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FABLES OF REGENERATION: MODERNISM, BIOPOLITICS, REPRODUCTION

By EVAN MAURO, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates a turn in the modernist period towards organicist and life-science frameworks to explain political conflicts. How is it, I ask, that organic form comes to be a leading aesthetic ideology in a period in which the reproduction of social relations was in crisis? In my introduction, I frame a historical argument that the remainder of the dissertation draws out in detail: modernism is best understood as a response to the failure of nineteenth-century liberalism's organization of social relations, and a politics of life in different guises—decadence, vitalism, organicism, and everyday life—is modernism's way of conceptualizing alternative modes of social reproduction under new, transnational conditions and pressures.

In the first half of the dissertation, I outline how the historical avant-garde's revolutionary aim to merge art with everyday life presumes that life can offer a new foundation for social organization beyond liberalism’s institutional forms. Turning to the Futurists in Italy, I argue for a more complex understanding of how intertwined discourses of national organicism and a revolutionary vitalism resulted in their self-contradicting political program for anti-liberalist and, occasionally, anti-colonial revolution that frequently exceeded its own self-imposed national limits. The dissertation’s second half shows how modernism’s politics of life were eventually recuperated to a liberal consensus in the twentieth century, first in William James’s figure of a new social body traversed by overwhelming and destabilizing sensations, which required better systems of self-management, and which, I argue, anticipates the regulated

national space of mid-century welfare state liberalism. Meanwhile, D. W. Griffith's compulsive return to scenes of rebirth in two films, *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916), expresses an ideology of imperial rebirth that rearticulates liberalism as the management of sensations and populations in America's turn of the century, transnational moment.

Focusing on two national contexts in which migration and imperialist expansion were transforming domestic politics, this study extends a recent turn towards transnational articulations of modernity, by reconsidering how the cultural forms emerging in these sites are marked by a biopolitical discourse that reimagines how social reproduction can take place.

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Somewhere in the final stages of writing this dissertation, I opened David Graeber's book *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. It told me that once you remove today's moralizing language and financial algorithms, some concept of debt, obligation, or reciprocity has been foundational to all sorts of social formations since, well, the beginnings of recorded time. (It's a big book.) I'm still not sure that debt is the best way to frame the kinds of cooperation and exchange that make up intellectual work, but at the end of the day, my name is the only one on the title page of this document. Some sort of accounting is necessary, so long as everyone mentioned here (and anyone left unmentioned) understands that I'm with Graeber's Rabelais: "God forbid that I should ever be out of debt!"

Imre Szeman took this project on, believed in it, and stayed with it through a job change, a cross-country move, and all the administrative wrangling these imply. He meanwhile put this work into conversation with fields and communities of scholars I would never have thought it had something to offer, which challenged me to think in ways I wasn't always immediately ready for, but eventually found a way into. I can only hope that he sees the trace of those new contexts and conversations in these pages, not to mention some of his own critical sense; when I read it, his influence jumps off every page. Mary O'Connor stepped in to offer guidance and focus at several critical moments, and her generosity and acumen as a critic and advisor was indispensable. Susan Searls-Giroux is exactly the kind of reader I needed, or everyone needs: she called out vagueness where she saw it, and pushed me to develop the few good ideas in here with her

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And Jaime, for whom a full accounting of my debts would be another dissertation in itself, in the sense that I wouldn't know where to start and, once started, wouldn't know how to finish: I dedicate these pages to you.

Introduction: The Politics of Formlessness

This dissertation starts from an observation that should sound less counterintuitive than it does: modernist thought was fixated on the concept of "life." That is, the period we know as a time of machine aesthetics, of mass cultural forms, of technological reproduction, and of the totalizing, rational administration of society, was less technophilic than all that would suggest. And though we can identify the modernist-era emergence of industrial agriculture and the scaling up of waste that, from the standpoint of today, require us to think past that era's framing of nature as some undifferentiated "standing reserve" for human use, modernists nevertheless had an active and searching interest in the categories of life and the organic.[1] Small wonder that they did, if we look only briefly at contemporaneous developments in the life sciences. Modernists were confronted with life's malleability in a series of discoveries that would be foundational to twentieth century biology: the neuron doctrine, posited in the late nineteenth century, discovered the autonomy and functional specialization of individual brain cells, leaving an older reticular theory of inflexible neural networks behind; cell theory was generally accepted by the end of the nineteenth century, and more extreme versions of it put forward the notion of a cellular-level evolutionary competition for bodily resources, or a constant internal antagonism of forces; microorganisms, suddenly everywhere, were found to cause disease, as Louis and Marie Pasteur's well-publicized research showed;

[1] The concept of nature as a "standing reserve" is elaborated in Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology."

and Röntgen's x-rays hinted at a fully transitive physical world, uncovering a more fluid relationship between solid objects and the spaces surrounding them, and giving rise to theories of liminal forces, ethers, and electric fields interpenetrating organic and non-organic matter. Life was suddenly unruly, flexible, and its boundaries unfixed; much philosophical speculation would follow. As Georg Simmel wrote in 1914, for modernists the concept of life is “dominant in the philosophical interpretation of the world”; it “represents the 'secret being' of the epoch” (13).

I'll return to Simmel in a moment, but his designation of “life” as his era's master-term, circulating through philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic discourses, was also an argument that life was a terrain of struggle, or a reified concept obscuring a series of contradictions and antagonisms. Simmel understood what my argument will explore in detail: that modernist “life” was political through and through. To come at the question of modernism's politics of life from a different angle, recall that several of the seminal theorists of biopower and biopolitics are recurrently drawn to the modernist period. Foucault's most direct treatment of biopolitics, in the final lecture of *Society Must Be Defended*, focuses on the development of state racism in the first half of the twentieth century, and though he elsewhere genealogizes the term within different political configurations, from the Keynesian welfare state (in *Security, Territory, Population*) to liberal and neoliberal governmental forms (*The Birth of Biopolitics*), he tends to only invoke the terms “biopower” and “biopolitics” when discussing political formations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*

abstracts Foucault's genealogy of early twentieth century biopolitics by elevating the genocidal logic of the camp, which emerges in the period "between 1890 and 1940," as the "*nomos* of the modern" and the period in which the "inner solidarity between democracy and totalitarianism" reveals itself (80, 166, 10). Roberto Esposito sets Agamben back on his feet by tracing specific articulations of biopolitics in the first half of the twentieth century, locating the emergence of the term itself in discourses of statecraft and social science that made up the intellectual formation undergirding the expansionist and exterminationist policies of Nazi Germany. Esposito's historicism underlines a critical point: biopolitics, the term and the concept, isn't a Foucauldian neologism, but a pre-existing field of research that emerged in the modernist period.[2] And so by pursuing biopolitical articulations in modernist writing, as my argument proposes to do, in a sense I'm following it back to its native soil.

One advantage to re-situating biopolitics at the point of its first conceptual elaboration is that a stubborn problem in its current theoretical uptake can be addressed. That problem stems from two different genealogies of biopolitics in Foucault: in one, it emerges from within modern liberalism as a necessary supplement to constitutionally limited government; in the other, it partitions the social whole along lines of healthy and sick, normal and pathological, under state racist and Fascist government. Foucault's double genealogy is an intentional challenge to the boundaries drawn between democracy and totalitarianism in postwar historical and political analysis, but it has had the collateral

[2] See Roberto Esposito's *Bios*, 16-32, for this early history of the concept of biopolitics. I'll return to the term's emergence in chapter 2, below.

effect of collapsing a spectrum of different politicizations of life in the modernist period into Fascist or protofascist thought. Just as Esposito's genealogy of the term biopolitics lends some historical density to the question of how biopolitics at the level of statecraft was possible, a closer reading of how liberalist and state racist versions overlapped, contradicted each other, and integrated elements of each other over the course of the twentieth century will offer some needed concretion and specificity to the concept itself. By returning to the politics of life in the modernist period, my aim is to trace the historical point of convergence between these two strains of biopolitical thought. I'll explore, over the course of four chapters, how figures of life, and specifically figurations of rebirth and regeneration, were initially a counterdiscourse to liberal capitalism's organization of social relations, but were recuperated and appropriated to midcentury governmental forms. These midcentury forms, all the result of a crisis in classical liberalism, include Fascism's ideology of total control over life and the social body, as well as what Étienne Balibar calls the "national-social state," or welfare state liberalism, whose defining characteristic is how it takes the security and risk of its population as a central concern and site of governmental intervention and institutional expansion.[3]

My argument proposes that the question of how life was politicized in the early

[3] In *Race, Nation, Class*, Balibar argues that the national-social state emerges from the ashes of classical liberalism in the early twentieth century: "what made it possible to resolve the contradictions capitalism brought with it and to begin to remake the nation form at a point when it was not even completed (or to prevent it from coming apart before it was completed), was the institution of the *national-social state*, that is, of a state 'intervening' in the very reproduction of the economy and particularly in the formation of individuals, in family structures, the structures of public health and, more generally, in the whole space of 'private life'. This is a tendency that was present from the very beginnings of the nation form—a point to which I return below—but one which has become dominant during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the result of which is entirely to subordinate the existence of the individuals of all classes to their status as citizens of the nation-state, to the fact of their being 'nationals' that is" (92).

twentieth century necessarily runs up against an older problematic that now looks far from settled: modernism's politics of form. The key register in which the counterdiscourse of life was articulated was in the modernist struggle against form: not only a rejection of specific aesthetic forms of the nineteenth century, but rather in modernism's renunciation of form itself. This is the pretext of Simmel's essay quoted above, and of his sense of what culture had become in 1914: that period's wide range of philosophical and aesthetic repudiations of formal conventions were not only about renovating specific forms, but about a political desire to transcend or explode form as such, and speak directly to some concept of life itself. Existing cultural forms, Simmel writes, “do not share the restless rhythm of life, its ascent and descent, its constant renewal [...]. Each cultural form, once it is created, is gnawed at varying rates by the forces of life” (11). Modernist anti-formalism, as I understand it, expresses a desire for new ways of knowing, perceiving, and feeling; it registers the hope, whether fully utopian or simply antinomian and iconoclastic, for new modes of social being and interaction. It was on the basis of some new and liberatory formlessness and potentiality that life entered modernist thought: life was the central concept in the influential vitalist philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche, William James, and Henri Bergson; it resides at the heart of the avant-garde notion of collapsing the distinction between art and everyday life, as my first section explores; and as I'll argue in my second section, it shapes the development of twentieth century psychology's concept of how sensation constitutes and destabilizes the subject, a discourse that itself influenced the development of early narrative film, which sought to

transcend form and manage audience sensation directly. In both sections, my reading of modernism's formal negations and experimentations draws from a critical tradition that reads form and formalism not as an evasion of politics, but as a crucial mediation of it. What a biopolitical analytic offers here is a way to reconstitute form's primary opposing term, and thereby restore a politics of life at the heart of modernism's anti-formalism. At the same time, and reciprocally, it reinterprets a significant strain of modernist culture as an important, if obscured, archive for contemporary theoretical and political investigations of the politics of life—an archive hidden, as it were, in plain sight.

I: Figuring Formlessness

But what, precisely, was the "crisis" in liberalism at the turn of the twentieth century? And if liberalism was in crisis, how did appealing to life constitute a counterdiscourse? Further, how was this counterdiscourse appropriated or recuperated to midcentury governmentalities? These are crucial historical questions for my study, and for the notion of modernist anti-formalism that I propose to analyze.

Slavoj Žižek is fond of observing that in the early twenty-first century, it is easier to imagine a global apocalypse than a political alternative to neoliberal capitalism;[4] the situation at the turn of the twentieth century was less imaginatively constrained. From the precursors to the national-social state in Bismarck's Germany and, eventually, progressivist America, to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, to the appropriation of

[4] As, for example, in Žižek 's recent essay "Living in the End Times," in which current predictions of ecological catastrophe are taken up in detail.

socialist struggles by reactionary nationalisms in Italy and then Germany, the ability to think of social forms outside of hegemonic liberalism, contractual government, and representative assemblies was, if anything, too easy. The proliferation of left and right positions against liberal democracy in this period, and the traffic in ideas between them, remains in many ways the political unconscious of modernist studies. George Sorel's anarcho-syndicalist *Reflections on Violence* (1908) called for workers to withhold their votes, as well as their labour, in order to expose the everyday violence of class society and the hegemonic form of bourgeois rule that structured and limited the parliamentary system that purportedly represented them. For Sorel, republican government was "the leadership of people void of ideas" (81), and should be replaced by more direct forms of democratic participation.[5] The antinomial relationship between liberal parliamentarianism and principles of participatory democracy would later reappear, transformed, in Carl Schmitt's treatise *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), and set the stage for Schmitt's juridical rationalization of the state of exception, or the suspension of parliamentary authority. Several canonical modernists, of course, had their own regrettable allegiances to emerging, anti-liberal ideologies of political party and reactionary nationalism. Meanwhile liberalism, though embattled, found its modernist

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[5] "Socialists should therefore abandon the attempt (initiated by the Utopians) to find a means of inducing the enlightened middle class to prepare the *transition to a more perfect system of legislation*; their sole function is that of explaining to the proletariat the greatness of the revolutionary part they are called upon to play. By ceaseless criticism the proletariat must be brought to perfect their organisations; they must be shown how the embryonic forms which appear in their unions may be developed, so that, finally, they may build up institutions without any parallel in the history of the middle class that they may form ideas which depend solely on their position as producers in large industries, and which owe nothing to middle-class thought; and that they may acquire *habits of liberty* with which the middle class nowadays are no longer acquainted" (Sorel 85-86).

defenders: while E. M. Forster would call his *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1938) "the reflections of an individualist and a liberal who has found liberalism crumbling beneath him" (72), Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis, and W. H. Auden found themselves defending liberalism more indirectly, retaining the critical, cosmopolitan individualism of Enlightenment liberal thought, even as they sometimes rejected, or at least made no case for, parliamentary politics.[6] And as Foucault's genealogy of liberal governmentality describes, the between-war period marked the first theoretical formulations of neoliberalism, whose insistent critique of the excesses of governmental *dirigisme* and faith in the subject's (or *homo oeconomicus*'s) critical individualism, now framed as "rational choice," became the first principle of a market-based neoliberal hegemony that swept Western democracies in the late 1970s. So in effect it may be necessary to see the modernist period itself as the beginning of a brief interregnum between two phases of liberal hegemony.

If liberalism was indeed in some sort of legitimation crisis, important cultural and economic implications follow. Franco Moretti's argument that modernism's millenarian spirit can be explained by a crisis in capital legitimation still holds true: the various claims to a modernist-era "crisis," whether it be of values, of modes of representation, of the subject, or of civilization itself careening towards the epochal trauma of the 1914-18 European war, tend to misunderstand the crisis's symptoms as causes. As Moretti argues,

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[6] Rebecca L. Walkowitz's recent study of modernist "critical cosmopolitanism" is a good exploration of this kind of recuperation and transformation of liberalism at the end of the imperial period (see her *Cosmopolitan Style*), and so is Douglas Mao's reading of the queer liberalisms, or critical individualisms, of sometimes anti-liberals Wyndham Lewis and W. H. Auden (in his "A Shaman in Common: Lewis, Auden, and the Queerness of Liberalism").

the real issue was the objective problem of a global crisis of overproduction, or the end of a purportedly self-regulating market's capacity to organize social relations.[7] Immanuel Wallerstein has argued that centrist liberalism was the ideological formation that accompanied the international trade system of the nineteenth century, navigating between a withering *ancien régime* and radical demands for popular sovereignty after the French revolution; liberal hegemony was also able to contain various social antagonisms, from women's and workers' movements to anticolonial uprisings, by creating a formally capacious, if in practice quite limited, concept of citizenship that sutured subjects to nation states.[8] And if, as Fredric Jameson argues, the nineteenth century's "national allegory" was in the process of disintegrating in the modernist period, then the cultural legitimation of a long, liberal phase of accumulation was effectively transitioning into something quite different.

Jameson's explanation of the breakdown of national allegory in the modernist period indicates a line that my dissertation will follow in greater detail: what he calls a "new libidinal apparatus," or a different formal organization of affect, outside an earlier identification of subjects with nation-states, is essential to understanding why modernist formal innovation happened at all, and why it took the specific forms that it did. Jameson writes that with modernism, "we mark the transformation of national allegory into what

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[7] Moretti's still-important *Signs Taken for Wonders* offers a reading of James Joyce "as the poet of the crisis of classical capitalism in its classical area of development," whose *Ulysses* "offers us a monumental autopsy of an entire social formation" (185).

[8] See Wallerstein's *The Modern World System IV: Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789-1914*, especially his chapter on the development of the category of citizenship over the course of the nineteenth century, pp. 143-217.

J.F. Lyotard has called a *libidinal apparatus*, an empty form or structural matrix in which a charge of free-floating and inchoate fantasy – both ideological and psychoanalytic – can suddenly crystallize, and find the articulated figuration essential for its social actuality and psychic effectivity" (95). In other words, modernism's self-conscious formal ruptures are indications of a new mode of feeling in search of a form. Elsewhere Jameson calls this affective confusion a "new psychic energy model" (11) corresponding to transnational forces that dislocate subjects from national imaginaries.[9] The specific forms that this amorphous libidinal apparatus took, from the Futurists' radical depersonalization of sense and affect to the more general avant-gardist negation of institutions and received genres, and from anti-sentimentalism in late nineteenth century American culture to the growth of psychological and visual discourses about managing sensation, are the bulk of the story this dissertation will try to tell.

In tracing modernism's various attacks on received forms as symptoms of the breakdown of a liberal political ontology, I seek to contribute to the kind of historical formalist revision of literary genres practiced recently by Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse. For both, tracing "the form of formlessness" through literary modernity reveals a conceptual and political opposition of the individual to the multitude, mass, or

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[9] All Jameson quotes in this section are from his *Fables of Aggression*. In that book, Jameson is interested in how Fascism and Communism emerge as new ideological mediators of the subject's place in the world, supplanting the nation; but these two "transnational" ideologies (in theory, perhaps, though in practice less so) are only ever, for Jameson, ideological screens for the social relations that global capitalism articulates. Elsewhere Jameson's category of the transnational forms of the modernist period is much broader: in his essay "Modernism and Imperialism," for example, the spatial gaps in modernist fiction by Forster and Joyce are homological to the very tension between nation and empire, or metropolis and colony, that were rendered visible in the period from the "scramble for Africa" in the 1880s to the 1914-1918 European War. My use of the concept of transnational forces disrupting national imaginaries follows the more expansive spirit, if not the letter, of Jameson's project.

population on which the fundamental categories of liberal thought and literary discourse are mutually founded. Their most potent example of this is an analysis of the American novel as a form that emerges from barbary slave and captivity narratives across an unconsolidated (and unceded) territory, which oppose mobile populations to citizens and complicate the generally domestic, national, and individualist ideologies of the novel form.[10] Armstrong and Tennenhouse show how formlessness itself tends to be a mark of affective confusion at dissolving boundaries and vertiginous mobility, which dislocates the basic forms of political discourse and sovereignty. And they stress that the definitional and material exclusion of formlessness continues to define political antagonisms in the present: "Whether it takes something so basic as a shortage of natural resources and a global economic recession to make a critical mass of modern individuals feel their dependence on populations they regard as less human than they are, the truth is that the modern individual has, for well over three centuries, remained conceptually dependent on largely underanalyzed and phobic constructions of the human to define its own humanity" (Armstrong and Montag 7-8). Political theory has recently developed a number of conceptual tools for this figure of formlessness, from "bare" or "wasted" life, to abject cosmopolitanisms, to subjects who lack the right to have rights, to the "part with no part."[11] Setting aside the differences between these concepts, together they identify

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[10] The argument for barbary slave and captivity narratives as precursors to the novel form is made in Armstrong and Tennenhouse's "The Problem of Population and the Form of the American Novel"; the authors expand this theoretical approach to encompass Shakespearean tragedy and modern social contract theory in "Sovereignty and the Form of Formlessness."

[11] This is the position taken in the introduction to a recent special issue of *differences* entitled *The Future of the Human*, edited by Nancy Armstrong and Warren Montag. The theories of political formlessness

precisely the problematic of modernist form that my argument will pursue: how formlessness stands as both a threat to be contained or managed and, simultaneously, an important resource to the development of new imaginations of social relations.

This historical formalist approach sheds new light on modernist formal experiments. Even where these appeared to be exploring the depths of the individual psyche they were often resting on a social ontology constructed to obscure the struggles of non-individuals, non-citizens, or, to use the period's preferred term, masses. If literary history is composed within a liberal political ontology that renders these masses an impossible subject, or an unfigurable totality, then modernism has its own way of compulsively thinking the limit: Charles Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*, and Walter Benjamin's well known critical uptake of it, are standard texts on how a modern sensibility is defined out of the experience of the urban crowd, as both an object of aesthetic fascination and a problem to be solved; Raymond Williams compares the new forms of metropolitan modernism to earlier literary attempts to represent the urban crowd, noting that the crucial distinction lies in the borderless exile's centrality to modernism (39-47); Stuart Hall argues that modernist-era mass culture's "missing subject" is the masses themselves, at least insofar as they constitute real, desiring, thinking subjects (qtd. in Huyssen 47); Fredric Jameson notes that canonical modernism's textual innovations tend to recognize the sudden visibility of obscured collectives like the urban mass and the

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cited come from the work of Giorgio Agamben (bare life), Zygmunt Bauman (wasted life), Peter Nyers (abject cosmopolitanism), Étienne Balibar (the right to have rights), and Jacques Rancière (part with no part).

colonial subject, and so register a need for post-individualized aesthetic forms, yet these more often than not take politically neutralizing, or even reactionary and protofascist shape;[12] more recently, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière have each offered powerful new formulations of how non-subjects, or those populations historically rendered invisible and formless in political discourses, put a new kind of pressure on aesthetics in the modernist period. For both thinkers, the "politics of form" is reversed into something closer to a concern with the kinds of formalization embedded within politics: the act of populations taking form is the condition of possibility for any kind of political intelligibility, and therefore aesthetics resides at the heart of politics as such. Modernism's formal inventions, then, create new political possibilities by disrupting an existing "formalization of the real" (Badiou) or "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière).[13]

II. Organic Form

The way modernism was able to think "the form of formlessness," or to conceptualize population outside of a liberal ontology, was through the figure of the organism. Organicist figures are a long neglected, but utterly central, aspect of modernist thought. Critical neglect owes primarily to organism's politically regressive valences: it was quickly appropriated to sociobiological and fascist legitimations of sovereignty. But a closer look at the full range of organicist modernisms is overdue. An overview would

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[12] Jameson reads Wyndham Lewis's machine aesthetic as a case where "The mechanical stands as a figure for the collective" (106-07), and registers a desire for the extinguishing of the masses whole; this boundary case, however, is meant to be exemplary for the internal logic of modernist form

[13] See Alain Badiou, *The Century*, and Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

need to address how "organic community" became an important figure in the late nineteenth century as a nostalgic reaction to the social effects of industrialization, and the transformation of social relations that came along with it. Ferdinand Tönnies' critique of modernity's transformation from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, or, literally, community to society, underlined the point that a whole way of life was in the process of being displaced by the scalar shift of industrial modernization.[14] Tönnies articulated a certain resistance to modernity visible everywhere from early film melodrama to the development of trade and craft unions on the model of an older and largely displaced mode of production.[15] German expressionism, too, trafficked in the melancholic loss of a whole social formation, in which the confrontation with urban and industrial modernity is experienced as a violent rupture, an irreconcilable antagonism between soul and machine, and an anti-modern "irrationalism" that tended to re-entrench patriarchal gender roles by repeatedly staging a conflict between a nostalgic, femininized organicism and a modern, masculine techno-rationality.[16] Some of the same ideological configuration runs through the Anglo-American high modernist literary sensibility: Ezra Pound's nostalgic unearthing of past forms, from Italian Renaissance verse to Japanese Haiku or Noh drama, was done under the influence of a Yeatsian idea of cyclical history and the interpenetration of the

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[14] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society.* Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* pursues this distinction in a very differently calibrated English history and literature, though in less nostalgic terms. Or at least strategically nostalgic terms.

[15] On Tönnies and the archetype of rural innocence lost in the encounter with the metropolis in early film, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 33-58. On the question of the "organic" growth of Europe's towns versus the geometrically planned character of American cities, and how these effect different outcomes for labour organization, see Werner Sombart, "Why is There No Socialism in the United States?" (1906).

[16] On German Expressionism, loss, and gender, see Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, 136-64.

present and the past, or a nostalgic sensibility that should be seen as an inevitable and even predictable critique of industrial modernity; T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is meanwhile shot through with metaphors of a lost organic wholeness and a stalled geo-cultural metabolism, held in opposition to that poem's "unreal city" of the present, the latter being associated with death, abortion, corpses, and cultural loss. All of this prefigures Eliot's later critical commitment to a calculated and reactionary neoclassicism that remained influential half a century later, and enshrined a particular structure of feeling, a sense of loss as the key register in which aesthetics "responds" to modernization, as a dominant reading of the modernist period.[17]

But modernism's sense of a lost organic wholeness was not the only organicism at work in the period, and probably not even the most significant. Organicism was also an influential concept for progressive and utopian attempts to reconcile the concepts of the species and life itself to an increasingly technologically-mediated modernity. The high water mark of this mode of thought could well be Lewis Mumford's notion of *biotechnics*: on this theory, mechanical and industrial developments are rearticulated as a species-wide biological evolution, though less beholden to the capriciousness of random variation than

[17] The politics of Eliot's influential metaphor come into sharp relief in his *After Strange Gods*, a series of lectures given at the University of Virginia a little over a decade after the poem's publication. He refers to the "healthy and flourishing growth" of "the agrarian movement in the South" (15), whose better prospects for a "native culture" come from two simple anti-modern causes: "you have been less industrialised and less invaded by foreign races; and you have a more opulent soil" (17). The waste land, apparently, ends at the Mason-Dixon line: death and decay only occur in the U.S. North, which suffers "the immense pressure towards monotony exerted by the industrial expansion of the latter part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century" (16). Important, too, is Eliot's contextualizaton of his reinterpretation of his most well-known metaphor, as the conviction of a critic living "In a society like ours, worm-eaten with Liberalism" (11-12). Eliot later disavowed the lectures, but they offer a relatively clear articulation of how organic metaphors were mobilized for reactionary ends.

to the cautious and progressive intervention of the modern designer: "the organic image takes the place of the mechanical one, one may confidently predict a slowing down of the tempo of research, the tempo of mechanical intervention, and the tempo of social change, since a coherent and integrated advance must take place more slowly than a one-sided unrelated advance. […] We can see plainly that power, work, regularity, are adequate principles of action only when they cooperate with a humane scheme of living: that any mechanical order we can project must fit into the larger order of life itself" (Mumford 374). Indeed an organic analogy threads its way through much of modern architecture and design's fundamental principles.[18] Le Corbusier's "total environment" is an ultimately evolutionary principle, extending a Lamarckian organism-environment relation to encompass built form and human behaviour within it.[19] Modern architecture's ban on needless ornamentation and the requirement that "form follow function" draws from the discourse of biological functionalism, or the idea that all individual organisms contribute to a larger whole, though now projected onto entire organic and designed world. The first mention of "form follows function," this central tenet of modern design, from American architect Louis Sullivan in 1896, is worth hearing again in its original context:

> It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic,
> Of all things physical and metaphysical,
> Of all things human and all things super-human,
> Of all true manifestations of the head,

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[18] On the organic analogy in modern architecture, see Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs*.

[19] Le Corbusier: "Not in pursuit of an architectural idea, but simply guided by the results of calculation (derived from the principles which govern our universe) and the conception of A LIVING ORGANISM, the ENGINEERS of to-day make use of the primary elements and, by co-ordinating them in accordance with the rules, provoke in us architectural emotions and thus make the work of man ring in unison with universal order." ("Towards a New Architecture" 31)

> Of the heart, of the soul,
> That the life is recognizable in its expression,
> That form ever follows function. This is the law.[20]

What emerges in Sullivan's "law" is what would soon be a central modernist approach to form: a fundamentally subtractive aesthetic, a reduction to formal essences grounded in a biological discourse that also stood as a new metaphysical ordering principle ("all things organic and inorganic [...] all things human and superhuman").

When Walter Gropius later instructed his Bauhaus school to identify basic functional design "types" and conceptualize them within a larger, collectively-designed whole, this was simultaneously a move away from traditional handicrafts and towards the kinds of product standardization that were necessary to the development of mass production, and a biological principle, an "organic evolution as we see it in nature" (Gropius, qtd. in Steadman 139). The Bauhaus pursuit of basic types and pure forms resonates with a much broader modernist imperative to "clean" or "pure" formalism: from Bauhaus it would be only a short step to Clement Greenberg's theory that each individual medium has its own internal laws of development. The organic analogy, though no longer overt, continued to exert an unavowed but determining influence over the formal imagination of modernist aesthetics. In 1932, Herbert Read's *Form in Modern Poetry* would characterize the modernist break with past forms as the discovery of poetry's own internal, organic form: "[Organic form is] the form imposed on poetry by the laws of its own origination, without consideration of the given forms of traditional poetry. It is the

[20] From Louis Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Reconsidered."

most original and most vital principle of poetic creation; and the distinction of modern poetry is to have recovered the principle."[21] An older, Kantian doctrine of a self-enclosed aesthetic purposelessness or autonomy is thus given a modern update by way of a biological analogy. When not openly based on a concept of organic form, modernist autonomy theories still followed a broader logic of self-purposive function and type. It would hardly be an overstatement to claim that the procedures of close reading, or modernism's scholarly legitimating discourse, was an outgrowth of a generally unacknowledged homology with the life sciences.

Read's characterization of organic form as a question of discovering "laws" of a poem's "own origination" underlines the central appeal of organicist thought in the modernist period, and the key distinction between liberalism and the various organicisms and vitalisms that entered political thought in early twentieth century. The multi-disciplinary resonance of the idea of *self-organization* is precisely how "the form of formlessness" entered modernist political thought. Henri Bergson is the imposing figure in this tradition: his vitalist concepts of creative evolution and *élan vital* were the pivot point around which new ideologies on the Right and Left defined themselves. T. S. Eliot characterized "Bergsonism" as an "epidemic" in the pre-war period, and several critical studies have shown Eliot wasn't exaggerating Bergson's influence by much.[22] After the

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[21] Read is quoted in Peter Faulkner's *Modernism*, p. 19.

[22] Bergson's influence over modernism is taken up in Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (eds.), *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, Sanford Schwatz's *The Matrix of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, and Early Twentieth Century Thought*. The Eliot quote is drawn from his "Commentary" in *Criterion* 12 (1932), and quoted in Burwick and Douglass's introduction to *The Crisis in Modernism* (3).

publication of his *Creative Evolution* in 1907, Bergson's ideas about life as a creative power, multiform and imprecise in its foundations but nevertheless irreducible to mechanistic or positivistic explanation, provided the possibility of an epistemological liberation from the calculative rationality of the Enlightenment. He renewed the importance of qualitative, individualized sensation over the quantifiable notion of sensation that dominated the late nineteenth century's incipient psychologies, and positioned his é*lan vital* as a pre-individual, species-level creative force. Human development was guided less by rationality or mechanical causality than the ontologically-generative force of intuition. In effect, rationality itself was reduced to an epiphenomenon of that intuition, and so all the forms and institutions of the Enlightenment tradition were, with Bergson, planted firmly on a foundation in life and biology. This made sense to any politics that wanted to do away with the political form of enlightenment rationality, or a contractual form of government based on the consensus of enlightened, rational actors; for several kinds of political radicalism, Bergson authorized a whole different foundation for political articulation.[23]

The critical point in Bergson's philosophy that authorized these various reactions was essentially an evasion of form: where he grounded rationality in a pre-individual and protean concept of life, Bergson was essentially short-circuiting any question of formal

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[23] Mark Antliff's *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* helpfully reconstructs the reception of Bergson by groups on the European political Right and Left, from the right-wing *Action Francaise* to Sorelian anarcho-syndicalism, and Donna V. Jones's *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Negritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* has recently argued that Bergson's influence was decisive in the formulation of midcentury decolonization movements, underpinning the politics of *Négritude* as formulated by Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire.

mediation, political or otherwise. In Mark Antliff's terms, this seemingly transparent signification made room for mediation at another level, or made Bergsonian "life" appropriable to any political ideology that could base itself in organic crisis and change (11-15). And the dominant reinscription of Bergson's liberation from enlightenment rationality was the kind of organic nationalism, or biopolitical state form, that Thomas Lemke has called the dominant mode in which life entered the political in the early twentieth century:

> The organicist concept understands the state not as a legal construction whose unity and coherence is the result of individuals' acts of free will but as an original form of life, which precedes individuals and collectives and provides the institutional foundation for their activities. The basic assumption is that all social, political, and legal bonds rest on a living whole, which embodies the genuine and the eternal, the healthy, and the valuable. The reference to "life" serves here both as a mythic starting point and as a normative guideline. Furthermore, it eludes every rational foundation or democratic decision-making. From this perspective, only a politics that orients itself toward biological laws and takes them as a guideline can count as legitimate and commensurate with reality. (Lemke 10)

The importance of this biopolitical state form can't be understated, and my first two chapters are devoted to an exploration of how avant-gardist concepts of life marked a counterdiscourse to state sovereignty that was ultimately recuperated to it. But as the argument below hopefully makes clear, this was not the only form that organicist thought took in the early twentieth century. Other biopolitical organicisms were embedded in the rise of what William James called, in 1903, a "new liberalism," which I will detail in my third chapter. Key to James's politics was a managerial notion of self-organization, which is a ground he shares with the distended forms of state sovereignty developing out of the conjunction of politics and life in the early twentieth century—namely the total

bureaucratic state, itself predicated on a form of self-management that would mediate the conflict between capital and labour and bring about a rationally planned utopia. Setting this politics on the terrain of life and organism was, as we'll see, a crucial step for both political versions of self-regulation and organization.

III. Organism and reproduction

Nevertheless, the crucial stake in grounding a politics in any concept of life, it seems to me, is how it reframes the question of reproduction. I've been stressing the senses in which a political organicism functioned ideologically, as an easy epistemological shorthand for how economic and cultural crisis would be mediated. But this leads directly to the larger question of how political and economic forms reproduce themselves at all, and why organic regeneration was the dominant understanding of this process in the early twentieth century. Organicism wasn't the only way to think social reproduction, and neither did it pass uncontested, as two different responses to vitalism, by M. M. Bakhtin and Georg Simmel, make clear. In 1926, Bakhtin published "Contemporary Vitalism" under the name of I. I. Kanaev, who was a colleague in the Leningrad circle and a biologist. The essay is a departure for the Bakhtin we know primarily as a philosopher of language and a literary historian, as it tackles biological concepts and scientific methodologies in detail. But in 1926, this soon-to-be theorist of polyphony, socialized epistemology, and heteroglossia saw in vitalism a mode of thought that had begun to sound like official philosophical discourse, and so needed to be

questioned.[24] Bakhtin's immediate target in the essay is Hans Driesch, author of *The History and Theory of Vitalism* (1914), but he is also arguing against the tendency in social and political thought to resort to biological analogy at all, in evidence everywhere from Bergson to Freud.[25] Bakhtin's essay pursues two goals: first, to prove that vitalism is bad science on its own terms, which he does by demonstrating exactly the moment in which an ideology of free will and self-determination enters into vitalist presuppositions about organic life; vitalism, therefore, is "a subjectivist scheme" and a "metaphysical theory" (Bakhtin 92, 96) projected onto life processes, which are fundamentally more complex than vitalists make them out to be, and categorically different than the scope of human affairs for which vitalists make them a model; and second, in a dialectical reversal, to show that all science is ideological anyway, including the empiricist methodological argument just used to expose vitalism. This allows Bakhtin to end with this surprising and unexplained statement: "Only dialectical materialism can provide the proper ground for an adequate, scientific presentation of such complex phenomena as the organic regulations" (96). This call for dialectical materialism in science is a claim about knowledge itself, in a way that discredits both vitalism's attempt to root itself in immutable biological laws, and positivism's faith in the perfectibility of science, which

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[24] In their biography *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Katarina Clark and Michael Holquist write that experimental biology "had been assigned a privileged status by the Russian intelligentsia since the 1860s, when all factions in society had looked to physiology for answers to the social and ethical questions plaguing Russia" (174).

[25] In his critique of Freud published soon after (as V. N. Volosinov), Bakhtin sees in any biological analogy "A *sui generis* fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and the historical, a search for this world precisely in the depths of the organic—these are the features that pervade all systems of contemporary philosophy and constitute the symptom of the disintegration and decline of the bourgeois world" (Bakhtin, cited in Clark and Holquist 176)

presumes the eventual unfolding of empirical knowledge. For Bakhtin, all knowledge is social and historical, and so border crossings between science and society are inevitable and, in the case of vitalism, need to be recognized for what they are. Near the essay's opening he indicates this direction: “It is obviously impossible to suggest any neutral biology. It is impossible to say: search both for causal determinants and systematicity, both physical-chemical and vital: whatever you find will be fine; that is the same as saying: look for nothing” (78). In other words, vitalism's short-circuiting of enlightenment political ideology only revealed more ideology, and scientific method offered no way out either.

Simmel's critique of vitalism was more sympathetic. His essay “The Conflict in Modern Culture” (1914) offers a better idea of how a dialectical vitalism might operate. The essay notes that life has become a *Weltanschauungen* or worldview since the late nineteenth century, and the ideological terrain upon which a number of social antagonisms are seemingly resolved. But for Simmel, a basic contradiction exists at the heart of the concept:

> Life, as we have said, can manifest itself only in particular forms; yet, owing to its essential restlessness, life constantly struggles against its own products, which have become fixed and do not move along with it. This process manifests itself as the displacement of an old form by a new one. This constant change in the content of culture, even of whole cultural styles, is the sign of the infinite fruitfulness of life. At the same time, it marks the deep contradiction between life's eternal flux and the objective validity and authenticity of the forms through which it proceeds. It moves constantly between death and resurrection—between resurrection and death. (12)

The struggle between life's drive towards formlessness and the inevitability of form is the

central problematic of modernist aesthetics (or "Futurism," as Simmel and others still called it in 1914). Meanwhile, an organic analogy of death and regeneration runs through Simmel's critique of life's dialectic, as in the following passage, in which figures of cultural decay and rebirth are mobilized to describe the modernist predicament, in which it isn't any particular cultural form that life struggles against, but the notion of form itself: "Since this struggle, in extent and intensity, does not permit concentration on the creation of new forms, it makes a virtue of necessity and insists on a fight against forms simply because they are forms. This is probably only possible in an epoch where cultural forms are conceived of as an exhausted soil which has yielded all that it could grow, which, however, is still completely covered by products of its former fertility" (13). Simmel prefigures Eliot's *Waste Land* here, though his use of metabolic metaphors is more transparent and self-conscious; what his essay wants to articulate, after surveying forms of vitalism in contemporary art, philosophy, and religion, is that life's elevation to an ideological *Weltanschauungen* is a sign that "the present is too full of contradictions to stand still" (25); the question posed by life is a question of how social forms will reproduce themselves, if at all. They, too, are subject to the dialectic between form and life; and whatever new social form might take hold will be "a struggle in the absolute sense of the term," and its resolution "remains an eternal (*göttlich*) secret to us" (25). Simmel's cryptic and apocalyptic ending makes sense only if we remember how his essay initially frames the contradiction between life and form. The contradiction he diagnoses in culture's struggle against form is only intelligible because it "was first noted in economic

change" (12). Transitions between modes of production are only so many social forms that are eventually displaced by new life energies, new forms, new organizations of production. What distinguishes the modern moment for Simmel is a resistance to form *as such*; following the economic analogy from which his analysis derives, this means that some punctual break or revolution is the real content of life philosophies. "Although this chronic conflict between form and life has become acute in many historical epochs, none but ours has revealed it so clearly," Simmel writes, adding that "The bridge between the past and the future of cultural forms seems to be demolished; we gaze into an abyss of unformed life beneath our feet" (25).

Organicist ideologies, then, met with resistance from some quarters of the left. On the one hand, this was a historical materialist critique of organicism's tendency to abstract social relations into biological laws, or in other words a point of contention over methodology and historiography. But the consequences of the Marxist critique were very real, and concerned what those organicist models, when adopted as economic or political metaphors, implied about capital regulation. If the organization of production was like an organic system, then it would have its own in-built systems of self-regulation. Bakhtin addresses this problem head on, noting that "those processes, on which the neo-vitalists advantageously ground their theory, come under the rubric of self-regulation" (82), but that ultimately "the harmonious developmental system [...] is just a wished-for something [...] a causality applied retrospectively" (94-95). For Simmel, as the above-quoted passages should make clear, organicist models are treated more equivocally. Framing the

dialectic between form and life as a movement “between death and resurrection—between resurrection and death” (12) upholds its own ideological sense of life and rebirth; the notion that culture in 1914 was “an exhausted soil which has yielded all that it could grow, which, however, is still completely covered by products of its former fertility” (13), however, indicates that Simmel's version of life had less in common with vitalist notions of a self-regulating social organism than with a terminal crisis in social reproduction that a fuller accounting of life under modern capitalism would reveal. That “abyss of unformed life” (25) in his essay's closing moments needs to be considered, it seems to me, in the context of modernism's formal expermentation, or, as I've been arguing, the limits of its political ontology.

To come at this from another direction, consider that Bakhtin and Simmel are effectively restating, on organicism's own terrain, the central internal (and internecine) debate of the Second International: whether capitalism could reach an equilibrium state of roughly egalitarian redistribution, or whether it was predestined to collapse under the weight of its contradictions and be replaced with another form of economic organization. The debate winds its way through many of the principle writings of the Second International, notably the controversy over Charles Bernstein's "revisionist" *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899), a foundational text for social democracy, and a work that makes its own displacement of political economy onto a biological, evolutionary foundation. In both Bernstein's writings and Rosa Luxemburg's denunciation of them, debate pivots around the second volume of Marx's *Capital*, and specifically a section on simple and expanded

(or enlarged) reproduction, or how macroeconomic growth, fundamental to capitalism, is reabsorbed, thereby perpetuating and renewing the capital-labour relation.[26] The figure of the organism and the problem of the reproduction of social relations, in other words, cuts a seam across several different discursive levels in the early century, from modernism's notion of crisis to the most rarefied economic discussions of finance capital.

Luxemburg and Bernstein interpret Marx differently, but the key feature of their dispute is the question of the scale at which reproduction needed to be thought: whether economic growth can be redirected internally, thereby redistributing wealth within the boundaries of the nation, which would in turn produce a larger and more differentiated class of small entrepreneurs (Bernstein), or whether capital's very nature is to exceed national boundaries, begin new processes of primitive accumulation elsewhere, and exacerbate inequality locally until some imminent revolutionary event (Luxemburg). In

[26] The debate over Marx's reproduction schemes is summarized in Roman Rosdolsky's *The Making of Marx's* Capital, 445-505, and in David Harvey's *The Limits to Capital*, 166-76. A brief overview: Austromarxists like Rudolph Hilferding, Otto Bauer, and Gustav Esckstein saw in the section on reproduction an argument for social democracy, since by Marx's schemes it seems possible to politically regulate capitalism into a well-equilibrated and more or less egalitarian system for the distribution of profit. This interpretation, as Rosa Luxemburg saw in her *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), ignores the rest of *Capital* by restricting capitalism to a question of circulation only and bracketing production entirely, or setting aside the generator of internal contradictions that makes capitalism prone to crisis. Though Luxemburg's critique was directed at Marx and wanted to dispense with the section on reproduction entirely, the real target here was the social democratic notion that markets could be equilibrated and regulated into some capitalism-compliant form of socialist redistribution. Marx's own prefatory remarks to his reproduction section, which Luxemburg ignores, note that he is exploring reproduction strictly as a diagnostic tool for mapping different national capital configurations, and therefore setting aside the basic internal contradiction inherent to capital accumulation, or how surplus value is derived from labour discipline and increasing exploitation. But as Luxemburg notes, surplus is only ever partially reinvested within the state, and capitalists seek external sites of capital reinvestment and exploitation in the movement towards realizing a world market. In other words, *Capital*'s central methodological tendency, of taking political economy's best arguments (in this case Quesnay's map of capital reproduction in his *Tableau Économique*) on their own terms, within their own conceptual limits, and demonstrating their internal contradictions, is misunderstood by Austromarxists as an argument about how to regulate a national economy; it is similarly misinterpreted by Luxemburg, who was willing to dispense with this section of *Capital* in order to save the whole.

other words, the question of reproduction and the figure of organicism suggest a problem of form: national, imperial, global? And what political form could ever manage these telescoping scales? Liberal, “classical” capitalism was faring badly, even in the centres where economic growth was concentrated. In my second chapter, which traces organistic and biopolitical threads in Italian Futurism, Italy's surprising economic growth in the first decade of the twentieth century, concentrated in Northern industrial cities, is one half of a national frame that also includes what came to be called, by Antonio Gramsci and others, as the "Southern Problem," or economic stagnation in Italy's South. The United States, of course, had its own southern problem accompanying its unparalleled industrial growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as civil war and reconstruction had left a similar dividing line between Northern industry and stagnating Southern agriculture. And so in both sites, a belated entry to the imperialist World Powers was accompanied by an uneven economic geography, or the "development of underdevelopment," at home. The process of proletarianization, or the impoverishment of certain geographically or racially identified populations as a consequence of economic growth, gives an indication of some of the problems with the nation form in this period.

The political forms that Italy and America would transform themselves into are two different versions of a regulated organism: the self-regulating body of the totalitarian state in Italy, and the formally democratic national-social (welfare) state in the U.S. But this self-regulating body was deeply unsure of its boundaries. In Italy, a large expatriate population, as in the contested port of Fiume, led to expansionist policy and the problem

of finding a legal framework to extend citizenship beyond national borders. For the U.S., citizenship was a terrain of struggle with multiple fronts in the post-Civil War landscape, including and especially in the *Insular Cases* (1901), which created a new category for populations in annexed zones like Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. In both cases, I argue, thinking of social reproduction and of the movement of populations within and beyond the borders of the nation in organicist terms leads to these midcentury political forms. This comparison between the U.S. and Italy, however, can only go so far: my primary concern is how organic and biological figures were used to explain unprecedented economic expansion and dynamic population movement across these two sites.

My focus in the chapters that follow will be on figures of rebirth and regeneration, which are prominent in both sites. Rebirth was effectively the syntax in which modernism was thought for these two nation-states. Tied to millennial anxieties and often deliberately used to overturn notions of cultural decadence from the late nineteenth century, the notion of rebirth always contains within it the implication that the social and the political have been displaced onto the terrain of biology. My argument examines different versions of this modernist sense of rebirth. I begin with the avant-gardist desire for new forms and new cultural institutions; the historical avant-garde's aesthetic break with past forms was accompanied by an often-overlooked and frequently self-contradicting political program for revolution, or national rebirth. In my first chapter, I argue that the core of the avant-garde demand for a negation of previous art and art institutions, and a merging of art with

everyday life, is essentially modernism's rebirth ideology in a condensed form, and has attached itself to different avant-garde struggles throughout the twentieth century. That these were inevitably conjoined, in the modernist period, to a revolutionary politics whose object and horizon was the seizure of state power, or in other words that it remained limited by the form of the nation-state, is one reason for a now generalized critical position on modernist avant-gardes that deems them "historical" and therefore no longer relevant; I re-examine the consequences of this critical position, especially in light of certain survivals of avant-garde techniques in the present. My second chapter expands on the question of rebirth and nationalism in the avant-garde by taking up one particular avant-garde whose nationalism is widely understood to compromise its politics: examining Italian Futurism's version of a widespread Italian ideology of rebirth, I take up not only its iconoclastic and scandal-baiting aesthetic manifestos, but its political writings and actions as well, to determine how the intertwining discourses of a national organicism and a Bergsonian liberation from form resulted in a complicated, self-contradicting political program for revolution—one that frequently exceeded its own self-imposed nationalist boundaries.

