

The Clarity of the Cold War: Truth and Literary Communism between the U.S.A. and the  
U.S.S.R. in the Era of Postmodern Globalization

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the cultural logic of the Cold War, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as a symptom of postmodern globalization. Following Under Secretary of State Dean Acheson's 1947 proclamation that Cold War propaganda should be crafted as "clearer than truth," this study investigates the complicated relationships among truth, production, and interpretation that emerged in similar manners between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. during the Cold War period. In particular, I consider literary, visual, and critical texts that contest a logic of truth which seeks to dissociate truth from its conditions of production. In so doing, I assert that a *second* Cold War took place between a global creative class, which has been termed "the multitude," and the (unwittingly) allied forces of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Accordingly, I argue that the Cold War cannot be understood simply as a battle between East and West, capitalism and communism, two world orders, or disparate modes of production.

In chapter one, I explore the transition to postmodernism, as the cultural logic of late capitalism, to detail the changing conditions for aesthetic and political dissent against the neo-liberal management of American capitalism and the socialist management of Soviet state capitalism. I explore diplomatic correspondences between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. as well as a number of examples of aesthetic dissent ranging from popular magazines to Soviet subcultures to Leftist American avant-garde visual art and a ten-year old American schoolgirl's quest to discover the truth about the Cold War. In chapter two, I provide a close reading of E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, a meta-fictional, "autobiographical" novel about political life during the Cold War period. I read this text

alongside Louis Althusser's autobiography, *The Future Lasts Forever*, to examine the complexities of locating truth that have resulted from postmodernity's complication of the distinction between subjects and objects. Chapter three presents a historical case study of how the concept of truth was contested within samizdat, the underground late-Soviet self-publishing movement. In particular, I look at *Metropol*, a 1979 samizdat literary anthology, which, I argue exemplifies a form of literary communism within the creative block of actually lived "communism." The fourth and final chapter explores the autobiography of Assata Shakur—communist, former Black Panther, and escaped convict who writes from socialist Cuba. I argue that the complex interplay of narrative forms in her text, as well as her use of intuition as a methodology, exposes a logic of truth that is non-representational, points to similarities between late capitalist and prison temporalities, and radically remaps the discursive parameters of the Cold War.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vii
Introduction: “Clearer Than Truth”: The Logic of the Cold War and its Expressive Antagonists.....	1
Chapter One: Crossing the Line: Postmodernity, Oppositional Aesthetics, and Cold War Correspondences.....	25
Chapter Two: Absent Causality and Shocking Connections: Truth and Revolutionary Reading in Louis Althusser’s Philosophy and E.L. Doctorow’s <i>The Book of Daniel</i> .....	73
Chapter Three: Literary Communism in the Creative Bloc: Samizdat, <i>Metropol</i> , and the Aesthetics of Poverty.....	145
Chapter Four: Literature of Conviction, Communist Chronotopography: Assata Shakur’s Captive Liberation.....	208
Bibliography.....	267

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Still shot from Valeriy Todorovsky's <i>Stilyagi</i> .....	53
Figure 2: Komar and Melamid, <i>Double Self-Portrait As Young Pioneers</i> (1982-1983)...	56
Figure 3: Cover of <i>Soviet Life</i> Magazine (May 1990).....	67
Figure 4: U.S.S.R. Samantha Smith Stamp (1985).....	70

## Introduction

### **“Clearer Than Truth”: The Logic of the Cold War and its Expressive Antagonists**

To soar above a kingdom dim and mute,  
Imagine just how lonely it can get!  
Two-headed eagle, how I envy you—  
Alone and yet you're always tête-à-tête!  
-Andrei Voznesensky

We must have courage and self-  
confidence to cling to our own methods  
and conceptions of human society.  
After all, the greatest danger that can  
befall us in coping with this problem of  
Soviet communism is that we shall  
allow ourselves to become like those  
with whom we are coping.  
-George Kennan

But already Huey Newton, Bobby  
Seale, the members of the Black  
Panther party, George Jackson, and  
others have stopped lamenting their  
fate. The time for the blues is over, for  
them. They are creating, each according  
to his means, a revolutionary  
consciousness. And their eyes are clear.  
Not blue.  
-Jean Genet

On February 27, 1947, Dean Acheson—corporate lawyer and Under Secretary of State—met in the cabinet room of the White House with President Truman, George Marshall, and a small group of congressional leaders to discuss a strategy to ensure Greece would not fall to communists in its upcoming election. The British government

had just sent an urgent memo to the White House warning that it could no longer afford to provide financial support to the “democratic” regime in Greece. Without this assistance, Britain claimed that Greece could fall out of the grip of the American sphere of influence and into the hands of communist powers. Furthermore, if Greece were to become communist, its neighbor Turkey also risked coming under Soviet control.

