

*We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss.*

*(Gilles Deleuze, Pure Immanence: A Life, 27)*

**University of Alberta**

**“What Drives Your Own Desiring Machines?” Early Twenty-First  
Century Corporatism in Deleuze-Guattarian Theory, Corporate Practice,  
Contemporary Literature, and Locavore Alternatives**

by

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For Adrian and Eria

## Abstract

This dissertation identifies and investigates the characteristics of the early 21<sup>st</sup>-century social, economic, and political situation as intrinsically connected and grouped under the concept of *corporatism*. Starting from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's schizoanalysis of capitalism, this thesis argues that corporatism or corporate capitalism is immanent: an interconnected, networked, rhizomatic system that has been successful at overtaking biopower – life in all its forms, human and otherwise – and managing it, or even making it its business. Methodologically, this dissertation aims to move beyond negative into creative critique, whose role is the uncovering of imagined or real alternatives to the problems of corporatism.

Consequently, this dissertation is divided into four chapters that attempt to bring this methodology to life. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical basis of corporatism, modeled on the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Chapter 2 begins to exemplify corporatism by investigating three corporate examples. This chapter sheds light on the real-life functioning of three corporations, Hudson's Bay Company, Walmart, and Unilever, while also connecting them to the theoretical genealogy of human social systems described by Deleuze and Guattari. Chapter 3 turns to literature as both a diagnostician of the contemporary corporatism, as well as an imaginative solution-provider. While not instrumentalizing literature, this chapter rather looks to three novels for both descriptions of the corporatist social machine and prescriptions on how to attempt to change it. The novels featured in this chapter are aligned with the

creative critique methodology: from the negative and even reactionary critique of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, through the problems with the contemporary episteme illustrated by Margaret Atwood's dystopic *Oryx and Crake*, to the alternative outlined by Scarlett Thomas in *PopCo*. Chapter 4 investigates real-life experiments in order to assess their viability in altering the present conditions of life. To this end, the last chapter couples theoretical Deleuze-Guattarian alternatives with two locavore books: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* by Barbara Kingsolver, with Steven L. Hopp and Camille Kingsolver, and *The 100-Mile Diet* by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon.

Keywords: immanence, corporatism, capitalism, corporation, globalization, neoliberalism, negative critique, creative critique, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, rhizome, schizoanalysis, desiring-production, line of flight, body without organs, deterritorialization, axiomatic, becoming, haecceity, minoritarian, feminism, social machine, nation, state, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Great Recession, Hudson's Bay Company, Canada, Walmart, Unilever, Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, North West Company, corporate subject, corporate culture, corporate story, Canadian literature, William Gibson, Margaret Atwood, Scarlett Thomas, Michel Foucault, genealogy, episteme, locavore, local food, slow food, 100-mile diet, Alisa Smith, J. B. MacKinnon, Barbara Kingsolver.

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sustained me both emotionally and personally, always listened to me, and always been there for me. My parents, Ruth and Seryl Talpalaru, raised me to think I could do anything, and then allowed me to follow my own path in spite of their uncertainty towards it. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my partner, Adrian Dabija, and our daughter, Eria Dabija.

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*“Buy this car to drive to work*

*Drive to work to pay for this car”*

(Metric, “Handshakes,” Live It Out)

## **Introduction**

### **Can the vicious cycle be broken?**

#### **From Immanent Corporatism to Alternatives**

#### **The Event: The Global Financial Crisis of 2008, a.k.a. The Great Recession**

*“We are witnessing the deepest, broadest, and most dangerous financial crisis since the 1930s.”*

(Martin Wolf, Financial Times, 9 March 2009)

Under the burden of countless sub-prime mortgages<sup>1</sup> packaged and sold numerous times among financial investment corporations, the U.S. financial

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<sup>1</sup> Richard P. Nielsen, professor of business ethics explains the sub-prime mortgage process that led to the crisis thus:

Starting as early as 1980 and growing until 2008, many subprime mortgage leverage values had risen to over 20 from previous norms of 5 to 10. That is, while borrowers had previously invested 10% to 20% downpayments while borrowing the remaining 80% to 90%, they now were able to invest 5% or less while borrowing 95% and even 100% of the property purchase price. The proportion of subprime, undocumented, first-time home buyer mortgages rose to 44% by 2006 (Ferguson, 2008). In addition, mortgage brokers and lenders offered below-market rates of interest for the first few months to two years of the life of the mortgage. After that initial period of below-market rates, interest rates and required mortgage payments rose to market and above-market levels that many borrowers did not have the income to support. (305-306)

The loaning banks then “package[d] the high-risk loans into securities (SIVs; and collateralized loan obligations, CLOs) that are then resold, often within a year, to other banks and investors” (307) within the framework of “the ‘musical chairs’ model of pass the bad and/or very high-risk debts on to someone else (while retaining large fees, commission, and bonuses) before the music stops” (307). The music finally stopped when “the housing bubble burst” (306), i.e., when “when initial low mortgage interest rates were reset to high rates and the borrowers could neither meet the increased interest payments nor resell the properties” (306).

market crashed in late 2008, taking with it a plethora of major financial investment companies, banks, and insurance firms that had always seem like untouchable giants – veritable pillars of the financial system. Mid-2010, most countries in the world are still reeling and scrambling<sup>2</sup> to shake the aftermath of the Great Recession and return to growth, the ultimate aim and engine of the contemporary corporatist economy.

That the ripples of this event were felt around the world in no time can certainly be placed under the heading of globalization – that phenomenon which makes the world seem like a small place due to the increasing uniformization of economic activity worldwide. What globalization fails to explain, however, are the causes leading to the global crisis. Why would profitable, well-established banks, financial investment companies, and insurance corporations run such risks? Why would rational individuals<sup>3</sup> enter into contracts that would bear such

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<sup>2</sup> Greece, for example, teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, before being ‘bailed out’ by the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Its budget deficit for 2009 was 13.6%, over four times the EU allowed limit. By April 2010, two separate “emergency loan packages” had been granted Greece, one of twenty-two billion Euro in March 2010, and one of thirty billion Euro in April 2010 (BBC News, n.pag.). Although the causal links between the US financial sector and Greece’s crisis are not explicitly spelled out, the moment of the latter’s collapse was acknowledged as consecutive to the former’s: “When the global financial downturn hit, Greece was ill-prepared to cope” (BBC News, n.pag.).

<sup>3</sup> I am using this contentious phrase to signal the ideological use of the “rational choice” theory, in which a “homo economicus” always makes the best-informed decisions that would lead to the most favourable outcome for that particular individual:

*Homo economicus* ‘is cold and calculating, worries only about himself, and pursues whatever course brings him the greatest material advantage’. *Homo economicus* is a single-minded, wealth-maximizing automaton, who does not take into account “morality, ethics, or other people.” Not surprisingly, subscribing to the *Homo economicus* model of humankind leads to characterizing problems and framing solutions in economic terms of benefits and costs, incentives and disincentives. (Colombo 739)

The recognition of problems with this theory dates almost as far back as the theory itself. In 1953, for example, Herbert Simon was attempting to amend the theory,

a high risk of insolvency, and lead to their losing their homes, their assets, and their lifestyles? Why would regulatory bodies condone such practices that so blatantly ignore and intentionally jeopardize<sup>4</sup> not only their business, but also the U.S. economy and, with it, the global one?

The answers to those questions are not simple, but they are interconnected in a manner which this dissertation attempts to illuminate. It is no secret and no novelty that the economy occupies the prominent place in the Western world and that, with the help of intensive globalization, this hierarchy has been replicating itself around the world, with notable and problematic effects for humans. The following chapters analyze the nature of the contemporary system in order to make sense of the place of humans in it, and, ultimately, to seek alternatives, i.e., ways to change the present situation in a way that would improve people's lives.

The theory of corporatism this dissertation develops rests on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's schizoanalysis of the capitalist plane of immanence. It emerges in the midst of a prolific field of theoretical propositions concerning the present moment. This subject will likely only increase in volume,

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because "great doubts" had been raised "as to whether this schematized model of economic man provides a suitable foundation on which to erect a theory" (99). In spite of its reductionism and failure to model accurately, the "self-interest variant of the rational choice model [is still] favored by economists and many other social scientists" (Frank 1789).

<sup>4</sup> On April 16, 2010, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) "accused the biggest and most influential U.S. securities company of hiding from investors the fact that a prominent hedge fund manager helped create a subprime mortgage product and was betting against it" (Wutkowski, n.pag.). Goldman Sachs, the company in question, was consequently charged with fraud by the SEC.

in the wake of the Great Recession, as theorists on the right look for explanations<sup>5</sup> and those on the left come up with synonyms for “I told you so.”

### Globalization, Neoliberalism, or Corporatism?

Globalization appears as one of the buzz-words in characterizations of the present moment. Theories of globalization abound nowadays in multiple disciplines as well as in interdisciplinary studies. However, globalization is nothing new. As world systems perspective claims, one can trace globalization – understood as the process by which the capitalist system spreads around the world – back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century explorations and commerce, while its inklings go even further back<sup>6</sup>. The reason we think globalization is a new development is because we equate it with corporatism. After all, in cultural studies and other social-critical disciplines, the imperative is to link neoliberalism with globalization and trace a causative relation that starts with the former and ends in the latter. A popular way of exemplifying globalization is by pointing out the ubiquity of brands all over the globe: “Look, Coca-Cola and the Golden Arches of McDonalds are everywhere in the world now!” Brand visibility and concerted neoliberal measures (think IMF or the World Bank)<sup>7</sup> lure us into thinking

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *The Road from Ruin: How to Revive Capitalism and Put America Back on Top* by Matthew Bishop (U.S. Business Editor of *The Economist*) and Michael Green.

<sup>6</sup> As Immanuel Wallerstein argues, the modern world-system had its origins in the sixteenth century. This world-system was then located in only a part of the globe, primarily in parts of Europe or the Americas. It expanded over time to cover the whole globe. It is and has always been a *world-economy*. It is and has always been a *capitalist* world-economy. (23)

<sup>7</sup> For an illuminating explanation of the role of IMF in disseminating neoliberal measures, see David Havey’s *The New Imperialism*. The book traces the methods

globalization an invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Replace Coca-Cola with an unbranded spice like pepper or cinnamon and neoliberal measures with imperial policies, and we find ourselves transported back two hundred years. As much as this claim exaggerates the case, the differences are more quantitative than qualitative, as capitalism has always tended to engulf the entire territory of the globe and has historically been as expansionist as it is today.

This dissertation identifies and investigates the characteristics of the contemporary social, economic, and political situation as intrinsically connected and grouped under the concept of *corporatism*. Corporatism designates the appropriation of biopower by corporations, which have been gaining an increasing stronghold on all aspects of life. However, the present situation does not constitute a break from capitalism, but rather its continuation, its latest stage, two of whose most theorized aspects are “neoliberalism” and “globalization.” Corporatism thrives on neoliberal measures and strives toward globalization<sup>8</sup>, i.e., toward engulfing the entire world under its immanent grasp. Because it is at its most visible in North America, particularly the United States and Canada, this is the region that this dissertation focuses on, without, however, ignoring other

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through which the U.S. increased its world domination since WWII. In the “Afterword,” Harvey explains

In the thirty years bracketed by the violent imposition of neo-liberalism on Chile and Iraq, all manner of states, beginning with Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US, turned away from concerns for full employment and the well-being of all citizens and took the path of neo-liberalism which focuses solely on curbing inflation, creating a good business climate, and promoting market freedoms. Bremer’s orders in [the ‘reconstruction’ of Iraq after the second US war there] effect do by main force what the US has been trying to do globally (with the aid of the IMF and its structural adjustment programmes, as well as through the WTO)... (216)

parts of the world. After all, in the immanence of globalizing corporatism, one cannot pretend to contain its manifestations neatly within the boundaries of any one geographical area. However, one has to acknowledge corporatism manifests with different intensities in different geographical areas, even though a more detailed analysis of those differences does not constitute the focus of this dissertation.

The concept of “corporatism” is not new<sup>9</sup>, nor is it unproblematic<sup>10</sup>. Not only is the concept’s history riddled with debate, but also with controversial collusions with Italian fascism. At its core, corporatism signals the partnership between civil society or business groups and the state: “a system of interest and/or attitude representation, a particular modal or ideal-typical institutional arrangement for linking the associationally organized interests of civil society with the decisional structures of the state” (Schmitter and Lembruch 8-9). Other definitions emphasize the participation of multiple interest groups in the decision-making around the process of policy development. In *Comparative Politics*, Edward J. Wiarda considers corporatism

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<sup>8</sup> As I explain further down, I view contemporary corporatism as different, even though contiguous with historical corporatism, which does not necessarily sit well with globalization, due to the former’s national focus.

<sup>9</sup> The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (CODP) notes “Although the modern debate started in the mid-1970s, the idea of corporatism has a long history” (n. pag.), which it traces to the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> Here, again, from the CODP:

After the First World War, the idea of corporatism was taken up by the radical right, in particular by Mussolini, who placed it at the centre of the fascist regime in Italy. As a consequence, corporatism suffered from guilt by association. It came to be regarded as a synonym for fascism and disappeared from most political discussion, although it survived in Spain and especially Portugal. (n. pag.)

a system of social and political organization in which major societal groups or interests (labor, business, farmers, military, ethnic, clan or patronage groups, religious bodies) are integrated into the governmental system, often on a monopolistic basis or under state guidance, tutelage, and control, to achieve coordinated national development. (84)

The seeming neutrality of these two definitions is not accidental. Historical corporatism – as distinguished from the contemporary version that constitutes the subject of this dissertation – aims to position itself midway between the communist left and the conservative-libertarian right. Schmitter assures readers that “by defining corporatism in terms of its praxis, the concept is liberated from its employment in any particular ideology or systems of ideas” (9). Wiarda, on the other hand, keenly aware of his U.S. audience, warns

The topic [of corporatism] is sensitive because the individualistic and liberal-pluralist ethos and ideology are so strongly ingrained in the American political consciousness. Americans are often reluctant to admit the power of certain groups in our society to control the economic and political system. But powerful interest groups tied into a strong state are precisely what corporatism is all about. (84)

The difference between this accepted understanding of corporatism and the one that I am proposing as the latest stage of capitalism hinges on the role of the State, and, ultimately, on the structure of the system. While the traditional definition of corporatism presupposes a transcendent structure, with the State or government heading and directing the actions of a number of actors,

contemporary corporatism functions through an immanent network, in which the role of the State has much diminished, becoming even negligible, a prop for other (corporate) interests.

A definition coming closer to the contemporary nature of corporate capitalism appears in Luis Suarez-Villa's *Technocapitalism*. He defines contemporary corporatism as "the power of business corporations over society. Such power now tends towards hegemony...[and] is therefore used to refer to the wide-ranging influence of corporate power on society, including its governance, and on nature" (1-2). This notion of corporatism comes to support his view of the contemporary system being characterized by the "exploitation of technological creativity" "grounded in corporate power," which Suarez-Villa rallies under the heading of "technocapitalism" (3). Although some of the key words of his vocabulary, e.g., hegemony, exploitation, point to a transcendent system, other descriptions suggest the imbrication of all elements pertaining to corporatism: "These regimes and the corporate apparatus in which they are embedded are to technocapitalism what the factory system and its production regimes were to industrial capitalism" (4). Suarez-Villa thus places contemporary corporatism at the end of the capitalist continuum, while also noting the embedded nature of the contemporary system.

In fact, in spite of the debates and controversy surrounding the concept of corporatism, one stable characteristic emerges: its interconnectedness. The idea of integration of government and business interests does situate contemporary corporatism in a continuum with historical definitions of corporatism. In that



sense, not only is my usage in line with the traditional application of the term, but the latter also suggests the validity of viewing contemporary corporatism as immanent.

The immanence of corporatism draws conceptually on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's development of the theory of immanent capitalism. This thesis argues that our contemporary system – corporatism or corporate capitalism – evinces many of the traits of capitalism described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the two *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes. Most importantly, corporatism is immanent: an interconnected, networked, rhizomatic system that has been successful at overtaking biopower – life in all its forms, human and otherwise – and managing it, or even making it its business. Corporatism has accomplished this feat by integrating desire within the field of economic production. To return to the example of the 2008 global financial crisis, if the human desire states that one wants a large house that one cannot afford, but an economic institution such as a bank supplies the financial product tailored to fulfill that desire, both human and lender ignore the risks at their own perils (human: losing everything; lender: losing money and eventually damaging the global economy).

If stating the obvious might be excused for a moment – or a sentence –, corporatism functions in this manner, except for when it breaks down, or encounters unforeseen circumstances. The triumph of corporatism resides in its ability to handle crisis and novelty. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that capitalism has made “a habit of feeding on the contradictions” it gives rise to, “on the

crises” it provokes, “on the anxieties” it “*engender[s]*”, and on the infernal operations [it] regenerate[s]” (*Anti-Oedipus* 151). In the same breath, they warn that capitalism

has ceased doubting itself, while even socialists have abandoned belief in the possibility of capitalism’s natural death by attrition. No one has ever died from contradictions. And the more it breaks down, the more it schizophrenizes, the better it works, the American way. (151)

Capitalism, in all of its forms – whether industrial or corporate – thrives on contradictions, and displays the ability to manage change by swiftly integrating it into its regular operations. Deleuze and Guattari describe its process of producing axioms whenever the system is faced with changes. Axioms are primary propositions of a high level of generality that regulate the details of capitalism’s functioning<sup>11</sup>. Capitalism also has the potential to avert or even benefit from crises<sup>12</sup>.

This ability to profit from crises has been described by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Klein argues the latest stage of capitalism distinguishes itself by exploiting natural disasters or creating

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<sup>11</sup> Please see Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of capitalist axioms. One example I offer in Chapter 4 is the integration of the new concerns of local eating into the large corporate aggregate by offering local foods at chain supermarkets.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels also argue that crisis is the *modus operandi* of capitalism. The bourgeoisie is “like a sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has summoned by his spells” (67). Most often the crises are of a commercial nature, e.g., overproduction, but they threaten the existence of the bourgeois society. The bourgeoisie eventually overcomes these crises by “the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of old ones... By preparing the way for more general and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.” (68). Ultimately, for Marx and Engels, these crises demonstrate that the system is not sustainable and that the proletarian revolution can overturn it.

ones. The aim is to perform “orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events” (6) in order to take advantage of the shock and to introduce free market measures. Stemming from the famous *laissez-faire* economist Milton Friedman’s theories, Klein claims, “the preferred method of advancing corporate goals [is] using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering” (9). She views the architecture of contemporary capitalism headed by “a powerful ruling alliance between a few very large corporations and a class of mostly wealthy politicians” (17). Ultimately, she argues, “a system that erases the boundaries between Big Government and Big Business is not liberal, conservative or capitalist but corporatist” (18).

Klein’s definition of corporatism aligns itself with traditional meanings of the term. However, the rest of her analysis of the present moment contradicts the “Big Government” part of the equation. Indeed, she argues, for the George W. Bush administration, which Klein presents as a culmination of disaster capitalism in action, “the job of the government is not to govern but to subcontract the task to the more efficient and generally superior private sector” (345). This renunciation points more toward a weakening of the government function than the “Big Government” claim entails. Klein goes on to explain that the second Bush’s administration set itself the task of privatizing what was left of government operations, “the core”: “those functions so intrinsic to the concept of governing that the idea of handing them to private corporations challenged what it meant to be a nation-state” (345). The recognition thus appears that the

Big Government-Big Business collusion argument serves more as an emphatic statement than as a characterization of the present moment. It is true that governments have been playing a significant part in instituting deregulation and minimizing the State's role in the lives of the people to the increasing benefit of economic entities, but the conspiratorial tone implied in "the corporatist alliance" (22) serves only to diminish the validity of the argument through undue hyperbole. Ultimately, the conspiracy theory only brings to mind a back chamber where gentlemen's agreements are made by nefarious, shadowy figures clad in black robes, in order to subjugate humanity. In reality, contemporary corporatism operates in a subtler and more systematic manner. Most of all, it is not a transcendent system, where one can point to a person, an institution, or a grouping thereof and yell "sovereign!"

### **How fast can you grow? Economic growth as telos of corporatism**

*"Slow recovery a threat to rally, central bank says: In an unusual departure, Bank of Canada says [stock] market prices might not be supported by economic growth."* (David Milstead, *Globe and Mail Report on Business*, B1, 11

December 2009)

*"A little perspective from the IMF's chief economist: Oliver Blanchard says growth – once government intervention ends – is essential for sustained recovery."* (Dan Richards B9, 18 January 2010)

*“Tread carefully on foreign shores: Despite all the money pouring into emerging markets in search of fast **growth**, there are plenty of red flags to heed.”* (Allan Robinson B9, 18 January 2010)

*“**Growth** to slow this year: Export Development Canada; Report says Canada’s growth will cool to below 2 per cent in second half of 2010.”* (Tavia Grant B4, 27 April 2010)

*“Faster **growth** brightens the profit picture.”* (Brent Jang B1, 27 April 2010)

*“**Growth** beats [stock] value, and when it doesn’t, it’s time to worry.”* (George Athanassakos B18, 29 April 2010)

The preceding headlines all appeared in the *Report on Business* section of *The Globe and Mail*, one of only two Canadian national daily newspapers. As they attest, in the wake of the Great Recession, economists, commentators, and business pundits are all looking in their crystal ball for one indicator of better times to come: growth.

Arguably, the main axiom of capitalism – both historically and presently –, indeed its very engine, is the imperative for growth. This need for growth both explains and connects disparate corporatist phenomena such as rampant consumerism, the reluctance of Western states to institute reductive economic policies in light of climate change, and even the business dealings resulting in the Great Recession.

Before throwing a quick glance at what macroeconomics has to say about the centrality of economic growth for capitalism and humans’ quality of life, I

want to flag a simple but efficient definition of capitalism. Immanuel Wallerstein, prominent representative of the world-systems perspective, terms capitalism the system which “gives priority to the *endless* accumulation of capital” (24). The pivotal idea of growth finds itself encapsulated in this concise sentence about the ultimate aims of the system. This definition, which can also be viewed as the basic axiom of capitalism, points to both the motor of the system – accumulation or growth – and its hubris: the italicized “endless.”<sup>13</sup>

Capitalism, as well as its latest stage, corporatism, strives toward “endless” growth. Beyond the stated aim of accumulation of capital, it becomes clear that the modifier “endless” can be aligned with capitalism’s tendency to run into periodic crises. By definition, then, capitalism strives toward the unattainable. As we shall see in Chapter 1, Deleuze and Guattari claim capitalism always tends to its limit, which it constantly manages to defer and avert. In mathematical terms, capitalism’s desire for accumulation tends to infinity: as much as it desires to attain it, the endlessness of accumulation perpetually escapes its grip; nonetheless, the action of striving towards the unattainable goal remains, and spurs capitalism on.

Two questions arise immediately: 1) What exactly is economic growth? and 2) How can economics – a discipline so reliant on reason – actually support the concept of endless growth? Both questions yield problematic answers. The first points to the convenient slippage between State and corporatism, while the

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<sup>13</sup> Please see Chapter 2 for a discussion of how retail giant Walmart uses this axiom to attract customers by offering them the illusion of endless consumption.

second shows a optimism reminiscent of religious faith that can help explain the reluctance to take reductive measures in light of climate change.

For answers to both these questions, I turn to *Principles of Macroeconomics* (2007), whose author, N. Gregory Mankiw, explains growth as follows:

What explains these large differences in living standards among countries and over time? The answer is surprisingly simple. Almost all variation in living standards is attributable to differences in countries’

**productivity**—that is, the amount of goods and services produced from each unit of labor input. In nations where workers can produce a large quantity of goods and services per unit of time, most people enjoy high standard of living; in nations where workers are less productive, most people endure a more meager existence. Similarly, the growth rate of the nation's productivity determines the growth rate of its average income.

(13, original emphasis)

Growth depends on productivity, i.e., how efficiently workers use the time to produce new goods and services<sup>14</sup>. More importantly, according to

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<sup>14</sup> The primacy of productivity can be traced as far back as Adam Smith, who, in his famous *The Wealth of Nations*, identifies the division of labour as primary cause for a spectacular increase in productivity:

if they [the manufacture workers] had all wrought separately and independently...they certainly could not each of them have made twenty, perhaps not one pin in a day; that is, certainly, not the two hundred and fortieth, perhaps not the four thousand eight hundredth part of what they are at present capable of performing, in consequence of a proper division and combination of their different operations. (5)

Arguably, the notion and importance of growth that capitalism has always relied on can be assigned to the same economics theoretician. The line between description – this is how the division of labour leads to better productivity, which equals more wealth – and prescription – what the system needs to create more wealth is more productivity, i.e.,

macroeconomics, growth is both measure and proof of the prosperity of a nation. Growth here represents the increase in “real GDP,” where the gross domestic product

measures both the total income earned in the economy and the total expenditure on the economy’s output of goods and services. The level of real GDP is a good gauge of economic prosperity, and the growth of real GDP is a good gauge of economic progress. (246)

The most egregious problem of this definition and this line of thinking concerns the unit of measurement: the nation has long ceased to be the primary “site of accumulation.” As this dissertation aims to show, the present system, whose roots can be traced back to the seventeenth century<sup>15</sup>, relies less on the nation-state as the site of accumulation of capital, than on the corporation. Corporations may originate in a certain nation-state, be it Great Britain, U.S., Holland, or any other one, but they tend to be transnational, operating in and relying on multiple nation-states in order to function, accumulate capital, and grow.

Even though growth as an economics concept refers to GDP, which is a national indicator, growth in corporatism refers to corporate revenue, not to national income. The unit of measurement has changed, but it benefits corporatism to maintain the illusion of significance for the nation, because the national sentiment is a powerful human desire of belonging that proves rather lucrative for many corporations. Chapter 2 debuts by discussing the topic of

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endless proliferation of goods and services will make us live better, becomes rather blurred.



Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) exploiting national allegiance in its portrayal of itself as direct ancestor to the Canadian nation-state. Nor is HBC alone in this marketing strategy: from mayonnaise (Hellmann's) to beer (Molson Canadian), and from athletic clothing (Roots) to vehicles (General Motors), it seems like every other corporation claims to be part of the definition for Canada.

The second question points to the limits to growth. Mankiw claims macroeconomics have already figured that dilemma out:

most economists are less concerned about such limits [finite natural resources] to growth than one might guess. They argue that technological progress often yields ways to avoid these limits. If we compare the economy today to the economy of the past, we see various ways in which the use of natural resources has improved. Modern cars have better gas mileage. New houses have better insulation and require less energy to heat and cool them. Recycling allows some non-renewable resources to be reused. The development of alternative fuels, such as ethanol instead of gasoline, allows us to substitute renewable for non-renewable resources. (255)

While these rebuttals ring true, one also has to take into account that the growth frenzy leaves no one out; in reality, growth has long relied on growing consumption, or "consumer spending" in its economics guise, which remains

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<sup>15</sup> As I argue in Chapter 2, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), incorporated in 1670, stands at the beginning of a genealogy of corporatism by displaying mechanisms of operation similar to contemporary ones.

one of the best indicators for good economic times<sup>16</sup>. Yes, it is true that “modern cars have better gas mileage”; yet more people have more cars nowadays, and are forced, due to urban sprawl and corporatist urban planning<sup>17</sup>, to use them more, to the point of utter dependency. And, yes, it’s true that “new houses have better insulation and require less energy to heat and cool them,” but they are also so much larger than older houses, costing more, therefore requiring larger, riskier mortgages, therefore bringing us back to the causes of the Great Recession.

Moreover, the defense of growth points us towards one of the major debates of our time: climate change and the necessary action for the continued survival of humanity. As Mankiw points out in the quote above, the “development of alternative fuels, such as ethanol instead of gasoline, allows us to substitute renewable for non-renewable resources.” Corporatism’s drive for growth rejects any suggestion of reduction. When environmental activists say, “reduce your footprint,” corporations hear “threat to growth”. The corporatist answer to climate change, besides denial, is proliferation: corn-derived ethanol

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<sup>16</sup> An Associate Press article links several pieces of the economic growth-consumer spending-Great Recession puzzle:

Spending by consumers rose by the fastest pace in three years, the Commerce Department said Friday. That helped the economy grow at a 3.2 percent pace in the January-to-March quarter. It marked the third straight quarterly gain as the United States heals from the longest and deepest recession since the 1930s.

(Aversa, n.pag.)

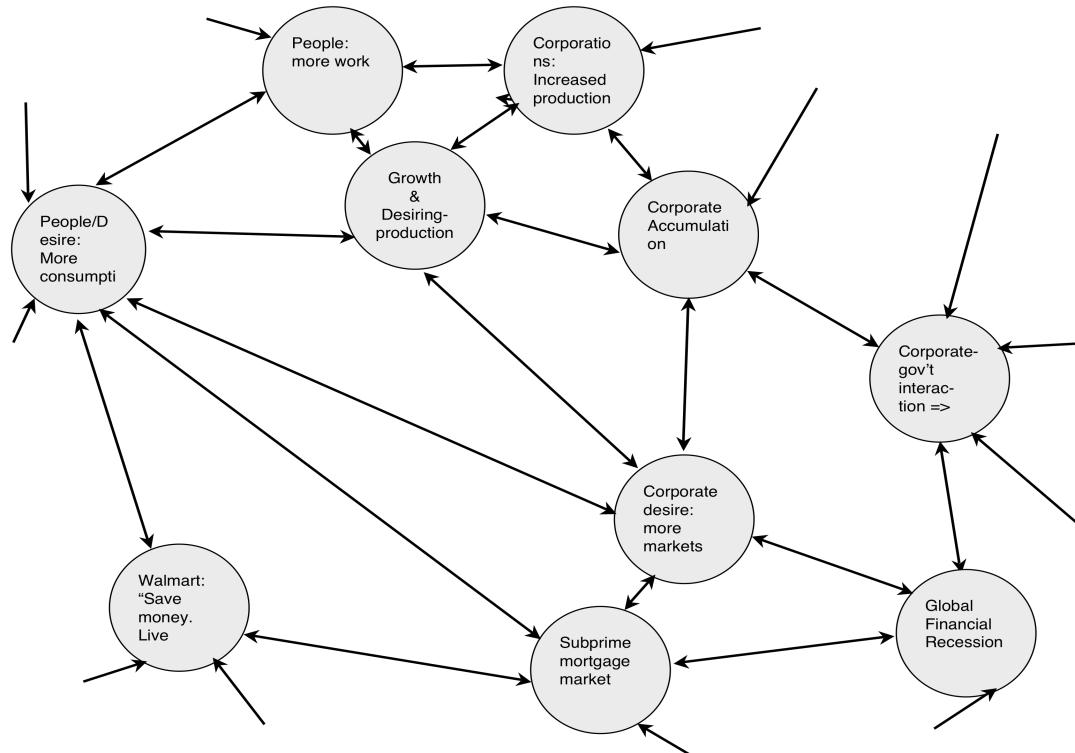
<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the ever growing spread of shopping towns, i.e., strip malls, populated by big box chain stores, on the outskirts of cities. People not only have to drive to reach them, they have to drive within them because of their sheer enormity. More sadly, these large global corporations luring consumers with their discounted merchandise have been long stifling any downtown independent merchants, to the point of a large increase in ghost downtowns.

instead of reduced consumption of gasoline, carbon-capture and storage instead of reduced emissions<sup>18</sup>.

The corporatist plane of immanence thus emerges, with rhizomatic connections between so many elements, one can hardly comprise them all even in a partial snapshot of one aspect of the system. I have attempted, however, a visual representation of *part* of a network of elements centred on growth, in the hopes of illustrating how the rhizome can help us conceptualize the many phenomena within corporatism:

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<sup>18</sup> Carbon capture and storage (CCS) is Alberta's provincial government's favourite answer to the critics of the controversial oil-sands developments. Instead of halting these environmentally devastating oil production sites, the politically conservative government touts the benefits of developing a new technology to trap noxious carbon emissions and store them underground. The development of this new technology promotes business growth, as opposed to the reduction of business that a ban on new oil-sands exploitation would. For a detailed discussion on CCS, please see the research conducted by the Pembina Institute.



The preceding graphic attempts to portray a schematic fragment – hence the unconnected lines pointing to other linking possibilities – of a rhizome of the economy with the indicator of growth centrally placed so as to determine both economic behaviour, e.g., production, and human behaviour and desires, e.g., more money to consume more, which, in turn, determines an increase in production. This economic behaviour leads this argument in two directions: on one hand, the concept of desiring-production developed by Deleuze and Guattari, and on the other, the multiple examples that the market offers, not least of which the so-called Great Recession, with prominent predecessors such as Enron and WorldCom<sup>19</sup> in the early 2000s.

<sup>19</sup> Both Enron and WorldCom, the two corporations at the centre of the largest corporate scandals in the U.S. prior to the fall of Lehman Brothers investment bank on 15 September 2008 which triggered the Global Financial Crisis, prefigure the crisis through similar methods. Their methods can be traced to the imperative for growth. The

Desiring-production signals the imbrication of economic activity with human and other kinds of life. It points to the immanent nature of capitalism – a system which integrates all aspects of life on earth into one network: the immanent plane of capitalism. In the very beginning of the two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari<sup>20</sup> argue that “production as process overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle” (5). In analyzing the economic system, in other words, one can no longer resort to the all-rational *homo economicus* and ignore the influence of human emotions and desires, which are interconnected with economic production in a manner that eludes classically logical causal relationships. In other words, one has to move beyond the simple demand and offer equation, in which demand springs out of the natural needs of the population, only to be quenched effectively by the self-regulating market.

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financial companies and investment banks (re-)packaged and (re-)sold high-risk investments to leverage more borrowing and high risk investment, thus triggering the recession. Similarly, WorldCom, a communications company, and Enron, a natural gas company turned commodities trader, have had their moment in the spotlight – albeit with less severe consequences for the rest of the world – in the early 2000s when they filed for bankruptcy after enjoying most impressive growths in the tens of billions of dollars. It subsequently came to the surface that these growths had been fuelled by unorthodox accounting practices. For Enron, after it “enjoyed spectacular growth with annual revenue hitting \$100 billion US in 2000,” an investigation showed that “a complex web of partnerships was designed to hide Enron's debt” (CBC News, “Collapse”). Similarly, in a growth frenzy after spending US\$ 37 billion on “the largest takeover in American corporate history” (CBC News, “WorldCom”) in 1997, and being denied an additional takeover of Sprint Corp. for US\$ 129 billion in 2000, WorldCom announced that “its earnings will fall short of estimates by 40 per cent” (“WorldCom”). After its shares fall 95% in 2002, WorldCom “discloses that it inflated profits for more than a year by improperly accounting for more than \$3.9 billion US” (“WorldCom”).

<sup>20</sup> Please turn to Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and how it can help explain contemporary corporatism.

So, what exactly are the connections that appear on the plane of immanence? Returning to the example of the Global Financial Recession and the chart schematizing a few of the links between select flows playing out within corporatism, one can start to identify the interrelating points. The Great Recession constitutes the event that brings to the fore the functioning of the interconnected plane of immanence, linking the corporate desire for endless accumulation – exemplified by the investment banks dipping into highly risky investments only to increase their market, irrespective of profitability or long term consequences – with people’s desire for conformity within a system that always elicits more and bigger, as in more conspicuous consumption symbolized by larger homes, more expensive vehicles, again, irrespective of the amount of debt one enters into. The flow of desire for more consumption is captured by big box retail corporations, e.g., Walmart, which confer the illusion of endless consumption with their ever lower prices promise, which they equal with an ever “better life<sup>21</sup>”. Walmart, for example, was one of the few entities to come out on the plus side of the Recession, because of its market positioning. As the Recession left people with less disposable income, Walmart<sup>22</sup> emerged as the solution for maintaining similar levels of consumption, while more upscale goods stores, e.g. Abercrombie and Fitch or Aéropostale, saw their sales fall by a quarter to even a third in year-to-year comparisons (LaMotta, n.pag.). If in non-recessionary economic times, the corporatist-fuelled desire for more

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<sup>21</sup> At the beginning of 2010, Walmart’s advertising slogan was “Save money. Live better.”

<sup>22</sup> Please see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of how Walmart captures and integrates people into its corporatist aggregate.

consumption amounts to the axiom to “work more,” the corporatist system comes up with such solutions as the above for unemployed people in economic downturns. Each of these elements, in turn, send their own flows in multiple directions and connect to various other elements (machines) in the plane of immanence of corporatism, which the subsequent chapters of this dissertation aim to illustrate in more detail.

As Chapter 1 argues, the theory developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the two *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, best describes the complexities of capitalism. As a later stage of capitalism, corporatism has preserved and taken the former’s immanence to a different level. If the State, in Deleuze and Guattari’s description of immanent capitalism, was still somewhat exterior to it, a remnant of the previous barbaric-despotic regime, corporatism manages to deftly integrate it into its plane of consistency, making it integral to the functioning of desiring-production, i.e. the integrated machine of economic activity and human life.

In Deleuze and Guattari’s description, in the genealogy of human social systems, there are three types of regimes: primitive-territorial, barbaric-despotic, and civilized-capitalist<sup>23</sup>. All of these regimes have their specific ways of managing desiring-production. The first inscribes a code directly onto the body of the earth: people are assigned to literal territories (hence territorialization) where they live, and which define who they are. The human relations that ensue are ones of lateral connections: one develops links with the people in one’s

territorial proximity. The second regime imposes a code onto the body of the despot, who thus becomes the transcendent figure to which everything and everyone is connected. The system of lateral alliance is replaced by a system of direct filiation: the despot is the descendant of god on earth, and so all desiring-production is due to him (both through his grace, and belonging to him). The transcendent despotic regime, which codes the flows of desire characterizing human life, onto the body of the despot, is replaced by the capitalist regime, which, for the first time, is based on an abstraction: money. Deleuze and Guattari assert “Capital is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being” (*Anti-Oedipus* 10). What that means is that it submits to no imposed mode of organization and allows flows of desire to move freely across it. However, a remnant of the barbaric regime is the State, whose role it is to code the free-flying flows of desire and to rein them in.

Deleuze and Guattari provide the following description of how capitalism functions:

capitalism is the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows, substituting for intrinsic codes an axiomatic of abstract quantities in the form of money. Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it toward this limit. At capitalism's limit the deterritorialized socius gives way to the body

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed description of the three social machines, please turn to Chapter 1.



without organs, and the decoded flows throw themselves into desiring-production. (*Anti-Oedipus* 139-140)

This description captures the way capitalism function, its propensity to tend to the limit, to provoke and avert crises, as well as the emergence of possible alternatives to the system. Firstly, the system integrates “decoded flows.” A flow, in D&G vocabulary, signals a continuous process. Anything can be a flow: “flowing hair, a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit, or urine that are produced by partial objects...Every ‘object’ presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow, the fragmentation of the object” (*Anti-Oedipus* 6). Every operation in existence on the plane of immanence is comprised of a flow and a machine interrupting it; conversely, a flow is the connection between two machines. Thus, in one of D&G’s examples, the flow of milk connects the breast of the mother with the mouth of the baby; or, conversely, the mouth-machine interrupts the flow of milk erupting from the breast-machine. Put more generally, “a connection with another machine is always established, along a transverse path, so that one machine interrupts the current of the other or ‘sees’ its own current interrupted” (6).

Desire represents yet another flow, connecting different machines, and integrating them into the production of the corporatist social machine: the human machine desiring a bigger home to the lending bank drawing up an unaffordable mortgage contract to the investment financier putting his/her clients’ money into a whole package of unaffordable mortgages and betting his/her own money on the failure of the mortgage titular to actually pay off the unaffordable

mortgage<sup>24</sup>. But where does the initial flow of desire stem from? The human machine? The corporatist system eliciting growth and consumerism? Difficult to say, and the answer may well be irrelevant. What is important here is the interconnectedness: the desiring-production that constitutes the core process of the corporatist social machine.

The longer quote above mentions that “at capitalism’s limit, the deterritorialized socius gives way to the body without organs,” which brings to the fore another crucial term in the D&G terminology. While I expand the subject in Chapter 1, I think the body without organs does not bring to mind the same kind of imagery as deterritorialization, and thus needs a short, usable definition. The body without organs, like most concepts in the D&G theoretical landscape does not point to lack, to a body stripped and emptied of organs. Rather, the body without organs opposes the organism, whose main trait is the *organization* and hierarchy of organs in the order of their social importance. The body without organs symbolizes the liberation from hierarchy, and thus, at the limits of capitalism, can allow desire to flow freely across it, without being necessarily coupled into a productive machine.

As a later stage of capitalism, corporatism is still based on capital as its body without organs, but it has also added to the mix some other assemblages, or “organizations of power” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 69) made up of multiple machines, flows and lines of flight. One of the most visible, and one that relies on visibility is branding. Branding now constitutes one of the major operations

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<sup>24</sup> Goldman Sachs hedge-fund “king” John Paulson “made \$1 billion as a result” of “people like Stella Onyeukwu, Gheorghe Bledea and Jack Booket” not being able to pay

of this latest stage of capitalism, seamlessly flowing from desire into production, which remains the site of exploitation of labour, and then back into desire – through advertising – fuelling, in its turn, consumption. As Naomi Klein shows, in her acclaimed book on the subject, *No Logo*, brands, as opposed to products, can encapsulate both “the corporate ‘personality,’ uniquely named, packaged and advertised” (6) and its relationship with the consumer, by creating a “spiritual” (6) connection with the latter. Through advertising, the brand can build for itself a narrative about its cultural value, and spell out the way in which buying it changes the consumer’s life for the better, in a way that cannot be ignored by the consumer.

Branding thus connects consumer to corporation via desire rather than need, or rather, a new desire inoculating the consumer into the corporatist aggregate to the degree that it becomes necessity. The consumer’s desire is integrated into the machine of branding, which continually expands to cover the entire plane of immanence with the help of axioms. Branding, however, does not work unidirectionally from corporation to consumer; although abstract and far-reaching, it originates in the desiring machines operating on behalf of the corporation, people who tap into their own creativity and wishes in order to dream up the complex mechanism of branding. At the same time, however, branding covers the relationship between corporation and employee, creating a corporate culture that integrates the very desiring machines that propel it into its plane of immanence. As Klein points out,

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their mortgages” (Mollenkamp, et al., n.pag.)

[Corporations like Nike, The Body Shop, Starbucks] integrated the idea of branding into the very fabric of their companies. Their corporate cultures were so tight and cloistered that to outsiders they appeared to be a cross between fraternity house, religious cult and sanitarium.

Everything was an ad for the brand: bizarre lexicons for describing employees (partners, baristas, team players, crew members), company chants, superstar CEOs, fanatical attention to design consistency, a propensity for monument-building, and New Age mission statements.

(16)

The corporate culture, partially synonymous with branding – except that most corporations own and operate more than one brand – proves itself one of the pillars of corporatism, managing to collect the flows of desire of creative employees, and thus help create a new axiom for each new situation<sup>25</sup>.

It is through axioms – primary rules that emerge directly from the economic conditions – that corporatism manages newness. Corporatism has invented, through axioms, new ways of capturing desire masquerading as free will: Who would admit to having been ‘convinced’ into buying things one does not need, and having to work more to pay them off? Instead, there is always a ready explanation for the urgent necessity that spurred the purchase, such as the axiom that one needs to be fashionable at all times, and thus buy new apparel, shoes, accessories, every year<sup>26</sup>. Consumerism forms a large part of corporatism, and a

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<sup>25</sup> Please see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of corporate culture.

<sup>26</sup> Fashion represents another productive rhizome for corporatism: the combination of fashion magazines, fashion gurus, the well-nourished obsession with celebrities and what they wear, eat, drink, endorse, etc. all work to produce new desires for the rest of

very visible one. However, I am not arguing that people are being duped into consumerism by a higher order force that I have termed corporatism. On the contrary: first, there is no higher order force in the immanent plane of corporatism; second, the time of false consciousness has passed, but it doesn't mean that the guilt brought on by the consciousness of consumerism, and its problematic effects work against corporatism. Guilt, like almost every other affect, becomes productive for corporatism, through its prompt use of axioms. Do you think you're destroying the environment by consuming so much? Here's our new organic line of products, made of bamboo harvested by our ~~near-slave-labour force~~ global associates in Thailand, and processed at our ~~sweat shop~~ collaborating facility in China. In the end, you're buying a sustainable product ~~that has travelled thousands of miles to reach you.~~

### **Globalization, Neoliberalism, Empire: Where to, capitalism?**

What follows should by no means be taken as an exhaustive or comprehensive exposé on theories of the present moment. Rather, it constitutes an attempt at sketching and exemplifying the variety of scholarly-academic cultural critiques concerning contemporary capitalism. Globalization, neoliberalism, corporatization emerge as keywords in characterizations of this system, so a brief glimpse into these conversations can establish the theoretical playing field more plainly.