In part two of my dissertation, I follow rebirth ideologies through the American progressive era, where, as Jackson Lears has recently argued, rebirth circulated between both state-official discourses justifying American expansionism and oppositional, rights-claiming movements. As a sort of secularized protestant millenialism, the idea of a cultural and political rebirth was critical to progressivist ideas about how the state should

manage its rapidly changing population, transformed by migration and newly visible subject groups. The idea that the nation was a body politic in the process of being reborn defines a broad national project in the decades following the dismemberment of the Civil War and throughout the expansionist border anxieties of the late nineteenth century, themselves figured as conflicts over the limits of that body politic. My argument traces two different articulations of American rebirth: in my third chapter, I focus on William James's concept of a social body traversed by overwhelming and destabilizing sensations, which required better systems of self-management; and in my fourth chapter, I analyze D. W. Griffith's constant, compulsive return to scenes of rebirth in two of his films, *Birth of a Nation* (1914) and *Intolerance* (1916), expressing in allegorical form an ideology of imperial rebirth. Between them, I'll argue, they theorized the reinvention of liberal governmentality, in a way that contains the destabilizing presence of newly visible social groups by way of a biopolitical model of the management of the senses.

And so the politics of life in the modernist period, I'll argue, turned on a certain way of thinking about social reproduction that overwhelmingly tended to ground itself in figures of organism and rebirth. These figures tend to naturalize historical struggles and antagonisms; my argument will follow Foucault's reverse strategy of historicizing, and so contesting, the naturalization of the political, drawing out the fields of historical forces and antagonisms within which the figure of life could be positioned as a solution or escape. It's worth recalling in this context that Foucault's theory of biopolitics emerges from a specific political situation in post-1968 French Marxism. After the suppression of

that uprising against the national-social state, the category of reproduction re-emerged with a vengeance in Marxist theory. In 1973, Henri Lefebvre noted the "discovery" of the "continent" of reproduction by his contemporaries, or rather that May 1968 had forced that continent to reveal itself (7). Seminal works from this period by Althusser (*Sur la reproduction* [written in 1969], "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" [1971]), Bourdieu (and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* [1970]), Lefebvre himself (*The Survival of Capitalism* [1973]), and, later, Foucault all addressed reproduction in different ways. To the question of how class domination persists and reproduces itself in a formally egalitarian republic, post-'68 Marxism developed a set of now-indispensable theoretical tools to analyze the reproduction of social relations at its various levels of mediation: the state (repressive state apparatuses), institutions (ideological state apparatuses, the factory-school-prison triptych), spatial form (panopticon, the city), bodies (habitus, discipline), and social practice (everyday life). But if the tendency in Foucault's own thought was already towards a "microphysics" of power, biopower took him well beyond the question of the welfare state and its institutions, and down to the (necessarily) vague and formless level of population and life itself.

Foucault's analysis of biopower comes at the tail end of the post-'68 debates, and in some sense it reframes the problematic of reproduction entirely: rather than a secondary and somehow hidden "continent" of capitalism, reproduction and life become

the linchpin of the whole system.[27] Foucault does a remarkable thing to the post-'68 notion of reproduction: his interest is not so much to anatomize its dynamics in welfare state liberalism but to genealogize the concept of reproduction itself, and reconsider the ways life has been inscribed within modes of sovereignty over the course of modern history. His conception of biopower builds on his earlier work in *The Order of Things* (1967), whose "archaeological" method, designed to uncover the "network of analogies" between seemingly distinct disciplines and knowledges that make up an episteme, turns up one absolutely critical insight: modern biology and political economy not only develop contemporaneously in the eighteenth century, but according to a shared logic and a conceptual interdependence. And it is the concept of "organic structure" (227) that acts as a bridge between political economy and modern biology, or "corresponds to labor in the economic sphere" (227), as "that which *produces*, *grows and reproduces*" (232). In other

[27] Since the 1970s, Marxist thought has turned to reproduction in earnest, taking off from Marx's comments in *Capital Volume I* that "When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction" (*Capital* I 711). Post-autonomist Marxism has theorized a shift in the hegemonic form of labour under postmodern, post-Fordist capitalism, where production is no longer oriented around commodities but the production of social relations themselves, or in other words oriented around the sphere of reproduction, generating new forms of immaterial and affective labour, as well as new possibilities for political mobilization (Hardt and Negri 260-79). Meanwhile, focus on the reproduction of the capital-labour relation has also renewed interest in the process of primitive accumulation, or the imposition of the capital-labour relation in the first place, which Marxist theorists now tend to argue takes place not as some prehistoric big bang moment, but continuously and throughout the production cycle (see Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism* [2000]). Marxist-feminist writing has known this for some time: capitalism itself, it argues, would not exist as a mode of production without unwaged and feminized domestic labour, or primitive accumulation at the site of the reproduction of labour-power and the imposition of the patriarchy of the wage. As Silvia Federici has powerfully stated in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), this recurring cycle of primitive accumulation mirrors historical enclosures over bodies and reproductive processes that capitalism has imposed across the globe, namely late medieval witch hunts and modern slavery. Massimo de Angelis's *The Beginning of History* (2007) provides an overview of this critical literature; I'll return to his argument in more detail in my introduction to Part One, below.

words, these two discursive fields, each with its own outsized purchase on how social relations are mediated and organized, draw from each other's vocabularies, or "truth regimes," and enter into different "ensembles" and rationalities over the course of capitalism's history. This has the effect of thinking reproduction beyond its immediate configuration in the institutions and forms of the national-social state: hence his much longer historical view in subsequent lectures on biopolitics, from *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. These expansive lectures were Foucault's way of showing that the question of reproduction had not only a much broader field of application in the present—outside institutional forms in which life is protected from risk—but also that reproduction and life have been thought in very different ways over the course of modern history. In the modernist period, or the period in which the concept of a state biopolitics emerges for the first time, the pre-existing liberalist "ensemble" begins to be problematized by competing models of social organization, each with its own organistic and (socio)biological logic and justification. But in an interview from the late 1970s, Foucault underlines how life, before its securitization and capture by the national-social state, was also the focal point of a crucial struggle over capitalism's very survival:

> [A]gainst this power... the forces that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being... [W]hat was demanded and what served as an objective was life, understood as the basic needs, man's concrete essence, the realization of his potential, a plenitude of the possible. Whether it was Utopia that was wanted is of little importance; what we have seen has been a very real process of struggle; life as a political struggle was in a sense taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it. (*Power/Knowledge* 144–145)

My own interest in Foucault's concept of biopolitics is right at this apparent conflict in his

thought, which is really a historical reversal in which life and rebirth, initially discourses of liberation, are transformed, repositioned, and become legitimations of the reproduction of capitalism.

As for the echo of Fredric Jameson's *Fables of Aggression* in my title, I foreground him for at least two reasons. Most importantly, Jameson stresses form as a still-relevant category of study for modernist culture; as recently as his 2007 introduction to *The Modernist Papers*, Jameson reiterates the importance of form to both modernist cultural politics and our own political situation.[28] His work has elsewhere linked form to the nation as the fundamental epistemological categories of the modernist period: as necessarily interlinked and implying each other, as ideological constructs through which relationality and collectivity are imagined, and as frames through which modernist writers were able to think their relation to the globe. Still, I want to avoid potential misunderstandings around my return to questions of form, and my decision to analyze texts from European and American modernist traditions. This will appear out of step with the recent turn towards transnationalism in both modernist and American studies; the "new modernist studies" especially values canon-expanding inquiry into global modernist

[28] This isn't exactly a "new formalism," though, if that recent turn in literary studies is in some senses a reaction against Jameson's influential call to periodize, and the broad historical turn in literary study that followed it and other seminal historicist and materialist critical interventions of the 1970s and 1980s. Any fair reading of Jameson's work, especially on modernism, will complicate a simplistic opposition between formal and historical registers of criticism. On the "new formalism" in literary studies, see Marjorie Levenson's review essay, "What is New Formalism?"

manifestations, across a broader historical sweep.[29] My contribution, I would argue, is not only informed by these new transnationalisms, but wholly consistent with them, in that I approach the nation as a provisional and incomplete imposition of formal boundaries around the transnational flows of goods and people. The danger here, for my argument as well as for a transnationalist critical sensibility that avoids explicitly "nationalist" writers, is portraying European and American state forms as more stable and integral than they were, and less the products of a complex and antagonistic transnational and transcultural exchange. Here I follow Étienne Balibar's concept of the nation as a project never completed: as a palimpsest of ideologies and institutions from various historical conjunctures and class formations, but undergoing a historical reconsolidation in the modernist period under organicist and biological terms.[30] These nations, in other words, are transnational sites too, with, as I've suggested, a double status as both burgeoning imperialist states and yet still containing their own severely impoverished internal peripheries—and in this sense they were typical of all imperialist nations. Only by reconsidering the biopolitical logics by which they legitimate themselves can we get a sense of the stakes at play in a genuinely trans*national* criticism.[31] Form, as I've indicated,

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[29] Two recent overviews of transnational criticism in modernist studies and American studies, respectively: Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," and Winfried Fluck, "A New Beginning? Transnationalisms." I'll have more to say about transnational American studies below, in my introduction to section two.

[30] See Balibar's *Race, Nation, Class*, particularly the chapter "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," 86-106.

[31] An exemplary collection of new transnationalist modernism studies, which informs my approach here, is Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel's collection *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity.* The editors write that transnational approaches can investigate how "canonical white Anglo modernism is itself determined by contact-zone clashes and reversals and how it, too, is haunted by ghosts—the repressed ghosts of an African modernity, an Atlantic modernity, a subaltern modernity. That is, we begin to see all

is a necessary concept here, in the sense that it is implied in any national or transnational articulation, and especially those that base themselves in some or another concept of organic form, or in the apparent formlessness of "life itself."

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kinds of modernisms as they make themselves and are made from the *outside in*" ("Introduction" 3).

PART ONE: Avant-gardes and the politics of life

Introduction

One has to imagine the question has occurred to every avant-garde at some point: why continue to make art at all? If prior artistic production is so deplorable, and if the real terrain on which an avant-garde intends to have its effect is political, why not leave the art world to its own irrelevance and intervene in the world in some other way? The answers given over the course of the twentieth century, which encompass several sea changes in how we think about what art is and does—what is admissible as art, where art takes place, and what sort of relevance and cultural capital artists and avant-gardes can have—is the internal history of twentieth century aesthetics commonly called the "death of the avant-garde." But before its apparent death, in the middle of the first full manifestation of avant-gardism of the twentieth century, Italian Futurists Bruno Corradini and Emilio Settimelli offer an odd kind of answer. In their 1914 manifesto "Weights, Measures and Prices of Artistic Genius," the authors offer a different vision of what art can be, requiring a different measure of the value of artworks:

> The artist of genius has been and is still today a social outcast. Now genius has a social, economic and financial value. [...] The Artist will finally find his place in life, along with the butcher and the tyre-manufacturer, the grave-digger and the speculator, the engineer and the farmer. This is the basis of a new universal financial organization through which a whole series of activities, formidable in

> their development, completeness and importance, which have remained up to the present time in the grip of barbarism, will be fitted into modern civilization (*FM* 147).[1]

In order to integrate artists more fully into the process of production, the manifesto's authors invent a metric for the calculation of aesthetic value. A new appraiser, or "measurer," will evaluate a work's "genius" by essentially calculating its eccentricity. Outlandish analogies and juxtapositions are evidence of the amount of neurological energy, or genius, that went into a piece's production, as well as how much energy it will effect in its readers: "The quantity of cerebral energy necessary to produce a work is directly proportional to the resistance which separates the elements before its action is felt and to the cohesion which unites them afterwards" (*FM* 145). This criteria is quite obviously self-serving, as it favours precisely the kinds of wild recombinations of media and objects that Futurism had made central to its style. No small irony, then, in their claim that this was a defense against arbitrariness and charlatanism in art markets: "We therefore ask the state to create a body of law for the purpose of guarding and regulating the sale of genius. One is astonished to see that in the field of intellectual activity fraud is still perfectly legal" (*FM* 146).

Underlying the fairly transparent self-promotion in this manifesto is the notion that "The work of art is nothing but an accumulator of cerebral energy" (*FM* 149), and

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[1] This manifesto is cited in Umbro Appolonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos*, 47. All subsequent references to this collection will be in-text, using the abbreviation *FM*.

that artworks, too, can stimulate social activity. Implied in this new basis for evaluating art, however, is a thoroughgoing rejection of the very basis of the capitalist system out of which the sphere of aesthetics developed: in arguing for their new "energy" metric, they were dispensing with all those market-based valuations of aesthetic objects, and all the attendant values of cultural capital, that could be accumulated by the collector. Theirs was a measure of the social utility of the artwork that simultaneously rejected the whole premise of art as surplus activity and surplus value, along with all those works that had accrued such value in Italy. Just as Marx had shown that the science of political economy was based on a price fundamentalism that effaced all traces of productive processes and social relations from the commodity's surface, these Futurist writers wanted to question the reified value of art works by reinstating the productive process and the social effect these art works could have. Their alternative criteria for aesthetic value was, it has to be acknowledged, based on mystifications like the social "energy" artworks put into circulation, the scarcity of "genius" on which art markets depended, and most importantly the "life" artworks fostered, but the fundamental point was a struggle over how art was, and should be, valued. They rejected an entire critical apparatus that turned art into cultural capital, a mode of "disinterested" objectification and speculation that, as Pierre Bourdieu's research has shown, reinforces class domination by indirect means.[2] Instead,

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[2] As, for example, in Bourdieu's argument about cultural capital: "Cultural capital in its objectified state presents itself with all the appearances of an autonomous, coherent universe which, although the product

the Futurists wanted a full accounting of art's productive processes and social effects. This was the core of the avant-gardist slogan "art into life": art would no longer be a separate sphere into which surplus value was invested. By foregrounding not only their artistic process, but art's ability to constitute and transform social relations, the Futurists contested the institutional frame in which art was valued under market capitalism.

When they invoke the term "value," Corradini and Settimelli thematize, but only partially realize, the central problem that avant-gardes all through the century have attempted to address. The narrative of the death of the avant-garde in the twentieth century, notably in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, is about the end of any kind of autonomy for art, and the ultimate failure of avant-gardes to define some sphere of life outside of the commodity world, to which they were eventually assimilated. But what I want to propose is that in some sense the reverse is true: the avant-gardes have been defined by their ability to repeatedly generate new autonomous spaces of critique, however temporary and liminal. What I propose below is that avant-garde practices are today and have always been less an example of art's diminishing autonomy from the

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of historical action, has its own laws, transcending individual wills, and which, as the example of language well illustrates, therefore remains irreducible to that which each agent, or even the aggregate of the agents, can appropriate (i.e., to the cultural capital embodied in each agent or even in the aggregate of the agents). However, it should not be forgotten that it exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and, beyond them, in the field of the social classes—struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, and therefore to the extent of their embodied capital" (Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital" 50).

political and economic spheres, and closer to what Massimo de Angelis has called a "value struggle." For de Angelis, the closing down of autonomous spaces of critique is not a one-way street, in which all of capital's outsides are eventually colonized, infiltrated, and reified; rather, even under advanced, global capitalism, outsides are continuously generated any time there is a struggle over the means of social reproduction, or the capacity for groups of people to engage in non-capitalist forms of social exchange and relationality. The struggle over how social relations would be reproduced, or reconstituted from scratch, was decisive for the historical avant-gardes, and shaped the utopian horizon of the first decade of Futurist manifestos, as I'll argue below. But value struggles remain central to the current-day global activism, as de Angelis's affinity with anti-capitalist and counter-globalization struggles suggests; from this perspective, the avant-garde problematic has been prematurely laid to rest.

The difference between the turn of twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first, then, is the relative importance of the state as a mediator of social reproduction. Futurists were part of a modernist political epistemology for which the state was the horizon of social reproduction, and so their struggle against liberal capitalism's value regime was conjoined to a national revolutionary politics. To illustrate this historical difference, consider that Settimelli and Corradini's call for a centralized administrative body for the valuation of art works, a "measurer," doesn't sound all that outlandish now, after the postwar establishment of arts funding and granting agencies in most advanced

capitalist countries. Clearly some reversal has taken place in the strategies of value struggles.

In the two chapters that follow, I argue that the abstractions on which Futurism based their alternative value scheme for art—life, most centrally, but also energy, regeneration, and rebirth—together compose an alternative genealogy for the avant-garde through the twentieth century. A major stake in the debate around avant-gardes since Bürger 's *Theory* has been the ultimate failure of avant-gardes to resist commodification: Bürger 's history ends with the triumph of a culture industry that effectively accomplishes the “art into life” programme of the avant-gardes, but within a capitalist framework, and as a constantly proliferating source of economic value. By reinterpreting the initial premises of the historical avant-gardes, I want to reconsider this trajectory. The question I raise is how the avant-gardes' eventual appropriation to capital represents not the negation of a fundamentally revolutionary project, but a contingent and labile value struggle that wanted to find new modes of aesthetic valuation, and became attached to larger revolutionary projects at specific conjunctures. In detailing how avant-gardes were appropriated to capitalism at different moments in the twentieth century, I make use of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's argument for different “spirits,” or regimes of legitimation and justification, of capitalist accumulation. By this theory, capitalism can only reproduce itself so long as its social legitimation, or the values it attaches to social goods and social production, incorporate the various challenges and critiques that have

challenged it throughout its history. One important consequence to this genealogy is a reconsideration of how current-day artistic practice relates to the historical avant-gardes: I argue that the now-widespread gesture of renouncing the avant-gardes' large scale revolutionary ambitions, together with the usually unacknowledged survival of many avant-gardist rhetorics and forms, indicates that the problematic of avant-gardes as value struggles continues to define how critical art can exist in the world.

My second chapter returns to the Futurists as a key and precedent-setting case study in how value struggles work. I argue that they posited a concept of life on which they based their major aesthetic and political statements. This move overlapped with a broader history of the politicization of life, or biopolitics, developing in the early twentieth century. In practice, they wanted to develop new forms of life for an era of centralizing, industrializing capitalism, against the period's reigning bourgeois liberalism. This value struggle made possible a series of political statements and positions that, taken as a whole, appear incoherent; by analyzing Futurism's biopolitics, I hope to offer some clarity to that incoherence, as well as identify some dynamics in the politicization of life that continue to invest and determine political discussion, even after the apparent death of the avant-garde and the very real demise of Futurism in Italy.

CHAPTER ONE: The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde

I: The historical avant-garde and the spirit of capitalism

What sort of relevance can the category of the avant-garde have today? When Peter Bürger 's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) declared it "historical" a generation ago, the avant-garde's potential as anything more than a periodizing term was thrown into question. Subsequent criticism has tended to prove Bürger right: the trajectory suggested in his *Theory* has been largely accepted, and the story of the twentieth century avant-gardes is invariably a story of decline, from revolutionary movements to simulacra, from *épater le bourgeois* to advertising technique, from torching museums to being featured exhibitions in them. Consensus has settled on an interpretation that has the avant-garde crashing on the reef of postmodernism sometime around 1972.[1] Outside of historicist modernism studies, the avant-garde's treatment has been even less kind. In social and political writing since at least the Situationists in France, its fraternal twin "vanguardism" has become a leftist code word for an outdated strategy – no longer the necessary ideological and intellectual preparation for social transformation, but rather an anti-

[1] The date is Peter Wollen's, who cites the breakup of the Situationists as having "brought to an end an epoch that began in Paris with the Futurist Manifesto of 1909" (124); see his *Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth Century Culture*. Other prominent critical works that agree in substance with this view of the avant-garde's demise include Perry Anderson's *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Matei Calinescu's *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, and Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*.

democratic elitism and crypto-totalitarianism.[2] To bring the story right up to date, today any putatively transgressive artistic practice falls flat against, in no particular order, intellectual relativism, a culture of permissiveness, and state-supported, market-segmented cultural difference – the avant-garde's ancient target of a stable bourgeois moral order long since displaced by the universal imperative to "Enjoy!".[3]

If the avant-garde has entered into a phase of conceptual exhaustion, then a recent twist should do it in for good. In their 2005 book *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski point out that avant-gardism has filtered its way into management seminars: its anti-establishment shock techniques are now functionalized as organizational strategy. Surveying a large sample of American and French management texts from the 1990s, Chiapello and Boltanski observe that the once-opposed logics of managerialism and the avant-garde have begun to overlap significantly.[4] One the one hand, artistic work is increasingly a managed enterprise: as Hal Foster decries in *Design and Crime* (2002), "a nexus of curators and collectors, dealers and clients" (121) has

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[2] For example in Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, which rests on the premise that a distributed, nomadic general intellect is the present moment's model of political resistance, replacing vanguards looking to seize state power.

[3] On the postmodern imperative to enjoy, see Slavoj Žižek 's *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*.

[4] "Mais il faut aussi souligner tous les signes de rapprochement des deux logiques de l'art et du management qui s'accumulent especialement depuis les années 80. [...] Le manager est ainsi en passé de devenir le meilleur allié de l'artiste après avoir été consideré comme son bourreau" (Chiapello, *Artistes versus managers* 205, 211). ["But it is also necessary to underline all the signs of a reconciliation of the two logics of the art and management which have accumulated particularly since the Eighties. [...] The manager is thus in the process of becoming the best ally of the artist after being regarded as his antagonist."]

taken over the functions previously assigned to artists and critics, compromising the autonomy, or nominal autonomy, of both art and criticism – a phenomenon confirmed by George Yúdice's *The Expediency of Culture* (2003), which documents the development of a new, globalized regime of arts administration and international exhibitions.[5] But on the other hand, and reciprocally, business management itself has been transformed. In its shift from the hierarchical models of Taylorist planning in favour of postmodern, flexible networks of improvisation, entrepreneurialism, and self-management, the management of enterprise has, Chiapello observes, deployed avant-garde rhetorics and techniques to transform itself. Organized anarchy, workplace insurrection, business revolution: the shift is more than terminological, and goes well beyond the longstanding corporate predilection for military metaphors (including voguish appropriations of Sun Tzu and Clausewitz as business "wisdom").[6] If the purpose of avant-garde intervention has always been the destruction of outdated hierarchies – of representational form, of cultural capital – then management has been on board since the post-Fordist turn, in which, as one *Harvard Business Review* writer put it, "greater speed and flexibility undermines

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[5] Yúdice writes, "the evolution of arts administration since the 1960s has increasingly encouraged artists to become better service providers. This refunctionalization is not limited to the United States but is a characteristic of the role of artists as catalysts for cultural citizenship in the new cultural policies throughout Latin America and many other regions" (319).

[6] See Matthew Jesse Jackson's "Managing the Avant-Garde" for a brief survey of recent "revolutionary" business tracts, which, he argues, are the latest development in "the last century's contest between 'artists and managers' – one that has been increasingly resolved by a tendency to merge, or even trade places, as the arts become more commercialized while business recuperates their discarded mythology of creative individualism" (107).

hierarchy" (89).[7] On the other hand, if the avant-garde has always had a certain nihilism at its core, wanting no less than the destruction of bourgeois capitalism and its attendant institutional and moral forms, then capitalism's recent history of outsourced or precarious work, not to mention long term assaults on welfare state provisions and institutions, has arguably pushed further in the direction of social nihilism than any historical avant-garde. Again, in the words of the *Harvard Business Review*, "the promise of freedom has a dark side: insecurity and loss of control" (90).

From one angle the avant-garde's migration to management training is just the latest chapter in the narrative of the avant-garde's assimilation to capital outlined by Bürger. The endurance of his critique lies in the basic antinomy that he attributes to the historical avant-garde: to sum it up in a phrase, it could only ever eat its own tail. If Surrealism, Expressionism and dada all gestured toward a radical transformation of society by shrinking the distance between art and life, by reconciling elitist "institution art" to an everyday "life-praxis," this synthesis could only come at the expense of the very space of cultural autonomy that made their critique possible in the first place. Bürger writes: "it can be seen that the avant-gardistes' attempt to reintegrate art into the life process is itself a profoundly contradictory endeavor. For the (relative) freedom of art vis-a-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality. An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but

[7] Rosabeth Moss Canter, "The New Managerial Work."

wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance" (Bürger 50). Having developed out of the bourgeois separation of the cultural sphere from politics and economy, the historical avant-garde marks the moment of culture's self-criticism; but in the end the avant-garde was unable to overcome its own merely-cultural status, an internal contradiction that has manifested itself in over the course of the twentieth century in the eventual synonymity of "avant-garde" and elitist formal experimentation – the crucial, wished-for synthesis with "life-praxis" long since abandoned. Bluntly, the historical avant-garde was undone by its faith in aesthetic self-critique as a sufficient condition for social transformation. So Bürger 's *Theory* doesn't only announce the collapse of the historical avant-garde under the accumulated weight of its misplaced ambition, but warns against the possibility of trying to revive it: Bürger argues that the real successor to the avant-garde's attempted negation of aesthetic autonomy is not the 1960s neo-avant-gardes who would revisit pastiche and minimalism, dada and Constructivism, Duchamp's readymades and Rodchenko's monochromes, in an implied critique of the museumization of high modernism, but rather the "false sublation" of the commodity form, or mass culture's union of art and commerce. The passage quoted above continues: "During the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had all the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this also allows one to

recognize the contradictoriness of the avant-gardiste undertaking" (50). The recent reorganization of business along avant-gardist principles, then, is an intensification of Bürger 's logic, or proof of his original complaint that reducing art to life under capitalism could only result in further encroachments on autonomous spaces of critique.

Chiapello and Boltanski's argument suggests a different periodization. The central historical argument of *The New Spirit of Capitalism* is that the long term effect of France's 1968 uprisings has been a transformation in capitalism's mode of self-justification, a "recuperation" of 1960s-era anti-capitalist and anti-state critiques, after which such critiques are not only structurally impossible but deployed as part of capitalism's very logic of expansion.[8] Boltanski and Chiapello show how the central premises of the 1960s critique of capitalism – a demand for liberation (from administered lives, state and normalizing apparatuses) and rejection of inauthenticity (of consumer conformity and spectacle) – are, on the one hand, a continuation of an "artistic critique" of alienation under capitalism that was inaugurated by the avant-gardes of the late nineteenth century (419), and on the other hand ultimately neutralized by the shift from

[8] On the dynamics of recuperation, Boltanski and Chiapello write: "Capitalism attracts actors, who realize that they have hitherto been oppressed, by offering them a certain form of liberation that masks new types of oppression. It may then be said that capitalism 'recuperates' the autonomy it extends, by implementing new modes of control. However, these new forms of oppression are gradually unmasked and become the target of critique, to the point where capitalism is led to transform its *modus operandi* to offer a liberation that is redefined under the influence of critique. But, in its turn, the 'liberation' thus obtained harbours new oppressive mechanisms that allow control over the process of accumulation to be restored in a capitalist framework. Cycles of recuperation thus lead to a succession of periods of liberation *by* capitalism and periods of liberation *from* capitalism" (425).

rational-bureaucratic to post-Fordist and neoliberal models of labour organization.[9] Personal fulfillment and liberation have been recuperated by capitalism and located *within* the organization of production, itself reoriented in the direction of labour flexibility, self-management and project-based adhocracy. Management's guiding principle has shifted from Fordist discipline to neoliberal "workforce participation."[10] All of which means that Boltanski and Chiapello give sociological substance to a familiar point. What has elsewhere been termed the "real subsumption"of labour to capital, or the completion of a world capitalist system and the turn to intensive, as opposed to extensive, forms of accumulation, is felt here in Boltanski and Chiapello's picture of the contemporary regime of business management. One key consequence of real

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[9] Boltanski and Chiapello: "Hence it can be said, without exaggeration or paradox, that if capitalism attempted to recuperate the demand for authenticity underlying the critique of the consumer society (by commodifying it, as we have seen), in another respect - and relatively independently - it has, with the metaphor of the network, assimilated the critique of this demand for autonomy, whose formulation paved the way for the deployment of reticular and rhizomorphous paradigms. This contradictory double incorporation tends both to acknowledge the demand for authenticity as valid and to create a world where this question is no longer to be posed. And this, as we shall see, underlies the existential tensions - inextricably psychological and ethical - felt by people engaged in the process of accumulation" (452).

[10] Chiapello writes, "Ces deux dernières décennies, qui ont vu la mode de la culture d'entreprise dans les années 80 et celle du réseau et de la confiance dans les années 90, doivent être vue comme une periode de profond bouleversement du management et de ses préceptes puisque ont été célébrés des formes difficiles à maîtriser, faisant appel à l'affectivité des personnes et à leur histoire sociale, qui sont autant d'aspects que le management scientifique des débuts aurait bien voulu ignorer. If faut encore montrer que ces nouvelles formes ne sont pas de simples ajouts à une liste de pratiques managériales, traditionellement très éloignées des fonctionnements des mondes de l'art. Elles accompagnent en fait une évolution en profondeur de la définition centrale du management" (215).
[These last two decades, which have witnessed the culture of the enterprise of the 80s and that of the network and trust in the 90s, must be seen as the period of a profound overturning of management and its tenets, since what has been celebrated are difficult forms of control that appeal to people's emotions and their social history, which are aspects that, from its beginnings, scientific management would have preferred to exclude. It remains to be shown that these new forms are not simple additions to a list of managerial practices, traditionally very distant from the workings of the worlds of art. They actually accompany a profound evolution of the core definition of management.]

subsumption, according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, is the rise of immaterial labour, or the transformation of previously semi-autonomous spheres like intellectual and cultural work, as well as the very production of subjectivities, into a new source of the production and accumulation of value (Hardt and Negri 269-76). Put another way, demands for personal or collective autonomy can no longer be positioned as critiques of an impersonal and alienating wage-labour system, but are instead requirements of the system itself. From the proliferation of personalized goods and service economies, to the demand to view one's own employment as the never-ending expansion of human capital and transferable capacities under flexible employment regimes, capitalism's absorption of the oppositional politics of avant-gardes has been nothing less than total: the familiar surrealist critique of instrumental rationality, "take your desires for reality," was only too easily reconverted into a post-behaviourist principle of "employee empowerment" and *Liberation Management*, to borrow the title of one business bestseller.[11]

What Boltanski and Chiapello's recuperation thesis makes possible is a finer-

[11] From Tom Peters, *Liberation Management* (1992): "Finally, get turned on. Or follow your bliss, or whatever. Vacuous advice? Perhaps. But the practical implication is this: In a knowledge-based economy, you must – to survive – add some special value, be distinctively good at something. And the truth is, we only get good at stuff we like. [...] Ain't nobody going to take care of you on the job in a big company anymore: It's not dog-eat-dog out there anymore, it's skill-eat-skill. If you're not skilled/motivated/passionate about *something*, you're in trouble!" (757-58). Other classics of the business-self-help genre: Peters, *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution* (1987); Richard Tanner Pascale, *Managing on the Edge: How the Smartest Companies Use Conflict to Stay Ahead* (1990); Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *The Renewal Factor* (1987). The crisis in finance capital of 2007-09, however, has had its effects on management too: some have called for a walkback from the edge of neoliberal crisis-theory to an older form of structured management and vectors of real productivity. See Jack Buffington, *The Death of Management: Restoring Value to the U.S. Economy* (2009).

grained genealogy of avant-garde practice. Bürger 's thesis, in all its finality and despair at the avant-garde's "false sublation," has to be understood in its historical moment, at the conjuncture where the real subsumption of the social begins to impose itself in earnest; where, as Fredric Jameson has argued, those last few untouched spaces of social reality, or standpoints of potential resistance "from the outside" – geographically, the third world, and in private experience, the unconscious – succumb to the all-encompassing logic of the commodity.[12] Bürger's thesis on the intractable contradictions of the avant-garde, its negation of its own autonomy, is unmistakably a document of this critical closure. The aspects of Bürger's critique that speak the clearest today are the many nods towards May 1968, when, as he notes in a postscript, "the hopes of those who, like myself, believed in the possibility of 'more democracy' in all spheres of social life went unfulfilled" (95). Bürger's intervention stands as a sort of summary judgement on two decades of artistic and theoretical engagement with the avant-garde concept, from echoes of dada and Constructivism in postmodern visual artists like Rauschenberg, Warhol, and Johns, with all their implied and overt contestation of high modernism's ascendancy in galleries and art criticism; to Situationism's direct lineage from Surrealism, and its intensification and

[12] Jameson writes, "late capitalism in general (and the 60s in particular) constitute a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism – the last vestiges of a noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world – are not ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment when the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the Third World and the unconscious. The 60s will then have been the momentous transformational period when this systemic restructuring takes place on a global scale" ("Periodizing the 60s" 207).

re-politicization of the Surrealist critique of instrumental rationality and the dead forms of capitalist reification with the irrationalism of the dream image and the motility of desire; to, in criticism, the real emergence and codification of the avant-garde as an intelligible critical category, and no longer only a performative self-description by artists, in the work of critics like Renato Poggioli, Hans-Magnus Enzensburger, Leslie Fiedler, and others.[13] Bürger's thesis, it seems to me, is significant primarily as a document that recognizes the real subsumption of the social at the moment it was set in motion.

II. The avant-garde is history, but which one?

But this raises the question of what the concept of the avant-garde had to offer to a critique of capitalism in the 1960s, or why it became necessary to evaluate social and artistic movements of that decade in terms of a prior cultural formation. Here the picture gets complicated, but in broad outline, the failure of the historical avant-garde was only partial: its critique of a moribund liberalism in politics and economy, of a philistine and classicist national bourgeois culture, formed the very basis of the planned economies of the mid-twentieth century. In a word, its critique of bourgeois liberalism paved the way

[13] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968); Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, "The Aporias of the Avant-Garde" (1974); Leslie Fiedler, "The Death of Avant-Garde Literature," (1971). The standard surveys of criticism from the definitional moment of the avant-garde in the 1960s are Andreas Huyssen's chapter "The Search for Tradition" in *After the Great Divide*, 160-78, and Matei Calinescu's "The Crisis of the Avant-Garde's Concept" in *Five Faces of Modernity*, 120-25.

for the midcentury "managerial revolution."[14] In its various, and widely disparate, forms – fascist corporatism, the Soviet five-year plan, the Keynesian economic *dirigisme* – planning formed an ideological consensus that displaced classical liberalism's axiom of free competition and, for the problematic raised by the avant-garde, produced new avenues for integrating culture and industry and a whole new conception of culture *as work*, cast in the image of the designer – as well as new resistances to integration. In the analysis of the architectural theorist Manfredo Tafuri, "the ideology of the plan" was nothing less than capitalism's mid-century recuperation of the avant-garde, a transformation of the negative critique of the cultural apparatus articulated by Futurism and dada into more production-friendly schools of design modernism like De Stijl and Bauhaus.[15] These latter rapidly became the hegemonic form of modernism, which cut across political divides: "Organization and planning," argues Tafuri, "are thus the passwords of both democratic socialism and democratic capitalism" (69). We would have to add to Tafuri's bipolar map of the twentieth century the uses of planning in developmental policies enacted primarily in African and Latin American countries – and

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[14] Classical sources for this shift include Chandler, *The Visible Hand* (1977) and James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (1941). For a critical history, see David Harvey's "Fordism" chapter in *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

[15] Tafuri singles out Breton as one artist-intellectual who resisted the functionalization of culture by industry. In his second Surrealist manifesto (1924), Breton marks out the very tension that would later be the basis of Bürger's antinomy of the avant-garde: thought "cannot do other than oscillate between the awareness of its perfect autonomy and that of its strict dependence" (qtd. in Tafuri 64). Breton ultimately pushed for art's critical autonomy, as opposed to, for example, Russian Constructivism, for whom art as propaganda posed no great worry. See Tafuri 63-68.

indeed the idea of a modernizing "third world" itself has to be considered a key symptom of the near-global acceptance of the ideology of the plan.[16] For Tafuri, utopian design modernisms were dialectical realization of the first, negative moment of the historical avant-garde, whose critique of the residues of classicism cleared the way for the ambitious planning projects of Le Corbusier or Lissitzky, and the transformation of everyday life by industrial design in Gropius. That these were a partial version of the transformation of life by art envisioned by the historical avant-garde, or in other words capitalism's homeopathic defense against more radical systemic change, is precisely how we should understand the mechanics of recuperation to work.

All of which is to say that the 1960s rediscovery of the avant-garde was, in a sense, directed against its own false realization. But here it becomes necessary to make a distinction between specific historical avant-gardes. The particular movements Bürger takes as paradigmatic of the historical avant-garde period are Surrealism and dada, especially, with some space dedicated to the Frankfurt School's uptake of Expressionism – all of them critiques of the very forms of instrumental rationality that would manifest themselves in the Fordist rationalization of production and form the intellectual basis of the post-war Keynesian managerial state. As some critics have noticed, Bürger neglects

[16] World systems theorists recognized in the 1970s that the export of "development" was part of a global accumulation strategy, consistent with older imperialisms See, for example, Samir Amin's *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* and "Accumulation and Development: A Theoretical Model."

the Futurist movement almost entirely.[17] On the one hand this omission is confusing, because Futurism appears to meet his minimum requirements, as a movement that made the destruction of the cultural sphere and the integration of art and life its most basic tenet, and did this nearly a decade before the movements he chooses to investigate. The easy explanation for Bürger 's avoidance of Futurism is its eventual accommodation to Fascism, which is a much more complicated issue than it appears, but has been an insurmountable barrier for leftist critics both before Bürger and since. The more likely reason that Futurism is overlooked in Bürger's *Theory* is because its totalizing ambitions looked too much like the expanded state-form of the postwar period, from which dada and Surrealism offered a potential, but ultimately contradictory, liberation – what Roland Barthes once dismissively called a "life style" avant-gardism.[18] By contrast, Futurism's scope was all-encompassing. It sought to rehabilitate much more than just a stagnant art world: the range of targets in its manifestos includes the institutions of parliament, industry, church, and schools, but also the disciplines of city planning, architecture, fashion, cuisine, and far beyond – witness Giacomo Balla and Fortuno Depero's 1915 manifesto called "The Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe."[19] From their agenda-setting critique, it was only a few steps to realize midcentury planning ideology, or "a utopia serving the objectives of the reorganization of production," in Tafuri's words (98).

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[17] Notably Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism,* 6.
[18] Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, 67.
[19] In Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos*, 197-200.

And so if the avant-garde re-emerged as a critical category during the 60s, it was partly as a discourse of complicity: this is the other side of Bürger 's antinomy, where the false sublation of art's autonomy meant its ability to envision, and then find a place within, the "endogenous imperialism" of the midcentury administrative state.[20]

As for Bürger's own false sublation of the avant-garde, the commodification of everyday life, it too stands to be folded into this periodization. One of the more historically and ideologically remote aspects of the early avant-gardes is their unproblematic enthusiasm for industry and mass production. But this enthusiasm needs to be considered in the contexts of a widespread productivism that threads its way through even the most radical writers of the period – witness Gramsci's enthusiasm for Fordism, his question of how it would restructure social conditions for the better, far beyond the factory floor.[21] But it must be remembered that mass commodity production – all those midcentury labour-saving consumer durables, along with Keynesian full-employment policies and the expansion of the welfare state – offered an unparalleled mobility and freedom from the constraints imposed by a more family- and location-based bourgeois capitalism. It was in this way that planning and industrial design were positioned as market-based solutions to the demands for liberation posed by historical avant-garde. As Peter Wollen's *Raiding The Icebox* argues, modernism itself can be understood as a kind

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[20] "Endogenous imperialism" is Foucault's term for the institutional proliferaton that characterized the post-War state. See *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 187.

[21] Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.*

of "cultural Fordism," negotiating the impact of an emergent Fordist-Keynesianism in phenomena as varied as film (Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Léger's *Ballet Mécanique*), Surrealist automatic painting, the architecture of New York's 1920s skyscraper boom, Coco Chanel's unadorned "little black dress," Clement Greenberg's radically abstracted formalism, and Vienna Circle linguistics, with its anti-metaphysical approach to language, no less reality itself, as segmented parts open to rational analysis. For Wollen, mass production had worn out its welcome by the 1960s, when it was met with the parodies of standardization in Pop Art (Warhol's "factory") as well as the *détournements* of the Situationists. Writes Wollen,

> From the beginning, modernism developed out of the circulation of images from low to high and periphery to core and, by doing so, challenged the aesthetic hierarchies of the *anciens régimes*. On this subversive and unstable base an aesthetic of rationalism and functionalism was later superimposed, after the collapse of the *anciens régimes* precipitated by the First World War. Artists and art theorists rallied to a utopian dream of a new society modelled on the exemplary modernity of a new American technology and new Fordist industrial organization. But the circulation of images and discourses was never completely blocked and with the collapse of high modernism, it simply re-emerged (208-09).

By the time of Bürger's critique, mass consumption itself had so saturated the social world that another liberation was needed: Dada and surrealism's anti-rationalization critiques, then, were revived for a time in order to contest the "bureaucratic capitalism" that Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* called "the concentrated form of the spectacle" (41), an anti-technocracy, anti-rationalization stance adopted from the *Socialisme ou barbarie* group. Important here is that consumption, too, was determined by the logic of

Taylorized production and centralized management, and required a kind of Copernican revolution in consumer orientation to absorb the anti-establishment zeitgeist of the 1960s: as Thomas Frank argues in *The Conquest of Cool*, the conformity of mass consumption was transformed on Madison Avenue into individualized appeals to self-realization that make up what he calls a "countercultural style," which has only since continued to develop in the direction of personalized niche products and experience economies.[22]

So it becomes necessary to recognize two distinct moments of avant-garde recuperation by a resilient and adaptable capitalism. First, the historical avant-garde set itself against bourgeois liberalism, whose expanding industrial organization was at odds with its residually classicist culture, and provided the aesthetic and ideological critique necessary for an ascendant managerialism. Second, in the 60s, the avant-garde was again appealed to, this time as a discourse of liberation from the hegemonic state forms of managerialism that were derived, ironically, from the historical avant-garde itself. Our present-day unease with the avant-garde concept follows in the wake of this second recuperation. It may not be necessary to add that capitalism's recuperation of these avant-garde critiques ignored the more radical claims for social change to which they were, in their historical moments, linked – from the anarchism and syndicalism of dada and

[22] Frank writes: "The countercultural style has become a permanent fixture on the American scene, impervious to the angriest assaults of cultural and political conservatives, because it so conveniently and efficiently transforms the myriad petty tyrannies of economic life – all the complaints about conformity, oppression, bureaucracy, meaninglessness, and the disappearance of individualism that became virtually a national obsession in the 1950s – into rationales for consuming" (31). In Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*.

Futurism, to the council communism that underpinned Situationism's notion of self-management. Instead, the recuperation of these critiques essentially assimilated their aesthetic forms, their critiques of hierarchy and alienation, and turned them into new models for the accumulation of value.

Like any survey, this one is tentative. But one advantage of starting from an analysis of recuperation – or how cultural and political formations move against and then within a dominant order or rationality – is how it explains a certain definitional confusion around modernism's politics: why certain modern movements can seem to be both revolutionary and reactionary, or rather why they look radical from one vantage point and conformist from another.[23] But that problem dissolves if we adopt a thoroughly historical understanding of these movements, one that refers itself to broad changes in the organization of production, as well as the different justifications used to perpetuate them. For example, the problem I opened with – avant-gardism as management doctrine, and as

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[23] Susan Stanford Friedman's widely cited "definitional excursion" into the conflicting political valences of modernism and modernity in in humanities and social science scholarship is a case in point. While her argument ultimately points to a "relational" and "adjectival" use of modernism that is sensitive to the specifics of time and place, and thereby able to incorporate a multiplicity of non-Western modernities and modernisms, it does this by condensing a series of temporally and analytically situated observations about modernism into the straw target of what she calls "a critical Tower of Babel" (497): a symptom, apparently, of scholarship's overdevelopment in the West, rather than as a symptom of the dehistoricizing and essentializing approach presupposed by the very question that opens her essay, "what was modernism?" For example, her seemingly deliberate misreading of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity,* a book that, she contends, "slides back and forth between 'anarchy' and 'organization' as the defining modes of High Modernism with only occasional allusion to the tension between these meanings" (502), entirely suppresses the historical dimension of Harvey's argument – which is impossible to do on any fair reading. See Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism."

part of a new labour regime based on flexible networks – seems a scandal precisely because our conceptual tools for the avant-garde are outdated. The fact that Bürger's *Theory* remains the standard reading of the avant-garde today should tip us off that our concept remains locked within the constellation of terms that emerged in the anti-commodification critique of the 1960s.

III. Contemporary disavowals

Today, the dynamics of the avant-garde have changed: after the real subsumption of cultural work, or in other words at a point where culture's ubiquity and non-autonomy are the condition of possibility of cultural work at all, any purportedly resistant cultural or artistic practice has been forced to redefine its aims and terms. Typically these redefinitions are accompanied by an almost ritualized disavowal of the avant-garde, but with decidedly mixed results. One strategy can be found in the 2005 book *Collectivism After Modernism*, whose editors situate their idea of the kinds of artistic resistance that have been on the rise since the eclipse of modernism in a collectivist "general intellect," following Italian *autonomia*, where the legacy of the avant-garde is reclaimed for political radicalism, though in spectral, almost spiritual, terms:

> This new collectivism carries with it the spectral power of collectivisms past just as it is realized fully within the hegemonic power of global capitalism. Its creativity stands in relationship to the modernist image and the postmodernist counterimage much in the same way that the multitude of Sunday painters and other amateurs does to the handful of art stars: as a type of dark matter encircling

> the reified surfaces of the spectacle of everyday life. Vastly more extensive and difficult to pinpoint, this new collectivist fetish inhabits the everywhere and nowhere of social life. In so doing it gives its own interpretation of the old avant-garde banner – 'art into life!' – that it proudly carries forth from its predecessors: that the ancient dream of the glorious, all-encompassing body of the collective – of Christ or God or Allah or King or Leviathan or Nation or State or Public – the dream of redemption, of experiencing the imagined community as an end to alienation and as a promise of eternal life, realize itself not as an image or as flight from images but instead as a form of social building that brings itself into being wherever and whenever it can. (13)

This model of a resistant art, drawn from Hardt and Negri's concept of the constituent power of the multitude, has broad appeal. Compatible approaches are taken elsewhere. Nicholas Bourriaud's grouping of a series of 1990s art exhibitions as a "relational aesthetic," where the gallery space is a sort of laboratory in the exploration of new social forms and the constitution of communities, is one version of this post-avant-garde collectivism.[24] Many of the exhibitions cited by Bourriaud and Claire Bishop that fall under this category take as their subject matter figures and bodies of the multitude – service workers, undocumented immigrants[25]–and use the gallery space as the site of a suspension or *détournement* of marginalizing discourses or forms of labour in an attempt to "fill the cracks in the social bond" (Bourriaud 36): from Rirkrit Tiravanija's interactive installations, in which the artist takes up the position of a service worker by, in one

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[24] For Bourriaud, "present-day art is roundly taking on and taking up the legacy of the 20th century avant-gardes, while at the same time challenging their dogmatism and their teleological doctrines. [...] It was based on conflict, whereas the imaginary of our day and age is concerned with negotiations, bonds, and co-existences" (45). Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*.