In an effort to convince congress of the urgency of supporting the Greek “democratic” regime, Acheson delivered an eloquent and forceful speech at this congressional meeting where he outlined what would later become known as the “domino theory.” There, Acheson asserted that the stakes of this election were much greater than simply losing control of Greece and Turkey: “Like apples in a barrel infected by the corruption of one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and alter the Middle East...Africa...Italy and France” (Chafe 65). Moreover, Acheson argued, “Not since Rome and Carthage has there been such a polarization of power on this earth...We and we alone are in a position to break up” the worldwide communist threat (Chafe 65). Following Acheson’s comments, Senator Arthur Vandenberg informed Truman that legislators were so moved by Acheson’s speech and supported his recommendations for financial support so strongly that they demanded the President address Congress and the American public in a radio address to “scare the hell out of the country” (Vidal par.15). According to Gore Vidal, this meeting not only served as the first major impetus to propel the Cold War propaganda machine into action, but also as the very gathering that “officially launched our global empire” (Vidal par.12).

In his autobiography, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, Acheson characterizes his discourse at this meeting as “clearer than truth” (375). Rather than setting up a simple binary between truth and falsity, however, Acheson explains that truth is malleable and only carries value if it can be understood. He writes:

The task of a public officer seeking to explain and gain support for a major policy is not that of the writer of a doctoral thesis. Qualification must give way to simplicity of statement, nicety and nuance to bluntness, almost brutality, in carrying a point home. It is better to carry the hearer or reader into the quadrant of one’s thought than merely to make a noise or mislead him utterly. In the State Department we used to discuss how much time that mythical “Average American citizen” put in each day listening, reading, and arguing about the world outside his own country. Assuming a man or woman with a fair education, a family, and a job in or out of the house, it seemed to us that ten minutes a day would be a high average. If this were anywhere near right, points to be understandable had to be clear. If we made our points clearer than truth, we did not differ from most other educators and could hardly do otherwise. (Acheson 375)

In this passage, Acheson not only admits that official communication during the Cold War exceeded the truth—sometimes to the point of reaching near “brutality”—but he also makes the point that presenting information in excess of truth is no different from standard pedagogical practice. Here, propaganda and scholarship become virtually indistinguishable. Accordingly, Acheson claims that his methodology for producing a

clarity beyond truth is (frighteningly) akin to methodologies that were arising at the same time in a variety of fields from academia to public policy. In effect, Acheson identifies a shifting orientation toward the concept and practice of truth that emerged during the Cold War period in both governmental communication and global culture at large.

While it may seem Acheson is arguing that scholarship and policy depend on two different sets of standards regarding the production and interpretation of truth, I argue to the contrary: Acheson's primary contention is that it is impossible to differentiate propaganda from scholarship as both are discourses wherein the speaker or writer works to produce an argument because he or she believes in the necessity of his or her truth. Similarly, both are discourses intended to relay or produce a truth, albeit one that might be but a fantasy for the thinker involved. For as Acheson states: "It is better to carry the hearer or reader into the quadrant of one's thought than merely to make a noise or mislead him utterly" (Acheson 375). In other words, the clarity to which Acheson refers should not be understood as the opposite of truth. Here, clarity is a supplement to truth; this clarity depends less on the means by which it is represented or can be proven than the ends it serves. Truth can serve no ends if it cannot be understood and believed. Put simply, in this formulation, the importance of truth is its clarity.

If we are, therefore, to follow Acheson's claim that his form of truth-telling is nearly identical to that of academic discourse, then it follows that the most useful way to contest propaganda within the critical academy is by producing visions of truth that are clearer and more powerful than those of the state. Understood in this manner, the form of truth for both dominance and resistance is the same: the potentiality of truth is not what is

immanent to it. In other words, the currency of truth is its clarity, and, more generally, the effects it can have. Here, dissent is positioned simply as the act of producing, exchanging, and containing counter-narratives; the object of reflection becomes divorced from its representation.

This dissertation takes Acheson's concept of "clearer than truth" as a starting point to examine the complicated relationships among truth, production, and interpretation that emerged in similar manners on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War period. Even though this strange notion of "clearer than truth" fell into relative obscurity as the Cold War gained momentum, I argue that Acheson's paradoxical concept of "clearer than truth" became an unspoken yet crucial criterion for regulating the shifting relation between fiction and truth by dominant state powers during the Cold War period on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In addition, I contend that the Berlin Wall, which purportedly separated capitalism from communism for nearly half a century, served not as a barrier between disparate modes of production, but as a permeable divide through which an economy of creative energies circulated between the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and a global, creative class that opposed both of these state regimes. In contemporary Marxian discourse, this creative class has been termed "the multitude."<sup>1</sup>

The most vital object of exchange across this ostensibly impervious divide was the very concept of truth itself. And while the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. functioned as adversaries in the sense that each sought to capture the productive power of truth, they

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<sup>1</sup> For the most thorough assessment of the multitude's (re)emergence in postmodernity, see: Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. Penguin (Non-Classics), 2005. Print.

also acted as unwitting allies in an undeclared *second* cold war against cultural producers on both home fronts. This second cold war can be characterized as a battle between cultural producers and state powers to control and contain the means of cultural production and the proliferation of truths.

To be specific, throughout the Cold War, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. engaged in forceful rhetoric declaring “absolute truths” surrounding ethics of wealth, freedom, community, art, and dissent. At the same time, power on both sides of the Iron Curtain was maintained by blurring the line between fact and fiction—at times by exercising honest skepticism, at times by deliberately engineering paranoia. As the boundaries between truth and falsity, fact and fiction became increasingly complex so too did the conditions for contesting dominant power within both the aesthetic realm and the critical academy. The individual chapters of this dissertation examine disparate attempts by literary authors and critical theorists on both sides of the Iron Curtain to navigate and contest dominant concepts of truth throughout the Cold War. The particular literary works I consider are E.L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel*, an underground Soviet literary collection entitled *Metropol*, and Assata Shakur’s autobiography, *Assata*.