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the Western world, desires temporarily quenched with items manufactured by the global South.

Considering the majority of theories of and alternatives to capitalism still rely on Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism, it becomes clear that a comprehensive overview – even when focused precisely on the suggestion of alternatives – becomes impossible. I will therefore mention the ones that seem to bear intellectual connections to the overarching theory of this dissertation. The rhizome emerging from such an exercise will serve to illuminate more my own intellectual journey culminating in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* than any rational or justifiable genealogy of contemporary capitalism.

Starting from the Karl Marx, then: together with Friedrich Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, they demand the “formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois rule, conquest of political power by the proletariat” (74), and ultimately, the “abolition of private property” (75). The proletariat would consequently obtain collective ownership of the means of production. Ultimately, they would “centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class” (75). Marx reiterates, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the solution resides in the unification of the agricultural smallholders with “the *urban proletariat*, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order” (115). Marx was convinced that the culmination of his science of historical materialism would be the result of this overthrow: the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would put an end to “the real struggles of the different classes” (*The German Ideology* 54), and eventually lead to a classless society. These aims were to be attained through communism: “We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the

present state of things” (*Ideology* 56-57). Communism, for Marx and Engels, was thus not, as they put it, “a state of affairs” or “an ideal” (56), but the reality of the movement of the proletariat to change the exploitative situation of industrial capitalism.

Marx and Engels’ prescription became reality when the 1917 Russian Revolution entrenched communism under the leadership of V.I. Lenin. Previously, Lenin had revised Marx’s analysis of capitalism in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. According to Lenin, since the beginning of the twentieth century, capitalism had entered a new phase, which manifested itself differently than industrial capitalism based on competition. Imperialism, this latest phase of capitalism, is characterized by the concentration of production in a few hands, monopoly therefore taking the place of competition, by finance capital, in which the banks transform themselves from the repositories of capital into the owners of capital, dictating to the industrialists, and by the export of capital across national borders, rather than the containment within one national economy, whose focus was the export of goods. While Lenin’s assumed alternative does not differ from Marx and Engels’, his conclusions in this brief analysis of financial capitalism can be considered a precursor of much of the theory on globalization, including world-systems perspective and the famous *Empire*, by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s (H&N) *Empire* (2000) offers the most well known reiteration of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of immanent capitalism. The book generated a plethora of responses to the highly ambitious

and extremely controversial propositions brought forward. Essentially, H&N propose that there is a new type of sovereignty that takes over the world, an unlocalizable new juridical order called Empire, which takes over every aspect of human life with the help of the new technologies of communication. Empire constitutes a radical break with preceding social organizations and aims to control the entire planet and all its contents immanently: its power is working everywhere through networks, rather than being located in a certain geographical spot. What Empire still retains from previous eras is the exploitation of the workers. However, there is hope that the tools that Empire employs to make the proletarian's work profitable for itself can be turned against it, if the Multitude (the collective of workers from around the world) unites and decides to use the methods of communication at their disposal to overturn Empire. In addition, it is the Multitude – even in its exploited state – that directs and decides how Empire operates; the Multitude generates the crises of Empire, which the latter has learned to manage and even take advantage of by governing in a permanent state of exception. However, there is no doubt for H&N that the Multitude will soon rise and take down Empire and, in true Marxist spirit, take over the means of production and govern itself.

My own analysis of the corporatist system is similar to Hardt and Negri's in its reliance on Deleuze and Guattari. The mechanisms at work on the plane of immanence of contemporary capitalism, e.g., machinic integration of people and their desires, flows of movement of people, as well as capital and merchandise, or the functioning of the axiomatic, appear as key both in *Empire*, as well as in



my analysis. What differs, crucially, is the focus. While Hardt and Negri's book zeroes in on the juridical organization of Empire, which subsumes the entire functioning of the system, this dissertation argues that, because of its immanent functioning, no single assemblage can be addressed or analyzed in perfect isolation, much less presented as the main driver of the contemporary system. Immanence is the main characteristic that differentiates capitalism from previous social formations, or social machines, as per Deleuze-Guattarian lexicon. I chose to take this injunction to heart and present examples<sup>27</sup> of how the rhizomatic connections between the many machines makes isolating a driving cause defeat the notion of immanence<sup>28</sup>. That aspect may reveal this dissertation as dogmatically Deleuze-Guattarian, if such a thing were possible. Hardt and Negri, on the other hand, operate more in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, taking their concepts, and articulating them back to traditional Marxism.

Aside from this methodological difference, however, *Empire* provides this dissertation with a conception of labour that finds its applicability in the corporate case studies presented in Chapter 2. Hardt and Negri offer the notion of "immaterial labour," which constitutes a radically new type of work, based on

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<sup>27</sup> Please see Chapter 2 for examples of the integration of economic activity (retailing, manufacturing), people's lives, and narrative, which arguably operate as equal parts/mechanisms in the functioning of corporations nowadays, as well as historically.

<sup>28</sup> Ernesto Laclau, in one of the many responses that *Empire* has generated points out that immanence does not sit well with Hardt and Negri's conception of the juridical order, their description of imperial sovereignty, and their discussion of constituted vs. constituent power: "If constituent power and its commensurate immanence depend upon constituted power for a 'defined' existence, the constituent is definitely immanent to a delimited 'Something' and, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it, the transcendent is 'reintroduced'" (43).

using and eliciting affect. The authors view immanent labour as part of what they call “the postmodernization of economy,” characterized by a shift in the nature of production from industrial manufacturing in the modern era to postindustrial/informational economy. The latter brings to the front a new type of labour: “*immaterial labour* – that is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication” (290). This informational economy brings about a new “fundamental division of labor” (292), and also produces a deterritorialization of production that, on the one hand, creates a community without proximity, while on the other hand, weakens the bargaining power of labour (through the menace of or the real outsourcing of labour, runaway factories, etc.).

Immaterial labour is an apt characterization of the new type of work relations established in our time. As we shall see through the various examples I will analyze, corporatism capitalizes on the affective involvement of people to the point of impossibility of divesting one’s life from the far reach of corporate imbrication. Working at Wal-Mart (WM) also implies shopping at WM, due to lack of alternatives, and in the U.S., also receiving one’s health insurance benefits directly from WM. Similarly, shopping at WM implies creating an insatiable demand for low-paying jobs, as well as exploitative relations with suppliers, while fuelling the need for sweat-shop jobs in periphery countries. How are all these connections affective, though? The point of affective association resides in the corporation’s rhetoric about itself and its relationships

to consumers, employees, and, more covertly, suppliers<sup>29</sup>. However, the existence of this justificatory rhetoric does not point to a false-consciousness type of ideological discourse. None of the parties involved, from consumer to supplier, delude themselves that the corporation deals ethically with everybody and somehow miraculously sells small kitchen appliances imported from China at the price of a hotdog on U.S. streets. It is through the manipulation of desire – even though I do not mean to construct a reason vs. affect dialectic here – and with the help of deeply entrenched neoliberal policies that WM, to continue with our example, proceeds onward with business as usual without any of its points of connection breaking down. For a final instantiation of the manipulation of desire consider that staunch individualism, as inevitable precondition of the functioning of capitalism, excuses one's conscience from caring about one's community, let alone a sweat-shop worker in China, while also making one blind to the similarity of these two conditions: the WM consumer, whose only option is to shop there, and the Chinese worker, a half-a-world away.

Hardt and Negri's concept of immaterial labour distinguishes between two types: abstract labour (homogeneous, generalizable labour practices brought about by the ubiquity of computer work), and affective labour<sup>30</sup>, which involves caring, or the production of emotional responses (e.g., the entertainment industry), and whose "products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being,

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<sup>29</sup> Please see Chapter 2 for more details on how Walmart uses affect manipulation by deploying the rhetoric of family duties toward its employees.

<sup>30</sup> While I am not proposing that the D-G concept of desire is perfectly synonymous with the notion of affect deployed by Hardt and Negri, it appears, from the latter's explanations and exemplifications that the two are, if not synonymous, at least overlapping.

satisfaction, excitement, or passion... the creation and manipulation of affect” (293). The new economic system is immanent in the sense that information is embedded indissolubly in production, and creates networks of deterritorialized production. One example is the Internet, which H&N identify as a rhizome, “a non-hierarchical and noncentered network structure” (299). For Hardt and Negri, immaterial labour presents the unique occasion of organizing resistance across the entire network of Empire: “Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities” (302), which could eventually lead the multitude to organize against the imperial structure.

This preoccupation with the potential for the traditional revolution in the Marxist sense may take attention from the stated novelty of the situation. If labour takes place immanently in Empire, one can arguably not think of the multitude, as the heir of the proletariat, simply overturning the bourgeois class or the sovereign without ending up with a contradiction: either there is no immanence, and therefore the labouring class can divest itself easily from the sovereign and topple it, or the immanent network knows and reacts immediately to the possibility of revolution by drawing up one or more new axioms to counteract it. The differences are germane to this thesis, whose focus resides in identifying alternatives, be they imaginary or actual.

### **Looking for alternatives beyond Marxist negative critique**

The persistence of Marxist theory in Hardt and Negri’s book proves its importance for diagnosing contemporary socio-economic and political

problematic. Marx and Engels have set the tone, the vocabulary, and the logic by which subsequent theories measure themselves and characterize their subject-matter as well as potential changes, solutions, or alternatives to the problems which they identify. Marxist political economy was the first to both characterize capitalism in a comprehensive manner, and to offer a potential way out: its elimination.

Arguably, all theories of our present moment rely on Marxism<sup>31</sup> as their underlying theoretical predecessor and supplier of analytical methodology. Even though they detail the consequences of the planetary spread of the capitalist system, these theories overlook the generator of this new development, the multi- or trans-national corporations, and return to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' analysis of industrial capitalism in order to make sense of happenings in contemporary capitalism. A number of problems arises from this persistence: firstly, what should be an inductive process, starting from the particular situation of today's capitalism and drawing abstract conclusions with generalizable application, becomes a Procrustean endeavour of mapping individual examples onto the characteristics of an outdated political economy. This forceful application may not end up in ineffectual or incorrect conclusions, but nor can it present a systematic and comprehensive larger picture in which any particular example can be integrated. For instance, sweat shops represent an instance of labour exploitation, but it becomes more difficult, on the one hand, to identify

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<sup>31</sup> Deleuze and Guattari declare their indebtedness to Marx at different points throughout their tract, e.g. when they describe the genealogy of human social machines and conclude "it is correct to retrospectively understand all history in the light of capitalism, provided that the rules formulated by Marx are followed exactly" (*Anti-Oedipus* 139-40)

the exploitative class – Is it the proprietors of the sweatshop, their multinational corporate retail clients they manufacture for, or the end consumers in the First world? – because the current system is immanent, rather than transcendent. We thus end up in a paradox, a vicious circle that neither accurately diagnoses the problem, nor can it begin to offer an alternative.

The question of the alternative brings us to the other major problem of the wholesale application of Marxism to today's capitalism: the persistence of the spectre of revolution as the favourite solution to circumvent and do away with the inequality built into the present system, as well as, or even more importantly, with the system itself. Some Marxist proponents contend that Marx “was very wary of speculation about the character of future society, declining to write recipes for the cookshops of the future” (Levitas 606).

As it stands, the Marxist vision of capitalism inevitably draws one into a negatively critical stance, which means that one can limit oneself to identifying the problems and shortcomings of the subject under discussion, without looking beyond these, toward alternatives that might produce creative change. The problem of negative critique resides in its utter inability to produce a viable alternative to the system it vilifies. Negative critique thus paralyzes one into the same discourse one attempts to negate, which ends up validating the power that props up that discourse. Even if this negative critique “undermines and exposes [the power produced by the discourse], renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, “Sexuality,” 101), what ensues in the optimistic case in which power has successfully been thwarted is a void which, due to the absence

of an agreed-upon alternative, allows for an opportunistic power of a similar brand to take the place vacated by the former one. Ultimately, negative critique is vital for pinpointing the problem. Unfortunately, it can only take one so far.

Marxism, therefore, while at points very astute in posing the problem, offers solutions which, albeit very promising, do not abdicate the negative stance of overthrowing the power of capitalism. In *The Communist Manifesto*, for example, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels call for a radical solution, which includes the “formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois rule, conquest of political power by the proletariat” (74). Historically, these Marxist solutions proved either impossible to apply (Marx and Engels’ orthodox version of communism remained utopian), or disastrous when translated into practice (see the dictatorship of the proletariat in the former ‘communist’ countries, e.g., Stalin’s rule). By dwelling in Marxism, therefore, current theories about the present moment unwittingly trap themselves into a dead-end situation, which affords no escape from the binary opposition between capital and proletariat, which misdiagnoses the immanent nature of capitalism, and lures one into a false sense of possibility. The very solutions offered in the Marxist paradigm reinforce the binary hinging on the negative: resistance implies refusal, negativity of action, while the coming revolution has become the abstract ideal whose practical instantiation can no longer be envisioned.

### **Methodology: creative critique**

While not attempting a binary opposition between negative and creative critique, this dissertation relies on both as a methodology. The first step, methodologically, is to characterize the present situation; secondly (and consequently), one can identify the problems with the existing system: this constitutes the ‘negative’ part of the critique. An additional step requires the presentation of examples for the previous theorizing. The subsequent, and crucial, step to produce a creative critique represents the uncovering of imagined or real alternatives<sup>32</sup>.

Consequently, this dissertation is divided into four chapters that attempt to bring this methodology to life. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical basis of corporatism, modeled on the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Chapter 2 begins to exemplify corporatism by investigating three corporate examples. This chapter sheds light on the real-life functioning of three corporations, Hudson’s Bay Company, Walmart, and Unilever, while also connecting them to the theoretical genealogy of human social systems described by Deleuze and Guattari. Chapter 3 turns to literature as both a diagnostician of the contemporary corporatism, as well as an imaginative solution-provider. While not instrumentalizing literature, this chapter rather looks to three novels for both descriptions of the corporatist social machine and prescriptions on how to attempt to change it. The novels featured in this chapter are aligned with the creative critique methodology: from the negative and even reactionary critique

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<sup>32</sup> Please turn to Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of the creative critique methodology and its connections to Deleuze-Guattarian theory.



of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, through the problems with the contemporary episteme illustrated by Margaret Atwood's dystopic *Oryx and Crake*, to the alternative outlined by Scarlett Thomas in *PopCo*. Chapter 4 investigates real-life experiments in order to assess their viability in altering the present conditions of life. To this end, the last chapter couples theoretical Deleuze-Guattarian alternatives with two locavore books: *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* by Barbara Kingsolver, with Steven L. Hopp and Camille Kingsolver, and *The 100-Mile Diet* by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon. At stake in this scholarly exercise is seeing corporatism for what it is and thus starting to envisage tailored alternatives. In my opinion, the immanence of corporatism, together with its system of axioms that integrates newness should not be crippling and cynicism-inducing. On the contrary: it offers more readily available solutions to the imagination and practice of alternatives. It is true that realizing its difference determines a change of paradigm in which one can no longer conceive of resistance per se. Resistance will be quickly annihilated, as so many examples show (quashed revolutions, wars in the name of "protecting the Western lifestyle"). Alternatives, however, upon integration, may change the face of the system altogether. I cannot make predictions, nor is clairvoyance the scope of a scholarly dissertation in cultural studies. Happily, though, as Chapter 4 shows, examples exist of alternatives which become reality and change the corporatist social machine. They might be slow-moving, imperceptible, or flawed, but they are also cause for hope. I am not advocating embracing corporatism. Rather, I think by revealing its strengths, one can also discover its

weaknesses; maybe, by inventing and imagining enough alternatives, the system itself can turn into an alternate... hopefully a better one.

## Chapter 1

### Corporatism in Theory: Creative Critique and the Immanence of Corporatism

*Immanence is immanent only to itself and consequently captures everything, absorbs All-One, and leaves nothing remaining to which it could be immanent. In any case, whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to Something, we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent.*

*(Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, What is Philosophy, 45)*

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari rely on many disciplines in the development of their schizoanalysis in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. They bring up musical compositions side by side with geological processes and biological phenomena to illustrate both the repetitiveness of some mechanisms as well as the rhizomatic nature of both natural and social life. It is in this spirit, then, that I wish to illustrate my understanding of the plane of immanence – which I take to be one of the most important aspects of Deleuze-Guattarian schizoanalysis – with the image of a drop of red ink dispersing in a glass of water. After the two liquids meet, the red ink appears as a drop for the tiniest moment, only to send countless little narrow veins throughout the volume of the water the next moment. The veins sprout their own thin arms, which, in turn, do the same, until the entire mass of water changes colour to a faint pink. Imagine now a system of far greater complexity than the inert water in the glass, a system with countless elements, capable of generating their own metaphorical drops of coloured ink, which nonetheless borrow the same *modus operandi* from the drop of ink in a glass of water.

The system under discussion is corporatism. A body of people, earth, machines, animals, plants, and many other elements, which form assemblages and generate flows that connect every point to other innumerable ones through concrete or abstract lines or processes. There are processes that generate that drop of ink from within the system, in the form of a thought or an action; then, other processes take hold to ensure the integration and dispersal of that drop of ink across the system. Sometimes the system is large enough that the drop becomes invisible when stretched across the entire plane of immanence. Other times, the drop garners more strength, its colour becoming more vibrant as it travels through the plane, managing, in the end, to change the makeup of the entire system, to take it in a different direction.

This chapter describes the contemporary capitalist system, called corporatism, in theory. It argues that the best paradigm for understanding the complex, intertwined phenomena happening in the world today – primarily, but hardly restricted to the global North – can be understood through the theoretical paradigm developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (D&G) in *Anti-Oedipus* (AO) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (TP). Their theoretical paradigm is comprehensive, abstract, and open to further generation of theory and articulation to practice or examples. It is, however, a rather circular system, in the sense that one has to suspend one's desire for explanation and go through the majority of their novel concepts before an image of their worldview begins to take contour. This chapter is structured, therefore, by necessity, more like a glossary with interconnected definitions, than like a traditional argumentative

progression. Structurally, this chapter moves from a discussion of creative critique, the methodology of this dissertation modeled after Deleuze and Guattari's own, to an interconnected, glossary-like explanation of some of the most important Deleuze-Guattarian concepts.

### **From Anti-Oedipus to the many *Plateaus*: Positive philosophy, Schizoanalysis and Creative Critique**

Relying on D&G's view of philosophy and their schizoanalysis, the methodology of this dissertation emerges as *creative critique*. Creative critique builds on the negative critique methodology advocated by critical theory<sup>1</sup> and takes it further, into Deleuze-Guattarian nomadic science<sup>2</sup>: identifying problems in everyday life or blind spots in existing theories becomes a step rather than the aim of the scholarly exercise. As Deleuze and Guattari explain at the end of *Anti-*

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring to the methodology championed and illustrated by the members of the Frankfurt School, most notably by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Horkheimer assigned critical theory the aim "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (qtd. in Bohman, n.pag.), therefore designating a prescriptive valence to the methodology. However, critical theory in practice rarely strays from negative critique, i.e., identifying problems and providing an oppositional stance. Arguably, this position stems from the Marxist roots of this methodology: "When reality is governed by antagonistic relations, Marxism can only be critique, and critique can only be negative: the critique of existing social conditions based on the difference between the rational concept of reality and reality itself" (Baugh 378).

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze and Guattari posit "nomad science" outside of the disciplines sanctioned by the State, outside of the "royal" or "major sciences." Nomad, or minor, science proceeds hydraulically, by way of flows and fluids, in opposition with the royal sciences which privilege solids. Its model "is one of becoming and heterogeneity, as opposed to the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant" (TP 361). Finally, even though State science constantly seeks to bar it and avert it, nomad science still survives, with its "problematic, rather than theorematic model" (362), thriving on differences rather than trying to resolve them. Claire Colebrook identifies nomadology's aim "to free thought from a fixed point of view or position of judgement" as different from Western thought, which tends "to operate from a fixed or grounded position: either the position of man or the subject of humanity" (*Understanding* xxvii).

*Oedipus*, the first step of the “Four positive theses of psychoanalysis” “goes by way of destruction... Destroy Oedipus, the illusion of the ego, the puppet of the superego, guilt, the law, castration” (311). First destroy, then rebuild.

It is important to note that what is known as “immanent critique” does not overlap with Deleuze’s own methodology, for which he advocates in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Immanent critique, according to Moishe Postone, does not judge critically what is from a conceptual position outside its object — for example, a transcendent ‘ought’. Instead, it must be able to locate that ‘ought’ as a dimension of its own context, a possibility immanent to the existent society. (qtd. in Larsen 50)

Immanent critique thus does not start from an outside perspective or ideology from which it judges its subject. Rather, it investigates its subject on its own terms. According to Neil Larsen, immanent critique is situated in “Hegelian-Marxism” (52), characterized by “general dialectical principles” (52), and “epitomized by Marx’s *Capital*” (50). Deleuze, following Nietzsche, critiques Hegelian dialectics because of its negativity and its “false image of difference” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy* 196):

The Hegelian dialectic is indeed a reflection on difference, but it inverts its image. For the affirmation of difference as such it substitutes the negation of that which differs; for the affirmation of self it substitutes the negation of the other, and for the affirmation of affirmation it substitutes the famous negation of negation. (196)

The irony, therefore, emerges from the clash between the epithet of “immanent”

shared by a method of investigation based on logical-philosophical principles that Deleuze rejects, and by one of the central characteristics of capitalism as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Ultimately, Deleuze has a problem with the negativity pervading dialectics and the other methodologies it supports:

Three ideas define the dialectic: the idea of a power of the negative as a theoretical principle manifested in opposition and contradiction; the idea that suffering and sadness have value, the valorisation of the ‘sad passions’, as a practical principle manifested in splitting and tearing apart; the idea of positivity as a theoretical and practical product of negation itself. (195)

The difference between “immanent critique” and the methodology Deleuze (alone and with Guattari) advocates rests on vitality and affirmation both as a means of investigation, and as the aim of this philosophical/theoretical investigation. Deleuze presents himself in direct opposition with the Hegelian dialectic that stands as the basis for immanent critique, due to its privileging of the “power of the negativity,” as well as of the principles of “opposition” and “contradiction.” Especially in his work with Guattari, who rejects psychoanalysis as both a way of knowing and a curative method because of its predication on “lack,” i.e., negativity, Deleuze aims toward a theory of affirmation, of life triumphant, of vitality, and of creativity. These aims also guide the following chapters of this dissertation, namely in its search for creative alternatives, ways in which, after identifying the problems, we can come up with solutions which improve life, rather than dwelling in negative critique.

The way to channel negative critique into a creative outcome thus resides in identifying an alternative. This additional step also presupposes an inherent transformation in the very nature of the critique itself, by eschewing the oppositional stance presupposed by negativity and focusing on a somewhat teleological analysis. Less abstractly, instead of looking for fault for the sake of it, one has to discern the origins, the mechanisms, and the methodologies employed by the problematic system/situation, with a view to proposing new ones that will change it for the better, rather than merely resist it or overturn it. In theory, these aims do not stray from the core of Marxism. After all, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and all their followers were convinced that the revolution of the proletariat they were proposing was only a step and a means toward building a better, egalitarian, classless society, in which everyone would thrive, irrespective of their background. The reality of applying their theories, however, turned rather grim: all of the communist societies modelled on Marxist theories proved to take the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat”<sup>3</sup> to heart, and became strictly authoritarian terror regimes, with repression apparatuses that would ‘carry on the revolution’, even though the revolution had already taken place and been successful at abolishing private property<sup>4</sup> and transferring the means of production from the bourgeoisie to the working class.

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<sup>3</sup> In *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx describes a transitional period between the overthrowing of capitalism to the establishment of a communist state: “Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*” (n.pag.)

<sup>4</sup> “the Communists can sum up their theory in one motto: abolition of private property” (*The Communist Manifesto* 75)



Furthermore, when applied theoretically, this brand of critique remains negative, without offering any alternatives beyond resistance, which only propagates an oppositional stance without solutions. The reason might stem from various definitions of communism provided by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things” (56-57). The aim of Marxist action is thus predicated on the oppositional stance, focused more on abolition of the existing state of affairs, rather than on establishing a clear alternative to it: “for the real communist, it is a question of overthrowing the existing state of things” (60). Overthrow, abolition, opposition, resistance, all originate in the Marxist vocabulary and culminate in the concept of activism, which, like the very commodity Marx was describing in his *opus magnum*, *Capital*, has the tendency to become fetishized<sup>5</sup>, i.e., elevated to a level where it acquires a life of its own, revered and respected for the mere mention, rather than the outcome of its action.

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<sup>5</sup> “The mysterious character of the commodity form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things...the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social...It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight in the misty realm of religion. There, the products of the human brain appear as **autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own**, which enter in relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.” (Marx, *Capital*, 164-65).

In the famous *No Logo*, for example, Naomi Klein provides a groundbreaking and comprehensive analysis of the widespread corporate action of branding and its implications. Klein also displays the actions of the other side: anti-corporate activists, whose aim is to resist the ever-growing encroachment of corporatism onto culture. The movements Klein presents, however, speak more of resistance than of alternative creation. They are culture jamming/ad busting, Reclaim the Streets through impromptu parties that disrupt traffic, exposing corporate bad practices like slave labour inappropriate labour conditions, sweatshops by the National Labour Committee or Workers' Assistance Centre. Klein's argument here is that the brand can be used as a double-edged sword:

It may be nothing new for consumer goods to be produced under oppressive conditions, but what clearly *is* new is the tremendously expanded role consumer-goods companies are playing in our culture. Anti-corporate activism is on the rise because many of us feel the international brand-name connections that crisscross the globe more keenly than we have ever before – and we feel them precisely because we have never been as 'branded' as we are today. (334-35)

Because of this visible corporate involvement, Klein argues that the branded corporations open themselves up to critique: "when they do wrong, their crimes are not dismissed as merely misdemeanors of another corporation trying to make a buck" (335). Klein feels this visibility works to undermine the big brands, e.g., "Nike, Microsoft, and Starbucks" (335), and intensify resistance movements.

Other authors debate the efficacy of these resistance movements that Klein describes, due to their negatively critical focus. In *Nation of Rebels*, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter argue that “If anything, consumer capitalism has emerged from decades of countercultural rebellion much stronger than it was before” (8), because “the theory of society on which the countercultural idea rests is false” (8). Heath and Potter add that

countercultural rebellion is not just unhelpful, it is positively counterproductive. Not only does it distract energy from the sort of initiatives that lead to concrete improvements in people’s lives, but it encourages wholesale contempt for such incremental changes. (8)

Once one embraces negative critique as ultimate goal, the space necessary for generating alternatives is colonized by that aim: anything one encounters is examined for fault, rather than assessed for viability<sup>6</sup>. As Christine Harold points out in analyzing Heath and Potter’s argument, “rather than offering and *alternative* to rampant consumerism, counter-cultural ‘rebellion’ is actually the engine that drives the competitive consumption on which neoliberal capitalism thrives” (xx), because “the countercultural rebel is indeed something of a myth, which in no way voids its importance as a story that inspires people” (xxi).

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<sup>6</sup> Nor am I arguing for the uncritical embrace of ‘positive thinking’. As Barbara Ehrenreich shows, in her *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America*, positive thinking can be a powerful dogmatic and oppressive tool in the service of corporatism: “But if early capitalism was inhospitable to positive thinking, ‘late’ capitalism, or consumer capitalism, is far more congenial, depending as it does on the individual’s hunger for *more* and the firm’s imperative for *growth*” (8). Ehrenreich thus pins the imperative for positive thinking – for which she provides both ample analysis and multiple examples – on corporatism’s axiomatic desire for growth, which I discussed in the Introduction. For a further example on the connection between business growth and the push for consumerism, please see the Walmart section of Chapter 2.

Harold would thus agree with my view of the fetishization of resistance-activism.

Both books therefore point beyond the negativity of the “anti-” and the “counter-” toward creative alternatives that produce a change in the circumstances of human life, rather than merely negating the existing system or attempting its overthrow. Harold points the finger at negative critique and provides examples to support the “inability of such rhetoric to affirm any alternative beyond endless critique,” which can “only negate, only repudiate the status quo” (53). Harold’s contention that, while a necessary stepping stone, negative critique “is insufficient as a strategy for addressing the mode of power it faces” (56) supports my own claim toward the identification of creative solutions in light of an accurate diagnosis and analysis of the present corporatist system.

This accurate diagnosis and analysis can be attained, I argue, by turning to the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their entire thought paradigm relies on proliferation and multiplicity, rather than reductive negativity. In other words, instead of merely talking back to previous philosophers or theorists in order to carve their theoretical niche, Deleuze and Guattari focus on constructing a new system of thought<sup>7</sup> that both makes sense

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<sup>7</sup> For example, to illustrate a free-standing analysis of capitalism that does not rely on Marxian terminology, D&G propose the following:

We define social formations by *machinic processes* and not by modes of production (these on the contrary depend on the processes). Thus primitive societies are defined by mechanisms of prevention-anticipation; State societies are defined by apparatuses of capture; urban societies by instruments of polarization; nomadic societies, by war machines; and finally international, or

on its own and allows further conceptual proliferation. In fact, D&G encourage their readers to take up their concepts and make them their own. New concepts, after all, are what philosophy is all about for D&G:

The philosopher is the concept's friend; he is potentiality of the concept. That is, philosophy is not a simple art of forming, inventing, or fabricating concepts, because concepts are not necessarily forms, discoveries, or products. More rigorously, philosophy is the discipline that involves *creating* concepts... The object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new. (*What is Philosophy?* 5, original emphasis)

Philosophy, which I take to extend further than the discipline itself, relies on creation of new ways of thinking, which for D&G are symbolized by the “concept.” However, it is not just creating for the sake of multiplying; rather, D&G’s view of philosophy consists in novelty that allows for constant re-application in different situations, hence “concepts that are always new.” On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari prove themselves aware of the dangers of such a proposition, especially when “creativity” and “concept” are such buzzwords for the corporatist system:

Finally, the most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the word *concept* itself and said: ‘This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the *ideas men*! We are the friends of the concept, we put it in our computers.’ Information and creativity, concept

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rather ecumenical, organizations are defined by the encompassment of heterogeneous social formations. (*TP* 435)

and enterprise: there is already an abundant bibliography. (10, original emphasis)

Concept-car manufacturers, concept-based marketers, and corporate creatives all stand to undermine the legitimate duty of philosophy to create new ways of looking at the world. Or rather, all have decided to encroach on and colonize the concept-creating endeavour and make it their business, and so “the only concepts are products that can be sold” anymore (10). D&G caution further “Philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced Critique with sales promotion” (10).

However, negative critique for its own sake cannot remain the go-to methodology, either. In *Pure Immanence: A Life*, Deleuze explains that dwelling in negativity takes away from the vitality of life and leads to submissiveness:

And at the same time that thought thus becomes negative, life depreciates, ceases to be active, is reduced to its weakest forms, to sickly forms that are alone compatible with the so-called higher values. It is the triumph of ‘reaction’ over active life and of negation over affirmative thought. (68, original emphasis)

With Nietzsche in the back of his mind, Deleuze thus argues that persisting in negative critique cannot lead to a better life, just as it cannot create any new ways of thinking. Negative “thought” leads only to reaction, to the depreciation of life—both the mark of the Nietzschean slave mentality, as Deleuze points out in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Moreover, because it hinders new ways of looking at the world, negative thought leads to the ossification of life into conservatism:

the blind allegiance to those “so-called higher values.” The price of conformity resides in the depreciation of life, which “ceases to be active, is reduced to its weakest forms, to sickly forms.” These weak and sickly forms of life lead to submission:

We are always asked to submit ourselves, to burden ourselves, to recognize only the reactive forms of life, the accusatory forms of thought. When we no longer want, when we can no longer bear higher values, we are still asked to accept ‘the real as it is’ – but *this ‘real as it is’ is precisely what the higher values have made of reality!* (71, original emphasis)

Deleuze is not advocating for a pull-yourself-by-the-bootstraps-and-snap-out-of-your-melancholia model here, which serves political conservatism so well. Rather, he is pointing to the very causes that lead to that situation in the first place: searching for scapegoats to blame – “the accusatory forms of thought” – while maintaining an adequate level of rage because of reacting to the inadequacy of a “reality” in which the “higher values” one has adhered to are unattainable.

Therefore, it is time to change our world outlook, to renounce negativity, reactivity, and those “higher values,” in order to change life itself. In what follows, I examine not only what contemporary life in corporatism looks like, according to Deleuze and Guattari, but also what their solutions are to change it. The theoretical process of philosophy that they describe finds application in their thorough analysis of life that *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* represents, because

philosophy not only analyzes life, but also holds the key to its change; the way thinking operates in philosophy mirrors the process of life:

This process of degeneration concerns not only philosophy but also becoming in general – not a fact in history, but the very principle from which derive most of the events that have determined our thinking and our life, the symptoms of a decomposition. And so, true philosophy, as philosophy of the future, is no more historical than it is eternal: it must be untimely, always untimely. (*Pure Immanence* 72)

Philosophy, in the larger sense that arguably can be made synonymous with creative critique, must thus both analyze its contemporaneous life situation and offer “untimely” solutions, i.e., preventative and effective ones. The course of action prescribed by such a methodology goes beyond palliative and into substantive change. So, what exactly do Deleuze and Guattari have to offer when it comes to the latest stage of capitalism, corporatism?

**“Flying anuses, speeding vaginas, there is no castration”: Shifting the paradigm à la Deleuze and Guattari**

I have been making the claim that Deleuze and Guattari offer unique ways of both analyzing and characterizing the present moment, as well as potential alternatives to it. However, they do not come into a theoretical void. Their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes, on which the theory of this dissertation relies, enacts the two-step process of “creative critique” that I have outlined in the previous section. The first volume is *Anti-Oedipus*, therefore



nominally against Oedipus, where “Oedipus presupposes a fantastic repression of desiring-machines” (3). This volume critiques the predication of theories of life on the negativity brought about by psychoanalytical repression and lack, while also highlighting the manner in which this world outlook benefits capitalism: “the link between psychoanalysis and capitalism is no less profound than that between political economy and capitalism... Psychoanalysis is the technique of application, for which political economy is the axiomatic” (A-O 302-303). Capitalism and psychoanalysis use methods and mechanisms that make them benefit one another. The axiomatic—the primary rules emitted directly by the economic production of capitalism—work in much the same way that psychoanalysis does, Deleuze and Guattari argue.

Moving beyond the negative critique, however, *Anti-Oedipus* also starts to show how recognizing capitalism’s minute way of organizing life into its own operations can lead one into the direction of discovering and formulating alternatives. In summary, more than critiquing the present situation in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari offer a holistic way of counteracting the problematic of the existing situation. Oedipus comes to signify paranoia brought about by the constant feeling of insecurity bred by a psychoanalytical world outlook based on repression and lack, which capitalism integrates into its own mode of production. D&G ask “Is it not more likely that Oedipus is a requirement or a consequence of social reproduction, insofar as this latter aims at domesticating a genealogical form and content that are in every way intractable?” (A-O 13). And even though the question seems rhetorical, the

authors propose that the answer comes when one examines the role of lack both for psychoanalysis and for capitalism: “Lack (*manque*)\* is created, planned, and organized in and through social production” (A-O 28). Therefore, D&G do not so much deny the importance of lack, as they dethrone it from its determining role – which would make it transcendent – by pointing to its productive, if sometimes artificial, deployment by both psychoanalysis and capitalism. The asterisk next to the French word points to a translators’ note alerting readers to the double meaning of “*manque*” in French: both “lack” and “need.” The translators point to the very intersection of psychoanalysis with capitalism that *Anti-Oedipus* argues for: “*manque* may mean both lack and need in a psychological sense, as well as want or privation or scarcity in an economic sense” (A-O 28, translators’ note). D&G then move on to specify the interleaving of these two realms: “production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack,” the latter being deliberately created “as a function of market economy”<sup>8</sup> (28).

*Anti-Oedipus* therefore investigates the paranoiac (psychoanalytical and capitalist) mechanisms which converge to render humans and their desires productive for the system. More significantly, A-O starts a process that is better visible in *A Thousand Plateaus*. It looks at possible alternatives and potential ways to dismantle the territorialities (institutions such as the school, the

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<sup>8</sup> Corporatism disproves the simple “supply for demand” rule of economics by first creating a product and then marketing it so the need for it emerges. One of the best known examples for this strategy is Head and Shoulders shampoo, whose appearance onto the market transformed an innocuous situation – dandruff – into an unacceptable social faux-pas. Corporatism thus does not respond to a perceived lack in the market,

workplace, which insert humans as desiring-machines into the capitalist assemblage of production); to oppose to the organism (characterized by a clear hierarchy of the organs of the body, and thus making the body liable to be disciplined) the body without organs whose smooth, unstriated surface allows for continuous flows; and to counter the repressed individuality created by Oedipus with schizophrenia, “the *absolute limit* of every society” and capitalism’s “own *exterior limit*, which it is continually repelling and exorcising, while capitalism itself produces its *immanent limits*, which it never ceases to displace and enlarge” (A-O 266, original emphasis). Capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is an immanent social machine, which works hand in hand with psychoanalysis to integrate humans, as well as other life forms, into its own production system. As we shall see, capitalism constitutes “the *relative limit* of every society” (266), because it does away (decodes) the societal rules (codes) of the previous social systems, and replaces them with an immanent axiomatic which serves to “displace and enlarge” capitalism’s limits. The absolute limit of any kind of social formation is schizophrenia, a limit towards which capitalism always tends, but which it always manages to avert. The trick, then, may just be to push capitalism so far that it finally morphs into schizophrenia: absolute deterritorialization (without reterritorialization according to axioms), freely flowing desires across an unproductive, unhierarchized body without organs<sup>9</sup>.

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e.g., a need that is not met by a certain product. Rather, it creates that lack as part of its desiring-production.

<sup>9</sup> In his reading of the entire Deleuzian oeuvre, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences*, Slavoj Žižek inverts the D-G concept of the body without organs into “organs without body (OwB)” (30) to symbolize both a psychoanalytical partial object, and Deleuze’s philosophical work before his collaboration with Guattari. For Žižek, the

### The Plane of Immanence

The imagery I have used in the beginning of this chapter, of the drop of ink in a glass of water, was meant to bring to mind an immanent system, in which the clear hierarchy between a sovereign and his subjects has been replaced by intensities and movements of different speeds, all of which influence and change the system to a certain degree. Immanence constitutes the hallmark of corporatism, as the latest stage of capitalism. As Deleuze and Guattari describe it in one of the many references,

There are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages... We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to the plan(e) of organization or development). It is necessarily a plane of immanence and univocality. We therefore call it the plane of Nature, although nature has nothing to do with it, since on this plane there is no distinction between the natural and the artificial. However many dimensions it may have, it never has a

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“Guattarized” Deleuze goes against the writings in his previous books, to the point of calling *Anti-Oedipus* “arguably Deleuze’s worst book” (21). Žižek’s argument is that beyond Deleuze’s better known collaborative work with Guattari lies “another Deleuze,

supplementary dimension to that which transpires upon it. That alone makes it natural and immanent. (TP 266)

This excerpt both situates the Deleuze-Guattarian theory in terms of its interlocutors (“forms,” “subjectivity,” “structure”), and provides an explanation of the plane of immanence and a glimpse into its mechanisms and functioning. Life itself, symbolized by “Nature” in this quote, functions immanently, i.e., without a structure or a hierarchy in which certain elements would reign over or determine others. Life on this plane requires no interpretation, because, as its “univocality” demonstrates, there are no metaphorical meanings, which have to be explained by a transcendent or hierarchically superior interpreters, e.g., the priest, the despot, or the psychoanalyst. Why? Because "It comes to the same thing to say that the sign refers to other signs ad infinitum and that the infinite set of signs refers to a supreme signifier" (TP 115), which would then lead us back to a transcendent system.

The plane of immanence, however, does not imply flattening. Even if the transcendent hierarchy has disappeared, the plane has “many dimensions,” but “never has a supplementary dimension to that which transpires upon it” (TP 266). Immanence is not a flat, two-dimensional idealistic simplification of life; it can extend into multiple directions. What distinguishes it, again, is the lack of an organizing principle that imposes a distinction between a determining factor and a determined element.

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much closer to psychoanalysis and Hegel, a Deleuze whose consequences are much more shattering” (xi).

Nor is the plane static. On the contrary, it is defined by “relations of movement and rest,” by interactions between elements which, even though different, do not carry more or less significance than other categories of elements. They can be “molecules and particles” or “haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages.” What matters more than their category or their kind, is their location, their “longitudes and latitudes” and their speed.

The plane of immanence holds the key to both the functioning of the capitalist social machine and the potential alternatives to it. Before I investigate the immanence of capitalism in more detail, there are a few other concepts to discuss. The versatility of concepts such as immanence in D&G’s work arguably comes from the fact they offer first a methodology, instead of an ossified theory, which can be variously applied to different situations, while also presenting abstract solutions, e.g., becoming, lines of flight. These alternatives originate in the reality of the investigated situation, but they can also be modified and applied individually according to concrete details. D&G’s methodology – named variously schizoanalysis, nomadism<sup>10</sup>, or rhizomatics – comes from their conviction that everything constituting reality finds itself in continuous movement at different speeds, and that what needs to be emphasized is always difference, rather than identity. According to Brian Massumi,

‘Nomad thought’ ... does not repose on identity; it rides difference. It does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of

representation, subject, concept, and being; it replaces restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds. The concepts it creates do not merely reflect the eternal form of a legislating subject, but are defined by a communicable force in relation to which their subject, to the extent that they can be said to have one, is only secondary. (5)

Instead of creating a structure focused on the Subject, Deleuze and Guattari privilege and promote the movement of processes that better define life. Thus the traditional category of the subject or identity<sup>11</sup>, with its assumption of stability, disappears from the foreground, or becomes secondary, and is replaced by the investigation of the methods and operations of capitalism that affect all life on earth, not just the traditional subject, irrespective of how he (sic) is defined. Thus, we are invited to ponder on movements of different speeds, diverse elements or machines interconnecting and forming assemblages, their desires caught up in an immanent system, which swiftly integrates these desires into its production system. Or we can maybe envisage an alternative in which the desiring machines allow flows, which they otherwise interrupt<sup>12</sup>, to escape into

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Massumi notes “A Thousand Plateaus (1980), written over a seven-year period, is less a critique than a sustained, constructive experiment in schizophrenic, or ‘nomad’ thought” (4).

<sup>11</sup> As Rosi Braidotti points out, “Historically, continental philosophy – prior to an including post-structuralism – is connected to the issue of European identity and ‘civilisation’” (80).

<sup>12</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, “desiring-machines are the fundamental category of the economy of desire; they produce a body without organs all by themselves... Desiring machines are both technical and social” (A-O 32). If desire is what animates life, then the desiring machine is the fundamental ‘unit’ of life as it were. The desiring machine emerges as a result of the connections between humans and other elements in the processes of life. A desiring machine can therefore be “technical” if we look at a person operating a piece of machinery, e.g., someone wielding a tool in the process of accomplishing a task. In “The Joy of Philosophy,” Claire Colebrook explains the connection between machines and flows thus:

lines of flight across a body without organs. They relinquish the imposed organism, which serves to integrate them in to the hierarchical and teleological plane of immanence of capitalism, in order to undergo the process of becoming. Thus, they, and we, can open them-/our-selves up to an ever-changing life of becoming, while also allowing for more compassion, understanding, and exuberance to the detriment of security, rigidity, and solidification.

### Desiring-production

In their “Introduction” to *Deleuze and the Contemporary World*, Ian Buchanan and Adrian Parr approach Deleuze from his contention that “you can never know a philosopher properly until you know what he or she is against” (1) and argue that

One answer to the question of what Deleuze and Guattari are against, then, is this: the axiomatic. The axiomatic is the latest form of social organization, which for Deleuze and Guattari always means the organization of flows of desire. For them, desire is a kind of cosmic energy that is constantly being deformed into desire-for-something; but, in their view, its true form is that of production itself. It is, in other words, a process rather than a thing. Desire is the force in the universe that brings things together, but does so without plan or purpose and the results are always uncertain...desire is an ambivalent force – without it,

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In the beginning is the machine, not the organism: not a self-enclosed being that somehow has to attach itself to an outside world, but a series of connecting operations or functions that allows the relatively stable point of the living being to maintain its own life. Bodies are coupled to environments – eating, breathing, adapting movements to spaces, creating territories by moulding themselves to relevant differences, and relevant differences to themselves. (219)



we shrivel up and die, but if it isn't carefully harnessed it can tear us apart. (1-2)

Indeed, if one sought an entryway into *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, desire would have to top the list of keywords in search for a definition. The axiomatic, on the other hand, could wait for a while. While definitive of how capitalism operates, the axiomatic should take a back seat to *desiring-production*, which, I would argue, signals the interconnectedness of contemporary life within the immanent plane of economic production of capitalism. For the sake of explanation, the immanent imbrication of desiring-production can serve as an entry point into the theory of capitalism developed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Desiring-production signals the interconnection of economic activity with life: "Production as process overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle" (A-O 5). No longer can we speak of human life withdrawn from the processes that propel capitalism, symbolized here by "production." There are no outside, "idealistic categories," since capitalism has made everything its business. Production – read capitalist operations – has developed "an immanent" relationship with desire. Their connection is so strong that one cannot be understood or analyzed in the absence of the other. Moreover, the recognition of the mutual imbrication between desire and the realm of production leads to "desire produces reality, or stated another way, desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production" (30). Desiring-machines – living beings displaying affect – serve both to explain the role of humans within capitalism,

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and also to point towards alternatives: “desiring-machines are the fundamental category of the economy of desire; they produce a body without organs all by themselves” (32). The potentiality to produces the body without organs, as we shall see further down, points to the possibility of liberating desire from its imbrication with capitalist production and the opening of a different, alternative plane of immanence.