[25] Bishop writes: "relational art is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy" (54). Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics."

example, cooking for gallery patrons and creating a convivial, reparative space for open-ended sociability (Bourriaud 25, 30), to Santiago Sierra's more confrontational "ethnographic realism," which foregrounds an exploitative and exclusionary economic and legal order by, in the case of his exhibition at the 2001 Venice biennale, paying undocumented immigrants who work as the city's street vendors to dye their hair blond and then inviting those who typically surround the biennale into his exhibition to sell their goods (Bishop 73). However, Bourriaud's rejection of the world-historical ambitions of the avant-garde and his accompanying restriction of relational aesthetics to the "laboratory" of the gallery space – a complaint that has been raised from several quarters[26] – are signs that the avant-garde's most fundamental problematic, the autonomy of the aesthetic from the economic and the political, returns here in all too familiar form: to its credit, Bourriaud's relational aesthetic has thematized that divide, but how it might be surpassed remains unclear.

Another post-avant-garde development, different in character, is *The Coming Insurrection* (2009) by the Invisible Committee, which resuscitates the avant-garde's signature genre, the manifesto, in a blistering anarcho-autonomist critique of the contemporary global order. The text's call to action tries to dissolve any residual twentieth-century vanguardism in the very act of negating the category of authorship –

[26] Bishop's observation of the audiences of these exhibitions forces her to conclude that despite its ambitions, relational aesthetics essentially "permits networking among a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers" (Bishop 67).

with its "invisibility" metaphor, and the claim that the manifesto's ideas are drawn directly from the multitudes themselves: "This book is signed in the name of an imaginary collective. Its editors are not its authors. They were content merely to introduce a little order into the common-places of our time, collecting some of the murmurings around barroom tables and behind closed bedroom doors" (n.p.). More than mere conceits, these gestures towards authorial self-dissolution are part of a larger strategy of struggle, or perhaps more properly an anti-strategy, aiming to "Turn anonymity into an offensive position" (n.p.)– the point being that identifiable and visible groups open themselves to police repression or market appropriation, and meanwhile exploitation has reached a such a point of saturation that resistance could conceivably begin anywhere, or everywhere at once. It remains to be seen whether this anti-organizational politics, based as much on Deleuzian lines of flight as coalitions of anti-globalization activist groups in recent years, can overcome its very formlessness, or what Ernesto Laclau has called the lack, in the figure of the resistant multitude, of a theory of articulation.[27] For my purposes here, the issue raised by *The Coming Insurrection* is the tension between its imagination of a creative, adaptable, distributed resistance and the apparently still-necessary act of writing a manifesto, which is perhaps better stated as a contradiction between content and form, or ends and means; in this text's case, a disavowed vanguardism seems to by

[27] Ernesto Laclau, "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?" A similar critique of the non-strategic character of the multitude can be found in Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, "Gems and Baubles in *Empire*."

necessity reappear at another level, in the performative contradiction of an anti-vanguardist manifesto.

Still, if the political horizon of these movements is a genuinely globalized capital, then how does the concept of the avant-garde resonate outside the West? This problem raises is a theoretical legacy that routinely excludes non-Western avant-gardes, both historical and contemporary. To fully appreciate the challenge to the concept of the avant-garde from the non-Western world, I want to draw from two essential critical texts by George Yúdice. The first, titled "The Avant-Garde from the Periphery" (1999), argues that if an essential element of avant-gardes is the imaginative proximity of social revolution, in Perry Anderson's phrase, then this insight needs to be tempered by a global perspective that de-emphasizes the 1917 Bolshevik revolution as the *sine qua non* of a strictly Western avant-gardism. Anti-colonial revolutions and uprisings swept across the non-Western world in the early twentieth century, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, and each adapted avant-gardist techniques to its specific circumstances. Focusing particularly on Nicaragua and Brazil in the 1930s, Yúdice shows how avant-gardism was often combined with indigenous and ethnic traditions in order to create national cultures that would contest the deterritorializing forces of imperialism. In many cases, peripheral avant-gardes were enthusiastic about the forces of modernization and development which in those contexts contested the rule of an older oligarchy. That legacy has made the contemporary reception of "global" avant-gardes problematic: the tendency

is for Western art institutions to delegitimize them by a double strategy of ghettoization—metropolitan exhibitions themed on "third world" avant-gardes— and ideological misinterpretation, reading many of them as examples of colonial mimicry of Western forms, with any subversive or revolutionary potential in these non-Western avant-gardes negated by the nationalisms and postcolonial statisms with which they are often imbricated.[28] At base this is a formalist reading of global avant-gardism that forgets the critical and social dimension that constitutes avant-gardist practice as such, and the importance of historically specific understandings of the various social forces—revolutionary nationalism, imperialism, decolonization, modernization, community, ethnic identity—that compose the political field in which these avant-gardes respond. It is worth noting, meanwhile, that the revolutionary nationalisms of peripheral avant-gardes is a mirror image of the pro-modernization, revolutionary nationalist projects of some key Western avant-gardes, like the Futurists, whose own exclusion from Bürger's and others' selective histories of the avant-garde begins to make more sense. In this case, the peripheries reveal the truth of the centre, as statism and modernization were, at the time Bürger took up the avant-garde concept, impossible to incorporate into a leftist position.

Yúdice argues for a "conjunctural" sense of avant-gardism, which would include all of the different social forces just mentioned: "It is possible, by a postmodern turn, to

[28] For critiques of this tendency, see Elizabeth Harney, "Postcolonial Agitations: Avant-Gardism in Dakar and London," and Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India.*

rethink the avant-gardes as not constituting a particular moment in the history of modernity but, rather, a transformative power that is generated whenever the conjunctural circumstances allow for it" (74). Yúdice's conjunctural reading immediately complicates Bürger's historicism, which relies on a Hegelian "unfolding" of the aesthetic sphere as such, to the point of its terminal, avant-gardist moment of crisis—a complaint against Bürger that has been raised by several critics.[29] I would like to suggest, following Yúdice, that we can better understand avant-gardism—in its historical guises, but also its global manifestations and its more recent self-disavowing varieties—as what Massimo de Angelis has termed "value struggles." These are not struggles over value in the narrow sense of beliefs or ethics, but the modes in which labour and reproduction are organized and valued within a capitalist system. Value struggles, he argues, exist throughout the social field, and so

> capital's value practices [are] in perpetual struggle with other value practices. [Capitalism] is also preservative of the rules generated by enclosures, because through repetition subjects tend to become normalized to them. Yet this is a normalisation that does not abolish conflict among value practices, but that turns

[29] Yúdice s conception here bears some similarities to Hal Foster's better-known critique of Bürger, which also argues, although from an internalist and western art-historical perspective, for a more flexible historiography to the concept of the avant-garde. But this temporal flexibility comes with a cost; Foster's critique wants to redeem neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and 60s and open the possibility of future ones, but to do this he draws from psychoanalytic concepts of return, deferred action, and compulsive repetition to frame the avant-garde as a traumatic hole in the signifying order that is periodically reiterated by subsequent avant-gardes. The cost here is any sense of the "conjunctural circumstances" Yúdice refers to above; historical analysis recedes behind a poststructural, traumatic model of a more or less involuntary mechanism of repetition. Contrast this to Yúdice, who is careful to temper his historical and geographical expansion of the concept of the avant-garde with the material circumstances of decolonization, in which they occur. See Hal Foster, "What's Neo About the Neo-Avant-Garde?"

> this conflict into the driving engine of the evolution of the organisational form of capitalism while basic processes of homeostasis keep social forces and conflicting value practices coupled together. In other words, *in the daily reproduction of our livelihoods we are involved, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly, in a form of civil war cutting across the social body.* (81)

De Angelis writes from a post-Autonomist perspective that reinterprets Marx's labour theory of value in light of contemporary non-factory production; like Hardt and Negri, he understands struggles over reproduction—of bodies, social relations, labour power—as increasingly central both to capitalism's survival and to any potential resistance to it. The struggle over this expanded reproductive sphere is exemplified, for de Angelis and other post-autonomists, by an alter-globalization movement that engages in political opposition to processes of primitive accumulation and enclosure of various commons at work in today's globalized accumulation strategies. De Angelis argues convincingly that the everyday social field is made up of non-capitalist value practices and reproductive processes too, and so any model of a totalizing capitalism that rearticulates all forms of social cooperation as market-based exchanges misses a key part of the picture and, worse, limits our ability to theorize and practice real alternatives.[30] From de Angelis's perspective it becomes clearer why the avant-garde form was tied to statist articulations in the early

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[30] Yúdice, not an autonomist Marxist, nevertheless agrees with de Angelis on the risks of theorizing capitalism as a totality, and the necessity of thinking through local value struggles: "The struggle for local autonomy proceeded according to a distinct logic of its own: the logic of community building. This logic included the creation of coherent meanings, cultural identities, and social solidarities—or organizing the relations of gender, class, and ethnicity. That is, we must be careful not to assume that the forces of [capitalist] integration [of a world market] were, themselves, the driving forces of twentieth-century global development. That would only reduce world history to the history of western domination" (56).

century and in decolonizing zones, and then to anti-state, anti-institutional critique in the West after 1968: each of these conjunctures has its own reigning value regime, which avant-gardes, in some sense by definition, contest.

Meanwhile, the historical dimension of de Angelis's theory is important here too: by tying the question of value to non-capitalist spheres, modeled on a notion of the commons that fights capitalist enclosure and the imposition of private property, the avant-garde concept connects to a series of struggles that precede its apparent start date, somewhere around 1900, and survive past its demise after May 1968. Further, it may well be that Bürger's apparent "self realization" of the avant-garde is some sense a genre effect, a consequence of avant-gardes resuscitation and chronic use of the manifesto form, from the Futurists forward. As Janet Lyon argues, the manifesto can be traced back to the Diggers' and Levellers' responses to the enclosures of the commons in seventeenth-century England, and the exclusion of the poor from the newly formed Parliament; these manifestos themselves have to be understood as a paradigmatic case of a "value struggle," where a social form of commoning was forcibly displaced by a new regime of property and rent, and the manifesto was critical to the articulation of non-capitalist values (Lyon 16-23). Finally, for those contemporary manifestations of post-avant-gardism, which want to create a para-political, relational space out of the current institutional framework of art, and to alternately heal, oppose, or travesty the usual market relations and forms of gallery spectatorship, are all directly foregrounding this question of the struggle over value and

social reproduction.

The second text by Yúdice that I want to consider is *The Expediency of Culture*, which offers a rigorous exploration of the value struggles and the real subsumption of cultural work under global capitalism – and in this case the frame of reference is indeed global. Yúdice's few remarks on the avant-garde raise two related problems with it in present-day art practice: its all-or-nothing criteria of social change, where art's effectivity is judged solely by its transformative social power and not by its more micropolitical effects in raising the visibility of oppressions or helping communities constitute localized responses to global capitalism; and the inevitable avant-garde gesture towards a "real" social life outside of political representation or artistic institutionalization, a space whose political effectivity, let alone its ontological status, Yúdice rightly questions.[31] His analysis of Latin American activist art and popular culture – maquiladora documentaries, baile funk, AIDS activism, and other complicated responses to the globalization of economy and culture – all take for granted that these practices can only take place with the assistance of supranational bodies like UNESCO, international biennales, and NGO-sponsored events like inSITE. For Yúdice, the question of these cultural forms' social effectivity is not overdetermined by their institutional involvement, but is a complex site of negotiation between funding agencies, artists, communities, and international

[31] Yúdice explores the limitations of Bürger's *Theory* for contemporary activist art throughout the book by implication, but explicitly in a discussion of inSITE "border art" exhibitions in the 1990s, 316-24.

audiences – and Yúdice's methodololgy here is exemplary, tracing out the "meaning" of specific art exhibitions from the conflicting testimonies by artists, granting agencies, community responses, and so on. That said, the very integration of culture into the production of a global order raises the issue most central to his book, where culture is now treated as a "resource" within global circuits of production and exchange (9-10). Yúdice doesn't mean by this to extend and globalize the indispensable but well-worn Frankfurt School thesis on culture's commodification, but rather that culture is, like any other key "natural" resource, now put to use in the management of life itself. For example, in a logic that connects border art exhibitions in Mexico to urban galleries in America, art is increasingly used as an indicator of "social health" in depressed economic zones, and exhibitions used as proof for a community's ability to attract capital investment. This plays out as urban "revitalization" and "renewal" strategies – what Manuel Castells calls the ability of art infrastructure to "give life" to urban zones (qtd. in Yúdice 19) – and the identification of "creative capitalism" as a motor of development in de-industrialized and "dead" city cores (16). The use of life and death metaphors in gentrification discourses is hardly incidental, as this functionalization of art for development purposes has arisen precisely during the period of a prolonged attack on welfare state provisions of social assistance, which brought with them their own idea of how life and populations were to be managed. What Yúdice's book offers, beyond its own remarkable analysis of Latin American art and activism, is a framework to connect artistic

practice to the dominant modes of biopolitical governance that are key to understanding our own historical moment and our own organization of production, in which immaterial labour is increasingly the hegemonic form of value creation in post-Fordist economies.

The problem I would like to turn to is whether Yúdice's framework invites a different kind of question about the politics and periodization of the avant-garde: wasn't it was about the politicization of life all along? That is, doesn't the avant-garde's interest in merging art and life put it on the same trajectory as biopolitics, in which, as Foucault conceived of it, a "whole political network became interwoven with the fabric of everyday life"?[32] However counter-intuitive the connection, there is at least a starting point in their overlapping histories: Foucault's genealogy of biopolitics is notably concentrated in the modernist period, from the deployment of political technologies of population management over the course of the nineteenth century (mortality rates, pensions, hygienics, and so on) to their transformation into the biological state racisms that were suspended, or displaced, at the end of World War Two. Is the avant-garde's wished-for transformation of "life-praxis" part of this biopolitical genealogy – part of this diffusion and internalization of power, which has arguably become the dominant mode of power in a present-day society of control?[33] Following the periodization I outlined above,

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[32] Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," 288.
[33] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control."

the historical avant-garde comes onto the scene during a first, nation-based articulation of biopolitics, where the nation-state's institutional expansion is posited as the solution to a growing number of deficiencies in the prior mode of social reproduction, bourgeois liberalism, whose very remoteness from "life" was precisely the complaint of the historical avant-gardes.[34] The next chapter will consider Futurism as one particular case study in this realization of biopolitical state forms, but the subsequent institutional critiques of the Keynesian regulation of social life, and the ways these critiques were repurposed by a resurgent neoliberalism to scale back the institutional security of "life" under the midcentury nation-state in favour of greater flexibility, precarity, and self-management – these make up the horizon against which I'm writing.

[34] The transformation of the nation-state in the modern period will be returned to below. This reading of a first, nation-based articulation of biopower is based on Foucault`s March 17, 1976 lecture in the *Society Must Be Defended* collection, in which he outlines his theory of biopolitics in relation to state racism. Étienne Balibar's *Race, Nation, Class* expands Foucault's analysis of how biopolitics is inscribed within democratic political forms and the expansion of educational, health, and private rights: "In the last analysis, the overlapping of [racism and nationalism] goes back to the circumstances in which nation states, established upon historically contested *territories*, have striven to control *population* movements, and to the very production of the 'people' as a political community taking precedence over class divisions" (48).

CHAPTER TWO: Biopolitical Futurism, 1909-1919

In what follows, I will make the case that Futurism was a cultural response to the emergent state-based biopolitics in the modernist period. Foucault's explanation of *why* this mode of biopolitical governance was necessary during the modernist period, and why an older sovereign political authority was displaced, stresses the related factors of urbanization and industrialization: “One might say this: It is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organizing schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization” (*Society* 249). Futurism, for its part, has always been understood as response to these same two factors. But where the administrative techniques of government that emerged during the rise of the “total state” were one way that a swelling urban population, or mass, was reinscribed within state sovereignty, Futurism's celebration of the protean character of life and the transformative potential of industry operated, for a brief time, as a sort of counter-conduct to the coalescing modes of power. This isn't to say that it was an entirely oppositional movement: there were significant areas of overlap between Futurism's vitalized poetics and the articulations of state power that ultimately recuperated it. But the problem of tracing the overlaps and disjunctures with Fascism's state-based biopolitics will underlie the argument of this chapter.

The specific form biopolitics took in the Futurist moment was a narrative of cultural and national rebirth or revitalization, which politicized life in novel and theretofore unseen ways – the most familiar of which is a myth of national organicism that structured the biopolitical imagination of the day. As historians Zeev Sternhell, Emilio Gentile, and Roger Griffin have all argued, rebirth tropes were widespread in turn of the century political and cultural writings in Italy and beyond, and formed the ideological foundation of between-war European fascisms. I want to stress, however, that Futurism's use of these myths was idiosyncratic, and that the question of how Futurism helped soften the ground for the rise of Mussolini can only be approached in terms of the concept of recuperation I outlined in chapter one – that is, as a partial and distorted realization of a more radical critique. When Marinetti concluded that Fascism had achieved "the minimal Futurist program,"[1] the point is to understand how the question of rebirth was made compliant with a surviving capitalist mode of accumulation. The Futurist idea of rebirth drew from a broadly based refusal of bourgeois liberalism, whose very survival as a mode of social reproduction had been thrown into question by radical critiques from workers' movements, women's organizations, and anti-imperialist resistances: or, the entry onto the political scene of the so-called masses, their irrationalism and volatility a clear threat to liberal individualism, as LeBon's *The Crowd*

[1] From F. T. Marinetti's 1924 manifesto "Artistic Rights Defended by the Italian Futurists," collected in *F. T. Marinetti: Critical Writings* (ed. Günter Berghaus), 357-63. All subsequent references to this collection will be in-text and marked with the abbreviation *CW*.

makes clear. Variously called the end point of imperialist expansion, a crisis of overproduction, or the financialization of capital, it was obvious to writers of the age that overaccumulation had reached a crisis point, and that the groups marginalized by that form of capitalism needed fuller recognition in the political realignment to come. Italy, resting as it did on the border between Europe and its "outside," taking the specific double character of both core and periphery, offered one particularly opportune site for a questioning of bourgeois liberalism.

Analyzing the biopolitics of Futurism is important on its own terms, as questions of life and rebirth were utterly central to how the movement understood its political and aesthetic radicalism. But it has the benefit of adding a needed perspective on the political affiliation of the movement, over which critical debate has long been deadlocked and contradictory. Generally accepted to be aesthetically revolutionary but proto-Fascist in politics, Futurism has always been something of a limit case in theoretical discussions of the politics of form. This polarized reception can be traced all the way back: Mussolini's admiration is a matter of record – "I formally declare that without Futurism there would never have been a fascist revolution" (Mussolini, qtd. in Gentile 41) – as is Gramsci's at least initial approval: "[The Futurists] have grasped sharply and clearly that our age, the age of big industry, of the large proletarian city and the intense and tumultuous life, was in need of new forms of art, philosophy, behaviour and language. This sharply revolutionary and absolutely *Marxist* idea came to them when the Socialists were not

even vaguely interested in such a question."[2] Much of the confusion has to do with Futurism's internal dynamics. It was far from a univocal movement, despite Marinetti's imposing presence, but even when it appeared to be speaking in a single voice, Marinetti's simultaneous political affiliations with the Italian Nationalist Association on the right and anarcho-syndicalist groups on the left is an insurmountable barrier to critical attempts to reduce Futurism to a single political camp. More recent appraisals have avoided politically reductionist conclusions by stressing the movement's own self-difference: shifting political positions over time (a broad distinction is generally made between a revolutionary "first" Futurism of 1909-1919, and an accommodationist "second" futurism of 1919-1944),[3] extreme diversity of sources for their political ideas and affiliations,[4] and differences between geographically distinct Futurist groups, both within Italy and

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[2] From Gramsci's short article "Marinetti the Revolutionary" (1921), reprinted in *Selections from Cultural Writings,* 49-51. Gramsci's approval of Futurism in this quote is offset by a critique a year later, in a letter answering Trotsky's query about the status of the movement: "Before the war, Futurism was very popular among the workers. The magazine *Lacerba*, with a circulation of 20,000 copies, had 80 per cent of its distribution among workers. During numerous Futurist meetings in the theatres of the largest Italian cities, workers defended Futurists against young semi-aristocrats and bourgeois who came to blows with them. Marinetti's Futurist group no longer exists. [...] It could be said that after the conclusion of the armistice the Futurist movement entirely lost its character and split up into different trends created and formed during the upheaval of the war. Nearly all the young intelligentsia have become reactionary" ("A Letter to Trotsky on Futurism," *Selections from Cultural Writings* 52-54).

[3] Walter Adamson,in his *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe*, distinguishes between Futurism's first, revolutionary period, and its second decade of "design Futurism" that was more in line with De Stijl and Bauhaus.

[4] The combination of philosophical and political sources of the Futurist movement is taken up in Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944*; Giovanni Lista, "Marinetti et les Anarcho-Syndicalistes"; and Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century.*

beyond,[5] all argue for Futurism's complex and conflicting relationships to its period's political exigencies. Rather than the impossible project of taking the aggregate of these statements and calculating some kind of median political position, or deciding on the truth or falsity of various Futurist positions, I want to understand Futurism in terms of the political statements it made possible: that is, in terms of how it imagined politics otherwise, and specifically how it imagined politics after its discursive displacement onto the terrain of life and biology.[6] In taking up a properly genealogical approach to Futurism's involvement with biopolitics, I want to take seriously Foucault's methodological statement that genealogy "consists in taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists in using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing

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[5] Walter Adamson's *Avant Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* has to be considered a forerunner in tracing the specific geographies of Futurism in Italy; for an account of Mediterranean Futurist circles, see Claudio Fogu "Futurist Mediterraneita between Emporium and Imperium," 25-43; meanwhile, Marjorie Perloff's *The Futurist Moment* remains one of the better accounts of how Futurism resonated internationally, especially in Russia and England, as what has to be considered a transversal strategy of resistance: crossing national boundaries and modifiable for different political circumstances.

[6] Beyond Foucault's own writings, I draw this framework of biopolitics in the twentieth century from Roberto Esposito's genealogy: "the specialist language of politics is now enlarged to include a more complex relation derived from the meeting, conflict, and layering with other disciplinary lexicons that interact and contaminate each other to create new and different effects. The appearance onstage of biological life [...] has a disruptive effect that then positions modern philosophy along different vectors of sense, which overlap without coming together in a single line. The force of the biopolitical perspective lies precisely in its capacity to read this interweaving and this conflict, this gap in meaning and what is implied, which is to say the powerful antinomy between intersecting languages that are originally heterogeneous, such as those of politics and biology" (639). From Roberto Esposito, "Totalitarianism or Biopolitics? Concerning a Philosophical Interpretation of the Twentieth Century."

power relations through the antagonism of strategies."[7] It happens that this catalyst metaphor, as helpful as it is in thinking through a distributed and often self-contradictory resistance like Futurism, appears in the same essay in which Foucault discusses the importance of the *reversibilty* of strategies of power and resistance: "In fact, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal. At every moment, the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries. Equally, the relationship between adversaries in society may, at every moment, give place to the putting into operation of mechanisms of power" (347). I can think of no better operating procedure for a criticism that wants to understand Futurism's reversals, and its links and disjunctures with an emerging Fascist movement whose own recuperation of leftist organizations on their way to a seizure of State power remains an unprecedented and historic warning.

I. Biopolitics and rebirth

As Roberto Esposito has shown, Foucault's use of the term "biopolitics" in his writings and lectures of the late 1970s is not a neologism, which is often mistakenly assumed. Esposito demonstrates that Foucault is actually intervening in a discourse on biopolitics that extends back to the early twentieth century: the term's emergence and its

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[7] Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power," 329.

earliest conceptual elaboration occurred in the 1910s.[8] For these early writings – Esposito identifies Rudolph Kjellén's *The State as a Form of Life* (1916) and Baron Jokob von Uexküll's *Staatsbiologie: Anatomie, Physiologie, Pathologie des Staates* (*State Biology: Anatomy, Physiology, and Pathology of the State*) (1920) as foundational texts – biopolitics was the name given to a specifically vitalist conception of the modern state, or a conception of the state itself as a life form, complete with its own organic drives and processes. This sociobiologically-oriented "naturalization of politics" (17) took explicit aim at the long history of Western liberalism, undermining constitutional forms of government by appealing to a more fundamental strata of biological laws that determine the functioning of a state and its population. It was from this first elaboration of biopolitics that the Nazis drew their concept of *lebensraum,* or "vital space," positing the state-organism's drive to expand its borders as one of its natural functions. The culmination of this initial, "organistic" phase of biopolitics occurs in the 1930s and 40s, with Nazi state racism and the accompanying identification of social "cancers" and "parasites" to be subjected to a program of social hygiene – a turn that Foucault identifies as one specific, "paroxysmal development" of biopolitical discourse (*Society* 259).

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[8] Esposito cites a series of mainly German-language social-scientific texts of the 1910s and 20s as the moment of emergence of "biopolitics" as a critical term: this "organistic" usage is succeeded by a second, "anthropological" inflection of biopolitics in France in the 1960s, followed by a third, "naturalist" phase that begins in Anglo-American life sciences in the 1970s. Crucially, none of these biopolitical discourses are able to move beyond the reduction of the political to biological laws, which is where Foucault's genealogy of scientific knowledges, and of the epistemological status of "life," contests and overturns them. See Esposito, *Bios*, 16-32; see also Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, 9-21.

But the state-as-organism trope had a much broader application in political writings before the Nazi "paroxysm." The sociobiological turn in thinking about the nation was by no means an exclusive property of the predominantly German-language theorists cited in Esposito, and neither was it necessarily tied to a Völkisch, blood-and-soil ideology. Organicism was a feature of political thought across the political spectrum, on the radical left as well as the hyper-nationalist right. For example, in a 1911 issue of the Fabian socialist London journal *The New Age* – the leading English modernist periodical, soon after translating, incidentally, two Futurist manifestos to an enthusiastic English audience – a version of biopolitics is outlined by G. W. Harris, neatly anticipating the writings of Kjellén and von Uexküll.[9] In a short article titled "Bio-Politics", which likely coined the term, Harris identifies the inefficiencies of parliamentary institutions in the face of recent population increases and mass political mobilizations, and identifies biological reproduction as the key site of governmental intervention, advocating a series of negative eugenic solutions to parliamentary impasse, like mandatory abortion for bastard pregnancies, the expulsion of "superfluous," non-reproducing women, and a state lethal chamber for the criminally insane. It would take only a few short years for much of the problematic Harris outlines, if not his chilling solutions, to reappear in a more fully theorized form in the writings of Kjellén and von Uexküll; but the initial displacement of

[9] G.W. Harris, "Bio-Politics," *The New Age* 10.9 (December 28, 1911), 17. Marinetti's manifestos in *The New Age* came less than three years later, roughly coinciding with his a lecture tour of England: see *The New Age* 15.1 (May 7, 1914), 16-17, and 15.11 (July 16, 1914), 255-56. For the reception of Futurism in England, see Lawrence Rainey, "The Creation of the Avant-Garde: F.T. Marinetti and Ezra Pound."

political discourse to the level of biology, or away from representative government and towards the management of the life of a population, is established at the outset of biopolitics's first expression.

If politics took a turn toward the regulation of life itself in this period, the nation-state remained the overarching framework in which this regulation was articulated: discussions of the health and vitality of the individuals and populations, and applications of new political technologies measuring birth rates, longevity, and mortality, were aimed at reconceptualising the nation as a biological entity and a unitary historical subject in its own right. As Étienne Balibar's indispensible genealogy of the nation and nationalisms has shown, the nation-state of the 1910s was predominantly understood in sociobiological terms, a legacy of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory grafted onto the post-Westphalian balance of powers in Europe.[10] Internally, the turn-of-the-century nation-state was the centralized political form of a "people," generally framed in the homogenizing terms of biological races; externally, the sociobiological turn served as a justification for intensified inter-state competition, colonial exploitation of "inferior" races, and core-periphery hierarchy – as Balibar calls it, this idea of the nation constituted a whole new "conception of the world" (63). For a very recently modernized Italy, whose industrial growth rate in the 1890s and 1900s was unparalleled in Europe, ideas of growth,

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[10] See Balibar's "Racism and Nationalism" (37-67) and "The Nation Form: History and Ideology" (86-106) in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*.

expansion, and competition found a predictably strong foothold as a kind of popular ideology – at least in the newly industrialized areas of the north.[11] New heavy industry in hydrochemicals, steel, and automobiles would provide Futurist painting and poetry with much of its early symbolic content, but the Futurists' specific take on industrialization, its *modernolatria*, was hardly an isolated phenomenon. Industrial growth and improving Italy's position among Europe's Great Powers underwrote the expansionist policies of the Italian Nationalist Association (ANI), whose advocacy for irredentism, or the expansion of Italy's borders to encompass "unredeemed" contiguous or neighbouring territories along the Dalmatian coast and in North Africa, marked out one influential pole of an organic reinscription of the nation-state. For the ANI, the nation-as-organism trope was made to carry a lot of water: imperialism abroad and national unity at home were both easily wrapped into a quasi-biological logic of the state's natural growth and expansion. From Enrico Corradini's sociobiologically-shaded nationalism, which aimed specifically at undermining syndicalism or any other movement that would divide the unified will of the "Italian race" and thereby lead to the nation's weakness, decadence, and eventual extinction;[12] to economist Alfredo Rocco's "naturalist" nationalism that recast the nation as a racial organism caught up in a Darwinian struggle for survival and dominance;[13] to

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[11] Between 1896 and 1908, Italy experienced industrial growth at an average of 7%, the highest in Europe; income levels rose 38% over the period. See Paul Corner, "State and Society," in Adrian Lyttelton, ed., *Liberal and Fascist Italy 1900-1945*.

[12] See A. James Gregor's *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, pp. 27-37, for Corradini's anti-socialist nationalism.

[13] See Emilio Gentile's *La Grande Italia*, p. 100, for Rocco's organicist nationalism, perhaps the fullest

sociologist of ("delinquent") crowd behaviour Scipio Sighele, for whom "the nation is conceived as an organism living and developing on its territory, like a plant that grows in the soil,"[14] the full range of sociobiological logics were explored, and had an enormous pull on turn-of-the-century Italian political thought. Taken together, these nationalist writers of the 1900-1910s indicate that the first articulation of biopolitics that Esposito locates in the writings of Kjellén and von Uexhüll, where the nation names a unitary and abstracted evolutionary subject, mapped onto a geographical territory (Kjellen also coined the term *geopolitics*), was also a home-grown phenomenon in Italy.

But it would be a misrepresentation to reduce organicist thinking to the writings of these ANI ideologists, and thereby to the prehistory of the Fascist party that would, by the mid-1920s, absorb the ANI.[15] The intellectual project of reconceptualizing politics as biology, or resolving the antinomies of the liberal state by recourse to an organicist myth of regeneration, was nothing other than a symptom of a much broader crisis of social reproduction. At a moment when the nineteenth century's dominant form of free-trade capitalism, based on colonial exploitation and extraction, entered into a deep and long-lasting legitimation crisis, the very survival of the liberal state form was by no means assured. For Italy, as Zeev Sternhell points out, "antipaliamentarism" was acute and widespread, as the successive constitutional governments of Crispi and Giolitti had

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theoretical articulation of the state as an organism of the period.

[14] Quoted in Gentile, *La Grande Italia*, p. 102.

[15] For a history of how the ideas of the ANI, and its key thinkers, were absorbed by Fascism in the 1920s, see Alexander J. De Grand's *The Italian Nationalist Association and the Rise of Fascism in Italy*.

collapsed into financial and industrial oligarchy, and movements on the left and right responded with a widespread distinction between the "legal" and "real" Italy, which in its mildest form was a rejection of an unbalanced electoral map, but was more often a repudiation of representative democracy itself. The republican promise of the 1860s *Risorgimento*, Italy's consolidation as a modern nation-state, remained unfulfilled for the vast majority of those perennially marginalized peasant classes that Garibaldi had mobilized in the 1840s and 50s for the purpose of national unification. As Emilio Gentile has argued, the dominant political metaphor of the 1900-1910s that gathered and condensed this antiparliamentary consensus, and presented itself as the completion of the Risorgimento (literally translated, "resurgence"), was the powerful ideology of national *rebirth*.[16] It was around this organicist trope of rebirth that every major political question of the day – the "nationalization of the masses," the "Southern question," irredentism, not to mention national industrial output and Italy's place among the imperialist powers – had to be rearticulated. At the moment of Futurism's emergence in 1909, rebirth was an ideology shared by, on the right, Corradini's ANI; in the centre, by the influential liberal-bourgeois reformers writing in the periodical *La Voce*, most notably the soon-to-be anti-fascist writer Giovanni Amendola, who wrote in 1908 of the need to revamp the country's life and habits and introduce "some *organism* in this atomic chaos that is Italy" (qtd. in

[16] Emilio Gentile, "The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy: From Modernist Avant-Garde to Fascism." Gentile expands this argument in *La Grande Italia*.

Gentile 31); and on the left by anarchists and even the syndicalist-inspired Marxist philosophy of Benedetto Croce, for whom the "regeneration of present social life" (Gentile 25) was a recurring figure.[17]

So when Umberto Boccioni and a group of Futurist painters declare, in a manifesto from 1910, that "Italy is still a land of the dead [...] But Italy is being reborn" (*FM* 27) the frame of reference is clear, even if their extension of the figure of rebirth onto the terrain of aesthetics is new. Pursuing a concept of a "living art," the painters insist that their movement is not merely the latest chapter in the procession of modern styles but a form of representation that derives from, and addresses itself directly to, the dynamism of "life" in a "contemporary," "frenetic" urban environment (*FM* 24-27). Similar calls for national and cultural rebirth echo throughout the manifestos, and are perhaps *the* signature Futurist gesture. Every invocation of a historical break or an atemporal Futurist "moment,"[18] expressions of that profoundly influential modernist wish to "sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects which have been used in the past" (*FM* 26), are articulated in the terms of a thoroughgoing organicism, one that informed every facet of Futurism's politics and its conception of aesthetic form. For what

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[17] Gramsci's reappropriation of Fascist uses of organicism in his *Prison Notebooks*, where he maps organism onto antagonistic social classes – organic movements, organic intellectuals – can be read as both a significant critique of his captors' key ideological signifier of national unity, as well as a final judgment on the false consensus that this pre-War discourse of organicism appeared to have secured.

[18] Marjorie Perloff's *The Futurist Moment*, which elaborates on an argument made in Renato Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, makes the case for a Futurist rupture, influential over later twentieth century art movements.

was at issue in the Futurist conception of a "living art" was nothing other than a shift in the centre of gravity in the political itself, now reorganized around vitalist conceptions of the Italian nation, and seen from the perspective of artists concerned with the senescence of political institutions and practices, most notably the existing academies and museums, whose cultural capital urgently needed to be redistributed to a new, interventionist cadre of artists. It was less a changing of the museum guard that the Futurists had in mind than an attempt to reframe the question of cultural capital around a new set of questions smuggled in from biopolitical discourses, and concerned with the vitality of the nation; and it was precisely on these terms that art and life needed to merge.

Marinetti was so enamoured of the rebirth trope, in fact, that he offered up three separate versions of the movement's birth: in the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (the First Manifesto) (1909), concurrently in his novel *Mafarka the Futurist* (1909), and again in his long poem *Zong Toomb Toomb* (1914).[19] These three versions of the birth of Futurism go beyond the many calls for cultural rebirth in the manifestos, adding substance to what was otherwise a relatively formulaic trope. In the First Manifesto, which I analyze next, Marinetti activates but also distances himself from then-circulating cultural narratives of rebirth, both nationalist and leftist; and in *Mafarka* and *Zong Toomb Toomb*, to which I return below, Marinetti discloses key political limits around which this

[19] Futurism's three births are also discussed from a different angle by Claudio Fogu, in his "Futurist mediterraneità between Emporium and Imperium."

rebirth was imagined – that is, as a *national* rebirth, it always indexed a relation to the global or international (at the twilight of the high imperialist age), as well as a specific negotiation of gender and mobility within the domestic space of the nation.

II. The First Birth of Futurism: Out of Decadence

The First Manifesto's birth scene is the most well known: before settling into its list of aesthetic axioms, Futurism's departure from the reigning style of French Decadence is dramatized in unambiguous terms. Marinetti and his artist-compatriots are drawn out of a moonlit Decadent salon, filled with "rich oriental rugs" and "atavistic ennui" (*FM* 19), by the noise of "great ships," "locomotives," and "huge double-decker trams" (*FM* 19) – that same industrial modernity that was the reason for Decadence`s faux-nobilitarian withdrawal in the first place. Marinetti and friends greet the noise of the city with an open-armed embrace: in what follows, these suddenly reformed decadents stage a spontaneous automobile race through Milan's streets, culminating in Marinetti's rebirth as a Futurist after crashing his car into a ditch filled with factory waste. As Peter Nicholls has argued, this rebirth signifies the merging of two modernities, aesthetic and bourgeois, that had, since Baudelaire, been kept strictly separate in the reigning Parisian styles of the *fin de siècle*, Symbolism and Decadence.[20] Futurism's outright reversal of

[20] Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, particularly chapters 3-5, on the transition from symbolism to decadence to Futurism.

Decadence's aesthetic codes – the manifesto slogan over the refined lyric, an overblown virility over vulnerability or erotic transgression, mass publicity over reclusiveness and interiorization – has its beginning here and, considering Marinetti's own prior involvement with importing and translating Decadence to Italian literary culture in the 1890s and early 1900s, bears all the signs of an extreme anxiety of influence.[21] But all of these formal or stylistic shifts turn on one central point, as Nicholls notes: Futurism's repudiation of that complex relationship to cultural decline and death – both a mourning and an enjoyment of mourning – that characterized Decadence as an intellectual formation. Futurism overturns this with a technophilic vitalism, or an equally complex aestheticization of life itself, now tuned to the pitch of industrial modernity.

If Decadence deliberately evoked the corruption and fall of the Roman Empire in order to imagine itself as the overcivilized aesthetic of France's waning Second Empire, then Futurism's stylistic reversals index a much more substantial rift. The very idea of decadence presupposes an eschatological historical framework, or what Matei Calinescu identifies as Decadence`s "secular millennialism" (153), a broad sense of civilizational crisis that found an easy reference in both France's military embarrassment in the 1870

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[21] See Marinetti`s 1910 manifesto "We Renounce Our Symbolist Masters, the Last of All Lovers of the Moonlight" (*CW* 43-46). Also, Matei Calinescu's chapters on "The Idea of Decadence" and "The Idea of the Avant-Garde" in *Five Faces of Modernity* stress continuities between French Decadence and Futurism; Marjorie Perloff's *The Futurist Moment* and Günter Berghaus's *The Genesis of Futurism* detail Marinetti's early career as an editor of the journal *Poesia*, importing symbolist and decadent poetry to From Paris to Milan, while writing his own symbolist-inspired poetry and plays through the 1900s.

Franco-Prussian war and its revolutionary aftermath in the 1871 Paris Commune.[22] Futurism's most significant reversal of Decadence is its rejection of this cyclical historical framework, or the eschatology of empire itself, based on a cycle of birth-growth-perfection-decline. Futurist rebirth was an exit from this very cycle, which indicates why the Futurists had little patience for any call for a "Third Rome," whether in the writings of Mazzini, the positions of the ANI, or, later, in official Fascist ideology. While Futurism had every interest in encouraging opposition to the collapsing Empires of the Ottomans and Hapsburgs in central Europe, it was the ideology and temporality of Empire itself that they contested, including and especially the Decadents' foundational self-fashioning as the decadence of the Roman Empire. This had a decidedly different resonance in Italy, where the ruins of the Roman Empire were responsible for a burgeoning tourist industry that, in Marinetti's eyes, kept Italy in fealty to Europe's more developed nations. Italy's cultural inheritance, Marinetti wrote, was no more than an open-air museum for tourists; its monuments a collection of "dead cities" and "sunken capitals" (Marinetti, qtd. in Berghaus 16).[23] Futurism's anti-traditionalism was not merely an attempt to usurp

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[22] David Weir, analyzing decadence's reverberations in America, writes: "empire appears to be the necessary precondition of both historical decline and cultural decadence [...] In Europe, a particular interpretation of history could be combined with a specific identification with the aristocratic class. To be decadent, then, it was necessary to believe that civilization was nearing its end and to maintain membership in the social class most responsible for that which was most civilized: the refinements of culture at the farthest remove from the barbarities of nature." Weir adds, importantly, "What was not necessary was that either of these beliefs be true; in fact, decadent culture appears to emerge no so much from the reality of decline or the fact of the aristocracy as from a bourgeois fantasy of both" (Weir 2)

[23] "Foreign tourism," explained Marinetti in a 1915 interview, "upon which it is commonly believed the economic prosperity of our people largely depends, necessarily presumes that monuments will be

Decadence in a strictly aesthetic procession of styles, but an ideological battle over Italy's entry into modernity and the modern state-system. In a 1910 manifesto, addressing the ANI's Roman revivalism, Marinetti declares, "The concept of cyclical historical evolution [...] we now believe to be utterly childish" (*CW* 66).[24] The historical break implied in the moniker "Futurism," in all its brash and oversimplified utopianism, is nothing other than a desire to step outside of this mythic framework, and into the open-ended temporality of Westphalian Europe, a balanced plurality of nation states, which, following Foucault, implies the radical shift to "open historicity", or "a perspective in which historical time is indefinite, in a perspective of indefinite governmentality with no foreseeable term or final aim" (*Security* 260). In terms consistent with early biopolitical discourses, Futurism's rejection of the past was a negation of decadence's eschatology, and indeed of history itself, in favour of the immutable biological laws of the organistic state.

Meanwhile, Futurism activated several myths of its own, but with a radically transformed understanding of the function of myth itself. In the First Manifesto, Marinetti declares, "Mythology and the Mystic Ideal are defeated at last," a triumph redacted in the line that follows: "We're about to see the Centaur's birth" (*FM* 20). Setting aside the deliberate and attention-calling contradiction, the Futurist "centaur" adapts Nietzsche's critique of humanism, where "the human is a rope, fastened between beast and

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preserved alongside veneration for tradition. It is inconceivable that this industry will not be destroyed and eliminated" (*CW* 243).

[24] From "The Necessity and Beauty of Violence" (*CW* 60-72).

Overhuman – a rope over an abyss" – with the *ubermensch* a mythological figure that quickly becomes the template for Futurism's masculinist cult of heroism.[25] In rejecting and immediately redeploying myth in this passage, Futurism is signalling an important shift, and another point of departure from Decadence: the use of myths not as a means of transcendence, but as an immanent, vital force. Consider how the First Manifesto revises Decadence's privileged symbol, Death – its "ideal Mistress" (*FM* 20), according to the Manifesto. Decadence's investment in death as an aestheticized escape from bourgeois modernity's commodified vulgarity and as the organizing point of a new erotics that would transcend the multiple corruptions of the body is, in the Manifesto's opening pages, overturned completely.[26] As the cars speed along Milan's city streets and the long night of decadence gives way to "the very first dawn" (*FM* 20), death is incorporated into Futurist rebirth, subsumed as new functions of risk and danger in an expanded and qualitatively enhanced experience of life: "And like young lions we ran after Death, its dark pelt was blotched with pale crosses as it escaped down the vast violet living and throbbing sky.[...] Death, domesticated, met me at every turn, gracefully holding out a paw, or once in a while hunkering down, making velevety caressing eyes at me from every puddle" (*FM* 20). A series of other metaphors gather around the passage's primary mythical transformation of Death from the ultimate horizon into an immanent component

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[25] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 13. See Gunther Berghaus, *The Genesis of Futurism*, pp. 65-72, for Nietzsche's influence over Marinetti's pre-Futurist writings.

[26] See exemplary Decadent novels like J.K. Huysmans's *Against Nature* (1884), Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axël* (1890), and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *The Triumph of Death* (1894).

of life: Marinetti crashes his car into a ditch and drinks the "nourishing sludge" of a "factory drain" (*FM* 21), swallowing death whole, as it were. This baptismal moment recalls, for him, "the blessed black breast of my Sudanese nurse" (*FM* 21), activating a racialized discourse of impure reproduction that we will return to in *Mafarka*. Typically, Marinetti's poetic approach trades subtlety for the sheer accumulation of metaphors, as city, machine, heavy industry, seduction, race, animality, and daybreak are tied into one untidy symbolic knot. Later Futurist manifestos will continue the pattern of piling myth upon actuating myth, substituting for the First Manifesto's centaur a series of figures like the bomb-throwing anarchist, the surgeon, and human-technology hybrids involving the machinery of modern transportation and war, the evanescence of wireless radio, and the spectacle of early aircraft. All of this casting around for appropriate myth-figures to encapsulate their *modernolatria*, a sort of crisis of mythic overproduction, is part of a deliberate strategy to follow the pattern of the great reworking of myth by Georges Sorel. Sorel's "general strike" was an attempt to substitute for the complexities of Marxist economic analysis and party organizing a myth-image that would act as proletarian self-consciousness, revolutionary horizon, and extra-legal moral force all at once. Sorel's notion of myth as "a body of images" or "a coordinated picture" whose combinations result in a "maximum of intensity" (Sorel 127) – a politicized version of Bergson's dynamic intution – is followed almost to the letter in Futurism's later "technical" manifestos for poets, in which, Marinetti writes, "poetry must be a continuous stream of

new images" (*CW* 109), and "we have to orchestrate images by arranging them with a maximum of disorder" (*CW* 110).[27] Futurism's scattershot attempt to provide as many different images of transformation as possible, then, is the attempt to dispense with any stylistic mediation or representation whatsoever in favour of the kinetic immediacy of an instantly realized, intuitive myth.

III. The Second Birth of Futurism: Out of "Africa"

Futurism's repositioning of the figure of death comes into sharper focus in its second birth scene, in Marinetti's 1909 novel *Mafarka the Futurist*.[28] Subtitled *An African Novel*, and ostensibly drawn from Marinetti's youth spent in Alexandria as the son of an Italian lawyer, administrator, and Suez canal investor, the novel's dependence on imperialist and orientalist codes is not hard to spot: a feminized and formless desert landscape, subjected to violent masculine domination; a disposable population of speechless "natives" variously bestialized, hyper-sexualized, or symbolically reduced to extensions of the formless landscape; and Mafarka himself as alternately the cruel oriental despot and the deceitful soothsayer. What Marinetti refers to in the preface as his novel's

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[27] See Alice Yaeger Kaplan's *Reproductions of Banality*, 59-74, on Bergson's influence on Sorel, in which she quotes the following, decisive passage from Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics*: "The image has at least this advantage [over the concept], that it keeps us in the concrete. [...] Many diverse images, borrowed from many different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized" (Bergson, qtd. in Kaplan 64). Kaplan's subsequent throwaway remark is dead on: "Bergson's idea of good metaphysics, like Sorel's of good revolution, sounds a lot like futurist paintings" (64).

[28] F.T. Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*.

"polyphonic" character – "at once a lyric poem, an epic, an adventure novel and a play" (1) – is perhaps better thought of as a kind of genre piracy, as the aim seems to be to push each of these genres to the point of scandal: "Don't defend it," he advises his Futurist compatriots in a preface dedicated to them, "just watch it bounce and burst like a loaded grenade over our contemporaries' cracked skulls, and then dance" (1). And nobody did defend it, particularly in the author's drawn-out 1910 obscenity trial and conviction in Milan, which Marinetti cannily and correctly saw as an opportunity for publicity.[29] But what interests me in *Mafarka* is how it develops the same transition outlined above, from a symbolics of decadence to a myth of social reproduction: in this case, and in the most unambiguous of terms, Marinetti's text illustrates what Foucault calls the repositioning of death under biopolitical governance, where state racism emerges as a new articulation of the sovereign's right to kill, dividing and hierarchizing an otherwise undifferentiated population into different biological races, differently exposed to mortality and risk (*Society* 255). As Foucault notes, the colony is the site where this racial differentiation is first applied, providing an evolutionary underpinning to colonial genocide (257); colonial racism "justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger" (258), a significant relocation of death in the exercise of modern sovereignty. In Marinetti's typical hypberbolic style, *Mafarka* pushes this biopolitical logic to its extremity.