Each in their own way, these texts present innovative narrative strategies and methods of interpretation that allow us to reconsider the geographic and discursive parameters of the Cold War, contest dominant notions of truth, and produce historiographical interventions into how we characterize the Cold War. Like Acheson, the authors and critical figures I engage also write against a transcendent and static notion of truth. Unlike Acheson and the American and Soviet propaganda machines, however,

these authors do not locate the necessity of truth within understanding, representational politics, or a clarity that exceeds truth. To be more precise, in very different ways from each other, these authors refuse a figuration of truth that separates means from ends. Truth for them is not located in surplus of vision, but in the power of necessity, production, and expression.

While the question of truth and narrative production clearly pertains to the Cold War insofar as the Cold War was a war of words fought across a narrative terrain, throughout this dissertation I also show that the concept of truth was important not solely due the Cold War's infiltration into cultural affairs. More precisely, I claim that the concept of truth became increasingly critical during the Cold War because it was developing simultaneously with the global economic transition to a late capitalist mode of production. In that sense, battles over truth and interpretation in aesthetics, politics, and academic affairs were not merely effects of the Cold War. Rather, I claim the entire Cold War and its cultural products were symptoms of the passage to postmodernity as the process of late capitalist globalization.

Therefore, instead of examining how the concept of truth operated during the Cold War as a problematic in its own right, this dissertation approaches the Cold War and transformations in the concept of truth as symptomatic of postmodernity itself. As such, even though the dissertation provides case studies investigating how the concepts of truth, interpretation, and production were navigated in American and Soviet literary, critical, and propagandistic texts during the Cold War period, both the guiding theoretical concept and the historical orientation of the present study are postmodernity.

Moreover, even though I have emphasized Acheson's advocacy of a discourse that is "clearer than truth," the subject of this dissertation should not be mistaken for either Dean Acheson's policy positions or Cold War propaganda. Instead, Acheson's statement illustrates a logic of domination which, I believe, largely came to shape the Cold War and its aftermath. I understand this logic of domination to be one of most essential characteristics of what Fredric Jameson calls "postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism."<sup>2</sup> The case studies presented within, therefore, examine how this cultural logic of domination was negotiated and contested by literary authors and critical theorists on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War period.

The dissident authors I consider did not reject the historical reality of the process of postmodernization, and its radical destabilization and transformation of the conditions for truth. Rather, these authors actively "occupied" the process of postmodernization by creating forceful instantiations of truth—texts that shattered the very illusion that truth is only located in a representational clarity dissociated from the material conditions of its production. More exactly, these authors accentuated the use-value of truth, in turn striking down the foundation of two fundamental logics of postmodern dominant power: first, the spurious notion that the concept of truth lost its relevance and potency in postmodernity; second, the implication that truth's only power resides in a clarity detached from truth itself.

Furthermore, because this dissertation positions postmodernity as "the [global]

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<sup>2</sup> See: Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press Books, 1990. Print.

cultural logic” of late capitalism, many of the critical texts I examine do not have their origin in the U.S. or the former U.S.S.R. I have elected to engage a variety of non-American and non-Soviet critical texts—primarily what we call “post-structuralist theory” in the North America context—not merely for their theoretical utility, but more precisely because the dissertation’s major claim is that the Cold War cannot be understood simply as a battle between East and West, capitalism and communism, two world orders, or disparate modes of production (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 6). The truths of the Cold War must be situated within the global context of capitalism’s transformation from primarily an industrial to a post-industrial mode of production. The critical texts I examine are responses to, as well as symptoms of this transformation. Consequently, insofar as late capitalism is nearly synonymous with the concept of capitalist globalization, it would be disingenuous to study the Cold War and its cultural products from either an area studies approach or the perspective of two isolated economic empires.

At the same time, even as I reject an area studies or comparative approach for this project, I am deliberately prioritizing the concept of postmodernism over that of globalization because globalization is *not* strictly a postmodern phenomenon. The global spread of humans, animals, ideas, diseases, currencies, and goods clearly predates our historical moment by millennia. The constitutive difference between postmodern globalization and the globalizations that came before it, however, is that postmodernity involves a single mode of production (i.e., late capitalism) taking hold at a global level. It is imperative for this project, therefore, that I privilege the concept of postmodernity over globalization. In other words, the concept of postmodernity as I am using it necessarily

involves globalization; globalization does not necessarily involve postmodernity. Additionally, this project is neither an argument in favor nor against postmodern globalization. Instead, it is a mapping of diverse literary and critical texts produced within the Cold War, which offer, at times, impossible renderings of the concept of truth.<sup>3</sup> The common connection between these texts is their production of what Geoffrey Pleyers calls an “alter-globalization.”<sup>4</sup>