### Lines of flight

Significantly then, the analysis<sup>13</sup> that D&G offer serves as its own potentiality for change. Their concepts describe processes more than static events, and therefore open themselves up to be drawn in a different direction than the one they inhabit in that moment. The line of flight exists among the various connections between different machines, or elements of the plane of immanence, ready to escape, i.e., take flight, in a different direction – maybe break through the limits of the plane – onto its own body without organs:

Individual or group, we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics, and zones marching to different beats and different in nature. We said that we are composed of lines, three kinds of lines... In short, *there is a line of flight, which is already complex since it has singularities; and there [is] a customary or molar line with segments; and between the two (?), there is a molecular line with quanta that cause it to tip to one side or the other.* (TP 202-3, original emphasis and punctuation)

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<sup>13</sup> “Schizoanalysis, as the analysis of desire, is immediately practical and political, whether it is a question of an individual, group, or society. For politics precedes being.” (TP 203)

Any human being or other form of life lives along these types of lines. In other words, there are always links that can be drawn between one desiring-machine and another kind of machine. Some of these lines, or connections – the molar kind – lead people to assemblages, and link them within the productive operations of the system. Others – the line of flight – can lead to changes to the very system. The third kind of line, the molecular one with the quanta – this quanta signalling that it can only take one of two distinct values – can determine the desiring-machine to go one way or another. In turn, this move potentially turning one into a line of flight can lead to a systemic transformation, taking the entire plane of immanence with it in a different direction<sup>14</sup> thanks to the axiomatic that provides the rules of conduct, as it were, for the capitalist world.

#### Social machines: Primitive, Barbaric, and Capitalist

As Buchanan and Parr mention in the quote above (p. 67), the axiomatic takes a prominent place in the functioning of capitalism. It not only drives its actions and explains its quick reactivity, but also connects it with the preceding social machines: the primitive territorial and the barbaric despotic ones. In the genealogy of human social systems, as Deleuze and Guattari explain in *Anti-Oedipus*, one can distinguish three phases: primitive-territorial, barbaric-despotic, and civilized-capitalist. Each social machine, or *socius*, has its specific ways of organizing life through the management of desiring-machines<sup>15</sup>.

Although the three social machines present many differences, what defines them

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<sup>14</sup> Please see Chapter 4 for an investigation into the potential of the locavore movement to become a line of flight and transform the corporatist plane of immanence.

as such is their regulation of desire: “To code desire...is the business of the socius” (*A-O* 139). Indeed, “the social machine is identical with the desiring-machine” (*A-O* 151). The primary role of the socius thus consists in dictating, administering, and organizing human desire. It is this point that corporations have become most adept at exploiting, as will become apparent in Chapter 2. The definitive trait of corporatism is the integration of desire within the plane of economic production; what results is an immanent desiring-production.

Another common trait of all social machines – the systems of social organization<sup>16</sup> – is their reliance on contradiction: “it is *in order to function* that a social machine must *not function well*” (151, original emphasis), because “social machines make a habit of feeding on the contradictions they give rise to, on the crises they provoke, on the anxieties they *engender*, and on the infernal operations they regenerate” (151). In other words, the more problems it can throw in the way of the desires it sanctions, the better the socius becomes at integrating people as its machinic parts. The more rules – be they codes or axioms, even though the two are hardly synonymous –, especially contradictory ones, a social machine proclaims, the better its handle on its human parts, whether they be called subjects, citizens, or machines.

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<sup>15</sup> “the unconscious constructs machines, which are machines of desire, whose use and functioning schizoanalysis discovers in their immanent relationship with social machines” (*Anti-Oedipus*)

<sup>16</sup> As Kenneth Surin explains, “Deleuze and Guattari seek what amounts to a comprehensive undoing of the transcendental basis of the constitution of the social order” (255). Thus emerges the need for a new term for human social organization: socius or social machine. Surin goes further with his explanation of the term:

In *Anti-Oedipus*, the socius is said to be necessary because desiring-production is coterminous with social production and reproduction, and for the latter to take place, desire has to be coded and recoded, so that subjects can be prepared for

All three machines have further in common that “society is...rather a socius of inscription where the essential thing is to mark and be marked” (A-O 142). Therefore, their role, as Surin points out in the quote above (footnote #16), is the marking or “inscription” of people in view of establishing clear roles for their integration – and the integration of their desire – within production. However, what differentiates them are the methods they employ to administer the human desire and to inscribe humans, to integrate them within their respective systems, i.e., to territorialize them, as in the primitive territorial machine, or include them in the molar assemblages of the immanent capitalist socius.

Although D&G offer no timeframes for the social machines – probably because their conceptualization eschews the tree-structure and Eurocentrism of traditional history or anthropology –, they present clear and identifiable characteristics for each. To start with, the primitive territorial machine is “inscriptive: not exchanging but marking bodies, which are part of the earth” (185). This socius inscribes a code directly onto the body of the earth: people are assigned to literal territories (hence territorialization) where they live and which define who they are. Moreover, D&G note that “filiation and alliance are like the two forms of a primitive capital,” and that “filiation is administrative and hierarchical, but alliance is political and economic, and expresses power” (146). The primitive territorial machine consists of “*the declension of alliance and filiation*—declining the lineages on the body of the earth, before there is a State”

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their social roles and functions. The socius is the terrain for this coding and recoding. (255)

(146, original emphasis). The human relations that ensue in this socius are therefore ones of lateral connections, based on alliance, which does not necessarily derive from kinship, but works with familial relations in this social machine. As Claire Colebrook explains it in *Understanding Deleuze*, alliance is the type of relationship that appears first: “Before there can be families—the recognition of mother–father–child units, or lines of filiation—the intense germinal influx needs to be organised into bodies occupying separate tribal territories, or lines of alliance” (133). Alliance thus predates familial relationships, as the organization of bodies on the territory of the earth responds to basic economic necessities. On top of these, the next socius imposes a filiative organization.

### The State and Overcoding

The barbarian despotic machine emerges in opposition with the primitive socius, and its main trait is “The full body as socius has ceased to be the earth, it has become the body of the despot, the despot himself or his god” (194). The second regime imposes a code onto the body of the despot, who thus becomes the transcendent figure to which everything and everyone is connected. The system of lateral alliance is replaced by a system of direct filiation: the despot is the descendant of god on earth, and so all desiring-production is due to him (both through his grace, and belonging to him). The most important innovation emerging in this socius is the State:

in place of the territorial machine, there is the ‘megamachine’ of the State, a functional pyramid that has the despot at its apex, an immobile

motor, with the bureaucratic apparatus as its lateral surface and its transmission gear, and the villagers at its base, serving as working parts.

(194)

The vivid imagery of this description of the barbaric despotic machine makes its transcendent and hierarchical system clear. The State becomes not only the unifying regime, but also the organizing principle: “the State is the transcendent higher unity that integrates relatively isolated subaggregates, functioning separately, to which it assigns a development in bricks and a labor of construction by fragments” (198). The subaggregates, which the State manages and brings together as bricks in a “higher unity,” are remnants of the previous socius, “the concrete base and beginning” (199). Overcoding characterizes the *modus operandi* of the State; it

constitutes the essence of the State, and that measures both its continuity and its break with the previous formations: the dread of flows of desire that would resist coding, but also the establishment of a new inscription that overcodes, and that makes desire into the property of the sovereign, even though he be the death instinct itself. (199)

The State thus builds on the previous social machine, taking its disparate territorial elements, deterritorializing them, and re-organizing them by means of this operation of overcoding. Moreover, “overcoding is the essence of the law, and the origin of the new sufferings of the body” (212). Codes represent the method through which the State organizes desiring-machines in the barbaric despotic socius. They replace the literal and palpable territorial connection of the

previous social machine with these set rules, such as the laws, that dictate the place of people in the tapestry of the system. Overcoding regulates desire.

Ultimately, “the State is desire that passes from the head of the despot to the hearts of his subjects, and from the intellectual law to the entire physical system that disengages or liberates itself from the law” (221). The State emerges in this socius as a new method to organize people according to the will of the sovereign/despot by means of codes. All human desires become restricted and expressed in terms of the despot’s desire.

In turn, the transcendent despotic regime, which codes the flows of desire onto the body of the despot, is replaced by the capitalist regime, which, for the first time, is based on an abstraction: money. "Capital is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being" (*A-O* 10). What that means is that capital submits to no imposed mode of organization and can flow freely.

capitalism is the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows, substituting for intrinsic codes an axiomatic of abstract quantities in the form of money. Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it toward this limit. At capitalism’s limit the deterritorialized socius gives way to the body without organs, and the decoded flows throw themselves into desiring-production. (*A-O* 139-40)



### Body without Organs and Deterritorialization

What is the body without organs (BwO)? The body without organs is the outcome of the process of deterritorialization on the organism. Even though it might sound circuitous, the organism has been constructed from the body by the social machine, which assigns functions and, more importantly, a hierarchy to the organs. In other words, the organs have been territorialized and codified, i.e., organized into a definitive, immutable structure that fixes their roles. In *Anti-Oedipus*, which looks at how the mechanisms through which capitalism and psychoanalysis feed into each other to subjugate the flows of desire, and consequently people, D&G talk about how the social machine inscribes the body into a code, making it an organism (*A-O* 144). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, which investigates more abstract and more pervasive modes of domination and subjugation – as well as a methodology of escaping these – the body without organs becomes

not an empty body stripped of organs, but a body upon which that which serves as organs... is distributed according to crowd phenomena, in Brownian motion, in the form of molecular multiplicities. The desert is populous. *Thus the body without organs is opposed less to organs as such than to the organization of the organs insofar as it composes an organism.* (*TP* 30, original emphasis)

The BwO is thus predicated on a defiance of organization, therefore of structure/hierarchy, and that is how it functions rhizomatically. Although *Anti-Oedipus* does not talk about the rhizome, and how, through its unlimited

possibilities of connection, it defies the traditional arborescent structures of organization leading to hierarchization and binarization, the definition it provides for the BwO anticipates this notion:

The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable... the BwO is nonproductive... Above all, it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image. (*A-O* 8)

No image means no possibility of representation, because it is with the help of representation that structuring and binaries occur, e.g., language and its biunivocal relations between signifier and signified in the structuralist view. Deterritorializing the organs, however, does not necessarily imply a reverse process, one of ‘liberation,’ because Deleuze and Guattari never speak in metaphors, and ‘liberation’ would be a metaphor (the organs can’t really be ‘liberated’ while the body would still be living). Rather, constructing the BwO entails the removal of the biunivocal relation between the organ and its function in the overall organization of the organism. The construction of the BwO has larger social implications; in *Anti-Oedipus*, D&G talk about the BwO as the deterritorialized socius.

As mentioned above, it is capitalism that can turn the socius or social machine into a BwO: “Capitalism tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius in order to make it a body without organs and unleash the

flows of desire on this body as a deterritorialized field” (*A-O* 33). However, the BwO is not a template of the socius, either:

The body without organs is not an original primordial entity that later projects itself into different sorts of socius... The social machine or socius may be the body of the Earth, the body of the Despot, the body of Money. It is never a projection, however, of the body without organs. On the contrary, the BwO is the ultimate residuum of a deterritorialized socius. (33)

Capitalism can make the socius into a BwO because the capitalist machine “is faced with the task of decoding and deterritorializing the flows” (33).

Capitalism, however, constitutes only a relative deterritorialization, relative in comparison to the other social machines (primitive and barbarian). Therefore, if I were to take it further, the BwO that capitalism gives rise to is one that still serves its purposes; true, if there is a BwO, the flows of desire can flow across it. The problem is that this desire is one produced by and benefiting capitalism, since "Capital is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being" (*A-O* 10).

Once again, identifying the problem properly leads to the potential solution: becoming and absolute deterritorialization, instead of the relative kind produced by capitalism. Recognizing that the present socius – late capitalism or corporatism – relies on immanence is what can potentially free the flows of desire into absolute deterritorialization. Capitalism, à la D&G does deterritorialize, it's true, but as they point out, it is a relative deterritorialization

which emerges only when this regime is compared to the previous sociuses, both based on more concrete supreme signifiers (the body of the Earth, and the body of the Despot, respectively). Capitalism does indeed free the flows of desire, but only to recapture them later, either with the help of the axiomatic, or with the help of the State.

### Axiomatic

The axiomatic, therefore, constitutes part and parcel of the operations of corporatism, just as coding and overcoding had for the State in the previous socius. A remnant of the barbaric regime, the State's role is to code the free-flying flows of desire and to rein them in:

the conjunction of the decoded flows, their differential relations, and their multiple schizzes or breaks require a whole apparatus of regulation whose principal organ is the State. The capitalist State is the regulator of decoded flows as such, insofar as they are caught up in the axiomatic of capital. In this sense it indeed completes the becoming-concrete that seems to us to preside over the evolution of the abstract despotic Urstaat: from being at first the transcendent unity, it becomes immanent to the field of social forces, enters into their service, and serves as a regulator of the decoded and axiomatized flows. (*A-O* 252)

The State finds itself thus caught up in the immanence of late capitalism, a mere tool for the regulation of decoded flows and their subsequent imbrication in capitalism with the help of the axiomatic. The axiomatic of capitalism constitutes one of the most important developments, and a real break with the

previous regime. The axiomatic is what confers on capitalism its endless flexibility, its potential to deal with any emerging issue, irrespective of its degree of novelty. Simply put, the axiomatic allows capitalism to constantly adapt in order to meet any new situations it encounters. By devising axioms – primary propositions that do not rely on any other and that deal with turning each new situation to its benefit – capitalism manages to break away from the regimes of old and construct itself the plane of immanence. In other words, D&G stress, the axiomatic has replaced the code of old, making capitalism different from the previous regimes because its axioms flow directly out of the conditions of the market, whereas the despotic codes were imposed by the transcendent sovereign:

capitalism is the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows, substituting for intrinsic codes an axiomatic of abstract quantities in the form of money. Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it toward this limit. At capitalism's limit the deterritorialized socius gives way to the body without organs, and the decoded flows throw themselves into desiring-production. (*A-O* 139-40)

The description of how the system functions contains hints towards alternatives. As the above quote shows, capitalism indeed undertakes a certain degree of deterritorialization, since desiring-machines are no longer directly linked to territories, but have moved on to form abstract assemblages. However, it is in the

system's interest for this deterritorialization to remain limited, while capitalism constantly strives to avert the limits. Surpassing the limits would give rise to a non-hierarchical, non-instrumental type of life, in which people would see their desires determine their lives without being interleaved within the plane of corporatist production.

In a seeming anticipation of right-wing triumphalist discourse<sup>17</sup>, D&G place capitalism at the end of history<sup>18</sup>, because of its continued dwelling at its own limit:

Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it toward this limit. (*A-O* 139)

For this reason capitalism's deterritorialization is only relative: compared to the previous regimes, the ones that either assign people to territories, or that code those territories so that they belong to and hinge on the transcendent sovereign, capitalism introduces a novelty: money. Capital represents an abstract, deterritorialized, and free-flowing machine, one that sets desire free both from a set territory and from a confining code that would see it submit to a transcendent power. But the process does not go all the way, because that would constitute the end of capitalism, the emergence of a body without organs that would truly

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<sup>17</sup> See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which trumpets the irrefutable victory of capitalism in the wake of the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes.

<sup>18</sup> "Primitive societies are not outside history; it is capitalism that is at the end of history, it is capitalism that results from a long history of contingencies and accidents, and that brings on this end" (*A-O* 153)

liberate desire. No, in order to survive, capitalism constantly tends to its limit, which it averts, whenever challenged, by emitting new axioms.

To reiterate towards a more comprehensive definition, an “axiomatic” is a group of primary propositions, or statements, that do not derive from any others. Capitalism, according to D&G replaces the codes used by the other two social machines with an axiomatic:

The axiomatic deals directly with purely functional elements and relations whose nature is not specified, and which are immediately realized in highly varied domains simultaneously; codes, on the other hand, are relative to those domains and express specific relations between qualified elements that cannot be subsumed by a higher formal unity (overcoding) except by transcendence and in an indirect fashion (*TP* 454).

The capitalist axiomatic is immanent to the relations of production, general enough to be flexible and to allow for change, and abstract enough to cover a variety of phenomena, from human interrelations to financial markets. While codes are intrinsically extraeconomic, which makes them transcendent, the axiomatic is immanent, because it is generated by the conditions of the market and acts on the social machine in the interest of the economic plane of immanence that generates it.

Moreover, the axiomatic is endlessly flexible: for each new situation, a new axiom is added:

The strength of capitalism indeed resides in the fact that its axiomatic is never saturated, that it is always capable of adding a new axiom to the previous ones. Capitalism defines a field of immanence and never ceases to fully occupy this field. (*A-O* 250)

It is this flexibility of the axiomatic that allows capitalism to tend to its limit, and simultaneously to avert this limit, and to change it. The axiomatic also constitutes the definitive trait and mode of operation of capitalism as an immanent system, which does not depend on or give rise to any elements outside itself. Deleuze and Guattari definitively change the analysis of capitalism by emphasizing its immanence.

### Immanence and Rhizome

I take the plane of immanence of corporatism to be a rhizomatic network of interconnection, rather than a literally flat plane. In fact, an attentive look at the way this concept is built throughout *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* shows that Deleuze and Guattari suggest it – rather than proclaim it – to be so. First, it would be helpful to take a look at some of the principles of the rhizome – one of the ways in which immanence function – as outlined in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*:

1. connection: any point can be connected to any other point;
2. heterogeneity: “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (8), thereby bringing together elements from a variety of fields.



3. multiplicity: “A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature...” (8).

There are three more principles (rupture, cartography, and decalcomania), but they would not pertain directly to the plane of immanence. Although it seems a natural connection that comes out of the close reading of both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, D&G never clearly establish the link between immanence and rhizome. *A Thousand Plateaus* presents several discussions of immanence, either connected with the plane of immanence of capitalism, or with the immanence of absolute deterritorialization. However, if we take the plane of immanence to be synonymous with the plane of consistency<sup>19</sup>, we have this allusion to the rhizome:

We must try to conceive of this world in which a single fixed plane – which we shall call a plane of absolute immobility *or* absolute movement – is traversed by nonformal elements of relative speed that enter this or that individuated assemblage depending on their degrees of speed and slowness. A plane of consistency peopled by anonymous matter, by infinite bits of impalpable matter entering into varying connections. (255)

We have, therefore, “nonformal elements” flowing across a plane that connect with each other in different ways or are harnessed into individuating

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<sup>19</sup> “The plane of consistency or immanence, on the other hand, implies a destratification of Nature, by even the most artificial of means. The plane of consistency is the body without organs. Pure relations of speed and slowness between particles imply movements of deterritorialization, just as pure affects imply an enterprise of desubjectification.” (*Plateaus* 269-70, my emphasis)

assemblages. The elements themselves are impossible to categorize, identify, or taxonomize on their own, but they become structured when caught in assemblages. This contention sounds as if they could go in more than one direction: either axiomatized in the relative deterritorialization that the plane of immanence of capitalism constructs, or free-flowing across a body without organs, and entering into processes of becoming that can no longer be quantified or appropriated by molar aggregates. Moreover, the first possibility does not definitively preclude the latter. In other words, processes of becoming can ensue even out of the axiomatic of capital. There are two questions that emerge here: 1) How would that process happen in practice? and 2) Is the reverse also true, i.e., can the process of becoming or the free flow across the BwO be re-axiomatized and thus re-appropriated by capital? I will return to these questions throughout this dissertation, in the examples that I have chosen to illustrate the workings of as well as the alternatives to corporatism.

To get back to the connection between immanence and rhizome, Deleuze almost comes out and expresses it in an interview in *Negotiations*, called “On Philosophy.” He points to the connection by describing immanence with the help of the principles of the rhizome: “That’s what it’s like on the plane of immanence: multiplicities fill it, singularities connect with one another, processes or becomings unfold, intensities rise and fall” (146-47). The use of the vocabulary pertaining to the description of the rhizome (“multiplicity,” “singularities” implying heterogeneity, “connect”) directly imbues immanence with a rhizomatic character.

In typical manner, Deleuze opens up the concept to endless additions, explanations, therefore basically to any applicability, all of which he subsumes under the necessity for “constructivism”: “If new concepts have to be brought in all the time, it is just because the plane of immanence has to be constructed area by area, constructed locally, going from one point to the next” (147). Doesn’t the latter point directly to the rhizome? Surely, by adding new points of connection that open up new areas of the same plane of immanence, one has to think of a rhizomatic construction rather than a flattening homogeneity. More on this point:

And the plane of immanence has to be constructed, immanence is constructivism, any given multiplicity is like one area of the plane. All processes take place on the plane of immanence, and within a given multiplicity: unifications, subjectifications, rationalizations, centralizations have no special status; they often amount to an impasse or closing off that prevents the multiplicity’s growth, the extension and unfolding of its lines, the production of something new (146).

The end of this quote pointing to the product of a process is somewhat surprising, given that D&G stress that it is not the outcome of a process that counts, but the process itself, especially when it refers to becoming:

Becoming produces nothing other than itself. ... What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes... This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself. (*TP* 238)

This statement is just an example of how D&G jolt us out of our positivist and teleological thinking that processes have to end in a product that can be taxonomized, structured, and organized. But no, they argue: instead, it is all about the process, an endless shifting, changing, i.e., becoming, which elides the subject, the individual, in favour of the event and the haecceity, i.e., the being-in-the-moment. Subjectivity stands in the way of multiplicity. Subjectivity solidifies a stable individuality that serves the purposes of the dominant regime. Haecceity, on the other hand, denotes the instantiation of an individuality in a given moment, i.e., in the event, or in the process of becoming. D&G thus envisage individuation (subjectivity and becoming) in terms of time, which, again, suggests multiple possible points of connection, in rhizomatic fashion, that change in time and pre-empt any forceful (dogmatic or otherwise) imposition of stability and immovability. The plane of consistency of capitalism evolves into a more rhizomatic immanence in corporatism. One cannot speak of flattening any more: machines are connected in networks and plugged into one or more assemblages. For example, simplistically put, I work for HP, but only buy Adidas sports gear, and only shop for groceries at Safeway.

Can we speak of immanence without mentioning capitalism? Obviously, immanence<sup>20</sup> is a philosophical concept that can stay on its own feet. Even in

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<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Laclau, in a review of the famous Deleuze-Guattarian-influenced *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, traces the concept of immanence back to Christian theological questions: “The original theological question—which occupied the mind, among others, of no less a thinker than Saint Augustine—was how to make compatible the worldly existence of evil with divine omnipotence... Immanentism in its first formulations is an answer to this question” (23). Laclau points out that, in spite of vigorous discussions in the works of Hegel and Marx, “the immanentist route *is not followed*” (23). One exception is the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, one of the stronger

Deleuze and Guattari, and especially in the more philosophical works of Deleuze alone, immanence has its own distinct life, apart from capitalism. Capitalism, for D&G is one example of the workings of immanence: as discussed earlier, capitalism has constructed its plane of immanence by performing relative deterritorialization, and always deferring its own internal limits to prevent the creation of the BwO. Rather than resorting to the metaphor of flattening, one can view immanence as a network of rhizomatically connected machines and lines, which does not imply any two-dimensional collapse onto a literal plane. The plane is abstract, rather than metaphorical, and the idea that lines of flight can be potentially drawn in all directions supports the multi-dimensionality of the plane of consistency. A line of flight points to a possibility of escape, i.e., to the construction of a BwO and not to transcendence.

#### Corporatism and Alternatives: Becoming, Micropolitics

After all of this conceptual running in circles, what is the implication of immanence for corporatism? Firstly, corporatism refers to the overtaking of biopower by corporations (in Foucauldian terms), or to the appropriation or construction of the plane of immanence of desiring-production by the same corporations. The notion of desiring-production already points to the imbrication of economic production with the reproduction of life. What that means, therefore, is that life itself, in all of its aspects, has become the domain of formerly exclusive economic entities, to the detriment of the State, which used to have the upper hand when it came to the administration of life (as in the barbaric-despotic regime, where the State was synonymous with the all-powerful

transcendent despot). In other words, corporations have made it their business to be concerned with both economic production and the less abstract motor behind it, i.e., the social force driving it, people's lives and all of the other connected issues. Corporations have thus created themselves a plane of immanence, in which people are rhizomatically connected to industrial machines, to the more abstract bottom line, and to the even more abstract stock exchange performance of a particular company.

Six degrees of separation? Yes, but no longer restricted to people; instead, opened up for everything in existence. Fortunately, that interconnection also offers a mode to escape it, change it, construct alternative planes of immanence:

becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. (TP 272)

The process of becoming represents one of the alternatives D&G put forward. Becoming implies the recognition of life as movement, infused with the wish to lead a more ethical existence. Becoming entails a process of shedding the desire for power or domination in favour of the possibility of freeing one's desire from molar assemblages:

Yes, all becomings are molecular: the animal, the flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from

experience, through science, or by habit. If this is true, then we must say the same of things human: there is a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, that do not resemble the woman or the child as clearly distinct molar entities (although it is possible--only possible--for the woman or child to occupy privileged positions in relation to these becomings).

What we term a molar entity is, for example, as woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject." (*TP* 275)

It becomes clear that the definition of becoming hinges on the difference between molecular and molar. We have to turn to the sciences in order to grasp the meaning of these concepts, since this example illustrates "a vitalist, physicalist Deleuze [and Guattari] whose philosophy makes sense only when its vocabulary is traced back to its scientific origins" (Colebrook, "Joy," 225).

D&G thus take their cue directly from chemistry – since they reject any metaphorical use of language – when they discuss modes of organization and structuring. A molecule is the smallest amount of substance to still display the characteristics of that substance. If the molecule is further divided into atoms, these atoms do not retain the particularities of the initial substance. A mole, on the other hand, is an arbitrary measurement (the quantity of substance made of the same number of elementary components as 12 grams of Carbon 12, or Avogadro's number). Moreover, the mole has nothing to do with any substance; it merely denotes a quantity (like "a dozen"). The mole therefore points to the structuring of elements into assemblages whose actions are quantifiable and

predictable. The molecular and the molar allow D&G to replace the clunky and politically charged notions of individual and society, and to make the relations between the ideas designated by the latter concepts more flexible and fluid, and therefore, less stable and definitive:

For, in the end, the difference is not at all between the social and the individual (or interindividual), but between the molar realm of representations, individual or collective, and the molecular realm of beliefs and desires in which the distinction between the social and the individual loses all meaning since flows are neither attributable to individuals nor overcodable by collective signifiers" (*TP* 219).

The State becomes only one example of a molar assemblage<sup>21</sup>, while the molecular points both to single machines emitting flows of desire and to the flows of desire themselves, which can belong to multiple persons at the same time. Therefore, the molecule becomes that particular group; hence, animated by the same flow of desire, that group cannot be further divisible into individuals, but can only be considered in its molecular existence as group (which, again, may sound quite circuitous).

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<sup>21</sup> A handy definition of the assemblage from *A Thousand Plateaus*:

We will call an *assemblage* every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow – selected, organized, stratified – in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention. Assemblages may group themselves into extremely vast constellations constituting ‘cultures,’ or even ‘ages’; within these constellations, the assemblages still differentiate the phyla or the flow, dividing it into so many phylas, of a given order, on a given level, and introducing selective discontinuities in the ideal continuity of matter-movement. (406)



This differentiation constitutes the point of insertion of politics. If macropolitics is the molar politics, practiced by the State, for example, on behalf of molar assemblages (which can be the State itself in the interest of self-preservation, or some other entities, such as corporations), micropolitics exists at the molecular level and offers the possibility of both deterritorialization, i.e., freeing of the flows of desire, and of becoming. D&G offer the example of feminism to clarify. A molar woman is a “woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject” (*TP* 275). Therefore it is the molar aggregate that designates “woman” based on her organism. This situation cannot be counteracted through micropolitics: “It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: ‘we as women’ makes an appearance as the subject of enunciation” (*TP* 275-6). It is the molar aggregate that transforms the body into gendered organisms, and therefore feminism has to be successful first as a macropolitics.

Micropolitics, on the other hand, becomes necessary for the process of becoming, as pointed out by the quote the brought about this excursus into molar vs. molecular (page 87 above). In becoming, one achieves a form of being as event, i.e., being in the moment (the “haecceity”), a form of being that cannot even be called “being” because it defies the solidification and stability of the subject, while not being instable, either. Rather, it is a flexible, transformable form of existence in the moment. It is a political form of existence, because it

defies – and also opposes – the molar form of being assigned to it, i.e., its subjectivity.

Becoming presupposes molecular or minoritarian politics: “all becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is becoming-minoritarian” (*TP* 291). Minoritarian, in D&G’s understanding, does not refer to number, but to domination and degree of power. If majority refers “not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian” (291), then “women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian” (292). Becoming thus entails the process of renouncing one’s dominating, standardizing, and conformist status in order to attain something different, or a differing status that would ultimately proliferate multiplicity to a degree that would render the very majoritarian status useless, or redundant.

In this manner, “becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power, an active micropolitics” (292). Becoming can thus be seen as much a personal act as a political one. Translated into contemporary situations, this is how D&G methodology proves empowering at the level of small groups or even single persons. The process of becoming, undertaken at the molecular level, amounts to a minoritarian politics that, when confronting the immanent corporatist socius, has the potential of shifting the paradigm, even if little by little. Instead of an earth-shattering revolution, small individual changes can lead to larger ones in the system that might, ultimately lead to steering the plane of immanence in a different direction.

This potential alternative also serves to respond to the sense of inescapability that might emerge from D&G's analysis of the axiomatic plane of immanence of corporatism: if all is immanence, then how am I to escape it? If the socius constantly emits axioms to integrate and control any differing standpoints, then how could any change come about? All the while, their proposition of becoming can seem much too abstract to be put into practice, especially for those deeply invested in the Marxian model of the revolution of a unified proletariat. It is for this reason that I chose to investigate, in Chapter 4, the newly emerged and quickly adopted locavore movement. Its texts, part of the newly invented genre of one-year-trials that leads to blogs and books about the one-year adventure into gardening, self-sufficiency, sourcing one's supplies from close-by, and living with a smaller foot-print, can offer a glimpse into how becoming can be instantiated. The most prominent of these trials, Kingsolver's and Smith and MacKinnon's, rely on constructing a body without organs, on taking down the hierarchy between organs, on doing away with the dualism mind-body. These books show us how one can begin to deterritorialize, but they also reveal the impossibility of extremes: one can hardly live on a 100-mile diet anymore. However, one can almost do it. What that means is that idealist radicalism (either go all the way or don't go at all) cannot be sustained, because of immanence. The connections are too powerful, and they cannot be completely severed while maintaining a life in society; one can, however, on one's own, attempt to steer the entire immanence in a different direction and corporatism will change direction. A brusque paradigm shift cannot be expected anymore,

due to the strong interconnections in this rhizomatic immanence of corporatism, but absolute deterritorialization, the creation of a body without organs, and the liberation of the flows of desire are not sudden either.

## Chapter 2

### Corporatism in Practice: HBC's Corporate Nationalism, Walmart's

#### Corporate Subjectivity, and Unilever's Corporate Social Activism

*Today we can depict an enormous, so-called stateless, monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by the States, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a de facto supranational power, untouched by governmental decisions. But whatever dimensions or qualities this may have assumed today, capitalism has from the beginning mobilized a force of deterritorialization infinitely surpassing the deterritorialization proper to the State... the State is termed 'territorial.' Capitalism, on the other hand, is not at all territorial, even in its beginnings: its power of deterritorialization consists in taking as its object, not the earth, but 'materialized labor,' the commodity. And private property is no longer ownership of the land or soil, nor even of the means of production as such, but of convertible abstract rights.*

*(Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 453-4)*

According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in its history, humanity has known three types of social organization, social machine, or socius: primitive territorial, barbaric despotic, and civilized capitalist<sup>1</sup>. This dissertation focuses on the early twenty-first-century developments of the latter socius, termed here “corporatism.” This chapter, however, starts further back in time, in the seventeenth century and moves to the present in order to analyze examples that amount to a genealogy of corporatism, which starts close to the very beginnings of capitalism. This chapter presents a genealogy of corporatism by investigating three examples: Hudson's Bay Company, Walmart, and Unilever. By doing so, it also traces the relationship between the corporation and the

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of the characteristics of each of these social machines.

nation-state, from the infancy of the former to the rendering of the latter as almost redundant.

The three examples employed in this genealogy of corporatism all display the use of contradiction by corporatism. The opposition appears between the public face of the corporation, which I've termed the *corporate story*, and its internal organization and functioning, broadly known as the *corporate culture*. Hudson's Bay Company, Walmart, and the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty all provide instances of how corporations manage contradiction, conflict, and crisis in different ways, while still maintaining a similar *modus operandi*.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari present immanence as the main feature of capitalism: there is no transcendent despot any more, and the State subsides and becomes merely one assemblage among the others on the plane of immanence. The State's power of overcoding also gives way to Capital's new methods: an axiomatic that is embedded into the plane of immanence because it derives directly from production. In other words, any needs that arise through the normal functioning of capitalism are immediately satisfied by emitting a new axiom that covers that need, fulfils it for that moment and for the future, so that similar situations would arise also already within the plane of immanence of capitalism<sup>2</sup>.

It is in this area that the D&G theory, although abstract enough to account for corporate operations, has to be supplemented with the details of contemporary corporatist reality. A short essay of Gilles Deleuze's, written later

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for explanations, definitions, and contextualizations of the terminology and theory created by Deleuze and Guattari.

in his career and which updates Foucault's theory of disciplinary societies can be summoned to provide the needed details that *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972-1980) lacks. "Postscript on Control Societies" (1990) starts to describe the way in which the plane of immanence of capitalism is overtaken by corporations, as well as the outcome of this action.

Within the civilized capitalist regime, two different phases become apparent: the disciplinary society as described and analyzed by Foucault in detail and the society of control, swiftly characterized in this brief essay by Deleuze. Hudson's Bay Company (HBC<sup>3</sup>) illustrates the first type of society – while at the same time displaying the inklings of or tendency toward corporatism existed from the beginning of capitalism – while Walmart and Unilever correspond to the second. Deleuze saw the disciplinary societies, with their interior organization (school, hospital, prison, factory) in the process of being replaced by a new form of social machine – the society of control:

*Control societies* are taking over from disciplinary societies... It's not a question of amazing pharmaceutical products, nuclear technology, and genetic engineering, even though these will play their part in the new process. It's not a question of asking whether the old or new system is harsher or more bearable, because **there's a conflict in each between the ways they free and enslave us**. With the breakdown of the hospital

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<sup>3</sup> I am using this acronym as per the corporation's own "Style Guide," which mandates: When referring to Hudson's Bay Company:

- Appropriate secondary reference HBC.
- **Do not** reference as: The Bay, The Hudson's Bay Company or Hudson's Bay. ("Style Guide" n.pag.)

as a site of confinement, for instance, community psychiatry, day hospitals, and home care initially presented new freedoms, while at the same time contributing to mechanisms of control as rigorous as the harshest confinement. **It's not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons.** (178, my emphasis)

Conflict is the keyword. Or, as D&G put it in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, it is crisis. Although not synonymous, conflict, crisis, confrontation represent hallmarks of capitalism<sup>4</sup>, and even more of corporatism: conflict between the front put up by a marketed brand image, or corporate story, and the reality of corporate operations, or its corporate culture; crisis maintained at any cost so that the desiring machines never become complacent but rather dream up new flows to complete deterritorialization, never feel like they can liberate their desires onto the body without organs; and confrontation both small-scale between one's personal interest and the overarching interest of the institution one supposedly belongs to (employer, religion, nation, State, etc), and large-scale wars to open new markets or new suppliers (and therefore to expand the plane of immanence of corporatism), or to avert the limits of corporatism (such as in "we have the right to maintain our way of life" rhetoric).

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<sup>4</sup> D&G argue that "social machines make a habit of feeding on the contradictions they give rise to, on the crises they provoke, on the anxieties they engender, and on the infernal operations they regenerate" (*A-O* 151), and add that "Capitalism has learned this, and has ceased doubting itself, while even socialists have abandoned belief in the possibility of capitalism's natural death by attrition" (151). Thus neither D&G, nor my argument point toward a possible synthesis as materialist dialectics would have it, between a thesis and its antithesis. Rather, corporatism thrives by constantly deferring its limit, which it confronts due to these crises, and also which allow it to expand its plane of immanence through, for example, the emission of new axioms.



As the preceding quote shows, the answer is not complacency (worrying, hoping for the best), but one of ingenuity (“finding new weapons”). Nor does the control society, with its new mode of operation, call for recycled solutions. Methodologically, the disciplinary society exercises confinement or enclosure, while the newer one is based on control: “Confinements are *molds*, different moldings, while controls are a *modulation*, like a self-transmuting molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to another” (178-9). The society of control has the ability to constantly change, adapt, and renew its hold on the desiring machines. One way of constantly re-establishing a hold on new developments, as described in Chapter 1, is through axioms. What also becomes apparent in the differential description of control vs. confinement is the subtly ever-changing character of immanent control, “from one moment to the next.”

Equally, the institution representing each of these types of society has transformed: “in a society of control, businesses take over from factories, and a business is a soul, a gas” (179). The new social machine, corporatism, operates differently, plugging desiring machines into the assemblages in new ways. As we shall see, HBC – true to its disciplinary nature – attempts to confine its Canadian operations through literal territorializations within the enclosure of its forts, factories, and outposts, with stringent rules. Walmart, on the other hand, undertakes the transformation of the former disciplinary citizen of the state into a corporate subject of the control society/corporatist socius. Lastly, Unilever, through its Dove brand, speaks to a subject whose confinement is only

metaphorical: within strict definitions of beauty that Dove aims to shatter in favour of its corporatist-defined “real woman,” a veritable work-in-progress.

Deleuze points out that whereas “in disciplinary societies you were always starting all over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory),” in control societies “you never finish anything,” resulting in an “*endless postponement*” (179). This shape-shifting system makes it near-impossible for people to have a handle on its operations, keeping them in a limbo of ever-changing demands and conditions. Is there a more apt manner of ensuring control than the generalized anxiety of inadequacy? There may, or may not; however, one way toward dismantling, averting, or diverting the immanent socius would be to analyze examples of how it works.

Within the genealogy of corporatism, some operations endure. These operations constitute the focus of this chapter. It deals with corporatist desiring-production in general, and in particular with the disconnect between the marketed image of three brands – HBC, WM, and Dove – and the reality of their corporate culture. The chasm between the two can be summarized by comparing the corporate story – which includes branding, marketing, and any other public release – and the corporate culture – the company’s actual way of managing desiring-production, which includes its treatment of employees, its way of conducting business with associates (e.g., sourcing merchandise from sweatshops), or its attempts to bully governments into submission (e.g. Google leaving China for allegedly opposing that country’s stance on censorship<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>5</sup> On March 23, 2010, Google announced it would stop censoring its services “by rerouting users through Hong Kong” (Waldie B1) When it opened google.cn in January

These two aspects of corporate behaviour are not as cut-and-dried as their two different concepts might make it seem. In fact, they act in unison in the day-to-day operations of a corporate entity, whose interest they serve, in a manner that remains immanent to the plane of corporatism, and connects rhizomatically to all the other flows that the socius enlists. In other words, a clear-cut classification of elements or actions that belong exclusively to either the corporate story or the corporate culture is neither possible nor useful. Of more importance is the manner in which corporatism manages desiring-production, and through it, the flows and machines that make up its assemblages. The three corporate examples described in this chapter constitute instances, without any claim to either comprehensiveness, or a definitive depiction, of the tools that make corporatism function. They do, however provide a useful glimpse into the diversity of corporate operations and their ever-expanding grasp on biopower.

### **“We Were Made for This”: Hudson’s Bay Company and Canada**

*“Founded in 1670 by King Charles II, the Hudson’s Bay Company played a vital role in building Canada as a nation.” (hbc.com, n. pag.)*

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2006, the company promised to abide by Chinese regulations and “filter” search results connected with several sensitive political issues, e.g. Tiananmen Square. At the beginning of 2010, Google accused China of employing hackers to break into and monitor emails belonging to human rights’ groups that were hosted on Google email service, Gmail. The company threatened to leave China altogether if the alleged hacking did not stop. This seemingly moral stance is not uncommon posturing for corporations. While easily spun as such, the corporation is probably more interested in finding ways to remain in China because of its growth potential – “China has more than 300 million Internet users and the figure is growing” (B6) – than out of any desire to become a human rights crusader. Arguably, Unilever uses a similar strategy with its “Dove Campaign for Real Beauty” and Hellmann’s Real Mayonnaise.

A brief history of HBC has to start with the Charter that King Charles II conferred onto his cousin, Prince Rupert, and his seventeen other associates. HBC, named in the Royal Charter “Governor and Company of Adventurers of England, trading into Hudson's Bay,” was granted, in 1670, a gift of land<sup>6</sup> in North America that encompassed “a virtual sub-continent of 3.8 million square kilometres” (Andra-Warner 37). As the Charter shows, this land made HBC into an entity, “one Body Corporate and Politique,” which would be “personable and capable in Law to have, purchase, receive, possess, enjoy and retain, Lands, Rents, Privileges, Liberties, Jurisdictions, Franchises, and Hereditaments, of what Kind, Nature or Quality soever they be, to them and their Successors” (*Charter* 6).

The date of its incorporation through the Royal charter and its generous gift make HBC quite a unique corporation. Adding to this alluring corporate story are statements such as Peter Newman’s contention that “much of modern Canada emerged from the HBC” (4). Although Newman is largely perceived as hyperbolic in his descriptions of the Company, he hardly stands alone in his opinion. On the contrary, the widespread conviction that HBC birthed Canada appears on the Canadiana.org website, a collaborative endeavour whose mission is to “to present our cultural and scientific heritage in its bilingual and multicultural variety to our citizens and to the world” (n.pag.) and to provide easy online access to its heritage. The website, curated by librarians, archivists,

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<sup>6</sup> John S. Galbraith notes that “[a]t the height of its expansion, the Company ruled an area of more than 3,000,000 square miles, approximately one-fourth of the continent of North America” (3).

and academics, prefaces its history of the HBC by linking HBC to the very development of Canada:

This site is about the fur trade in Canada and how it led to the exploration of the country and the formation of the oldest and largest company in Canadian history: Hudson's Bay Company. In fact, the history of the fur trade, Hudson's Bay Company and the exploration of Canada are so intertwined that they can not [sic] be separated. So read on and learn more about Canada! (n.pag.)

HBC's peculiarity as "the oldest continuing trading company in the world" (HBC, n.pag.) makes it such a compelling case for any genealogy of corporatism. Its venerability, coupled with its constant attempts at muddling the distinctions between HBC as a corporation and Canada as a nation-state, place HBC at the beginning of corporatist chronology. Even though the company's contemporaneous system was not corporatism, HBC paradoxically displays the seeds of this latest stage in the very beginnings of capitalism. The fact some operational mechanisms used by HBC endure into the contemporary corporatist socius serve to place corporatism as a continuation of capitalism, rather than a completely new social machine. Also because of its age, the corporation effectively straddles two of the social machines described by Deleuze and Guattari: while it originates in the barbaric-despotic regime, it foreshadows and survives to the present day, i.e., through the civilized capitalist socius into the corporatist one. The despot-conferred Charter supports the company's origin in the former socius. On the other hand, HBC's operations, from the very

beginning, point more toward the incipient plane of immanence of corporatism. From the moment of its arrival in Canada, the company integrates its employees – whose every aspect of their livelihood depends on and is regulated by the company in a proper exemplification of the disciplinary society – as well as the territory with its native inhabitants and their way of life into the very functioning/production of the HBC itself.