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[29] Carol Diethe, Translator's Introduction to Marinetti, *Mafarka*, vii-xix: ix.

The novel revolves around Mafarka's creation of a mechanical son, Gazourmah, as an attempt to condense all the warrior virtues of his conquering army into one composite body, one "flaring will" (3). Gazourmah's exceptionality stands in contrast to his stark surroundings, an African continent that, on the novel's post-battle opening, "evoked countless black corpses strewn on the plains and baking in the sun" (6). Those "countless" dead bodies are reduced to landscape throughout the novel: where they aren't being recycled into the metabolic process of the soil as "stores of fertilizer" (12), they are symbolically equated with the wasted landscape out of which they emerge and recede, as in the following description of battle on horseback: "a monstrous fabric of hoofs and manes took shape, fought for a long time in a tangled interlock of lances, and suddenly collapsed with fatigue, like a great lacustrine structure, into a lake of pitch" (60). Against these surroundings, Mafarka imagines, and then constructs, his mechanical "son," whom he intends to quite simply transcend the decomposing, dying continent, to be "unspoiled by the spectacle of death" (145). Mafarka builds his son a set of wings, used to escape the continent's "odour of mummies" and the "stench of dead centuries" (202), a sequence that ultimately rewrites the Icarus myth with Gazourmah forcing the sun into submission ("Back, Sun, dethroned monarch whose realm I have destroyed" [205]); and Gazourmah's sometimes-metallic, sometimes-organic flesh is designed for invulnerability and regeneration – "You will feed on hydras, because their flesh has an amazing power to reproduce itself" (187). At work in this contrast between Gazourmah's regeneration and

an omnipresent, environmental death, inscribed on both the landscape and the aggregated bodies that inhabit it, is the specific transformation that biopolitics takes in the colony: as Achille Mbembe has argued, the biopolitical project of managing and optimizing an aggregated concept of life is inverted when it encounters the colonial territory, where the European legal order is suspended.[30] The result is a dynamic where European citizenship is defined and maintained against the disposability and "living death" of non-Europeans, and European peace and diplomacy constitutes itself against the colony's naturalized condition of war and disorder: in Mbembe's words, "the calculus of life passes through the death of the Other" (18). Mbembe's "necropolitics," a logic of extermination and generalized exposure to death applied to masses of de-individulized, racialized bodies, identifies a real mechanism of power, but also the "reservoir of cultural imaginaries" (26) that give Gazourmah's birth its meaning. "Necropolitics," in other words, is operative in *Mafarka*'s version of Futurist rebirth, and this is in no way incidental to the rejection of decadence outlined above, in the birth scene of the First Manifesto. Discourses of biological degeneration and decadence were also discourses of imperialism, as Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* reminds us, initially mobilized by social scientists to map biological metrics of "backwardness" onto colonized bodies before being re-depolyed at home to pathologize non-normative cases of degeneracy.[31] Gazourmah's birth and self-

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[30] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.

[31] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, 42-61.

sufficiency show how Futurism imagined itself as an escape from these interlocking modalities of degeneration.

Formally, the novel's "polyphony" is really Marinetti's avant-garde attempt to exhaust all prior narrative modes, before coming to rest on the mythic birth of Gazourmah. The progression of the novel follows a clear pattern in which each successive narrative mode is abandoned for a figure of bodily degeneration: in this way, the formal coherence of subaltern bodies – or, more accurately, masses of subaltern bodies – and the coherence of the narrative modes themselves are made to stand for each other, and both are broken up into sheer, unformed matter at the close of each section. The dissipating bodies that close each section are also overwhelmingly figures of war and conquest: mass extinctions of opposing armies and populations act as a sort of grotesque punctuation mark on whatever formal parody had been in play. The first and most extreme example occurs at the end of the novel's first chapter "The Rape of the Negresses," a post-conquest narrative rendered in epic form that culminates in a Sadean tableau, an obscene mass orgy, depicted as a "steaming, shouting mass" and a "strange human cyclone" (22, 23). The excessive sexual violence of the tableau, as "fettered women" (28) are offered as gifts to the conquering army, mimics the colonial relation itself in typically blunt terms: the sexual act itself is described in terms of an agricultural production process, the

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Francis Galton's career trajectory from President of the Anthropological Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science to his invention of eugenics can be taken as paradigmatic of the shift in application from scientific racism abroad to the pathologizing of difference at home.

"threshing" or "grinding" of a "fantastic pressing machine" (25, 23) whose only apparent function is to turn masses of bodies into a waste product – "yellowish bodies [...] exuded their juices" into a pool of "green putrefaction" (23, 25). Mafarka's dressing-down of his troops as he breaks up the orgy, certainly not any kind of moralistic renunciation of rape or imperialism, is instead only the first of his several refusals of the sexual bond itself, and his valorization of a warrior-like self-containment and asceticism – which will be written into the "birthing" of Gazourmah that is to follow.

The manner in which *Mafarka* moves through its series of narrative modes on the way to the birth of Gazourmah serves as a sort of narrative demonstration of the axioms from the First Manifesto. Primarily, the Manifesto's iconoclasm – its admonition that Futurists "set fire to the library shelves" (*CW* 15) – motivates the novel's parodic and destructive "polyphony." Other axioms – glorification of war, poetic aggressiveness, love of danger, taste for boldness, and especially the feminist-baiting "scorn for woman" (*CW* 13-14) get no small amount of play in *Mafarka*, too. On this last point, Barbara Spackman argues that *Mafarka* depends on a reproductive fantasy of male parturition that rests on an overt misogyny or, more accurately, gynophobia.[32] By her argument, the fabrication of Gazourmah is not just the centrepiece of this novel, but a blueprint for Futurist creation itself. The novel's preface calls on Marinetti's Futurist "brothers" (1) to emulate

[32] Barbara Spackman, "Mafarka and Son: Marinetti's Homophobic Economics."

Gazourmah's birth in their own artistic work: “I tell you that the mind of man is an unpractised ovary... It is we who are the first to impregnate it” (3), and the birthing metaphor is repeated by Mafarka, who builds his son “without the support and stinking collusion of the woman's womb” (145). Instead, Gazourmah's creation is an act of pure will, as Mafarka describes it in the transitional chapter “The Futurist Address,” in which he abandons his military conquests for a new vocation as a Daedalus-like creator: “You have to believe in the absolute, definitive power of the will, which must be cultivated and intensified by following a cruel regime [...] Our will must come out of us so as to take hold of matter and change it to our fancy. So we can shape everything around us and endlessly renew the face of the earth” (145-46). The chapter itself is essentially another manifesto inserted in the middle of the narrative, and Spackman argues that the philosophical foundation of this aesthetic doctrine, an idealism that forces unbound matter into form, betrays a gender politics “in which woman supplies matter, and man supplies form; its progeny is the philosophical opposition between matter and spirit; and its dream is that of immaculate conception” (Spackman 90-91). Marinetti's attempt to recast aesthetic production as quasi-biological reproduction – a reproduction that annihilates femininity entirely and relies on an “absolute” masculine will – announces its carefully maintained limits. As discourses of life were politicized, or as biology became the new language in which questions of political sovereignty were articulated, fantasies of a more throroughgoing biopolitical control over life itself, down to the level of basic matter, were

inevitable. *Mafarka* is essentially a boundary case in this discourse. For Marinetti, imagining his movement as part of a broader cultural-biological rebirth involved converting two constitutive exclusions upon which the autonomous liberal subject was based – the exclusion of the subject positions of women and of the colonized from the sphere of politics and citizenship – into active suppressions, in the most violent and murderous terms of which his imagination was capable.

In her consideration of *Mafarka* within a tradition of Fascist literature, Alice Yaeger Kaplan identifies the book as Futurism's disconcerting source text, a sort of unconscious wish-fulfilment on which the later manifestos' revolutionary content would problematically rest. She identifies the novel's basic contrast between the individual genius and personality cult of the artist-creator, Mafarka, and those undifferentiated "countless black corpses" (*Mafarka* 6) on an African continent that Mafarka reduces to formless waste. If this novel is indeed Futurism's "fascist fantasy narrative" (Kaplan 76), then it bears underlining how the text lends implicit support to an analysis of the Nazi "paroxysm" that finds the source of its logic of extermination in the colonial exercise of sovereignty – a point that Mbembe's reading of biopolitics stresses.[33] But Gazourmah's fabrication also marks the moment in the text that Mafarka renounces sovereign rule over the "Africa" he has conquered, as if dramatizing the transition from one form of rule to

[33] Mbembe 22-23; the point is drawn from Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

another, from a centripetal sovereignty to a distributed form of control that takes as its objects generalized biological capacities of a whole population. Gazourmah, a hybrid of human, animal, plant, and machine who should count as the earliest figuration of the "non-human type" that would occupy the Futurists over much of the 1910s, is a fully biopolitical body, a body conceived of as an assemblage of organistic properties, which the novel proposes are manipulable enough to permit a transcendence of territorial sovereignty. Kaplan rightly identifies this as a shift in power's optic, or establishment of a "transcendent perspective" (84) in Gazourmah's flight over the continent, which she suggestively links to Futurist aeropoetry and aeropainting of the 1920s and 30s, as well as to the canonical airborne shots in Leni Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1936), in which the camera placement in the airplane as it descends on Nuremburg is later revealed to have sutured the viewer to the perspective of the airplane's passenger, or Hitler himself (Kaplan 91-92).[34] Marinetti himself discusses this new optic as an important moment in the development of Futurism's aesthetic in "Technical Manifesto for Futurist Literature" (1912):

> The deep feelings for life, linked one to another, word after word, in accordance with their illogical coming into being, will provide us with the broad outlines of an intuitive psychology of matter. It was all revealed to my spirit, high up in an airplane. Seeing things from a new perspective, no longer frontally or from behind, but straight down beneath me, and thus foreshortened, I was able to break the age-old fetters of logic and leaden wire of traditional comprehension. (*CW* 112)

[34] Futurism's fixation on airplanes is also discussed in Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Propeller Talk."

Several key Futurist aesthetic concepts are brought together in this passage, but none more important than a suddenly vibrant world of objects made available to "an intuitive psychology of matter," or a break from "traditional comprehension" that would keep poet, subject, object, and the immaterial forces of the environment distinct. What Marinetti is getting at in this passage, with its claim to an intuition of an "illogical coming into being," is a whole new ontology, a boundary-crossing between organic and non-organic – or rather a reduction, via developments in atomic theory, to the biological, to the point that "life" is positioned as an immanent organizing principle for social reality itself. The inanimate world begins to behave, at the subatomic level, as if it were animate: made of the same stuff and subject to the same physical laws as the living. Kaplan is exactly right when she points out that *Mafarka*'s new optic, or what I'm suggesting is a whole ontological framework, reappears in later Futurist writings at the level of form, as a set of new, and integrally modernist, principles. Marinetti's "Technical Manifesto" calls on Futurists to avoid poetic anthropomorphism and "guess rather what [matter's] different determining impulses will be, its compressive and its expansive forces, what binds it, what breaks it down, its mass of swarming molecules or its swirling electrons" (111). Other "technical" manifestos for poets, all written in 1912-14, were a more or less faithful transposition to poetic language of a set of aesthetic ideas for painting and sculpture that

Umberto Boccioni had proposed a few years before.[35] Boccioni's cubist-influenced ideas pit an emergent and dynamic life against any containment by form: "Our straight lines will be living and palpitating. This will show everyone the necessities inherent in the limitless expressive potentialities of matter" (64). Or more prosaically: "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies? [...] Our bodies penetrate the sofas upon which we sit, and the sofas penetrate our bodies" (30). It was this atomistic universe, with all parts alive and in motion, that underpinned Futurism's approach to aesthetic form, and made possible their wildest imaginings of the interpenetration of human and machine.

IV. The Third Birth of Futurism: Anarchist and Transnational Lineages

It was at the level of political ontology that Futurism's use of the rebirth myth was raises difficulties. Historians of Fascism have established that the idea of rebirth was ultimately appropriated by Mussolini as a central ideological tenet in his seizure of state power. Roger Griffin, in particular, has argued that a "palingenetic myth" is the common thread that runs through all European fascisms of the early century, where rebirth marks a mythological passage from a state of decadence or civilizational crisis to a cultural and

[35] Marinetti's manifestos on poetic style are the "Technical Manifesto" cited above, as well as 1913's "Destruction of Syntax – Untrammeled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom" (*CW* 120-131) and 1914's "Geometrical and Mechanical Splendor and Sensitivity Toward Numbers" (*CW* 135-142) ; Boccioni wrote "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto 1910" (*FM* 27-31) and "The Exhibitors to the Public 1912" (*FM* 45-51) (both written with Carlo Carra, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini), as well as "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture 1912" (*FM* 51-66).

national rebirth organized around images of a New Man and organic community.[36] Griffin's study of the broad range and variety of rebirth tropes in circulation during the modernist period stands, along with the more Italy-specific work of Emilio Gentile, as important archives for any study of the multiple points of intersection of politics and life in the early twentieth century.[37] And Futurism's rejection of decadence and its address, in the First Manifesto, "to all the *living* of the earth" (*FM* 21), is part of this history, which culminates in the deployment of biopolitics under the intensified sovereignty of the modern state itself, the political form of totalitarian government. But if Futurism hinged on an idea of palingenesis, it seems to me that this was deployed in a very particular sense: Futurism took palingenesis to its definitional limit, where rebirth was less about a single, punctual break with history in the birth of a new, total state, but about the ongoing rebirthing and self-renovation of the lives and habits of a population subject to a rapid industrial modernization. Perpetual self-reinvention was so built into the Futurist movement, it promised its own obsolescence in its founding manifesto: "The oldest of us is thirty. When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts – we want it to happen!" (*FM* 24). That is to say, though Futurism's version of rebirth may bear a family resemblance to the protofascisms of the 1910s, its imagination of how social reproduction should operate posed a key

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[36] First argued in Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, but developed substantially in his *Modernism and Fascism*.

[37] Emilio Gentile, *Struggle For Modernity* and *La Grande Italia*.

obstacle for any eventual consolidation of sovereignty, Fascist or otherwise. Although the primary goal of Futurism's avant-garde agitation was the promotion of a resolute "Italianism" that often appeared to be totally consistent with the nationalist goals of the political right, the specific and eccentric construction of Italianism in Futurist writings worked in the opposite direction of any program of national homogenization, thematizating and even inciting Italy's internal antagonisms in their public stances and performances. Their Italianism made no space for the nostalgia for past empires, a species of *passéism* to which the Futurists were constitutionally opposed, and the eventual basis of their break with Fascism in the 1920s, as fascist ideology came to its full realization as a "third Rome."[38]

Instead, Futurism wanted to recast Italy in a fully Nietzschean mould: it is perhaps best understood as an attempt to apply Nietzsche's vitalist, physiologized politics at the level of state form. If the key to Nietzsche's critique is, as Roberto Esposito argues, a transvaluation of modern social contract theories of government, which base themselves in the principle of the preservation of life, at the risk, or indeed at the expense, of that life's innate dynamism and force, then Futurism's unyielding critique of modern Italy's political and cultural institutions, not to mention its program for a national revitalization,

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[38] Giuseppe Prezzolini's 1923 article "Fascism and Futurism", reproduced in *Futurism: An Anthology* (2009), 275-79, is an early diagnosis of this insurmountable clash between Fascism and Futurism over classicism and the invocation of Rome. For a more recent account of how Fascism and Futurism diverged in the 1920s, see Walter Adamson, *Embattled Avant Gardes*, 227-63.

amounts to something like a Nietzschean theory of the state.[39] At the base of Nietzsche's critique of modernity lies his important displacement of politics to the *topos* of the body, a literalization of the classical body politic metaphor, which leads him to a condemnation of contractual government for effacing the body and its vital energy from the political sphere.[40] The Nietzschean body – traversed by forces both internal and external, constantly at war with itself, constantly expanding its own boundaries and limits[41]– becomes, under Futurism, the elevation of generalized violence to a principle of social organization: internal strife and external aggression are both signs of Italy's overall health.

The Nietzschean vision of a politics of constitutive and interminable antagonism marks one point of consistency through the first ten years of Futurist manifestos. Marinetti's programmatic statement of Futurist politics in his 1910 speech "The Necessity and Beauty of Violence" offers the best summary Futurism's version of a politicized organicism:

> This is how the prosperity of a nation is shaped, out of the antagonisms and the conformities of the multiple organisms of which it is made. In the same way, the industrial and military rivalries that develop between different nations are a necessary factor in human progress. A strong nation can contain, at one and the

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[39] Esposito devotes chapter 3 of *Bios*, "Biopower and Biopotentiality," to a reconsideration of how Nietzsche's writings as an early and relatively comprehensive biopolitical critique of the "irreversible crisis of the modern political lexicon" (83), or, in Nietzsche's own terms, "modernity."

[40] For Nietzsche, "every philosophy that ranks peace above war is a *misunderstanding of the body*" (*The Gay Science* 34-35)

[41] For example: "one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely medium, of overwhelming forces" (*Ecce Homo* 72).

> same time, droves of people intoxicated with patriotic enthusiasm and the wholly insensitive, thirsting for rebellion! (*CW* 61)

From its first *serate* agitating for the reclaiming of Trieste, through the movement's enthusiastic support for Italy's involvement in the First World War, and on into the political confusion of the *bienno rosso,* or the "two red years" of 1919-20, where factory councils posed a legitimate threat to Italy's state apparatus, Nietzschean vitalism remained the key in which Futurist politics were composed. The vitalist strain in Marinetti's thinking is nowhere more pronounced than in his 1919 survey of post-war political battles, where the intersection of politics and life expands well beyond the ANI's conception of the state as a self-sufficient, unitary organism: "Life itself creates, controls, shapes ideologies. Every political idea is a living organism" (*CW* 299). On the one hand this appears to be the consummation of the organicist trajectory in theories of the state, with biology no longer crudely mapped onto a unified state but now subsuming political positions themselves, their internal differences resolved to a higher, organic unity. But I want to suggest that the opposite is true: when Marinetti equates political ideas with biological organisms, he reverses the ANI's attempt to contain syndicalism via an ideological program of "nationalizing" the masses, insisting instead that "Italianism" would never be able to neutralize the antagonistic social forces that compose the nation. Quite the reverse: the agonistic national space envisioned by the Futurists – their refusal to allow war and expansion as a foreign policy to salve domestic tensions, as Corradini

hoped, instead theorizing a mutual intensification of conflict in both directions at once – places their movement outside this organistic trajectory. Or rather, if, as I've indicated, the Futurists mapped a Nietzschean concept of self-overcoming onto the organistic nation, their own compulsively oppositional Italianism was not *external* to organistic nationalism, but marked an internal limit to any homogenizing notion of "the people."[42] If the purpose of the ANI's ideological project was the production of a homogeneous political community that effaced constitutive fault lines of mobile, polyglot, and often antagonistic populations and social classes, then it bears emphasis that Futurism's axiomatic belief in perpetual and dynamic conflict as an in-built, quasi-natural law of the organistic state pushes in exactly the opposite direction.

In fact, Futurism's idiosyncratic organicism brought it more closely in line with another major anti-liberal position: anarchism. Futurism's engagement with anarchism was evident from the First Manifesto, with its celebration of "great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot," the "multicoloured, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals," and "the destructive gesture of the freedom-bringers" (*FM* 22). As Giovanni Lista has shown, this wasn't a merely rhetorical anarchism: Futurists made several overtures to anarchist and syndicalist groups throughout the 1910s, including an

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[42] Scholarship on Nietzsche has contextualized the idea of a struggle at the cellular level, and so a body constantly in a state of internal conflict – or a dynamic natural selection inscribed not between bodies but within them – in the biological science of his day, and specifically from Wilhelm Roux's 1881 text on embryology, *The Struggle Between Parts of an Organism*. See Keith Ansell Pearson, "Nietzsche's Brave New World of Force," 8.

essay by Marinetti published in the anarchist journal *La demolizione*, which reinterprets the First Manifesto in anarchist terms: "You can be sure, brothers, that the Futurist Manifesto has been spelled out for the benefit of a single, immense phalanx of souls, that of the strong and the exploited" (*CW* 51) – using a Fourierist term, phalanx, to describe Futurism's utopian social project.[43] While taking account of the strong reservations their anarchist contemporaries held towards Futurism's nationalist and pro-imperialist stances, Lista notes that Futurism's involvement with anarchism was both enduring and, in terms of the impression anarchism made on Futurism's aesthetic strategies, foundational. Leading Futurist figures like Carlo Carrà, Gino Severini, Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni counted themselves as anarchists, and were drawn to Futurism in the 1910s; it offered their anarchism a new aesthetic syntax, and their presence held a strong pull on the movement's first decade. As Eric Hobsbawm has argued, the combination of anarchism and nationalism was not out of the ordinary, as the two became intertwined as popular ideologies in the prewar period: "the acquisition of national consciousness cannot be separated from the acquisition of other forms of social and political consciousness during this period: they all go together. [... The development of nationalism] is neither linear nor necessarily at the expense of other elements of social consciousness"

[43] See Lista's *F.T. Marinetti: L'Anarchiste du futurisme*, and especially his "Marinetti et les Anarcho-Syndicalistes."

(Hobsbawm 130).[44] It was anarchism's very adaptability to different national conditions that, for Benedict Anderson, enabled it to become "the dominant element in the self-consciously internationalist radical left" (2), and allowed it to be coupled with nationalism as a viable form of resistance to the capitalist world-system.[45]

For his part, Marinetti was aware of the seeming contradiction of his politics, acknowledging that his combination of anarcho-syndicalism and nationalism seems "like madness to the political establishment" (*CW* 299); given his fondness for scandal, the combination was less a political stance than an attempt to play both extremes against a liberal bourgeois middle. Across a series of political manifestos written in the 1910s, Marinetti stridently opposed the liberal-bourgeois form of government: in 1910's "Against Sentimentalized Love and Parliamentarism," Marinetti draws on his doctorate in parliamentary law to critique the paradoxes of representative government, where "the people" are a creation of parliamentary government, they "owe their very existence" to

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[44] Hobsbawm analyzes Italian and Balkan soldiers' letters during the final stages of the First World War and finds that, well ahead of Fascist counter-revolution of the 1920s, dependent as it was on mobilizing dispossessed soldiers against labour organizations, the radical left groups "became *the main vehicles of their people's national movement*" (125).

[45] Anderson's explanation of why anarchism outpaced Marxism as the dominant left position on the era is worth quoting in full: "Notwithstanding the towering edifice of Marx's thought, from which anarchism often borrowed, the movement did not disdain peasants and agricultural labourers in an age when serious industrial proletariats were mainly confined to Northern Europe. It was open to 'bourgeois' writers and artists – in the name of individual freedom – in a way that, in those days, institutional Marxism was not. Just as hostile to imperialism, it had no theoretical prejudices against 'small' and 'ahistorical' nationalisms, including those in the colonial world. Anarchists were also quicker to capitalize on the vast transoceanic migrations of the era. Malatesta spent four years in Buenos Aires – something inconceivable for Marx or Engels, who never left Western Europe. Mayday celebrates the memory of immigrant anarchists – not Marxists – executed in the United States in 1886" (2).

representative democracy, but are given an "illusory sense of participation" and "thus remain forever outside government" (*CW* 56).[46]

This line of critique continues all the way through to 1919's "Beyond Communism," written by Marinetti while imprisoned for organizing anti-governmental riots in Milan, which attempts to redefine politics and community around interventionist, living art – a "wonderful anarchic paradise of total freedom" led by a "proletariat of talented people" (*CW* 346, 350). It would be simple enough to interpret the anarchist tropes running through Futurism's political writings as a reactionary appropriation of the first order, a cynical attempt to marshal anti-state positions to a revitalized nationalism; but this would be ignoring how absolutely foundational anarchist ideas were to Futurism's self-concept and aesthetic strategies. From its celebration of interventionist violence, its identification with "the masses," its refusal of progressive change for the immediacy of the revolutionary event, and most of all its belief in the expansion and realization of human potentiality, Futurism hinged on anarchist principles. Marinetti's critique of liberal government opened a space for anarchism, and expressed one side of a two-pronged critique of representation, at the levels of politics and aesthetics simultaneously.

Two prominent critical works on Futurist formal innovation will help illustrate the

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[46] Details of Marinetti's legal education can be found in his "Self Portrait" (*CW* 5-8), as well as Günter Berghaus's helpful footnotes to that text (*CW* 426 n.8, 9). Marinetti's doctoral thesis at the University of Genoa, *The Role of the Crown in Parliamentary Government* (1899), combined with his professed familiarity with John Stuart Mill's writings on representative government, argue for a more sustained reading of Futurism's political manifestos, which I try to initiate here.

point. Peter Nicholls has correctly called attention Futurism's invention of "a language which does not so much represent as present" (97), or a new aesthetic idiom less concerned with interiorities (of subjects, of signifiers) than with a whole new cacophony of depersonalized sensations, modelled on paradigm-shifting developments in technoscience, from Marconi's wireless radio to Brownian motion at the molecular level (*CW* 126).[47] In the same vein, Marjorie Perloff has argued that Futurism's "invention of collage," or the discovery and thematization of the sheer materiality of images and signifiers, is a significant and subsequently influential departure from the endless signifying chains and metonymic displacements developed by Mallarmé and Decadence.[48] All of this went well beyond post-impressionist anti-mimeticism; Futurist art was a confrontation, and words were kinetic objects, as Marinetti was fond of saying, to be "hurled" at the reader (*CW* 128). In other words, Futurism's uses of language reveal a rather different understanding of anarchist "propaganda by the deed" – one that redefines propaganda itself as deed and thereby makes the act of enunciation an insurgent event in its own right. I would quickly add to Nicholls and Perloff the two aesthetic strategies I discussed above – the generalization of Sorelian revolutionary myth as a style, where the immanent political effect of representation outweighs any specific content; and the "intuitive psychology of matter" laid out in their technical manifestos, with its

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[47] See Nicholls, "A Metaphysics of Modernity: Marinetti and Italian Futurism," in *Modernisms*, 84-111.
[48] See Perloff, "The Invention of Collage," in *The Futurist Moment*, 42-79.

subordination of aesthetics, no less reality itself, to an expanded and constitutively antagonistic concept of life. These aesthetic strategies, the heart of Futurism's "rupture" not only with prior modes of representation but with representation itself, would have been unthinkable without an anarchist critique of liberal politics. Alice Kaplan's summary of Sorel on liberalism (who Marinetti certainly read closely) gets right at the heart of the matter: "the legislation of a leader is arbitrarily connected to the lives of the people represented, and the leaders end up identifying with the law, and not with the people. Democracy, we might say, is 'badly metonymic'" (Kaplan 65). An anarchist desire for political liberation was the condition of possibility for Futurism's aesthetic strategies.

Marinetti's 1913 poem *Zong Toomb Toomb* exhibits several of the tensions of trying to put Futurism's liberated aesthetic into effect. The poem is titled after the sound of firing a machine gun, following Marinetti's stint as a war reporter in the Bulgarians' siege of Adrianopolis in the 1912 Balkan War against a receding Ottoman Empire.[49] The title, and the poem's reliance on what Marinetti would come to call "onomatopoeic fusillades" (*CW* 235) all through, indicate the poem's performative character, but Marinetti was also careful to design the page layout of the published version to embody Futurism's anarchic "battles between typographical characters" (*CW* 235), or pages of poetry that approach the condition of a living organism at war with itself, complete with

[49] The title is elsewhere translated to *Zang Tumb Tumb, Zang Toumb Toumb,* and *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, but I follow the version published in Marinetti's *Selected Poems and Related Prose* (2002).

word-clusters, mathematical symbols, vertical and diagonal type, and arrows, all indicating that the words on the page follow multiple intersecting lines of force. The poem's first manipulation of typeface is the gradually increasing font size that announces what I'm taking to be Futurism's third dramatization of a cultural rebirth: "No poetry before us [...] finally finally finally finally finally finally FINALLY POETRY BEING BORN" (57). In spite of the line's manifesto-like directness, this poem's rebirth scene is remarkably subdued by comparison with the set pieces we've seen in the First Manifesto and *Mafarka*, folded as it is into an unmistakably modernist scene of composition: a train journey. Speeding through city and countryside, Marinetti's page acts as a condensing point for the depersonalized sensations of the journey – "all that outside me but also within me totality simultaneity absolute synthesis = superiority of my poetry over all others STOP" (57). The technique should be familiar enough to readers of stream of consciousness writing, except with a difference: in *Zong Toomb Toomb*, the train's movement doesn't only shrink distances, compress time, and provide a whole new phenomenology of simultaneity, but it reveals the ontological flux at the heart of the object world itself. Marshall Berman's influential "all that is solid melts into air" reading of modern literature is pushed to a literal extreme in Marinetti, where the landscape itself loses its solidity and becomes only so much "petrified lava" (59), a long geological view that renders landscape itself as a biological organism, subject to its own decompositions and regenerations.

By basing the poem, no less the birth of Futurism, in the experience of train travel, Marinetti reveals what was ultimately to be the political limit of his avant-gardism. As Perloff has shown, the expansion of rail and other forms of modern travel – automobile, airplane, steamship – were central to a developing modern consmopolitanism, formed around the experience of travel and borderlessness.[50] The internationalism of this moment can find no better figure than Marinetti himself, whose fetishizing of aircraft and automobile aside, was tireless in promoting Futurism in Europe's cultural capitals. In the words of two younger Futurists, Marinetti "spends half of his life on the train."[51] All this travel not only established echo Futurist movements, and backlashes, outside of Italy, but underlined the importance of a certain experience of mobility through rigid political and geographical spaces for modernism's conception of itself. Marinetti understands as much in the following passage from his "Words-in-Freedom" manifesto:

> Futurism is based on the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries made by science. Anyone who today uses the telegraph, the

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[50] Perloff writes: "Between 1909 and 1914, the world witnessed the first successful expeditions to both North and South Poles [...]; the first extended airplane run [...], the first flight across the English Channel [...]. [One] could travel without a passport from the Urals to the Atlantic – a situation reflected everywhere in the arts" (13).

[51] Quoted in Adamson, *Embattled Avant-Gardes*. The whole passage is worth noting: "During the first futurist years, Marinetti never ceased being on the run, giving 'conferences,' exhibitions, and *serate* in two dozen Italian cities and a dozen countries and managing most of the details himself. As two of his young futurist disciples marvelled, 'Marinetti spends half of his life on the train': war correspondent and soldier in Tripoli and Bengasi and the Bulgarian trenches of Adrianapolis; futurist propagandist in Paris, Bruxelles, Madrid, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Milan, Palermo. His home is not the Casa Rossa of Milan nor the Excelsior Hotel in Rome but the railroad car." All told, between 1909 and 1915, he paid four hundred visits to London, seven to Paris, four to Berlin, two to Brussels, and one each to Russia, Libya, and Bulgaria, and he did roughly twenty-five *serate* from Trieste to Palermo and Turin to Catanzaro. At the same time, he was producing hundreds of poems, articles, and manifestos" (88).

> telephone, and the gramophone, the train, the bicycle, the motorcycle, the automobile, the ocean liner, the airship, the airplane, the film theater, the great daily newspaper (which synthesizes the daily events of the whole world), fails to recognize that these different forms of communication, of transport and information, have a far-reaching effect on their psyche. (*CW* 120)

The passage states what we now take to be self-evident, but with a problematic condescension that I think is politically revealing. The distance between Futurism's "renewal of human sensibility," embodied in the train-bound perspective of *Zong Toomb Toomb*, and the "far reaching effect on their psyche" that all those users of modern technologies somehow "fail to recognize" is precisely where Marinetti's political affiliation with anarchism ends. Or again, from the First Manifesto, in the passage that follows directly after Marinetti's reference to anarchism in those "multicoloured, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals," the manifesto turns immediately to technologies of transportation – "adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; steep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing; and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd" (22). The machines themselves, in other words, substitute for the crowds they move. In terms of metonymic displacement, this one is startling if only because the real displacement of people in Italy's outmigration in the period from 1880 to 1920 was so staggering. By one historian's account, "Between 1880 and 1915, thirteen million Italians emigrated to North and South

America, Africa, and the Mediterranean Basin, launching the largest emigration from any country in recorded world history."[52] The "Southern Problem," or what Gramsci considered one of the most acute cases of primitive accumulation in modern Europe's history, reduced the political options for many Southern Italians to either radicalism or flight.[53] Marinetti's enthusiasm for machines has to be understood in this context: next to their real effects on all those subjects who "fail to recognize" the effects of modernization – or who, from the opposite standpoint, formed the political unconscious of Marinetti's techno-cosmopolitan experience. This much is implied in *Zong Toomb Toomb*'s seeming hostility to the traditionalism of Southern rural life. In a key moment of stasis that contrasts sharply with the mobility and impact of the rest of the poem, the train brakes to a stop in a nameless southern village, and the poem's depersonalized flow of images recedes for a moment behind empty spaces, as if the speaker was hearing his own opinion for the first time: "ironies of a village 306 years foolishness of the mountain landscape" (60). The solidity of that mountain and that window of silence, or something like introspection, impels Marinetti to escape the dead Southern landscape, too. He drives

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52 Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (2008), 1.

53 Answering (in the early 1930s, or approximately 20 years later) the problem of why industrialization and modern industry didn't lead to a technocratic solution to the Southern Problem, Gramsci writes: "Indeed, the State is creating new *rentiers*, that is to say it is promoting the old forms of parasitic accumulation of savings and tending to create closed social formations. In reality the corporative trend has operated to shore up crumbling positions of the middle classes and not to eliminate them, and is becoming, because of the vested interests that arise from the old foundations, more and more a machinery to preserve the existing order just as it is rather than a propulsive force. Why is this? Because the corporative trend is also dependent on unemployment" (293-94). Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," *The Prison Notebooks*, 277-318.

off in a car, chasing the landscape's rebirth in the "valleys streams trees grasses," a return to mobility that re-establishes the all-important scene of writing – or in the poem's terms, the birth of Futurist poetry – after a fashion: "correct proofs no no here / HERE / my proofs just as they are to WIPE my DEAR surviving carburator" (60).

V. Futurism in Fiume, 1919

If Marinetti's cosmopolitanism indicates one direction in which Futurism's more radical implications are recuperated, then the other is doubtlessly the development of a renewed and more virulent nationalism. Historical accounts of Mussolini's stunning appropriation of anarchist and socialist organizations to fascist corporatism in the 1920s are not in short supply, and Futurism's political turn in the late 1910s is typically read as part of that history, as one of several cultural formations providing ideological justification for a renewed patriotism that ultimately won out over the class struggle that motivated the *bienno rosso*, or "two red years" of 1919-20. But if it was indeed the ideological preparation for a Fascist counter-revolution, the specific incidents that made up Futurism's political reversal are still imperfectly understood – namely, how its own position changed over the course of the *bienno rosso*, when a still-anarchist Fascism and Futurism's political party, a post-war invention that lasted only until 1919, were something like friendly rivals in the struggle for political influence. A full accounting of overlaps and discrepancies, cooperations and rivalries, borrowings and plagiarisms, is

beyond my scope here, but I want to focus on one event in particular – the seizure of the port city of Fiume by anarchist nationalists, an event that historians have only recently begun to consider as a Futurist-inspired insurrection against both the Italian state and the international reorganization of capital and political borders that was taking place at the Versailles peace conference.[54] It was only subsequently that the insurrection in Fiume was considered a key moment in Fascism's prehistory, too, and so this flashpoint stands as a key to understanding how Futurist ideas were transformed into a rationale of power in the between-war rise of fascist nationalism.

Directly political manifestos were a Futurist staple all the way through the 1910s, beginning with 1910's "The Necessity and Beauty of Violence" and culminating in a series of writings around 1919-20, most notably 1919's "Beyond Communism," these latter featuring an actual, if unlikely, political programme for recreating society around interventionist art.[55] The terms introduced in these writings are an extraordinary study in the concretization of avant-gardist "art into life" ideals, proposing an institutional and governmental reconstruction that would make experimental art a state priority, and would

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[54] Günter Berghaus's *Futurism and Politics* provides an excellent account of these moment-to-moment alliances, particularly in the chapter "Futurism and the Combatants' Movement, 1917-1920" (92-171). One English-language, book-length study has been written on the Fiume episode: see Michael Ledeen, *The First Duce.* Fiume is also briefly discussed by the autonomist writer and artist Bifo (Franco Berardi) in a recent interview, "Bifo on Futurism."

[55] "Beyond Communism" synthesizes a series of other manifestos issued during the 1918-19 period, notably "An Artistic Movement Creates a Political Party" (*CW* 277-82), "Futurist Democracy" (*CW* 300-03), and "The Proletariat of Talented People" (*CW* 304-08). In Marinetti's *Critical Writings*, Günter Beghaus has helpfully compiled these and many other manifestos of the period into a section entitled "The Postwar Political Battle" (*CW* 271-366).

transform the state, democracy, and daily life itself, with the liberatory and carnivalesque power of their art. These political manifestos sought nothing less than the generalization of their theretofore self-promotional and factionist aesthetic manifestos into public policy: Futurists wrote of a "proletariat of talented people" (*CW* 304), a "mass of talented individuals" (*CW* 302), a "widespread proletariat of the creative imagination" (*CW* 307) a "true democracy, conscious and bold" (*CW* 300), energized by "creative, innovative, and inventive powers" (*CW* 300), "artistic flexibility," "speed of improvisation," "flashes of enthusiasm," and "vital forces" (*CW* 337), and manifested in "free public exhibitions" (306-07) open to all exhibitors, and a "technocratic council," including artists, to experiment with new social forms (332). Politically outlandish, these proposals actually formed the policy ideas of a Futurist Political Party that ran for seats in a 1919 general election; and if we were to follow this body of ideas only as far as the Futurists' total defeat in that election, they would remain only a historical footnote. But the siege of Fiume in the fall of 1919, and the anarcho-syndicalist government of that city for 16 months, until the Italian government removed the insurgents by force on December 24, 1920, put all of these Futurist ideas into effect and, for a brief period, appeared to realize the ambitions of the avant-garde, attracting Dadaists, Bolsheviks, and artists from all over Europe and the United States, "who had come to Fiume to participate in the 'great experiment' that was taking place there" (Berghaus 141).

A port city on the Dalmatian coast with a majority Italian population in 1919,

Fiume was seized by a legion of *arditi*, the much-celebrated "shock troops" of Italy's war effort, and annexed to Italy, against its own government's wishes. Led by the poet-aviator and war hero Gabriele D'Annunzio – Marinetti's once-mentor, subsequently his target as a Decadent poet, and now remade as a Futurist in all but name – the arditi staged a bloodless takeover of the city, in the name of an Italian nationalism that exceeded the territorial boundaries of the state. This notion of an inclusive Italian nationalism that included migrants was one consequence of the large migration of the 1880-1920 period, and was a key pressure on the definition of Italianness on some basis other than citizenship – a "real" as opposed to "legal" Italy, in the terms of the day – whether that basis be a racial identity, "spirit," or some combination of the two. In any case, the seizure of Fiume was intended as a direct challenge to the post-war settlements being negotiated in Versailles, as well as to Francesco Nitti's Italian government, which was ineffectually participating in them.

What transpired in Fiume over the 16 months of its occupation was nothing less than an attempt to put into place an anarchist, Futurist utopia – a "temporary autonomous zone," in the anarchist writer Hakim Bey's words, or in the terms I'm proposing here, a particularly concrete example of a value struggle.[56] Fiume was, for over a year, a bounded

[56] Or, better, Bey calls Fiume a "pirate utopia," along the lines of other, more frequently cited revolutionary moments: "I believe that if we compare Fiume with the Paris uprising of 1968 (also the Italian urban insurrections of the early seventies), as well as with the American countercultural communes and their anarcho-New Left influences, we should notice certain similarities, such as:--the importance of aesthetic theory (cf. the Situationists)--also, what might be called 'pirate economics,'

experiment in anarchist self-government: the city's charter, written principally by the anarchist Alsace de Ambris, created a decentralized democracy, with law-making authority distributed among worker-led councils; it was also an attempt to place aesthetics at the centre of political life, which D'Annunzio reinforced by holding daily rituals of poetry readings, and nightly bacchanalian festivals; it instituted a number of progressive social policies, including extending the franchise to women, free medical care and old age pensions, and a minimum wage; it saw itself on the leading edge of an international proletarian revolution, was approved by Lenin, seized cargo ships carrying armaments across the Black Sea to anti-Bolshevik armies; it organized the *Liga di Fiume*, an "anti-League of Nations," to gather movements resistant to the post-war re-entrenchment of imperialist spheres of influence in Africa, Ireland, and especially Eastern Europe – the latter having been identified by Woodrow Wilson as a zone for American market expansion in the Versailles treaty, and which therefore made Fiume a port of significant territorial importance.[57] Futurism had not only influenced Fiume's leaders, D'Annunzio and de Ambris, but Futurists had helped set the political agenda of the city – from the poet

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living high off the surplus of social overproduction – even the popularity of colorful military uniforms – and the concept of *music* as revolutionary social change – and finally their shared air of impermanence, of being ready to move on, shape-shift, re- locate to other universities, mountaintops, ghettos, factories, safe houses, abandoned farms – or even other planes of reality. No one was trying to impose yet another Revolutionary Dictatorship, either at Fiume, Paris, or Millbrook. Either the world would change, or it wouldn't. Meanwhile keep on the move and *live intensely*" (Bey, "T. A. Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone")

[57] One contemporary analysis of Wilson's interest in the Balkans is Gertrude Slaughter's 1919 article, "The Significance of Fiume."

Mario Carli to the fascinating figure of Guido Keller, an airman, war hero, political revolutionary, and founder of both a Fiumian, para-Futurist artistic movement and a militia recognizable by their wild interpretation of military dress (Ledeen 145).

But for all its carnivalesque utopianism and anarchist conviction, Fiume was recognizably Futurist in its contradictions, too. Concepts of nationalism were the first, and perhaps most important, terrain of struggle between Fiume and the official forces that sought to politically contain it. By claiming to fight for the Italianness of an overseas community of Italian migrants, D'Annunzio was delegitimizing what he came to call the "anti-Italian government of Francesco Saverio Nitti" (qtd. in Ledeen 92). This sat badly with the redrawing of Europe's map that was taking place in Versailles, whose justification was Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination – which could only ever be selectively applied in an age of transnational migration. But it also formed a blueprint for Fascist *ressentiment* against Versailles' major powers that, not accidentally, under Mussolini, took pains to reverse the relationship between a (population-based) nation and a (territorially bound) state, as in the first principle of Italian Fascism, that "It is not the nation that generates the state […] Rather the nation is created by the state which gives to the people, conscious of its own moral unity, a will and therefore an effective existence."[58] But in 1919, "D'Annunzio had become, for many Italians, the

[58] Benito Mussolini, "The Doctrine of Fascism."

highest symbol of love and dedication to the *patria*" (Ledeen 93). This led revolutionaries in the country, among them the anarchist Errico Malatesta, to try to draw D'Annunzio into a march on Rome, which was a genuine possibility. He was reluctant, wanting to secure Fiume's future first: "any effort at liberation must start at Fiume. For a vaster social enterprise I must begin here. [...] Here the new forms of life are not only conceived, but fulfilled" (qtd. in Ledeen 142). The reappearance of the discourse of life in D'Annunzio's speech should not come as a surprise, especially given the Futurist influence over the city's cultural activities, or what Carli called Fiume's "dynamism," or "constructive energies," of "brains bursting into flames" (qtd. in Ledeen 144). D'Annunzio went on: "We have laid the foundations for a city of life, an entirely new city [...] It lives, and radiates splendor. It has the vigor and splendor of a fifth season upon the world" (qtd. in Ledeen 143). But subtracted from the concept of life that the Futurists had deployed earlier in the decade was any reference to its constitutively antagonistic character, which was precisely how Futurism's biopolitics were made to fit the structures of state power, or how life was repoliticized as a Fascist myth of national organicism. In a key speech in October 1919 in Fiume called "Italy and Life," D'Annunzio effectively dematerializes and sacralizes the concept of life, reinterpreting it as a national spirit: "We may all perish in the ruins of Fiume; but from those ruins the spirit will leap up, vigilant and strong [...] the great cause is the cause of the spirit, the cause of immortality" (qtd. in Ledeen 119). From here it was only a step to Fascist nationalism's idea of rebirth, or Griffin's palingenetic

myth, or what Emilio Gentile has identified in Fascism as a call "for the renewal of the inner life of Italy" and a "total spiritual revolution."[59] In other words, it was by a hollowing out of the lively, combative materiality at the core of Futurist organicism that Fascism was able to lay claim to its doctrine of rebirth – or by alienating life from itself.

VI: Aestheticizing Politics, Politicizing Life

One of György Lukács's most telling insights into modernist literature was a bit of gallows humour. In 1956, and so a few years removed from his seminal critiques of modernist formal experiments as idealist and decadent, Lukács was now Imre Nagy's minister of culture in Hungary. When Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest to suppress the Hungarian uprising, Lukács was among a number of officials in Nagy's government to be taken from his home in the dark of night, blindfolded, and transported to a large castle in Transylvania, where he was locked up without comment in what appeared to be indefinite detention. Lukács reportedly turned to another minister and said, "So, Kafka was a realist after all."[60] The joke's target is on its face the totalitarian exercise of power, with some self-irony mixed in. But the joke is also on modernism itself, whose most feverish, dangerous fantasies all need to be read, then and today, with the bracing and dismal knowledge that they too often came true.

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[59] Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 40, 29.

[60] As re-told in Simon Critchley's *The Book of Dead Philosophers*, 199-200. Parenthetically, or not, Lukács, unlike Nagy, survived the Soviet repression.

The most widely known analysis of how Futurism came true is the final section Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (1935), where Marinetti's fetishism of war technology is interpreted as an "aestheticization of politics" that ultimately bore the poisoned fruit of the Nazi dictatorship; Futurism's infamous axiom from its First Manifesto, "We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene" (*FM* 22) culminates in humankind's total self-alienation, or pushes Decadence to a radical extreme in which the species "can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure" (Benjamin 122). The seizure of Fiume by legionnaires is part of the trajectory Benjamin maps out: he offhandedly mentions D'Annunzio in the same breath as Marinetti ("With D'Annunzio, decadence made its entry into political life; with Marinetti, Futurism; and with Hitler, the Bohemian tradition of Schwabing" [121]); but more materially, D'Annunzio's use of mass political spectacle, in the form of rallies and balcony speeches, set a blueprint that Mussolini copied almost to the letter. Thus the title and central argument of Ledeen's history of Fiume – *The First Duce*.[61]

The initial premise of Benjamin's essay is important to keep in mind here. Concepts like the aestheticization of politics and its revolutionary opposite, the politiciziation of the aesthetic, both show Benjamin trying to work through the

[61] It needs to be added that Mussolini's first Fascist political program was a more or less complete plagiarism of de Ambris's anarchist Fiumuan charter. Only after its defeat in the November 1919 general election did Mussolini's fascist party reverse its politics and tactics to the side of right wing reaction. See Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics*, 144-50.

consequences of artistic practices no longer confined to a separate aesthetic sphere. By 1935, artworks and art worlds had been reshaped by mass production and standardization, and were more closely integrated with state politics and economies than ever before. Benjamin's essay is therefore a key index of modernism's "cultural Fordism," to follow Peter Wollen's important argument. It registers what I have argued is the first recuperation of the avant-garde, where cultural work was repositioned as a component in a larger, rationalized "ideology of the plan" that was in the process of coming into its full, midcentury form. One important symptom that era's integration of the aesthetic into production is, for Benjamin, that the figure of the artist needed to be rethought. With the artwork's new Fordist orientation, "a number of traditional concepts – such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" are "neutralized" (101), and Benjamin proposes replacing the romantic figure of the artist with a fully integrated member of the modern technocracy – the surgeon. Not only does the figure of the surgeon permit Benjamin to underline the rising tendencies, strongest in film, toward formal pastiche and serial production, but the surgeon metaphor allows him to reposition the reception of the artwork *inside* the body of the viewer: "The surgeon [...] greatly diminishes the distance from the patient by penetrating the patient's body" (115). The formally and technologically discrete images of a film strip are reconstituted by the viewer's perceptual apparatus into a new, seamless-seeming whole. In this way, art closely resembles an embodied kind of Fordist process, whose final goal is an acclimatization of the senses to

modern industrial and urban life: to "establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus" (117).