During the second half of the Twentieth Century—and especially since the collapse of the Soviet empire—a variety of thinkers have turned to the writings of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) to both understand the emergence of the multitude as a constituent power of alter-globalization and to locate a politically resistant form of truth.<sup>5</sup> Within the chapters of this study, I will return to the issue of the multitude as a global, constitutive power. Here, though, I would like to explore Spinoza’s concept of truth to illustrate how

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<sup>3</sup> By impossibility, I refer to the concept Gilles Deleuze develops from Gottfried Leibniz’s original deployment of the term. For Deleuze, impossibility pertains to antinomial, intermediary, divergent concepts folded into the same monadic world, despite appearing so contradictory as to be incapable of co-existence. For Deleuze, impossibilities are not, in fact, contradictory; instead, they are divergences that constitute singular parts of the same expressive, monadic universe. See: Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. Columbia University Press, 1995. Print; *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. 1st ed. Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1992. Print; and *The Logic of Sense*. Columbia University Press, 1990. Print.

<sup>4</sup> See: Pleyers, Geoffrey. *Alter-Globalization*. 1st ed. Polity, 2011. Print.

<sup>5</sup> See, among others: Althusser, Louis, and Etienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Verso, 1990; Deleuze, Gilles. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York, Zone Books, 1990; “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics’.” *The New Spinoza*. Eds. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. Theory Out of Bounds Series. Vol 11. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997. 21-36; *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988; Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Reprint. Harvard University Press, 2001. Print; Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1981; Macherey, Pierre. “The Encounter with Spinoza.” *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Paul Patton. Blackwell Critical Reader Series. Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. 139-161; Montag, Warren. *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and his Contemporaries*. New York: Verso, 1999.

it serves as an antidote to Acheson's emphasis on clarity over truth and corresponds to the divergent concepts of truth generated by the authors considered in this study.

To be clear, I am taking a specific cut into Spinoza's onto-epistemology for three primary reasons. First, Spinoza's ontological system of substance, attributes, and modes provides a totalizing framework through which to understand how texts and readers interact within a fully subsumed, late capitalist global world order. Second, Spinoza's system is utterly anti-anthropomorphic, and, as a result, forces a reassessment of common notions regarding the relationship between subjects and objects, readers and texts. Third, Spinoza's onto-epistemology, as explicated by Gilles Deleuze, does not do away with the category of representation; instead, it prioritizes nonrepresentational, conceptual, and intuitive knowledge over the superficial and problematic category of representation. So far as the category of truth is concerned, taken together, these facets of Spinoza's thought provide a structure in which it is possible to identify the qualitative differences between propagandistic pursuits to dominate the effects of truth and resistant attempts to express truth in a nonrepresentational manner within the ontological conditions of the Cold War. The authors I examine reveal that impossible worlds existed on a global level throughout the Cold War in spite of dominant power's attempt to position the world as a choice between totalitarian state capitalism and "representative" democratic exploitation.

To understand Spinoza's concept of truth, we must first chart his ontology of substance, attributes, and modes. By substance, Spinoza refers to "that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself: in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception" (*Ethics* 45). For Spinoza, God is the only

substance; however, his concept of God does not refer to a transcendent or theistic figure. God is, rather, an infinite being “consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality” (Spinoza, *Ethics* 45). In other words, Spinoza’s God constitutes an ontological unity made up of all expressions of what does and has existed. God is not external to the world; God is (a single, monadic) substance.

Unlike the Cartesian tradition, which definitively separates mind from body as two separate substances, Spinoza rejects this dangerous dualism. Instead, he presents a theory of attributes as a way of understanding the complex interaction between thought and extension, each of which belong to the same substance. He defines attributes as both infinite and “what the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence” (Spinoza 47). Yet, even though Spinoza claims an infinity of attributes does exist, he also states that thought and extension are the only attributes humans currently perceive. The human mind, then, is neither separated from nor oppositional to the body. The mind is, simply, an expression of the body in the realm of thought.

Finally, Spinoza accounts for individual mind-bodies through his theory of modes. In basic terms, modes are modifications of substance. Like the attributes they modify, modes are infinite. While humans constitute one particular form of the modification of substance, one should not take the human to be substance’s only mode. Here, I am focusing specifically on human modes in order return to the issue of truth and its relation to the postmodern mind-body. In the realm of extension, substance is modified through motion and rest. In the realm of thought, substance is modified through intellect. Our thoughts can be characterized as either adequate or inadequate; the power

of these ideas depends on transforming the imagination (representations and impressions of ideas in relation to particular modes) into reason (understanding ideas as implicated in the totality of a single substance).

An inadequate idea corresponds to confused knowledge that has reference only to the human mind. Specifically, Spinoza claims that “the human mind does not perceive any external body as actually existing, except through the ideas of the modifications of its own body” (Spinoza 105). In contrast, an adequate idea is rational, orderly, and situated in a causal nexus. Adequate ideas are intellectual and point to the common nature of things; inadequate ideas inhabit only the imagination of human modes. In this formulation, falsity functions as the privation of the knowledge of causal necessity. That is not to say, however, that a Spinozian true idea correlates exactly with the contemporary binary between truth and falsity. Regarding truth, Spinoza writes, “All ideas, in so far as they are referred to God, are true. Proof—All ideas which are in God agree in every respect with their objects, therefore they are all true” (Spinoza 108). Here, truth is positioned as both object and cause. Ideas are true not because of their verity; they are true because they exist in a causal relationship with substance and express the *whole truth* of their placement within that system.