Lydia Semotuk argues, based on the Charter and the Company's operations within the Red River Colony, that HBC has to be regarded as a political institution as well as a business:

The company appointed all governing authorities in Rupert's Land and their jurisdiction included all functions of government. Essentially, the HBC legislated and executed all laws (within the general scope of English common law) in the territory granted to it. The Charter also provided that the company could punish, as it deemed just necessary, those who disobeyed laws. The HBC could enlist the aid of the British military and government in executing company law. It could declare and wage war. (27)

One has a difficult time viewing HBC as a straight-forward corporation in light of the powers granted by the Charter. Its legislative and executive powers – “the HBC legislated and executed all laws” – make the company resembles more a state formation than any strictly economic entity.

HBC, therefore, constitutes a great example for a genealogy of corporatism, one that looks for similarities between mechanisms of operation,

rather than chronological accuracy. Even if it originates in a despotic social machine, and operates itself partly as a despotic social machine, HBC shows how the plane of immanence of capitalism extends to encompass new territory and new people. Moreover, HBC exemplifies how the civilized capitalist socius takes over from a barbaric despotic regime which allows the State to emerge. The story of Canada emerging from the HBC supports the corporation's official story, but fails to match its corporate culture.

HBC thus provides us with a great example of managing conflict and averting crisis, while actually causing the crisis. The conflict in the case of HBC consists of a corporate story that claims HBC and Canada share a history beginning with the Charter granted to the Company by King Charles II, a story which goes against its imperial corporate culture, i.e., HBC's actual interest in accumulation rather than, and even to the detriment of, nation-building<sup>7</sup>.

Methodologically, this section starts by illustrating its argument by looking at an advertisement for HBC made for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, which illustrates the Company's corporate story. I will juxtapose the reading of the ad with glimpses into HBC's corporate culture, by analyzing its actions before and around 1821, as well as by summoning various critical works that synthesize some of the Company's rich archival documents<sup>8</sup>. I have chosen this

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<sup>7</sup> Galbraith also points out that "Canada was the source of menace to the Hudson's Bay Company before 1821" (Galbraith 46), when HBC merged with the North West Company, their Montréal-based rival in the fur trade.

<sup>8</sup> HBC has one of the largest archives of any corporate entity due, in part, to its venerable age, but more likely to its zeal at documenting any and all activities, no matter how petty and insignificant. The HBC Archives, part of the Archives of the Province of Manitoba, are "approx. 2 km in linear extent" and detail "daily events at almost 500 trading posts as well as voyages in Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic waters. Records trace

particular timeframe because it highlights the contradictions between the Company's corporate culture and corporate story. While the juxtaposition of 1821 with 2010 may seem haphazard, the two moments in time allows us to critically investigate the conflict between the HBC corporate culture (strongly visible around 1821) and its corporate story (2010). While the story goes that the arrival of the fur traders, i.e., the beginning of the fur trade, equals the beginning of Canada, it is, in fact, not until around the time of the merger of HBC with the North West Company (NWC) that HBC changed its policies. The preceding era displays a corporation interested more in an imperial economy rather than a colonial one. In other words, HBC wanted commerce out of and not settlements in Rupert's Land. The HBC's policy toward settlements emerged first as a reaction to and then as a result of the merger between HBC and NWC, because the latter comprised of Canadians: *voyageurs*<sup>9</sup> and *courreurs de bois*<sup>10</sup>.

The corporate story that HBC likes to tell about itself appears very well in its advertisement campaign before and during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. The 2010 Olympics took place in Vancouver, British Columbia, and not only was Hudson's Bay Company one of its major sponsors, but also the official outfitters of the Canadian National Olympic Team. To mark the occasion, HBC

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Hbc's evolution from a trading company, through its involvement in land sales, oil and wholesaling, to its current nationwide presence as a retail giant" (HBC Heritage, n.pag.). "Meticulous records were kept, leaving a legacy of information of tremendous significance documenting the growth and expansion of the Hudson's Bay Company in the vast territories of Rupert's Land, through the fur trade and exploration and the later development of a retail empire" (Manitoba Archives, n.pag.).

<sup>9</sup> "Voyageurs were French-Canadian, Métis, and Aboriginal traders who canoed inland to support the fur trade" (Nault 7).

<sup>10</sup> "(French for 'runner of the woods') a fur trader who went into the woods to find fur and trade fur with First Nations." (Canadiana.org, n.pag.)



put out an advertisement that presents a chronology of sorts, equating the history of HBC with the history of Canada.

The sixty-second spot shows a man in seventeenth-century garb (Champlain<sup>11</sup>? Radisson or De Grosseilliers<sup>12</sup>?) climbing out of a boat and looking around at the scenery while his underlings, who only moments earlier were rowing the boat, scurry ahead. Cut to a couple of older children in pre-twentieth-century clothes running around their Native mother who is doing the laundry surrounded by clotheslines with Aboriginal-patterned fabrics hanging on them. Cut to running huskies pulling a sled, which an Inuit, icicles hanging from his short beard and hood fur, drives through a snowstorm. The running continues when the clip cuts again, this time to some European-looking loggers, then to another European man sliding down and then walking through some deep snow in the woods, walking stick by his side, and a backpack topped with an HBC blanket on his back; cut again to a man snowshoeing in heavy snow, dressed in an HBC blanket-coat.

The clip continues in what seems to be the 1970s with skiers coming down a mountain, then cutting to an image of just a couple of legs cross-country skiing, then to a father pushing a child in a modest-looking sled down a hill, and

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<sup>11</sup> “One of the first to realize the potential of trade in North America was Samuel de Champlain. In 1603, he made his first trip to North America. He returned several years later to establish a permanent settlement. He wanted to bring many more people to settle in Canada. The King of France gave him permission to do so, but in return Champlain was told to develop the fur trade.” (Canadiana.org, n.pag.)

<sup>12</sup> The group of investors lead by Prince Rupert whom Charles II granted the Charter, and who formed The Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson’s Bay, “worked closely, initially at least, with two voyageurs, Groseilliers and Radisson. These two individuals provided the necessary knowledge of the geographical conditions of North America (as known by 1666) and, more importantly, the fur resources of the area.” (Semotuk 7)

then to an '80s-looking ski-doo. Closer to our time, we see a skier in contemporary competitive gear (complete with competition bib) slaloming the slopes and then morphing into a snowboard rider performing a high jump. The image blurs for a moment while the sentence "We were made for this" fades in and out and a couple of young people walk confidently toward the camera: he is East-Asian, and wearing a Canada toque and a white Canada hoodie under a heavy black parka, while she, a Caucasian, wears a Canada baseball cap and an imitation Cowichan knitted jacket. They part ways and leave the picture by the sides of the camera, while the name and logo of Hudson's Bay Company lights the screen to the swelling of the background music.

Imagine the preceding visuals accompanied by crescendo music, while a baritone voice narrates:

We arrived 340 years ago to a land of rock, ice, and snow. We outfitted a nation of pioneers, explorers, and dreamers. We are the skiers. We are the sledgers. We didn't just survive the elements; together, we thrived in them. [onscreen: We were made for this.] The official Vancouver 2010 Olympic collection from Hudson's Bay Company: only at the Bay and Zellers. ("Made," n. pag.)

This clip captures HBC's claim to being indistinguishable from the very history of the Canadian nation<sup>13</sup>. HBC is not the only corporation to take advantage of

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<sup>13</sup> This advertisement is posted, among other places, on YouTube. One commenter, firefox858, declared her/himself so stirred by the patriotic feeling as to surmise on 27 Nov. 2009: "If Canada made more commercials like this. Our National Pride would go through the roof. I love this commercial. It shows the hardships of this land how everyone adapted to this land. Good Job HBC. This is a awesome commercial" [sic]. S/he received 17 thumbs up.

the upsurge in national sentiment stirred by hosting the Olympics in Canada<sup>14</sup>. However, HBC definitely trademarked the conflation between its activities and the nation of Canada as not only contemporaneous and coterminous organizations, but equivalent historically. On June 5, 2009, for example, the opening Flash headline taking up half the screen on the HBC website read: “Founded in 1670 by King Charles II, the Hudson’s Bay Company played a vital role in building Canada as a nation” (HBC, n.pag.).

In the quote from Canadiana.org, which appears at the beginning of this section (page 101), the educational historical website claims “the history of the fur trade, Hudson's Bay Company and the exploration of Canada are so intertwined that they can not be separated” (n.pag.). The excerpt, introducing a

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<sup>14</sup> Molson Canadian beer’s “Made from Canada” campaign also debuted during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. On the background of various nature images meant to signify the majesty of Canadian landscape, the voiceover narrates:

When you think about Canadians you might ask yourself, why are we the way we are? Well, the answer is lying right under our feet. Fact is, it’s this land that shapes us. We know we have the best backyard in the world and we get out there every chance we get. Molson Canadian: Made from Canada. (Advertolog, n.pag.)

MolsonCoors Corporation was an “official supplier” of the 2010 Games.

Roots, a Canadian athletics manufacturer, and former outfitter of Canadian Olympic teams, also came up with a “Canada Collection by Roots” during the Olympics. Aggressive advertising by this corporation informed all viewers that Roots was donating part of the proceeds to “Right to Play,” “a charity that sets up sports programs in the developing world” (Austen, n.pag.).

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) protested to Lululemon’s profiting from the Olympics in the absence of any partnership or contribution between this famous Vancouver athletic gear manufacturer and the Olympics governing body. Lululemon’s tongue-in-cheek campaign advertising the clothing line “Cool Sporting Event That Takes Place in British Columbia Between 2009 & 2011 Edition” was admonished by the IOC. The Lululemon campaign could not be legally faulted, however, because it had not used any of the trademarked signage of the Olympics. A high-ranking member of the Vancouver Organizing Committee expressed his disappointment that Lululemon had obeyed the law thus managing to get away with profiting from the Olympics without any of the strings attached to the IOC: “That’s a large part of what we find disappointing, that the only standards they held themselves to was the letter of the law” (Austen, n.pag.).

section titled “Exploration, the Fur Trade and Hudson’s Bay Company” demonstrates how HBC’s brand has played and continues to play on the slippage between the company and the nation of Canada, and the Olympics represent a crowning occasion of this marketing strategy. The strategy has become so effective as to be internalized by the country and nation itself<sup>15</sup>, as seen in people’s reactions, as well as in educational materials and documents.

Nor is the capitalization on the Winter Olympic games and their rallying of patriotic sentiment a novelty for HBC. In Harold Tichenor’s *The Blanket: An Illustrated History of the Hudson’s Bay Point Blanket*, published by the corporation, the author chronicles the connections between HBC, Canada, and these politically-charged sporting events through the lens of this signature artefact of the company: “The Hudson’s Bay blanket coat was the garment of choice for the Winter Olympic Games for the Canadian athletes and officials in 1936 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany; in 1960 in Squaw Valley, USA; in 1964 in Innsbruck, Austria; and in 1968 in Grenoble, France” (68).

Re-writing the history of this part of the North American continent according to its corporate story, HBC rallies patriotic sentiment on its side, while editing out parts that do not serve its interest. The interest of this section falls

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<sup>15</sup> “The phenomenal runaway success of the Vancouver 2010 Red Mittens is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to sales of official Games gear at Hudson’s Bay Company store locations across the country and we’re replenishing our stores as fast as we can to meet the demand,” said Mark Kinnin, vice president, Olympics and global sourcing, of the Hudson’s Bay Company. “We’ve also seen remarkable sales of our official 2010 Canadian Olympic Team apparel. It’s wonderful to see Canadians excited about the Games, our athletes and showing pride in their country.”

“With only 58 days to go to the start of the Games, already one in 34 Canadians owns a pair of Vancouver 2010 Red Mittens. That’s a staggering statistic given that we expected sales to peak in January and February,” said Dennis Kim, director of licensing

more on how the corporation manages the disparities between the story it manicures and projects publicly and the reality of its culture, rather than the glaring elisions from the troubled history of this part of the world. However, the critical eye cannot easily turn away from the glimpse of the Aboriginal woman relegated to hanging the laundry and supervising the rowdy children. In such an instant, the corporate culture emerges unchecked through the story. Ostensibly, the advertisement tries hard not to omit First Nations people, as much as it wants to suggest contemporary Canadian demographic diversity at the end of the video by casting an East-Asian actor. However, in the glimpse of the Aboriginal woman, the double collusion, both between HBC corporate story and culture, as well as between HBC history and Canada's comes to full force. HBC's story edits out the decimation of the Native populations and their struggles with the infamous European 'gifts' of, among other things, smallpox-infested blankets<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, the presence of the single Native woman doing the laundry subversively signals the subaltern role which the corporation assigned to Native peoples in general, and to Native women in particular. The relationship between the fur traders and the Native peoples were more complex than that depiction. Not only was HBC's policy to have Native trappers come to its forts, factories, or posts, but they were also providers of game. E. E. Rich notes, "It was the 'home-guard' Indians who conducted the hunts, not the Europeans," to such an extent that "Indians were able to threaten to starve the posts by refusing to hunt"

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and merchandising for the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC n.pag.).

(495). However, Rich also points out that “The North American Indian had, within one generation of contact with the fur trader, become so utterly dependent on European fire-arms for hunting” that their absence caused “starvation, cannibalism, and infanticide... ‘for they had lost their skill with the bow since Europeans had supplied them with fire-arms’” (494). Even acknowledging their datedness and biased perspective, these accounts do point to a rather uneven relationship between the Honourable Company and the Native populations. Even if its corporate culture and history show otherwise, the HBC is not deterred from rescuing itself in the corporate story it propagates. In *The Blanket*, the corporation declares its fairness in its dealings with the Native populations:

It is often assumed that the English fur trade companies wantonly exploited the Native peoples of North America. But if the manufacturing cost of the blankets, the market value of the furs in Europe, and the early rule of thumb of one point per made beaver are all taken into account, a more balanced picture emerges. English craftsmen laboured far longer making the blankets than did Inuit or Cree trappers obtaining the blanket’s equivalency in beaver pelts. And Hudson’s Bay Company also incurred great expense in shipping goods both ways across the perilous North Atlantic and in penetrating some of the most remote areas of British North America. (Tichenor 18)

This attempt at saving face in terms of its fair business practices, spoken back to unmentioned critiques of its historical “wantonly exploitat[ion]” emphasizes one

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<sup>16</sup> For a brief description of the encounters of HBC fur traders with smallpox-plagued Natives, see C. Stuart Houston and Stan Houston’s “The first smallpox epidemic on the

of the omitted aspects in the great saga of North American ‘exploration.’ The majority of texts on HBC claim that its exploits were spurred on by high demand for beaver pelts in Europe, where the beaver was near-extinct in the seventeenth century, due to the fashionable top hat, a powerful status marker for a couple of centuries<sup>17</sup>.

However, they fail to mention the equal, if not higher, need for markets for British manufacturing products, e.g., blankets, guns, beads, etc. As E. E. Rich explains, “they [the Indians] would trade [prime furs] for the guns and shot, the cloth, the iron-work and the heavier and larger blankets which the English alone could supply” (512). This oversight characterizes much of the discussion of imperial endeavours, and what becomes lost is the very history of capitalism, which is the system that initiated the need for such exploration. It may be difficult to quantify or to determine which need was bigger, but judging from the contemporary nature of capitalism, growth and expansion have always been hallmarks of the system, and thus it might not be an exaggeration to claim that the need for new markets (the equivalent of what are nowadays called ‘emerging markets’ in business circles) that attracted many of the investors; the possibility

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Canadian Plains: In the fur-traders’ words.”

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Bown, for example, explains that

Furs have always had value for their warmth, but it was their use in the manufacture of felt that drove the demand in Europe. Felt was primarily used to make hats, an ever-changing fashion accoutrement that was indispensable to gentlemen as well as ladies. (Each profession or calling boasted its own hat style, from the distinctive cocked hat of the navy to the tall, imperious Regent or top hat, to the faintly ridiculous-looking “Paris Beau.”) People wore hats to mark their social position, and the hats carried price tags to reflect that. Some gentlemen’s hats were so valuable that even well-off people protected them and dutifully handed them down as inheritances, assuming the fashion had not changed. (201)

of opening new markets for British products might have been a great inducement and might help better explain the generous charter bestowed by Charles II onto HBC.

However, while Native men were perceived as ‘useful’ to the company operations, their families were viewed as a nuisance. Rich decries this habit of Company men:

To encourage the more distant indians [sic] to travel in search of furs, too, the Hudson’s Bay men developed a habit of allowing them to leave their old, their young, and some of their women, at the posts whilst the hunt lasted. (496)

He explains this magnanimity in the imperial vein that justified exploitation of Native people and their territories with the Europeans’ desire to civilize and protect the “primitive people” (510): “It was the Europeans who, on the whole, worried about keeping the Indians alive and capable of hunting through the winter, not the Indians themselves” (510).

Again, in spite of or maybe due to being written in the 1950s, these lines let the utilitarian spirit of the HBC endeavour transpire, a utilitarianism that encompasses human lives. If they justified ‘taking care’ of the Native men due to their hunting and trapping prowess, the Company found no excuses for long-term relationships with the women. While the London Committee – the HBC’s governing body in England – was certainly aware, as Rich is, that “‘intercourse’ in its sexual sense was becoming increasingly common” (604), the “Committee had set its face against Indian women in the early days, partly on moral grounds



but with more conviction on the grounds of danger and of expense” (604). Therefore, it effectively forbade any decent treatment of Native women by prohibiting its employees from marrying them or from bringing them onto Company property: “you do not harbour or Entertain any Indian woman or women in our Factory or permit others under you to do so” (605) was a condition imposed on a governor in 1750, in spite of the fact that “certainly a high proportion of the Governors of this period had their Indian women” and “most of the half-breeds, it was said, were Governors’ sons” (605). The management of the HBC thus decided that it was not profitable for business for its employees in Rupert’s Land to form legitimate families with Native women. Officially, therefore, they had washed their hands of the whole situation, while also knowing that such relationships were unavoidable. Such a policy not only displays hypocrisy, but also ensures systemic sexual exploitation.

Actually, one of the most famous of HBC’s governors, George Simpson, became well known for his serial sexual exploitation of primarily Aboriginal women. He did not restrain his disdain, nor did he mince his words when talking about his many brief liaisons, in spite of the fruitfulness of many of them. In a private letter to one of his friends, J. G. McTavish, he confesses, “I see no fun in keeping a Woman without enjoying her charms which my present rambling Life does not enable me to do” (qtd. in Raffan 159). On a different occasion, he advised the same friend about yet another woman, whom he designated as “the commodity” (233), after she had given birth to one of his many children, that “if

she behaves well, let her be treated accordingly, but on the contrary, [be] sent about her business and the child taken from her” (qtd. in Raffan 234).

These may be mere examples of one governor, whom historians have chosen to lionize and turn into an iconic figure of the Honourable Company, but they are also illustrative of a way of life for men of the company and their relationships with native populations. While one might also bring the epoch to the table as an excuse for the generalized exploitation of women, James Raffan, from the 21<sup>st</sup>-century vantage point which understands sexual harassment, seals the case for this systemic behaviour within the company. He speaks about Ann Foster, yet another of Simpson’s ‘conquests’, a white woman this time, and concludes that “like her Aboriginal equivalents, she had not the station or power to resist the advances of her employer” (235).

It might be an ironic flashpoint that many of Simpson’s preys were Native washerwomen, just like the woman glimpsed in the 2010 Olympics advertisement, but this coincidence also provides a good example for how the much-guarded corporate culture can sometimes be glimpsed through the public corporate story. One might argue that exploitation of native peoples constitutes the hallmark of imperial and colonial endeavours, and therefore these details do not set HBC apart from any others.

However, the point is that, in spite of its oft-proclaimed corporate story thesis, HBC not only never set out to build a nation in Rupert’s Land, but it did everything in its power to stifle it and continue its imperial business endeavours. Arguably, one does not ‘set out’ to build a nation. As Benedict Anderson puts it,

the emergence of a nation constitutes a complex phenomenon, marked by “the spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces” (4). However, HBC, through its policies and its governors’ actions, systematically prevented any community building which might in retrospect be viewed as precursory to the birth of the Canadian nation.

Stephen Bown notes, for example, George Simpson’s efforts at preventing any settlement of a permanent community in or around the Company forts, as it might contravene HBC business interests:

Simpson worked to prevent as many of his employees as possible from remaining in the region after their service with the company had expired, shipping them back to Montreal instead... It was in the best short-term interest of the company, he believed, to keep the territory as wild as possible for as long as possible – a situation that... placed him as the unofficial representative of his country, the mercantile arm of his government, in a conflict of interest between the interests of his nation and the interests of his company. (225-26)

Bown’s unspoken assumption is that “the interests of his nation,” i.e., England’s, would be the settlement of Rupert’s Land. Speculative or not, that conclusion has the wisdom of retrospection, just like this analysis of HBC’s intent toward nation-building can be accused of anachronism for imposing a twentieth- or twenty-first-century concept onto eighteenth-century business dealings. However, if HBC may twist and adapt its history to conveniently spell out a nation-building corporate story, one has to take it on its own terms in order to

dismantle its argument. This way, it becomes crucial to point out that business trumped community in the eighteenth century, or, in more general terms, capitalism came before the nation, then as well as now.

Maybe unwittingly, in spite of the above conclusion, Bown repeats the HBC mantra: “The story of Sir George Simpson and his empire of the beaver is inextricably intertwined with the founding of the nation of Canada” (196). He supports this claim by suggesting that under Simpson’s leadership, Canada emerged in a despotic barbaric social machine:

After 1826, Simpson was the undisputed master of an enormous commercial, and increasingly political, empire, with untold power over the people who lived there. His capacity to direct the minutiae of their lives was unparalleled, and he enjoyed lording it over others. He would later earn his unofficial title of ‘the little Emperor’, the head honcho of the only general store for half a continent. (219)

The metaphors Bown uses in this paragraph – “‘the little Emperor’, the head honcho” – are telling of the imbrication between the business that HBC conducts in Rupert’s Land and the emergence of the State within the same era. Bown displays his conviction that the HBC transformed into Canada when he equates the management position that Simpson occupied, as “the head honcho” of the monopolistic Company, with his apparent despotic – in D&G terms – title of ‘little Emperor’. It becomes clear that the HBC is mutating from a business endeavour into a political entity: “an enormous commercial, and increasingly political, empire.” Whether the Company intended it that way is not immediately

clear in this paragraph, but the issue re-emerges when Bown juxtaposes the HBC business model with its archrival, the North West Company (NWC).

HBC, in spite of its granted monopoly, was not the only fur trader in the North American territory. Its major rival, until their merger in 1821, was the North West Company. While HBC started its business by setting up posts along the coast of Hudson's Bay, there had been numerous *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois* who had been trading inland with the Aborigines for fur. In 1783, after New France was lost to Britain as a result of the Seven Year War (Canadiana.org, n.pag), "the Montreal traders combined their capital to form the North West Company, a decentralized fur-trading operation that soon expanded beyond the French fur trade in the West to include the Peace, Mackenzie, and Columbia River districts" (Francis, Jones, and Smith 400). The two companies were vying for the same resources, which unsurprisingly led to the competition surfacing in various ways. In addition to the economic viewpoint, it did not help that the English and the French were operating on long-standing feuds.

However, as Bown explains, the main differences between the two companies had less to do with their nationalities and more with their modes of conducting business:

The rivalry that quickly developed between the two enterprises, a rivalry that stemmed from the original battles between the English company and the French traders along the bay prior to 1713, was a struggle between two distinct business models – one imperial, the other colonial. Such

different corporate philosophies could not easily blend and were essentially irreconcilable. (205)

At stake between HBC and the NWC was a profoundly different purpose allotted to Rupert's Land. The NWC was operating from a colonial perspective, i.e., from the point of view of people who made this part of North America their home. Contrary to the HBC corporate story, it had not been the Honourable Company's intention to establish itself in the region long-term. As a result, Bown says,

The NWC drew on Quebec's population of sixty thousand, people who were in their homeland, rather than relying on foreigners to board a ship bound for distant shores of a frozen bay to toil in drudgery and for low wages for several years before returning home to move on to better things. Each business enterprise had its competitive advantages and disadvantages. (206)

Semotuk agrees with this view, when she points out that, from the very beginning, "[t]he courtiers to whom the two French-Canadians [Radisson and des Groseilliers] appealed were primarily concerned with the problems of setting up a balanced imperial economy" (7).

The imperial business model, which regarded Rupert's Land as a source of revenue from both the exploitation of its resources and from marketing English manufacturing products, runs counter to the story of the birthing of Canada. That the emergence of the nation was an unintended consequence of the

merger with the NWC<sup>18</sup> and its colonial way of operating its business never appears in the HBC official corporate story.

While HBC's Charter stipulates "that the company had the right... to establish colonies and bring men from overseas" (Semotuk 24), "there is no word in the Charter which lays fostering of settlement on the company as a duty" (Rich, *qtd.* in Semotuk 25). According to Semotuk, HBC, far from willing to build a permanent settlement, was rather forced by "those groups who maintained that the company had a duty to either settle Rupert's Land or at least allow settlement by others" (24). The need for settlement was circumstantial, in the need to pre-empt Americans from settling and "claim[ing] parts of Rupert's Land" (25).

The historical corporate culture starts emerging in contrast to what HBC propagates to this day as its official story: it was thus the fear of losing its monopoly – for fur trading, as well as the market for its "assortment of inexpensive goods" (Burley 2) – that made HBC change its policy, which had been against colonization: "[u]p until 1811, when settlement at Red River"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Newman stresses the importance of the NWC merger in the myth of HBC birthing Canada: "Bearing in mind that the HBC was heir to the Montreal-based North West Company, which it absorbed in 1821, the company's impact on the formation of present-day Canada has been incalculable" (4).

<sup>19</sup> "In 1811 [Thomas Douglas, Earl of] Selkirk bought enough of Hudson's Bay Company stock to gain control of the company. In order to provide a new life for Scottish farmers back home, Selkirk decided to give them a place to live in North America. A huge area of land was bought from HBC company - 300,000 square kilometres along the banks of the Red River in what is now Manitoba." (Canadiana.org, n.pag.). Explaining that it was meant as a place for former employees to retire and subsequently provide the company with "both produces and workers" (5), Edith I. Burley qualifies HBC's intentions regarding the formation of this colony: "The acquisition of land was to be regulated in such a way as to ensure that only retiring officers could support themselves through agriculture alone, while the lower ranks would have to combine farming with wage labour" (5).

commenced, the decision-making hierarchy was opposed to settlement in Rupert's Land" (Semotuk 25-26). In fact, the Company's strategy for hiring people supports the view of its overwhelmingly imperial commercial interests, as opposed to any colonial intentions, especially since the Royal Charter had granted the Company the right to "establish colonies and towns and to engage in immigration schemes to settle them" (Semotuk 27).

### **Conclusion: "Canada's Merchants since 1670"**

In 1870, the entire remaining territory of the Hudson's Bay Company became part of a new nation, the Dominion of Canada. The company's despotic days had ended; it would now have to live or die as a regular business, albeit one with vast landholdings in western Canada and with entrenched supply lines and depots spanning half a continent. Tragically but not surprisingly, the hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples were not consulted in this monumental business transaction between the British company and its colonial government. (Bown 235-36)

The HBC is a truly unique corporation: originating in a king's gift of land, it overtakes an entire territory, which it proceeds to deterritorialize, while instituting its own immanent plane of corporatism. In D&G terms, one could even argue that HBC's history spans all three of the social machines. After all, Rupert's Land displayed a primitive territorial socius, in which the Aboriginal communities thrived in balance with the natural resources of the territory they inhabited. HBC effectively deterritorialized them, and encompassed them into



the Company's own social machine with the help of blankets, beads, and, firearms, alcohol<sup>20</sup>. This socius, however, although seemingly despotic<sup>21</sup>, was a proto-capitalist one, which immediately started creating axioms<sup>22</sup> for the life of the people it was taking hold of.

Indeed, as its history as well as its present show, HBC's operations distinguished themselves from the first as different, in their management of biopower. A veritable example of the society of control, HBC marked its workers from the first: a twentieth-century fur trader, John Seagrave, for example, titles his memoir *The Hudson's Bay Boy*. Furthermore, and closer to the period investigated in this chapter, HBC exerted a careful and precise control of whom it employed and what roles it allowed different people to take. Edith I. Burley shows how the Company preferred to engage Scots from the Orkney Islands on limited-time contracts because they were "isolated, poor, and underdeveloped and their society was traditional and hierarchical" (3). Equally, HBC "did not want to transform the local population into workers," because it needed them "to remain hunters and trappers, supplying the furs" (4).

The company exemplifies deterritorialization very well: plucking people out of their habitual environments and plugging them into its own desiring-

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<sup>20</sup> In what might be read as a justification for colonialism, E.E. Rich repeatedly claims the immediate dependence of Aboriginal populations on the Europeans, e.g., "the marked tendency for the Indians to become dependent on the traders" (71), or "for the French also bore witness to the speed and completeness with which the Indians lost their skill with the bow and arrow and became utterly dependent on the white man's weapons for their hunts" (429).

<sup>21</sup> George Simpson, one of the best-known HBC governors, was known as "the little emperor" (Bown), which would suggest the despot of a barbaric regime.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of the D&G axiomatic and its relationship with capitalism, please see Chapter 1.

production assemblages; taking advantage of these desiring-machines to conduct its business; reterritorializing people and their desires according to its interest. HBC thus exacted close and very precise control over its employees and its business. Before Europe even developed the disciplinary society that Foucault described, HBC managed to erect a society of control in Rupert's land that functioned along the lines outlined by Deleuze<sup>23</sup>.

### **“Our People Make the Difference”: Walmart’s Corporate Subjects**

Many people probably do not shop at Walmart. And yet, Walmart has definitively stamped the plane of immanence of corporatism and touched everyone's lives one way or another. The “everyone” in the previous sentence might seem an exaggeration, but Walmart has managed to effect such a change in the retail world that, even if one positively shuns Walmart, one's life is still affected by the ripples of this retail giant's worldwide operations.

The quotation in the title of this section, “Our people make the difference,” is the slogan that Wal-Mart employees used to wear on the back of their uniforms. The slogan indicates, through the use of the possessive pronoun “our,” that there are some people who belong to the corporation and who give it the competitive advantage, signified by the idea of “the difference.” Even though the statement purports to convey the corporation's appreciation for its

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<sup>23</sup> One question still remains on the flip side of the coin: What of Canada? Did HBC truly beget Canada, even if in spite of itself? This remains an open question, which falls outside of the focus of this section. From a Deleuze-Guattarian viewpoint, however, Canada emerges within the already-formed capitalist plane of immanence brought about by the latter's expansion from the European centre, and of which HBC constitutes one assemblage.

employees, a close reading reveals its more nefarious implications, of asserting proprietorship over people, while also acquiescing the importance of having people transformed into WM's own brand of corporate subjectivity.

If I were to break it down I would argue that corporate subjectification is achieved through the two usual corporate channels: the first – the *corporate story* – is overt and operates through advertising, and engenders consumerism, while the second – the *corporate culture* – is covert, operating through in-house human resources manuals, and generates a narrative about the existence of the corporation that integrates and justifies the relationship between employer (corporation) and employee (one version of the corporate subject). The corporate story comprises official website contents, advertisements, slogans, press releases, branding– in short, any kind of publicity that creates the image of the corporation in the public eye.

The reason I hesitate to perform a neat breakdown between the two channels is because corporatism, or contemporary capitalism, of which WM is such a fitting example, does not lend itself easily to such a clear-cut differentiation of its operative components. While corporatism functions within its own plane of immanence, “corporate subjectivity” may imply a transcendent system, with a sovereign and its subjects. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari deny the existence of subjectivity, opting instead for a more versatile, suppler condition of being-in-the-moment, called *haecceity*<sup>24</sup>.

Consequently, any attempts at analyzing aspects in isolation run the risk of oversimplification, and the danger of inapplicable conclusions. In other

words, when one overlooks that, as D&G put it, “Capitalism defines a field of immanence and never ceases to fully occupy this field” (*Anti-Oedipus* 250), one can suppose that by tackling one aspect of the socius – say, labour injustice – in isolation, one can actually effect change, or even overturn the system. The difficulty of separating one aspect of corporatism from any others is highlighted when D&G speak of subjectification: “Capitalism’s originality resides rather in the fact that the social machine has for its parts technical machines attached to the full body of the socius, and no longer men, the latter having become adjacent to the full body of technical machines” (*Anti-Oedipus* 251).

However, I prefer to use the notion of “corporate subject” in this case to signal a rupture between the well-established position of “citizen” previously available for humans to inhabit, and the new condition of being brought about by the latest stage of capitalism. This concept, rather than moving away from the D&G conceptualization of corporatism as rhizomatically interconnected, isolates humans momentarily from the molar assemblages in order to investigate the very manner in which they are inserted into the corporatist system. Also, the concept of corporate subject bridges the very abstract machinic position provided by D&G theory and the self-image people might have of themselves as free-willing individuals. In other words, the concept of “corporate subject,” although artificial within the theoretical backbone of this dissertation, can provide the necessary stepping-stone for a better understanding of the mechanisms of

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<sup>24</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of the notion of “haecceity.”

corporatism. The corporate subject<sup>25</sup> is by no means a homogeneous puppet that each person is in danger of becoming; rather, many forms of corporate subjectivity coexist, and their common denominator resides in the different forms and different degrees of personal articulation to the plane of immanence of corporatism.

Methodologically, if the analysis of Hudson's Bay Company had to be undertaken diachronically in order to position it at the origins of the genealogy, Walmart calls for a drastically synchronous approach. A frozen snapshot allows us to see how corporatism functions rhizomatically, creating connections and networks between any and all aspects of daily life, be they social, political, or economical and how it slots desiring-machines into its aggregated operations. So, how exactly does Walmart integrate the people that come into contact with it into its machine? The specific ways in which WM calls its corporate subjects into being follow the two channels outlined before: a *corporate culture* devised exclusively and secretly for its employees, and a *corporate story* presented to the public. Sometimes the two channels intertwine, in the sense that glimpses of the corporate culture can be gleaned in the corporate story. An example of such an intersection is, as Naomi Klein (2000) also points out, the "bizarre lexicons for describing employees" (p. 16) that designates WM workers as "associates<sup>26</sup>." It becomes immediately obvious why the choice for "associates," rather than a

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<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the concept of "corporate subject" according to the world-systems perspective, see Satoshi Ikeda, "Imperial subjects, national citizenship, and corporate subjects: Cycles of political participation/exclusion in the modern world-system" (2005).

more mundane “employee,” would be preferred, for a company that touts its wholesome, family values (Featherstone). However, while WM’s discourse of benevolent inclusivity suggests the promise of wealth-sharing, it, in fact, camouflages an ideology and a business behaviour that does anything to control its corporate subjects. WM’s corporate culture erupts through the corporate story as the epitome of family-oriented, wholesome, conservative small-town America, but both the culture and story are put hard at work to hide the realities behind the world’s largest retailer. Union busting, employee exploitation through compulsory unpaid overtime, and dictatorial policies and policing all contribute to a corporate culture of terror and blackmail meant to keep WM employees in check, by calling them into corporate subjectivity as their only possible condition of being.

It is through these two channels that both corporate employees *and* consumers, irrespective of the frequency with which they consume the products of a certain brand, are targeted to become corporate subjects. Both these channels can be analytically dismantled by looking at the specific discourses they employ. In order to do that, specificity is needed, because it would be less useful to speak in abstract terms about a process that, while general, employs specific strategies that vary from one corporation to the next. Thus, even though the process of corporate subjectification is a generalized one in the present corporatist socius, the manner in which the cultural aspect of corporate

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<sup>26</sup> Coincidentally, HBC refers to its employees with the same epithet: “It is the policy of Hudson's Bay Company to refer to all employees as associates regardless of level of employment” (“Style Guide” n.pag.).

subjectification emerges varies with each corporation along the two channels laid out in the previous paragraph.

Walmart appears as a well-suited choice in an analysis of the mechanisms of corporate subjectification, due to its enormous influence both on the global retail market, and to the change it has been bringing to the way in which people shop. Walmart's influence on the global market is visible due to almost daily reports in the media about its newest endeavours to secure its position in new markets around the world, as its only means of corporate growth<sup>27</sup>. WM's world-wide spread brings with it an idiosyncratic way of corporate subjectification, one of the most efficient, due to the concerted efforts the corporation expends in applying its unique philosophy, as we shall see further down, a legacy of its founder, Sam Walton<sup>28</sup>, of handling both its consumers, and its employees

A number of WM critics<sup>29</sup> show themselves puzzled by the attraction that the retail chain exerts even on people who outspokenly oppose its practices. The great number of both media and scholarly publications chronicling the various aspects of this retailer's actions proves the general interest that WM elicits across the board. WM seems to have become the social train-wreck that people

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<sup>27</sup> Please see the "Introduction" for a detailed discussion of the importance of "growth" to corporatism.

<sup>28</sup> According to Walmart corporate website, the corporation still operates according to the vision of its founder, Sam Walton: "Saving people money to help them live better was the goal that Sam Walton, our founder, envisioned when he opened the doors to the first Walmart" ("What we do" n.pag.). The corporate website dedicates one separate page to the thorough presentation of the life and deeds of its founder – arguably a shrine to his cult of personality – complete with links to his biography, videos featuring him, anecdotes about his memorable feats, and "stories from associates (our employees) that met Mr. Sam" ("Our Founder" n. pag.)

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Featherstone (2004), or Fishman (2006).

cannot look away from. It has become clear that “Walmart shapes where we shop, the products we buy, and the prices we pay – even for those of us who never shop there” (Fishman 5). Therefore, it does not matter whether one is a WM supporter or critic, because either way, one cannot escape its grip. Whether one likes it or not, one is bound to become a WM corporate subject. However, this current influence exerted by WM does not explain its historical rise to this position.

WM’s March 2010 slogan is “Save money. Live better.” It clearly displays WM’s corporate story, which aims to transform consumers into corporate subjects by offering the illusion of the possibility for endless consumption through low pricing. This strategy mirrors the very tendency of capitalism towards “the sole end [of] abstract wealth” (*Anti-Oedipus* 254), or the “*endless* accumulation of capital” (Wallerstein 24). Within capitalism, low prices, the crux of WM marketing, are therefore instrumental in creating corporate subjects by conferring the illusion of possible participation in the process of accumulation. This illusion is backed by the rags-to-riches story of WM’s founder, Sam Walton, which every employee has to know by heart as a way of enacting WM corporate culture, and which transpires in all of WM’s public actions.

Moreover, the Walmart story purports to parallel and reproduce not only the American classic-liberal ethos of individualism, but also the history of the United States. This parallel translates itself in the contemporary moment as the duty of WM paralleling the duty of the U.S. as guarantor of neoliberal



globalization. Charles Fishman, for example, talks about WM's single-handed "ability to suffocate inflation across the entire U.S. economy" (222), through its constant drive to lower prices (Bergdahl). Isn't this the dream of any believer in neoliberalism, who might say "see, I told you there was no need for government regulation, since corporations like WM can do what's best for us, because what could be better than stifling inflation?" Sarcasm aside, WM's corporate story insidiously constructs an alternative vision of the American ethos – a neoconservative one at that – complete with the founding father figure, in the larger-than-life image of Sam Walton, who, in the narrative constructed around him, clearly parallels if not Jesus Christ himself, then at least the founding fathers of the U.S. Indeed, as Featherstone (2004) asserts, "Walmart's professed values are, for many workers, the most compelling aspect of the Walmart culture, because they are the professed values of the United States itself" (54).

In what follows, I will provide details of the workings of these two channels, the corporate culture and the corporate story, in order to better see how the WM corporate subject emerges to life. Although the two channels are highly intertwined in terms of the narrative that both WM "associates" and customers are told, I will divide the two according to the level of transparency, or lack thereof. Keeping in mind that both these channels promote a story of WM as the benevolent family store across the street from your community, ideal as both workplace and shopping place, I will rally the more covert operations, such as union busting, under the corporate culture, while the pricing policies, as one of WM's more transparent actions, will go under the heading of the corporate story

### **“Pro-Associate, not Anti-Union”: the Walmart Corporate Culture**

The covert aspects of WM’s corporate culture fall into three categories: systematic union busting, employee exploitation through compulsory unpaid overtime, and dictatorial actions and surveillance, all of which amount to a culture of terror and blackmail for the employees, while inscribing the corporation into the society of control described by Deleuze. For the people who depend on WM for their jobs, the retailer offers rather harsh conditions of subjectification, all couched in a discourse of family values that elicits unquestioned loyalty and even personal sacrifice from “associates.”

In 2005, WM closed down a store in Jonquière, Quebec, as the only recourse to crushing its union<sup>30</sup>. After having tried all kinds of actions to intimidate or coax employees into staying out of the union, the corporation decided that the only possible way to deal with the threat of the union spreading across the board was to take the drastic measure of closing down a store with 190 employees (Griffiths, n.pag.). The action is meant to be a deterrance for any other attempts at unionizing, but it also represents a last resort for WM’s systematic policy of union-busting. Walmart insists on describing itself as “pro-associate, not anti-union,” but it is ruthless in trying to suppress any and all attempts by unions to organize its stores. One of the company’s standard-issue manuals for store supervisors is the *Managers’ Toolbox to Remaining Union-*

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<sup>30</sup> The corporatist socius has confirmed the State and its institutions constitute mere machines in the former’s plane of immanence when Canada’s Supreme Court sided with WM in a lawsuit launched by the Jonquière store union: “Canada’s top court on [27 November 2009] backed the right of Wal-Mart Stores Inc. to close a store after a union organized workers there... Justice Ian Binnie wrote for the majority that the court had

*Free*, which urges managers to keep an eye open for such telltale signs of incipient unionism as “frequent meetings at associates’ homes” or “associates who are never seen together... talking or associating with each other” (Bianco 6). These injunctions, part of the job for these supervisors, clearly indicate the level of surveillance the corporation undertakes in order to control its employees. It presupposes the managers should have extensive knowledge of their staff, not only in their work capacities, but also in their personal lives, so as to discern whether their acquaintances are friends or union agitators.

The motto of “pro-associate, not anti-union” represents yet another example of the corporation’s discursive instantiation of its corporate culture. By placing the emphasis on its declared support for its employees, and ending with a double negation, the phrase muddles the waters around its stance on unions, while simultaneously providing its statement on union organization as benevolent. After all, being “not anti-union” does not make WM pro-union, but it discursively diminishes the importance of organizing. The motto seems to paternalistically chide an infantilized employee – one version of the corporate subject à la WM – in saying that “since we’re all out for you, why would you want a union?”

Well, one of the possible answers to that question might lay in the protection such organizing would offer against dictatorial measures of surveillance<sup>31</sup>, such as the ones suggested by the *Managers’ Toolbox to*

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‘endorsed the view that no legislation obliges an employer to remain in business’” (Reuters, n.pag.).

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion of how surveillance operates and renders WM into a “panopticon of time,” see Max Haiven and Scott Stoneman’s “Wal-Mart: the

*Remaining Union-Free*, or described in the documentary *Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price* (Greenwald, 2005), where a number of employees describe being tirelessly followed around not only at work, but also in their private time by managers and other WM employees fearing union organization. Bianco adds “Walmart headquarters conducts covert surveillance of employee telephone calls and emails. Whenever it does detect pro-union sentiment at a store, the home office dispatches a ‘labor relations team’ by private jet to cajole and intimidate dissident workers into toeing its strict anti-union line” (6).

Why would WM employees even want a union, if their employer treats them so benevolently and caringly, according to official accounts? A number of reasons have been surfacing in the past period showing that WM’s treatment of its “associates” may not be as rosy as the retailer paints it. Even the writer of one of the few admiring accounts of WM admits to being “physically and mentally exhausted the entire time I worked [at the Walmart Home Office]... The high standards, work-load, small staff, and long hours clearly take their toll” (Bergdahl 63). These are the words of a former high-ranking manager at WM’s headquarters, who goes on to express his puzzlement at people who manage to sustain these conditions of employment over long periods of time. He, however, says nothing about the compensation received for putting in such long hours, or for the constant exhaustion that he constantly felt. As manager, he would be one

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Panopticon of Time.” The two authors argue that “Wal-Mart is a panopticon of time which brings together multiple technologies of power to define a new architecture of control over temporality, a complex machine whose purpose is to imprison human potential in multiple overlapping ways” (2). Haiven and Stoneman take WM as emblematic of the “new tendencies in global capitalist power, a power whose primary

of the “coaches” whose role would be to unquestioningly train others in the same culture.