Benjamin's substitution of the surgeon for the artist, however, was not an entirely new move. Futurism had done the something similar twenty years before, though with important differences. In a 1914 manifesto called "In This Futurist Year," Marinetti writes: "Italy, much more than any country, had an urgent need of Futurism, since it was dying of an obsessive love for its own past. The invalid invented its own cure. *We are its timely surgeons*" (*CW* 231). Of all the myth-figures the Futurists deployed over the course of their first decade, this one struck at the heart of their project and revealed their avowedly biopolitical ambitions. The figure of the surgeon in Marinetti indicates that the project of culture itself had changed, and was now imagined to coincide with the privileged biopolitical discourse of the twentieth century. As Giorgio Agamben and others have argued, medicine gains an unrivalled discursive and institutional priority in delimiting legal definitions of life, and therefore in defining the forms, and exclusions, of political communities; according to Agamben, in the first half of the twentieth century "The physician and the sovereign seem to exchange roles" (143). With Futurism's identification with the figure of the surgeon, all the questions raised in *Mafarka* and the First Manifesto about a different kind of social reproduction, palingenetic and self-regulating, find their appropriate figure. Now culture would intervene directly in the management and self-management of the body politic. None of this is very different from

Benjamin's ideas about art's surgical equilibration of the senses, except in one crucial respect: for the Futurists, self-regulation was only ever articulated as a nation-based project, or rather projected onto, and into, a national body politic. Marinetti states as much in "Beyond Communism": "The Nation is the greatest extension of the individual, or better, perhaps, the broadest possible individual who is capable of living fully extended, directing, controlling, and defending every part of his body" (*CW* 340). The class politics of Benjamin's essay could not be further removed.

For their part, the Futurists' use of the surgeon trope was part of a broader project of social hygiene. Present from the earliest of their writings, hygiene took a stronger hold over their political manifestos of the 1918-1920 period. What had begun in Futurism's call for a purge of dying and decaying art forms, institutions, and social policies – from their renunciation of Decadence to their critique of representational government – became an argument for better management and more efficient technocracy. In other words, the first, negative phase of their social hygienics was slowly replaced by a series of policy ideas. This allowed Futurism to reinterpret all that formless, boundless organicism we saw in their anarchic "intuitive psychology of matter" (*CW* 111); during 1919-20's two red years and the appearance of actually-existing anarchism, their chaotic social atomism was rearticulated as "a huge flexible mass to be molded" (*CW* 307). The political model that informed their idea of social hygiene was ultimately an industrial technocracy of Futurist-inspired "experts" stressing Taylorist efficiency, as in Marinetti's 1919 essay

"Technocratic Government Without Parliament or Senate" (*CW* 317-20). The movement that began in 1909 as an implacable rejection of all the central institutions of the modern state and civil society, from the family ("legalized prostitution [...] an inferno of plots, quarrels, betrayals" [*CW* 272]), to the church ("Our anticlericalism is total and uncompromising" [*CW* 272]), to the education system ("suppression of Academies and Conservatories" [*CW* 76]), and ultimately to parliament ("that great crap heap of corruption and banality" [*CW* 56]), offered in the post-war political struggle its own set of progressive, state-centred proposals. The Futurist Political Party advocated the elimination of a political class of bureaucrats, nationalization of church lands, road construction, obligatory primary education, universal suffrage, divorce laws, pensions, and the abolition of the *carabinieri*, or secret police.[62] Futurism started as a complete negation of all hegemonic forms of social reproduction, and perhaps a recognition that life itself, as they conceived of it, may well be ungovernable. By the end of the war they had shifted toward a further-reaching and more total governmentality that anticipated the forms of social regulation of the midcentury welfare state.

Futurism's hygienic nationalism was never able to fully escape its sociobiological foundations. The nightmarish visionary language that we saw in *Mafarka*, where hygiene and self-management carried with them the prospect of the ready sacrifice of bodies for

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[62] Repeated throughout Futurist political manifestos of the 1918-20 period, but especially in 1918's "Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party" (*CW* 271-76)

enhanced, optimized life forms, was never entirely absent from the Futurists' political programme and their self-identification as surgeons of the social body. Take, for example, Marinetti's idea of hygiene in the following passage from his 1911 manifesto "Electric War: A Visionary Hypothesis":

> Between one battle and the next, sickness is assailed on all sides, confined within the last remaining two or three hospitals, which are now quite superfluous. The weak and the infirm are crushed, crumbled, and pulverized by the fiercely grinding wheels of this intense civilization. The green beard of provincial byways is shaved away by the cruel razors of speed. Radiotherapists, their faces protected by rubber masks, their bodies covered by suits made from lead, rubber, and bismuth, will gaze through spectacles made from salts of lead, upon the piercing yet healthy dangers of radium (225).

Obviously, the course of history had its revenge on Marinetti's "visionary" and "hypothetical" provocation. Casting themselves as surgeons and their art as a kind of social hygiene was ultimately only too easy to recuperate by Fascist versions of national organicism and race-purity: the Nazis, for example, eventually used radiation for forced sterilization. But in any case, Benjamin's analysis of the aestheticization of politics, it seems to me, requires a further modification. If Futurism made it possible for humanity to "experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure," then such a move was only conceivable after a prior epistemic shift: one in which both aesthetics and politics were brought into the orbit of biological life.

These are the terms in which Futurism can be said to have "come true." A question remains, however: why did its philosophical foundation in vitalism and sociobiology, and

not its leftist political programme, determine its political legacy? Or in other words, and despite my attempt in this chapter to avoid reducing Futurism's contradictory politics to either a left-revolutionary or straightforwardly protofascist position, why has Benjamin's "aestheticization of politics" thesis carried the critical day? Mussolini's comment that "without Futurism there would never have been a fascist revolution" should at least tell us that it is not merely a case of selective hearing by critics reluctant to acknowledge Futurism's leftist ties; rather, the antinomial relationship of biopolitics to more democratic forms of government constitutes a genuine historical problem. In Roberto Esposito's genealogy of biopolitics in the twentieth century, he stresses that liberal democracy is based in an abstraction and a disembodiment of juridically equal subjects, who "are separated from their own bodies and therefore understood as pure logical atoms endowed with rational will," a subject position that couldn't be further removed from biopolitical organization of power over life, which "refers to the body of its citizens without mediation."[63] As a result, "when the living or dying body becomes the symbolic and material epicenter of the dynamics of politics as well as its conflicts, we move into a dimension that lies not simply, as we sometimes hear, after or beyond democracy but resolutely outside it – not only removed from its procedures but from its language and conceptual apparatus" (643). Futurism, I've argued, consistently pursued a syntax for this concept of life "outside democracy," conceiving of it as a space of liberation from the in-

[63] Roberto Esposito, "Totalitarianism or Biopolitics?", 643.

built contradictions of a liberalism that was in a state of historical crisis. Futurism's ultimate failure to recognize the incompatibility of its two impulses – toward political liberation and toward a more thoroughgoing management and self-management of life and reproduction – shouldn't necessarily be taken as a case of political naivety, and neither should it be thought of as cynical, reactionary manipulation. Now, after the massive expansion and then evisceration of welfare state institutions regulating and securitizing social life, after the real subsumption of 1960s liberatory discourses by market proliferation, and during a period in which the global expansion of the liberal-democratic form of state sovereignty is only matched by increasingly fine-grained mechanisms of biopolitical control, their political misrecognition should look more contemporary to us than that.

PART TWO: The Social Logic of Sensation: Rebirth in Modernist America

Introduction

A single shot near the end of Oscar Micheaux's 1920 film *The Symbol of the Unconquered: A Story of the Ku Klux Klan* condenses a whole social history. It serves as an establishing shot for the film's denouement; in it, an oil refinery sits in the middle of a Northwest plain, spewing smoke. An African-American prospector named Hugh Van Allen has struck oil on his settlement near the fictional plains town of Oristown. Van Allen, now "one of the oil kings," spends the majority of the film up to this point struggling against racial discrimination to stake his small property claim. So this shot of his refinery, "from which enormous plumes of smoke now obscure the sky," says the title card, is a statement of Van Allen's presence, inscribed on the landscape itself. The refinery now bears the weight of the film's title, a symbol of Van Allen's endurance of post-emancipation racism in the American West.

The "enormous plumes" from an oil smokestack on the plains are strangely prescient of resource extraction across the Northwest states today, but they would obviously have resonated quite differently in the film's era. Shot in 1920 and set in 1910, Micheaux's film spans a decade in which new forms of mass communication, film primary among them, steadily reminded America's mostly rural population of the nation-

building power of industrial modernization.[1] The primary significance of this image, though, lies in its relationship to film history. Micheaux, the first independent African-American film producer, made *The Symbol of the Unconquered* as a response to D. W. Griffith's racist epic *The Birth of a Nation* (1914). Micheaux drew his title from Griffith's film: in *Birth*'s depiction of the origin of the Ku Klux Klan, founder Ben Cameron holds up his grandfather's cross and deems it, in a title card, "the ancient symbol of an unconquered race of men." Micheaux's resignification of "unconquered race" is the focus of his film, which goes so far as to restage and revise *Birth*'s infamous, climactic "ride of the Clansmen" sequence. Where Griffith's Clansmen are a dispossessed Southern aristocracy seeking racial redemption, Micheaux offers a more profane depiction: *Symbol*'s Clan is a criminal gang hired by speculators to terrorize and drive off black property holders. The triumphalist ride to the rescue in Griffith's film becomes, in *Symbol*, an instance of mundane, if terrorizing, vandalism. When the Clansmen try to burn Van Allen's settlement down, he and his love interest, Eve Mason, heroically repel them. With bricks.[2]

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[1] Ben Singer and Charlie Keil suggest that the film industry helped ideologically justify industrial expansion and rationalization to a population that was still 60% rural in 1910. See their introduction to *American Cinema of the 1910s,* 1-25.

[2] This is partly speculative, as surviving copies of the film are missing the reel with much of the battle between the Clan and Van Allen. But J. Ronald Green's *With a Crooked Stick—The Films of Oscar Micheaux* reconstructs the lost contents from period reviews and production notes: see 53-65.

Film historians tend to consider Micheaux's prior film, *Within Our Gates* (1919), as his reply to *Birth of a Nation*, as it takes up racial lynching and North-South relations. For the reasons argued above, I think *Symbol of the Unconquered* is addressed more directly to Griffith, and contests its symbolic violence more directly.

A public discourse that encouraged thousands of racial lynchings over the decades following the Civil War may have required just such a blunt response. But what interests me in the shot of the oil refinery is the way it points to a different imagination of American futurity than we see in *Birth*. Griffith's film concludes with a white-bricked "City of Peace" visually superimposed over the marriage of Elsie Stoneman to Ben Cameron, or, allegorically, Unionist North to Confederate South. The City of Peace image embodies the hope of a nation reborn and fully healed from the wounds of the Civil War and Reconstruction, or on Griffith's title card, "*Liberty and Union*, one and inseperable, *now and forever!*" *Birth* was emblematic of a variant of Protestant eschatology that imagined national rebirth in terms of racial purification and blood sacrifice. Micheaux, on the other hand, not only depicts the Clan's defeat, but thoroughly demythologizes its sense of righteous dispossession and makes it a servant to land and resource interests. His film imagines a different future, one that includes black land ownership and economic self-sufficiency.[3] But that future is premised its own concept of rebirth: as he does in his semi-autobiographical novels *The Conquest* (1913) and *The Homesteader* (1918), Micheaux points to the frontier as the site for black self-realization, subscribing to a turn-of-the-century rationale for westward expansion and industrial development that found its most durable articulation in Fredrick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis," where the open spaces

[3] Micheaux supported Booker T. Washington's notion of economic self-sufficiency: his novel *The Homesteader* (1918) was dedicated to Washington.

of the West enabled a "perennial rebirth" for American culture and democracy.[4] There could be no more fitting visual for Turner's notion of development spreading westward than *Symbol*'s shot of Van Allen's oil refinery on the plains. In other words, Micheaux has upended one ideology of rebirth by leveraging a second one against it.

It's no wonder that rebirth figured so centrally in both films. As Jackson Lears argues in *Rebirth of a Nation* (2009), no other term carried the same ideological weight or covered the same breadth in turn-of-the-century American culture: rebirth cut across ideological divides between the Civil and First World Wars, an era of intensified social antagonisms and political convulsions. Lears's cultural history threads rebirth through a number of key moments: both Unionist and Confederate politicians rationalized the unprecedented loss of life in the U.S. Civil War as a regenerative bloodletting; Frederick Douglass interpreted the end of slavery as a spiritual deliverance, announcing "A country, redeemed and regenerated from the foulest crime against human nature that ever saw the sun" (Douglass 325);[5] meanwhile racial lynchings in the South and Indian removal in the Dakotas drew the idea of rebirth towards a genocidal logic of regeneration by way of racial purification; Ellis Island offered its own mythology of rebirth and self-reinvention

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[4] Fredrick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History,* 2. This collection grew out of Turner's hugely influential 1893 address to the American Historical Association, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."

For more on Micheaux's novels and the figure of the black homesteader in his work generally, see Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences*, 156-75.

[5] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.

to the record numbers of immigrants arriving on U.S. Shores between 1880 and 1924; Theodore Roosevelt rearticulated Turner's frontier thesis as an idealized cult of physical activity, a “strenuous” life that served both as a masculinist norm and a rationale for American imperialism; and Woodrow Wilson proposed a League of Nations, a progressivist, cosmopolitan world space into which America, its constitutional form and business interests intact, would be reborn. As Lears points out, this era's ideologies of rebirth borrowed extensively from Protestant millennialism, a deep structure in American culture, and gave it new, secular articulations. Rebirth functioned both as official state ideology, justifying America's new prominence in the international balance of powers, and as an individualized and individualizing belief system, embodying the diverse and often antagonistic aspirations of a changing citizenry.

Clearly many of these different uses of the rebirth trope were in direct conflict with one another. But rebirth's ideological multivalence is precisely the point. The sheer accumulated weight of all of these different calls for rebirth should indicate that something fundamental was at issue at the beginning of America's twentieth century: there was more at stake in the term than this or that governmental policy, be they progressivist, nativist, or expansionist. What rebirth signalled was an imaginative willingness to think beyond current political forms, a social imaginary made necessary by the different pressures that massive-scale immigration, internal migration, overseas expansion, and women's movements brought to bear on a formally capacious but

theretofore restrictive constitutional framework. What I want to propose is that all of these turn-of-the-century figures of rebirth index a crisis in social reproduction itself. There was no guarantee, and plenty of evidence to the contrary, that its representational government could survive the emergence and political visibility of these new groups of subjects. If rebirth throws into question the reproduction of social relations and political forms, then it also has to be considered the most typically modern of modernist tropes. It posits a temporal break between a faulty social organization of the past and some utopic, unalienated future, drawing a stark line between past and present, tradition and modernity.

The particularity of the rebirth metaphor matters here too. It situates the question of social reproduction on an implicitly biological terrain. Political discontinuity and economic reorganization are projected onto a new social body. In the late nineteenth century, there was no way for that body to avoid being understood in evolutionary and sociobiological terms. What was for some a question of the extension of rights to new subjects, for others a question of migration controls, and for others still a question of territorial sovereignty, was for all of them a new extension of biopolitical governance. Rebirth purported to solve at the level of a new social body certain tensions between citizenship and population, or the extension of sovereignty over newly visible or integrated populations.

One of the primary symptoms of this tension between citizenship and mobile populations shows up in aesthetic form. Sentimentalism, a dominant generic and affective

mode of the American nineteenth century, passed out of vogue at the beginning of the twentieth. But behind this minor shift in popular taste lies what I'll argue is a major reconceptualization of the most basic premises of aesthetics and politics, or form and power. What I want to examine are the specific transformations that sentimentalism underwent, rather than its more well-known disavowal by high-minded modernist writers wary of the conventional and the feminine. One transformation is the replacement of the term sentiment with its close cousin *sensation*; and one important question my argument will pose is how these two terms resonate differently, and point up different political projects. Period reviews have shown that readers in the late nineteenth century understood sentiment and sensation as shades of the same meaning: sentiment may have leaned further towards inviolably personal emotions and sensation more towards ephemeral, visceral thrill, but both pointed towards a non-rational, embodied reaction or attachment to cultural objects.[6]

But I want to insist that the differences between them are more significant than their similarities. Or, more accurately, there is a reason they were lumped together, but there was also a reason that one word supplanted the other. Sentiment, as I'll argue below, is the emotional currency of a liberal civil society that was, by the late nineteenth century,

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[6] For period reviews, see D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*, pp. 153, 158. Most critical literature unconsciously keeps the two domains, sentiment and sensation, distinct, or reduces one to the other. Miller is an exception. He reads the gender politics of male sentimentalism in the late nineteenth century together with an emerging, boundary-crossing body of sensation. See especially his chapter on Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (chapter five, "*Cage aux folles,*" pp. 146-191), a novel elsewhere claimed by both critics of sentimental and sensational literatures.

overwhelmed by external pressures and its own contradictions. The possibility of forming a sentimental attachment with the body of a vulnerable or marginalized sufferer was used as the basis of expanding political recognition within a liberal system of government. What occurred in the late nineteenth century was the collapse of that logic of attachment, and with it a whole system of governmentality. What sensation, in its nineteenth-century invocation, points to is a whole new model of regulation and equilibration to which individual bodies and especially whole populations were subjected. To chart the complicated transition between these two terms, my argument will follow them through the psychological and later political writings of William James, for whom the sensational body, rooted in a certain experience of modernity as overstimulating, needed to be tied back into a liberal political framework. His difficulty accomplishing this intellectual feat is a testament both to the resilience of a sentimental form that he wanted to surpass, and to the problems that inhere to any reconciliation of biopolitical management with the principles of liberalism.

But scientific psychology was not the only discourse where the tension between sentiment and sensation produced tensions. As I'll argue in the second chapter of this section, early film plays an important role here too. Since at least Walter Benjamin's essay on mechanical reproduction, it has been a critical commonplace to draw links between urbanism, film, and the senses. Benjamin was drawing partly on a series of writings by Hugo Münsterberg and Vachel Lindsay that sought to apply the insights of scientific

psychology to film, which they saw as a sort of proxy laboratory, where psychology's insights about embodied sensation could be tested on a mass audience. It was the composition of that mass audience that made sentimentalism such a difficult form for early filmmakers: as I'll argue below, and as Micheaux understood perfectly, Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* used every sentimental and melodramatic convention it could muster to mobilize sympathy for white Southern dispossession, and partially failed. That failure indicated Griffith's misrecognition of the social composition of his audience. My argument will treat how Griffith's following film, *Intolerance* (1916), is marked by a constitutive uncertainty about how to address the new social body that film was bringing into being. *Intolerance*'s near-compulsive return to a birth-figure, its infamous "cradle shot" that ties its four narrative threads together, takes on added significance in this reception context. Griffith's film, not unlike James's psychology, sits on the border between two modes of affective organization, which is to say two different modes of governing populations, and manifests all the contradictions between them.

The two chapters in this section speak to core issues in the recent turn to a transnational American Studies, or American Studies' anti-parochial self-criticism. Insofar as a transnational approach embraces globalist and postcolonial perspectives in order to re-frame core American narratives, myths, and symbols, my argument below falls within its broad parameters. More specifically, the editors of *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (2000), a key, early volume in this disciplinary reorientation, raise the problem of how to

understand America's histories of displacement and immigration in light of the recent development, in postcolonial and globalist literary criticism, of more politically and theoretically robust categories of analysis like diaspora, transnationalism, the black Atlantic, and migration across and within state borders.[7] This critical orientation requires in the first place an overhaul of Americanist canons, revaluing neglected cultural production like Micheaux's films, and considering how these new archives and objects can complicate any sense of a unitary national culture.[8] At the same time, a transnational approach means questioning the ways we frame already-canonical texts and contexts. For example, America's immigration narrative seems difficult to overturn because of its deep overdetermination, its coding by layers of social science, and its framing within a familiar version of American exceptionalism, but now reframed as an exceptional "nation of

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[7] In their introduction to the volume, editors Rowe et al write, "In one sense, then, we join the current chorus of calls to move U.S.-based American Studies, Women's Studies, and Ethnic Studies away from uncritical nationalist perspectives and toward what has been variously called critical internationalism, transnationalism, or globality. In particular, we are concerned with how one negotiates among local, national, and global perspectives, while remaining vigilantly self-critical about the epistemologically and historically deep ties that American Studies has had to U.S. imperialism" (7). My own concern is with the self-critical turn at the end of this overview statement; that is, revising interpretations of Americanist canons with an anti-imperialist and transnationalist critical framework.

[8] The scope of this move beyond the nation is ambitious, but necessary. It not only builds on decades of Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, and African-American Studies, as home-grown, as it were, forms of anticolonial writing (Rowe et al 5-6), but it seeks to engage with writing about America and Americanism sourced beyond the nation's borders and outside of its institutions: "What some cultural critics have termed the capacity of local cultures to 'write back' against cultural and even political and economic domination should be considered part of American Studies. [...] The study of U.S. imperialist policies toward Native Americans should not be conducted without consideration of how native peoples responded to the specific historical circumstances investigated, just as the Philippine-American War should not be studied exclusively from the perspective of the United States or the response to the Vietnam War studied solely through U.S. texts" (Rowe, "Post-nationalism" 28).

immigrants," in John F. Kennedy's phrase.[9] But on the other hand, this history of immigration also holds the possibility of destabilizing that particular national narrative if we take seriously the challenges of thinking post- and trans-nationally, and revising well-worn figures of immigrants' personal reinvention or rebirth, or the false universalism of America's so-called melting pot.[10] The two chapters here take key articulations of America's exceptionalist narrative by James and Griffith, and read them with an eye to reinstating the processes of marginalization and effacement that were necessary to establish them in the first place. By tracing how liberal governmentality, fundamental to America's constitutional form and ideological self-concept, not only fostered but required different technologies of population management, or biopolitical rationalities applied to a mobile and heterogeneous population, I think we can effectively dissolve the "golden age of immigration" concept. This is in keeping with what John Carlos Rowe has called transnationalism's "general interest in the origins, legitimation, and perpetuation of Euroamerican imperial and neo-imperial forms of global domination" ("Post-nationalism" 26). Though it has been argued that transnationalist American studies too often affirms a

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[9] See Kennedy's posthumously published *A Nation of Immigrants*. This new conception of America's break from the old world is based on an understanding of the nation as composed of immigrants, "with the exception of one group"; this "gave America a flavor and a character that make it unmistakable and as remarkable to people today as it was to Alexis de Tocqueville in the early part of the nineteenth century" (Kennedy 2-3).

[10] The *Post-Nationalist* editors ask, importantly, how "much work in a postmodern vein about diaspora, migration, and modern consciousness [...] nonetheless echoes (unknowingly, much of the time) the themes of an older immigration history," and whether "much of the recent theoretical emphasis on global migration and movement has paradoxically left some of us wondering why it is that some Americans still feel unique, others look for more specific forms of identification within the nation-state, and others reject the very idea of national affiliation" (6).

liberal pluralist and multiculturalist politics, I engage below in an anti-imperialist version of this scholarship that follows the consequences of Amy Kaplan's helpful reminder that "empire is a form of transnationalism."[11] Empire, that is, has become an urgent form to genealogize and problematize in the context of America's post-9/11 tendency to once again speak of itself as a global imperial power, and in terms familiar to any student of the American early twentieth century.

[11] From Kaplan's Presidential Address to the American Studies Association in 2003, titled "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today." The complaint that too much transnationalist scholarship is implicitly affirming a new, transnational exceptionalism, in which America serves as the site for neoliberalism-compliant forms of cultural hybridity and identity formation, is articulated in Winfried Fluck's "A New Beginning? Transnationalisms," which also offers a summary of a decade of transnationalist scholarship, in addition to this important critique.

CHAPTER THREE: From a Politics of Sentimentalism to a Biopolitics of Sensation: William James's *Principles of Psychology*

In the early twentieth century, the status of sentimentalism hit a low point. High modernism, as Suzanne Clark has noted, defined itself largely by its disavowal of sentimental forms and rhetorics. Modernists replaced performances of feeling with depersonalized objective correlatives, and the structure of twentieth century affect was never the same again. Clark, Andreas Huyssen, and others have shown that high modernism's affective style was never more than a minority phenomenon, since sentimentalism was not so much negated by the likes of Marinetti, T. E. Hulme, and T. S. Eliot as it was displaced onto those far more widely consumed pulp, pop, and mass cultural forms that fuelled the engine of commodification over the course of the twentieth century. But my interest in sentimentalism lies a little bit to the side of that story.[1] I want to reconsider what literary and cultural criticism has known for a while now about sentimentalism: that it is the cornerstone structure of feeling for political liberalism, mediating and individualizing an affective sense of belonging to a larger political community, but for the most part a radically circumscribed and exclusionary community at that.[2] I'll argue below that in sentimentalism's absence, or more properly in the anti-

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1 Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism*; Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman," chapter 3 of *After the Great Divide*.

2 Julie Ellison's *Cato's Tears* makes the case that sentimentalism is the affective logic of liberalism, tracing sentiment (and its related term sensibility) back to the early eighteenth century. Lauren Berlant's long engagement with sentimentalism works from a similar position: see especially her "Introduction: Compassion (and Withholding)" in *Compassion*. Foucault, meanwhile, notes in his genealogy of

sentimental consensus of the early twentieth century, liberalism underwent an important rearticulation. That this rearticulation happened to coincide with an important transnational opening in the American political imaginary, or a shift in its self-concept from a nation, however undefined its boundaries, to a budding empire, is, I'll argue, no accident. By focusing on how sentimentalism was displaced by the purportedly more neutral, physiological term sensation, I want to reconstruct how a whole set of political commitments that inhere to enlightenment liberal thought needed to be revised. I'll focus on the writings of William James, and specifically on what I take to be his significant shift in position, or at least in emphasis, after his involvement with the Anti-Imperialist League, protesting America's military aggression in the Philippines (1899-1903). Confronted with American overseas expansion, and unable to rally sufficient sympathy or sentiment for the colonized to stop the invasion, James began to articulate what he called a "new liberalism" for America's twentieth century. Like the old liberalism, however, this one had difficulty negotiating its nation-based limits and its global effects. In other words, it raised the question of where, in a world market, feeling can rightly and reasonably circulate—how far, and in what form.

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liberalism that sentiment plays a key role in eighteenth-century imaginations of liberal economic and political structures: "Civil society is much more than the association of different economic subjects [... W]hat links individuals to each other in civil society is instinct, sentiment, and sympathy, it is the impulses of benevolence individuals feel for each other," though sympathetic exchange operates by the same logic as self-interest and the profit motive: sentiment is "a mechanism of immediate multiplication that has in fact the same form as the immediate multiplication of profit in the purely economic mechanism of interests" (*Birth* 301) . A short list of literary and cultural criticism on sentimentalism that stresses the term's imbrication with liberal state and economic structures would include Berlant's *The Female Complaint* and *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Elizabeth Barnes's *States of Sympathy*, Julia Stern's *The Plight of Feeling*, and Shirley Samuels's edited collection *The Culture of Sentiment*.

The book on William James is that despite popularizing pragmatism, a homegrown, anti-idealist American philosophical position, and despite establishing psychology as a prominent discipline in American universities and social life, the ultimate horizon of his thought was a possessive, and even heroic, individualism. Russ Posnock refers to James's "commitment to individual voluntarism, expressed in his pragmatism and political activity, [which] acted as an inspiring therapeutic model for a college-educated audience in need of spiritual solace to confront the bewilderments of modernity" (15). Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse would later critique this tendency in James and American pragmatism more broadly, calling it a last-ditch attempt to preserve the subject in the face of an increasingly rationalized, bureaucratic social order. Marcuse writes that in James's era, "Philosophical justifications of individualism took on more and more the overtones of resignation. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the idea of the individual became increasingly ambiguous: it combined insistence on free social performance and competitive efficiency with glorification of smallness, privacy, and self-limitation. [...] The counter-position of individual and society, originally meant to provide the ground for a militant reformation of society in the interest of the individual, comes to prepare and justify the individual's withdrawal from society."[3] Desperate as James's grasp on the individual may have been, it provides a model for more recent neo-pragmatisms in Frank Lentricchia and Cornel West, who both invoke James in the late 1980s as a cure to

[3] Marcuse, from "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," quoted in Posnock 108-09. Posnock argues that despite the Frankfurt School's early critique of pragmatism, Adorno's late work, with its emphasis on non-identity and the limits of conceptual thought vis-a-vis concrete experience, resembles James's privileging of "wild facts," and makes James a partial forerunner to Adorno's own critique of the administered totality of mid-century capitalism. See Posnock 124-29.

poststructural malaise and as a model for a reflexive intellectual activity, potentially restoring political agency to humanist inquiry after the so-called death of the subject.[4] But these neo-pragmatisms take James with a few reservations: more thoroughly historicized, his writings evince what Jackson Lears calls a fundamentally anti-modern stance, looking further and further inward for a mode of authenticity in an increasingly rationalized and reified social world.[5] Charles Taylor interprets this as the definitive characteristic of modernist thought, or an "epiphanic" mode that seeks a kind of "unmediated contact with the fullness of life" against "the deadening, routinized, conventional forms of instrumental civilization" (469). But as Simon Gikandi's discussion of Taylor argues, that unmediated, epiphanic subjectivity is constituted through an encounter with its own alterity, or in Taylor's terms comes "close to merging with the other" (471); in other words, we need to be quite specific about exactly what sorts of otherness and difference modernists have in mind, since "it was in its engagement with what it construed as radical (colonial) difference that modernism derived its authority as a unique cultural moment" (Gikandi 32-33). Following Gikandi, I want to reconsider James's heroic, occasionally desperate, individualism from a perspective that takes account of its epistemological and geographical borders, or makes visible the subaltern populations on which that individualism tenuously rests.

My interpretation of James will contrast two very different moments in his

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4 Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 54-68; Frank Lentricchia, *Ariel and the Police*, 103-23.

5 Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*.

writing. The first is the publication of his first major work, and the first major work of American psychology: his three-volume collection *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). In it, James displaces the eighteenth century's basic liberal antinomy between self and society onto the more secure biological terrain of organism and environment. One way this manifested itself was in an anti-sentimentalist position in his writing, since sentiment struck James as an abstraction that was impossible to reconcile with scientific psychology's canons of inquiry. By contrast, sensation was quantifiable, and it became the new basis for affective states. But at as Marcuse points out, this move to recuperate the individual from the iron cage of rationalization was in some sense a pyrrhic victory. I want to examine how James's sensation model derived from a "probabilistic revolution" in the social sciences, which reshaped how populations were intelligible to liberal governments, and how they were to be managed.[6] James repeatedly characterized the subject as a defensive organism within a siege or storm of sensation; I'll argue that this crucial figure in James's writing derives from a statistical epistemology and an evolutionary framework. James, in other words, marks the point in American thought in which a new "social body" is born, to use Mary Poovey's term for the epistemological shift in social science that accompanied new ways of representing, knowing, and managing populations: "The nineteenth-century concept of a social body carries traces of both the political domain, to which the concept of a body politic properly belongs, and the economic domain, to which the 'great body of the people' referred. The substitution of

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[6] See Ian Hacking, "Was There a Probabilistic Revolution 1800-1930?" and "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers."

social for *politic*, however, and the disappearance of *the people* suggests that a new conceptual entity had begun to emerge by the early nineteenth century" (8). Foucault names the move towards probabilistic modes of social thought the beginnings of a biopolitical sense of population management, opening a space for interventions into the "species body" and the "biological processes" (Foucault, *History* 138, 146) that, for James's psychology, were the only ways in which the subject was still thinkable.

The second moment I'll trace in James's writing is the period around his resistance to the Philippine invasion, or about a decade after the publication of *Principles.* If James's sensational body was a departure from the liberal, sentimental intersubjectivity of prior political thought, or if represents the birth of a new social body, then this suggests a new mapping of the conceptual borders of the nation—a national project James was always concerned with, but which came to a point of crisis with America's military domination of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century. Amy Kaplan's recent work has indicated how the Philippine invasion was a turning point for American constitutional thought, adding new categories of non-citizenship in order to incorporate foreign territories, or permitting an inclusive exclusion of newly dominated populations. While the focal point for Kaplan is the jurdical creation of a category of "foreignness in the domestic sense" with the *Insular Cases* (1901) (Kaplan 3), which established the constitutional status of annexed offshore territories and their populations after the Spanish-American War, she also situates the Philippine flashpoint within the context of a series of other inclusive exclusions in the period, like the American South's Jim Crow

laws and the dispossession of Native American groups in the Southeast and Northwest. James's new social body emerges in a period in which the liberal extension of citizenship rights was denied more often than extended. James's position on the Philippine War is often understood as a high water mark in his ethical engagement with otherness; by first tracing how his political commitments with the anti-imperialists contradicted his own prior psychological work, and then by considering how his anti-imperial position shifted over the four years of the war, from principled rejection to accommodationism, I want to suggest a few ways in which the political dynamics of turn of the century America were not only an external context of James's thought but its very content, and its breaking point.

I. National sentimentality and William James

Towards the end of the chapter on "Habit" in his *Principles of Psychology*, William James takes a swipe at sentimentalism. "There is no more contemptible type of human character," he writes, "than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed" (*Principles* I 129). This is James at his most characteristically masculinist, holding fast to an ethic of self-assertion and volition that would later come to its full ideological expression in T.R. Roosevelt's militarist and expansionist idealization of the "strenuous life."[7] James's use of a male pronoun for the "contemptible" sentimentalist is a

[7] See Jackson Lears's *Rebirth of a Nation*, 167-221, for an overview of Roosevelt's strenuous life

case study in how sentimentalism becomes what Lauren Berlant has called a "gendering machine," a cultural form that polices normativity and constitutes divisions between public and private spheres.[8] In dismissing sentiment as a useless, indulgent expenditure of mental energy, James seems to be consigning what has become known as the "subject of feeling" to history: from its beginnings in the "fellow feeling" around which British moral philosophy and political economy were oriented in the eighteenth century, to its appropriation by suffrage- and abolition-based appeals for political inclusion in the American nineteenth century, the sentimental subject has a complicated genealogy, tied to varied and often contradictory political impulses. For James, however—or at least for the James writing this unexpected broadside against the "weltering sea of sensibility and emotion"—sentimentality was suddenly a regressive mental condition. What had changed?

At least since sentiment's recent emergence as a critical keyword with Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), cultural and literary histories have been forced to come to terms with the degree to which canons are constituted in the act of marginalizing sentimentalism. For Douglas, the heavily commodified novel trade of the late Victorian period was a template for twentieth century mass culture: sentimental rhetoric and emotional appeals are responsible both for the popularity and, relatedly, the critical denigration of both. So powerful is this cultural logic that more recent attempts to rehabilitate excluded female writers and reform androcentric literary traditions have been

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ideology.

[8] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint*.

caught up in it, and called sentimental critical projects in their own right.[9] Anti-sentimentality like James's, on the other hand, has never been anything other than a reinscription of gender asymmetry. This reinscription can be intentional, as with the "strenuous life" ideology at the turn of the twentieth century, or accidental, as in Douglas's competing impulses to on the one hand uncover a sentimental "women's culture" and read it seriously, but on the other hand censure it for its popularity and its ideological distortions. If James's attack can be said to be typically anti-sentimental, though, I want to suggest that it is typical in a specific, historically significant way. It takes place at a crucial conjuncture for sentimentalism: right in the middle of its pervasive denunciation by modernism, arguably the most thoroughgoing disavowal of the culture of sentiment since its emergence in the eighteenth century. James sits between Nathaniel Hawthorne's infamous and bitter characterization of American literary culture in 1850s as overrun by a "damned mob of scribbling women" whose bestselling "trash" forced him to reconsider literary value's relation to public taste (Hawthorne, qtd in Armstrong 2), and an influential mid-twentieth century critical tradition, from F.O. Matthiesson to Leslie Fiedler, whose creation of an American literary canon followed Hawthorne's high-minded distinction between literature and scribbling to the letter, excluding writing by women and African-American authors on the basis of its overt sentimentality.[10] Over the same period,

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[9] Armstrong, "Why Daughters Die," 6.

[10] See the discussion in Armstrong, "Why Daughters Die", 1-6. In addition to Matthiesson's *American Renaissance* and Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Armstrong cites the influential 1917 *Cambridge History of American Literature* as a key document in this anti-sentimental canon formation. The exclusion of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, and a number of other bestselling nineteenth-century authors from this canon, and therefore from the record of nineteenth-century

the renunciation of sentiment became an integral gesture for canonical literary modernism: from Gustave Flaubert's evisceration of sentimentalism as only so much bourgeois hypocrisy, to F.T. Marinetti's repeated attacks on sentiment in his poetic manifestos, to Imagism's dissolution of emotion into the complexity of a "natural object" that was to become the new limit point for poetry, to T.S. Eliot's ban on confessional verse with his objective correlative, to W.C. Williams's poetic slogan "no ideas but in things," the fate of sentimental writing was sealed.[11] As Suzanne Clark's book *Sentimental Modernism* argues, these statements add up to a wholesale re-gendering of literary and intellectual cultures at the turn of the century, mobilizing a dismissal of women's writing as a kind of hysterical speech, and interpreting women's reading as an early template for the emotional rhetorics of mass culture and consumerism.[12]

By pathologizing the psychology of sentimentalism, then, James helps marginalize a whole cultural form. Further along in the passage, he singles out literary and theatrical sentimentality for specific abuse:

> The habit of excessive novel-reading and theatre-going will produce true monsters in this line. The weeping of a Russian lady over the fictitious personages in the play, while her coachman is freezing to death on his seat outside, is the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale. Even the habit of excessive indulgence in music, for those who are neither performers themselves nor musically gifted enough to take it in a purely intellectual way, has probably a relaxing effect upon the character. One becomes filled with emotions which

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American political life, has been the main target of recent critical work on sentimentalism.

[11] Marinetti, "Against Sentimentalized Love and Parliamentarism" (*CW* 55-60) and "Destruction of Syntax—Untrammeled Imagination—Words in Freedom" *(CW* 120-131*)*; Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste"; Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems"; Williams, *Paterson*.

[12] Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism*. Clark's more challenging thesis is that there exists a strain of modernist writing by women like Emma Goldman and Edna St. Vincent Millay that troubles this gendered distinction and negotiates a new place for sentiment within modernist culture.

> habitually pass without prompting to any deed, and so the inertly sentimental condition is kept up. (*Principles* I 129)

At one level James is framing sentiment as a disposition of privilege that has become generalized, an indulgent emotionalism that "everywhere happens on a less glaring scale," presumably in the cultural tastes of an aspiring bourgeoisie. But beyond its critique of philistinism, this passage's scorn for the Russian lady's hypocritical sympathy for staged misery instead of the real suffering of her coachman rests upon a distinction between mental representations and "pure experience" whose implications can be traced all the way through James's *Psychology*, and beyond. The division between external events and their corresponding mental representations was a British empiricist doctrine that, in its reformulation in associationist psychologies in the nineteenth century, James opposed.[13] James's "radical" revision of empiricism wanted to close the distance between ideas and things, and by so doing overturn the very mechanics of liberal sentiment. These latter are articulated in an often-cited passage from Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a kind of imaginary identification with the suffering of others:

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. […] By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not

[13] Against in particular the psychologies of James Mill and Alexander Bain, James wrote: "the associationist must introduce the order of experience in the outer world. The dance of the ideas is a copy, somewhat mutilated and altered, of the order of phenomena. But the slightest reflection shows that phenomena have absolutely no power to influence our ideas until they have first impressed our senses and our brain. The bare existence of a past fact is no ground for our remembering it. Unless we have seen it, or somehow *undergone* it, we shall never know of its having been. The experiences of the body are thus one of the conditions of the faculty of memory being what it is" (*Principles* I 17).

> altogether unlike them […] this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or be affected by what he feels (11-12).

Smith's take on sentiment is important for a few reasons. His commitment to empiricism necessitates a pronounced epistemological gap between one's mental state and the suffering of another, and only imaginary projection, or "changing places in fancy," can bridge the mutual inaccessibility of social actors. As Jean Christophe Agnew and David Marshall have argued, Smith's sympathy, or the capacity for "fellow-feeling" with the sentiments of someone else, is modeled on the theatre: moral behaviour becomes a drama of actors and spectators, of representations and mimesis. Smith acknowledges as much in the opening chapter of his *Theory*, noting his "appropriation" of key neoclassical dramatic terms: "Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (13). Theatre's concern with the propriety of emotional display, with vicariousness and catharsis, and with how to emotionally move an audience were, with Smith, smuggled into moral discourse and turned into a model for social interaction. Agnew notes that for Smith, "Societies were founded on a dramaturgical rather than a categorical imperative" (184);[14] among other effects, this undermined the

[14] Agnew argues against the long-held notion that Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is at odds with his later and more famous work, *The Wealth of Nations*. Of the several links between the two works that Agnew identifies, the "dramaturgical imperative" that motivates social behaviour is the strongest. Sympathy is an entirely performative emotional state for Smith, and the object is to accrue as much sentimental "credit" as possible, in a sort of stock market in sympathy: "What was sympathy in this context but an ultimate commodity: a universal equivalent into which all other goods could be

apparent authenticity of moral behaviour and private feeling by throwing them onto a thoroughly performative terrain. And so James's sneer at the Russian lady's trumped-up tears at a play is on one level a call to invalidate sentiment's performative dimension, and to return to some more authentically felt emotional register. But more importantly, when James discredits sentimental theatre and novels, he is expressing much more than a genre preference; he is implicitly rejecting sentimentalism's central analogy, or the whole framework for sentiment's mediating role in social formation.

Smith's *Theory* remains significant for the way it positions an aesthetic principle behind, or beneath, that other mode of discourse with which his name has subsequently become synonymous—political economy. Smith, and moral philosophy as a whole, invoked sentiment as a kind of catch-all term for all those aspects of social life that lay outside economic exchange, or in other words the sphere that would later come to be named culture: sentiment rearticulated residual religious, aesthetic, and moral codes in terms of an extra-market "feeling" that acted as a principle for social cohesion.[15] But the

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converted? And what was the self in this context but a speculative fiction of joint manufacture: a venture, a text, a performance in which all spectators, investors, and consumers were invited, albeit obliquely, to subscribe? What indeed was Smith's theater of moral sentiments but a placeless market in which the peculiarly tacit conventions of dramatic realism were called on to conceal the character of the negotiation from the parties themselves?" (185). Jean Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*, 177-88.

15 The self-evidence of moral sentiment, and the tension between it and doctrines of self-interest, was quite literally the starting point for Smith's moral philosophy. His book opens with this very problem: "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it" (1). Smith's contemporary and friend Adam Ferguson reiterates this tension in his study of sentiment and civil society: "Mankind, we are told, are devoted to interest; and this, in all commercial nations, is undoubtedly true: but it does not follow, that they are, by their natural dispositions, averse to society and mutual affection: proofs to the contrary remain, even where interest triumphs most" (Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 35).

two spheres, economic and sentimental, were basically mirrors of each other in Smith's *Theory.* Benevolence may act as a counterweight to the ravages of the market, and human self-interest may be attenuated by an inherent sentimentality, but Smith was wary of stretching these concepts too far. Against the first wave of sentimental novelists in the late eighteenth century, or "those whining and melancholy moralists [who] have carried their doctrines a good deal beyond the just standard of nature and propriety" (160), Smith's "sympathy system" folded sentiment back into economy at every available turn. Sentiment became both means and end to market capitalism: it was both a minimum principle of intelligibility between economic actors—my capacity to sympathize with you is a precondition to any trade arrangement—and the ultimate end to accumulation itself, insofar as wealth was only important if one could capitalize on it in terms of increased social standing, or sympathy from others. Sentiment was so tightly interwoven with the theory of capitalism that Smith would later articulate in *The Wealth of Nations* that the initial purpose of moral philosophy, to account for non-economic instincts and impulses, doubled back onto economic life in a kind of moebius strip. The subject of feeling, in other words, was reduced to that other great figure of eighteenth century empiricist thought, *homo oeconomicus*, or the subject of interest.

Smith's sentiment was designed to mediate an epistemological problem—a sense of moral propriety in the face of human suffering—that was also a political reality in Britain's expanding imperialist economy. But Smith's enduring contribution to the discourse of sentiment was to radically restrict the sphere in which sentiment could

properly circulate. This is where his moral philosophy takes on the character of bourgeois ideology, in Marx's sense of a philosophy that universalizes the interests of a particular class. When novelists of the Age of Sensibility raised the question of a universal humanitarianism that would extend sympathy across the globe, Smith responded that stretching sympathy to the subjects of those far-removed places was an epistemological error.[16] This "extreme sympathy with misfortunes which we know nothing about," writes Smith, "seems altogether absurd and unreasonable." He continues:

> Take the whole earth at an average, for one man who suffers pain or misery, you will find twenty in prosperity and joy, or at least in tolerable circumstances. No reason, surely, can be assigned why we should rather weep with the one than rejoice with the twenty. […] All men, even those at the greatest distance, are no doubt entitled to our good wishes, and our good wishes we naturally give them. But if, notwithstanding, they should be unfortunate, to give ourselves any anxiety on that account, seems to be no part of our duty. (160-161)

The globalization of sympathy, or extending it to extra-national and colonial subjects on whose exploitation an entire imperialist world system depended, violated sympathy's "natural" bounds.[17] Colonies were simply outside the theatre of sympathy. For Smith

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[16] Northrop Frye, "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility"; but crucially, also the more recent political readings of sensibility in Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility* and Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears*.

[17] Hardly an accident, then, that one of Smith's only other mentions of the "whole earth" in *Theory* comes in another famous passage, his first mention of the idea of an "invisible hand":

> The rich only select from the heap what is most precious and agreeable. They consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, though the sole end which they propose from the labour of all the thousands whom they employ, be the gratification of their own vain and insatiable desires, they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements. They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. (215-16)

If my argument that the "whole earth" constitutes an episemological problem for Smith, then these two moments which raise it as an issue only to brush it aside are powerful examples of something like what Eve Sedgwick once termed "the privilege of unknowing" (*Tendencies* 23).

sentiment was limited to the boundaries of the nation, a point of compromise between the intimacy of an immediate community and the universality of all human life.[18] Smith's nation—or what his contemporary Adam Ferguson termed civil society, adding a developmental narrative of "rude" nations and "civilized" ones to inter-state relations—placed an important limit on how far sentimental relations could circulate.[19] By following the traffic in sentiment among the members of a bourgeois civil society who imagined themselves a modern nation, we find nothing other than the articulation of a core-periphery model of imperialism: the flow of sentiment, in other words, was a cognitive map to empire.

II. Anti-sentimentality and Physiological Sensation

Several deep homologies held together in Smith's philosophy of sentimental exchange, and it would take the majority of the nineteenth century for them come unraveled. The immense critical literature on sentiment of the past few decades has naturally focused on the American nineteenth century's genealogy of sentiment, when the term's resonances are strongest and most complex; from it, I want to single out just three

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[18] In another often-cited passage, Smith states clearly the distinction between a universal and a more restricted, nationalist sympathy: “the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension: the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country” (243).