In addition to truth, Spinoza also discusses clarity. He asks: “What can there be which is clearer and more certain than a true idea, to serve as a standard of truth? As the light makes both itself and the darkness plain, so truth is the standard both of itself and of the false” (114). That is, just as light exists as the absolute materialization of what it both illuminates and disguises, truth serves as the absolute condition for what it does and does

not reveal. As far as clarity is concerned, it simply does not exist as a remainder to truth; there is nothing clearer than truth because truth “agrees in every respect with [its] object” (Spinoza 108). Truth is absolute. In this peculiar explanation of truth and clarity, Spinoza reveals Acheson’s insistence on the representational and exterior nature of clarity in relation to truth to be nothing more than a very inadequate idea—one that exists in the first and most imaginary form of knowledge.

As I previously stated, the dissident authors considered in this study locate and produce truth neither in clarity nor vision, but in the power of necessity, production, and expression. By expression, I refer to the concept Gilles Deleuze produces by explicating Spinoza’s philosophy in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. For Deleuze, expression is both an ontological and epistemological procedure involving two processes of engaging substance as the condition of possibility for all production. These procedures are explication and implication. Deleuze writes,

Expression is on the one hand an explication, an unfolding of what expresses itself, the One manifesting itself in the Many (substance manifesting itself in its attributes, and these attributes manifesting themselves in their modes). Its multiple expression, on the other hand, involves Unity. The One remains involved in what it expresses, imprinted in what it unfolds, immanent in whatever manifests it: expression is in this respect an involvement...Expression in general involves and implicates what it expresses, while also explicating and evolving it. (Deleuze, *Expressionism* 16)

In the first procedure of expression—explication—substance undergoes a metamorphosis by expressing itself through its attributes in its modes. However, this metamorphosis should not be understood as the work of the subject. Deleuze clearly does not privilege the subject's role in explication: "It is not understanding that explicates substance... the explications of substance refer necessarily to an understanding that understands them" (Deleuze, *Expressionism* 18). That is to say, even though explication is a process connecting modes (be them objects or subjects) with substance via attributes, Deleuze's emphasis is not on the "doer" of the explication. Rather, his focus is on the object transformed in the act of explication, the "understanding that understands [the explication]" (Deleuze, *Expressionism* 18). In other words, he emphasizes the object transformed by the mode performing the explication instead of the subject transformed by the act of explication.

Deleuze's insistence on de-emphasizing the subject, however, should be understood as neither a disavowal of the process of thought nor an abnegation of the subject per se. To the contrary, by emphasizing the object transformed via explication over our understandings of those explications, Deleuze demonstrates a mode of inquiry that is neither exhausted by the category of representation nor confined to the ideology of thought as the private property of the subject. The object retains an immanent potential to be constantly shaped anew by its encounter with other modes. Representation is, after all, the most inadequate form of knowledge for Spinoza—knowledge that only involves "the ideas of the modifications of [the subject's] own body" (Spinoza 105). Surely,

representation is involved in explication, but the latter is not defined or limited by the former.

Deleuze thus explicates Spinoza's onto-epistemology to produce a theory wherein expression and representation are always immanent to each other, yet expression always precedes and takes precedence over representation. If one is to approach only the diachronic level of representation, then he or she will be stuck in the realm of the imaginary—in other words, with an inadequate idea that does not reveal God as cause. To be clear, by imaginary I am referring not only to Spinoza's use of the term, but also to Jacques Lacan's order of the imaginary—the field of the relationship between the ego and its images that is both utterly alienating and distorts the discourse of the Other.<sup>6</sup> The common nature of production is lost when the process of representation is limited to an individual's interaction with an object. Deleuze is not interested in knowledge that remains within the category of representation alone because it can only ever stop at the level of the imaginary and can never reach the third knowledge—intuition—which “leads us to go beyond the state of experience toward the conditions of experience” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 26).

Deleuze demonstrates the totality of Spinoza's expressive system by asserting that “Spinoza's philosophy is a ‘Logic’...[and] the nature and rules of this Logic constitute [Spinoza's] Method” (Deleuze 129). In this system, there is no division between ontology

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<sup>6</sup> See: Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Alan Sheridan. W. W. Norton & Company, 1998. Print; and Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses (Vol. Book III) (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan)*. Trans. Jacques-Alain Miller & Russell Grigg. W. W. Norton & Company, 1997. Print.

(being), logic (knowing) and method (doing). That is not to say, however, that these categories lose their distinction when taken together. Rather, the point for Deleuze is that Method as expression is immanent to substance and not an operation that occurs exterior to substance as the common nature of all production.

Deleuze explains that Spinoza's immanent Method contains three distinct parts, each of which are common to the others and are thereby always already drawn into their counterparts. The first part of the Method can be understood as reflexive; it concerns knowing *our* power of knowing. At this level, any fiction can be construed as a truth "*insofar as it is explained by our power of knowing*" (Deleuze 139, italics original). For our purposes, this is the level of knowledge at which clarity and propaganda operate. However, according to Deleuze, the second level of Spinoza's Method concerns the relationship between the means and end of actualizing (and hence realizing) the knowledge accrued at the previous level. There is always an idea from the first level, but it is our job to make it adequate—in other words, *expressive* of its cause—God.