Regular “associates,” however, routinely get asked to work over time, without even the hint of being paid for the extra hours they put in<sup>32</sup>. The manner in which the “coaches” ask the “associates” to perform the tasks without remuneration falls within the same discourse of family relations that WM upholds<sup>33</sup>, and the need for extra unpaid time is suggested – never said out loud, though – as a personal sacrifice for the greater good of the family (Greenwald). In addition to being asked to put in unpaid supplementary hours, WM employees testify to being forced “to work through their fifteen-minute breaks,” and claim to have documentation proving “7000 different instances of managers deleting large blocks of time from payroll records” (Bianco 6-7).

Moreover, like any model patriarchal family, WM also displays a gender bias<sup>34</sup>. If at home in the U.S., the corporation systematically denies women promotions into the higher executive ranks, thus denying them access into the core activities, in the periphery, women who work for the factories

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driving evolutionary motor is its need to overcome, incorporate, subordinate, co-opt or otherwise harness evolving forms of resistance that always-already escape its grasp”(2).

<sup>32</sup> “Wal-Mart employees have sued the retail chain for unpaid overtime in four states—West Virginia, New Mexico, Oregon, and Colorado. The plaintiffs allege that they were pressured to work overtime and that the company then erased the overtime hours from their time records” (Messina, qtd. in Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 183).

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Barbara Ehrenreich’s description of her brief experience as a WM employee in *Nickel and Dimed: On (not) Getting by in America*. She exposes the family rhetoric as displayed in one of the many WM educational materials on being an adequate employee. The one she quotes is a video titled “You’ve Picked a Great Place to Work,” and in it “various associates testify to the ‘essential feeling of family for which Wal-Mart is so well-known’, leading up to the conclusion that we don’t need a union” (144).

<sup>34</sup> Ehrenreich confirms: “we are all ‘ladies’ here, forbidden, by storewide rules, to raise our voices or cuss” (156).

manufacturing WM products are constantly exploited, overworked, kept prisoners, and even physically abused. One female worker in such a factory in Dhaka reports that “If you make any mistakes or fell behind on your goal they beat you... They slapped you and lashed you hard on the face with the pants. This happens very often. They hit you hard. It is no joke” (Fishman 185). The difference between the women in the periphery and those in the U.S. is that the latter can access the legal system in search for justice. *Betty Dukes vs. Walmart Stores Inc.*, “the largest civil-rights class action in history, representing 1.6 million women” (Featherstone 245) who are being or have at one point been employed by WM, tackles the problems of gender discrimination at WM. Although women make up 72 percent of WM’s hourly workforce and probably the overwhelming majority of the workers in the periphery, only “34 percent of its managers are women” (Featherstone 7). Moreover, even for a similar position, a woman earns less than a man at WM. It thus appears that the WM corporate subject is gendered.

### **“Rolling Back Prices”: The Walmart Corporate Story**

Few of the longer accounts on any of the aspects of WM’s activities fail to mention the importance of its founder to the manner in which the corporation conducts its business. “To understand the Walmart culture you have to gain an understanding of the character and personality of its founder, Sam Walton” (76), Michael Bergdahl (2004) trumpets as the introduction to a longer Jesus-like portrait of the man who built the largest retailer in the world, and whose

influence appears everywhere in the daily activities of the corporation. The religious discourse infuses Bergdahl's impassioned characterization of Sam Walton: "So strong were his disciples' beliefs in Sam's teachings that I'd even heard that someone made up bracelets like those that say WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) that instead say WWSD (What Would Sam Do?)" (62). Bergdahl uncritically concludes that "His [Sam Walton's] myth, folklore, and legacy still engender loyalty from his leadership disciples and associates," of whom the author declares himself to be one, and also that "His guiding principles still provide a touchstone for company leaders more than a decade after his death" (62).

Haiven and Stoneman claim that the idealized image of the founder distinguishes WM from other corporate entities:

Indeed, Walmart actively distinguishes itself from older images of the corporation and corporate imperialism by idolizing the modest, down-home hard-working image of its founder, Sam Walton, and painting the firm as the gift of a straight-talking upstart from Arkansas, a folk hero suffering the slings and arrows of the decadent, arrogant cosmopolitan corporate giants of the metropolis.<sup>35</sup> (7)

WM's corporate story thus emerges as not only a parallel to the development and growth of the United States, but also, given its roots "in the heart of America's Bible Belt" (Griffiths n. pag.), as a recurrence of the Christian narrative of

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, Walmart is hardly alone in deploying the family genealogy to support its corporate story. As Heather Zwicker shows in her analysis of construction giant Bechtel, "which proudly calls itself a family company – indeed, founder Warren A.

redemption. WM's story sells itself as *the* new redemption that can be achieved through either working or shopping there. With Sam Walton as the father figure watching from above, the corporation purports to function according to the wholesome values instilled by its founder. Family, tradition, Christianity, wholesomeness: one buys them all, when one shops at WM, thus becoming a good corporate subject.

What if one neither works, nor shops at WM, can one still be considered a corporate subject a la WM? Whether one shops at WM or not does not make too much of a difference in one's condition of being as corporate subject any more. As Fishman hints when he asserts that "the Walmart effect also extends to consumers who never shop at Walmart" (21), everywhere where WM comes, the retail business, to which everyone is connected in one way or the other, changes as a result, and these changes happen not only in the U.S., but arguably all around the world<sup>36</sup>.

Similarly, everywhere where corporatism extends its grasp, people are forced to change their habits and mundane lives, because of the changes in landscape (large buildings to which one has to drive), changes in types of

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Bechtel was known to his business contemporaries and is remembered within the company as 'Dad'" (109).

<sup>36</sup> The fact wherever WM appears independent stores go bankrupt is well known. However, the independent boutiques are no longer enough for WM in its quest for endless growth, symptomatic of corporatism. The retailer has decided to openly take on its big-box competition:

A third [goal of Project Impact]: home in on categories where the competition can be killed. "They've got Kmart ready to take a standing eight-count next year," says retail consultant Burt Flickinger III, managing director for Strategic Resources Group and a veteran Walmart watcher. "Same with Rite Aid. They've knocked out four of the top five toy retailers, and are now going after the last one standing, Toys 'R' Us. Project Impact will be the catalyst to wipe out a second round of national and regional retailers." (Gregory n. pag.)



commodities carried, their sourcing, and ultimately – and for most people most importantly – seemingly affordable pricing due to the externalization of the heaviest burden of costs related to infrastructure, the environment, and, especially in the case of WM, welfare. As Haiven and Stoneman confirm, WM is representative of the plane of immanence of contemporary corporatism:

In sum, Walmart is an instantiation of a form of corporate power which is as expansively global as it is intensively local. It operates as a hub or hinge of multiple processes, bringing together health, consumerism, new patterns of labour, global transportation and communication, the affective and subjective aspects of life, finance, culture and food. This is no mere over-inflated storefront but rather a paradigmatic nexus of the array of sometimes concurrent, sometimes contradictory forces collectively known as globalization – an organization oriented to a saturation of the time of everyday life for both workers and consumers (the line between which is often substantially blurred). (6-7)

Even though these authors do not assume the D&G conceptualization as their theoretical basis, their contention clearly points toward the immanent plane of our contemporary social machine. The image of “a hub or hinge of multiple processes” clearly points toward a rhizomatic construction of indivisibly connected elements, “a nexus,” of which they provide several examples (“health, consumerism, new patterns of labour, global transportation and communication, the affective and subjective aspects of life, finance, culture and food”). The fact they place this interconnected socius, “the array of sometimes concurrent,

sometimes contradictory forces,” under the heading of “globalization” does not take away from the reality of corporatism, nor does it make WM and its manner of integrating people and their desires into its own molar aggregate less of a good example for it.

### **Let the Girls Come to Me: Dove Campaign for Real Beauty**

After the first two steps in the genealogy of corporatism, we arrive at the limit. Unilever, through its personal care brand Dove, represents corporatism always reaching toward its limit and constantly averting it. Dove masquerades as the body without organs, i.e., “the deterritorialized socius, the wilderness where the decoded flows run free, the end of the world, the apocalypse” (*Anti-Oedipus* 176). Concretely, Dove’s corporate story promises a world in which ethics and the care of humans trump mercantile interests. That is why the Campaign for Real Beauty (CFRB) is so intuitively compelling that it has ensnared even socially aware critics. Dove’s corporate culture, on the other hand, reveals the corporate desire to the ever-growing market-share.

Dove manages to simulate free-flowing desires across the body without organs because it ostensibly aims to liberate the female body from the constraints of socially idealized normativity:

The mythologies sing of organs – partial objects and their relations with a full body that repels or attracts them: vaginas riveted on the woman’s body, and immense penis shared by the men, an independent anus that assigns itself a body without anus... The unities in question are never

found in persons but rather in *series* which determine the connections, disjunctions and conjunctions of organs. That is why fantasies are group fantasies. **It is the collective investment of the organs that plugs desire into the socius and assembles social production and desiring-production into a whole on the earth.** (*Anti-Oedipus* 142, my emphasis)

As D&G explain, the organism emerges when society invests the organs with concrete roles and subsequently hierarchize them. A woman or a man thus become part of the socius as a fe/male organism with certain functions, marked by his/her genitalia. Thus the body without organs of the potentially freely desiring human is assigned concrete functionality: “an independent anus that assigns itself a body without anus.” The organism as a socially determined functional machine does not emerge naturally out of the human physiognomy, but rather emerges “in *series* which determine the connections, disjunctions and conjunctions of organs.” This “collective investment” marks the modes in which desire becomes productive for the corporatist socius through the hierarchical organization of bodies. These machinic organisms, however, constantly threaten to liberate their desires and construct their bodies without organs, thus pushing corporatism to its limits.

Dove signals how corporatism constantly tends to its limit, yet all the while striving to avoid it. What is the limit, though? What comes on the heels of corporatism? What resides on the outside of ultimate branding? Can a brand build its own body without organs? No, because a brand is an assemblage – a

rhizomatic collection of machines performing certain operations of desiring-production – but it can appear as if it is, and thus become incredibly compelling for people already inserted into the molar aggregates of consumption, but also for socially conscious people. Dove comes at the end of this genealogy of corporatism because it symbolizes its latest trend: the overtaking of social activism by corporatism.

While many corporations proudly wear their corporate responsibility on their websites – donating parts of their proceeds to one cause or the other, supporting different causes and charities – Dove is the first to go as far as organize a full-blown social campaign of self-image awareness. After a beginning period of attempting to empower women to love their bodies by using ‘real women’ in their advertisements, the Campaign for Real Beauty has really found its grounding in protecting young girls from the deleterious effects of the proliferation of emaciated female bodies as ideals of beauty<sup>37</sup>.

Dove also exemplifies the coming out party of corporatism, the moment when the corporate story of acceptance and empowerment of ‘real women’ shamelessly props up the corporate culture whose only aim is boosting sales and growing the brand’s market share. Having established itself definitively and irrevocably, corporatism no longer needs to doubt or prove itself. Finally, its public face can speak with its inside voice.

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<sup>37</sup> Following the high-profile death of two fashion models due to complications from anorexia, French legislators passed a law in 2008 making it “illegal for anyone – including fashion magazines, advertisers and websites – to promote extreme thinness” (Lauter n.pag.).

### **Building self-esteem: Dove Corporate Story**

If you've noticed a disconnect between the first two corporate examples in this corporatist genealogy and this last one, you might be asking yourself: aren't two corporations and one brand constructing a chronology of apples and oranges? You are right, of course, and I would probably be hard-pressed to produce a scholarly explanation for this enumeration. There are two justifications I can offer for this choice, and they are symptomatically interconnected. The first one comes from Naomi Klein's analysis of branding as the radically new operative focus of the corporate world, and the second has to do with the particular corporation under discussion, Unilever, and its peculiar – read “unique” – way of conducting its business.

I will discuss the latter before I dedicate the necessary space to Klein's discussion of brands. Unilever, as opposed to its main home and personal care products competitor, Procter and Gamble, has chosen to market brands exclusively, to the detriment of its corporate identity awareness. Consequently most people know that Mister Clean, Tide, Pampers, Always and so many others are “superior quality” P&G products, while very few outside the industry can name any Unilever brands. The reason for this type of marketing can be found in Unilever's involvement in both home and personal care, as well as the more sensitive foods markets. The logic goes: if any of our brands run into trouble, at least none of the others will suffer by association. As we shall see when investigating the collusion between Unilever's corporate story as evinced by Dove and its corporate culture exemplified by its global brand Axe and its Indian

brand Fair and Lovely, its place in the corporatist genealogy is well deserved, and becomes apparent through the very operation of association that its marketing policy aimed to prevent.

The more general reason why a brand can appear in the same enumeration as two corporations has been illuminated by Naomi Klein's famous investigation of branding as the apex of corporate activity. In short, not only are brands the most important corporate assets, but also corporations aim to become brands themselves:

[Companies] integrated the idea of branding into the very fabric of their companies. Their corporate cultures were so tight and cloistered that to outsiders they appeared to be a cross between fraternity house, religious cult and sanitarium. Everything was an ad for the brand: bizarre lexicons for describing employees (partners, baristas, team players, crew members), company chants, superstar CEOs, fanatical attention to design consistency, a propensity for monument-building, and New Age mission statements. (16)

Branding allows corporations to position themselves and create a certain identity – thus living up to the very idea of one “body corporate” – complete with a corporate culture for the employees to follow and a corporate story trumpeted to the whole world. Branding also allows corporations to take advantage of the interconnectedness of the capitalist social machine and push the boundaries of their core activities. As Klein points out:

Branding...has taken a fairly straightforward relationship between buyer and seller and – through the quest to turn brands into media providers, arts producers, town squares and social philosophers – transformed it into something much more invasive and profound. (335).

It is in this all-consuming capacity that Dove – a personal care brand – can step in and fancy itself a social activism proponent. The immanence of the corporatist socius allows this brand to play on the rhizomatically linked resources a corporate brand can command, e.g., “media providers,” “arts producers,” and “social philosophers” in order to grow its market share, i.e., to sell more beauty products<sup>38</sup>. This bottom-line aim constitutes, after all, the *raison d’être* of the CFRB.

In the spring of 2004, Unilever launched a seemingly feminist campaign for its flagship personal-care brand, Dove. Under the hopeful name of “Campaign for Real Beauty,” Unilever aims to “broaden the narrow definitions of beauty. To challenge the stereotypes. To celebrate the diverse, the healthy, the real, the truly beautiful. We hope you’ll join us” (CFRB n. pag.). With a plethora of TV ads, print commercials, and websites featuring “real women,” who are not “afraid of supermodels,” the Dove ad campaign seems to represent an example of very expensive ‘consciousness’- building feminist activism, through which Unilever ultimately aims at selling its Dove products.

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<sup>38</sup> Not only does the CFRB have its own website, its own short films (*Evolution*, *Onslaught*), but it also produces a magazine: “the Australian division of Dove... came up with the idea of developing a custom magazine to tie in with the master brand campaign” (Nguyen 30).

Ever since its debut, the CFRB has sparked a huge controversy, with polarized discussants ranging from elation at seeing “everyday women with real bodies” (Prior n. pag.) to disgust at seeing an “old wrinkly lady” in a teenage magazine (qtd. in Millard 164). When the campaign started in 2004, it showcased six of these “everyday women” in white underwear. In the print ad, the caption reads: “Firming the thighs of a size 2 supermodel is no challenge. Real Women have real bodies with real curves. And Dove wants to celebrate those curves.” The TV ads feature the same, or other real women talking about their dissatisfaction with parts of their body, but concluding that they’re overcoming them, and feeling good about themselves, especially since Dove products make them feel so much more beautiful.

Ironic, isn’t it? First, we have women who are not happy about parts of their bodies, then, nudged by Dove, they learn to accept and feel good about their bodies, and finally, they transform their bodies into yet more beautiful and desirable shapes, with the help of Dove products:

It is hard to believe that Dove can be missing the irony of their ad campaign, which if opinion polls can be believed, is highly successful in targeting women who have an interest in cellulite-firming lotion. If the point of the campaign really is that it is okay for women to come in all different sizes, then why would those women "celebrate" those very curves by slathering them up with lotion that purports reduce those curves? If a woman believes she looks beautiful just as she is, is she



really going to rush out and buy a tube of Dove cellulite-reducing cream?

(“United States: ‘Campaign for Real Beauty’” n.pag.)

The irony is not lost on people bent on critical thinking. However, one of the aims of this campaign was to create controversy, conversation, and awareness, which would ultimately boost market share: “The company needed to ‘increase noise’ to capture women’s attention and, ultimately, their brand loyalties” (Greer et al. 125).

As a result, the brand, together with its advertising company, Ogilvy and Mather, commissioned a “global study” whose results were compiled in “The Real Truth about Beauty: A Global Report.” The study comprised a number of 10 countries (Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America), and 3,300 women and girls were interviewed on their ideas of beauty and their opinions about their and other women’s beauty. Some of the “findings” point to the fact that “90% of all women... want to change at least one aspect of their physical appearance,” most often their weight; “67% of all women 15 to 64 withdraw from life-engaging activities due to feeling badly about their looks (among them things like giving an opinion, going to school, going to the doctor)” (campaignforrealbeauty.ca).

Discussing the marketing campaign at its inception in 2004, Dove global brand director Silvia Lagnado displays the same contradictory stance. While strongly asserting Dove’s commitment to “broaden the world’s definition of beauty beyond physical attractiveness” (Prior n. pag.), Lagnado also talks about

how the campaign asks the viewer to make a judgment about the women's looks. The aim of the campaign is twofold: "Dove can promote a broader definition of beauty and grow the brand at the same time," says Lagnado, because "if it touches women's hearts, it will work" (Prior n.pag.).

"Campaign for real beauty" was what this advertisements were dubbed as initially. In the mean time, however, since 2004, this campaign has gained, or, more to the point, has been given a life of its own. If finding the ways to women's hearts will achieve brand growth, then Dove has been actively looking for more and more ways to get in there by starting early and focusing on girls' self-esteem. In the beginning, the CFRB started as "a global effort launched in 2004 to serve as a starting point for societal change," whose connection to the brand was only tangential: "The campaign supports the Dove mission: to make women feel beautiful every day by widening stereotypical views of beauty" ("Mission"). In spite of the apparent arm's-length-distance between the brand and the CFRB, the slippage is reinforced constantly, not only in the Mission-Statement, but also visually, on the Dove website, which now has engulfed the former [campaignforrealbeauty.com](http://campaignforrealbeauty.com), as well as in the films Dove produced to support the CFRB.

The films as well as the CFRB itself have, in the mean time, switched their focus from women to girls, by launching the Dove Self-Esteem Fund (DSEF)<sup>39</sup>:

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<sup>39</sup> The official CFRB Mission Statement does not specify it, but the DSEF branch of the campaign was initiated in 2006. One of the activities promoted on this occasion would be as follows:

The current focus of the Campaign for Real Beauty is aimed at raising the self-esteem of girls and young women through the Dove Self-Esteem Fund. In Canada, the Fund supports NEDIC, the National Eating Disorder Information Center, and ANEB, an eating disorders organization in Quebec. Additionally, the Dove Self-Esteem Fund is providing materials to conduct self-esteem building workshops and new online tools in an effort to educate moms, mentors and girls. Dove is working toward the goal of truly making a difference in the lives of 5 million young people globally by 2010. ("Mission" n.pag.)

Thus the core of the campaign has shifted from women to "girls and young women," after a brief stint in the aging women department in order to launch the Dove Pro-Age line in 2005 ("Mission"). It seems the lasting way to women's hearts and larger market shares revolves around helping young girls change their perceptions of their bodies. One of the findings of the study published on the former CFRB website announced that "69% of girls (15 to 17) feel that their mother has had a positive influence on their feelings about themselves and their beauty" (campaignforrealbeauty.com). The campaign found that only if mothers **did not** actively engage in conversations with their daughters about body image, was the media influence on young girls more powerful. In other words, mothers are to blame for not counteracting the impact of skinny supermodels and actresses that invade every corner of the media on impressionable young girls' body image. This disparate piece of evidence amassed by the studies

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For \$10, which is donated to the National Eating Disorder Information Centre, girls can attend a "Real Beauty Workshop for Girls" to learn how society

commissioned by the brand ostensibly compels the CFRB to distribute “materials to conduct self-esteem building workshops and new online tools in an effort to educate moms, mentors and girls.”

The same educational effort underlies the production and distribution of the short films, *Evolution* and *Onslaught*. The two videos were released only on the Internet and have become viral. To date, *Evolution*, by far the more famous of the two, had over 10.6 million views on YouTube, only one of its channels of availability. For many people, this short video, which “won the Grand Prix Award at the Cannes Advertising Awards in 2007” (“Dove Soars” n.pag.), constitutes the only exposure to the CFRB. The relevance of this detail consists in the image that this campaign projects.

As one writer notes, through the CFRB, “the line between doing good and marketing has become blurry enough that Dove's "Evolution" viral video had to be yanked from a not-for-profit classification at the last minute to qualify for last year's Film Grand Prix at Cannes” (Neff, “Unilever,” n.pag.). The subtitle of his article proclaims, without any irony that “Touting programs that benefit humanity offers big payoff for marketers.” This point deserves pondering because, while Unilever might not be the first to capitalize on good will<sup>40</sup>, its

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creates "ideal" images of beauty and how to improve self-image. (Dobson 4)

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, the array of companies which have jumped on the pink ribbon bandwagon in order to associate their brand with and benefit from a social concern that has become one of the most pervasive contemporary “causes.” Barbara Ehrenreich paints a telling image of this situation:

You can dress in pink-beribboned sweatshirts, denim shirts, pajamas, lingerie, aprons, loungewear, shoelaces and socks; accessorize with pink rhinestone brooches, angel pins, scarves, caps, earrings, and bracelets; brighten up your home with breast cancer candles, stained-glass pink-ribbon candleholders, coffee mugs, pendants, wind chimes, and night-lights; and pay your bills with Checks for the Cure™. (*Bright-Sided* 22)

branded CFRB campaign constitutes the latest encroachment on social concerns by corporations.

In D&G terms, Dove CFRB represents the instantiation of a new axiom in order to incorporate a marginal concern – to say that feminism has faded into the social background in the twenty-first century might be an understatement – that nonetheless has the potential to generate free flows of desire and construct its body without organs. This potentiality becomes stronger especially when one considers both preceding corporate examples, HBC and WM, have clearly gendered policies. The axiom states that this marginal concern better be integrated onto the plane of immanence of corporatism, where it could benefit the Dove brand, than run the risk – even if minimal – of having corporatism be confronted by a body without organs at its limits.

The body without organs can also help us illuminate the insidiousness of this campaign, especially its DFSE branch, since it concerns itself with teaching girls and young women to value and love their bodies as they are, but also buy Dove products to improve them. The very aim of the CFRB is to prevent the organism, the female one in this case, from disintegrating and giving way to a body without organs (BwO), whose main characteristic is the lack of organization and hierarchy between organs:

The full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable... the BwO is nonproductive... Above all, it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body

itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image.

*(Anti-Oedipus 8)*

The BwO is unrepresentable, because it escapes any organization: “desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way” (8).

If the alternative to emitting a new axiom is to liberate the female body from the desiring-production that makes it into a hierarchized organism, well integrated into the immanence of corporatism, the social machine will create a new axiom. Even if the risk is very small – after all, many Western women, whom the CFRB targets, fancy themselves in a post-feminist era – corporatism has decided it had better be safe than sorry and consequently put a lot of money and effort into this far-reaching campaign.

Ultimately, for all their talk about how “beauty can be achieved through attitude and spirit” ([dove.co.uk](http://dove.co.uk)), the focus is still on women’s bodies. Nobody debates why women’s bodies still constitutes a major issue. The focus is on the size of those bodies on display, and it is being taken for granted that it should be so. The paradox therefore is that even if it seems to be geared towards women’s interest, the Dove campaign still showcases women’s bodies by saying “let’s change the standard,” rather than let’s do away with the idea of women as bodies. Of course, their interest resides exactly in keeping the lime light on the body, because, after all, they’re marketing a product that improves the

appearance of the body. Dove's interest in redefining "real beauty"<sup>41</sup> does not aim at changing the perception of women as bodies, but the perception of women's bodies.

However, this focus on the reinforcement of the female organism and reiteration of its place in the immanent desiring-production of the socius does not take away from the allure of the campaign. One academic study in the U.S. found that "overall consensus indicated support for using "real" women in advertising," even though "40 percent of respondents disliked images of plus-sized women in their underwear" (Millard 149). Using real women in advertising works in theory, but those bodies still have to be attractive to appeal to viewers seems to be the conclusion. Closer to the corporatist home, another conclusion seems to say that "this sophisticated semiotic strategy of empathy gains advertisers a double profit" (Millard 148) because "[these brands] look like champions and oust the competition by outselling and making others look bad"<sup>42</sup> (Pederson, qtd. in Millard 148).

### **"The Axe Effect": Unilever Corporate Culture**

Unilever, just like HBC and WM, does not really walk the talk of its Dove corporate story; this contention becomes apparent when one looks across

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<sup>41</sup> Beauty is not the only "real" Unilever is interested in defining. Please see Chapter 4 for how the corporation tackles "real food" in order to promote its Hellmann's Mayonnaise brand.

<sup>42</sup> A writer on the über-feminist blog *Bitch, PhD* rejoiced in a new commercial for tampons that pokes fun at the general trend in advertising feminine products by showing women overjoyed, dancing and singing to suggest how these products have improved their lives. M. LeBlanc promises, in a post titled "Feminist Pop Culture Friday" that

its broad range of products. Here, again, Unilever's policy – imbedded in its corporate culture – to market brands individually rather than watermark them with the corporate identity proves justified. Even with Dove, the corporation ran into some – meagerly publicized – trouble when word came out that – oh, no! – they have retouched photographs of the nude women posing for the Dove Pro-Age line.

The campaign for Pro-Age, part of the CFRB, features middle-aged and older women in the nude, each appearing alone onscreen for a couple of seconds with a text that reads “too old to be in an anti-aging ad.” After a few images have thus paraded, another text appears on white background: “but this isn’t anti-age. This is pro-age,” while a mature woman’s voice in the background chants “Beauty has no age limit. New Dove Pro-Age” (Dove Pro-Age).

The print campaign for Pro-Age displayed photographs of nude mature women taken by the famous portrait photographer Annie Leibowitz. After *The New Yorker* broke the story, Unilever, Ogilvy & Mather, its advertising agency, and Annie Leibowitz, all came to the defense of the production process, claiming that the photographs were retouched “only to remove dust and do color correction,” while also declining “to make the original proofs or digital renderings from the December 2005 photo shoot behind the campaign available for inspection or publication” (Neff, “Retouching,” n.pag.). To what extent “color correction” changed the original photographs remains unknown to the public. What has become clear in light of this tempest in a teacup is that such a

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“women like me and the readers of this blog and all the other feminist blogs are *dying* for content like this, and when it comes we will promote it heavily” (n. pag.).



strong and determined drive to live up to the corporate culture that symbolizes the corporatist necessity to integrate all desires and thwart any possible escapes cannot remain concealed for too long, before it emerges through the carefully groomed corporate story.

Similarly, the corporate culture can be seen through when examining Unilever's personal care brand for men, Axe, whose corporate story portrays women – all very scantily clad models this time – as lurable, brainless creatures, easily intoxicated by the irresistible scents of that deodorant. Again, the controversy was sparked in the media by the release of Dove's second viral video in the CFRB, *Onslaught*. This video starts with a close shot of a girl on the background of “here it comes” repeated in crescendo. What follows is a parade of advertising images of skinny women, sexualized women's bodies, cuts from infomercials promising improvements to the female body, and images suggesting women dieting. Finally, the girl from the beginning is shown lagging behind a group of other girls her age while crossing the street while the on-screen text reads “Talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does” (*Onslaught* n. pag.).

Juxtapose, if you will, this very socially altruistic ad with the one for Axe deodorant, picturing fashion models dressed in skimpy bikinis, the tops of which are at least two sizes smaller, running through the woods, climbing down rocks and swimming towards the shore in droves to surround and pounce on a man who, a sardonic smile on his face, seems bent on emptying a can of axe deodorant on his bare upper body (*The Axe Effect* n. pag.). The onscreen text

promises: “Spray more, get more: the Axe effect.” Unsurprisingly, this juxtaposition has critics up in arms:

Viewers are struggling to make sense of how *Dove* can promise to educate girls on a wider definition of beauty while other Unilever ads [for Axe] exhort boys to make 'nice girls naughty.' ... Unilever is in the business of selling products, not values, and that means we, the consumers, are being manipulated, no matter how socially responsible an ad seems. (Gillet, qtd. in Neff, “Onslaught,” n.pag.)

While Gillet manages to hit at the core of the contradiction between the Unilever corporate culture and Dove corporate story, the scandal itself remained under wraps, only for the eyes and knowledge of people in the industry, since the resources Unilever – and corporatism in general – deploy to prop up its corporate story can serve to drown any controversy that might threaten its brands.

Unilever’s response to these charges was a cop-out of the “it’s just a joke. Sheesh! Lighten up!” variety, when it proclaimed that “The Axe campaign is a spoof of 'mating game' and men's desire to get noticed by women and not meant to be taken literally” (Neff, “Onslaught,” n.pag.).

An even less visible controversy surrounding the CFRB shows Unilever’s corporate culture as Eurocentric verging on racism. An article on Vancouver’s news blog *The Tyee* pits the CFRB against Unilever’s *Fair & Lovely* brand and its campaign in India. The campaign and the brand of skin whitening cream play on Indian women’s socially enforced insecurities concerning the colour of their complexion. The article explains that “Indian girls

are taught from a young age that fair and lovely go hand in hand; a complexion a couple shades lighter could mean the difference between a successful marriage and career, and a lifetime of dismal failure” (Tumato, n.pag.).

What makes the Fair & Lovely spot even more egregious – if that were possible – is its setting in an office environment, and its suggestion that brown women need not apply for a job until they whiten their complexions. Basically, the ad suggests that old prejudices would survive to the modern times, with a bit of corporate help. Tumato argues the skin colour insecurities can be labeled as “colonial hangover”: “Call it a sort of colonial hangover – a psychological effect collectively affecting a group of people conquered throughout their history by fairer folk from Europe and the Middle East” (n.pag.).

Even if the Fair & Lovely campaign directly contradicts the CFRB, it plays on the same corporatist *modus operandi* of emitting an axiom when one would be profitable for the system. It does not “give people what they want” as so many apologists of corporatism argue, but rather, it produces, manages, and integrates their desires into its desiring-production assemblage, so that nothing can escape the plane of immanence, and everything becomes a boon for the corporatist socius.

## Conclusion

Corporatism defines, maintains, and operates on the plane of immanence through the integration of desiring machines into the molar assemblages that sustain the system. If it seems circuitous, it is because of the rhizomatic connections between all the elements involved in the immanence of corporatism: human desires, brands and their sales numbers, advertising and art production, the organization of human life, the allegiances to nation, state, brand, corporation, and so many others.

What the genealogy of corporatism as presented in this chapter shows us is that the operations of the socius are similar and become even intuitive in hindsight. HBC, WM, and Unilever, three very different corporations with regard to their business activities, prove that corporatism operates similarly, irrespective of the discrete corporation one analyzes. Corporatism has something to do with the organization of bodies into productive organisms. It also undertakes steps to distinguish those organisms into genders and their attached machinic connections. Corporatism organizes human desires into its production, and engages human affect: it diminishes the political role of the nation-state, all the while touting its allegiance to the nation. It proves to have nefarious intentions to rule human lives with the purpose of endless accumulation. It couches those intentions in nicely packaged stories that cater to its target audience and its desires.

So, why is it that humans, seeing all of these operations, cannot disentangle their desires from the plane of immanence and allow them to flow

freely across the body without organs? Can we imagine ways outside of, or at least different directions in which to steer the immanent corporate socius? The following two chapters will attempt to look in those directions and investigate alternatives, both imaginary (Chapter 3) and applied (Chapter 4).

### Chapter 3

#### Corporatism in Literature: William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, Margaret

#### Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and Scarlet Thomas' *PopCo*

*Of course, everyone is like, da da da, evil corporations, oh they're so bad, we all say that, and we all know they control everything. I mean, it's not great, because who knows what evil shit they're up to. Everyone feels bad about that. But they're the only way to get all this stuff, and it's no good getting pissy about it, because they're still going to control everything whether you like it or not. Plus, they keep like everyone in the world employed, so it's not like we could do without them. And it's really great to know everything whenever we want, to have it just like, in our brain, just sitting there.*

(M. T. Anderson, *Feed*, 40)

Many novels feature corporations in one form or another. The popular thriller genre, for example, has developed the corporate sub-genre, in which corporations, just like the ubiquitous cardboard characters, routinely appear as villainous, conniving, and deceitful entities, always with a conspiracy or two up their sleeves, most often in the attempt to rule the world<sup>1</sup>. This template depiction of corporations generates more problems than it draws attention to, because it trivializes the nature of corporatism. Ironically, if the a priori image of corporatism is one of greed, deceit, and general desire to rule the world, then any analysis of the mechanisms at work in corporatism that lend it its powerful hold as contemporary dominant system becomes an exercise in futility, with the conclusion already revealed. In other words, if we already know that the corporation is always the bad guy, why bother to show why? Consequently, I would classify these popular corporate-thriller novels as an example of Foucault's "rule of tactical polyvalence of discourse" (*Sexuality* 100), which

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<sup>1</sup> For example, John Grisham's *The Firm* (1991), Floyd Kemske's series subtitled *A Corporate Nightmare*, Iain Banks' *The Business* (1999) etc.

shows that dominant discourse is practically indistinguishable from its opposition:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (101-2)

As Foucault warns, just because the discourse of a novel or a movie makes it seem oppositional to corporate culture, even to the point of whistle blowing, does not necessarily make it work counter to the operations of corporatism. On the contrary, by trivializing the bad corporation character aiming at world domination, this genre of popular culture, be it novels or movies, puts the onus on the bona fide critique to move beyond the ‘duh’ factor. While I am not attempting to create a high-brow/low-brow distinction, I think a credible critique has to part ways with the simply dichotomous view of the world, and, implicitly, of corporatism.

The novels that I chose to discuss in this chapter illustrate a range of corporatist critique. Starting with a novel which partly displays the dichotomous view, we move into a territory with less clearly-cut representation of corporatism. The investigation moves from corporatism’s baffling globalizing sprawl, in its contemporary inescapable complexity, and in its potential disastrous future. These three stances are respectively represented by William

Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, Scarlett Thomas's *PopCo*, and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. This chapter constructs, therefore, a genealogy of the literary engagement with corporatism, with an eye towards possible alternatives envisaged by the imaginative genre of fiction writing. Consequently, the vantage point of critique starts from the assumption that potential solutions to real-life crises can be found in the most surprising places, such as literature, or the arts or humanities in general, which, as we shall see, constitutes the moral of Atwood's dystopia<sup>2</sup>.

Structurally, the chapter traces the range of possible solutions, starting from a feeling of futility of resistance to an actual practical alternative. Rather than implying any ranking between the three, this chapter orders them from problem-outlining to solution-offering novels. *Pattern Recognition* displays a present in which commercialism and corporate interests dominate the world-image and imaginary, but it only counteracts them with a reactionary turn to a romanticized 'pure' aesthetic. Atwood, in turn, constructs a dystopian vision of the future, which, by definition, can no longer provide solutions, but does offer hope for the real world. Although dystopias are mostly negative views and cautionary tales that warn against maintaining what they see as a controversial course of action, Atwood subtly weaves in a potential alternative course of

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<sup>2</sup> The corporate dystopia genre appears also in T.M. Anderson's *Feed* and Max Barry's *Jennifer Government*, both of which tackle the possible outcomes of extreme neoliberalism. The former looks at corporatism through the eyes and lives of teenagers literally plugged into the immanent network through the live "feed" in their brains which presents them with instantaneous ads in response to their experiences in the moment. The latter envisages a future in which everything is privatized, including the army (in the form of the NRA), and the police, while the only token remnant of public institution is a budget-less Government.



action which can avert the perceived dangers. Atwood's suggestions illustrate the problems inherent in privileging some forms of knowledge over others, instead of integrating them for the benefit of humanity. For the purposes of my argument, the most conceptually productive novel proves to be Scarlett Thomas' *PopCo*. Thomas manages to exemplify the complexity of contemporary corporatism while also suggesting that the possibility of change rests with the development of a rhizomatic network of singularites, each of whom is personally responsible for system-altering behaviour.

### **Baffling Present and Reactionary Solutions: William Gibson's Refuge in Aestheticism**

No matter if Cayce Pollard finds herself in London, Tokyo, or Moscow, brand names and global corporate logos dominate the imagery in *Pattern Recognition*, just waiting to be connected with a critique of global market place that effaces national and ethnic differences, and "dissolves the membranes between mirror-worlds" (Gibson 202). "Mirror-worlds" is the metaphor that Cayce uses to describe her relationship to the urban settings she usually finds herself in: New York as home and London as work place. Cayce spends a considerable amount of time musing on her relationships with different parts of the world, to which she travels unrestrictedly, financed by a multinational advertising corporation, in a seeming illustration of the cliché of the 'small planet'. The cliché seems to apply to the plot of *Pattern Recognition*, which brings together not only geographic locations on three continents, but also a

plethora of different ethnicities, all ethnicities and nations sarcastically unified by the ubiquity of the same consumer products logos across boundaries. Surprisingly for a writer pegged as the founder of the “cyberpunk” genre (Tayler 34), Gibson counteracts this levelling of differences that multinational marketing produces in the interest of economic globalization with the aesthetic category of individualizing art. The novel posits an eminently aesthetic space, imagined by an artist, also known as “the maker” (283, 288). This aesthetic space becomes, on the one hand, the object of Cayce’s quest and, on the other hand, the idealized alternative to the logo-infested real world. The alternative to the corporation-run globalized dystopia is Nora’s T-shaped utopian city of art.

Art becomes not only the alternative to the dystopian world of mass-produced commodities that forward themselves all over the world swiping all difference and authenticity in their wake, but also the only challenger to economic globalization. While globalization itself is not necessarily menacing in this novel, it is the work of economic standardizing that has to be counteracted with the help of genuine aestheticism. Gibson’s nostalgia for uncorrupted aesthetics becomes strongly apparent when Cayce visits Moscow. Moscow evokes the memory of a prelapsarian place of aestheticism, but the Russian capital itself stands under the pressure of global brands, which have penetrated it, and threaten to turn it from a haven of aestheticism into the marketing heaven that London, New York, and Tokyo represent.

Writing about *Pattern Recognition*, Frederic Jameson argues that the distinctiveness of this novel resides in the elevation of its style to “a kind of

classical perfection” (108), and he defines the style as “a kind of hyped-up name-dropping” (108), in which he includes the ubiquitous brand names used throughout the novel. Jameson argues that these brand-names appear as a wink to knowledgeable readers, a way of entering the contemporary Western collective unconscious, as a strategy to differentiate it from the “Russian episode,” which the well-known critic views as “less interesting,” because “[Gibson] brings a residual Cold War mentality” to it (109). I would argue that the Moscow episode is crucial to the novel, which actually suggests that Russia finds itself in danger of relinquishing its role as symbol of the last bastion of authentic aesthetics, and becoming as commodified a simulacrum as New York or London already are.

Gibson’s brand-name-dropping points at a larger scope than the proliferation of signifiers, which Jameson’s postmodern stands for. Brand names signal the anxiety of the levelling work of globalization that not only forward themselves, by virtue of a self-constructed image, as icons of desirable consumer items that are no more than simulacra, but also control and manipulate individuals by eliciting organic reactions. Cayce’s affliction, at once physically and mentally disabling, while professionally profitable, symbolically stands for the overwhelming power of the brand name. I will delay the analysis of Cayce’s emblematic role as corporate subject, because it is more stringent to see how the novel constructs the dystopian world of the West with the help of marketing signifiers that are actually part of what produces corporate subjectivity.

The ubiquity of brand names in *Pattern Recognition* is both striking and strategic. The novel abounds in images of logos and brand names, and, in spite of its insistence on Cayce's sensitivity, whenever possible, brand names replace the actual generic descriptor, e.g. for clothes (Cayce's Buzz Rickson overcoat, her Parco boots, other people's Prada garments etc.), for beer, coffee (mostly Starbucks), soft drinks (Fanta, Pepsi), for technology (iBook) etc. These brand names take on a life of their own, especially because of the reaction they generate in Cayce, and become crucial points on a virtual map on which she moves.

The beginning of the novel offers a key to reading the multiplicity of logos, which at times becomes tiresome and puzzling. Going into a department store (Harvey Nichols) to purchase a new jacket (Buzz Rickson's), Cayce experiences a bad case of logo-inflicted allergic reaction, caused by a "display of Tommy Hilfiger" (17). Although we never really find out what her reactions consist of, one of the few cryptic descriptions of Cayce's symptoms presents them as similar to an allergic response to peanuts, when "[people's] head swells like a basketball. When it happens to Cayce, it's her psyche" (17). The logic of a swollen psyche is probably not to be analyzed in too much detail, because the focus should be on the allergen, and not on the symptoms. We should find out and pay attention only to what triggers Cayce's reactions, and concentrate our analysis on the malignity of logos. Interestingly enough, some brands are more harmful than others.

The ranking of brands according to the severity of Cayce's respective reactions to them generates a subtle hierarchy of commodities in the novel. At the top of the list of logos that invariably cause Cayce's crises, alongside Bibendum, the Michelin man, Tommy Hilfiger "does it every time" (17). The explanation for Cayce's severe response to this brand appears immediately, although it is difficult to tell if whether the virulent analysis crops up in Cayce's mind, or if it is the narrator's own musing:

My God, don't they know? This stuff is the simulacra of simulacra of simulacra. A diluted tincture of Ralph Lauren, who had himself diluted the glory days of Brooks Brothers, who themselves had stepped on the product of Jermyn Street and Savile Row, flavoring their ready-to-wear with liberal lashings of polo kit and regimental stripes. But Tommy surely is the null point, the black hole. There must be some Tommy Hilfiger event horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul. (18)

Logos and brand names, it seems, do not provoke mere ignorant responses from an innocent or defenceless individual. Although the reaction appears to be uncontrollably physiological, there is a rationale and a history behind the hierarchy of reactions, and hence, of logos. The more a logo is considered a simulacrum, the worse the uncontrollable physiological reaction Cayce experiences. Tommy Hilfiger is the thrice-removed simulacrum, *ergo* it generates the worst symptoms. The fissure in the logic of the novel that allows the above-quoted rationalization of hatred toward Tommy Hilfiger, while

trumpeting the unmanageability of Cayce's allergic reactions, affirms the epistemological richness of these marketing signs for *Pattern Recognition*. The rationale is surprisingly built on the criterion of style, as in fashion, in an attempt to discover remnants of authentic aestheticism underneath the self-valuing brand. Within the logic of the text, the more a fashion product is removed from the uniqueness of the primal aestheticism, the more severe Cayce's reaction to it.

The human litmus test for the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, Cayce capitalizes on her affliction by 'hunting cool' for advertising companies. Jameson suggests that her "talent" lies "halfway between telepathy and old-fashioned aesthetic sensibility" ("Fear" 112). This neat explication, tempting as it is for my argument, does not cover Cayce's allergic reactions to simulacra. There is a feedback factor built in Cayce's affliction that seems to beg further questioning: Why the severe physiological reactions<sup>3</sup>, instead of the good old trained *expertise*? The answer probably appears when we read the original simulacra theory<sup>4</sup> as it applies to the relationship between advertising, aesthetics, and simulacra:

the form of advertising is one in which all particular contents are annulled at the very moment when they can be transcribed into each other, whereas what is inherent to "weighty" enunciations, to articulated

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<sup>3</sup> Physiology – suggestive of the need for fundamental changes in the daily lives of people – seems a productive collusion point for all three novels featured in this chapter. Atwood dwells on Snowman's physiological failures, especially when juxtaposed with the Crakers' perfection, emphatically; Thomas suggests alternatives for better care of the body through a vegan diet and alternative treatments such as homeopathy and Bach flower remedies.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994.

forms of meaning (or of style) is that they cannot be translated into each other. (Baudrillard 87)

In other words, advertising transforms every formerly meaningful text into a simulacrum, an imitation without original that voids it of any significance. Cayce's allergic reactions seem to increase in direct proportionality to the level of simulation, and therefore, to the diminishment of significance. Baudrillard juxtaposes the nullifying work of advertising with the meaning-creation that art entails. Baudrillard's "'weighty' enunciations," or meaningful texts present untranslatability as their definitive trait. In terms of representation, then, following Baudrillard, the novel describes logos, such as Tommy Hilfiger, in detail because they are simulacra anyway, so reproducing their image perpetuates their role, albeit ironically. Equally, this logic applies to the reason why the description of Nora's footage in the novel does not aim at exhausting its image; snippets from the footage appear only sporadically, because the footage is not supposed to become a simulacrum, quite the opposite.