[19] Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics* locates Ferguson's idea of civil society in the long tradition of liberal thought, at the intersection of its grounding in a subject of interest and a subject of rights, who were, for Ferguson, ultimately reducible to each other, since sentiment acted as a sort of social capital. See Foucault, *Birth*, 300-302.

specific displacements and transformations. The first of these has already been alluded to in Ann Douglas's feminization thesis: in the latter half of the nineteenth century, sentiment becomes a template for mass culture.[20] Where for eighteenth-century moral philosophy sentiment designated a non-economic sphere that was, functionally at least, an incipient concept of culture, sentiment's dynamics shifted with its appropriation to consumer capitalism and the accompanying rise of what Pierre Bourdieu has called "the aristocracy of culture," or culture's articulation around a class-bound separation of high and low forms.[21] That sentiment was meanwhile "feminized" and domesticated, while for Smith it was a discourse exclusive to public men, is the symptom of another contradiction coming to the surface. Lauren Berlant's work on "women's culture" (her scare quotes, but also mine) taking shape in a conventionalized sentimental rhetoric of complaint, indicates how women appropriated sentimental form to make political claims against a public culture that forcibly excluded and sexually regulated them.[22] In this way, sentimentalism was indelibly linked into an ideology of domesticity as a separate sphere, and a naturalization of patriarchal sexuality, that governed both biological and social reproduction.[23] The

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[20] In addition to Douglas, Andreas Huyssen's chapter "Mass Culture as Woman" in *After the Great Divide* (44-64) argues for a conjunction of femininity and consumer culture in the early twentieth century.

[21] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* 9-95.

[22] Berlant writes that histories of sentimentalism should "trace the dialectic between ["women's culture"'s] critical incursions into the patriarchal public sphere on the one hand, and their 'sentimental reflex' on the other, which involves the assertion of a feminine value that still exists in a private realm outside social circulation. […T]he larger history of public 'women's culture' recasts conventional sentimentality as the ur-instance of collective social practice for bourgeois American women, whose foundational distinguishing mark was to refuse to identify female interest as 'political'—that is, interested in obtaining power within the terms of the patriarchal public sphere" (Berlant, "The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment," in Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment,* 268).

[23] On this important topic, see Nancy Armstrong's "Why Daughters Die" and Leonard Tennenhouse's "Libertine America."

politics of this feminization were mixed from the outset. In Berlant, the strict separation of "women's culture" to a para-political—though never quite political—sphere meant that sentiment held the double character of a fundamentally democratic complaint against the systemic marginalization of women, on one hand, but also as the necessary domestic complement and support to a masculinized public culture.[24] Finally, sentimental "women's culture," as many critics have shown, was based in a problematic racial equivalence: Berlant writes that the "image of black suffering provided a form of interiority for white women to borrow to make a legitimate social space and intimate public for their complaints" (*Female* 286 n.15).

Whatever the problematic effects of this racial appropriation—and they are many[25]—it still points to an important development in sentimental form: the eighteenth-century's isomorphic relationship between economic relations and civil society was shown to be a particularly devastating ideological distortion, and sentimentalism became the language in which all those repressed economic relations— the productive labour of slaves and the reproductive labour of women, in particular—were able to articulate their return. Many critics have maintained that although abolition and suffrage both made important gains by sentimental critiques of a white male public sphere, they nevertheless remained within the limits of compassionate liberalism by directing their energies towards

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[24] This double character of sentiment would later fuel the arguments between Douglas and Jane Tompkins, her first major interlocutor, over whether sentimental fiction was debased ideology or genuine counter-public. See Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*.

[25] Of the many works on the problem of race in sentimentalism, see especially Shirley Samuels's introduction to *The Culture of Sentiment* (3-8); also Berlant's essay "The Female Woman" in the same collection (265-81); Markman Ellis's *The Politics of Sensibility*; and Russ Castronovo's *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States*.

a more inclusive public sphere. Berlant calls these claims for rights and citizenship "a kind of sandpaper on the surface of the racist monument whose structural and economic solidity endures" (6). But if sentiment is therefore the language of one mode of liberalism leveraged against another—of a rights-based political liberalism critiquing the antinomies of a mercantilist economic liberalism—any such distinction should be remembered as a symptom of the effectiveness of Smith's eighteenth-century restriction of civil society rather than a fault of the complainants themselves.

Put another way, the nineteenth century enduringly distinguished the subject of feeling from the subject of interest. But returning to James's anti-sentimentalism, I want to suggest another repositioning of sentiment at the end of the nineteenth century, and one that brings it closer to its modernist disavowal. James's specific term, his "nerveless sentimentalist," tells most of the story: sentimentalism is recast as the *fin-de-siècle's* most widely diagnosed pathology, neurasthenia. In George Miller Beard's *American Nervousness* (1881) and Max Nordeau's *Degeneration* (1892), neurasthenia is a regressive condition tied to the overstimulation of the modern metropolis—"the vertigo and whirl of our frenzied life" (Nordeau, qtd. in Singer 121). Defined by Beard as nerve-exhaustion, and with a capacious page-and-a-half list of symptoms (though "not exhaustive" since "every case differs somewhat from every other case" [8]), neurasthenia was the object of both popular and medical enthusiasm and debate, an exemplary case of what Nikolas Rose has called the nineteenth century's medicalization of social space.[26]

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[26] Nikolas Rose, "Beyond Medicalisation," 700-01.

Neurasthenia was immediately enlisted in discourses of public hygiene, city planning, and transportation and sewer development.[27] It was called a consequence of both overcivilization and atavistic genes. It was an American disease, or a French one, but in either case restricted to modern metropolises and not a concern for indigenous "savages" or former slaves, who lacked its symptoms (Beard 182-91). Cultural evidence of nerve-degeneration was everywhere: Nordeau famously indicted impressionist painting as the product of an abnormality of vision, not to mention a broader organic decay; Beard linked neurasthenia to the "anxious" American cultural forms of public oratory and vaudeville humour (80-84). For James, whose own and his sister's intimate involvement with neurasthenia is a matter of biographical record—Alice James suffered several bouts with neurasthenia, and attempted remedies, before her early death, and James himself wrote about overcoming a nerve disorder as the founding moment of his career as a scientist and a philosopher—his campaign to overcome neurasthenia was a kind of personal and ethical crusade.[28] As I'll argue, James's motile and dynamic "stream of consciousness," before and beyond its epistemological significance, was a kind of regulatory ideal for human behaviour: nerves would simply wear out if sensations weren't effectively channeled, or, to follow James's stretched metaphor, if they were internalized in a "weltering sea of sensibility and emotion" (*Principles* I 129).

James didn't necessarily agree with Beard and Nordeau's alarmist diagnosis and

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[27] An excellent development of this Foucauldian point can be found in Alain Corbin's *Time, Desire and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, 146-71.

[28] The standard account of James's early-career soul sickness can be found in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (1935).

highly speculative etiology of neurasthenia, but he accepted their basic proposition:[29] the primary determination of modern subjectivity was no longer in exchanging sympathy, but in withstanding modernity.[30] A similar logic underpins Georg Simmel's 1902 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in which neurasthenia is less a pathology than a generalized condition of modern urban capitalism: the organization of social life in the hyperstimulated and rationalized metropolis will now "favor the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within, instead of receiving the general and precisely schematized form of life from without" (413). All of the epistemological inconsistencies in Smith's sympathy system are pushed to one side; the opaqueness of others was now a given, and a constitutive part of the immediate and hyperstimulated field of modern sensations. In the place of an interpersonal circulation of sentiment among public men, the late nineteenth century defaulted to an entirely different social model: an urban field of fleeting, anonymous encounters. Simmel's "blasé attitude" (413), a coping strategy in the face of "so many people with such different interests, who must integrate their relations and activities into a highly complex organism" (413), was a strategic numbness to "the intensification of nervous stimulation" (410) that was "tearing nerves so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent" (414).

Emerging along with this new set of determinations for the subject were new

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[29] For his measured approval of Nordeau, see James's review of *Degeneration*: "Review: Degeneration, by Max Nordeau."

[30] Ben Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity*, and in particular its chapter "Melodrama and the Consequences of Capitalism," outlines how the condition of "hyperstimulus" in urban centres turned quickly from scientific discourse to popular and journalistic truism in the early century.

aesthetic modes, built around an inflationary pressure for bigger and louder thrills in order to jolt increasingly exhausted nervous systems. What Walter Benjamin has called "a new and urgent need for stimuli," and a whole new viewing mode based less in absorption than what Sigfried Kracauer termed a "cult of distraction," found their fullest elaboration in reference to the emerging medium of film;[31] but even before that, in the sensational fiction, drama, and journalism of the mid-nineteenth century, the aesthetic question Smith put at the heart of his *Theory,* about how an audience can be emotionally affected, was beginning to be answered quite differently.[32] The new aesthetic relation tapped directly into the body itself, to its senses and viscera; as D. A. Miller has shown, sensational fiction, from Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) to Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), refers not only to a specific kind of content, but also, and primarily, to fiction's corresponding effect on readers: "The genre offers us one of the first instances of modern literature to address itself primarily to the sympathetic nervous system, where it grounds its characteristic adrenalin effects: accelerated heart rate and respiration, increased blood pressure, the pallor resulting from vasoconstriction, and so on" (146). Similarly, Jonathan Crary has detailed the nineteenth century's "recorporealization of vision," which brought the full weight of an epistemic shift from disembodied visualities to somatic, biological processes to bear in visual art. Technological and scientific

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[31] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" and "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility"; Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction"; these seminal essays and a number of other popular accounts of what film theory has come to call the "modernity thesis," or the development of film as a complement, or acclimatization, to urban modernity, are given an excellent summary in Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity*, ch. 3-5 (59-148).

[32] For sensational fiction and journalism as they emerged in the late nineteenth century, see, D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* and Richard Daly's *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000*.

discourses, he argues, were drawn upon in the creation of a host of new viewing practices that cut across elite art and popular entertainments alike.[33] Sensory thresholds were now part of the aesthetic equation.

III. Habit and Self-regulation

It is no coincidence, then, that James's rejection of sentiment comes at the end of a chapter on habit, his own answer to the question of how to withstand the sensory barrage of modern life, the "undistinguishable, swarming *continuum*, devoid of distinction or emphasis, our senses make for us" (*Principles* I 274). Habit means more than just longstanding custom or in-built tendency for James: it is the basic neural mechanism governing how bodies interact the world, and one that James transforms into a kind of elemental law: "The moment one tries to define what habit is," he writes, "one is led to the fundamental properties of matter" (109). Neural habit comprises a physiological architecture of reflex paths, nerve-concatenations, and sensory and motor processes: these make up the embodied and mental mechanisms with which a nervous system sifts through incoming stimuli and converts them into bodily responses. This is habit's defensive function: it performs mental triage for an organism under duress. The goal, James writes, is a sort of equilibration of the psyche to the world, or "the adjustment of inner to outer relations" (19).[34] Taking the full measure of the insights of German experimental

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[33] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* and *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. The nineteenth century's "recorporealization of vision" is outlined in the first chapter of *Techniques of the Observer*, 1-24.

[34] The phrase, James acknowledges, is borrowed from Herbert Spencer's own *Principles of Psychology*

psychology (or "psycho-physics") of the nineteenth century, but unwilling to commit fully to its radically anti-humanist reduction of subjectivity to little more than a series of stimulus thresholds and nervous reactions determined in the laboratory, James lodged himself between two incommensurate discourses: that German experimental tradition, which he was instrumental in introducing to English-speaking audiences, and the British empiricist tradition, whose underlying principles of personal autonomy and self-possession James wanted to somehow preserve, despite a natural scientist's misgivings about any a priori claim of their givenness.[35] The friction between these two discourses gave James's psychology its peculiar shape.

Habit was a key point of intersection of these two traditions. Since David Hume, and through the associationist psychologies of the nineteenth century, habit had described how ideas and experiences were connected in the mind: it was a fundamental empiricist

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(1855).

[35] James's mix of frustration and admiration for German experimental psychology reveals itself over the entire course of *Principles of Psychology.* The following passage comes from his most direct assessment of the discipline as a whole, and the sarcasm in it says a good deal about his ambivalence.

> Within a few years what one may call a microscopic psychology has arisen in Germany, carried on by experimental methods, asking of course every moment for introspective data, but eliminating their uncertainty by operating on a large scale and taking statistical means. This method taxes patience to the utmost, and could hardly have arisen in a country whose natives could be bored. Such Germans as Weber, Fechner, Vierordt, and Wundt obviously cannot; and their success has brought into the field an array of younger experimental psychologists, bent on studying the elements of the mental life, dissecting them out from the gross results in which they are embedded, and as far as possible reducing them to quantitative scales. The simple and open method of attack having done what it can, the method of patience, starving out, and harassing to death is tried; the Mind must submit to a regular siege, in which minute advantages gained night and day by the forces that hem her in must sum themselves up at last into her overthrow. There is little of the grand style about these new prism, pendulum, and chronograph-philosophers. They mean business, not chivalry. What generous divination, and that superiority in virtue which was thought by Cicero to give a man the best insight into nature, have failed to do, their spying and scraping, their deadly tenacity and almost diabolic cunning, will doubtless some day bring about. (191-92)

A number of studies detail James's indebtedness to British empiricism. I have found Clive Bush's *Halfway to Revolution* the most helpful.

law of mental constitution (Bush 210). James was, in a sense, reinvigorating this line of thought after scientific psychology's insights into the actions of the nervous system; now sensation was the ever-expanding middle ground between the external world and its representations in the mind, solving what James saw as empiricism's basic antinomy. If an "undistinguishable, swarming *continuum*" was the condition of modern sensory experience, mental habit, redefined as "nothing but *concatenated* discharges in the nerve-centres, due to the presence there of systems of reflex paths" (*Principles* I 112), would rise to meet it. Habit is the first of the psychological processes James proposes in his *Principles*, and is instrumental to all the ones that follow—structures of memory, acts of imagination, the finest discriminations and comparisons, and even the new locus of self-presence in the faculty of attention, are all possible because of these "concatenated discharges" that now mediate our experience of the world. James's most famous concept, the stream of consciousness, denies consciousness in any sovereign sense, and instead ties it to an embodied and temporally-bound flux of sensations as it is being felt and processed.[36] In other words, the intersection of an immediate and overabundant experience and an assertive mechanism of habit becomes the new site where consciousness, or subjectivity itself, can be said to exist.[37] If this emphasis on habit tended

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[36] James reiterates his opposition to empiricist and idealist forms of consciousness several years later in the more doctrinally philosophical essay "Does Consciousness Exist," in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

[37] In a famous passage at the end of his chapter on the stream of thought (he favoured "thought" to "consciousness" for its implication of volition), James refers to the brain's act of constructing new nervous concatenations in resolutely aesthetic terms:

> The highest and most elaborated mental products are filtered from the data chosen by the faculty next beneath, out of the mass offered by the faculty below that, which mass in turn was sifted from a still larger amount of yet simpler material, and so on. The mind, in short, works on the data it

to run too close to a notion of pure automatism, James was always eager to point out the necessity, and indeed the moral importance, of spontaneous habit-breaking. But this, like the faculty of attention, was in itself only ever a momentary diversion from habit, which would become all the stronger and more capacious with the breaking of every new discharge path. Writing on the same theme over twenty years after the *Principles,* James claimed the "dynamogenic effects" of those "excitements that carry us over the usually effective dam" of habit ("Energies of Men" 133), or in other words, any alteration in habitual discharge paths will tap unknown resources of mental energy. In outline, this was an ethic of self-overcoming that owed more to American bootstrapism than Nietzsche, a feelgood model of self-transcendence with all notions of antagonism or negation ruled out.

The piece from which this last quote is drawn, James's popular article called "The Energies of Men" (1907), takes up one of the troubling implications of his theory of habit. Guiding habit was a principle of neural economy: bodies needed to efficiently channel all

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> receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone.[...] Just so the world of each of us, howsoever different our several views of it may be, all lay embedded in the primordial chaos of sensations, which gave the mere *matter* to the thought of all of us indifferently. We may, if we like, by our reasonings unwind things back to that black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms which science calls the only real world. But all the while the world *we* feel and live in will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, like sculptors, by simply rejecting certain portions of the given stuff. Other sculptors, other statues from the same stone! Other minds, other worlds from the same monotonous and inexpressive chaos! (277)

Smith's epistemological doubt around other minds is confirmed and extended in this passage from James. While the latter admits that "in my mind and your mind the rejected portions and the selected portions of the original world-stuff are to a great extent the same," subjectivity is determined in the stream of thought, those fleeting and overabundant sensations, and not in any intersubjective identification. As I argue below, this forces a crisis in James's thought when identification with colonized Filipinos becomes an issue for him.

incoming sense data into physical output. It was on this basis, as I've argued, that he dismissed sentimental aesthetics as an activation of emotion with no practical outcome. With "The Energies of Men," James takes up the problem of a neurological "second wind," or the ability to find "a level of new energy, masked until then by the fatigue-obstacle" (132). James's initial comparison, between the "country person" to whom the "rapid rate of life" of an average "city person" will "seem monstrous," is only a question of overcoming habitual thresholds: "But settle him in town; and in a year or two, if not too old, he will have trained himself to keep the pace as well as any of us, getting more out of himself in any week then he ever did in ten weeks at home" (133). James concludes from this that "The human individual lives usually far within his limits: he possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use. He energizes below his maximum, and he behaves below his optimum" (144). To get human performance nearer to capacity, James calls for a new research programme: "We ought somehow to get a topographic survey made of the limits of human power in every conceivable direction, something like an ophthalmologist's chart of the limits of the human field of vision; and we ought then to construct a methodical inventory of the paths of access, or keys, differing with the diverse types of individual, to the different kinds of power" (145). A few short years later F. W. Taylor would take up precisely this research programme in his *Principles of Scientific Management*, whose original periodical publication in *The American Magazine* in 1911 is offered as a response to James's earlier article.[38] Taylor

[38] As noted by Jackson Lears in *Rebirth of America*, 261.

describes in detail a series of experiments designed to optimize labour productivity by measuring the "foot pounds of energy" a given unskilled labourer could be expected to apply to a given task over the course of a work day (Taylor 55-60). Here was one outcome of James's model of habit: intensive research into biological optimization for industrial expansion, or the transformation and disciplining of an urbanized labour force. Habit was all about efficiency, operating along the lines of the ideology of rationalized management that was beginning to take hold in U.S. culture more broadly. It was nothing if not an internalized managerialism, inscribed onto the innermost processes of mental life. That James's *Principles* was written during the period of the juridical separation of corporate ownership and management, and the resulting creation of the managerial profession, has been explored by several critics: James wrote from an educational institution—Harvard University—that was instrumental in establishing the training and values of that profession. If James deserves partial credit for displacing the mind's sovereignty over the corruptions of the body, it needs remembering that the body was never more intensively regulated than in his moment.

Of course James would have cringed at this association. While his close colleague Hugo Münsterberg —whom James hand-picked from Germany to head up North America's first experimental psychology laboratory at Harvard—would write *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913) and extend Taylor's factory discipline of labouring bodies inward, to a whole "applied psychology" of industrial work, James demurred on the question of scientific management. His deep-seated commitment to liberal individualism

got in the way. Far from being a technique for discipline, habit for James was the very expression of personal autonomy. Unregulated sensation led to depersonalization or madness; habit was a bulwark against sensory overload and neuraesthenia, a way to retain a sense of self in the thick of hyperstimulated modernity. His final word on habit, that we must "*make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy*" and that "*we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can*" (*Principles* I 126), indicates how volition and habit worked hand in glove in his thinking. Facing up to the rigors of modern life was a moral duty. James's use of this individualizing rhetorical mode—he calls it his "hortatorial ethics" (130)—owes as much to the American transcendentalism of Emerson's transparent eye-ball, with Universal Being circulating through it, as it does to experimental psychology's laboratory work on sense-thresholds.[39]

But here too, James's idea of habit wasn't without its contradictions. Elsewhere in the habit chapter, James seems to undermine the self-liberation-by-habit narrative to which he is so adamantly committed. Projecting his keystone psychological mechanism onto the social whole, James observes:

> Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor. It alone prevents the

[39] The line from transcendentalism to James is both biographical and intellectual. Henry James Sr. was a contemporary of Emerson, and James was a great admirer of transcendentalist writing. His essay "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," mounts a series of long quotes from Whitman, Emerson, but also Robert Louis Stevenson and William Wordsworth, and supports the basic transcendentalist belief in a moral force behind the individual's sensual encounter with the fullness of the external world, being moved "by the spell of this mysterious sensorial life, with its irrationality, if so you like to call it, but its vigilance and its supreme felicity" (149).

> hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at sea through the winter; it holds the miner in his darkness, and nails the countryman to his log-cabin and his lonely farm through all the months of snow; it protects us from invasion by the natives of the desert and the frozen zone. It dooms us all to fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice, and to make the best of a pursuit that disagrees, because there is no other for which we are fitted, and it is too late to begin again. It keeps different social strata from mixing. (125)

Here his theory of habit reveals itself as bourgeois mythology, offering self-transcendence to a few, but keeping the many in their place. The pressures of modern sensorial life begin, now, to reveal an unmistakably class-bound inflection. But class would simply not have scanned for James, who reframed any social antagonism in terms of the normal and the pathological. We saw this above, with his dismissal of the nerveless sentimentalist; we see it elsewhere too, as in this passage from the 1879 article "Are We Autonoma?", an early draft of the "Stream of Thought" chapter from his *Principles*, where, in a discussion of self-constitution through habit, the idea of volition is stretched to the point of breaking:

> Every day of our lives we struggle to escape some tedious tune or odious thought which the momentary disposition of the brain keeps forcing upon us. And, to take more extreme cases, there are murderous tendencies to nervous discharge which, so far from involving by their intensity the assent of the will, cause their subjects voluntarily to repair to asylums to escape their dreaded tyranny. In all these cases of *voluntas paradoxa* or *invita*, the individual selects out of the two possible selves yielded by his cerebral powers one as the true Ego; the other he regards as an enemy until at last the brain-storm becomes too strong for the helmsman's power. (59)

Madness, in other words, is a (paradoxical, conflicted) choice. Resorting to classicisms may not necessarily solve any antinomies for James, but it does reveal that the real anxiety at the centre of his thought is a problem of self-dissolution, a threat of

formlessness that plagued any attempt to ground the liberal individual in a new psychology. The classical helmsman was overmatched by the modern storm. The latter threatened James's well-managed subject with sheer anarchy.

IV. Overflowing Sensation, Shifting Borders

When James posits an oxymoronic "involuntary will," a "*voluntas paradoxa* or *invita*," he pushes the liberal principle of self-determination to its limit; when he calls habit the "enormous fly-wheel of society" that keeps social classes in place, his involuntary will edges towards a theory of ideology, or social being determining social consciousness. James burdened himself with the task of recuperating liberal subjectivity at its philosophical nadir, against what Foucault infamously called the dissolution the figure of "man" in the discourse of the human sciences.[40] Those sciences were themselves largely concerned with the sensory and perceptual effects of a hyperstimulated modernity that threatened another kind of dissolution. James can be credited, then, with identifying a central political contradiction of his historical moment. His constant return to the threat of siege, formlessness, and excesses of sensation are, as Simmel later noted in his exploration of the same question, a product of the phenomenology of the urban multitude. Liberal subjectivity was under pressure from an immediate source: the heterogeneity and agglomeration of bodies in urban spaces due to large-scale population movements that

[40] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaelogy of the Human Sciences*, 373-87.

characterized the American turn of the century.[41] A good deal of critical attention has been paid to hyperstimulation's technological and commercial manifestations—the sense of discontinuity and fragmentation brought on by new technologies in transportation and communication, from the electric trolley to the radio and telephone, and by the ubiquity of a new advertising-based mass culture, from urban billboards to periodical presses.[42] It seems to me, however, that the real threat is closer to the surface of James's thought, although also more speculative and harder to accurately document.

James's *Principles* was published, and his reputation soared, during a period in American social life where all the questions of the fixity of borders and the mobility of bodies across them were posed with a new urgency. Transnational literary and cultural studies, which highlights the traffic between cultures and peoples in a way that fundamentally alters how we think about cultural histories and the formation of national cultures, has found an important and rich field in the American turn of the century, as Amy Kaplan, Anita Patterson, John Carlos Rowe, and several others have shown.[43] This was a period of unparalleled migration and border instability in the United States, which put an intense pressure on the juridical form and constitutional framework of postbellum

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[41] Singer writes: "A wave of urbanization made the modern city considerably more crowded, chaotic, socially heterogeneous, and stimulating than ever before. The urban population in the United States quadrupled between 1870 and 1910, from just under 10 million to over 42 million. (In other words, it doubled in size every twenty years or so.) Metropoli like New York and Chicago grew even faster" (59)

[42] Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity* makes a convincing statistical case in this direction: over the latter nineteenth century, newspaper editions in all Western countries increased in number from the hundreds to the thousands, jumping as much as 2,230% in Germany (29); outdoor billboard purchases in the U.S. increased an estimated 1,750% over the first two decades of the twentieth century (59-60); trolley track mileage in the U.S. Northeast increased 350% in the 1890s (59).

[43] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture;* Anita Patterson, *Race, American Literature, and Transnational Modernisms*; John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*.

federalism. From the so-called golden age of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (1880-1924), to the forced removals and intensified violence against Native Americans across the Southwest and the gold-rich regions of South Dakota (1880s and 90s), to the overseas expansion following the Spanish-American War (1898) into Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines, the existence and political visibility of mobile and racialized populations threw America's territorial sovereignty and its constitutional form into an ongoing crisis. The most typical example of this crisis is the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision, and its invention of "separate but equal" status for African-Americans. The results of this decision are well known: the imposition of state-level Jim Crow laws, intensified racial violence, and, beginning a decade later, a "Great" migration of between two and six million African Americans from the South's plantation and sharecropping economies to the industrializing cities of the Northeast and Midwest. But if "separate but equal" fell well short of full citizenship, it was only one of a series of juridical compromises in this era, all of which had the effect of mitigating the destabilizing potential of incorporating racialized groups. David Roediger has analyzed the juridical and economic "in-betweenness" of new European immigrants, who were initially categorized into some forty-five separate incoming races and were only grudgingly granted full (white) citizenship, a process far more notable for its unevenness, nativism, xenophobia than progressivist narratives typically allow. Newcomers from Asia and Mexico, for instance, weren't as lucky.[44] Amy Kaplan has meanwhile pointed out the

[44] David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*. See especially 57-130.

liminal status of the colonial subjects of the "unincorporated territories" seized in the Spanish-American War: in one Supreme Court Justice's decision, these subjects were neither citizens nor aliens entirely but "foreign to the United States in a domestic sense" (qtd. in Kaplan 10)—this decision itself based on precedent from an 1830s decision that established Native Americans as a "domestic dependent nations," or neither under the sovereignty of the states nor the federal governments entirely. Along with the *Plessy* decision, each of these liminal legal positions built on the others' precedents, forming an interlocking system of marginalization. When newly visible populations became a challenge to a formally capacious juridical concept of citizenship, what followed was a multiplication of subcategories of national belonging and non-belonging. When the anarchist writer Randolph Bourne later imagined America as a utopic, cosmopolitan federation of immigrant groups in his 1916 essay "Trans-national America," it was in response to the legal and economic marginalization generated in this moment.[45]

James's vindication of liberal subjectivity, I want to suggest, has a homological relationship with these juridical maneuvers. Both demonstrate what, in a related context, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse have called "a growing tension between 'the people' and 'the population,'" that comes to inhabit the bestselling narratives and domestic fictions of the nineteenth century. The authors explain this tension: "Where the first concept ['the people'] refers to all members of the national community that can be construed as a single unified body, the second ['population'] points to those who are

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45 Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," 86-97.

included, whether permanently or temporarily, within the nation even as they are excluded from membership in it" (682).[46] James, writing in a different idiom than the novelists Armstrong and Tennenhouse examine, is more squarely situated in the discourses of the social sciences and statistics in which this second term, the population, was articulated. And these discourses were fundamentally biopolitical in character. Foucault begins using the term biopolitics when, a decade after publishing *The Order of Things,* he reevaluates his "end of man" thesis, following its consequences into the realm of political sovereignty. Under this lens, the rise of the human sciences can no longer be considered the product of an agentless epistemic shift: biopolitics names a governmental response to shifting political needs. A new kind of political subject, no longer the enlightened individual but the agglomerated bodies of a species, race, or population, becomes the object of power's exercise. Foucault calls biopolitics "a technology in which bodies are replaced by general biological processes. […] [M]echanisms are adjusted to the phenomena of population, to the biological or biosociological processes characteristic of human masses. This adjustment was obviously much more difficult to make because it implied complex systems of coordination and centralization" (*Society* 250). Managing migration and the large-scale movement of populations becomes a key function of this new kind biopolitical governance. The state transforms itself into a "regulatory apparatus (appareil) that prevents emigration, calls for immigrants, and promotes the birth rate […]

[46] Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, "The Problem of Population and the Form of the American Novel." Armstrong and Tennenhouse offer a powerful reinterpretation of US literary history in light of this tension, arguing for a reconceived canon that centers around conflicts between liberal subjects and mobile populations in barbary and captivity narratives, the antebellum era's first real generic innovation.

In short, it requires an apparatus that will ensure that the population, which is seen as the source and the root, as it were, of the state's power and wealth, will work properly, in the right place, and on the right objects" (*Security* 69). When managing a heterogeneous and mobile population becomes an urgent and central function state power, liberal subjectivity and the entire political philosophy based on contractual government can only recede. What makes James's recuperation of the liberal subject significant is how it admits the rise of the human sciences and its management of the "general biological process," while displacing liberal subjectivity to another level: no longer a natural or given property of subjects, personhood is suddenly an achievement and a moral imperative. Foucault's concept of biopower explains how power circulates at the level of individual subjects, operating on and through them in their self-fashioning and self-concept; James's rearticulation of the liberal subject as a neurological, sense-processing mechanism geared towards habit and normalization, within a biological and statistical framework, is an illustration of how biopolitics can operate at the level of governing populations and self-governing individuals at the same time.

James only publicly commented on one of the above-mentioned juridical crises. When the U.S. invaded the Philippines in 1899, pivoting from initial support for Philippine independence to its bloody suppression in the interest of establishing an American outpost in East Asia, James regularly and prominently denounced this imperialist turn in American foreign policy. His criticism was, at least initially, uncompromising: "We are cold-bloodedly, wantonly and abominably destroying the soul

of a people who never did us an atom of harm in their lives. It is bald, brutal piracy" ("The Philippine Tangle" 157). When Theodore Roosevelt—James's former student, then-Governor of New York, and soon-to-be President—gave his famous, pro-imperialist 1899 speech "The Strenuous Life," James rebuked him with all the force of a disappointed former mentor. Governor Roosevelt was still "mentally in the Sturm und Drang period of early adolescence" ("Governor Roosevelt's Oration" 163); his justification of armed expansion on the basis of the good it would do for America's apparently fragile postbellum national psyche was no more than a "flood of abstract bellicose emotion" (164), and "an evasion unworthy of the student of history which he is" (166). A better study of history, James pointed out, would make Roosevelt recognize the hypocrisy of a former colony and now-liberated republic slipping into the role of an imperialist aggressor: James counted himself one of many "Massachusetts anti-imperialists, who have fought in better causes" (166). All through the first phase of his opposition to the military occupation of the Philippines, James came back to this identification with the Philippine independence movement. He specifically attacked the notion that the people of the Philippines were unfit to govern themselves. "'Unfitness for self-control' means in the concrete a visible set of facts," James argued, "and not a paper label pinned to a population beforehand by an assumption made thousands of miles away. Visibly, the Filipinos were showing fitness for government by actually carrying it on" (165). The fundamental error of the imperialists, James argued, was psychological: they "have treated the Filipinos as if they were a painted picture, an amount of mere matter in [their]

way," operating with no "sympathetic insight into foreigners' minds"; he continued, "it is obvious that for our rulers at Washington the Filipinos have not existed as psychological quantities at all" ("The Philippine Question" 159-60). Sympathy, that key mechanism of liberal intersubjectivity that James had declared vague and unscientific ten years earlier in his *Principles of Psychology*, returned with a vengeance in his identification with the oppressed.

That identification, however, didn't last long. In the essay "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," written as a philosophical and aesthetic meditation on the Philippine invasion,[47] he challenges his own initial sympathy for the colonized. The essay opens with a promise to tackle "the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves" (132). Throughout the essay, this condition of blindness is an ontological certainty. Sentiment and feeling simply can't bridge the distance between subjects. Our inner life is "a vital secret, for sympathy with which we vainly look to others—the others are too much absorbed in their own vital secrets to take an interest in ours. Hence the stupidity and injustice of our opinions, so far as they deal with the significance of alien lives" (132). James's predisposition to sympathize with the struggle for Philippine independence is never broached directly, but the "alien lives" referred to in the essay are his way of reconsidering his transnational sympathy in light of his intellectual commitment to a psychology that keeps other minds at a distance. The remainder of the essay builds a case for the nobility of this self-

[47] See F. O. Matthiesson, *The James Family*, 397.

enclosed subjectivity, drawing from James's favourite authors of the nineteenth century: it might just as easily have been titled "Readings in Transcendentalism." Walt Whitman's now-famous lines from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," on the "Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes" (Whitman, qtd. in James 142), are James's most direct example of how the self-enclosed subject can remain open to the world: "To be rapt with satisfied attention, like Whitman, to the mere spectacle of the world's presence, is one way, and the most fundamental way, of confessing one's sense of its unfathomable significance and importance" (144). The indistinction with which James treats all "alien lives," whether Filipino or Brooklynite, and his assumed position of powerlessness before the moving spectacle of the world around him, becomes a suddenly quiescent retraction of his prior anti-imperialist statements. But conflating all categories of alienness has a precedent in James's psychology. In *Principles*, he creates the capacious category of the "not-me" to describe how truly alone each individual's stream of thought is in the world:

> One great splitting of the whole universe into two halves is made by each of us; and for each of us almost all of the interest attaches to one of the halves; but we all draw the line of division between them in a different place. When I say that we all call the two halves by the same names, and that those names are 'me' and 'not-me' respectively, it will at once be seen what I mean. The altogether unique kind of interest which each human mind feels in those parts of creation which it can call me or mine may be a moral riddle, but it is a fundamental psychological fact. No mind can take the same interest in his neighbor's me as in his own. The neighbor's me falls together with all the rest of things in one foreign mass, against which his own me stands out in startling relief (*Principles* I 277-78).

Against his own impulse to extend sympathy to "alien lives," James's intellectual commitment to a subject navigating the turbulent modern sense-world was revealing to him that his anti-imperialist identification with otherness rested on scientifically shaky

ground.

Four years later, with the U.S. incursion secured, James took the opportunity to write his way out of this contradiction. In his 1903 "Address on the Philippine Question," James distanced himself from any identification with Filipino independence, just as he called for an end to the anti-imperialist mourning of the damage done to American liberalist principles: "The wounds which our love of country received in those days of February, 1899, are of a kind that do not quickly heal," he wrote, but "the hands will not move backward on the dial, the day of genuine co-operation with the Filipinos is forever past" (82-83). At present, James wrote, the good offices of the American Anti-Imperialist League, of which he was a charter member, were doing more harm than good: they were "a sop to sentimentalists at home, and in the Islands a safe cover for the treacherous natives to hatch a new rebellion out" (82-83); he conceded that the League "had better not print [its] name upon our publications any longer" (85). James was able to carve out a measure of consistency between his political and psychological writings by acknowledging the impossibility of sympathy across national borders; anti-imperial humanitarianism, as Adam Smith well knew, was no match for economic and military interests. In 1903, with the possibility of Philippine independence more or less negated by the imperialists, James shifted registers from a principled objection to imperialist domination to the question of how this foreign population is to be assimilated.

> In the physiologies which I studied when I was young, the function of incorporating foreign bodies into one's organism was divided into four stages—prehension, deglutition, digestion and assimilation. We prehended our prey, or took it into our mouth, when President McKinley posted his annexation edict, and

> insalivated with pious phrases the alternative he offered to our late allies of instant obedience or death. The morsel thus lubricated, deglutition went on slowly during those three years and more when our army was slaughtering and burning, and famine, fire, disease and depopulation were the new allies we invoked. But if the swallowing took three years, how long ought the process of digestion, that teaching of the Filipinos to be 'fit' for rule, that solution of recalcitrant lumps into a smooth 'chyle,' with which our civil commission is charged—how long ought that to take? It will take a decade, at least. As for assimilation, that is altogether an affair of the day after tomorrow. The most sanguine expect no real assimilation of our prey to us or of us to our prey for fifty years to come, and no one who knows history expects that it can genuinely come at all. (81-82)

Though this remarkable passage signals James's grudging acceptance of the anti-imperialists' defeat, it is nevertheless remarkable for the way that the question of the Filipinos as "psychological quantities" in their own right has receded for James, and in its place he accepts an optic that takes into view the Philippine population as a whole. The figure of "incorporating foreign bodies" was in broad circulation at the time, as Amy Kaplan has shown; the *Insular Cases* of 1901, in which the Supreme Court decided against extending constitutional rights to "unincorporated territories" seized in the Spanish-American War, framed the debate entirely in terms of the corporal unity of the continental states, the incorporation of non-contiguous territories (including Hawaii and Alaska), and the shifting assignation of "domestic" and "foreign" that these cases provoked.[48] By breaking incorporation down to its physiological steps, James, partly ironically, indicates that imperialism is not a matter to be solved by juridical fiat alone.

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[48] See Kaplan's introduction, 1-22. She comments on the apparent fragility of the national body in the opinions of the Supreme Court: "The United States [in the *Insular Cases*] appears as a distended body that could be hacked apart, that could implode internally from its ingestion of foreign bodies. The appeal to the dismembered body of the Union would have evoked images from the Civil War, as though the absorption of alien territory threatened to maim again the recently healed body sutured together in the aftermath of that conflict" (8-9).

Incorporation will transform both the American "organism" and the "foreign body" of the Philippines. He offers a single solution for both, and draws from his psychology's emphasis on habit, now writ large onto national bodies.

Reversing his principled objection in 1899, James now agreed with the imperialists that the Philippines needed to prove a measure of "fitness" to qualify for self-rule: "It seems even doubtful whether it would be for the Islands' interest to have our government immediately withdraw. What they need now is quiet for a few years, time to repair war's ravages, and to acquire some habits of administration which might outlast our stay" ("Address" 83-84). Just as liberal personhood was now achieved through good psychological habits, Philippine sovereignty needed to demonstrate good habits of government to fend off post-war chaos. For America, James's solution came a few years later in his widely circulated pamphlet "The Moral Equivalent of War" (1910). In 1899 James had referred to Roosevelt's military patriotism as an "flood of abstract bellicose emotion" and a "big, hollow, resounding, corrupting, sophisticating, confusing torrent of mere brutal momentum and irrationality" ("Tangle" 157); now, James made the case that this imperialist "torrent" had to be re-channeled to domestic self-improvement. As Roosevelt had predicted, a new patriotism had been generated by the war; but that same patriotism could be achieved and sustained if the country now turned to war's "moral equivalent," which for James meant re-tasking the army with the "constructive interests" of national infrastructure: "To coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December, to dish-washing, clothes-washing, and window-washing, to road-building and

tunnel-making, to foundries and stoke-holes, and to the frames of skyscrapers, would our gilded youths be drafted off, according to their choice, to get the childishness knocked out of them, and to come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas" (171-72). James's proposal would take another twenty years, an economic crash, and another President named Roosevelt to be acted upon, in the form of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s, a public works program run by the U.S. Army. But the basis of James's proposal—redirecting Rooseveltian bellicosity into healthier channels—was, like his proposal for the Philippines, an argument that new habits could be transformative and restorative for the nation, just as for individual bodies.

What lay behind James's reconstructive proposals was a belief in what he termed the "new liberalism" just emerging, to replace the old liberalism that had reigned prior to America's extraterritorial aggression. The new liberalism would seek to contain bellicose nationalism with a global order of governance:

> We have thrown off our swaddling clothes. We are objects of fear to other lands. This makes of the old liberalism and the new liberalism of our country two discontinuous things. The older liberalism was in office, the new is in the opposition. Inwardly it is the same spirit, but outwardly the tactics, the questions, the reasons, and the phrases have to change. American memories no longer serve as catchwords. The great international and cosmopolitan liberal party, the party of conscience and intelligence the world over, has, in short, absorbed us; and we are only its American section, carrying on the war against the powers of darkness here, playing our part in the long, long campaign for truth and fair dealing which must go on in all the countries of the world until the end of time. Let us cheerfully settle into our interminable task ("Address" 85-86).

James recognized that the invasion of the Philippines had turned America into something other than a liberal nation—or as Kaplan argues, something foreign to itself, in the sense

that the *Insular Cases* had made imperial expansion juridically possible for a republican form of government. His solution to this contradiction was two-fold: on the one hand, new habits of governance could be adopted, new "moral equivalents" to imperialism, in a way that would make America again worthy of its liberal foundations. This involved, as I've argued, shifting to an understanding of the nation as a collective body governed by "general biological processes" of incorporation and assimilation, or in other words a biopolitical reinterpretation of the nation, its population, and its governance. Meanwhile, if the admission of biopolitics at the level of the individual made it necessary to think liberal subjectivity as an achievement and not a natural property of persons, admitting it at the level of the state forced a similar displacement. The site of legitimation or veridiction for James's new liberalism is no longer internal to the nation-state, but exists in what he calls an "international and cosmopolitan liberal party." Sovereignty could no longer be grounded in the natural right of kings or the consent of the governed: the right to rule was now a matter of international, or global, checks and balances.

V. New Liberalism and New Empire

James's new liberalism was quite emphatically, at that point, in opposition. A few months prior to his "Address on the Philippine Question," Brooks Adams published *The New Empire* (1903), a foreign policy treatise occasionally masquerading as history and social science. Walter LaFeber argues that Adams "exerted more direct influence on policy makers in the 1890s than did any of the other intellectuals" (80), and was a key

thinker in the intellectual formation on which turn of the century American expansionism was based.[49] In *The New Empire*, Adams traces the long history of transnational empires, focusing on the financial and shipping dominance America needed to exert in order to take up the imperial mantle from Great Britain. The mode of his writing is mostly history as prophecy: "Each man can ponder the history of the last fifty years, and judge for himself whether the facts show that Great Britain apparently lies in the wake, and Japan in the path, of the advancing social cyclone. The world seems agreed that the United States is likely to achieve, if indeed she has not already achieved, an economic supremacy. The vortex of the cyclone is near New York. No such activity prevails elsewhere; nowhere are undertakings so gigantic, nowhere is administration so perfect; nowhere are such masses of capital centralized in single hands" (208). America should now be focused on securing Asian and Latin American markets, lest a competing empire develop in Russia and Germany to reverse the westward trend of empires over the course of the last few millennia.

The book is a minor course correction for Adams. In *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1896) Adams had already laid out a "scientific" reading of imperial history. His immediate context was the financial panic of 1893 (setting off a four-year period, then known as the "great depression," which not incidentally wiped out the Adams family fortune). He took up two well-worn ideas from the Parisian Decadence of the decade

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[49] The chapter entitled "The Intellectual Formation" in LaFeber's *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* situates Adams at the centre of a small group of pro-expansion writers and academics.

before, and repurposed them for the American context: an extended analysis of the Roman Empire's disintegration, and a voguish and speculative use of the second law of thermodynamics on energy dissipation and conservation, applied haphazardly to social formations.[50] At root, Adams's theory was sociobiology as statecraft: all human life is reducible to a struggle of organisms against their environment and competitors, and this "struggle for life" takes advanced form with "the organism" called the nation-state, and even more advanced form with the consolidation of states in an empire (*The New Empire* 195-97). Crucial to forming an empire is establishing control over state-organisms' circulation systems, or their trade routes. The key to avoiding imperial dissipation is to manage efficiently the circulation of "energy," an important abstraction in Adams's writing that mostly refers to the movement or concentration people and capital. The shock of recognition for James, whose own theory of efficient neural circulation in the management of self and society, and of redirecting national energies inward as a moral equivalent to war, would have been severe: Adams's theory emerges from the same intellectual coordinates and Massachusetts mandarin class as James's, but with antithetical political goals.

The "law" of empire Adams devises looks, today, like a crude and pro-imperialist anticipation of World Systems Theory, positing the entrenchment of empire in its dynamic and productive phase, when energy is consolidated and centralized, and its disintegration in a decadent phase when financial speculation gains position, diverts energy into

[50] A case is made for Brooks Adams as a decadent thinker in Weir, *Decadent Culture in the United States*, 1-21.

currency, decreases the general level of production, and puts into place a new political division of authority. In *The Law*, Adams writes that the only potential remedy for an empire in this advanced condition is an infusion of "barbarian blood," or expansion and incorporation of new territories, which itself dissolves the political centralization on which empire depends. Thus empires crumble, energy builds up in new masses, and the cycle continues. In the context of the 1896 American election, where William Jennings Bryan's unanticipated success as a populist primary candidate saw American policymakers having to reconsider the gold standard, a move designed to weaken the financial sector that had brought on the 1893 crisis, and meanwhile contend with populist anxieties about the influx of immigrant labour ("barbarian blood"), Adams's "law" offered an intellectual basis for the restructuring of monopoly capital that was to come—especially Roosevelt's trust-breaking in the early twentieth century. *The Law* was an influential book with Roosevelt especially, and a new intellectual foundation was formed for America's self-conception as the natural heir to the British Empire.[51]

But when McKinley easily won the 1896 general election over Bryan, Adams's pitch shifted: the inevitability of decadence, so prevalent in *Law*, was no longer assured; in his next two books, Adams looks to the global capitalist crisis of the turn of the century

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[51] "Moving into Henry's empty house on Washington's H Street, Brooks found as frequent dinner guests Cushman Davis, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Henry Cabot Lodge, and [Alfred Thayer] Mahan. *The Law of Civilization and Decay* had made a resounding impact, nowhere more than in Washington. The first printing had sold out in three months, and Henry [Adams, Brooks's brother] had made certain that all the Supreme Court Justices and the Cleveland cabinet received copies. Now, as the United States gathered its immense economic strength and approached armed conflict with Spain, leading figures of the McKinley administration proclaimed Brooks a prophet." (LaFeber 84-85). See also Arthur Beringhause's *Brooks Adams: A Biography,* pp. 131-32 and 204-05, for Roosevelt's admiration of Adams's book in the late 1890s.

as an opportunity to establish American financial hegemony. In *America's Economic Supremacy* (1900) and *The New Empire*, Adams re-interprets his own "law," stressing that if America wants to cement itself as an empire, it needs to establish foreign markets for its products, an echo of the McKinley-era Open Door Policy. Financial consolidation isn't a threat so long as it is done with efficiency, as New York's banking elite had proven itself capable of doing; what was now important was a proper expenditure of energy towards gaining control of Asian and Latin American markets, or in other words finding the right balance between economic centralization and dispersal along new trade routes. Under less speculative intellectuals allied with Adams, this treatise became an official strategy for dealing with America's excessive production capacity via the "discovery" and control of export markets (Lafeber 88), first in the Philippines, and then, from a strategic base in Manila, across the Asian continent: "The natural focus of such a Pacific system would be Manila. Lying where all the paths of trade converge, from north to south, east and west, it is the military and commercial key to Eastern Asia. Entrenched there, and backing on Europe, with force enough to prevent our competitors from closing the Chinese mainland against us by discrimination, there is no reason why the United States should not become a greater seat of wealth and power than ever was England, Rome, or Constantinople" (*America's Economic Supremacy* 51).