Just as Spinoza claims it is impossible to start from the proposition of God but we should nonetheless try at all costs to get there as quickly as possible, his Method demands we move swiftly through the first step in order to come to know the idea of substance qua substance. Once made adequate, substance is both expressed and expressive. Finally, from the second methodological stage we are immediately faced with the third knowledge in which means and ends find their unity. Regarding this final unity, Deleuze writes:

How should we understand this last unity? An idea never has as its cause an object it represents; rather does it represent an object because it expresses *its* own cause. An idea has, then, a content, expressive and not representative, that is to be referred solely to the power of thinking. But the power of thinking is what constitutes the form of an idea as such. The concrete unity of the two appears when all ideas are deduced one from another, materially from the idea of God, formally according to the power of form, as logical form, and content, as expressive content, are conjoined in the sequence of ideas (Deleuze, *Expression* 139-140).

As a totalizing methodology that reveals the nature of production as common across all borders, Deleuze's concept of expression serves as an apposite and unequaled methodology to understand the conditions of creative production, and their transformation during the process of Cold War globalization. Unlike Acheson's method, which separates means from ends, Deleuze's concept refuses a figuration of truth that disconnects an object from its conditions of being. Furthermore, Spinoza's onto-epistemology, as detailed by Deleuze, offers an anti-anthropomorphic approach to studying the relationship between subjects and objects. It is, therefore, particularly compatible with the historical emergence of postmodern/posthumanist subjectivity and its political exigencies, limitations, and possibilities. Lastly, the concept of expression occasions an approach to the concept of truth that is qualitatively distinct from propagandistic representational strategies.

In the following chapters, I present four case studies pertaining to the questions of truth and clarity as they were navigated and contested by authors in both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War period. These texts locate political potentiality and contestation in the act of expression itself. Their authors do not attempt to re-present the Cold War within the imaginary discursive constraints of postmodern domination. Instead, they work to express the fundamental productive and resistant potentialities that remained present and in plain sight within the most repressive alcoves of capitalist domination on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

In the first chapter, “Crossing the Line: Postmodernity, Oppositional Aesthetics, and Cold War Correspondence,” I situate the Cold War within a broad network of Marxian discourses which consider the changing economic and cultural conditions of postmodernity. I then examine how late capitalism has complicated the conditions for opposition and resistance—especially as they pertain to aesthetic interventions. In particular, I develop an argument in favor of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of the simulacrum and minoritarian literature to illustrate how dominant and oppositional aesthetics are qualitatively and absolutely distinct from each other.

After providing an overview of the political conditions for aesthetic dissent during the Cold War period, I consider a variety of cases of correspondence between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. On the one hand, I investigate diplomatic cables and telegrams sent between the two countries during the first five years of the Cold War. By closely examining these materials, I demonstrate how the issues of truth and reception were at the forefront of propagandistic efforts by each world power. In opposition to the notion

that truth was but an obstacle in need of circumvention by the two propaganda machines, it is clear in these texts that the question of truth was at the very center of their respective pursuits for global dominance. On the other hand, I consider the popular publications of *Soviet Life* and *Amerika* as a collusionary attempt by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to limit the production of truth to their own representations.

Second, I shift my attention to the final years of the Cold War to show how citizens in both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. sought to produce their own antagonistic forms of truth that opposed dominant concepts of truth and reality. In particular, I highlight instances in which citizens on both sides of the Iron Curtain privileged expression over clarity, immanence over representation. To that end, I offer a brief history of dissident aesthetic movements in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, with special focus on the Sots-Art movement. Additionally, I examine the correspondence between a ten year-old American schoolgirl, Samantha Smith, and Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov. In their correspondence, Smith refuses supposedly “rational” constructions of authority to pose two questions of world historical consequences: “What is the truth of the Cold War?” and “Why should she *not* be afraid?”

In the second chapter, “Absent Causality and Shocking Connections: Truth and Revolutionary Reading in Louis Althusser’s Philosophy and E.L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel*,” I approach the concept of truth through an examination of how meta-fiction relates to postmodern historical reality. Here, I engage E.L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel* and Louis Althusser’s autobiography, *The Future Lasts Forever*. In so doing, I question whether it is possible to assign political and ethical responsibility in a

postmodern world where the distinctions between subject and object, fact and fiction have purportedly ceased to exist.

Doctorow's novel serves as a meta-narrative for the matters of truth and causality during the first half of the Cold War. The plot ostensibly centers on the story of the Paul and Rochelle Isaacson—fictionalized versions of the Rosenberg couple who were executed in 1953 for allegedly sharing the secret of the atomic bomb with the Soviets. Their son, Daniel, is deeply troubled by his inherited political and juridical legacy. As a result of his neurotic desire to grasp the truth of his personal history, he attempts—unsuccessfully—to sublimate what he feels is his political, familial, and societal obligations. He does so by writing an autobiographical dissertation concerning the history into which he was born. Ultimately, Daniel is unable to find a form for his narrative adequate to what he perceives as his complicated reality. Doctorow's text thus leads the reader through a series of fragmentary dead ends in which the causes of Daniel's narrative, his subjective responsibility, and his ethical obligations appear absent.