On the level of plot, the footage carries the entire weight of aesthetics: its elusiveness protects it from being explicated and translated, for the moment. However, the menace posed by marketers, such as Hubertus Bigend, targeting if not the commodification of the footage, then at least the acquisition of its techniques with the purpose of replication, should not be underestimated. As Jameson points out in his analysis of the group that follows the footage,

the deeper anxiety of the practitioners of the footage website and chatroom is, in other words, simply that it will go public... that the

footage, or the completed film, the identified and reconstructed work of art, will become... just another commodity” (111).

Jameson reads this protectionism as an attempt of the footageheads to remain the elitist keepers of the ‘secret’, thus excluding, or at least being able to control access to the footage. Their anxiety, however, seems better aligned with Cayce’s own allergic reactions to logos, which appears as a condensed prototype, a representative of the generalized fear that surrounds the dichotomy art/advertising as figured symbolically in the relationship between the footage and logos.

The literal panic attacks that Cayce experiences as a result of visualizing marketing signs corresponds metaphorically to the fear of aesthetics being overtaken, and finally completely eliminated, by corporation-generated commodities and brand names. The footage that Cayce ends up chasing all over the world stands as a symbol of untainted aestheticism. Its lack of traceable clues evokes the impossibility of duplication, of translatability in time and space:

They are dressed as they have always been dressed, in clothing Cayce has posted on extensively, fascinated by its timelessness, something she knows and understands. The difficulty of that. Hairstyles, too.

He might be a sailor, stepping onto a submarine in 1914, or a jazz musician entering a club in 1957. There is a lack of evidence, an absence of stylistic cues, that Cayce understands to be utterly masterful. His black



coat is usually read as leather, though it might be dull vinyl, or rubber.  
He has a way of wearing its collar up....

The one hundred and thirty-four previously discovered fragments having been endlessly collated, broken down, reassembled, by whole armies of the most fanatical investigators, have yielded no period and no particular narrative direction. (24)

Examining the footage seems to be surprisingly similar to reading literature: an indefinite number of readings can be supported by the footage. Moreover, this passage models the very process of interpretation, and a post-deconstruction one at that. The text tells us that ‘readers’ have tried to get at the meaning by literally breaking down the fragments, and then re-arranging them, and yet no consensus can be reached on its meaning. Cayce appears as one of the most fervent ‘readers’ of the footage. Quite predictably, due to her obsessive attention to clothing throughout the novel, her focus in examining the footage is on style. She aims at deconstructing it using fashion, but the footage resists, and it is this resistance that confers it its mastery for Cayce.

What further problematizes Cayce’s position as the representative of footageheads reading and interpreting the images is the ambivalence that she experiences between her crusade-like adventure in search of the ‘maker’ of the footage, and the provenance of the material resources that finance her search. The real impulse that sets Cayce off on her investigation of the footage comes from Hubertus Bigend, owner of Blue Ant. A post-multinational corporation, but all the more flexible for it, Blue Ant is an advertising agency, “relatively tiny in

terms of permanent staff, globally distributed, more post-geographic than multinational” (Gibson 7). Cayce’s ethical dilemma disappears when she refuses to use the Blue Ant credit card (why doesn’t she have an allergy to the Blue Ant logo on the card, which she had been using up to this point?) to pay for her trip to Russia, where her detective-like quest leads her with reasonable promise of identifying the maker of the footage.

Cayce’s newly ethical attitude inscribes itself along the lines of a series of dichotomies between the Moscow episode and the rest of the novel, which, in turn, stands for the binary aesthetics/simulacra, or art/advertising. In terms of imagery, for example, when Cayce is in London or Tokyo, the narrative looks like she moves through the virtual space of a video game. The entire quest seems predicated on the video game plot line: Cayce inadvertently meets several people, such as Voytek, or Ngemi, that soon become crucial to advancing the plot, because each furnishes a new piece of the puzzle. Ngemi, for example, leads Cayce to Baranov, a retired secret agent who, through his obscure connections to the netherworld of decrepit Cold War espionage, is able to furnish our heroine with the crucial email of the maker. Another episodic character, a bartender, can actually be figured as an “emoticon” (19).

Videogame imagery, as that of the ‘emoticon’ brings up the idea of different artistic genres, in which logos may take on different meanings: a Sony executive manager considers that “if a kid bouncing a basketball in a video game, to us it makes sense that it should be a Spalding basketball” (*qtd.* in Solomon 1). In video games, it seems, product placement is vital. London and

Tokyo, just like the absent New York, are also all about product placement in the novel. Cayce navigates these cities without difficulty, using her uncanny powers of pattern recognition (88), aware of the fact that the differences between these cities become fewer and fewer. As one design critic noticed, at first sight,

London seems to represent a substrata of authenticity in a profoundly simulated world. However, the text ultimately reveals London to be yet another environment that has been infected... succumbing to the logic of a hyper-reality in which the most authentic-looking buildings are the ones that are most to be suspected of being simulacra. (Skeates 136)

Under these conditions, Moscow emerges as the alternative: the city with fewer logos and more colours, old unrecognizable architecture, museum-like subway stations, and streets that Cayce cannot navigate using her pattern recognition prowess.

It is not accidental, then, that the maker of the footage comes from Moscow. When Jameson dismisses the Moscow episode as “less interesting” (109), he extrapolates the image of Cayce’s hotel room, described in the novel as a simulacrum of Western hotel, to represent Gibson’s attitude toward Russian art. This example of Moscow simulacrum, however, stands for the menace of Westernization, for the imminent transformation of even this last stronghold of aesthetics into a blank space for logos and brand names:

As they cross the eight lanes of the traffic-packed Garden Ring, the high-urban factor goes up several notches, and the advertising thickens. Off to the right, she sees an enormous Art Nouveau train station, a survivor

from an earlier era still, but on a scale to dwarf London's grandest. Then a McDonald's, seemingly as large. (280)

There is art to be discovered on the streets of Moscow, in a way that London does not offer any more. Aesthetics still forms an indissoluble part of the Russian capital, and the city manages to integrate it in a way that in London only appears as simulacrum. However, the shadow of the menacing logo looms large, and a McDonalds juxtaposed to an Art Nouveau building serves to emphasize the seriousness of the all-powerful marketing contender. Moscow thus mirrors the novel's struggle between art and advertising, but it also stands as the only city that still displays aesthetics, untainted with marketing signs.

Moscow is so entrenched in aesthetics that one can actually envisage campaigns for art. Out of her hotel room window, Cayce notices "a statue of quite unthinkable awfulness. Her Lonely Planet tells her it's Peter the Great, and must be guarded, else local aesthetes blow it up" (282). In the way that the West ranks logos, according to their degree of simulation, Moscow evidences artistic hierarchies. According to a tourist guide, financial resources and human effort go into guarding an aesthetically unsatisfactory object, or something like the art police will destroy it. The irony is implicit here; the information comes from a Western tourist guide that presents the concept of aesthetic hierarchy as an urban myth blown out of proportions, and offers it as a bit of funny trivia for Western tourists.

Even places of conspicuous consumption, such as an upscale coffee place, make an effort to display art that happily but ironically marries

aestheticism and functionality: “the fish: a large, freestanding sculpture, its scales cut from one-pound Medaglia d’Oro coffee cans like the ones Wassily Kandinsky used, but assembled in a way that owes more to Frank Gehry” (294). The fish, at once artwork and advertisement for the commodity on sale there, signals the conflation of aesthetics with marketing that Moscow can hardly resist any longer. The coffee shop thus serves multiple symbolic purposes, in an East-meets-West stereotypical manner. Even if the coffee shop is not part of a global franchise itself, such as Starbucks, garment brand names become ubiquitous again: “lots of Prada, Gucci, but in a Moneyed Bohemian modality too off-the-shelf for London or New York” (294). Interestingly, even brand-name clothes look different in Moscow than they do in the cities that used to form Cayce’s mirror-worlds. Finally, the coffee shop, the place where all boundaries seem to be brought down, is also the place where Cayce finally learns the secret of the footage, which thus opens itself to potential replication.

The coffee shop represents the terminus point of Cayce’s quest for the artist. From the point of view of the narrative, the scene in the coffee shop constitutes the climax, which means, in spite of any writer’s best efforts, that one can only go downhill from there. Jameson expresses his dissatisfaction with the ending of *Pattern Recognition* by asserting “unlike the footage [which is an escape from the noisy commodities themselves], however, Gibson’s novel gives us homeopathy rather than the antidote” (114). Homeopathy, as a healing practice, is predicated on the belief that fire should be fought with fire: one should administer substances that, in a healthy organism, would generate the

same symptoms that the afflicted organism to be treated experiences. This way, Jameson's concluding remark comes very close to describing Gibson's metafictional practice of enacting pattern recognition.

Jameson does not, in his evaluation of the conclusion of the novel, stray from the truth: the ending of *Pattern Recognition* is disappointing, because all the loose ends are tied all too neatly, thus causing a complete disconnect with the dystopian image of the world that the rest of the novel paints until the last twenty pages or so. The problem consists in the fact that the ending proclaims the novel as a rather stereotypically traditional mystery novel. Firstly, Cayce's problems are solved instantly by a *deus ex machina* appearance of Parkaboy at the Moscow hotel, just as Dorotea Benedetti, a former corporate spy ostensibly employed by Bigend, but actually working for the Russian magnate Volkov, was drugging her in the attempt to get Cayce to spill out all her secrets. Secondly, in the end, all of Cayce's friends or helpers get some kind of reward, e.g. Voytek gets his show, Judy gets a job with Blue Ant Tokyo, while all her enemies are mysteriously defeated by unknown forces, e.g. Dorotea disappears, Boone goes away. Finally, not only does she find her love in Parkaboy, but her allergy conveniently evaporates once she finds her 'love.' Not only does this represent a conventional happy ending, it also stands rather misaligned with all the ideas and gestures toward proclaiming aesthetics as alternative to the corporatization of the world.

*Pattern Recognition* thus seems to gesture towards the complexities of corporatism, but settles, in the end, for a facile oppositional stance. The message

that we receive is that the alternative to the commodification of the world and the proliferation of simulacra resides in a return to an ‘uncorrupted’ pure aesthetics. Although rather reactionary due to this conclusion, the novel does display the menace of the global expansion of corporatism’s plane of immanence.

**“Extinctathon”: dystopia and hope in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake***

*Extinctathon, Monitored by MaddAddam. Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones. Do you want to play?* That was what came up when you logged on. You then had to click Yes, enter your codename, and pick one of the two chatrooms – Kingdom Animal, Kingdom Vegetable. Then some challenger would come online using his own codename – Komodo, Rhino, Manatee, Hippocampus Ramulosus – and propose a contest. *Begins with, number of legs, what is it?* The *it* would be some bioform that had kakked out within the past fifty years – no T-Rex, no roc, no dodo, and points off for getting the time frame wrong. Then you’d narrow it down, Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species, then the habitat and when last seen, and what had snuffed it (Pollution, habitat destruction, credulous morons who thought that eating it would give them a boner.) The longer the challenger held out, the more points he got, but you could win big bonuses for speed. It helped to have the MaddAddam printout of every extinct species, but that gave you only the Latin names, and anyway it was a couple of hundred pages of fine print and filled with obscure bugs, weeds, and frogs nobody had ever heard of. Nobody except, it seemed, the Extinctathon Grandmasters, who had brains like search engines. (97-98)

In a novel that has been hailed as a possible sequel to her most famous *The Handmaid’s Tale*<sup>5</sup>, Atwood brings forth a critique of corporatism in the

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<sup>5</sup> See Coral Ann Howells, “Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, p. 161, and Helen E. Mundler, ‘Heritage, pseudo-heritage and survival in a spurious wor(l)d: *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood,’ in *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* 27.1 (2004): (89-98).

form of a dystopia<sup>6</sup>. *Oryx and Crake*, I argue, delivers a critique of the contemporary episteme, more specifically, a denunciation of the forced distinctions and separation of knowledge into two broad categories: science and humanities. The neat, if artificial, division between these two epistemological classes leads, as we shall see, to the disastrous situation presented in the novel.

Whether named *Zeitgeist*, structure of feeling<sup>7</sup>, or episteme, the characteristics of a certain period of time have been theorized as significant factors that shape societal norms, preoccupations, and customs. These concepts, although not interchangeable, indicate the need to pinpoint and analyze the plethora of interconnected elements that characterize the spirit of an age. *Oryx and Crake* puts late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Western social life under the microscope in order to critique its episteme.

The concept of “episteme” appears in Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, where he details its characteristics as a set of rules that unconsciously govern human thought and unwittingly order human sciences at a certain point in history. Foucault describes changes in the Western episteme at two different points in history: mid-seventeenth century (“the Classical Age”) and the beginning of the nineteenth century (the beginning of the Modern Age), and thus his interest veers more

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<sup>6</sup> Atwood herself notes that *Oryx and Crake*? “is not a classic dystopia. Though it has obvious dystopian elements, we don’t really get an overview of the structure of the society in it” (“*The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context” 517).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Raymond Williams, “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period” (131).



toward the practical aspects than to a theoretical definition of the episteme itself.

He briefly theorizes the episteme thus:

between the already ‘encoded’ eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself: it is here that it appears, according to the culture and age in question, continuous and graduated, or discontinuous and piecemeal, linked to space or constituted anew at each instant by the driving force of time, related by a series of variables or defined by separate systems of coherences, composed of resemblances which are either successive or corresponding, organized around increasing differences, etc. This middle region, then, insofar as it makes manifest the modes of being of order, can be posited as *the most fundamental of all*: anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures, which are then taken to be more or less exact, more or less happy expressions of it (which is why this experience of order in its pure primary state always plays a critical role); more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more ‘true’ than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation. Thus, in every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and of its modes of being. (xxii-xxiii, my emphasis)

According to Foucault, there always exists a set of rules – known, perceptible, even if unspoken – that have the task of ordering human life and culture. These norms are so subtle as to make them difficult to characterize theoretically, as

Foucault's lengthy definition shows. They are, luckily, more readily available when exemplified, as Atwood's novel amply shows.

If we return to the epigraph of this section, we are bluntly confronted by some of the main characteristics of our contemporary episteme. This paragraph brings to the fore some of the most important questions that the novel asks us to ponder. There are a number of immediate connections that this excerpt facilitates. Firstly, "Extinctathon" clearly suggests a race towards extinction, implying perpetual competition, an idea that is also emphasized by its internet game format, and reinforced by Crake's desire to become "Grandmaster." The competition that the game makes us think of resonates with capitalist conditions, which tout competition as the only type of regulation that a free market needs. The novel presents the unregulated corporations as one of the causes leading to its contemporaneous situation.

Interestingly, the way one can win the game is through naming. Taxonomy figures ironically here, in the line that calls for the organization according to "Class Order Family Genus Species," calling our attention to one of the many tensions in the novel. Here the tension is between the scientific character of the method of producing taxonomies versus the mythical dimensions invoked through Adam and his original attempt to name creatures. The irony comes out of a complete disavowal of the contemporary episteme - one that privileges a reductionist *Weltanschauung* under the pretence of science; a disavowal which goes beyond distrust, and foreshadows Crake's ultimate demise. The critique of the contemporary episteme, present in a larval state in

this excerpt, perpetuates itself throughout the novel as one of the main themes, and it appears, on the surface, as a tension between science and humanities. After all, the very relationship between Crake and Jimmy/Snowman can be easily read as an embodiment of this science vs. humanities tension.

The juxtaposition of these two epistemologies that Atwood uses to explain the problematic situation that leads to the destruction of humanity in the novel seems to go beyond a mere conceptual dichotomy. However, rather than privileging humanities over science, the novel subtly shows how the problem lies in the clear separation and establishment of a hierarchy between the two modes of knowledge<sup>8</sup>. It is the separation and hierarchy that the novel critiques, highlighting the need for an integrated epistemology in an immanent system<sup>9</sup>.

Atwood comes close to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have described in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*: the tree-root-book system versus the rhizome. At stake here are not only two different systems of organizing knowledge, but two different logics, one of which – the positivist, dichotomous, structural, chronological, and hierarchical – has risen to dominate humanity and, in Atwood's imagination, also to condemn it to death. While the novel strongly critiques the contemporary episteme, it only offers subtle

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<sup>8</sup> See also Coral Ann Howells, who discounts the opposition between arts and sciences: "But is there really an opposition between science and art? Is it not the case that the creative imagination is a distinctively human quality shared by both scientists and artists? Snowman is the artist figure, wordsmith and storyteller, and Crake is the scientist, a Mephistophelean figure perhaps, but also a failed idealist like Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau" ("Bad News" 93).

<sup>9</sup> *Year of the Flood* (September 2009), Atwood's second novel in the trilogy started with *Oryx and Crake*, features "the God's Gardeners – a religion devoted to the melding of science, religion, and nature" (yearoftheflood.com/ca/, n.pag.), a clear sign of the need for epistemological interconnectedness that relates to the immanence of the contemporary socius.

suggestions towards an alternative. The critique and the glimpses of available options are reminiscent Deleuze and Guattari's description of the two competing epistemological systems, i.e., the tree-root-book system and the rhizomatic method.

Deleuze and Guattari aim to expose the problematic of this former logic, dominant in the history of humanity, and to offer as alternative a different methodology, which they call schizoanalysis:

We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection to what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own convergence. (*Plateaus 4*)

Different modes of connection characterize the rhizome and schizoanalysis, as opposed to the traditional book system that seeks to assign a definitive value to any object, so that it can be fixated into a system, a genealogy, and a hierarchy. The idea of asking what a book means is not intended to deter critique; rather, it points to the problem of what D&G have called "interpretosis," or "humankind's fundamental neurosis" (114). Interpretosis leads to the need for specialized interpreters, who would define and assign immutable value to a certain signifier, which goes against the flexibility the fluidity that D&G argue for.

The rhizome offers an alternative to the tree, which corresponds to the traditional system of domination: "Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems

with centres of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories” (16). The arborescent system is thus based on transcendence: one is above others in a clear hierarchy. The rhizomatic, on the other hand, stays within its field of immanence. The rhizome emerges as an alternative: “To be rhizomorphic is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses” (15).

Deleuze and Guattari insist that the two methodologies are not necessarily opposed, but they do point toward two very different systems:

The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel. (20)

The main distinction between the two has deeper implications: the tree/book system is based on transcendence, i.e. on the existence of one above others, while the rhizomatic stays within a plane of immanence, i.e. a network of interconnected elements, in which none is the utmost dominant or determining in relation to the others.

Thinking back to the epigraph which opens this section, the need to categorize and hierarchize that Extinctathon foregrounds places the dominant epistemology squarely in the root-tree system. The game itself is a reward for the tree-root kind of thinking. It’s the epitome of this sort of epistemology. The

same Weltanschauung that destroyed these species because of its need for dominance and hierarchy finds its reward here through the adherence to this conceptual apparatus. Atwood's sarcasm pervading the explanation of this game serves to emphasize the novel's disdain for this type of knowledge: after all, these animals are all extinct. What purpose does it serve, but an ironic one, to put them all neatly in boxes and categories? Moreover, the derision of the hierarchical logic goes, if humanity still cannot learn anything from all this destruction, than the only possible outcome rests with complete extinction of the dominant species, which is itself implied in the suffix "–athon," pointing to the perpetuity of the race.

The parallels go even further in this paragraph: Kingdom Animal and Kingdom Vegetable appear as reminders of our unquestioned anthropocentrism: why would we name the totality of animals and/or plants with a designation of human social organization? By reversing the usual phrase Animal Kingdom to read Kingdom Animal, Atwood is creating a cognitive dissonance that leads us to question anthropocentrism, to keep in check our own smug complacency, to wake us up from day-dreaming and to push us to realize the immediacy of the problem of extinction<sup>10</sup>.

The problem of extinction is not only for science to grapple with: the problem resides as much in representation, as it does in people playing God, by

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<sup>10</sup> As Atwood notes "I'd been clipping small items from the back pages of newspapers for years, and noting with alarm that trends derided ten years ago as paranoid fantasies had become possibilities, then actualities. The rules of biology are as inexorable as those of physics: run out of food and water and you die. No animal can exhaust its resource base and hope to survive. Human civilizations are subject to the same law." ("Writing *Oryx and Crake*," n. pag.)

naming or rearranging genetic information and coming up with new species while others go extinct. Ascribing a human mode of social organization (e.g., kingdom) onto the other animals on this earth constitutes a manner of representation, which falls within the purview of the humanities. Toying with DNA, on the other hand, is usually the domain of the sciences. Thus, there is no innocent mode of knowledge for Atwood: both sciences and humanities are bent on organizing, stabilizing, and systematizing. If there should be an escape from this dystopia, it resides in an epistemological overhaul, one that can provide quick connections between the actions of humans and the repercussions on other inhabitants of their environment, e.g. animals.

Standing in for the humanities in the epigraph, history ushers in almost imperceptibly. The need to historicize and construct genealogies appears in the blunt “points off for getting the time frame wrong.” We’re dealing with an instrumentalized kind of history<sup>11</sup> that can only serve to piece together the ecosystem of old, before extinction. History as the need to tell stories about humans has no place in Crake’s little world, as we shall see a bit later on. On the whole, no stories whatsoever, according to Crake, must survive humanity into the post-human Crakers. But for now, narrative still appears almost unassumingly at the end of the scientific enumeration of extinction causes: “credulous morons that thought that eating its horn would give them a boner.” Bitter cynicism aside, humanities re-assert their explanatory value and potential for rhizomatic connections when it comes to phenomena that science cannot

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of history vs. genealogy according to Foucault, please see the following section on *PopCo*.

completely account for. When scientific explanations about the extinction of a species due to evolutionary or ‘natural’ causes do not suffice, humanities research can sometimes provide the missing links between cultural practices and ecological outcomes<sup>12</sup>.

My final point here has to do with language and style. Atwood’s painting of the future would be chilling and crippling if it weren’t so brilliantly satiric and sarcastic. The style brings out the tensions between humans and their environment; between different types of human endeavours: scholarly, e.g., sciences and humanities, or leisurely, e.g., playing computer games. These tensions are described in a language that casually mixes academic jargon with slang. All of these interconnected aspects pinpoint the utter imbrication of all these aspects of human activity as cause for the present situation: if only people acknowledged that making money off of selling animal parts for health benefits with the excuse that science has proven the inferiority of animal life, maybe humanity would not be doomed. Ultimately, Atwood’s wordsmith qualities enact her argument: there is more to humans than their DNA, no matter how convenient and easy to categorize it were, so that human organs could be harvested from genetically modified pigs. Like it or not, both humans and animals are more than the sum of their parts, as the complexity of their cultural

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<sup>12</sup> A similar epistemological problem is arguably at stake in the contemporary debates about climate change. Its detractors, claiming there is no ‘hard’ scientific proof for the phenomenon refuse to accept the connections that an integrated/immanent type of knowledge makes clear: the Western lifestyle (arguably more the purview of humanities and social sciences) causes climate change.



artefacts prove, be it the Crakers' quickly developed mythology<sup>13</sup> or this very novel.

There is no single cause to be blamed for the urgent situation that the dystopian world of the novel embodies. Dystopia, as the genre opposite to utopia, imagines a world that uninhabitable, or barely tolerable. Dystopia usually suggests the condition whose fulfilment can avert or avoid the situation described. So, dystopia posits that unless we change something in our current world, we won't be able to live within it. Of course, the role of dystopia resides in depicting a world so thoroughly uninhabitable or undesirable that humans will change their ways, and rectify especially the conditions that, within the world of the dystopia, have led to the emergence of that disastrous situation.

So what are these conditions that we're supposed to change before they lead us to the post-human world in *Oryx and Crake*? Stephen Dunning, in an article titled "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic" opines that "our current vulnerability to unprecedented disaster arises... within the qualitative vacuum of a culture that has lost its 'great' narratives" (86). Dunning thus turns Atwood into a skeptic of postmodernism as defined by Lyotard, who diagnoses the postmodern condition as "the distrust towards metanarratives"<sup>14</sup> used to legitimate economic, political, and social structures. The vacuum brought about by the loss of great narratives that

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of mythology in this novel, see Carol Osborne, "Mythmaking in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*," in *Once upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings*. 25-46. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars.

<sup>14</sup> Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

Dunning sees Atwood deploring seems to imply nostalgia for a prelapsarian moment when humans still had their great narratives to guide them.

In my opinion, Atwood points the causes for disaster in several directions, some of which are more concrete, but some of which have to do with a the contemporary hierarchical episteme, which tends to transform the humanities into an underdog, a situation that has been going on in the last decades of the twentieth century. However, the concrete causes that I mentioned before are not disjointed from the latter. More specifically, the novel blames the systematic and thoughtless exploitation of the environment with all its constituents (including humans, animals, plants, landscape) by an increasingly globalized capitalism that seeks nothing more than endless accumulation.

I want to examine the denigration of the humanities first, before analyzing what global capital has done to the environment. At one point in his quest for food in the ghost compounds, Snowman has an episode of remembering disparate words: “Rag ends of language are floating in his head: *mephitic, metronome, mastitis, metatarsal, maudlin.*’ ‘I used to be erudite,’ he says out loud. *Erudite*<sup>15</sup>. A hopeless word” (181). Snowman’s erudition was the result of his liberal arts education, one that is considered to be of a hopeless, second-class kind in the economy of *Oryx and Crake*. Very early on in the novel we find out that erudition does not equal intelligence, nor is it appreciated in any way. Ramona’s shower-gel babe talk elicits a defensive and educational response

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<sup>15</sup> As I discuss further down in the section on *PopCo*, Thomas presents erudition as an important tool when devising alternatives to corporatism. Just like Gibson and Atwood, Thomas shows by doing: she displays erudition and knowledge in action as traits of the

from Jimmy's dad: "She wasn't stupid, said Jimmy's dad, she just didn't want to put her neuron power into long sentences. There were a lot of people like that at OrganicInc, and not all of them were women. It was because they were numbers people, not word people, said Jimmy's father. Jimmy already knew that he himself was not a numbers person" (31). Jimmy's early realization of his own position on the hierarchy of values that his father embodies, and through him, the system of power in which they live, sets him apart as the outcast that he later becomes. He doesn't quite fit in his own family, realizing that "his parents knew nothing about him, what he liked, what he hated, what he longed for" (68), but this lack of integration into mainstream "numbers people" is anticipatory of his survivor status later in the novel.

Moreover, the enumeration of apparently disconnected words "*mephitic, metronome, mastitis, metatarsal, maudlin*" shows Snowman's thought as rhizomatic. His capacity for rhizomatic connections constitutes the very reason for his survival. He begins to think like the pigeons and the rats, and that is how he can outwit them<sup>16</sup>. The chains of words that flicker through his mind are examples of rhizomatic connections hijacked from a book structure – the dictionary. Snowman thus manages to integrate both types of knowledge – the book/tree and the rhizome – and make them work towards his survival. Ultimately, although precarious, his continued survival constitutes the moral of this dystopia. One critic writing on this novel, Cheng-Hao Ku, asks a rhetorical

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characters who turn to be on the side of NoCo, who use these tools to develop the alternatives.

question: “Furthermore, is it not truthful that the technocratic system’s privileging of “numbers people” like Crake render “word people” like Snowman human beings *manqué*?” (111). I would answer it with another question: what does it mean when, in the end, it is the *homme manqué* who survives? Maybe that the rest of humanity was even more flawed?

The word vs. numbers schism appears in full force when it comes time for Jimmy and Crake to attend college. While numbers people such as Crake are recruited by highly reputable institutions such as the Watson-Crick Institute, which “was like going to Harvard had been, back before it drowned” (200), words people such as Jimmy get “knocked down at last to the Martha Graham Academy” (218), “named after some gory old dance goddess of the twentieth century” (226), where he gets a “risible degree” in Problematics (229). Genius numbers people such as Crake with his hard-scientific thinking skills get the VIP education and treatment in their highly secured and lavish compound to prepare them for their future executive positions atop a corporation. Words people, like Jimmy, on the other hand would

have a choice between well-paid window dressing for a big Corp or flimsy cut-rate stuff for a borderline one. The prospect of his future stretched before him like a sentence; not a prison sentence, but a long-winded sentence, with a lot of unnecessary subordinate clauses, as he was soon in the habit of quipping during Happy Hour pickup time at the local campus bars and pubs. (229)

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<sup>16</sup> “If not people, there might be animals: wolvgos, pigoons, bobkittens. Watering holes attract carnivores. They lie in wait. They slaver. They pounce. Not very cozy” (*Oryx*

Alluding to the sciences vs. humanities rivalry that appears in the novel, J. Brooks Bouson maintains that “unlike those who insist that science is nothing more than a social construction, Atwood emphasizes the growing, and potentially lethal, power of sciences to manipulate and alter human biology – and reality” (151). At the same time, I would add, she offers the panacea by suggesting that it is the systematic denigration of the humanities in a hierarchical knowledge system that has led us to a situation in which scientific speculation goes unchecked, and can be easily taken to extremes, such as we see in the novel. Rather, she advocates for a different mode of knowledge, an inclusive, interconnected, more rhizomatic one, in which people who hold any type of knowledge communicate and work together, instead of passively consuming marketing promises.

The plague that apparently kills all of humanity save for Snowman, after all, represents the result of a very successful marketing campaign for “BlyssPluss” Pill:

a single pill, that, at one and the same time:

- a) would protect the user against all known sexually transmitted diseases, fatal, inconvenient, or merely unsightly;
- b) would provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth;

c) would prolong youth.

These three capabilities would be the selling points, said Crake; but there would be a fourth, which would not be advertised. (355)

This fourth, unadvertised point, proves itself the most significant, the virus named JUVE “Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary” (406), which was to obliterate humanity, and replace it with the much improved Crakers.

The critique of capitalism appears throughout the novel, embodied in the satirical descriptions of the compounds in which Jimmy’s family lives, in which his father works, and in which later on Crake and Jimmy work as well. The OrganInc Farms, Jimmy’s family’s first location in the novel, produces pigoons, officially named *sus multiorganifer*, whose role it is “to grow an assortment of fool-proof human tissue organs in a transgenic knock-out pig host” (27). The pigoons are a good example for how scientific taxonomy can be used to obliterate moral objections to the problematic treatment of animals. The Latin denomination, part of a hierarchy of similarly named genuses, species, etc, masks the fact that these modified pigs are genetically closer to humans than anyone would like to believe. Their consumption, both in terms of harvesting organs and as food, suggests a cannibalism that can be aligned with the general trend of consumerism. This corporate-encouraged overconsumption – of which the BlyssPluss Pill is only one example – ultimately leads to humanity’s demise, arguably another form of cannibalism.

Genetic engineering, the pinnacle of science, produces human spare parts in pigs that later on, as meat becomes more and more scarce due to the extreme

and systematic exploitation of the environment, are also served as lunch on the corporate compounds:

as time went on and the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes, and meat became harder to come by, some people had their doubts. (29)

In spite of the assurances laid out in their glossy brochures claiming that “none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages” (29), OrganInc employees knew better, but also did not seem to care enough to react. Atwood thus enacts a warning that veganism made explicit: humans who are willing to treat animals in such torturous and degrading ways will most likely enact the same treatment on other humans as well. The seemingly laid-back description of these high-tech pig farms also resonates with the increasing critique of industrial pig farming that wreaks environmental havoc around the world, and especially in North America. In an ironic inversion to the highly guarded elite group living around the pigoon farms in the novel, in our reality, “intensive hog operations” as they are called tend to be “located disproportionately in areas that are poor and nonwhite”<sup>17</sup>. As Frank Davey remarks, Atwood reconfigures the habitual associations between class, power, and urban locality in *Oryx and Crake*, with formerly “favoured middle and upper-classes” relegated to a mostly “neglected

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<sup>17</sup> According to research by Dr. Stephen Wing, an epidemiologist at UNorth Carolina Chapel Hill.

and civically unprotected” inner city (104), while the premium real estate resides in the gated corporate compounds.

So far, I have brought up many of factors that need to find mitigation in the hope side of the argument that I start outlining here, but the important thing is that Atwood gestures towards the possibility of changing our course of action to avoid Snowman’s present in the novel<sup>18</sup>. In her usual subtle way, the author intersperses the otherwise pessimistic story with glimpses of possibilities of alternatives. Jimmy’s Mom, Sharon, is one of the most important of them. We observe scattered images of her, through Snowman’s memories, and the picture that he paints of her is not a very positive one. Nor is it completely negative, though. Snowman remembers trying desperately to make his mother react to him in any way; he remembers wanting to antagonize her and then wishing that she had persisted in catering to him:

He resisted her, he pretended he didn’t understand even when he did, he acted stupid, but he didn’t want her to give up on him. He wanted her to be brave, to try her best with him, to hammer away at the wall he’d put up against her, to keep on going. (26)

Jimmy wants to be spoiled brat, in other words, and he wishes his Mom were a traditional mom, a self-denying woman that effaces her personality for the sake of taking care of her children. Sharon is different, though, almost the opposite. She quits her job, ostensibly to take care of Jimmy, but she does it when Jimmy starts going to school. From her endless fights with Jimmy’s father, we



understand that her resignation had more to do with ethical reasons concerning her employer, rather than a need to be with her child. Jimmy's mom thus uses the very patriarchal ideology that places her ideally in the home to care for the family to ultimately try to subvert a system that is based upon the same structure. It is through her voice, in her arguments with her husband, that we first hear of the environmental problems<sup>19</sup> that led to Snowman's situation, and also of the ethical questions involved in the activity that takes place at the compound. Sharon is also the one who embodies Atwood's deep-seated feminist convictions, when, for example, she complains of the guards at HelthWyzer, who "liked to strip search people, women especially" (62).

It is little wonder then, that, after she breaks away from the HelthWyzer compound, leaving her family behind, she joins a resistance group that protests corporate exploitation of people and the environment. Atwood weighs in again on a hot topic: the trope of coffee figures more and more in social studies of the oppression generated by indiscriminate economic globalization<sup>20</sup>. Resistance to the patriarchal systems that breed global capitalism and reproduce the structures of oppression can be thus enacted, as the novel urges us.

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<sup>18</sup> As Tom Moylan notes: "Many dystopias are self-consciously warnings. A warning implies that choice, and therefore hope, are still possible" (qtd. in Howells, "Dystopian visions" 161).

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion of environmentalism throughout Atwood's oeuvre, as well as her influences and scientific sources of information, see Shannon Hengen's "Margaret Atwood and environmentalism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, 72-85. Her discussion of *Oryx and Crake* (82-83) centres around her argument that "the humans in this novel are driven by greed" (82).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Gavin Fridell's *Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market-driven Social Justice* (2007), U of T Press, for a brief history of coffee trade and its neat parallelism to the development of neoliberalism, as well as the cooptation of the free-trade movement by the latter, in, I would add, typical corporatist fashion.

The Crakers represent main warning of this novel. Bouson asserts that *Oryx and Crake* is “a cautionary tale written to inform and warn readers about the potentially dire consequences of genetic engineering” (140-41). While I think this warning constitutes only one of the multiple facets of the novel, the figure of the Crakers as the culmination of the genetic games in the novel is worth investigating, but less from the cautionary point of view than from potential for hope that they suggest in the embrace of art and symbolic thinking in spite of their genetic designer’s best efforts to edit those impulses out.

In spite of Crake’s precautions, the Crakers still display what he views as the obsolete human need to produce narratives in order to make sense of their world. Atwood suggests this needs indirectly; when Snowman leads them out of the Paradise compound where they had been created into the outside world, the Crakers start asking questions about their environment. The answers, provided by Snowman, inevitably lead to stories, to narratives: “There were many questions, and much explaining to do. *What is that smoke? It is a thing of Crake’s. Why is that child lying down, with no eyes? It was the will of Crake.* And so forth” (420).

Thus the Crakers ironically epitomize the resolution of the epistemological tensions suggested by the neat division between “numbers people” and “word people.” They seek explanations, and firstly their quest opens up a mythology, a narrative, where Crake becomes the creator – not untrue – and Oryx the keeper of nature. The parallels to Judeo-Christianity appear very strongly: Snowman “led the Crakers out of Paradise” (418), the corporate

compound where the Crakers were created. Snowman becomes the new humans' narrator; he leads them to a shore and teaches them "It is called *home*" (421). Afterwards, Snowman goes back to the compound, and upon his return is surprised to find the Crakers have ballooned his bits and pieces of answers into a complicated incipient mythology, where Crake is a sky-dwelling superpower and Snowman his emissary. Ironically, Crake had been adamant against any kind of artistic thought: "*Watch out for art*, Crake used to say. *As soon as they start doing art, we're in trouble*. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake's view" (430). Apparently, if I may paraphrase a popular saying, one can take the genes out of the humans, but not the other way around.

In spite of the impression that humanity had perished, the novel concludes with Snowman stumbling upon three other humans of the *Homo Sapiens* kind, and muses on the possible interactions with them: "Or, *I can show you much treasure*. But no, he has nothing to trade with them, nor they with him. Nothing except themselves. They could listen to him, they could" (442). The time for trading is done – capitalism is over with all its destructive history. The novel comes full circle from the beginning, when it localized the origin of the present situation in imperialism and colonialism: "He has the feeling he's quoting from a book, some obsolete ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another" (7). Ultimately, Snowman dismisses the narrative that inscribed patriarchal domination through imperialism in the role of the doctrine of free trade with this closing statement. There will be no more trading, and as an implication, no more narratives that

justify it. Instead, the stories will be about people – a complete return to interconnected humanity, hopefully a better one.

**“Don’t eat anything that can play videogames”: Scarlett Thomas’ *PopCo* and a way out of the corporatist present<sup>21</sup>**

*How anyone thinks they can splice genes in and out of different species and actually improve on nature is just absurd, you know? It’s like breaking something you can’t fix. It’s a one-way function... With GM technology, you could mess around mixing up genetic equivalents of the blue paint and yellow paint not even realising that you’d never be able to get those paints back again. We already see super weeds, resistant to any kind of herbicide or predator – they already exist. You can’t undo the spread of mutation once it’s there.*

(Scarlett Thomas, *PopCo*, 145)

If Margaret Atwood points to the problems of the early twenty-first century episteme as the possible cause of humanity’s demise, Scarlett Thomas provides the examples to substantiate this claim. It seems that *PopCo* takes Atwood’s argument deeper and further, showcasing not only the genealogy of the contemporary episteme and its complex present, but also an uncomplicated alternative, based on personal runoffs from the immanent plane of corporatism. Thomas mirrors the immanence of corporatism by displaying the interconnectedness of our contemporary world. Conceptually, she guides her readers through a rhizome with seemingly disparate points: homeopathy, erudition (*pace* Atwood), genealogy, and personal responsibility. Thomas not

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<sup>21</sup> A version of this section has been accepted for publication in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, under the title “‘Don’t eat anything that can play videogames’: Scarlett Thomas’ *PopCo* and its Deleuze-Guattarian Alternative to Corporate Capitalism.”

only tells the story, she displays it in two ways: first, through the events that her protagonist/narrator goes through, and secondly, through the very construction of the novel, which is rhizomatic in itself, connecting three different strands.

Thomas mobilizes an impressive array of knowledgeable facts in her novel *PopCo* to illustrate, characterize, and offer alternatives to contemporary corporate capitalism (corporatism). *PopCo* comes up with a thesis of sorts, namely that one can change the corporatist present by employing its strengths against itself. Put in simpler terms: fight fire with fire. To arrive at this realization, Thomas helps her reader along, by offering a complex Bildungsroman, in which the heroine's Bildung, or education, mirrors a process of Deleuze-Guattarian (D-G) *becoming* that suggests a way for the contemporary world to shed its corporate imbrication and tend toward a more ethical existence.

*PopCo* presents us with a twenty-something heroine named Alice Butler, who works as a creative for the third-largest toy corporation in the world, PopCo. Among her creations are such brands as KidSpy, KidTec, and KidCracker, for kids who want to be spies, detectives, or code-breakers. At the beginning of the novel, she goes to what she thinks is a company meeting somewhere in Devon, only to discover that she's part of a hand-picked team of creatives chosen to develop the new it-product for the immensely lucrative, but improperly exploited market of teenage girls. While on this retreat, she starts receiving cryptic messages written in code with help from her kits, the first of which asks her the simple question "Are you happy?" It turns out, after Alice befriends a number of fellow PopCo employees, and gains their confidence, that

a counter-corporate movement is underway, one that works alongside corporatism and attempts to undermine it from within. It is Alice's decision to join this movement – named NoCo – seeking a way to change corporatism that constitutes the culmination of the protagonist's education.

This resolution of Alice's *Bildung* brings to the fore a D-G solution to the challenges of corporatism. I would argue that joining NoCo – a global rhizomatic network of interconnected people employed by various multinational corporations, in which members only know their immediate 'neighbours' – represents a practical alternative to corporate capitalism. The viability resides in the movement's use of the very characteristics that make corporatism work. The solution, in other words, fights fire with fire, which is one of the major themes of the novel, symbolized in the frequent references to homeopathy<sup>22</sup>.

Indeed, one could characterize Thomas' narrative structure as schizoanalysis in the manner described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari shun a clearly linear logic in favour of revelations of interconnections between eclectic elements, no matter how minuscule or apparently irrelevant. This methodology will yield the path toward a line of flight, i.e., an alternative to the present situation of corporatist capitalism, and the potential to change it.

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<sup>22</sup> According to the OED, homeopathy, also spelled homoeopathy, is  
 A system of medical practice founded by Hahnemann of Leipsic about 1796, according to which diseases are treated by the administration (usually in very small doses) of drugs which would produce in a healthy person symptoms closely resembling those of the disease treated.  
 The fundamental doctrine of homopathy is expressed in the Latin adage 'Similia similibus curantur', 'likes are cured by likes'.

The rhizome is the paragon of schizoanalysis: if the latter points to structure, the former defines the model, the end-result. So, if Scarlett Thomas performs schizoanalysis, then *PopCo* is the rhizome. According to Deleuze and Guattari, two of the main characteristics of the rhizome are connection (any point can be linked to another one) and heterogeneity (“A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles,” thereby bringing together elements from a variety of fields (8))<sup>23</sup>.

Arguably taking its cues from Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome, *PopCo* presents countless points of contact between apparently disconnected elements: what favour can a seventeenth-century pirate (‘the arts’ à la Deleuze and Guattari) do to a twenty-first-century anti-corporate movement (‘social struggles’ à la Deleuze and Guattari)? What about mathematics (‘sciences’ à la Deleuze and Guattari), homeopathy<sup>24</sup>, or cryptanalysis<sup>25</sup>? Not content with providing links between surprising elements to suggest the

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical concept of rhizome, please see Chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Gardner, author of a longstanding recreational maths column for *Scientific American*, proves himself baffled and disappointed with the emphasis on homeopathy in a review of *PopCo*: “I can understand how she might be a vegan, avoiding all food coming from animals, but her devotion to homeopathy is much harder to comprehend. One wonders whether this reflects the author’s opinion or is just written into her lead character. Surely Alice would know that homeopathic remedies dilute a drug so thoroughly that at most two or three molecules, if any, remain. (Somehow, the water is supposed to “remember” the drug’s properties.)” (241-42). Gardner’s sarcasm and derision point to his unfortunate cluelessness regarding the novel’s argument and anti-corporate message, which he considers quite far-fetched.

<sup>25</sup> Yet another review of the novel, written by an associate professor of computer science, notes that “Cryptology, mathematics, and the history of unsolved ciphers are central themes in this novel and Scarlett Thomas does an excellent job of getting the mathematics and cryptology right, explaining the systems well, and turning the history into a very readable story” (Dooley 298).

immanence of present-day corporatism, Thomas takes the rhizome theory to the plot as well as the structural level: an interconnectedness/network theory seminar provided by the corporation; and, respectively, three narrative strands that constantly converse and feed off each other.

In the contemporaneous storyline, the brief for Alice Butler and her fellow elite ‘creatives’ is to devise the new it-product to tap into the hugely lucrative teenage-girl market. The prolonged stay in the English countryside occasions the development of new relationships for Alice, as well as detailed reminiscing about her upbringing by her cryptologist and mathematician grandparents. The latter connects neatly with the plot in the present, when Alice receives mysterious messages in code. The connection with the third narrative strand about the pirate Francis Stevenson becomes clear only towards the end of the novel, when we discover that Alice’s necklace engraved with the mysterious code that her grandfather gave her when she was ten holds the location of Stevenson’s buried treasure. Alice herself is on a self-discovery journey, one that on the structural level of the novel signals the generic category of Bildungsroman, while at the level of narrated events shows the protagonist engaged in the D-G process of *becoming*.

Becoming represents a crucial process in the immanent D-G system, albeit a peculiar and abstract one:

*Becoming produces nothing other than itself. ... What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes... This is the point to clarify:*



*that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself*; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first.