Roosevelt fully subscribed to Adams's theory when he came into the Presidency after McKinley's assassination in 1901. What makes Adams's idea of empire "new" is its emphasis strictly on controlling exchange routes, and allowing capital to flow through a

financial centre; this was no longer an extraction-based empire, as the British and French had maintained, and so had no need for an imperial administration, or political control of the territories it opened up. It was, rather, an export-based expansion of the free market system to strategically important regions, and eventually the whole globe.[52] That is, it supports what Amy Kaplan has identified as a historically important revision to Hardt and Negri's thesis in *Empire*: they locate the roots of late twentieth-century sovereignty, with its multipolar, global form, in the Wilsonite turn to a distributed and super-national body in the League of Nations, and contrast this to the more classically imperialist expansion of Roosevelt. Kaplan argues that the dividing line between Roosevelt and Wilson is less defined than Hardt and Negri indicate, and that the open and expansive form of America's constitution made for a series of temporary and contingent compromises between the idea of a sealed off nation state and an expansionist capitalist enterprise culture over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Adams's version of that compromise, an early form of the imperialism without colonies that would define American global hegemony for decades to come, made up the intellectual foundation to America's "new empire."

The only thing missing was some kind of political legitimation. James offered this. Where Adams's view of international competition was typically sociobiological, believing sincerely in the virtues of survival of the fittest, James offered a way to conjoin America's

[52] "The upshot of the whole matter, therefore, is that America has been irresistibly impelled to produce a large industrial surplus—a surplus, should no change occur, which will be larger in a few years than anything ever before known. Upon the existence of this surplus hinges the future, for the United States must provide sure and adequate outlets for her products, or be in danger of gluts more dangerous to her society than the many panics such as 1873 and 1893" (Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy* 32).

emerging empire to a form of liberalism that would ideally act as a check on the excesses of military adventurism, but otherwise leave the expansion of markets unopposed. That is, James's "new liberalism" doesn't—and indeed can't—confront empire, and in fact winds up being appropriated to it. The forms that his "great international and cosmopolitan liberal party" took in the remainder of the twentieth century are an object lesson in history giving the lie to philosophy: the United Nations, the eventual institutional articulation of James's cosmopolitan liberalism, is mainly concerned with, Hardt and Negri argue, "legitimation of the imperial order" through "the production of international juridical norms" (180-81). Alongside other midcentury international institutions like NATO, the IMF, the OECD, and GATT, the UN produces a postwar global capitalist hegemony based in a contractual government modeled after the open and expansive constitutional foundation of the United States. And David Harvey adds that despite the formally democratic character of these institutions, their defense of the post-war capitalist order as often as not depended on "the overthrow of democratically elected governments" and "tactics of liquidation of those considered opposed to US interests," not to mention "privileged trade relations, clientism, patronage, and covert coercion" (*New Imperialism* 53-54). The legacy of the Philippines loomed large over the American century.

James, in other words, finds it morally desirable but philosophically impossible to oppose this expansionism. Where he went wrong is in precisely the shift I've tried to reconstruct here, from a sentimental liberalism to a "new liberalism" based in the sensations endured by a besieged modern subject. This shift was premised on an

effacement of new transnationalisms, migrations, and social relations responsible for that sensational flux, as I've argued. When it came time to recognize the historical consequences of withstanding the pressures that threatened to dissolve the body's borders, James could only respond with a renewed emphasis on inward-looking normalization and habit formation. In some important sense, then, James's psychology and his inability to reconcile it to his political principles allegorizes the development of midcentury liberalism, and the national-social state as it manifested itself in America. While the latter was a political formation that expanded rights, risk socialization, and the securitization of life domestically, it, too, depended on the export of market relations and the control of capital circulation abroad; a well-disciplined domestic body, in other words, actually produces the maelstrom that surrounds it. And as James's writing on the Philippines indicates, withstanding a torrent of sensations can sometimes just mean looking the other way.

CHAPTER FOUR: Liberal *Intolerance* and D. W. Griffith's Management of the Senses.

As I argued in the previous chapter, William James displaced a basic liberal antinomy between self and society onto the more secure biological terrain of organism and environment; this manifested itself in an anti-sentimentalism that, when tested by America's explicit turn to empire, left James equivocal about the political consequences of sympathy. Below, I'll take up the same opposition between sentiment and sensation as they apply to the early years of narrative cinema. Sentimentality, or film melodrama, was the genre on which film's popularity was built in the 1910s. When D. W. Griffith made two important departures from sentimental form in his feature films *The Birth of a Nation* (1914) and *Intolerance* (1916), it was in favour of a different logic of engaging his audiences: one that, for *Intolerance* more than for *Birth*, understood the sensation-based epistemology then emerging in scientific psychology, and recast film as the management of audience sensation. And so before I analyze the films themselves, I want to outline in greater detail how this sensation model derived from a "probabilistic revolution" in the social sciences.[1] This shift to social statistics reshaped how populations were intelligible to liberal governments, and how they were to be managed. Griffith's films, I'll argue,

[1] Ian Hacking, "Was There a Probabilistic Revolution 1800-1930?" and "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers."

participated in this statistical sense of its audience and its nation, and so reimagined film as a cultural form that would mediate a different, biopolitical form of government.

James characterized the subject as an organism defending itself against a maelstrom of sensation: this was the key model for James's psychology, but as I'll argue below, it was also central to early narrative cinema. Heroes and heroines withstanding the overwhelming forces of modernity was the go-to topic of the first decade of narrative film in the United States. But the notion of sensory overflow was also philosophically important, as it led to an epistemological shift in which sensation was valued positively, and was the site where variability and indeterminacy now resided. Contingency and chance were reframed as a fundamental property of what James called the subject's "pure experience" of the world.[2] This much was echoed by C. S. Peirce, James's Harvard colleague, a statistician by trade, and a thinker acutely interested in the ways probability was reshaping knowledge. Peirce's approach to statistics, like James's, transvalued the idea of contingency, making it not so much a deviation from the norm to be charted and controlled but an ontological principle:

> For a long time, I myself strove to make chance that diversity in the universe which laws leave room for, instead of a violation of law, or lawlessness. That was truly believing in chance was that was not absolute chance [...] Chance itself pours in at every avenue of sense: it is of all things the most obtrusive. That it is absolute is the most manifest of all intellectual perceptions. That it is a being, living and conscious, is what all the dullness that belongs to ratiocination's self can scarce

[2] "Pure experience," or James's term for an ontology (or "stuff") that is neither solely material nor mental. See the essay by that name in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism.*

muster hardihood to deny. (Peirce, qtd. in Doane 95)[3]

In trying to find a philosophical route between materialism and idealism, both James and Peirce settle on the physiology of sensation as an expanded middle ground in which both world and subject are constituted. And with the first principle that chance "pours in at every avenue of sense," Peirce makes the human sensorium the site where contingency and variation reside. While this would seem to point back to the subject's singularity, whose senses were now the site of random difference itself, it is important to note that both Peirce and James were working within a statistical epistemology and an evolutionary framework in which individuals themselves yielded no useful knowledge— large aggregates, populations, and species did. Sensation became both the site of potentially endless individual differences and also their ontological meaninglessness. It marked the space for interventions into the "species body" and the "biological processes" (Foucault, *History* 138, 146) that were the subject's beginning and end points in James's psychology.

The "probabilistic revolution," then, was crucial to the epistemological coordinates of James's psychology. It also influenced cultural production in turn-of-the-century America in a number of ways. In fiction, Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines* (1992) identifies a "cultural logistics" (5) at work in the naturalist fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America: concepts of agency, chance, risk, and

[3] James echoes this phrase when he underlines the subject's vulnerability to risk, change, and chance, a world in which "novely and possibility are forever leaking in" (James, qtd. in Perry 700).

causation were all thrown into question by a "dematerialized materialism" (14) that emerged from popular social scientific texts like Jacob Riis's *The Making of an American* to the fiction of Edith Wharton and Stephen Crane. Seltzer argues that whereas fictional realism of the early nineteenth century was primarily interested in revealing a subject's interior states, the naturalist writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries turned that realist interior into a Foucauldian "soul" imprisoning a body, or a series of regularities and tendencies by which bodies, in the plural, are managed and made to fit into regimes of production and reproduction (95). Closer to my purposes here, however, is Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (2002), which argues that the epistemological coordinates of statistics were foundational to, and inscribed within, the beginnings of cinema. If statistics was a discourse interested in taming and mediating contingency, the earliest actuality film reels in cinema's history thematized that desire explicitly (Doane 22). Film's ability to project and reproduce all those fleeting instants of city life foregrounded one of modernity's basic structures of feeling, or what Baudelaire famously called its tendency towards representing “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” (*The Painter of Modern Life* 13). Drawing extensively from Peirce's writings, Doane argues that film's epistemological impact was a continuation of the statistical mediation of contingency by other means. She writes,

> The classical cinema, in line with the logic of statistics, acknowledges the force of contingency and mobilizes chance, but ultimately it overrides both. This process allows for a containment of difference that is astonishingly flexible, since it

> provides a mechanism for thinking the coherence of varying groups, varying audiences. (138)

Doane's critique outlines a missing historical link between the statistical modes of knowledge of the nineteenth century and the emergent ideological forms of the twentieth: she calls statistics, at least as far as film embodies it, "an epistemology well suited to a mass culture" (138), containing deviation and difference both at the level of actual film audiences, and at the level of the sensorial experience of the modern city.[4]

One key methodological feature of Doane's approach is the way it reads the origins of cinema as the emergence of an apparatus, in the Foucauldian sense of a material and institutional network, a series of discourses about subjects and bodies, and an object of knowledge as such, with consequences for how the world is visualized and known.[5] In this respect, Doane's study makes an important contribution to how we think

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[4] Adorno and Horkheimer's "Culture Industry" essay understands the statistical basis of instrumental reason only too well: "Something is provided so that none can escape […] Consumers appear as statistics on research organization charts" (123).

[5] Foucault's concept of an apparatus is capacious, including virtually all kinds of discourses and behaviours, but stresses the rationalities that tie together disparate discourses in a given historical moment. From an interview in 1977:

> What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the network that can be established between these elements [...] I understand by the term "apparatus" a sort of—shall we say—formation, which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The apparatus therefore has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for an apparatus which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, mental illness, and neurosis. [...] On the other hand, there is a perpetual process of *strategic elaboration*. Take the example of imprisonment, that apparatus which had the

of film's relationship to other epistemological and scientific discourses of the modernist period. It marks an addition, for example, to Jonathan Crary's path-breaking investigation of modes of visuality in the nineteenth century. Crary's genealogy of vision, for all its density and cross-disciplinary breadth, stops just short of the emergence of film, which he argues is less significant than historians of film tend to think because it merely intensifies tendencies he sees already existing in the nineteenth century. But Doane's book suggests that the emergence of the apparatus of film was more of a departure than that: where Crary is interested in tracing how the body of the viewer becomes an increasingly foregrounded and contested site in the nineteenth century, especially between the mutually reinforcing logics of commodification and discipline, Doane indicates how film

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> effect of making measures of detention appear to be the most efficient and rational method that could be applied to the phenomenon of criminality. What did this apparatus produce? An entirely unforeseen effect which had nothing to do with any kind of strategic ruse on the part of some meta-or trans-historic subject conceiving and willing it. This effect was the constitution of a delinquent milieu very different from the kind of seedbed of illegalist practices and individuals found in eighteenth-century society. What happened? The prison operated as a process of filtering, concentrating, professionalising and circumscribing a criminal milieu. From about the 1830s onwards, one finds an immediate re-utilization of this unintended, negative effect within a new strategy which came in some sense to occupy this empty space, or transform the negative into a positive. The delinquent milieu came to be re-utilised for diverse political and economic ends, such as the extraction of profit from pleasure through the organisation of prostitution. This is what I call the strategic completion (*remplissement*) of the apparatus. (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 194-96)

In what follows I'll argue that Griffith's filmmaking, as part of an emerging apparatus that knew itself to be participating in what Foucault calls a "strategy" of power—an assimilationist, nationalist, and imperial project in *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*—but that the "strategic elaboration" of the film apparatus, or the unforeseen consequences of an assimilationist strategy, tended to work against that strategy. The "strategic elaboration" I'm concerned with below has both formal and material levels—its traces are left in Griffith's use of (formal) dynamic montage and in the (material) history of reception of his films.

was invested with a different logic of power entirely.[6] Film played to large audiences, and this exhibition history foregrounds not the body of an individualized viewer, which Crary's genealogy occasionally assumes, but the social logic of aggregated bodies—or the object of statistics. Aggregated bodies not only determine film's reception history, but also its content in film's overt thematization of multitudes and masses in early actualities and fictional films, and in its meditations on how the ephemeral and the contingent are visualized and thought. Statistical forms of knowing were central to film's development, Doane argues, and so if there is a new mode of visuality that emerges with film, it was closer to what, in a different but related context, James Scott calls "seeing like a state": accounting for all those modes of knowledge and rationalization that turn people into aggregated populations and make subjects into citizens of a states.[7] Doane's analysis of the intersection of statistical epistemology and the film's visual modes opens an avenue to reconsider how emerging national and transnational multitudes were made visible, and

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[6] For Crary, the body of the viewer becomes an increasingly foregrounded and contested site in the nineteenth century, and is caught within two mutually reinforcing logics of power: one that invests and commodifies inner life, as sensation is quantified and measured in terms of biophysical, "natural" laws of circulation and exchange (17); and another that disciplines that body, subjecting it to techniques of normalization and control (15). Occasionally Crary's self-restriction to discipline and commodification breaks down: for example, when discussing the emergence of the science of physiology in the nineteenth century, Crary cites Foucault's recognition that this science took the life of the population as its new object (79-81). But he immediately returns to a disciplinary framework and the individualized body.

[7] Scott documents several ways the imperative to make mobile populations "legible" created the modern state apparatus's disparate modes of knowledge and administration: "Suddenly," he writes, "processes as disparate as the creation of permanent last names, the standardization of weights and measures, the establishment of cadastral surveys and population registers, the invention of freehold tenure, the standardization of language and legal discourse, the design of cities, and the organization of transportation seemed comprehensible as attempts at legibility and simplification" (2). See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*.

how making them visible was also a way of making subjects knowable and manageable.

For Doane, probabilistic thought forms the epistemological horizon of film on two separate levels. On the one hand the dominance of the "classical" narrative form in film signals a containment of early cinema's more ephemeral formal experiments, much in the same way that an error curve in statistics contains statistical variation. The formal logic of narrative film is "a structuring of contingency and temporality through emerging technologies of representation" (11). The strongest version of this occurs in film melodrama, which relies on a highly conventionalized deployment of chance and accident to both expose its protagonists to vulnerability in an uncaring world, as well as rescue them from that vulnerability (Singer 136-37). On the other hand, film audiences themselves were constituted by racial, sexual, and class differences that the figure of a normative film "spectator" in the early twentieth century obscured. To make this argument about early film audiences, Doane draws on the work of film historians Miriam Hansen and Tom Gunning, whose influential readings of how changes in audience composition were a precondition for the emergence of narrative film are important to Doane's conception of the film spectator as a statistical composite.[8] What Gunning calls the "cinema of attractions" was displaced, beginning in 1907 or 1908, by longer-form,

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[8] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, 23-89; Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph*, 41-44, 86-87, 93. See also Gunning's seminal essay "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde."

feature length film narratives. The transition was extended and uneven, but at the level of form it meant a shift from an exhibitionist to a representational style, or from films featuring mainly technical effects, audience shock, and curiosities, to self-enclosed narratives, the diegetic immersion of point of view, and audience suture. This formal shift reflected a larger institutional transformation, as nickelodeons and neighborhood (or "slum") cinemas were replaced by larger, centralized movie houses. The changes in film consumption that resulted were wide ranging, from the introduction of seating, which fundamentally changed viewers' relationships to the screen and to each other, to the end of exhibitor-controlled programming, as single-reel actualities and trick films gave way to multiple-reel narratives with defined beginning and end times. The "film lecturer," or a live performer commenting on the action on the screen, was rendered obsolete by the enclosure of the narrative point of view within the visual language of the film, reflecting the consolidation of production and distribution companies' control over the film text. All of these changes, Gunning and Hansen argue, are part of the film industry's attempt to expand its middle class audience by leaving behind its origins in vaudeville and the fairground and competing with middle-class entertainments, most notably the theatre.

The invention of an abstract concept of the film spectator comes precisely during this decade-long transition, from about 1907-1917. All the institutional and formal changes in cinema of this period, Hansen argues, generalize a mode of middle class spectatorship as a new point of address for film. The idea that film could be a new

universal language—a "visual Esperanto," an "American hieroglyphics"[9]—was a turning point in the development of a mass culture, built around an open and capacious viewing position that effaced actual viewers' specificities of gender, race, or class, in the making of "an ostensibly classless mass audience, to integrate the cinema with an emerging consumer culture" (85). The spectator became a necessary concept at this moment precisely because new cinema was oriented towards its absorption and suture to the visual experience of the film. In the same way that statistics introduced the error curve into social thought, which ushered in a whole new way of conceiving of social groups according to norms and variations, narrative film was able to contain social differences in its largely immigrant and, Hansen underlines, markedly female audiences by the creation of a normative spectator, built right into film's narrative form.

But within that concept of the early film spectator, I want to specify two different and conflicting models that were simultaneously at work. Hansen identifies the first, by tracing how film interpellated socially heterogeneous viewers into a false universalism with the increasing prominence of character motivation in film plots, and the increasing importance of audience identification and emotional involvement. Modelled on the viewing experience of the theatre, this notion of how spectatorship operates is built out of a system of sympathetic exchange that, as I've argued above, was central to liberal

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[9] The notion of film as a democratic hieroglyphics comes from Vachel Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915); the idea of film as a universal language and a visual Esperanto was widespread in popular writing about film between 1909-1916. See Hansen 76-80.

political forms since at least Adam Smith's concept of moral sentiments. The other spectator, however, draws a lineage from the scientific psychology of the late nineteenth century, and specifically the questions about human sensory thresholds that were so central to what Jonathan Crary calls the "recorporealization of vision". Here the spectator is an embodied space whose perceptual apparatus is in fact part of the mechanism of the film: our "persistence of vision," or the ability of twenty-four still frames per second to be sensed as motion, and the physiological discourses of attention, made the spectator's sensory experience part of the apparatus of the film. In contrast to the spectator of the theatre, whose separation from the action requires a mechanism—sympathy—to bridge the distance between sovereign subjects, this latter spectator was inscribed within a wholly different circuit of affective transaction. The subject, here, is the site where the film image is realized, making the senses a site of malleability, but also contingency and the generation of new forms.[10] As Crary recognizes, this physiological spectator was thought as an individualized body, but a body that was only legible insofar as it manifested general biological capacities, or sense-processes and perceptual thresholds; in this sense, the physiological spectator was an invention of the "dematerialized

[10] Another way to approach the question of how the film was completed in the body is through Gilles Deleuze's film theory. Deleuze helpfully resurrects a Bergsonian term, the "sensory-motor schema," to explain how, and precisely *where*, film was thought to complete itself in the early twentieth century. Bergson's sensory-motor schema is essentially identical to James's prior notion of habit: both stress the processing of stimuli and their translation into a regulated field of action. What both concepts do is open up a space within the body, in the sensory apparatus, for new modes of self-assertion and external control. The space opened up inside the human body became, suddenly, a site of contestation for the new art. See Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-image.*

materialism" (Seltzer 14) of the age of statistics, its verification hinging on an individual experience that was only intelligible when aggregated onto an error curve.

In what follows, I want to argue that these two models of the subject, despite their contradictions, were superimposed in the D. W. Griffith's idea of his audience in the mid-1910s, especially around the release of his 1916 film *Intolerance*. The transition to narrative film was the place where older, sentimental forms of narrative identification intersected with newer ideas about sensory malleability and control, and Griffith's *Intolerance*, in all its narrative, thematic, and formal incoherence, embodies this contradiction fully. Most critics agree that the film is flawed. Epic in ambition, it wants to trace the malignancy of intolerance through history, using four separately conceived plotlines from four widely divergent time periods. The film's regular jumping back and forth between these four plotlines scatters the narrative point of view so effectively that a decade later Sergei Eisenstein would cite *Intolerance* as a precursor to his own dynamic montage; Griffith then stitches the whole thing together with Anita Loos's title cards and his emblematic "Cradle shot," which were both added at the editing stage and both designed to establish a thematic continuity between the film's main plotline, set in the present of the 1910s, and its three historical plots, which were conceived and shot separately. While the film is a terrific example of how conventions of narrative film took a number of years to come together, Griffith's experimentation is especially significant considering his own vaunted status in film history as the supposed inventor of narrative

cinema. Here was Griffith adding three historical analogues to what was essentially a long-form melodrama, and then cutting in extra-diegetic markers after the fact to ensure some measure of continuity; it was Griffith's biggest departure from the narrative conventions he had himself helped to entrench.[11] And if what was at stake in those narrative conventions was a new model of managing the senses that was also a model of managing the social, then the narrative discontinuities in *Intolerance* speak volumes about how film was a site where the sovereign spectator was thrown into question by emerging regimes of biopolitical knowledge.

I. Griffith's Inverted Sentimentalism

To illustrate Griffith's departure from sentimentalism in *Intolerance*, consider the film's immediate context. It was Griffith's third feature-length film, following immediately after *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Griffith was a generally acknowledged master of the short melodramatic film and had directed some five hundred of them for the Biograph company between 1908 and 1913.[12] But even with his departure from Biograph

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[11] *The Mother and the Law*, or the modern story, was conceived and shot in 1915, but was deemed too small a film to follow Griffith's epic *Birth of a Nation.* The other three plots were shot simultaneously over the 1915-1916 period. Title cards and the Cradle shot were added after the fact. Richard Schickel, Griffith's biographer, writes: "When [Griffith] realized there was a way to rescue the film he had already shot, by combining it with something that would both constitute a response to his foreign rivals," referring primarily to Giovanni Pastrone's 1915 film *Cabiria,* "and drive home still more powerfully his moral about the dangers of meddlesomeness, it must have seemed one of those happy moments where improvisation turns into inspiration" (Schickel, *D. W. Griffith* 310). Schickel details the several phases in the making of *Intolerance,* 303-31.

[12] Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film,* 3.

when he wanted to try making feature length films, Griffith held on to many conventions of melodramatic form.[13] *Birth*'s avowed ideological project was conservative: against abolitionist-era sentimentality, it wanted to re-route the flow of sentiment from the suffering of African-American slaves to the now-dispossessed Southern aristocracy who once owned them. The author of *Birth*'s source text, Thomas Dixon, was explicit on this point: "the real big purpose back of my film [...] was to revolutionize Northern sentiments by a presentation of history that would transform every man in the audience into a good Democrat! And make no mistake about it... we are doing just that thing... Every man who comes out of one of our theaters is a Southern partisan for life" (qtd. in Schickel 269). To "revolutionize Northern sentiments," Griffith trafficked heavily in melodramatic scenarios and sentimental tropes.[14] *Birth* depicts Northern, urban politicians motivated by sentimentalism gone awry: from the abolitionist politician Austin Stoneman's sympathy for his black servant's feigned suffering to the depiction of President Lincoln as the

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[13] At this point in his film-making career, Griffith was a key figure in the transition to a middlebrow version of melodrama: against his earlier "blood and thunder" melodramas for the Biograph company, Griffith's turn to feature-length films, upscale exhibition sites, and increased ticket prices was a direct appeal to middle class audiences. This shift transformed the melodramatic genre: as one contemporary critic condescendingly put it, the new melodrama saw film-makers "Unsplitting their infinitives and treating [audiences], in general, to a dosage of sophomore fine writing" (Singer 166).

[14] Ben Singer makes the case that melodrama was the privileged aesthetic form for the early American twentieth century. In his words, "Melodramatic conflicts gave dramatic shape to the adversities and insecurities of the modern world. Scenarios in which good people experience duress from forces beyond their control resonated with the urban masses. Poverty, class stratification and exploitation, job insecurity, workplace hazards, heartless contractual systems of housing and money-lending—these and similar components of the new capitalist social order, which represented such a striking contrast to the feudal gemeinschaft that had governed life for many centuries, played prominent roles in the narratives of classical melodrama" (133). See also Peter Brooks's seminal argument in *The Melodramatic Imagination* that melodrama was a dominant popular form of the late nineteenth century, expressing anxieties about the Western transition to industrial modernity.

unwaveringly sympathetic "Great Heart," the North's universalizes sentiment in a way that, a title card tells us, is a "weakness that is a blight to the nation." Meanwhile, Griffith repeatedly uses that most reliable of sentimental tropes, the sexual threat to young white women,[15] to re-establish racial order in the rural South: a four-minute scene painstakingly follows the black soldier Gus's attempt to rape Flora Cameron, in which Flora chooses suicide over capture; Elsie Stoneman is bound and gagged by the stereotypically lustful black lieutenant-governor Silas Lynch; and, in the film's the climactic ride-of-the-Klan sequence, with the Southern Camerons surrounded in a cabin by a rioting and vengeful black mob, the camera intercuts the tear-filled eyes of the youngest Cameron daughter as her grandfather holds a pistol up to her temple, ready to repeat Flora's sacrifice. The film, falsely but typically, aligns the enfranchisement of African-Americans with the specter of miscegenation, but later rectifies this with a symbolic castration of black men, as they are intimidated from a poll booth by rifle-bearing Clansmen. The rest of the film is less ideologically subtle. Commenting on the ride-of-the-Klan sequence, Griffith said "We had had all sorts of runs-of-the-rescue and horse operas. [...] Now I could see a chance to do this ride-to-the-rescue on a grand scale. Instead of saving one poor little Nell of the Plains, this ride would be to save a nation." (quoted in Shickel 213). *Birth*'s conclusion, with the double marriage of Camerons to Stonemans, consolidates an idealized, racially-coded domestic reproduction that figurally and literally effaces African-Americans from

[15] See Nancy Armstong's "Why Daughters Die" for a thoughtful analysis of this widespread trope.

the national narrative. And sentimentalism is the primary visual grammar in which that narrative is rewritten.

If sentimentalism was, as Shirley Samuels argues, a national project in the nineteenth century that aimed to change the body politic by re-imagining the kinds of bodies that could be sutured to it (Samuels 3), then Griffith's film is the reactionary appropriation of that project.[16] The very concept of a nation being birthed is here tied up in racial and geographic exclusion: Griffith's film dramatizes a Southern, libertarian-populist "nation" trying to map its official and unofficial racial exclusion back onto the national body. The film's use of blackfaced white actors for African-American characters is only the most obvious sign of this exclusion. Here, Griffith's racism resembles an early modern concept of "race war," in which dispossessed aristocrats (the South) write revisionist counter-histories to contest the sovereignty of their conquerors (the North).[17]

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[16] I have in mind Lauren Berlant's argument that a racially inclusive sentimentalism of the nineteenth century becomes a racially exclusive culture of complaint in the twentieth (though she focuses on a much later version of this culture of complaint, in the Reagan 1980s and beyond): "Since its inception as a kind of radical thought around abolition in the U.S. mid-nineteenth century, national sentimentality has been a project of privileged white citizens dedicated to reframing citizenship. In the nineteenth century this involved replacing citizenship's original status as a property- or identity-based condition of political legitimacy with a notion of citizenship as a private and personal formation based on subjective relations of identification and similarity. In the nineteenth century, national sentimentality was a terribly flawed vehicle for inducing a more racially and economically equitable mass national democracy: in the late twentieth century, the reverse is the case" (*Queen of America* 264-65 n.22).

[17] For Foucault, the early modern race wars, beginning with the dispossessed aristocrats of the 100 Years' War in France's seventeenth century, establish the non-homogeneity of a national population in a way that prefigures Marx's concept of class antagonism, but they also form the foundation of sociobiological racisms in the nineteenth century, when that heterogeneity becomes the object of various racial purification initiatives. By this reading, race war is a condition of possibility for the state racisms and biopolitics of the twentieth century—a central argument of his *Society Must Be Defended* lectures. See especially Chapter 4, "28 January 1976," pp. 64-85.

But despite *Birth*'s polemical and political aims, there is every indication that Griffith was genuinely surprised at the groundswell of opposition to his film.[18] *Birth* was wildly successful at the box office, but this was partly due to the front-page controversy the film generated: there were movements to ban it in all major American cities, organized by the NAACP, and supported by African-American leaders like W. E. B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington, as well as prominent progressivists like Jane Addams. The opposition to the film by black and progressive audiences plays out in miniature the problem posed by the film itself: though *Birth*'s fantasy space was an unreconstructed South, African-American citizenship was now a political fact. The film is a case study in what Berlant has identified as sentimentalism's key cultural function: it fills a gap between political form and people's sense of social belonging. Where abolitionist sentiment made an extra-political feeling and an identification with suffering the substance of its complaint on behalf of the oppressed, Griffith deploys sentiment in a purely reactionary direction. A community of aggrieved white Southerners could no longer use formal political hierarchy to define their social world, and so took recourse to aesthetic and sentimental forms to compensate for

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Griffith's film was by no means offering an original reading of Southern history. It stands in a long line of Southern complaint that stretches as far back, at least, as John C. Calhoun's claim for the "minority" rights of Southern slaveowners in the nineteenth century, against the majority rule of the abolitionist North. Made in the name of liberalism's protection of minority rights, Calhoun's claim, like Griffith's film, turns liberalism into the freedom to perpetuate slavery. See Domenico Losurdo's *Liberalism: A Counter History*, especially pp. 1-7, on Calhoun.

[18] "Very simply, [Griffith] thought everyone thought as he did about the matters he was taking up. The surprise he repeatedly expressed as the storm broke around him after the film's release was genuine. Why, he loved Negroes! And believed (as have many southerners before and since) that he had a special understanding of their natures not vouchsafed northerners, honestly felt that these good, childlike people had been grievously misled by outsiders and agitators" (Shickel 214; also 289-292).

this new racial indistinction in constitutional rights and political form.

What followed was America's first major, national debate on film censorship, in which Griffith and other industry representatives argued successfully for industry self-regulation instead of censorship by local or federal authorities.[19] Or in other words, the problem that Griffith's film opened up at the level of aesthetics moved up a level: now all those questions of sentimentalism's power to influence audiences were rearticulated as legal efforts to regulate the expanding film industry at the point of exhibition. Griffith's own intervention into the censorship debates, written while he was filming *Intolerance*, was a pamphlet called *The Rise and Fall of Free Speech in America* (1916). It demonstrates his uncertainty around the concept of the universal spectator, whose very universality was, against the backdrop of riots and efforts to censor his most popular film to date, now deeply uncertain. *The Rise and Fall* is part newspaper editorial, part avant-garde manifesto, with a rambling tract against censorship by Griffith, quotes from major newspapers and legislators in support of his view, and opposite-page illustrations emphasizing key points in bold typeface. With it, Griffith confronts *Birth*'s critics with a now-familiar first amendment argument for film's right to freedom of expression. Most of Griffith's own statement against censorship tries to position film in the noble history of banned books, including the Bible and Shakespeare, and even modern journalism. Film,

[19] This dispute, meanwhile, was an important moment for the NAACP, then only six years old, whose profile and mandate expanded to include contesting racist cultural representations on a national stage. See Stephen Weinberger, "*The Birth of a Nation* and the Making of the NAACP."

he argues, is threatening precisely because of the possibilities implicit in the medium: as "the laboring man's university," film depicts "the truths of history today" to "the entire world, without cost, while at the same time bringing diversion to the masses" (n.p.). But in a less high-minded and more personal mode, Griffith asks, "How does any man dare to invest his money in any picture that speaks against any certain class or condition of people, however evil and open to condemnation their works may be, when he knows how easy it is for a few individuals to go to any one of the many hundreds of censorship boards in the country and influence them to destroy the property which the producer has gone to great pains and care to build up?" The idea of a universal spectator, here, comes apart at the seams, thanks to the protest of what Griffith calls "any certain class or condition of people" who become "a few individuals" bent on censoring him. In the pamphlet's latter section, Griffith fills out this complaint against censorship boards by assembling quotes from the press that followed *Birth*'s battle with municipal censors. Through all of these newspaper quotes, whenever the problem of the film's racism is raised it is instantly dismissed under the tyranny of the universal: one newspaper writes, "The people are impatient of any censorship which limits that freedom (free speech) which they hold as a priceless heritage. They want exact fairness and justice for all races and creeds" (Boston Herald). There was apparently no irony in calling for justice and political freedom for the makers of a film whose central fantasy was rescinding these very principles where they apply to emancipated slaves. Another newspaper skips

constitutional homilies and cuts right to the issue: “the time has not come when the people of Houston are to have their standards of thought or taste set or fixed or regulated by the negro citizenship” (Houston Chronicle).

But the pamphlet's most interesting slip happens when Griffith cites English playwright George Bernard Shaw, apparently in support of the case for free speech in the movies. The way in which Griffith misunderstands Shaw is revealing. Criticizing the moral oversimplifications of melodrama, Shaw writes that “The danger of the cinema is not the danger of immorality, but of morality.” Griffith, curiously, misinterprets this as a statement against the moralizing censors he was currently battling. But Griffith includes the rest of Shaw's quote, which isn't the ringing endorsement Griffith seems to think it is, and which recasts cinematic “morality” in altogether different terms. Shaw writes,

> people who, like myself, frequent the cinemas, testify to their desolating romantic morality... there is no comedy, no wit, no criticism of morals by ridicule or otherwise, no exposure of the unpleasant consequences of romantic sentimentality and reckless tomfoolery in real life, nothing that could give a disagreeable shock to the stupid or shake the self-complacency of the smug... the levelling-down has been thoroughly accomplished. (quoted in Griffith n.p.)

Griffith doesn't comment on Shaw's condescending view of film's “romantic sentimentality.” But it seems to work unconsciously on him. The former melodramatist, the director of hundreds of “blood and thunder” short films, completes his self-transformation into a feature length aesthete by identifying a new, more high-minded vocation for film. Further on in the pamphlet, Griffith writes:

> If all the people of today were really educated and knew the history of the world since the beginning of time, there would be no wars, there would be no capital punishment,—there would be much less evil from America's favorite sins of hate, hypocrisy and intolerance. It is ignorance that makes possible the terrible waves of hatred that have caused our many wars and murders, inspired by politics, religion and all the various other causes. This is the reason for the teaching of history. We force our children to spend many years in school. At least a few months of this time in an average education are spent in the study of history. Six moving pictures would give these students more knowledge of the history of the world than they have obtained from their entire study. Besides these, the vast majority who cannot spare the time for this study, could in a few hours get an excellent idea of the history of the world since its beginning, *from moving pictures*. (n.p.)

Griffith was filming *Intolerance* when these words were written, and so that film's themes inform his commentary. Impossible as it is to distinguish the self-promoter from the high-minded auteur with Griffith, his most important maneuver in *The Rise and Fall* is to redeem the medium of film by allying it with the discipline of history. History becomes a legitimating principle for Griffith's films in two ways. First, Griffith retrospectively claims for the contested representations in *Birth* a veneer of historical truth; in this pamphlet and in interviews, Griffith cites then-President—and former Princeton historian—Woodrow Wilson's (likely misattributed) comment at a private White House screening of *Birth* that it was "like writing history with Lightning."[20] Second, playing up film's historical and pedagogical capacity set the stage for his upcoming epic, *Intolerance,* in which critiques like Shaw's of the cinema's narrow sentimentality would be impossible:

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[20] Quoted in Schickel (270), and in Griffith's *Rise and Fall*, though Griffith omits the second sentence of Wilson's evaluation of *Birth*: "And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true." Both sentences were disavowed by the White House, and the question of their attribution has been a source of critical controversy.

this was a different sort of film, tracing the adverse effects of intolerance in the broad sweep of history, the closest thing to a cinematic play of ideas—or of one big, vague one—that Griffith ever attempted.

II. Imperial Allegory

Intolerance's big idea was a key ideologeme of classical liberalism: in Western history, governments that tolerate different beliefs have been constantly usurped by power-hungry ideologues on moral crusades. The film depicts the crucifixion of Christ, the fall of Babylon, and the St. Bartholomew's day massacres as instances of this; but each of these is only a historical analogy to Griffith's present-day narrative, which was conceived and shot as its own self-contained film, called *The Mother and the Law*, prior to the addition of the three historical plotlines. In the present-day story, an official-bureaucratic arm of the government meddles in the domestic life of a young family, upsetting the course of "natural" reproduction. Two elements of Griffith's idea of intolerance are important to note. First, it was unquestionably self-justifying: with this film, Griffith wanted to deflect the complaint against *Birth*'s racism by striking back against his accusers. If racial intolerance is unacceptable, his film seems to say, it pales in comparison to the bureaucratic intolerance of those reformers who would censor him—just as, in *Birth*, any perceived injustice in Southern racial hierarchies can be overlooked given the social disruption of Reconstruction. Reformist and progressivist impulses are

not so much satirized as maliciously libelled in *Intolerance*, with the women of the Jenkins Foundation depicted as monstrous spinsters driven by envy, taking up "Reform as a second choice" of women who "cease to attract men." Second, Griffith's notion of intolerance is capacious. As if he wanted to show that his racial prejudice is just one of a potentially endless list of examples of intolerance, Griffith telescopes from world-historical acts of intolerance to everyday slights and offenses. The film makes an astonishing series of questionable isomophisms, comparing sectarian religious conflicts, the struggle for empire, modern temperance movements, progressivist children's aid, and Christ's crucifixion itself under the banner of intolerance.

But the modern plotline is distinguished from its three historical analogues by the fact that intolerance doesn't triumph in it.[21] Jesus is crucified, Babylon falls, and Catherine de Medici's Catholics slaughter the Protestant Huegenots, but in the modern narrative the *deus-ex-machina* of the Friendless One's sudden confession frees the wrongly accused Boy from the gallows, and his family is reunited. In other words, the film's underlying argument is that American liberalism can succeed where other empires have failed, if only it can contain its own intolerant elements, which in Griffith's view reside entirely in the overzealousness of the progressivist state apparatus. All the

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[21] From Miriam Hansen: "The problem [of the modern narrative's differentiation from the three others] is spelled out, illuminating the confusion with unusual clarity, in an advertisement for the film's first run. The ad announces D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* as "A Sun Play of the Ages,' 'in which four *paralleled* stories of the world's *progress* unfold before your vision in thrilling sequence.' It then lists the historical episodes, ending with 'a gripping modern story *contrasted* with these historic periods.'"

comparisons with past Empires—Judea, Babylon, Huegenot France—reveal exactly where Griffith imagines America's destiny to be pointing. The film, as several commentators have noted, is structured allegorically: the characters aren't given proper names, but are instead assigned types, like Friendless One, Dear One, Brown-Eyed Girl, and so on; and the three historical episodes lack Griffith's usual melodramatic plotting machinery, but are put forward strictly as historical analogues to the present-day narrative, drawing out Griffith's cyclical view of history (Hansen 170-71). This allegorical level in *Intolerance* is the key to the real ideological work it wants to do. Fredric Jameson has argued that national allegory, prevalent in the pre-war modernisms of Wyndham Lewis and other writers, acted as a sort of epistemological horizon in the pre-war period: early modernist writers couldn't help but figure the relation between individual experience and a global totality in terms of competitive states and narratives about their corresponding national "types." Jameson writes that "national allegory should be understood as a formal attempt to bridge the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a worldwide, essentially transnational scale" (*Fables* 94). The historical framework of Jameson's argument matters here: Jameson argues that the First World War broke apart that national system and epistemological horizon for modernists, as Europe's colonial spaces were suddenly foregrounded, and moved from a latent to a manifest content of the war. On Jameson's reading, the geopolitical consequence of the

First World War was that it laid bare the genuinely global nature of the European nations' interests, and this newly visible set of relationships between Europe and its colonies made the old self-contained national types impossible to sustain.[22] As I've argued, the early modernist period saw the U.S. repositioning itself in the international system, which suggests that America's singularity in Jameson's national allegory system needs to be carefully reconsidered. If (im)migration, exraterritorialism, and expanding into foreign markets were all determining factors in the U.S.'s early century economic expansion, the discourse that accompanied this new set of relations had to be explicit about America's place in the world system, and therefore it suffered relatively little of that typically modernist elision and indirection that Jameson successfully diagnoses elsewhere.[23] In fact

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[22] Jameson later analyzes national allegory's second wind in the decolonizing literatures of the mid-twentieth century. In "Third World Literatures," his argument is extended to non-Western writers, which, because they have no proper assigned subject position within representational economies of the first world, are always in part read as, and conscious of themselves as, national allegories. It's important to underline that this isn't offered as a developmentalist narrative, where Western writers have superceded an older model of national allegory that third world writers still labour under, their national identities not yet globally legitimated; rather, Jameson wants to use his model to leverage national allegory, or a socio-historical content of third-world texts, back into the most ideologically individualizing and hermetically sealed of Western texts, in a way "that necessarily entail[s] a whole social and historical critique of our current first-world situation" (79). See Imre Szeman's "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization" for an overview of the critical controversy around Jameson's essay.

[23] I'm suggesting that American cultural production would have more closely resembled the semi-peripheral fiction of James Joyce than E. M. Forster's fiction of the metropolitan centre, if we follow Jameson's two models from his essay "Modernism and Imperialism". Jameson's comparison of the two writers brings to light how Joyce's later fiction avoids the stylistic and spatial gaps that characterize metropolitan modernism, but instead they in some sense theorize their place in the global system: in Joyce's Ireland, this means representing the "overlap and coexistence between these two incommensurable realities which are those of the lord and of the bondsman altogether, those of the metropolis and of the colony simultaneously" (164). While America was differently contingent in a world system of centres and peripheries than Ireland at the turn of the century, I would argue that Griffith's film, with its constant return to the question of rural or Southern manners and relationships

American film was singularly interested in representing foreign conflicts, from the Boer War to the Philippine invasion, in both newsreel and dramatic re-enactments. These films placed America in a global imaginary. As Amy Kaplan has argued, Griffith's own filmmaking prior to *Intolerance* was influenced by early cinematic treatments of foreign conflicts, films that were "about redrawing the boundaries between home and abroad, between the domestic and foreign, boundaries that were both threatened and reconstructed by imperial expansion" (154).

For my purposes, the example of Griffith's *Intolerance* marks the transition from *The Birth of a Nation*'s explicit national allegory to what might be best thought of instead as an imperial allegory. The film places America at the end of a long line of empires, inheriting the dominant imperial position from the old world; in this, it resembles the historiography of Brooks Adams, whose thesis on the inexorable passage of the seat of empire westward, and currently across the Atlantic, had by now become not only official state policy but a key part of the national mythology. Adams's influence was a signal that history itself was being interpreted in an allegorical mode. For Adams, America would be exceptional in the history of world empires only if imperial decline, historically inevitable, could somehow be held off. The way to do this, he argued, was avoiding colonial dispersion and instead controlling foreign economies and resources indirectly

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coming into contact with mass urbanization, comes closer to the tension in Joyce than the modernisms of the imperial centre. See Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism," *The Modernist Papers*, 152-69.

through the imposition of free markets. Achieving financial hegemony was central to Adams's idea of a "new" American empire: "Supposing the movement of the next fifty years only to equal that of the last, instead of undergoing a prodigious acceleration, the United States will outweigh any single empire, if not all empires combined. The whole world will pay her tribute. Commerce will flow to her from both east and west, and the order which has existed from the dawn of time will be reversed." (Adams, *New Empire* 208-09). For Griffith, this economic liberalism found its corollary in a politically liberal government that would avoid the moral pitfalls of imperial autocracy. Opposing intolerance, to Griffith, was a way to imagine a lighter and more benign empire, much like the McKinley-era Open Door Policy, or market domination without colonial presence. Griffith's move from *Birth* to *Intolerance*, I want to suggest, marks the transition from a nationally-bounded imperialism to a form of empire that, as Hardt and Negri have it, "incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (xii). Importantly, this new empire was imagined outside of history, or at least outside of any imperial eschatology that followed the usual cycle of birth-growth-perfection-decline.[24] For Adams, America's "new empire" could well be permanent, with the right geopolitical maneuvering; for Griffith, the solution to imperial decay lay in avoiding

[24] Foucault takes up the difference between cyclical and indefinite historical models, and their different corresponding modes of political sovereignty, in a discussion of the "open historicity" of the Westphalian balance of powers. The indefinite history of nation-states and imperial eschatology, as I understand him to argue, are only ever partial and competing justifications for sovereignty throughout the modern period. See *Security* 260ff.

autocracy, and somehow combining liberal freedoms with America's assumed imperial destiny.

III. History and form

With all that said, the film's imagination of the globe is deeply distorted. The scenes from Babylon are driven by sheer spectacle, participating in a more widespread orientalist vogue that overtook American popular culture in the 1910s.[25] But beyond trafficking in signifiers of the mysterious and exotic East, Griffith's orientalism was part of a meditation on the political tensions of imperial rule. The particular manner in which political anxieties of 1910s America are projected onto a distant past are telling: as Michael Rogin has noted, the Babylon narrative never quite resolves its central contradiction, which simultaneously codes Mountain Girl as a New Woman, or a figure who embodies sexuality liberated from male domination, and yet takes every opportunity

[25] Orientalism had crept into American popular culture via Euopre by the mid 1910s, mainly as a mass-marketed image of luxury and splendor that shaped fashion and design (Hansen 237-38; Schickel 311-12). The film's release in 1916 came shortly after the first American tour of Diaghelev's *Ballets Russes*, whose influence over American consumer culture was enormous. The choreography of a series of *Intolerance*'s sequences in Babylon show a fleeting influence, from the expressive movements of the vestal virgins praying to the goddess Ishtar to the public dance after Belshazzar's first victory over Cyrus. Diaghilev's multi-city American tour, and the breathless press he received, suggests Griffith would have been aware of the *Ballets*. Incorporating ballet movements into his film, then, might only be Griffith's tendency to subsume other spectacular forms into film; but it may also be the case that Griffith included the dance sequences as a tribute to a tour with which he felt some kind of solidarity, as the *Ballets*' itinerary in America was marked by scandal over a scene of interracial desire in *Scheherazade*, and subsequently attracted attention from the same public censors who considered shutting down *Birth* only a year before. See Nesta Macdonald, *Diaghlilev Observed by Critics in England and the United States, 1911-1929*.

to demonstrate her simultaneous adulation of and submission to Prince Belshazzar, Babylon's benevolent patriarch. This repeats in microcosm the larger antinomy surrounding individual rights and sovereignty that runs all the way through the Babylon section, and the film as a whole: Griffith takes the contradiction between liberal personhood and empire that America's constitutional democracy was struggling to re-articulate in an age of expansion and passes it off as a transhistorical conflict, endemic to empires modern and ancient, between an abstract "love" and an even more abstract "intolerance."