Similarly, Louis Althusser's autobiography attempts to ascertain the truth of whether or not he ultimately bears responsibility for murdering his wife while mentally ill. To answer this question, he reflects on his earlier philosophical works on absent causality and aleatory materialism. According to his theory of aleatory materialism, history is a process without subjects—a process that occurs by chance, contingent encounters. When he approaches his previous theory in his autobiography, he is stymied by his inability to apply it to his own life conditions. By engaging Althusser's critics and his texts, I argue that his failure to understand his own actions lies not in his philosophy,

but in his inability to read his own philosophy and life history through the concept of absent causality he developed in *Reading Capital*.

I place Doctorow's novel in conversation with Louis Althusser's autobiography because each of these texts grapples with similar questions about truth, narrative, form, and causality in the postmodern moment. In the end, both call into question the concept of the subject and the very category of autobiography. Thus, I read Althusser's autobiography as *autobiography*, not as merely a conceptual tool to be applied to other texts, to demonstrate how both of these texts occupy a similar postmodern, globalized world where the distinction between subjects and objects has broken down. Ultimately, neither text succeeds in answering the questions it asks. However, by reading these texts together, I identify the stopgaps within the characters' and authors' strategies for determining truth. In the end, I argue that the concepts of symptomatic reading and complementarity allow us to read texts together to produce politically resistant, non-relativistic forms of truth.

In the third chapter, "Literary Communism in the Creative Bloc: Samizdat, *Metropol*, and the Aesthetics of Poverty," I provide an extended history of the concept of truth as it was navigated in the *samizdat* underground from the 1950s until the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, I focus on *Metropol*, a 1979 samizdat collection of essays and literary works. Unlike previous samizdat authors who sought to avert the state's attention, *Metropol's* editors presented their collection to the state and demanded its publication on the grounds of aesthetic merit.

It is tempting to interpret their demand as evidence that freedom of self-

expression can be measured in words. I call this conclusion into question, however, by examining how *Metropol's* writers critiqued both the graphomaniacal nature of the samizdat movement at large and the pursuits of other samizdat writers to focus merely on recording the reality of Soviet oppression. In so doing, I argue that *Metropol* offers a method for producing truth in opposition to the truths offered by more well-known samizdat works. I then examine *Metropol's* editor's concept of an "aesthetics of poverty" as a method of re-investing non-realist aesthetic objects with political significance. Finally, I situate *Metropol* within Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of literary communism to argue that literary communism expressed a form of aesthetic-political agency against Soviet state power within the U.S.S.R. In other words, this chapter presents a literary history of communism within "communism."

In the fourth and final chapter, "Literature of Conviction, Communist Chronotopography: Assata Shakur's Captive Liberation," I provide a close reading of the autobiography of Assata Shakur—former Black Panther, political prisoner, and escaped convict living as a political refugee in Cuba. While representing herself in court against accusations that she was an accessory to murder, Shakur urged jurors to listen not to what witnesses had to say about her, but instead to how they said it (Shakur 244). Her tactic of valuing form over content is also expressed in the structure of her autobiography, which moves between prose, poetry, and official court records. I argue that the formal structure of her book provides truer portrait of herself than the facts of her case ever could. I also look at how she depicts her interrogation by the state and her own methods of

undermining these efforts. In so doing, I engage Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* and Gilles Deleuze's work on intuition.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, I read Shakur's text alongside Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope—a theory demonstrating the ways literature represents the relationship between time and space in particular historical moments. The temporal structure of Shakur's text and her descriptions of life behind bars produce a chronotopic image of the time of life emptied and transformed by late capitalism. I draw upon Michael Hardt's essay, "Prison Time," to argue that late capitalism dissolves the differences between the time of work and the time of life—a conclusion Shakur herself arrives at in her autobiography.

Furthermore, I investigate Jean Paul Sartre's writings on "committed literature" to consider how Shakur's narrative navigation of her own politics puts the utility of discourse analysis and identity politics into question; in the end, she privileges a methodology of intuition. I consider how Shakur's material and linguistic experiences as a Black woman within the relatively egalitarian racial relations of Cuba transform her personal conceptions of belief and truth. In so doing, I demonstrate both how Shakur's text cripples the U.S.'s attempts to use her race to convict her without evidence and how her text's complex interplay of literary forms and narrative temporalities serves as a powerful weapon in the Cold War to control the production of a truth. The reality that Shakur makes absolutely certain is that truth requires neither external authority nor representational clarity, but only an intuitive knowledge that change is always possible.

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<sup>7</sup> Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Columbia University Press, 1984. Print.

## Chapter One

### **Crossing the Line: Postmodernity, Oppositional Aesthetics, and Cold War Correspondences**

No cross no crown.

-Francis Quarles

In his 1986 essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Fredric Jameson argues that critical scholarship has tended to collapse American and Soviet cultures into a “convergence theory” whereby the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. are considered “largely the same thing” (Jameson, “Third World” 67). While the focus of his essay is specifically on the scarcity of the inclusion of third world literature in the first world canon (and hence not on the so-called second world or the former Soviet Union), Jameson neither contests the validity of this “convergence theory” nor develops an argument as to why its use might be appropriate in the era of multinational capitalism.