This is the principle according to which there is a reality specific to becoming. (*Plateaus* 238, my emphasis)

Becoming is a process that implies movements and various speeds, a process that is significant in itself, rather than for what it produces; there is no teleology here, since the end-result does not exist. For this reason, instead of the traditional compartmentalization of time, as in Memory, or History, *becoming* refers rather to the event. Consequently, the type of individuality that corresponds to *becoming*, called haecceity, is instantiated in the moment and changes perpetually, rather than being a stable, solid subjectivity. The big categories on which Western ontology relies, e.g., reason, structure, organization, subjectivity, macropolitics, State, institutions, territories, etc., and which are usually brought about by a binary kind of thinking and by biunivocalization, are replaced by different, more subtle and flexible intensities in the D-G theory.

Scarlett Thomas has her heroine undertake a process of *becoming* that goes beyond the mere personal journey of a relatable Everyone, albeit a feminine one, which constitutes the staple of a Bildungsroman. It is the background narratives – Alice's grandparents' lives as well as Francis Stevenson's – that create a genealogy of nonconformity which ultimately yields the solutions for an ethics of the present moment that can start to dismantle the apparent helplessness

of the present, as illustrated by the first epigraph to this chapter, which echoes the feeling of futility when it comes to eschewing corporations in any way.

Alice Butler, as the narrator and protagonist of the novel *PopCo*, sets out to contradict the narrator of M.T. Anderson's novel *Feed* when he contends that "it's no good getting pissy about it, because [corporations a]re still going to control everything whether you like it or not" (40). The novel lucidly presents contemporary corporatism, amply displaying its immanence through the lens of marketing, with its far-reaching tie-ins seeping into any and all areas of human life and culture, and then sets out to discover, together with the protagonist, an alternative way. *PopCo*'s alternative to corporatist life places responsibility for change on people themselves: "Do No Harm, Stop Others Doing Harm and Do What You Can" (450). It is no coincidence that the first injunction comes from the Hippocratic oath, foundational motto of the Western medical profession; Thomas' ample discussions of homeopathy *tie into* her broader interest in alternatives to the status quo. As this chapter argues subsequently, Alice's adoption of homeopathy to the detriment of established Western medical treatment, coupled with the Hippocratic motto, shows that the alternatives to corporatism are to be found within the system's *modus operandi*. Just like homeopathy, with its "*similia similibus currentur*<sup>26</sup>" law, *the alternative to corporatism will be extracted from the system's own operations*.

Even though fictional, the solution that Thomas envisages goes hand in hand with the real-life one-year-trials of the locavore movement discussed in the next chapter. The people who undertake these trials attempt to minimize their

ecological footprint by eating locally, by consuming less in general, and by questioning and challenging the corporatist status-quo and the much-touted North American (where Mexico always gets elided) way of life, or, more generally, the Western one.

While not exactly amounting to a line of flight<sup>27</sup>, *PopCo*'s alternative, NoCo, an eminently rhizomatic structure, offers practical solutions for anyone who wants not necessarily to resist corporatism, but to lead a more ethical existence. This seemingly modest solution comes not from cowardice, but rather from an acknowledgement of the immanent nature of capitalism, where any resistance is immediately co-opted with the help of a new axiom and even marketed and made profitable for corporatism. *PopCo* offers many examples to exemplify this lucidity, the most prominent of which is the concept of mirror-branding, which states that for every successful mainstream brand the corporation has to come up with an underground one, and make it seem like it is alternative, in order to cater to "the no logo" crowd:

Mirror-branding, when you first come across it, can seem perplexingly anti-brand – like why have a huge international brand like PopCo unless you stick the logo on everything? Surely the logo is what makes the toys

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<sup>26</sup> Like cures like.

<sup>27</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain it thus:

Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world, but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a whole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic about a line of flight. (204)

Even in the immanence of the rhizomatic connections, things can sometimes mutate in a different direction, causing the entire system to change. A line of flight is a movement of the flow in an unexpected direction, one that has the potential to alter the face of corporate capitalism, for example.

sell. Well, most of the time, except for when you're selling to what has recently been termed the *No Logo* demographic. The *No Logo* kids, also referred to in some study as "Edges" have money, too, and want to spend it on small, independent brands. (42)

In other words, if one fancies oneself as "edgy," rebelliously rejecting corporatist mass consumption by choosing "small, independent brands," one is at best self-deluded. Corporatism affords no escape, no outside, and no short-cuts. Its main characteristic, immanence, survives with the help of an effective and prompt axiomatic:

The strength of capitalism indeed resides in the fact that its axiomatic is never saturated, that it is always capable of adding a new axiom to the previous ones. Capitalism defines a field of immanence and never ceases to fully occupy this field. But this deterritorialized field finds itself occupied by an axiomatic, in contrast to the territorial field determined by primitive codes. (*Anti-Oedipus* 250).

Therefore, the secret of corporatist immanence is its flexibility, its capacity to add more axioms to cover any possible deviation, to recapture any potential line of flight. These axioms are by no means some form of abstract theory that props up corporatism ideologically. On the contrary,

The axioms of capitalism are obviously not theoretical propositions or ideological formulas, but operative statements that constitute the semiological form of Capital and that enter as component parts into assemblages of production, circulation, and consumption. The axioms are

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primary statements, which do not derive from or depend upon another statement... There is a tendency within capitalism continually to add more axioms. (*Plateaus* 461-2)

When some rebellious teenagers decide to go *No Logo*<sup>28</sup> and shun established brands, corporatism, through its interconnected “assemblages of production, circulation, and consumption,” emits the marketing axiom of mirror-branding: Edgy teens will be provided with seemingly small independent-brand consumer items, on which they can discard their disposal income.

Similarly, when Alice walks around a small village in the vicinity of PopCo Towers, where the retreat takes place, she is happy to find a “funny little department store... with traditional toys displayed all around [a large rocking horse]... There are no big brand names, no guns, no electronics, just simple, well-made toys” (438). Her happiness is cut short by the recognition of a PopCo mirror-brand: “various Milly and Bo products: a fire-fighter’s uniform for Milly. A nurse’s outfit for Bo. A Milly and Bo doll’s house which has solar panels, a composter and encourages equal gender roles” (439). Yet another axiom has emerged, probably not long after environmental concerns, the need to eliminate double standards, and the preoccupation with gender issues have become mainstream. Teach your kids that women *can* be fire-fighters and men *can* be nurses, while both should limit their ecological foot-print. In Alice’s words: “This means that parents can buy these products without ever realising that they

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<sup>28</sup> An intertextual nod should probably be acknowledged here for Naomi Klein’s best-selling anti-corporate manifesto *No Logo*. Please see the Introduction for a more detailed discussion of this critique of branding and its social implications.

are lining the pockets of the third richest toy corporation in the world” (439), feeling good about themselves and their ethical choices all the while.

Not surprisingly for a rhizomatic novel like *PopCo*, which draws connections between so many elements, axioms in both the mathematical and the D&G sense loom about the narrative, uniting the protagonist’s contemporary corporate life with her childhood memories of her mathematician grandparents. Thomas points to the similarities between mathematics and corporatism. She says about mathematical ones that “Axioms are the very foundation of mathematics. Axioms are things that you can’t necessarily prove but form the basis for all mathematical proofs” (284). However, “Gödel proved that you can always add new axioms to mathematics – and never be sure that it’s possible to prove something that is true” (288). When juxtaposing Gödel’s conclusion to D&G theory, we see that just like in mathematics, so in corporatism, there can be an unrestricted proliferation of axioms. Mathematics, in Thomas’ view, proves to be one stop in the genealogy of corporatism, as we shall see further in the chapter.

Another example in the vein of the novel’s rhizomatic argument concerns the transformation of Alice’s dietary choices. During her stay at the secluded Hare Hall/PopCo Towers/ mansion where the creatives’ retreat takes place, Alice alters her previously-taken-for-granted habits, at first without much thought. For example, she starts ordering vegan food from the on-call chefs provided by her employer, and only once the change becomes entrenched does she start to question and analyze her reasons for doing so. Like many other examples in this

novel, Alice's altered culinary choices support a larger point: change comes about subtly, seeping into the status quo almost imperceptibly, until the status quo itself alters significantly, making the very concept of "status quo" as a fixed, neatly characterizable moment<sup>29</sup> in time questionable.

The protagonist's transition towards a vegan lifestyle also supports the novel's generic classification as Bildungsroman<sup>30</sup>. What makes the genre important is that the growth of the protagonist mirrors the attempt to convince readers of the urgency of the present situation and the need to take measures to change it. Even though eminently literary, this novel works hard to prove this thesis, by creating rhizomatic connections between seemingly disparate events that ultimately amount to the urge to live ethically, ecologically, and harmlessly. The internal logic of the novel, consistent throughout the three narrative strands, and reinforced with small details at every step of the way, follows this dictum. It is this logic that dictates my argument, namely that in order to create an alternative to corporatism, whose traits appear very well defined in the novel, one has to fight fire with fire, i.e., make use of the internal contradictions of the plane of immanence to change its nature. This impulse aligns itself with the

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<sup>29</sup> For the fluidity of subjectivity, please see Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *haecceity* discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>30</sup> Another Bildungsroman in the same corporatist vein is Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs*, which highlights a group of computer programmers leaving Microsoft and starting up their own business endeavour. Alongside copious amounts of coding, the characters find themselves and "get a life." Coupland's novel, while arguably anti-corporate (a lot of sarcasm is directed not only at Microsoft, but also at the 'hip' brands and thus the very idea of branding), has a very subtle anti-capitalist message. After all, the protagonists develop and 'find themselves' as a result of starting up their own business – the paragon of 'picking yourself up by the bootstraps'. However, more emphasis appears on the building of a human community of people, who previously, even though physically together, did not know anything about each other. Thus, similar

Deleuze-Guattarian conclusions that there is no outside to the plane of immanence; one has to act from the inside, with a comprehensive knowledge of the mechanisms that operate rhizomatically, in order to attempt to change the immanent corporatism.

As the protagonist muses at the end of her literary journey, after being invited to join NoCo, the resistance organization within PopCo,

the weakness of all the big corporations nowadays is that they have to employ people to think... the things that have value today are the invisible ideas and the marketing plans and the logos and labels that are created on invisible machinery in our minds. We own the means of production – our minds – and we can use our brains to produce whatever we want... When you join NoCo – or whatever your version is called – you simply agree to use your labour in a positive rather than a negative way. (462)

In other words, Thomas shows how one has to use the available resources in the system, within one's grasp, in order to create an alternative, and change the conditions of the plane of immanence. The underlying reasoning suggests that since one cannot conceive of an outside to it, one can also not resist or overturn corporatism. So, rather than have people unite against a common enemy, Thomas has them forming rhizomatic connections, in which a person only knows her adjacent links in the network, such as the one who brought her in and the one whom she brought in, and maybe one or two more beyond those.

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to Scarlett Thomas, Coupland's alternative resides in tweaking the status quo and thus finding alternatives, rather than negatively rebelling against it.



The above quote also displays a realization of the need for a new kind of resistance. The obvious nod to classical Marxism, “we own the means of production,” shows that the enemy is no longer the bourgeois owner of physical commodity producing factories. Instead, Thomas argues, we are all caught up inside the same corporate system that needs to be transformed from within. Purely oppositional stances are not tenable when transcendence is not an option.

These connections with the present reality of corporatism might seem speculative if not for Thomas’ adherence to the New Puritans, a group of British writers collected in the 2000 *All Hail the New Puritans* anthology by Nicholas Blincoe and Matt Thorne. Apart from the collected short stories, the anthology contains a ten-point manifesto:

1. Primarily storytellers, we are dedicated to the narrative form.
2. We are prose writers and recognise that prose is the dominant form of expression. For this reason we shun poetry and poetic licence in all its forms.
3. While acknowledging the value of genre fiction, whether classical or modern, we will always move towards new openings, rupturing existing genre expectations.
4. We believe in textual simplicity and vow to avoid all devices of voice: rhetoric, authorial asides.
5. In the name of clarity, we recognise the importance of temporal linearity and eschew flashbacks, dual temporal narratives and foreshadowing.

6. We believe in grammatical purity and avoid any elaborate punctuation.
7. We recognise that published works are also historical documents. As fragments of our time, all our texts are dated and set in the present day. All products, places, artists and objects named are real.
8. As faithful representation of the present, our texts will avoid all improbable or unknowable speculations on the past or the future.
9. We are moralists, so all texts feature a recognisable ethical reality.
10. Nevertheless, our aim is integrity of expression, above and beyond any commitment to form. (Blincoe and Thorne i)

Perhaps the common thread of all the points can be contained in a desire to renounce all artifice and tell important, contemporary stories plainly. Point number nine declares that “We are moralists, so all texts feature a recognisable ethical reality.” Thomas thus aligns herself with a certain ethical concern for a “faithful representation of the present,” as stated in point number eight. Without delving further into author intentionality and biographical criticism, I want to conclude that the representations of the present moment are avowedly serious, as is the quest of the novel for a practical and applicable ethical alternative.

Yet another concern of the New Puritans explains *PopCo*’s wealth of well-researched elements culminating in the conclusion that I presented as a rather simple thesis: fight fire with fire. Thomas weaves a well-documented history and methodology of cryptology with mathematical topics, homeopathy,

and history, all presented in simple and easily comprehensible language. As the New Puritan Manifesto's seventh dictum states, since "We recognise that published works are also historical documents," "All products, places, artists and objects named are real." In the end, the novel uses all these disparate elements to show how the immanence of our moment does not render corporatism inviolable; on the contrary, the use of its much-touted qualities (e.g., innovation, creativity) can be turned against it, even if one may not be able to dismantle it, as more historically radical resistance would have it.

One of the most important elements constitutive of the fabric of resistance is the genealogy that the novel constructs in its support. I use the term "genealogy" as discussed by Michel Foucault in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), which opens with the explanation that "Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (76). Foucault's analysis of Nietzsche emphasizes a clear distinction between the history traced by professional historians and genealogy.

Historians, Foucault argues, "take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy" (90), thus aiming for something like objectivity<sup>31</sup>, or ultimate truth in their description of what would become 'historical fact.' This preoccupation goes against the injunction of the New Puritans to date themselves in the present, as per point number seven: "As fragments of our time, all our

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<sup>31</sup> "The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgements on an apocalyptic objectivity" (Foucault 87).

texts are dated and set in the present day.” As part of the New Puritans, Thomas does not seek historical truth, but rather a documentation of the present situation of corporatism. Her incursions into the past – her protagonist’s and Francis Stevenson’s, which suggests the beginnings of capitalism, therefore the roots of corporatism – settle along the lines of Foucauldian “genealogy,” whose character appears as “an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath” (82).

As opposed to the historian, the genealogist aspires to “identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or, conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us” (81). Constructing a genealogy implies more of a quilting of eventful bits and historical pieces of the past that come to hold significance on the present, than a continuous, rational, and impartial narrative of capital-T truth. That quilt describes the narrative structure of *PopCo*: a rhizome that jumps from a twenty-first century corporate retreat, to a late-twentieth-century childhood, to a mid-twentieth-century wartime retreat of cryptanalysts, to a seventeenth-century ethical pirate, and finally, back to the present-day corporatism and the simple solutions to change it. No details are accidental, and no events are disconnected.

Alice’s preoccupation with cryptanalysis, for example, inherited from her grandfather, a preoccupation that makes her focus on old documents, all of them veridical, even if their authenticity is contested outside the fictional world of the novel, proves the author’s efforts to provide historical depth to the resistance

movements in the present of the novel. Thomas goes to the literal meaning of genealogy as presented by Foucault in order to show that the potential for change has always dwelt within the immanence of power, being used by it to its own advantage. The author shows that it does not take much to harness that potential and turn it against corporatism.

It thus seems that NoCo, the rhizomatic organization that the novel presents as alternative to the present situation, aligns itself with the history of piracy that Francis Stevenson represents. The narrative strand that carries the story of this pirate seems completely disjointed from the other two in the novel: Alice's present and her upbringing by her grandparents, which are obviously centred on the protagonist. One wonders, upon a first encounter, why a story that touches only tangentially and precariously on the main narrative is given so much space and detail. The connections become apparent at the end of the novel, when we see how the narrative in the present finds resolution with the help of both the pirate and the cryptanalysis ones. It also seems like the novel urges us to follow Foucault's genealogical methodology and temporarily suspend our impatience:

Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material. Its 'cyclopean monuments' are constructed from 'discreet and apparently insignificant truths and according to a rigorous method'. (76-77)

Cryptanalysis relies on "patience," "a knowledge of details" and a painstaking "accumulation of source material" as the story of Alice's childhood shows us.

Detailing the minute and complicated tasks her grandfather asked her to perform, such as prime factorization of dauntingly long numbers or tabulating the frequency of certain words in a book-length document, stands proof not only of the interconnection of Alice's own genealogy to the genealogy of the present, but of her suitability to compile the latter. She has a genealogist's training and the narrative she recounts represents the culmination of her work.

Of all the narrative strands, the minute details, and the apparently insignificant truths, the most important story of PopCo happens in the present of the novel, though, where Alice starts discovering, or rather re-discovering, her need for ethics, propped up by her upbringing with all the social justice narratives that her grandparents and her mother leave her with. From a structural point of view, the end of the novel shows that the incursions into the past are part of Alice's conversation with Chloë, the coordinator of NoCo Europe, and the protagonist's recruiter. The fact this conversation constitutes the climax of the novel comes in support of my argument that the parallel narratives offer a supporting genealogy to Alice's maturation journey, and a logical path for her choice of resistance.

The story of Francis Stevenson, which the narrator tells by virtue of its connection to the Stevenson/Heath manuscript that her grandfather decoded and which points to a hidden treasure, can be easily read as a metaphor for the beginning of capitalism. The fact Stevenson used capitalist sea trade to turn pirate shows how the system started with its own built-in resistance. Francis Stevenson began his life in a small village in Devon, in 1605. He was found on

the doorstep of the Younge family, abandoned by his parents who lost everything because “Enclosure had recently taken away their small plot of land and their cottage in a Cornish village” (173). The Younges, a yeoman family who raised him as their own, ran a very productive farm, whose surpluses were taken to the market. The seeds of capitalist problems begin to show themselves when the Younges manage to raise the villagers’ ire because they send their excess produce “to distant markets where a better price could be obtained” (174). As Marx shows in *Capital*, Vol. I, this profiteering was in line with the development of capitalism: “What the capitalist system demanded was... a degraded and almost servile condition of the mass of the people, their transformation into mercenaries, and the transformation of their means of labour into capital” (880-81). This manner of interspersing “discreet and apparently insignificant truths” (Foucault 77) throughout the novel makes the parallel narratives legitimate genealogies in support of Thomas’ advocacy for alternatives toward a more ethical way of living that can be envisaged within the plane of immanence of corporatism.

Seemingly innocuous connections such as the one above appear throughout the novel, making it look as coded as some of the messages that Thomas shows how to analyze with the help of cryptanalysis. These connections, which I have called rhizomatic before, add to the legitimacy of the novel as an anti-corporatist manifesto. Corporatism, as Thomas shows, hardly allows for straightforward opposition. Its immanence means that not only does it spread its influence in every aspect of life, but also that it manages novelty quite easily by

immediately emitting new rules, or axioms, to integrate newness into its fold. Hardly fatalistic, though, the novel asks us to ponder whether we might use corporatism's strengths to alter its course. Traditional resistance culminating in overthrowing corporatism might be out of the question, but we can, *PopCo* argues, change the system from within. We just have to fight fire with fire.

## Conclusion

Three exemplary novels out of a growing pool of literature on corporatism, *Pattern Recognition*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *PopCo* each show different facets of immanent late capitalism, and present alternatives in their own way. Of course, there is no clear-cut distinction between the three novels temporally, the way I might have made it seem. However, just as their perspectives vary, their solutions differ in their applicability. William Gibson's nostalgia for a pure type of aesthetics that can insulate against the perils of ubiquitous simulacra of the globalized world can seem somewhat elitist, if not self-indulgent, when one has one's eye on potential lines of flight that would steer the plane of immanence away from corporatism into a new socius.

Margaret Atwood and Scarlett Thomas, on the other hand, bring different suggestions to the equation, and both of them turn attention to personal responsibility and individual action as possibilities for change. Atwood's choice of genre – dystopia – lends itself to dire warnings, as per the conditions, since the writer sees humanity very close to the point of no return. However, she does



intersperse hopeful elements, and points to the problems that need to be solved, and to ways of solving them.

Arguably, *PopCo* is the most hopeful of all, the one that spells out the solution, rather than remaining blasé or becoming apocalyptic. What is more, the solution it provides clearly depends on personal responsibility, and leads to an easily attainable and practical ethics. *PopCo*'s solutions foreshadow the subject of the next chapter: the locavore movement, in which people choose to consume food from close to their home, so as to minimize their environmental footprint, and to create a community of food consumption and a more ethical foodshed than corporatism offers.

## Chapter 4

### “Lines of Flight”: Does the Locavore Movement Offer an Alternative to Corporatism?<sup>1</sup>

*But sticking it to the Man (whoever he is) may not be the most inspired principle around which to organize one's life... We hoped a year away from industrial foods would taste so good, we might actually enjoy it. **The positives, rather than the negatives, ultimately nudged us to step away from the agribusiness supply line and explore the local landscape.** Doing the right thing, in this case, is not about abstinence-only, throwing out bread, tightening your belt, wearing a fake leather belt, or dragging around feeling righteous and gloomy. **Food is the rare moral arena in which the ethical choice is generally the one more likely to make you groan with pleasure.** Why resist that?*

*(Barbara Kingsolver, **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life**, 22)*

The Oxford English Dictionary named “locavore” word of the year 2007.

Their AskOxford website modestly claims that “It scarcely matters if that word proved ephemeral, or if it arose out of an activity of little political or sociological importance: the very fact that it became high-profile can shed as much light on the preoccupations of its time as any photograph or historical summary.” The OED’s word of the year, “as a short-hand summary of a period in time,” brings to mind Raymond Williams’ structure of feeling. As Williams puts it, the structure of feeling is “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period” (131).

Of course, in Williams’ view, the structure of feeling does not characterize as neat a period as a year, but the OED’s “word of the year” designation can certainly be aligned with an attempt to fix, define, and name the dominant social interest of a period of time. So, what does that impulse say in

relation to the word “locavore”? What does it mean to be a locavore, anyway? More importantly, do locavores actually have the potential to impact significantly on our contemporary social system, or are they a passing trend?

This chapter argues that the locavores are part of a larger movement that views food and eating habits as symbolic of corporatism; in a move that might seem reactionary and bring the charge of romanticizing the past, these food activists suggest that changing eating habits, i.e., going back to a simpler, literally more wholesome diet might bring about a change of paradigm. If all thinking goes through the stomach, then by reversing eating habits, the effects of corporatism and, more generally, capitalism, can be reversed, changed, or taken in a different direction.

A growing body of publications focuses on eating. Indeed, the interest in food issues appears in various unexpected places. Whereas opening a magazine to a recipe page used to peg that publication as woman-centred, food and diet advice seems ubiquitous nowadays: almost every TV channel has at least one food-related show, almost every magazine has a recipe of some kind, be it straight-forwardly, or couched in an opinionated review of some posh restaurant, or in an advice column about how to live healthier.

The food hype would not be complete without the requisite scare mongering; in fact, large-scale fear mongering is emblematic of large-scale interest. We are told that bananas will soon go extinct because of an ever-

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<sup>1</sup> A condensed version of this chapter was published in *Rhizomes* 20 (2010).

shrinking gene pool; that honeybees are affected by an incurable disease<sup>2</sup> that will soon render them history; and, of course, we hear about more and more product recalls every day. It seems that micro-organisms like *E coli*<sup>3</sup> or *Listeria*<sup>4</sup> are hell-bent on making us more thoughtful about Western food habits. And a lot of people are doing the thinking and the research to prescribe the necessary changes.

A number of books focus on the critique of the present situation, others on alternative movements, variously motivated, while others still do both. Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* (2001) provides a strong criticism of the meat industry, while showing the connections between the latter, the fast-food industry (e.g. McDonalds), the entertainment one (Disney), as well as labour injustice, connections that emphasize the immanent nature of corporatism. Schlosser's salient connections have propelled the book into widespread popularity<sup>5</sup>, arguably spurring such reactions as the equally (or even more) famous Oscar-nominated documentary *Supersize Me* (2004), which details the

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<sup>2</sup> Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, "Bee Colony Collapse Disorder And Viral Disease Incidence Under Investigation."

<sup>3</sup> In September 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a statement urging the public to refrain from eating fresh spinach as a result of outbreak of E-coli traced to the vegetable that caused 19 cases of human contamination (n. pag). The same bacteria left seven people dead and made "more than 2,300 others ill in Walkerton, Ont., in May 2000, in Canada's worst-ever E. coli outbreak after the bacteria got into the town's water supply" (CBC, "Understanding," n.pag.).

<sup>4</sup> In August 2008, Maple Leaf Foods recalled "more than 200 brands of ready-to-eat deli meats and sandwiches" (Nguyen n. pag.). According to the Food Inspection Agency of Canada, the outbreak caused 57 cases of listeriosis across Canada, 22 of each ended in death (n.pag.).

<sup>5</sup> Marion Nestle, one of the most influential academics writing about food politics calls Eric Schlosser's book "already a classic—reached a huge audience, continues to be widely assigned on college campuses, and has turned masses of readers into advocates eager to change the current food system into one that is better for producers as well as eaters" ("Reading" 39).

author's, Morgan Spurlock<sup>6</sup>, immediate health deterioration in the course of his 30-day self-imposed exclusive McDonald's diet. On the alternatives side, Carlo Petrini's Slow Food movement, which he describes in *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*, has taken root in many parts of the world, with people eager to follow its Official Manifesto. An author that plays both sides, critique and prescription, Michael Pollan, details the problems with the American food supply chain in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, and pens some solutions in his *In Defence of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. Finally, a variety of celebrity chefs turned food activists use their clout to teach people how to consume food more sustainably, and, one reads between the lines, to live that way, too. Two examples are Alice Waters, a veteran in the field local and seasonal eating, and the über-celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, whose efforts to improve school cafeteria food and teach Brits how to grow and cook better food have made him internationally known<sup>7</sup>.

### **Representative Locavores**

Within this field of "foodies," locavores are perhaps best represented by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon, authors of *The 100-Mile Diet: A Year of Local Eating*, and Barbara Kingsolver, who co-wrote *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* with her husband Steven L. Hopp and her eldest daughter

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<sup>6</sup> Morgan Spurlock wrote, directed, produced, and starred in *Supersize Me*.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver's latest book is *Jamie's Food Revolution: Rediscover How to Cook Simple, Delicious, and Affordable Meals* (2009), published in the UK under the title *Jamie's Ministry of Food: Anyone Can Learn to Cook in 24 Hours*. The latter shares a title with the celebrity chef's latest TV show, in which he teaches people how to cook at home.

Camille Kingsolver<sup>8</sup>. Both books were published in 2007 and detail events happening around 2005<sup>9</sup>.

Locavores aim to lower their ecological footprint and honour their environment by eating locally available food, produced within a limited radius of their homes, e.g., a hundred miles. Whereas this chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive genealogy of local eating, it must acknowledge that locavorism still constitutes a living tradition for many peoples around the world<sup>10</sup>, while many others still attempt to rescue and revive nearly lost local culinary gems<sup>11</sup>. The focus of this chapter resides on the most recent incarnations, ones whose declared aim is to transform local eating from a habit in danger of extinction into

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Paul Nabhan's *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods* (2002) may well be considered the precursor of these two year-long locavore experiments, especially since Nabhan's is anchored in a career and an oeuvre displaying a continuum of preoccupations with the conservation and promotion of local and traditional foodscapes.

<sup>9</sup> The locavore books are also part of a larger genre of yearlong experiments, albeit born out of differing intents (either attempts at living more ethically, or at becoming famous). One better-known example is A.J. Jacobs' rather self-explanatory *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible* (2007). Sara Bongiorni's *A Year without "Made in China": One Family's True Life Adventure in the Global Economy* (2007) proves that unexamined negative critique leaves one (either author or reader) feeling dissatisfied and frustrated, without any means of redemption. The thoughtful and well-researched *Not Buying It: My Year without Shopping* (2006) by Judith Levine, starts out with negative critique of consumerism, but quickly moves beyond it with in-depth analysis of the problems and consequences of over-consumption.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Gary Paul Nabhan's *Renewing America's Food Traditions: Saving and Savoring the Continent's Most Endangered Foods* (2008), where Nabhan, working with a team which includes Native American and First Nations activists, outlines a "manifesto for renewing place-based food traditions through biocultural conservation" in North America.

Similarly, Nabhan's *Gathering the Desert* (1985) expresses its debt to the "knowledge of all the Native American people ... who passed on the stories, skills, and observations that make our desert plant heritage so rich. Their wisdom and wit form the heart of this book" (ix).

<sup>11</sup> See further down (page 14) for the explanation of the Slow Food Movement's "Ark of Taste"

a line of flight, aimed at moving, pushing, or maybe only nudging the ever-expanding plane of immanence of corporatism in a different direction.

The locavore argument, while ecological in origin, becomes immediately and deliberately anti-capitalist and anti-corporatist. Indeed, Barbara Kingsolver draws a clear connection between food production and consumption and corporatism:

Owing to synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, genetic modification, and a conversion of farming from a naturally based to a highly mechanized production system, U.S. farmers now produce 3,900 calories per U.S. citizen per day. That is twice what we need and 700 calories a day more than they grew in 1980. Commodity farmers can only survive by producing their maximum yields, so they do. And here is the shocking plot twist: as the farmers produced those extra calories, the food industry figured out how to get them into the bodies of people who didn't really *want* to eat 700 more calories a day. That is the well-oiled machine we call Late Capitalism. (14)

Kingsolver thus neatly touches on some of the main characteristics of corporatism as the latest stage of capitalism: endless growth of the economy as both primary driver and telos of the system – while simultaneously doing away with the idea of needs-based economic production, as in the traditional market view of basing offer on demand – as well as the interconnectedness of economic production with people's lives. Juxtaposing the industrial branch of the economy ("synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, genetic modification") with agriculture

(“farmers can only survive by producing their maximum yields”) and with the consumers at large (“the bodies of people who didn’t really *want* to eat 700 more calories a day”) in one neat paragraph and then naming this collusion as “the well-oiled machine that we call Late Capitalism” proves Kingsolver acutely aware of the immanence of corporatism, and the subtle ways desiring-production functions at the interstices of elements generally viewed as separate.

As an alternative, the locavores argue for a return to a traditional way of consuming food by buying local, organic products, and thus eschewing large-scale agriculture, food processing, and supermarkets, all operated by big corporations. Moreover, by insisting on being satisfied with local foodsheds, on consuming ethically from one’s vicinity, from a community of known people, the locavores arguably want to do away with the heritage of imperialism that built the capitalist system into global corporatism. Both books provide a thoughtful critique of corporatism, detailing their attempts at circumventing it, while at the same time investigating its historical capitalist origins and tracing its pervasiveness in our contemporary lives in general and diet in particular.

In the “Introduction” to *The 100-Mile Diet*, for example, Smith and MacKinnon speak about that invisible prop of free-market ideology, *externalities*, which constitute costs that are not supported by any company or consumer and usually result in ecological depletion: “I don’t have to pay for the dams, the wild places given over to reservoirs and farms, and the resulting decimation of species from chinook salmon... to all the plants of the bunchgrass prairie” (31). Similarly, in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*,



Barbara Kingsolver *et. al* remark that “the average food item on a U.S. grocery shelf has travelled farther than most families go on their annual vacation” (4). They also assert, with the help of hard evidence, that “small changes in buying habits can make big differences. Becoming a less energy-dependent nation may just start with a good [locally and organically raised] breakfast” (5). Kingsolver thus emphasizes the need for personal action in order to bring about systemic change. One need take action on one’s own if a more ecological lifestyle is to emerge as an alternative to the present situation.

While both sets of authors seem to have been prompted by similar concerns and have similar aims in their respective undertakings, their situations and methodologies are different enough to warrant close separate attention to each book in particular. One of the first differences brings to the fore their locations: Smith and MacKinnon live in Vancouver, a large city, with a putative high quality of life that also makes it rather expensive; Kingsolver and her family moves out of a big city, Tucson, Arizona, to a farm in U.S. Appalachia region, in the state of Virginia. Urban versus rural, their different locations both elicit and result in diverse lifestyles. While Smith and MacKinnon do more metaphorical foraging through urban markets, and surrounding agricultural areas, Kingsolver’s family resolves to literally live off the proverbial land, by producing most of their food themselves. Happily, these dissimilarities lend versatility and adaptability to the locavore experiment.

Perhaps more importantly, the differences in these two chronicles point to the futility of critique at face value: yes, these are rather extreme experiments,

but extremism is not their point. They have undertaken a drastic yearlong renunciation of foods from far away, but it doesn't mean everyone should do the same. Their aim points to the realism and applicability of their projects, not their purity. In other words, one can *strive* toward eating locally as much as possible, but exclusivity is not the higher aim. What they emphasize is the existence of possibilities for a more ethical diet, not the importance of following prescriptions to T.

What motivates Smith and MacKinnon are the conditions of possibility available to a generation jaded by fear-mongering and doomsday speak:

We are at a point in history where bad news about the state of the Earth is just as jaded and timeworn as the idea that there is nowhere left to go, nothing new to explore. Put these two statements side by side, however, and something hidden is revealed... We need to find new ways to live into the future. We can start any time; we can live them here and now.

(222)

The optimism evident in this quote characterizes the very experiment at the centre of the book: a search for alternatives that not only denies an apathetic stance that the “jaded and timeworn” state implies, but shouts out to the world that negativity and fatalism cannot carry the baton of humanity any longer. The idea of exploration, implied metaphorically here, also brings to mind the imperial endeavours that have propped capitalism historically and made it self-evident that one (read privileged Westerner) can eat – and, more generally, consume – the entire Earth in the era of corporatism. Lest I be accused of

projecting my own thesis into this quote, let me summon another from a few pages back: “The mark of an empire, it seems, is to eat its length and breadth. In Roman times, food grown within the Italian heartland was considered suitable only for peasants... However, it was the British mania for the perfect cup of tea that built a global trade of the greatest speed the world had ever known” (198-99). Food stands in here as a major signifier of corporatism. If you thought that Smith and MacKinnon couldn’t sometimes see the forest for lack of edible wheat flour, then quotes like these, subtly interwoven in their narrative about cooking the next meal, demonstrate their thoughtful analysis of the overarching global system.

Just like the patrician Romans, smug over their imperial feast, corporatism has made people feel entitled to consume the globe and proud at their elitist privilege. Kingsolver recounts an episode when, as a guest, she partook in a feast where she was “consuming the United Nations of edible plants and animals all in one seating. (Or the WTO is more like it)” (66) in the middle of winter. When she expressed her surprise at being served a raspberry desert in which the “eminently bruisable fruits...survive[d] a zillion-mile trip looking so good,” the host was amused “by my country-mouse naïveté,” and assured her that “[in New York] we can get anything we want, any day of the year” (66). The New Yorker’s sense of entitlement bluntly silences the concerned and informed, if maybe too subtle, critique. Kingsolver’s finesse appears very subtly again a few lines before, when she corrects her literary leanings and demonstrates that she means business by replacing the metaphor of “consuming

the U.N. of edible plants” with “the WTO is more like it.” Her intentions are thus not simply poetic in this book. A mere turn of phrase, however successful, would not do. Precision and argument are key here. The problem is earnest, and her solution has claims to realism and applicability. And the metaphors had better conform to these aims through their precision: the reason corporatism has reached so far resides less in political entendres than in economical treaties and institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, whose role it is to spread neoliberalism globally, i.e., open up all territories of the world as markets of consumption for the world’s large corporations, and boomerang the privilege right back; in this particular instance, by recycling an old imperial habit of eating the globe and bragging about it.

The locavores, therefore, as Kingsolver points out in the quote that serves as the epigraph to this chapter, have decided to oppose the imperialist mentality by creating an ethical consumption niche. As she puts it, their aim cannot be a negative “sticking it to the Man,” because negativity does not provide a suitable organizing principle. The implied suggestion here points to the futility of resistance as the fetishized weapon of anti-capitalists. She actually goes on to express the idea that if one is to change the face of corporatism, one has to be positively creative<sup>12</sup>: “The positives, rather than the negatives, ultimately nudged us to step away from the agribusiness supply line and explore the local landscape” (22). It appears that, for Kingsolver and her family, the idea of collective organizing goes beyond gathering with like-minded people to shout

slogans and wave placards in front of some corporate headquarters or WTO summit in protest. She, like other locavores, much to the outrage of seasoned anti-capitalist activists, prefer to “actually enjoy” (22) the actions that might help steer corporatism in a different direction. Her language, again, subtly but nonetheless clearly shows her opposition to resistance as the way forward, in favour of the creative and pleasurable gastronomic endeavour: “Food is the rare moral arena in which the ethical choice is generally the more likely to make you groan with pleasure. Why *resist* that?” (22, my emphasis).

The juxtaposition of pleasure with resistance here signals a very potent mix that at once symbolizes the kernel of locavorism and signals a productive point of contention by academics outraged at the “neoliberalization” of food activism<sup>13</sup>. I will investigate the idea of pleasure before moving on to the critiques of neoliberalization, because its reclamation by the locavores signals a clear, if subtle repudiation of capitalism, both in its machinic form described by Deleuze and Guattari, and in its connection to the Protestant ethic famously uncovered by Max Weber. Kingsolver does not stand alone on the issue of pleasure. On the contrary, all locavores emphasize the pleasures of eating above all other benefits of local and seasonal gastronomy. Alice Waters, pioneer locavore in the 1970s, says that “the people who were growing the tastiest food were organic farmers in my own backyard, small farmers and ranchers within a radius of a hundred miles or so of the restaurant who were planting heirloom

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<sup>12</sup> Please see the Introduction for my argument about the problems of negative critique, and Chapter 1 for my proposed alternative for creative critique, modelled on D&G’s schizoanalysis.

<sup>13</sup> Guthman, Roff, Blue.

varieties of plants and vegetables and harvesting them at their peak” (3). She does not mince her words when she calls this find “revolutionary” and gushes over the “extraordinary” taste food that “tastes like what it is” (3) has.

The Slow Food movement that many of the locavores quote as partial inspiration was founded in 1989 under the full name of “International Slow Food Movement for the Defence and the Right to Pleasure.” Entitled by its very name to seek and protect pleasure, one of the points of the movement’s manifesto explains the need for a “firm defence of quiet material pleasure” as “the only way to oppose the universal folly of the Fast Life” (Petrini xxiii). The slow foodies peg their enemy generically as “Fast Life,” whose main characteristic is the fact it “forces us to eat Fast Foods” (xxiii). They take their food very seriously as the paragon of human life, asserting that the perversions of speed that lead people to fast foods can also reduce “[*Homo sapiens*] to a species in danger of extinction” (xxiii).

In the name of recapturing pleasure, the Slow Food calls for its members to “rediscover the flavors and savors of regional cooking” because “Our defence should begin at the table” (xxiv). In a rather Deleuze-Guattarian move, the first point of the Manifesto asserts that “Our century... first invented the machine and then took it as its life model” (xxiii). The slow foodies’ aim is to disrupt the corporatist machine by reclaiming human desire from the assemblage of desiring-production that corporate-backed fast food represents. They want to withdraw themselves from the system and indulge the pleasures of slow food that can hardly be reintegrated productively into the system.

It all hinges on pleasure. Capitalism proficiently repudiated pleasure from its positive vocabulary, because it did not prove productive. Deleuze and Guattari show in *Anti-Oedipus* how the immanent system first integrates human desire with economic production, making the two so indistinguishable as to yield the hyphenated concept of desiring-production. Then, it manages to turn pleasure into a negative, problematic thing running people into its all sorts of trouble because of its propensity to make them act ‘irrationally’. According to Deleuze and Guattari, Freud and his psychoanalysis, with their desire=lack equation, are the primary apologists of capitalist guilt-tripping of any pleasure. Deleuze and Guattari’s political aim was to recapture desire from the capitalist machine and show how people could escape it and transform it by causing runoffs through ethical *becoming*, or transformations into minoritarian ways of existence, where minoritarian refers less to numbers than to degree of power<sup>14</sup>.

Arguably, the slow foodies attempt their own becoming by purposefully slowing down to smell the delicious local and seasonal cooking. Their mandate starts by sanctifying pleasure, but goes on to describe and enshrine (to continue the religious allegory here) an ethical way of pursuing it, one that ensures the preservation of as many heritage species, together with respectful ways of breeding and humane treatment, and heirloom plant varieties. Ironically, the way to preserve these old varieties is by consuming them; the Slow Food movement has devised the Ark of Taste, a virtual repository of old foods, be they meats,

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<sup>14</sup> For a summary of Deleuze-Guattarian theory as it pertains to locavorism and corporatism, please see the end of theory section of this chapter. For a more detailed theoretical discussion and the interactions between their schizoanalysis and corporatism, please turn to Chapter 1.

dairy, vegetables, together with their particular ways of culinary preparation and preservation. The Ark comes with its own Manifesto, which asserts the Ark's role:

“To protect the small purveyors of fine food from the deluge of industrial standardization; to ensure the survival of endangered animal breeds, cheeses, cold cuts, edible herbs – both wild and cultivated – cereals, and fruit; to promulgate taste education; to make a stand against obsessive worrying about hygienic matters, which kills the specific character of many kinds of production; to protect the right to pleasure.” (Petrini 91)

Again, lest we become confused, the Slow Food with its Ark of Taste wants to reclaim and preserve pleasure. They do it not by simply opposing the present way of life ingrained in the immanence of corporatism, not by rallying and demonstrating in front of any McDonald's, but by salvaging endangered foodstuffs and creating a worldwide rainbow of taste and food pleasures. Their aim is not to consume the world in their homes, but rather to preserve each local foodscape in its traditional richness and cultural complexity, in its pre-Fast Life form.

Fast Life, of course, is a metaphor for corporatism, which, as the latest form of capitalism, has taken desiring-production to previously unknown heights, by mastering the art of sublimating/subsuming human desires and dictating new ones that better work in the logic of its immanence<sup>15</sup>. By making

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<sup>15</sup> See the Introduction and Chapter 2 for details on how corporatism convinces/obligates people to work more so that they can consume more of the things that, in turn, drive the growth corporatism values so much; or for how corporatism integrates body image concerns with advertising campaigns (“Dove Campaign for Real



their project about reclaiming pleasure, locavores attempt to turn the clock back before the rise of corporatism, and rewrite the future in a different ink. Pleasure, or its denial, is the lynchpin, because, according to Max Weber, capitalism began thriving when coupled with a self-denying Puritan spirit:

In fact, the summum bonum of this ethic, the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudæmonistic, not to say hedonistic, admixture. It is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational. Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs. This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship, so irrational from a naïve point of view, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism as it is foreign to all peoples not under capitalistic influence. (Weber 18)

If the repudiation of any “spontaneous enjoyment of life” marks the success of capitalism, the reason for its thriving for so long, then it makes sense for people attempting to change the course of the system to reclaim a tinge of hedonism in their lives. If capitalism has (over)determined its subjects to relinquish personal and material pleasures, convincing them beyond any doubt that more work equals more happiness because of the promise of more gain, then a logical

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Beauty” that later became “Dove Campaign for Self Esteem”) that make women feel better about showering with a product that helps them gain self-esteem.

alternative is to say “stop.” The locavores, through their conscientious analyses of corporatism, expose and critique this basic assumption of capitalism: that endless accumulation, or as Weber puts it, “economic acquisition” is the “summum bonum,” the end-all and be-all of human existence. It is by questioning this foundational tenet of capitalism that locavores gain credibility as alternative to the system. The fact they use corporatist weapons to chip at its very core shows not only that they have internalized the eminently successful capitalist *modus operandi* of fighting fire with fire, but that they may eventually steer it in a different, more socially beneficial direction.

The locavores’ use of corporatist logic, however, attracts, alongside growing popularity, numerous critiques from academic circles, whose main charge is that of “neoliberalization” of food activism. Locavores have actually been accused in academic circles of representing the ultimate neoliberal subject, one that purports to change the world by deluding oneself that there are choices and agency in the mere act of consumption. Julie Guthman, author of an article titled “Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California,” for example, warns that “much of what passes as politics these days is done through highly individualized purchasing decisions,” whose role ultimately translates in the production and reproduction of “neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and mentalities” (1171).