But Babylon is a significant choice for Griffith for other reasons. Babylon's excavation by archaeologists, begun in earnest at the turn of the nineteenth century and the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, intensified at the turn of the twentieth century; a series of texts based on archeological expeditions, particularly by A. H. Sayce and Morris Jastrow, were published in Britain and America between 1897 and 1917.[26] Emerging portraits of the Babylonian site captured the Western imaginary. In Adams's narrative of the westward march of empires, Babylon was the origin point and ur-capital, the first trade hub of an interlinked market system: "Many independent kingdoms once flourished together in Mesopotamia, but, when consecutive history begins, all had been welded into a single organism with Babylon for a heart" (*New Empire* 2). *Intolerance* repeats this

[26] See Drew, *D. W. Griffith's Intolerance*, 42-62, for the influence of these expeditions in *Intolerance*'s Babylon narrative.

interpretation of history in the title card that introduces the Babylonian narrative, hearkening back to "that distant time when all the nations of the earth sat at the feet of Babylon." Griffith's decision to represent it as the historical point at which a regime of tolerance, under Prince Belshazzar, was displaced by the monotheistic Priests of Baal gives his film a family resemblance to all those millennial high modernists—T. E. Hulme, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, H. D., and T. S. Eliot—looking well into the prehistory of the modern era, at pre- and non-Christian forms, for a way out of the much-discussed civilizational crisis of the modernist moment.[27] But unlike these modernist writers, Griffith had little interest in some return of the repressed that would reject the many pathologies of the modern world, be they rationalization, consumerism, or the dissolution of class and gender hierarchies. For Griffith, despite a flirtation with ideas of eternal recurrence, and despite the allegorical structure of the film, history was fundamentally progressive: *Intolerance*'s conclusion indicates that American modernity is capable of overcoming two millennia of intolerance that seems to inevitably accompany imperial rule, breaking out of the very cycle of history on which it is narratively structured. As indicated above, the modern plot is the only one of the four in which the forces of intolerance are overcome. The modern form of intolerance was state's expansion into the reproductive sphere—but metonymically, for Griffith any government regulation at all,

[27] On the high modernists' use of the mythic past as a defense against the modern era, see Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms*, 165-92.

including film censorship boards. Using typical melodramatic plotting, Griffith reunites the Boy with the Dear One and their child at the end of the film, a victory for reproductive futurity against the urban forces that would undermine it: namely the false "social" Christianity of the progressivists and the industrial capitalist, Mr. Jenkins, who bankrolls them, but also the social dynamics of the urban slum, ruled by the underworld figures that Griffith romanticizes as "muskateers." On a strictly narrative level, all three other historical plots are merely background to this relatively straightforward melodrama.

Another way Griffith gestures towards America being a new empire in kind, however, are those few moments in which the film's innovative, and even radical, elements emerge as a formal experimentalism that, at times, exceeds the ideological boundaries of the film. Early in the modern plot, a strike takes place in the factory town. The owner, Mr. Jenkins, has been impelled by his sister to contribute funds to her social Christian organization. To raise the funds, Jenkins imposes a wage cut at his factory. The workers strike, so Jenkins calls in a hired police force. The scene depicting the strike, in which the private police open fire on the strikers (orphaning both Boy and Dear One, both children at this point in the film, who independently move to the city and meet again years later) stands apart from the rest of the film in the way it films the crowd. As Sergei Eistenstein notes a decade later, this strike scene is an example of dynamic montage, where the omniscience of the camera disintegrates into the partial perspectives of the

strikers themselves running and taking cover.[28] The scene has been interpreted as Griffith's most radically democratic few minutes of filmmaking, where the crowd seems to exceed the capacities of the camera to shoot it, and the film's multiperspectivalism emphasizes partiality, perspective, incompleteness, and identification with no one character in particular. By comparison, *Intolerance*'s several other scenes with large masses of people, from the Babylonian court or the Judean street, are composed of long shots and stable points of view. The strike scene inaugurates a new way of filming crowds and masses: as Rogin argues, it "creates sympathy for people as a mass rather than for individual, working-class lives" (549). The radicalism of Griffith's technique led Eisenstein, a decade later, to praise *Intolerance*'s montage sequences as formative influences over his own filmmaking, and in particular his first feature film *Strike* (1924), which recasts *Intolerance*'s short strike sequence as a montage-based feature film. Eisenstein's praise, meanwhile, was a sign of Griffith's larger influence over Soviet cinema: hundreds of prints of *Intolerance* were sent to the new USSR and screened all over the country, and Lenin made overtures to Griffith himself to run the emerging Soviet film industry.[29] Miriam Hansen maps a reading of this scene onto the film as a whole,

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[28] The immediate historical referent for this sequence is most likely the Ludlow massacre in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1913-1914, which was in the newspapers while Griffith was conceiving the plot for *The Mother and the Law*. But by effacing historical referents in the sequence Griffith suggests that it stands for the labour protest and worker repression at the turn of the century more generally. See Drew 32-34 on the Ludlow massacre as a source.

[29] In the new USSR, William Drew writes, "Griffith's artistic monument to American Progressivism achieved unsurpassed popular acceptance." Drew continues: "According to a *New York Times* article on

noting how techniques that disrupt the usual melodramatic suturing of viewer to narrative are dispersed throughout the film:

> The very term of spectatorship, as a unified and unifying process by which the viewer becomes the subject inscribed in a film, is put into question by the textual peculiarities of *Intolerance*: its multiplication of positions of identification and fragmentation of vision and character subjectivity [...] both overdetermine the position of the specatator and leave it relatively indeterminate. [...] The failure of *Intolerance* may have resulted not so much from Griffith's miscognition of the kind of spectator that evolved with the norms of classical cinema, as from a much nobler infatuation with the viewer as a collective body, investing confidence in their imagination, curiosity, and interpretive capabilities (Hansen 240).

Here Hansen is concerned with the kind of public Griffith is addressing or constituting with *Intolerance*, noting that while it contains elements of his earlier Biograph films' address to the immigrant and neighborhood cinemas, *Intolerance* seems to want to subsume that audience into a larger whole, following the general shift in the 1910s towards an appeal to middle class audiences and consumers and, relatedly, Griffith's new sense of a historical and pedagogical mission behind his filmmaking. Griffith's route to that broader audience is written into the formal experimentalism of this strike sequence, which undercuts at the outset the typical sentimental work that the rest of his melodramatic, modern plot was to do. If Rogin, Hansen, and Eisenstein are right, this sequence is the mark of a different structure of identification, directed towards a different

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Griffith appearing on April 13, 1924, 'hundreds of prints' of *Intolerance* were made available for its Russian release. 'Not only were these shown in the established picture houses, but auto vans equipped with projecting paraphernalia were sent out' [...] Lenin was so impressed with *Intolerance* that he sent several delegations to Griffith, asking him to take charge of the Russian film industry [...] V. I. Pudhovkin was so impressed with Griffith's film that because of it, he abandoned chemistry for the cinema" (Drew 137-39).

object—the mass—than his previous films.

Nevertheless, period critics were more or less unanimous that the film's emotional appeal was lacking something. Quoting from a series of press reviews, Schickel summarizes: “The trouble with *Intolerance* at the popular level is that it kept interrupting one narrative with another, spoiling the identificatory impulse just as it started to build in one story of the other. In short, a vital emotional connection was missed” (334). A key dissenting voice was Vachel Lindsay's, who saw *Intolerance*'s temporal leaps as the next great technical innovation from Griffith: “The usual shallowness of appeal of private griefs and loves as shown in the most painstaking intimate films, their inability to arouse complete responding passion in the audience, is thus remedied. The modern story is made vibrant by the power of whirling crowds from the streets of Time” (Lindsay 76). In fact what Griffith does in *Intolerance* is enclose a melodramatic plot within a different narrative structure, which implies a different conception of his audience. The shift was from an individualized viewer's sympathy and suture towards a broader conception of how the film would engage the “brain” of the audience—this latter term indicating a trajectory that follows from the nineteenth century's optical technologies and scientific discourses. Griffith now thought of the film as an intervention into that brain's very processes and thresholds—a deeper and more thorough method of managing the senses of the American population than he had attempted to date.

IV. The brain of the film

Griffith's writings around this period indicate that he was moving away from melodrama and towards historical allegory, as I argued above. But he was also moving towards a different kind of viewer engagement—something more embodied, and less conscious. A key figure in his thinking on this point was the "brain" or "mind" of the film. In a 1916 article, Griffith states,

> I have endeavored to make the incidents which I have shown on the screen of such a nature that the audience on viewing the picture conceives and elaborates the story in his [sic] mind. In other words, the greatest value of the picture will be in its suggestive value to the audience, in the manner in which it will force it to create and work out the idea that I am trying to get over. I have made little or no attempt to tell a story, but I have made an attempt to suggest a story, and to my mind, it is a mighty big story (Griffith quoted in Hansen 137).

In another piece from that period, called "The Future of the Two-Dollar Movie," Griffith distances his current work from melodrama, which is still too indebted to its theatrical backgrounds, and still too dependent on actors' performances of emotional turmoil to create impressions on viewers. Instead, Griffith wanted to construct viewers' memories by different and more oblique means, using the film as a medium for a direct intervention by one brain—the director's—into others—or the mind of his audience. Film could bring several new techniques to bear: "the poetic stimulation, the tour de force, which arrests attention and makes memories that are to live, is a silent power. The brain behind this power is never revealed. It lends itself to that concealment which is one of the rarest attributes of true art" (qtd. in Shickel 301). Griffith's speculations on an abstract "brain"

which the film somehow constructs is less idiosyncratic than it might look. His ideas bear a close resemblance to Hugo Münsterberg 's 1917 book *The Photoplay*, proclaimed by fellow pioneering film critic Vachel Lindsay to be the unintentional "guide-book to the newest photoplay experiment, Intolerance" (Lindsay 76). In it, Münsterberg wants first of all to distinguish the film from stage drama: "the art of the photoplay has developed so many new features of its own, features which have not even any similarity to the technique of the stage, that the question arises: is it not really a new art which long since left behind the mere film reproduction of the theater and which ought to be acknowledged in its own esthetic independence?" (16). This book, Münsterberg continues, will "approach the art of the film theater as if it stood on entirely on its own ground, and extinguish all memory of the world of actors. We analyze the mental processes which this specific form of artistic endeavour produces in us" (19). Though there is no clear evidence that Münsterberg ever saw *Intolerance,* the coincidence of ideas about how film engages the senses differently, and what new possibilities this opens up for filmmakers—and the political significance of this new mode of visualization—it is impossible not to agree with Lindsay that Griffith and Münsterberg were operating out of the same set of coordinates, and illuminating each other's ideas.[30]

Key for Münsterberg's argument is that film is the art form of its historical

[30] Other critics have followed Lindsay's suggestion and compared Münsterberg's *Photoplay* to *Intolerance*—notable here is Hansen's discussion (137-40)—but I reconsider and develop the connection because Münsterberg's connection to James, scientific psychology, and its biopolitical resonances is so far under-explored.

moment: it must "be classed as an art in itself under entirely new mental life conditions (17)—and Münsterberg's sense of those "new mental life conditions" are borrowed directly from his colleague William James's psychology, stressing how the "chaos of the surrounding impressions" is "organized into a real cosmos of experience by our selection of that which is significant and of consequence" (31). Film is able to help an overloaded sensorium because of its technological development, emerging from the long history of technological devices of the nineteenth century, from the thaumatrope to the stereoscope, which incorporate the viewer's perceptual faculties into the apparatus itself. Film creates "positive afterimages" (25), Münsterberg writes, and these attain a certain semi-autonomy in viewers' perceptual fields, as both depth and movement are created through our sensory engagement with a sequence of still images projected onto a flat screen. That this is perceived as real space and real motion is the important technical fact for Münsterberg, and the space that film creates in our sensorium—crudely virtual, by current definitions, but a space whose borders with reality Münsterberg was interested in blurring—was the expanded space of sensation, or general biological capacities, that film worked to exploit.[31] For this reason, the emotional effects of film were different than those of the

[31] Münsterberg's interest in film's capacity to simulate real motion and depth led him to predict stereoscopy's next development, 3-D glasses: "if the apparatus which projects the left side view has a green glass in front of the lens and the one which projects the right side view a red glass, and every person in the audience has a pair of spectacles with the left glass green and the right glass red [...] the whole chaos of lines on the screen is organized and we see the pictured room on the screen with the same depth as if it were really a solid room. [...] The effect is so striking that no one can overcome the feeling of depth under these conditions" (20-21).

stage. Münsterberg distinguishes between a first- and second-order affect for film. Dramatic sentimentality is the first order, consisting of the theatre's usual mimetic relationship between actor and spectator: “the feelings of the persons in the play and “the feelings of the spectator” are “exactly the same,” and the spectator has an “awareness of the emotion expressed” (53). But film also accesses a whole other category of affect: “that second group of emotions, those in which the spectator responds to the scenes on the film from the standpoint of his independent affective life” (53). Often, these second-level affects reverse sympathy, and so they include spectatorial disgust, irritation, indignation, and so on. For Münsterberg the key point is that “the spectator superadds to the events, to the show on the screen” (54). They don't necessarily have anything to do with actors. And, he adds, after his relatively vague definition, “The photoplay has hardly come to its own with regard to these secondary emotions” (54).

Second-level affects in film are Münsterberg's real interest throughout his book, and he explains them in the terms of the Jamesian psychology of which he was a leading proponent. The real significance of film's sensorial interface is that it creates new affects and, more importantly, a way to experiment with the very formation of affects:

> impressions which come to our eye at first awaken only sensations, and a sensation is not an emotion. But it is well known that in the view of modern physiological psychology our consciousness of the emotion itself is shaped and marked by the sensations which arise from our bodily organs. As soon as such abnormal visual impressions stream into our consciousness, our whole background of fusing bodily sensations becomes altered and new emotions seem to take hold of us. (55-56)

For Münsterberg, film generates of new neurological flows and new affective constellations. Media theorist Friedrich Kittler is hyperbolic about Münsterberg 's discovery: “For the first time in the global history of art, a medium instantiates the neurological flow of data” (Kittler 161). Kittler's point is less sweeping than it seems: the key move in Münsterberg is a rearticulation of classical aesthetics in the terms of a technologically-mediated scientific psychology, or the language of neurology and sensation.

By integrating film form and scientific psychology, Münsterberg opens a line of inquiry into film as a biopolitical technology, that at its most basic technological level – the stream of images that produce a continuous whole – is involved in the management and equilibration of sensation. Münsterberg does this by transposing film's formal language to the terms of James's *Principles*; James's chapter titles are reproduced in *The Photoplay* and paired with formal techniques in film that illustrate them. Attention, for example, finds its correlative in film's unheralded use of the close-up; memory corresponds to the cut-back; imagination to the cut-forward. The central physiological mechanism in James's arsenal, the stream of thought, is equated with the overarching technical logic of film itself, as the seamless flow of isolated picture frames is a precise extension of the mind's stream of thought, or what Münsterberg calls the “feeling of movement” (30), which characterizes the flow of perceptions in modern mental life.

Because film can reproduce this feeling of movement, the separation between reality and representation is thrown into question: “It is as if reality has lost its own continuous connection and become shaped by the demands of the soul[...] The photoplay obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world” (41). Film plays on our sensory capacities, and so it makes the basic biological capacities of the human organism available for optimization and management—a point certainly not lost on Münsterberg, the first major figure in applied and industrial psychology, the author of *Psychology and the Teacher* (1909) and *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913), and a theorist whose aesthetic appreciation of film was never distinct from his professional interest in it as a proxy laboratory for test population beyond the factory or schoolroom: “The screen ought to offer a unique opportunity to interest wide circles in psychological experiments and mental texts and in this way to spread the knowledge of their importance for vocational guidance and the practical affairs of life” (11-12).

So when Griffith, as we've seen, began to speak of the “silent power” in film that “arrests attention” and indicates a larger “brain” at work in the film, he was on firm discursive ground. Firmer still when, in another interview, he drew from James's stream of thought metaphor to explain *Intolerance*'s four separate plots: “the stories begin like four currents looked at from a hilltop. At first the four currents flow apart, slowly and quietly. But as they flow, they grow nearer and nearer together, and faster and faster, until in the end, in the last act, they mingle in one mighty river of expressed emotion” (Griffith,

qtd in Hansen 330 n.16). Fluvial metaphors have accompanied the film ever since, as critics from Griffith's era to the present have described the film in terms of torrents, maelstroms, cataracts—for one early critic the film is "an intense hail of images" (qtd. in Hansen 133). Griffith's innovation in *Intolerance* was always aimed at bringing the film closer, formally, to mental operations themselves. I've suggested that this is largely because of his loss of faith in sentimentalism and melodrama, which had partly backfired on him in *Birth of a Nation*. Regardless, the melodrama in the modern plot is interrupted, recontextualized, and made to fit a film that wanted to operate like a brain: "Events are not set forth in their historical sequence, or according to accepted forms of dramatic construction, but as they might flash across a mind seeking to parallel the life of the different ages" (Griffith, qtd. in Hansen 138). Sentiment becomes only one tool in a larger formal project; the new discourse of sensation indicated a new terrain, bridging a reality "out there" and internal mental states, and figured as a topology that Griffith's "streams" would re-shape. The brain was a new spatial figure that collapsed the distinction between viewer and text, object and subject, in a sort of virtualized world where directing the flow of sensation would be the same as directing the beliefs and behaviours of an audience.

V. Out of the cradle

Münsterberg agreed: "Life does not move forward on one single pathway. The

whole manifoldness of parallel currents with their endless interconnections is the true substance of our understanding" (44). Film was able to technically overcome the limits of time and space on the stage, and this allowed it to trace these interconnections. The question this leaves us, however, is what links these four narratives, and why Griffith understood them, in some sense, as a single narrative of intolerance reasserting itself through history. In the film, the "cradle shot" formally links the four narratives, serving as a transitional marker between them. The shot is repeated twenty-six times over the course of the film (with small variations in length and camera angle). As Schickel indicates, the Cradle shot, and the larger theme of intolerance, were both added by Griffith after the film was more or less finished, to lend the four parallel narratives a sense of continuity. From one angle, the Cradle shot stands for the very principle of "interconnections" mentioned by Münsterberg, or neural "concatenation" in James: that is, it provides a missing coherence and identity, much in the same way habits of mind, based on established neural links, are the only real substance of identity. But what kind of identity? The figure of rebirth in early twentieth century America was, as we've seen, widespread and ideologically variable. The progressives whom Griffith was trying to slander had a serious investment in a version of the term, as Jackson Lears's history of social Christianity has indicated. So what sort of image is Griffith's cradle?

A heavily freighted one, to start with. For years analytically under-examined, and either affirmed as a key thematic device by fans of the film or dismissed, as by Eisenstein,

as a strained and ineffective allegorical symbol, the Cradle shot has been recently historicized more rigorously. Miriam Hansen underlines how the shot "claims the status of a generative symbol, anchored in a metaphysical truth which would make the film cohere," but its "obsessive repetition" and "overdetermination" ensure that "the shot fragments the very discourse whose coherence and transparency it protests" (199). On Hansen's reading, the Cradle shot bleeds into the modern narrative, which is explicitly concerned with the reproduction of the family against the various forces of modernity that would tear it apart; the compositional symmetry between aspects of the Cradle shot (the Eternal Mother, the three fates in the background) and aspects of the modern narrative (one particular shot of the three women of the Jenkins foundation standing over the Dear One's child; another shot of the Boy's three would-be executioners) all underline that Griffith wants comparisons to be made between the vicious cycle of the Cradle shot and the liberation from history achieved in the modern story. But the Cradle shot signifies more than that, for Hansen: "the Cradle shot becomes the involuntary point of eruption for a repressed female sexuality, epitomizing the crisis of femininity that pervades the whole film. *Intolerance* is literally littered with 'wayward' and 'neglected girls,' 'fallen women' and anonymous prostitutes" (217). In this, her reading agrees with Michael Rogin's understanding of *Intolerance* as a document that shifts political conflict onto the terrain of sexual reproduction, but ultimately fails in its aims: "Griffith wanted to bring female sexuality, public pleasure, and the family together, but he could not do so. Griffith

bade farewell in *Intolerance* to his embrace of the modern city and his flirtation with female sexuality" (551). By reading the Cradle shot alongside other mythic symbols from the Babylon story, Rogin concludes that Griffith tries and fails to harness the polymorphous pleasures of the modern city, and so the Cradle shot references the emergence of the New Woman in the American early century, but fails to recontain the threat she poses to normative heterosexual reproduction. Both of these readings grasp what is at stake in the Cradle shot: it points to the fact that Griffith has transposed the entire weight of America's political situation onto the struggle over reproduction itself, in all its biological, legal, and cultural dimensions. The choice to stage the triumph of a tolerant American Empire over the cycle of imperial decadence as a drama about reproductive rights should indicate that the Cradle shot is carrying a significant bit of symbolic weight for Griffith's film, and for his vision of America.

But the historical resonances of the cradle figure are important to reconstruct here too. It was a key signifier in nineteenth century biopolitical and racialist thought. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835) named the North American territory an "empty cradle" waiting for white settlers to colonize it, a startling metaphor given de Tocqueville's otherwise clear-eyed depiction of the extermination of native populations, and the settlers' "utter insensitivity" and "ruthless sentiment" in accomplishing it.[32]

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[32] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* Vol. 1 p. 434. Losurdo analyzes de Tocqueville's comments on the empty cradle metaphor, and his disparate writings on Indian extermination, in

Elsewhere, de Toqueville renders the violence of the "empty cradle" metaphor more explicitly: "Do the Indians have an idea that sooner or later their race will be destroyed by ours?"[33] Walt Whitman takes up the figure of the cradle twenty-five years later in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1860), the source for an early title card in *Intolerance*: "Out of the cradle, endlessly rocking, / Uniter of here and hereafter, / Chanter of pains and joys."[34] The emphasis in these abridged lines of Whitman is on eternal recurrence and the self-reflexive act of documenting it: Whitman re-tropes and in effect launders the cradle metaphor in transcendental, romanticist thought, connecting it to a broader and nobler ideology of a national renaissance, or of a disparate geography and population reborn as a unity and then filtered through an all-encompassing poetic subjectivity. Whitman's poet, who styles himself the "chanter" of the new nation's "pains and joys," was an authorial persona Griffith, a Whitman enthusiast, was without doubt trying to emulate.[35] Finally, by the turn of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt was citing birth rate statistics and speaking of "race suicide" in America, inciting a wave of anti-birth control and anti-immigration groups for the next few decades. Roosevelt claimed that "the old native American stock, especially in the North East" was under threat of

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Liberalism: A Counter-History, 229-233.

[33] Quoted in Losurdo 232.

[34] Griffith has heavily abridged and modified the source, bringing together opening and closing lines from a twenty-two line poem. The final lines read slightly differently: "I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter / A reminiscence sing." See Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*.

[35] For more on Griffith's enthusiasm for Whitman's poetry, which he could apparently recite by the page, see William M. Drew, *D. W. Griffith's* Intolerance, 86-92.

being swallowed whole by larger families among new immigrants and former slaves. These were the domestic threats: looking abroad, Roosevelt claimed that Germany had "won the warfare of the cradle in the nineteenth century."[36] With Roosevelt, the cradle metaphor is re-deployed in the context of an ideology of imperial rebirth, and questions of racialist population management linked domestic concerns, from immigration to segregation to birth control, to international rivalry and the competition for empire.

Griffith's use of the cradle trope, then, is a continuation of a rationale for territorial and imperial expansion that animated the nineteenth century. This rationale was biopolitical in several of the ways Foucault identifies: it takes as its object the management of populations, in the form of birth rates, migration, and population growth; it makes racialized divisions between the legitimate and illegitimate citizenry; and it mobilizes anxieties about racial purity that make necessary the policing of borders, whether internal, as in that era's Jim Crow laws and miscegenation anxieties, or external, as between a territorial America and its international competitors. In effect, Griffith's use of the cradle figure carries a nineteenth century domestic ideology into the twentieth century: one use of the cradle figure that may have been more present to mind was Stuart Blackton's film *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), a pro-war propaganda piece targeted at women viewers, which cited the well-worn nineteenth century cliché that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." This effectively summarized the drift of a nineteenth

[36] Quoted in David M. Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, 42.

century separate-spheres ideology that feminist critics, notably Nancy Armstrong and Lora Romero, have linked to a certain fantasy of American national integrity, projected onto the white, patriarchal family's biological reproduction.[37] Or at least this is what Griffith is doing with his modern narrative in *Intolerance,* which codes these expansionist anxieties as a melodramatic reclamation of normative reproduction, against interference from an increasingly bureaucratized charity and juridical state complex. But as I've argued, there is reason to doubt Griffith's own commitment to that single narrative, and to the effectiveness of the melodrama within it. Griffith was no doubt transposing a whole series of questions around expansion, immigration, and empire onto the terrain of biological reproduction, and making his own conservative, even libertarian plea for the sanctity of the family. But I want to suggest that this wasn't all he was doing. Having lost some faith in the very mechanism of sentimental identification after *Birth*'s mixed reception, he also displaced the figure of rebirth onto the very structure of the film, a characteristically modernist gesture that transposes the previous century's narrative contents to the level of form.[38] What Griffith accomplishes in *Intolerance* is in this sense

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[37] There is no surviving copy of the Blackton film, but see the discussion of it in Hansen, 206ff. For nineteenth century domestic ideology, see Armstrong, "Why Daughters Die," and Lora Romero, *Home Fronts*.

[38] Jameson has persistently diagnosed the move from content to form as the central problematic of aesthetic modernism as such. In his introduction to his collection *The Modernist Papers*, he discusses this at length, identifying modernism as the moment "in which the ideological forms of an older content are somehow neutralized and bracketed by an abstraction that seeks to retain only from them their purely formal structures, now deployed in a kind of autonomy" (xvii). This formalism, distinct from the literary criticisms that would later take up its name but not its spirit, was a failed attempt to short circuit the ideological forms of the past: "Formalism must therefore necessarily fail: we cannot escape our

a typically modernist repurposing of a nineteenth century ideology, in which allegory and formal elision take the place of character psychology and audience identification.

If this were all *Intolerance* were doing, it would be a significant, if often overlooked, document of early modernism. But there remains an important sense in which the film's form is itself representational, or registers the same biopolitical dynamics, only in a more contradictory way. As I've argued, Griffith's conception of form always implied the question of a growing and increasingly heterogeneous audience, which in a sense came to stand, metonymically, for the social body itself, invested with all of his era's anxieties around immigration, assimilation, democracy, and citizenship that animated the political and economic debate of the early century. We've seen how the ideology of film's universalism in the 1910s turned on a concept of a classless, raceless, genderless spectator that film took pains to construct and suture to the narrative of the film; for Griffith, though, this disembodied spectator was taken a step further and became a “brain” which was opened up to manipulation to a “silent power” behind the film. That is, faced with the partial failure of his melodramatic narrative machinery, based in a fundamentally self-enclosed and internal sentimental imagination, Griffith posited a different affective circuit, finding a foundation for it in scientific psychology's research into sensation, a middle ground between external and internal worlds. By calling his own activity as a

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being-in-the-world, even by way of its formalizing negations. Yet the attempt to escape that world's ideologies must also be faithfully registered, and counted as a Utopian one” (xvii). Below, in my discussion of Griffith's attempt to move beyond form, I have in Jameson's crucial insights in mind.

director a "silent power" behind the film's brain, Griffith articulates a fantasy of a more total manipulation of his spectators, in effect stepping beyond all the usual narrative mediations; by cutting new "streams" across the terrain of the brain, and forging new links between them, Griffith wanted what other modernists in this period were thinking in terms of an epochal leap beyond form itself. The prospect of unmediated access to the senses and minds of an audience was, for modernism proper as for Griffith, tied up in an aesthetic and political fantasy of utopic reinvention and rebirth.

Film, in particular, lent itself to this notion of a direct intervention into the nervous system. Walter Benjamin's mechanical reproduction essay locates the revolutionary potential in film in the filmmaker's surgeon-like abilities, "penetrating the patient's body" (115) in order to reorganize the senses around the urban experiences of shock and distraction, or "establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus" (117). But more than a decade earlier, Dziga Vertov saw in film's technological interface the capacity to carry through the political revolution of the Bolsheviks on the terrain of the senses. He wrote, around 1922-23, of a "communism of the senses" and of cinema as an organism.[39]

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[39] For example, see the following poem Vertov composed in 1922-23:

A friendly warning:
Don't hide your heads like ostriches.
Raise your eyes.
Look around you—
There!
It's obvious to me
as to any child.
The innards,
the guts of strong sensations

For Vertov, the new cinema would inaugurate the era of New Man, a revolutionary subject formed through the dissociative sense-training of his Kino-eye, or "the strategic brain of man directing." The form of film was now both more embodied more depersonalized, based on a general biological level at which sensation was simultaneously intimate and unfamiliar or other. In Griffith's case, however, the sensory revolution that film would bring about was drawing from a different store-room of symbols. Not so radical as the image of the surgeon in Benjamin or of the eye and viscera in Vertov, the fluvial metaphors in Griffith's statements on *Intolerance* suggest that he would treat the film's brain as *terra nullius*, or more to the point, an empty cradle in de Tocquville's sense of a space open for conquest. This signals not only a missed lesson from the reception of *Birth,* that viewers come to films as culturally and historically positioned subjects who negotiate their own interpretations. It also signals the immense work of effacement—of the changing composition of America's political community, and its imperial grasp—that culture would have to accomplish in order to bring about the imperial rebirth that Griffith's film was calling for.

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are tumbling out
of cinema's belly,
ripped open on the reef of revolution.

All Vertov quotes are from Alberto Toscano's "'European Nihilism' and Beyond," the afterword to Alain Badiou's *The Century.*

VI. Liberalism and Biopolitics

The final irony in Griffith, and arguably a constitutive one for the mass cultural forms that would follow him, is that while he envisioned a "silent power" and a more complete control over audience reactions, he was explicitly arguing against the extension of governmental control over individuals' private lives. But isn't this precisely the condition of biopolitics in the twentieth century? Biopolitics first and foremost names forms of control that stand beyond conventional juridical means. Foucault was nowhere more aware of the slipperiness of biopolitics than in his last lecture series on the topic, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, which has surprisingly little to say about biopolitics itself: instead he undertakes a genealogy of liberal and neoliberal governmentality, precisely because liberalism creates the very condition of possibility for biopolitics.[40] Liberalism acts as a political and juridical frame, or what Foucault calls a "regime of truth" (18-19), within which a series of biopolitical techniques gain traction. And so when Griffith's film heaps scorn on a children's aid foundation—and by extension all social Christian and progressivist modes of regulating behaviour, including and especially censorship—he articulates a certain kind of liberalism, a distilled form, or a liberalism that is purely

[40] From Foucault's first lecture in *The Birth of Biopolitics*: "I thought I could do a course on biopolitics this year. I will try to show how the central core of all the problems that I am presently trying to identify is what is called population. Consequently, this is the basis on which something like biopolitics could be formed. But it seems to me that the analysis of biopolitics can only get under way when we have understood the general regime of this governmental reason I have talked about [...] only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will be be able to grasp what biopolitics is." (21-22)

subtractive: one which can potentially interpret any act of government as an over-extension of sovereign right. Foucault argues that this is the key element of liberalism as a practice of government—that liberalism is government's self-critique, or "the self-limitation of governmental reason" (20). But liberalism is only able to do this when it displaces all questions about managing the life of the population onto other discourses: political economy in the eighteenth century, and then society in the nineteenth century, are both discursive objects and modes of knowledge that disarticulate questions of the population and its basic needs from governmental responsibility. Social statistics uncovers a layer of regularities and laws surrounding life, death, and reproduction that reinforce a division between political sovereignty and the population. In other words, if liberalism and neoliberalism are designed to economize and reduce government, some other principle of population management—from below, as it were—needs to be discursively generated in order to account for how subjects and populations are formed and could be governed. Thus statistics, scientific psychology, sensation—a series of interlocked discourses about the purportedly natural biological capacities and laws of the species, which sociobiological race theories had extensively studied and mapped out—as Foucault's prior work on biopolitics as a form of state racism makes dramatically clear.

What constitutes liberalism for *Intolerance*, then, is how it re-locates the management and reproduction of the population. By sublating a melodrama about reproduction to the level of film form, which was inevitably a self-reflexive and anxious

exercise in a transitional decade for the film industry, Griffith is mapping out an ambitious program for what culture can do. Mark Manganaro has suggestively itemized a number of the ways culture's definition and function was displaced and differently articulated in the modernist period: master terms like "myth," "metaphor," and "function" took the place of a cultural sphere that was, in every possible sense, in transition.[41] All debates over culture's place in a liberal democracy were in some sense referring to a crisis of social reproduction. *Intolerance*, to its credit, thematizes this reproduction, and places it within a millenarian argument for the emergence of an American form of empire that would remain fundamentally liberal; but it could only imagine this if some other agency or institution would manage the incorporation of new populations, absent the extension of full political rights and cultural recognition. And so Griffith's focus on his expanded and heterogeneous audience, and his ambitious and failed plan to form them into a citizenry by re-forming their sensory lives, was symptomatic of a general confusion about the place and influence of a budding mass culture. There is one sense in which what I've been arguing here fits comfortably into film histories of the twentieth century by Ben Singer and Miriam Hansen, among several others, that stress the growth of film audiences in the 1910s as the sign of an expanded project of assimilation, or the development of a "universal" language of film out of the particular and neighborhood-based immigrant film traditions of the decade before. But this history of assimilation is only part of the story:

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[41] Mark Manganaro, *Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept* (2002).

what remains to be accounted for is the degree to which cultural production itself, by raising the issue of the reproduction of social relations, defines a field in which certain kinds of visibility and engagement are foreclosed. In Griffith, cultural reproduction was re-articulated as biological rebirth, which fits with a general naturalization of politics that occurs over the course of the early twentieth century. What he raises, then, is the degree to which that rebirth came to define not only American empire, and not only the management of his audience's sensory lives, but a horizon in which culture takes up the project that liberal sovereignty has to, by definition, neglect; that is, the ways in which cultural production was also the management of life and reproduction, then and today.

CONCLUSION: When the Field is Open

In a recent interview with the cable news network Al-Jazeera, Slavoj Žižek sums up a year of social struggles in 2011—from the Arab Spring, to neo-Jacquerie in London and other UK cities in August, to the Occupy Wall Street movement in the fall, to the ongoing strikes and demonstrations against fiscal austerity policies in peripheral Eurozone countries—with the observation that "the system has lost its self-evidence, its automatic legitimacy, and now the field is open."[1] In terms of Žižek 's own writing, at the very least, this is a significant development: post-1989 liberal capitalist hegemony, epitomized by Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis, has been Žižek 's most consistent target since it first emerged. If that historic bloc—call it the Washington Consensus—has broken apart and the ideological field is indeed now open, a close look at the political forms that stand to replace it is an urgent critical task.[2] But any student of the break-up of Western capitalism's last fully global liberal consensus, in the modernist era, will meet contemporary events with a measure of concern. The differences between then and now are important: by most accounts, the movements resisting the current global order are anti-modernist, disorganized by design, transversal, and geographically

1 "Slavoj Žižek: Capitalism with Asian Values," from the *Talk to Al-Jazeera* series, November 13, 2011.
2 Žižek understands this need, and his turn in the interview to a warning against a so-called "capitalism with Asian values," or a more efficient, bureacratic, and totalitarian form of market organization, is, I suspect, essentially a warning for moderate readers that the choice today is a more democratic governmental form, or else backsliding (again) into authoritarianism in the name of efficiency and global competition.

distributed—although I hope to have shown that even the most apparently reactionary avant-garde of the modernist period was more horizontally organized and, with exceptions, emancipatory than most accounts allow. In any case, a deliberate avoidance of vanguardism is built right into the Occupy movement's self-identification as a capacious "99%", and in its use of general assemblies, a direct democratic process with a lineage through twentieth century council communist and anarchist movements. And so the political culture of modernism, a diverse field, finds itself once again a sort of constitutive outside to present-day anti-capitalism: a crucial historical predecessor, but also overdetermined and ultimately reduced to a reactionary vanguardism.

I've argued here that the vanguardist moment was a strategic political form in the early century, when the nation-state formed the imaginary horizon for political articulation. Vanguardism was a conjunctural strategy, but not a necessary part of the avant-garde's value struggles with liberal capitalism. This point is worth insisting if a full sense of the political impact of that century-old moment of the historical avant-garde is worth preserving, and if the Occupy movement is interested in genealogizing its own position and circumstances. There are important continuities: like the historical avant-garde, Occupy refuses the strategies of representational containment or divisions of visibility of a contemporary neoliberal capitalism, whose news media dismiss the movement for its lack of programmatic demands, leaders, or routinized lobbying strategy; in a similar vein, Occupy wants to think and practice politics outside of legislative

processes and more in terms of an everyday, lived democracy that fundamentally interrupts and intervenes in the current governmental order, introducing a sense of political possibility where before there was only "the end of history." That is to say, if my argument that the avant-garde was primarily an instance of value struggles against capitalism's organization of production and reproduction, then today's movements are in the same tradition, and a similar relative political position. They could be called, if the contradiction can be entertained, anti-vanguardist avant-gardes. But in any case today's Occupy movement has historical predecessors worth knowing.

Of course, historical comparisons come easy. Journalists have lately been obsessed with them. Is the present financial crisis a repeat of 1929? 1937? 1997, 1892, 1907? The answer is none of the above, strictly speaking: what Marx once called the organic composition of capital, in yet another metaphor drawn from the life sciences, is nothing like what it was: the scale of global production, its ratio of "dead" to "living" labour, its increasing reliance on knowledge and affective labour, all of these limit the usefulness of any lessons from recent history.[3] But on the other hand all of these parallels are also, in a limited sense, true: if capitalism endures by dynamically overcoming barriers, deepening its hold over social life after each crisis, then each of these historical episodes has to be considered a variation on a theme, or a point of intensification in capitalism's genealogy.

3 Marx discusses the organic composition of capital in chapter 25 of *Capital Vol. I.*

And so our historical sense becomes even more urgent.

Modernist studies has its own way of understanding capitalism's dynamic expansion over the century. But current social struggles underline why the terms of the debate need to be more carefully laid out. The transnational turn in modernist studies comes from an overdue recognition that Euro-American modernisms are only a handful of a larger series of historically contingent reactions to, for the lack of a better term (or in the place of one), modernity. The turn in "new" modernist studies to a finer-grained historiography, counting cultural production outside the Eurocentric boundaries of prior scholarship, is a tremendously important development, but even its historicist methodology is not beyond reproach. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar's formulation of "alternative modernities," while it has directed attention to non-Western modernisms and to international development and capital accumulation, is itself too reliant on abstracted concepts of modernism and modernity that, though finally understood in their international and global reach, may now be too distant from the actual political and economic processes they are supposed to describe to be of much use.[4] In Gaonkar's account, much cited in the critical literature on how modernity travels, is delayed, and then is finally experienced in non-Western sites, the emphasis on a certain structure of

4 See Gaonkar's article "On Alternative Modernities," which has been influential with leading modernist transnationalist scholarship in Susan Stanford-Friedman ("Definitional Excursion," "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies," and "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies"), Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (*Geomodernisms*), and many others. Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* (2002) offers an extended critique of the alternative modernities thesis.

experience, or a specific sense of new, open possibilities offset by the simultaneous closing down of older ways of social and communal life, has been crucial to how scholarship understands modernity's ability to fuse itself with different political and cultural traditions. From this, Gaonkar and others note the potential for alternative routes to modern subjectivity, different hybidizations of past cultural forms with present ones, and so, potentially, new forms of political agency. The point that postcolonial modernities use modernist formal strategies not as a necessary consequence of modernity, but as a deliberate mediation of a specific political conjuncture, or to foreground the contact zone between local and international cultural knowledges, is the key point that Gaonkar's concept emphasizes. But Gaonkar frames his alternative modernities as only so many "creative adaptations" in which postcolonial subjects "make themselves modern" (16); the language of sociobiology creeps in to his conception of modernity's "alternatives" in a way that threatens to compromise an urgent political project from the start. The resounding echo of Henri Bergson's "creative evolution," or one of the modernist period's most influential cultural readings of Darwin, and, as I argued in my introduction, one of the first articulations of modernism's biopolitical turn, indicates the limits to this particular framework for thinking about how modernism travels across borders and time periods in the twentieth century.

What concerns me is that Gaonkar's language of this modern, ambivalent "structure of experience" is drawn from Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into*

Air, the book that influentially conjoined the concepts of a (political) modernity and a (cultural) modernism, or entrenched the idea that modernism is a cultural response to the processes of modernization that constitute the period named modernity. As Perry Anderson noted in his generous critique of Berman's book, modernist ambivalence in Berman rests on a questionable concept of history—an anti-historical historicism if there ever was one, insensitive to how any "belated" modernity encounters a fundamentally different set of political and economic coordinates than its forerunners.[5] What I would add, after tracing a handful of the figures of social and political rebirth in early twentieth-century writing, is that Berman's argument itself falls under the sway of this powerful metaphor; to quote from Berman's opening paragraph, the modern experience is "a mode of vital experience [...] a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'" (15). The echoes in Berman of Simmel's era-defining account in "The Conflict in Modern Culture," foregrounding the modern period's "constant change in the content of culture," its "deep contradiction between life's eternal flux and the objective validity and authenticity of the forms through which it proceeds," and its formal movement "between death and resurrection—between resurrection and

5 Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution."

death" (12), should indicate that the complex ideological form of rebirth has not, in Berman or in Gaonkar, been recognized. Berman's main goal is to revive a certain nineteenth century humanist progressivism in the face of the bane of 1970s humanists and Marxists alike, a nihilist, anti-modern poststructuralism (which turns out to be a creature of their own invention anyway). But his reactivation of the rebirth metaphor in the face of this intellectual threat should be a concern for any contemporary critic of modernism uncomfortable with the history-suppressing power of the rebirth metaphor, which as we've seen has been used to render whole populations invisible, and to create a field in which unmediated access to a social body has been turned into a technology of social control. Modernity itself, on these terms, is precisely the concept that the alternative modernities school should be working to problematize.

But if Berman is right, and rebirth is a central experience for transnational or alternative modernities, then these latter formations register a political reality that my argument in Part II has attempted to genealogize: ideologies of rebirth and regeneration have successfully inscribed themselves within the globalization of capital, the process of modernization, and the hegemonic liberalism that reasserted itself in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Or in other words, regeneration is a key component of the dynamic of modernization, and has been reclaimed by the very liberal capitalist hegemony that it once opposed. On the one hand this should offer no surprise; earlier, I used the term "recuperation" to describe how the avant-garde's vital politics became part of the

expansion of the national-social state in the mid-twentieth century, but it has to be conceded that liberalism itself is the paradigmatic case of recuperation in the history of Western politics. The standard reading, in which revolutionary demands for liberty and popular sovereignty in 1789 and 1848 were partly met with representative, republican governments, offering a formal, if limited, democracy that maintained the dominance of property—this is, in many ways the ur-narrative of recuperation in the political history of the West. The specific recuperation with which my argument has been concerned is liberalism's appropriation and rearticulation of the same organicist modes of thought that once threatened it; as Robert Esposito argues, biopolitics embeds itself within liberalism in the latter half of the twentieth century, after the end of totalitarian state biopolitics; today's liberalism, like the early century's sociobiological forms of government, increasingly looks like "a politics that finds its only possible basis of legitimacy in life" (Esposito, "Totalitarianism" 43), concerned primarily with regulating populations across a number of vectors: human security, immigration, ecological sustainability, "quality of life," and a fully medicalized social body. As Esposito argues, this liberalism is very far from all those classical doctrines of individual rights, civil society, and constitutional sovereignty on which its politics of emancipation depended.

Liberalism, then, can sometimes appear to be as varied and imprecise a concept as modernity, but I've used it here with two specific critiques of liberalism in mind: the first, Domenico Losurdo's *Liberalism: A Counter-history*, explores how liberalism's

"community of the free" depends upon a population of the unfree, both as material support and conceptual opposite. It wasn't just that John Locke, to take just one of Losurdo's examples from the canon of liberal thought, wrote privately in favour of slavery, or that he invested in the slave trade, or that he wrote the pro-slavery Carolina Constitution. Losurdo argues that Locke's definitive liberalist tract *Two Treatises of Government* was intended and received as a legitimation of the possessive individualism that would make slaveholding and the extermination of native populations in America intellectually and juridically palatable.[6] My argument that the subject under siege in James's late nineteenth century is the product of a specific re-articulation of national boundaries in the face of a mobile population is another, more recent version of Losurdo's basic insights about liberal citizenship's constitutive exclusions; with D. W. Griffith, James's besieged subject effectively becomes the spectator of narrative cinema, or an early iteration of the twentieth century's mass cultural subject.

The second critique of liberalism I've drawn from is Foucault's *Birth of Biopolitics*, which materializes the recuperation-of-liberalism thesis by tracing it through the specific discourses and governmental policies by which liberalism becomes a discourse of governmental self-critique. In his words, "liberalism is the solution that consists in the maximum limitation of the forms and domains of government action" (21),

6 Losurdo, *Liberalism*. See 3-4 for Locke's investments in the slave trade; 23-25 on *Two Treatises*; and 41-44 for the Carolina Constitution and private letters.

and while this was originally a limitation on sovereign abuses of power, it quickly became repurposed as a limit to governmental regulation of private property. From Adam Smith through Milton Friedman to the Tea Party, liberalism has been mobilized against governmental "tyrrany" of this latter sort. Foucault elaborates that liberalism has been from the beginning the conjunction of two very different philosophical traditions: a French revolutionary discourse on innate, natural rights enshrined in constitutional form, and an English radical utilitarianism that wants to reduce and economize government and stress individual autonomy (42). For Foucault, liberalism isn't a set of core values, but consists of the alternating regimes of truth and justification that have resulted from this conjunction. For all that, however, Foucault's *Birth* lectures focus on how the two discourses form a system of legitimation, or a strategic logic, that he calls a single governmentality, and he quickly identifies the American context as one site where liberal revolutionaries have managed to hold the two traditions in some kind of disjunctive synthesis (43). Though today's global liberalism is legitimated by a conjunction of the two traditions, or the extension of free markets and the rule of law, American politics has always been determined by a conflict between republicanism and liberalism, or state autonomy and federal right—and this contradiction is ongoing.

The austerity programmes that result from governmental self-limitation, or the privatization of publicly controlled resources, are a key site of contestation today: to take one example, only a few days before I wrote this, the Occupy Oakland collective

announced and attempted the reclamation of an empty, publicly-owned convention building, which they intended to turn into an active community centre, offering free health services, community meeting space, and a central locus for general assemblies and workshops. Thousands marched, but they were halted by intense police repression, including the use of rubber bullets, tear gas, and kettling. Some 400 protesters were arrested, and stories emerged about police physically abusing them in detainment centres.[7] The specific value struggle this initiative wanted to foreground—that the withering of the state in areas crucial to low or no-wage social reproduction could be counteracted by an autonomous movement to provide these sorts of reproductive services outside the state's reach—was quickly repressed in the name of public order. Though the police response was more immediate and intense than Occupy movements had yet experienced, this incident follows the script of the fall's Occupy encampments across North America, which provided the same community services and more in public parks and squares, and which were broken up by police under some abstract idea of public safety and "quality of life" in urban centres. Today's state holds not only a monopoly on violence, but a monopoly on the means of social reproduction—or at least the ability to refuse them.

If current social struggles centre on reproduction and reproductive labour, then we

7 "Regime Change in Oakland" on OccupyWallSt.org; Cami Graves, "Why Occupy Oakland Keeps Capturing Headlines"on Al Jazeera English; Yael Chanoff, "Occupy Oakland Inmates at Santa Rita Attacked—Developing Story" on San Francisco Bay Guardian.

may well have located the most substantial continuity between the modernist period and the present. I've traced figures of rebirth and regeneration through avant-gardes, scientific psychology, and early film, and outlined the social logic that frames reproduction as, alternately, a heroic palingenesis, a managerial re-channelling of overwhelming external forces, or a privatized, family-based autonomy from the so-called "intolerance" of the progressive state. Reproduction, in other words, has been the site of struggle for the better part of the century—the modernists, fascinated with life and rebirth, only foregrounded it. That the struggle over reproductive austerity and autonomy will continue is a given. The question is what social struggles today will do if another liberal discourse of rights emerges in a way that rebalances neoliberalism's single-minded focus on governmental economization and reduction, or if some grand institutional investment is made in social services that counteract the everyday violence of capitalism. For Occupy and its allied movements, the modernist period is worth re-evaluating in the face of this prospect: if liberalism starts speaking the language of rights again, will that be enough, or will the desire for more democracy and more autonomy result in some other vision of common life entirely?

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