Guthman inscribes the locavore movement among the signs that “projects in opposition to neoliberalizations of the food and agricultural sectors seem to produce and reproduce neoliberal forms, spaces of governance, and

mentalities” because they rely on “neoliberal rationalities: consumer choice, localism, entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement” (1171). On the face of it, the locavores might be labelled as perfect neoliberal subject. After all, in a simplified thesis that would do Dame Thatcher proud, they advocate that individual choice can lead to systemic change. More specifically, they talk about food choices and grocery money, and making deliberate decisions about where it goes and who benefits from it. Throw in more capitalist vocabulary as in “100-Mile Challenge”<sup>16</sup>, as in competition, as in (self-) improvement and all the free market apologists are tickled pink.

Guthman is one of the locavores’ most prominent critics:

It seems that notions of the season, local, organic have hailed a foodie/yuppie subject to be the carrier of transformation in agro-food politics. That this subject is also hailed by the neoliberal rationales of choice, responsibility and competitiveness certainly attenuates the conceivable in agro-food activism. (1177)

Guthman’s use of the Althusserian notion of interpellation points to her view of the corporatist system as positively transcendent; a world in which the as-of-yet uncorrupted (not-yet-interpellated/hailed) people manage to eschew subjectivity and can, if they wanted, freely oppose the system, becoming pure oppositional agents that can take the system apart, if only they united and organized into a collective. While places may still exist on Earth that have not yet been

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<sup>16</sup> *The 100-Mile Challenge* is a Food Network Canada six-episode program which started airing in April 2009, and in which James MacKinnon and Alisa Smith guide some of the residents of Mission, British Columbia – six families of whom are

neoliberalized, i.e., have not been colonized by the corporatist frenzy for open markets and free trade, nothing and nobody in the Western world escapes it; corporatism has successfully integrated most of the world, starting with the West, in its immanent grasp. The imbrication is so strong as to disallow any outside. As Althusser himself had realized, the belief that one is outside of ideology is the strongest proof one has been co-opted: “those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology” (163).

While not conflating the immanence of corporatism with Althusser’s view of ideology, my point directs attention to the impossibility of an outside to neoliberalism as it functions in the world today. My invocation of Althusserian theory – which does not align well with the overarching theory of this dissertation, since Deleuze and Guattari deny the existence of ideology as a category separate from language – serves to point out the fallacy of believing in any outside forces capable to overturning corporatism from an untainted external position. In other words, in the Western world especially, we are all always-already corporatist and neoliberalized, and the sooner we realize it, the sooner we can start working toward establishing our lines of flight rather than trying to devise militant *dei-ex-machina* to come to come to our rescue.

In all fairness, toward the end of her article, Guthman gestures toward the immanence of corporatism, noticing that “it is difficult to know what something outside neoliberalism might look like when all is seen as neoliberalism” (1180-81). The same position is echoed by other articles that start from the premise of

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showcased – through 100 days of the hundred-mile diet. The show is available for viewing online for people in Canada: [http://100mile.foodtv.ca/show/episode\\_guide](http://100mile.foodtv.ca/show/episode_guide).

neoliberal omnipresence and point to the locavore trend as a movement that is worth watching because of its potential to change the course of corporatism... In all of these articles, however, the prominence of neoliberalism as the large-looming problem obliterates the overarching corporatist system that employs neoliberal tactics among others. It is true that neoliberalizing moves are the most visible macro-economical aspects of corporatism, but the submerged part of the iceberg might be both more significant and yield more possibilities for alternatives if given a second glance.

Robin Roff and Gwendolyn Blue, for example, both recognize the unavoidable neoliberal character of food activism, but go in different directions. In her article “Shopping for change? Neoliberalizing activism and the limits to eating non-GMO,” Roff argues that “market-based activism and its goals of ‘ethical consumption’ and ‘freedom of choice’” activist practices support food manufacturers’ interests and “reinforce current trends towards processed and pre-fabricated meals” (513). Blue, on the other hand, looks for the possibilities opened by locavore-type alternatives, which, she asserts, represent “the logical, practical and vital extension of contemporary political dynamics” (n. pag.). Channelling Foucault, she recognizes that “they manifest at a biopolitical as well as political level. They engage power at the level of life itself” (n. pag.).

In their productive diversity, these critiques point both to the importance and to the possibilities opened up by imaginative and creative alternatives. In spite of a residual nostalgia with the ideas of resistance and militant activism of formally organized collectives, they also indicate an appetite for a different kind

of alternatives, ones that better speak to the present conditions of corporatism, and that may prove more effective in changing it. Even though I have been heralding the locavores as the epitome of this new type of activism, I want to take a step back and regard them critically, pointing to problems and potential pitfalls in their arguments.

### **Locavore Problem: reactionary return to a romanticized past**

My main point of contention with the locavore movement is its tendency to romanticize the past, more specifically, the traditional way of preparing and eating, which, while less egregious in itself, has the potential of slipping into a reactionary glamourization of the past as a whole. The prominence of favourable examples from the past in these writings, however, functions more as a rhetorical device than an injunction to turn back the clock. The locavores support their claims with events and ways of living, eating, and performing agricultural tasks that actually existed in the past to prove the applicability of their thesis: that one can actually live ecologically, because, look, it has actually happened for most of the history of humanity. They are also cautious to infer that these examples can cause dangerous slippages into a wholesale reactionary stance, with the potential of their entire stance being discounted based on charges of anti-progressive infatuation with the past.

It would not be difficult, though, to level those charges when one reads seemingly wide-eyed remarks such as:

[Dr. William] Rees [developer of the “ecological footprint” model] traces the roots of his eco-footprint brainwave to a single meal on his mother’s family farm in southern Ontario when he was a boy. It was the early 1950s, “the pre-tractor days,” and some thirteen brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles were gathered on his grandmother’s country porch for a workday lunch on a July afternoon. Young Bill looked down from his food and had a kind of epiphany. The baby carrots, the new potatoes, the fresh lettuce – there wasn’t a single foodstuff on that plate that he hadn’t had a hand in growing. It was a feeling, he remembers, like a rush of cold water being poured down his back. He was riveted. He was so excited he couldn’t eat his lunch.

It was, like, everything was *connected*. (Smith and MacKinnon 8)

The sense of marvelling at the parade of fresh vegetables that one prepares to eat after having grown them can hardly be conveyed to someone who has never gardened and experienced the extraordinary sense of accomplishment that the simple natural process of growing greens can impart. MacKinnon does a good job of describing the emotions involved, but, to a cynic – or an academic, even though the two words are not necessarily interchangeable – this description reads as corny promo for gardening. It’s all a little too picture-perfect: the “brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles” gathered around the table for a good-old traditional family meal; the colourful meal of “baby carrots, the new potatoes, the fresh lettuce.” The entire quote paints too stereotypical an image of agriculture, one that, as consumers, we are bombarded with constantly in real-

life advertising, in an attempt to elicit those hearth-loving feelings and connect them to a certain product, irrespective of its connection to actual farming or agriculture. So scepticism is warranted. But then comes the punch line: “It was, like, everything was *connected*.” An irreverent mix of irony and seriousness rears its head in this conclusion to the picture-perfect revelation that yielded the footprint model; first, there’s the “like,” a morpheme with various grammatical values that has become a colloquial ubiquity, peppering unwarrantedly the speech of teenagers, and then spreading its colonization of spoken language to everyone else. Its appearance here, at the end of a rather solemn speech on the interconnectedness of humans with their food signals the writer’s own misgivings about the holier-than-thou message he is sending. It’s *like* he’s deliberately undermining his own point. But, of course, he’s merely proving that, even though summoning the past to justify steps for the future, he’s not advocating for an uncritical return to it.

The contrasting evidence provided, however, does promote a possible charge for idealizing the past. Alisa Smith points out that nowadays, “The lettuce was grown in Asia and came to port under a Panamanian flag-of-convenience. All is hidden and anonymous” (33). She further explains why this anonymity works:

The anonymity is in part a comfort: plastic-wrapped ground beef does little to remind you of the carcass of a cow. At the same time, packaged and processed foods share few of their secrets. From mad cow disease to *E. coli* bacteria to genetically modified ingredients, many North



Americans have begun to fear their daily nourishment; 300,000

Americans are hospitalized each year by the food they eat, while fully one-third of Canadians will suffer some kind of food-related illness this year. (48)

Smith thus jumps on the fear-mongering bandwagon to rally support to the idea of local eating, because local eating allows one to know where the food comes from, who grew it or raised it, and the short supply chain (from neighbouring farm to plate, for example) guarantees fewer chances for contamination, not to mention all the other benefits the locavores tout. In other words, the old-style connectedness prevented the perils of disconnected foodsheds that we experience these days.

Smith and MacKinnon press the point further to highlight the paradox of food alienation:

It isn't only that our food is travelling great distances to reach us; we, too have moved a great distance from our food. This most intimate nourishment, this stuff of life – where does it come from? Who produces it? How do they treat their soil, crops, animals? How do their choices – my choices – affect my neighbours and the air, land, and water that surrounds us? If I knew where my food and drink came from, would I still want to eat it? If even my daily bread has become a mystery, might that total disconnection be somehow linked to the niggling sense that at any moment apocalyptic frogs might start falling from the sky? (6-7)

MacKinnon emphasizes the close connections between the act of eating and the community one builds: knowing the history of one's food brings about knowledge of one's community and a responsibility for it. He also displays the close links between global fear mongering in light of the many food-borne pandemics in recent years (mad cow disease, avian flu, swine flu) and food resources. The paragraph neatly sums up not only why one should take charge of one's food supply, but also why it is an alternative to the present way of life. If one feels secure about one's basic necessities, one might be less amenable to be co-opted in the corporate molar aggregates.

Barbara Kingsolver echoes this opinion when she suggests that knowing the origins and characteristics of one's food can make one feel empowered: "Knowing the secret natural history of potatoes, melons, or asparagus gives you a leg up on detecting whether those in your market are wholesome kids from a nearby farm, or vagrants who idled away their precious youth in a boxcar" (10). Kingsolver metaphorically plays on the stereotypes with a strong intent here. She has a point to make, an argument to support, and many readers to convince. What's more, she does not shy away from capital-P politics in order to drive her point home:

The same disconnection from natural processes may be at the heart of our country's shift away from believing in natural processes. In the past, principles of natural selection and change over time made sense to kids who'd watched it all unfold...For modern kids who intuitively believe in the spontaneous generation of fruits and vegetables in the produce

section, trying to get their minds around the slow speciation of the plant kingdom may be a stretch. (11)

Kingsolver seems to be saying that merely using examples from the way things were done in the past does not make one reactionary. In fact, she turns the table on the argument and proves how anti-progressive beliefs emerge in the empty space that cultural amnesia opens.

There is little delusion on the part of Smith and MacKinnon when it comes to the pros and cons of the past as well. Smith spends the better part of the first chapter she authors (the two authors take turns writing the chapters in the book) musing about her grandmother's life and subtly demystifying the stereotypes associated with the past, as they reflect through the lives of grandparents. For Smith, the idealized domestic past is epitomized by two types of meals: "the grand New Year's, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas feasts" (26) balanced by the more mundane Sunday meals. Smith keeps her grandmother's *Good Housekeeping Cook Book*, "a World War II edition that my grandmother had relied on as a young wife and mother" (24) and refers to it throughout her year of living on the 100-mile diet.

What the author's foray into her grandmother's life occasions is the revelation of possible gender and class problems. The first presents the perils of supplementing women's labour, when reverting to a more "traditional" way of eating, since domestic work is still primarily performed by women; the second emerges because of the high prices that local food can carry, even if purchased in season. As Michael Pollan points out, "Not everyone can afford to eat high-

quality food in America, and that is shameful; however, those of us who can, should” (*Defense* 184). Pollan, who offers many prescriptions in his second book, still cannot get around the issue of class.

It may be these authors’ aim for people to emulate their example and start going to farmers’ markets, to local producers, or growing their own produce. However, that option presents little feasibility for people with less flexible jobs than freelance writers, as the authors of the two locavore books. People who are more integrated in the corporate global aggregate, working so-called nine-to-five jobs that usually extend into the late hours of the night without any pay for overtime, because the employee is supposed to have the ability to perform that job stellarly in the eight hours allotted, may not have the time to drive for hours in search of local wheat that Smith had assumed “it grew everywhere” (25), but was disappointed to discover Vancouver and surrounding area an exception. If one found oneself without it, though, finding local wheat would not equate a sandwich on the plate: one would have to grind it, sift it, mix it with yeast, water, salt and other ingredients, proof the dough, knead it, let it rise, bake it, let it cool, in order to have a lowly sandwich<sup>17</sup>. It’s true that the sandwich would taste fantastic, but who has the time to even think about the laborious process it entails? Shall we ask Grandma how much it took her? Or if she enjoyed it as much as her family enjoyed the results?

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<sup>17</sup> I am rather exaggerating the point here for the sake of argument; most people would probably buy a bread machine. However, I also have to note the resurgence, among self-proclaimed ‘foodies’, of the artisanal process of bread making as a backlash to the mass-produced, preservative-laden supermarket bread with a three-month shelf life.

Smith has the answer to that hypothetical question: she shows her perplexity when her grandmother, the most accomplished cook she knows, confesses to hating the whole process. The writer recounts how her grandmother's life and role in the family revolved around preparing elaborate, elegant, and standard-setting meals for the family. Smith's impression is that

Meals were the all-important social glue to my grandmother. My family went over to her house every Sunday for about fifteen years, from the time she moved to the city of Victoria to be near my mother, her eldest daughter, until she moved into a senior's apartment with no kitchen four years ago. (26)

Imagine Smith's surprise when, years later, she asks for her grandmother's noodle casserole recipe and gets a list of ingredients that comprises pre-packaged soups and canned salmon, a recipe which only requires combining. She declares her amazement at "how 'packaged' this recipe was" (27). Shortly afterwards, the idyllic image of the eminent homemaker grandmother, revelling in her role as domestic matriarch, crumbles when she tells her granddaughter simply "I never liked to cook" (27). This incident, subtly detailed by Smith, sums up the problem with romanticizing the culinary past of the Western world: laborious cooking, or food preparation in general, adds to women's work, rather than 'making the family come together' or making them spend any kind of 'quality time'.

The subtle manner in which these authors deal with the potential pitfalls of the locavore movement, such as the apparent tendency to idealize the past, or to blur gender and class differences, indicates the level of thoughtful analysis of

today's corporatist situation, one in which agricultural mega-businesses are deliberately depleting the world's edible plant variety by modifying plants genetically, by controlling seed types and their behaviour and by dictating which plants humans will consume. Seen from this perspective, the people who want to live off their lands, and get to know their food producer and make a decision about what they eat become anti-poverty crusaders: seed saving and heirloom varieties preservation are the new human rights<sup>18</sup>.

Hyperbole aside, Kingsolver repeatedly warns that depletion of seed stock leads to poverty, not only in terms of plant variety, but also on a human scale: "Garden seed inventories show that while about 5,000 nonhybrid vegetable varieties were available from catalogs in 1981, the number in 1998 was down to 600" (53). Corporations love growth and hate complexity. They want to channel their forces toward a simple way of increasing their dominance, and they prefer to do it by remaining limber and flexible. The fewer SKUs<sup>19</sup>, the

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<sup>18</sup> Vandana Shiva – prominent environmental activist focused on exposing the perils behind patenting seeds and thus privatizing the age-old custom of seed-saving and free exchange – explains the connections thus:

The universalization of patents to cover all subject matter, including life forms, has resulted in patents invading our forests and farms, our kitchens, and our medicinal plant gardens. Patents are now granted not just for machines but for life forms and biodiversity; not just for new inventions but for the knowledge of our grandmothers. Indigenous knowledge which India has used over centuries for everyday needs— *neem*, *haldi*, *karela*, *jamun*, *kali mirch*, *bhu-aml*a and hundreds of other plants used in food and medicine— are in imminent danger of being patented by the western world for commercial gain. This is tantamount to biopiracy. And contrary to popular perception, western-style IPR [Intellectual Property Rights] systems, especially US patent laws, far from preventing intellectual piracy; seem to in fact promote it, even at times violating human rights. (3-4)

<sup>19</sup> Stock keeping unit (SKU) is a unique identifier for any distinct product as an inventory item usually in the form of a bar code. "As part of a system for inventory control, the SKU represents the smallest unit of a product that can be sold from inventory, purchased, or added to inventory" (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.pag.).

better. 600 are still probably too many, and the rise to prominence of the dominant crops in the U.S. (corn and soy) demonstrate it plainly. Moreover “Modern U.S consumers now get to taste less than 1 percent of the vegetable varieties that were grown here a century ago” (49). While theorists debate the neoliberalization of food activism by framing it as consumer choices, the chest of edible treasures is emptying, it seems, under the corporatist watch bent on impoverishing species abundance so as to cut complexity and redundancy, and promote easier manageability.

The question of poverty, however, emerges more starkly when one looks away from the first world and its petty GM vs. heirloom plant squabbles. The reduction of plant species impacts directly not merely on the quality of food consumed, but, more importantly, on its very availability. Kingsolver turns her analysis away from the U.S. to show that

As recently as ten years ago farmers in India still grew countless indigenous oil crops, including sesame, linseed, and mustards; in 1998 all the small mills that processed these oils were ordered closed, the same year a ban on imported soy oil was lifted. A million villagers lost their mills, ten million farmers lost their living, and GM soy found a vast new market. (49)

The writer decries the helpless situation of people affected by the depletion of plant variety, but, more importantly, she underscores the rhizomatic connections between the mechanisms of corporatism that made it happen: neoliberal free trade treatises, working hand-in-hand with increasingly powerless governments

bowing to the lobbying pressure of corporate domination. The result: poverty, dependence, inclusion into the global corporatist system, on the one hand, while, on the other, opening new markets, less complexity, and, most importantly, the much-coveted growth<sup>20</sup>. The push-and-pull of corporatism does not allow for one to happen without the other, and Kingsolver and other alternative-seeking writers demonstrate their understanding and their interest in identifying positive solutions for moving forward rather than endlessly critiquing others' actions.

However, stories of poverty and disenfranchisement are so pervasive 'on the other side of the globe' that people in the Northern hemisphere have come to expect them. How would a respectable tax-opposing middle class citizen of the U.S. or Canada feel good about herself if not by writing a cheque for a charity that promises to feed an African child for only \$1.00 a week<sup>21</sup>? Michael Pollan brings the problem closer to home when he shows how the system has reduced American farmers to poverty, in spite of hard work, huge crops, and that much-praised rugged individualism. The corn paradox makes it so that American

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<sup>20</sup> Please see the Introduction for a detailed discussion of the importance of growth to corporatism

<sup>21</sup> The notion of "aid" for so-called developing nations, especially in Africa, has started to lose credibility even outside of academic circles, where its critique has a long tradition. Richard Dowden, director of the Royal African Society – self-proclaimed "Britain's prime Africa organisation," "more than 100 years old" ("Who We Are") – argues that aid constitutes around 50% of some African countries' budgets which makes them "more dependent...than they were in colonial times." He points out that aside from the "unequal relationships" aid "creates and sustains," "much of it is spent in the donor countries in the form of consultancies and goods" ("Aid 'is not solution' for Africa" n. pag.). More recently, Dambisa Moyo, Zambian born, Harvard- and Oxford-educated economist, argues in *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* that the more than \$ 1 trillion in post WWII-foreign aid to Africa has only propagated poverty (from 10% of people living in poverty in the 1970s to 70% nowadays), because it breeds corruption, "causes inflation," "kills off the export sector" and allows African governments "to abdicate their role" responsibilities as providing healthcare and education (Wente F7).



farmers have to plant and harvest more and more each year in order to stay afloat; doing so, however, floods the market with cheap corn that drives prices down ever more, while costs remain the same or keep rising, under the pressure of corporations to acquire the most competitive (read state-of-the-art genetically engineered, therefore expensive) seeds and equipment that buries them more and more in debt.

Thus Pollan notes “since the heyday of corn prices in the early seventies, farm income has steadily declined along with corn prices, forcing millions of farmers into debt and thousands of them into bankruptcy each week” (*Omnivore* 53). The paradox, in a putative free market economy is that while “Iowa State University estimates that it costs roughly \$2.50 to grow a bushel of Iowa corn,” “in October 2005 Iowa grain elevators were paying \$1.45, so the typical Iowa farmer is selling corn for a dollar less than it costs him to grow it” (53). In spite of this puzzling situation, corn production steadily increases year after year, because farmers, working in a late-capitalist, corporate model get compensated for growth. The system values growth not only when it comes to corporations, but generalizes this trait as a desirable quality for other types of activity, because the mechanisms of the immanent system have to remain the same for it to thrive. Corporatism can afford losses in one area, if it ensures the entirety of the plane works seamlessly.

The paradox persists because its fiction sustains the interests of the system and offers the illusion of neoliberal axiomatic uniformity: the free market is the best way to do business and it applies to all types of businesses, therefore

agriculture must submit to it. The vicious circle that corn evinces goes further. Even though George Naylor, the corn farmer Pollan profiles in *Omnivore*, argues that “the free market has never worked in agriculture and it never will,” he also dismisses growing anything else because he fears there would be no demand for it: “What am I going to grow here, broccoli? Lettuce?... The market is telling me to grow corn and soybeans, period.” (54) Naylor has thus internalized, in spite of himself, the neoliberal chant that states a free market will balance demand with supply.

The reality behind the neoliberal myth has corporatism forcing governments to subsidize the huge yields of corn year after it, and the beneficiaries, contrary to the same neoliberal myth, are not the farmers. Pollan explains:

So the plague of cheap corn goes on, impoverishing farmers (both here and in the countries to which we export it), degrading the land, polluting the water and bleeding the federal treasury, which now spends up to \$5 billion a year subsidizing cheap corn. But though those subsidy cheques go to the farmer (and represent nearly half of net farm income today), what the Treasury is really subsidizing are the buyers of all that cheap corn... ‘it’s for Cargill and Coca-Cola’. (54-55)

Pollan summarizes the intertwined mechanisms that propel corporatism and show its immanent colours in the area of agriculture. The crops that corporatism favours are ecologically unsustainable, nutritionally reductive (as Kingsolver shows), and quite noxious to human health. But due to the tremendous benefits

to corporations, and because these two plants manage to live the corporatist dream of continuous growth, they are the protégés of the food industry. They are also what the locavores and the slow foodies set out to change.

### **Looking for Alternatives**

In fact, individual action and personal changes are the crux of the locavore movement. Resistance, however, may not be the first issue on the locavores' agenda, as it belongs to different frame of thought, one that posits the binary of the dominant versus the dominated, or of hegemonic powers over their underlings. The game of power, nevertheless, has long ceased to unfold in this manner, and corporatism certainly works in more complex ways that obscure not only the sources of power, but also the mechanisms of its operation.

Gone, it seems, are the days of political mobilization of the masses. The masses nowadays mobilize differently – see the unprecedented networking style of the Obama campaign as benchmark-setting precedent<sup>22</sup>. The locavores, I would argue, usher in a new style of building alternatives, with the ultimate aim of changing the present situation. Their style is rhizomatic and corresponds to the manner corporatism organizes itself. The locavores have undertaken small-scale living experiments illustrates personal quests of becoming, of drawing

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<sup>22</sup> Barack Obama's presidential campaign was unprecedented in its use of grass-roots organizing and large-scale fundraising of small contributions. Time magazine asserts that "the exact size can be measured in various ways. [Obama] controls a 13 million-name e-mail list, which is nearly the size of the NRA [National Rifle Association] and the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] combined. Three million people have given him money; 2 million have created profiles on Obama's social-networking site. More than 1.2 million volunteered for the campaign,

lines of flight, i.e., attempts at divesting desiring-production from the immanence of corporatism by creating alternatives. They exemplify efforts to de-link from various large-scale forms of globalization, and of getting away from the grasp of corporate bio-power. The fact that the locavore texts describe one-year-trials pessimistically speaks to the impossibility of inventing a quick-fix solution to our present situation. Nonetheless, these locavore quests are creative attempts at not only imagining, but changing by becoming, i.e., by adhering to a mode of flexible subjectivity, one that respects and aligns itself with minority politics, rather than seeking power. They aim less to deliver the panacea than to show that there exist ways and creative solutions to move the plane of immanence – the interconnected corporatist system of our time – in different directions.

As the Introduction describes it, corporatism is the latest phase of capitalism, one in which corporations dominate the scene and in which people's lives are completely entwined with corporate logic, not necessarily in a helpless way, but more in symbiotic relationship. Our present situation does not constitute a break from capitalism, but rather its continuation, its latest stage. Arguably, neoliberalism and the increased pace of globalization both characterize corporatism<sup>23</sup>. Corporatism thrives on neoliberal measures and

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which has trained about 20,000 in the business of community organizing" (Scherer n. pag.).

<sup>23</sup> See for example the discussions in May-June 2009 about U.S. protectionism measures built-in the Obama Administration economic bailout package, which go against neoliberal measures. *The Globe and Mail* reports that "World Bank president Robert Zoellick warned that protectionist Buy American rules in U.S. stimulus spending threaten the global economy" (Chase n. pag.). In spite of these anti-neoliberal State-

strives toward globalization, i.e., toward engulfing the entire world under its immanent grasp.

Corporatism refers to the overtaking of biopower by corporations (in Foucauldian terms), or to the appropriation/construction of the plane of immanence of desiring-production by the same corporations. The notion of desiring-production already points to the imbrication of economic production with the reproduction of life. What that means, therefore, is that life itself, in all of its aspects, has become the domain of formerly exclusive economic entities, to the detriment of the State, which used to have the upper hand when it came to the administration of life. In other words, corporations have made it their business to be concerned with both economic production and the less abstract motor behind it, i.e., the social force driving it, people's lives and all of the other connected issues.

Corporations have thus created themselves a plane of immanence, in which people are rhizomatically connected to industrial machines, to the more abstract bottom line, and to the even more abstract stock exchange performance of a particular company. Since corporatism is about biopower, it's nowhere more intimate than in the questions of literal physical sustenance<sup>24</sup>. Food, therefore,

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directed measures, corporations still retain the lead in the system, as both the quote and the bailout money doled out to corporations imply.

<sup>24</sup> Marion Nestle points to the close interconnectedness of politics, economic interests and biological life in her *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. As editor of the ambitious 1988 *Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health*, she was told that

No matter what the research indicated, the report could not recommend 'eat less meat' as a way to reduce intake of saturated fat, nor could it suggest restrictions on intake of any other category of food. In the industry-friendly climate of the Reagan administration, the producers of foods that might be affected by such

together with the complex relations and processes it entails – growing/harvesting in agriculture, distribution chains, be they large-scale ending up in the supermarket after thousand-kilometres long trips, or in the farmers’ markets around the corner from the field where they grew, and preparation, be it large-scale manufacturing or simple home kitchen assembly – gives us a privileged view of the corporatist system’s workings by virtue of both its complexity and its closeness to human life. It might also cast a light onto new ways of organizing the present world, after the imminent axiomatic integration of the locavore alternatives into the immanent system. As the concluding example about Hellmann’s Mayonnaise indicates, the axioms have been already been released and put into (profitable) practice.

## Theory

As the first chapter of this dissertation shows, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss, in the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), ways of escaping the plane of immanence of capitalism, of creating alternatives that would produce an equitable society. One of the solutions they propose is the creation of *lines of flight*, “which never consist in running away from the world, but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a whole in a pipe... lines of flight are realities” (204). A line of flight therefore does not constitute an escapist fantasy, but a way of modifying present

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advice would complain to their beneficiaries in Congress, and the report would never be published. (3)

As a result, “agency officials had learned to avoid such interference by resorting to euphemisms, focusing recommendations on nutrients rather than on the foods that contain them, and giving a positive spin to any restrictive advice about food. Whereas ‘eat less beef’ called the industry to arms, ‘eat less saturated fat’ did not” (3).

social conditions. Deleuze and Guattari decline any metaphoric use of their terminology: “There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic about a line of flight” (204), they insist. In their view, the way to change the status quo is the creation of these alternatives by “a single group or individual [which] functions as a line of flight” (204). The line of flight inscribes itself in the general quest for *becoming* in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, i.e., the acceptance of constant transformation of subjectivity as a mode of resistance to the regimentation of social systems. A pivotal process in Deleuze and Guattari’s alternative to capitalism, becoming liberates the flows of desire from the economic molar assemblage thus allowing the transformation of subjectivity into a more supple being-in-the-moment, called *haecceity*. This ever-transforming haecceity can, in turn, cause runoffs in the form of lines of flight, which allow desire to take forms and imagine alternatives to the existing situation.

Sounds easy, right? Imagine an unfettered desire, a different way of existing in the moment, and corporatism comes undone. The problem is that even if your desire were actually a novel one, unconnected to the network of desiring-production within the plane of immanence, corporatism still would not let you off the hook so easily. What corporatism does to manages novelty and integrate it back into the fold is create a new axiom for each new situation. Just like in mathematics, “the axioms are primary statements, which do not derive from or depend upon another statement... a primary proposition” (*Plateaus* 462). One such axiom states that one the main aims of corporations is growth. The concept of growth and its desirability have become so synonymous with

corporate business that the axiom does not appear as such any more, but only implied, in statements like “Our deep roots in local cultures and markets around the world give us our strong relationship with consumers and are the foundation for our future growth” (Unilever), or “Our vision for sustainable growth encompasses not only our environmental footprint, but the impact we have on our communities” (Walmart), or, finally “the Zucker family is committed to the continued success and growth of Hudson’s Bay Company and its related entities” (HBC).

Deleuze and Guattari further insist “The axioms of capitalism are obviously not theoretical propositions or ideological formulas, but operative statements that constitute the semiological form of Capital and that enter as component parts into assemblages of production, circulation, and consumption” (461). The capitalist axiomatic is immanent to the relations of production, general enough to be flexible and to allow for change, and abstract enough to cover a variety of phenomena, from human interrelations to financial markets. The axiomatic is immanent also because it is generated by the conditions of the market and acts on the social machine in the interest of the economic plane of immanence that generates it.

Moreover, the axiomatic is endlessly flexible: for each new situation, a new axiom is added: “The strength of capitalism indeed resides in the fact that its axiomatic is never saturated, that it is always capable of adding a new axiom to the previous ones” (*Anti-Oedipus* 250). It is this flexibility of the axiomatic



that allows capitalism to tend to its limit, and simultaneously to avert this limit, and to change it.

Corporatism, as the heir of capitalism, has not only inherited the agility of capitalism in dealing with adverse situations, but it has also improved on it. Aside from new products at your local supermarket<sup>25</sup> much touted as local and premium priced accordingly, the Food Network has picked up Smith and MacKinnon's book and made it into a reality show, called unsurprisingly "The 100-Mile Challenge". A number of questions arise from this new development (the show started airing on April 5, 2009 in Canada and its episodes are available online after they air): Does this mean the locavores have managed to steer the plane of immanence in a different direction, or that they've just been co-opted? If so, is their cooptation a triumph or a sell-out?

In lieu of an answer, one final example will support the argument about the nature of corporate immanence: that it co-opts every trend by emitting an axiom, by adding to its primary rules of functioning. Corporatism thus lets itself be changed by the marginal interests that gather enough critical mass to become significant. As a result, and for the sake of argument, one can optimistically say that every seemingly loony individual act or personal choice matters, because

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<sup>25</sup> Canadian supermarket chain Loblaw has implemented a new advertising campaign called "Grown close to home" in August 2009. The company claims "We have partnered with growers across the country to bring you the best selection of produce that is GROWN CLOSE TO HOME™" (Superstore, *sic*). The campaign showcases a number of Canadian farmers from whom the chain sources "farm-fresh" local products that it transports directly to the stores. The campaign enlists the popularity of the locavore movement, while, in fact, playing the national card. Given Canada's size of almost ten million square kilometres, "Canadian grown" can hardly equal "local" in the locavore sense.

any of those can give way to its own runoff, its own line of flight. Corporations will always be at the ready to catch it.

Case in point: Unilever's new campaign for its Hellmann's Real Mayonnaise, named, whose tagline is "Eat Real. Eat Local." Hellmann's promotional website begins with a video in which, in true locavore style, we are informed that even though Canadians may think of themselves as pretty self-sufficient,

we import more than 53% of our vegetables and almost all of our fruit. In forty years, red meat imports have gone up 600%... For every apple we export, we import about five... If this continues, we may lose the ability to produce many of the foods we eat. ([www.eatrealeatlocal.ca](http://www.eatrealeatlocal.ca))

The similarities become more striking when Unilever – one of the largest consumer products corporations in the world – starts lecturing on miles travelled by our food: "The Kitchener-Waterloo area is surrounded by fertile farmland, yet the average distance travelled by fifty-eight imported foods commonly eaten in Waterloo is 4497 km." The short video continues by rehashing the arguments about the loss of nutritional value in well-travelled "fresh food," compared to local food, which can reach our plates within hours of being harvested.

Rhetorically, we are asked if more of our food should not be produced "here, at home," and then prompted to help "our farmers grow more of the foods we eat here, in Canada." The answer to all of these problems of interloping food is to "Choose Canadian": "Start looking for [Canadian food], asking for it, and filling

your bag with it.” We can start to get more information at the “Eat Real. Eat local” website.

It is true: Unilever, positioning Hellmann’s as a lifestyle brand, has basically summed up the locavore ethos here. Their website, with the Hellmann’s logo looming large on it, offers detailed information on retailers, farmers, and farmers’ markets across Canada. It provides detailed downloadable documents, called “Hellmann’s® and Evergreen Guide to Local Food,” tailored by geographical region, (re)acquainting people with their local food landscapes – including fruits and vegetables that are in season in different months of the year – and with behaviours that go along with this way of eating locally, such as preparing your own food or growing it yourself.

As Chapter 2 shows when analyzing the case of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, this is not the first time Unilever proves very quick at constructing axioms that appropriate a growing popular concern and transform it into a brand image that propels or maintains that particular brand into/as a market share leader. Interestingly, both campaigns have the word “real” in them, which traces, alongside the corporation’s fetish with defining reality, the process of capturing a line of flight, a runoff and transforming it into a corporatist money maker, while also appearing as a selfless do-gooder.

The strategy is working, and it leaves one necessarily pondering many questions, such as: When the alternatives have been axiomatized, do they still count as alternatives? Should one rejoice at the speed with which corporatism has integrated this new trend (about two-three years; Unilever started this

campaign in May 2009)? I may have to sum up the conclusion to this chapter in someone else's words, because not only does she capture the essence of the process, but the conditions of her utterance symbolize the rapidity with which corporatism integrates not only new ideas, but new methodologies. Namely, the way in which Unilever has chosen to publicize this campaign circumvents traditional radio-TV-print media ad campaigns in favour of viral internet distribution. This time, however, they have not only 'leaked' a YouTube video – as was the case with the flagship Dove "Evolution" ad – but have tapped into the ever-expanding food blogging community (which, I have to confess, is how I found out about it). The advertising agency handling the Hellmann's account has invited a number of bloggers to Toronto, treated them to a stay there, complete with visits to luxury restaurants that showcased gourmet meals with local ingredients, all, in the words of one blogger with "no obligation or contract required of me to write about it" ([ugonnaeatthat.com](http://ugonnaeatthat.com)). The blogger did write about it, though, because that's why they have blogs, and one reader, named Bethany, commented that:

At first I was a little annoyed... seems everyone wants to profit off the better choices we're making for food - and the earth in general. But this seems to actually pass off as authentic. It will be large corporate companies like this that really help to make change. it's rather unfortunate - but that's the way we roll as a society. So keep it rollin'!  
(Pearce n. pag.).

## Conclusion

### Epilogue: Where Do We Go from Here?

*Schizophrenia as a positive process is inventive connection, expansion rather than withdrawal. Its twoness is a relay to a multiplicity... Not aimlessly. Experimentally. The relay in ideas is only effectively expansive if at every step it is also a relay away from ideas into action. Schizophrenia is the enlargement of life's limits through the pragmatic proliferation of concepts.*

(Brian Massumi, A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 1)

A global financial recession provided the example galvanizing the many aspects of corporatism in the opening of this dissertation. Another, arguably more catastrophic example lends itself as flashpoint to the conclusion: the ever-growing, seemingly unstoppable oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. On April 20, 2010, a British Petroleum (BP) operated oil rig off the coast of Louisiana, Deepwater Horizon, exploded “and then sank, breaking from an oil well on the seabed 1,500 metres below” (CBC News, “Obama,” n. pag.). Oil began spilling, at the initially estimated rate of “of up to 800,000 litres, or 5,000 barrels, a day and neither the U.S. Coast Guard nor oil giant BP are predicting when it might stop” (“Obama” n. pag.). The latest estimates, however, point to the “broken well head leaking up to 60,000 barrels of oil a day” (CBC News, “BP Enlists,” n. pag.), or, in other words, around twelve times more than initially projected. It took the oil mass nine days to travel the eighty kilometres to the coast of Louisiana (CBC News, “Massive,” n. pag.). In the mean time, the cleaning-up efforts have totalled a paltry “25,223 barrels on 6/29/10” (Governor of Florida n. pag.) – therefore less than half of what the well is estimated to leak in one day.

This event not only serves to illustrate the immanent plane of corporatism that this dissertation argues for – nor did I use it because it makes the image of the red drop of ink in a glass of water from Chapter 1 become real – but it also brings up a questions that flows out of this thesis: what is the responsibility of the corporation and what role remains for the state to perform? And what about all the other, unnamed desiring machines implicated: people, animals, habitats? Moreover, the event of the spill highlights the need for imaginative alternatives that renounce the ambition of totality in favour of the creation of more modest inroads that may have more success at changing the system than an attempted wholesale solution would. Just like the locavores described in Chapter 4 aim to change one aspect of their living and therefore give rise to a potential line of flight that might just alter the plane of immanence of corporatism, so, too, as the BP example shows, might one look in unexpected directions – a Hollywood actor and a director with an interest in and knowledge of marine life – for solutions, even if their solutions might prove fruitless on trial.

In the aftermath of environmental disaster caused by BP, many voices have joined the chorus of indignation: the US president has not done anything and he should have; he has done too much, and it is all wrong; who is the US government to reprimand a private corporation, etc. The reaction of US President Brack Obama was to halt any “new offshore oil drilling leases until a review of the accident that caused a massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is done and

new safety measures are in place” (“Obama”). It came on April 30, ten days after the explosion.

The U.S. president’s decision illustrates an instance of the State overcoding the desire that flows across the immanent plane of corporatism. However, it did not take long for a new axiom to be emitted in order to tame the State’s overcoding attempt and render it useless: a New Orleans judge, Martin Feldman, “acting on a request from a group of oil drilling and related service companies” blocked the President’s moratorium on June 22, 2010, because it “went too far and would have a permanent and harmful effect on the economy of the Gulf states” (Murray n. pag.). It was later revealed that the judge “owned shares in at least 17 oil and gas industry companies last year” (Williams n. pag.).

The immanence of corporatism makes even assemblages that traditionally belonged to the State and its apparatuses, such as the judiciary, work in its favour. There are no desires on the plane of immanence that can escape the production of corporatism. The federal judge, for example, had his money literally on the oil companies – having such significant financial investments in the business – and therefore his own desires become intextricably linked with the oil production that is the bread and butter of the offshore oil drillers.

The New Orleans judge and his ruling were not the only desiring machine to put the State overcoding in its place. While the U.S. President attempts to reassert the legitimacy of the State as a viable player on the corporatist plane, other politicians defer to corporate power and show that the

desiring-machines are well trained to recognize where their life-flows (read “paychecks”) are coming from. As a result of a meeting with Barak Obama, BP chief executive officer (CEO) Tony Hayward apologized and agreed to “to finance a \$20 billion fund to pay the claims of people whose jobs and way of life have been damaged by the devastating oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico” (CBS, “BP Agrees,” n. pag.). In response, Congress member Joe Barton of Texas has offered an apology to the CEO and the corporation. Claiming that he does consider BP “responsible for this accident,” Barton nonetheless declares that it is “a tragedy of the first proportion that a private corporation can be subjected to what I would characterize as a shakedown, in this case, a \$20 billion shakedown”<sup>1</sup> (Montopoli, n. pag.).

While the fund, even at that generous sum, does probably not even begin to cover the cost of returning the Gulf to its pre-spill state, the very fact of the payment as resolution to the environmental disaster caused by the Deepwater Horizon explosion points toward the nature of corporatism. This entire situation – oil spilling freely at unthinkable flows, affecting a complex environment whose balance had already been rendered unstable by excessive human activity – shows the inescapability of corporatism, the way in which all of us have a stake, to a varying degree, in every situation that takes place under corporatism. Where oil is concerned, most people drive vehicles or depend on transportation of

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<sup>1</sup> Surely, Barton’s response could be assigned to his embrace of conservatism to the point of complete dedication to neoliberalism and the eradication of State regulation. But aren’t those political stances part and parcel of the corporatist axiomatic and mundane operations? Doesn’t Barton’s gesture signify more than a belief in market self-regulation? His declaration of being “ashamed” (Montopoli, n. pag.) points directly to



different kinds for their food, clothes, or commute. Where the recipients of the BP reparation fund are concerned, haven't we all grown accustomed to cheap, plentiful, and ever-larger shrimp, even if we live thousands of miles away from where the crustacean lives or, more accurately, is farmed? These may seem like ready, simplistic, or even banal observations; they are things that everyone knows. However, that general knowledge works within corporatism to sustain, but also cover up this entanglement of all of our interests: desiring-machines, corporations, animals, plants, environments, etc.

Staying true to what I have called the "creative critique" methodology of this dissertation, I do not mean for these last pages to turn grim or fatalistic. Instead, I would like to turn attention to possibilities of turning the immanent plane of corporatism into something else or at least steering it in a different direction. After having displayed examples of the workings of corporatism in Chapter 2, I turned my attention to works of the imagination to investigate their responses and solutions, in Chapter 3, as well as to real-life examples, in Chapter 4. So, too, shall this Epilogue.

The crisis-management team in charge of 'controlling' the fallout from the Deepwater Horizon spill have turned to ask for help from very unlikely sources: filmmaker Kevin Costner. BP had "graciously" turned down film director James Cameron, who is "considered an expert in undersea filming," as he "has helped develop deep-sea submersible equipment and other underwater ocean technology for the making of documentaries" (Oreskovic, n. pag.). BP has

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his own desires, while his entire performance speaks to his machinic role in the process of corporatism facing its limits, averting them, and ultimately turning them beneficial.

instead turned to actor and filmmaker Kevin Costner to “buy 32 of Mr. Costner’s machines,” a type of “centrifuge originally developed and patented in 1993 by the Idaho National Laboratory” to separate oil from water (Fountain n. pag.).

While this act might spell more BP’s desperation than hope in its attempts to control or quell the oil spill and ensuing devastation, it also, methodologically, points to the need for creative alternatives, which would have to have been imagined before being put into action. It bespeaks the need for what Deleuze and Guattari have termed schizophrenia, “the universe of productive and reproductive desiring-machines, universal primary production as ‘the essential reality of man and nature’” (*Anti-Oedipus* 5). Schizophrenia thus constitutes the natural medium of life for people with their complex desires, and it offers the possibility of rescuing them from the repressive paranoia brought about by capitalism.

In the above epigraph, Brian Massumi explains schizophrenia as “a positive process [of] inventive connection, expansion rather than withdrawal” (1). Again and again we are told that resistance, “withdrawal” are not the right answers or the adroit responses to corporatism. Instead, bringing together unlikely elements might end up in never-before-imaginable results and alternatives, which, ultimately, could also lead to the “relay away from ideas into action” (1). And, who knows, it could be this type of action, based on imaginative ideas that makes corporatism’s gamble with its limit into a losing bet, resulting in this social machine’s impossibility to avert it. We might just end

up in schizophrenia: capitalism's "*absolute limit* that causes flows to travel in a free state on a desocialized body without organs" (*Anti-Oedipus* 246).

One of the main points of this dissertation is there might not be a wholesale solution that would make all of the problems of corporatism disappear all at once. That is why I thought it important to look at literature for both a description of corporatism and for possible creative solutions. That is also why the locavores provided an example of a potential, partial, solution – a line of flight that might change some of the conditions of corporatism, and might start taking it in a different direction. Maybe, based on their example or their partial and restricted results or lack thereof, some other group would start pursuing another idea that would transform them in yet another line of flight capable of taking the plane of immanence of capitalism in another direction. And so on. After all, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, "Individual or group, we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics, and zones marching to different beats and different in nature" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 202-3).

The point here is that, when one takes difference into account, there might not be any single holistic solution to the inequities and problems of this latest stage of capitalism, corporatism. A single solution negates the multitude of singularities, lines of flight, and haecceities and may just turn us back to the need for resolving those differences into identity. Instead, based on Deleuze and Guattari's injunctions, this dissertation proposes we look for more modest, smaller-scale experiments, for ingenious partial solutions that apply to some groups as potential ways of changing some features of corporatism.

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