It strikes me as curious, however, that the very thinker who had only two years earlier published the article which served as the basis for the first major study on postmodern culture, and who had also consistently argued for the necessity of thinking in terms of totalities and cultural dominants, would neglect to explain if the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were or were not “largely the same thing.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, from the standpoint of today—

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<sup>8</sup> See: Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” *New Left Review* I.146 (1984): 53–92. Print; and Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press Books, 1990. Print.

more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall—it easy to see how the Iron Curtain served as a conceptual limit to understanding the effect of multinational capitalism in the formerly “socialist” world. That is to say, even if the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were “largely the same thing” and anti-Soviet Marxists knew that the late Soviet regime was, at best, a club for confused bureaucrats who had misunderstood Marx’s fundamental message, the Iron Curtain had to be figuratively broken down in order to consider the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. together. Instead of merely geographically separating east from west, the Iron Curtain also engendered an entire discursive repository (i.e., communist, socialist, capitalist, totalitarianism, democracy, etc.) that required dismantling if a Marxist were to even consider how global capitalism was transforming cultural logics in both national contexts.

Writing from the privileged position of hindsight and armed with a mostly dismantled critical lexicon, in this chapter I examine how dissidents as well as Soviet and American authorities crossed the line—metaphorically and literally—in various ways during the Cold War. To begin with, I examine the concept of postmodernity as it relates to the global spread of capitalism on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In particular, I look at the twin forms of managing capital—neoliberalism and socialism—to argue that the Iron Curtain, the line purportedly separating capitalism from communism for nearly half a century, was primarily a symbolic limit. In so doing, I engage a variety of contemporary Marxian thinkers including Fredric Jameson, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolfe.

Next, I turn to the question of oppositional aesthetics and the production of truth

as critical theorists navigated it both before and during the Cold War period. I consider a variety of positions on the proper form of aesthetic dissent within a postmodern world where the distinction between inside and outside has ceased to exist. Specifically, I engage works by Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari. Ultimately, I argue that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the simulacrum, a minor literature, and expression provide the most adequate framework to understand dissent, or crossing a line, within the confines of the cultural logic of late capitalism. In this section I also analyze contemporary literary criticism on Cold War and postmodern literature.

In the third section of this chapter, I examine how various artistic subcultures exercised dissent in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War period. Some of the subcultures I examine include: *stilyagi*, samizdat, Ruskii rock, and leftist American avant-garde painting. I focus specifically on the ways in which both state powers sought to appropriate the creative energies of these subcultures in order to maintain aesthetic domination and further their own late capitalist agendas.

Finally, I return to the question of truth and the Cold War by investigating a series of correspondences between American and Soviet diplomats and citizens. In the first case, I show how the question of truth was at the forefront of questions of policy in both national contexts by examining early Cold War diplomatic cables. I then turn to the correspondence between Samantha Smith and Yuri Andropov to illustrate an example of how a ten year-old American schoolgirl crossed the line of political propriety by questioning the Soviet leader directly about his motivations for nuclear war. The

correspondence between Smith and Andropov serves to demonstrate how the question of truth remained a powerful weapon for everyday citizens and state powers until the very end of the Cold War.

### **I. The Development of Postmodernism During the Cold War**

Even though postmodernism is frequently regarded as an aesthetic style, following Jameson I understand postmodernism to be identical with the “cultural logic of late capitalism” (Jameson xii). For Jameson, late capitalism differs from earlier forms of capitalism primarily in the relationship between base and superstructure. According to Karl Marx’s elaboration of base and superstructure in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the economic base is comprised of “relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production”—in other words, the whole of productive relationships (Marx 13). Superstructure, on the other hand, “corresponds to definite forms of consciousness” that result from these economic relationships (Marx, *Contribution* 14). As a result of the relationship between base and superstructure, Marx argues, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx, *Contribution* 13). In other words, according to Marx, differing forms of human existence do not result from the values held by individuals; legal, cultural, institutional, religious, and political forces are effects of the economic realities of relationships between

individuals.<sup>9</sup>

For Jameson, as well as many earlier thinkers such as those belonging to the Frankfurt School, the traditional Marxian distinction between base and superstructure no longer applies to the system of late capitalist production. In late capitalism, base and superstructure implode into each other making it impossible to differentiate the cultural and the political/economic realms. As a consequence of this collapse, Jameson states, “[we seem to be] obligated in advance to talk about cultural phenomena at least in business terms if not in those of political economy” (*Postmodernism* xxi). In other words, the effect of late capitalist power on its cultural products cannot be viewed deterministically. Postmodernism, as the cultural logic of late capitalism, informs economic conditions to the same degree that economic conditions affect production. If there ever was a distinction between base and superstructure, late capitalism has rendered this division both indeterminable and inadequate.

Jameson develops his concept of postmodernism in conversation with Marxist economist Ernest Mandel’s work on “late capitalism” and sociologist Daniel Bell’s

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<sup>9</sup> To be clear, this is but one account of Marx’s distinction between economics and culture. I am using this particular description of the relationship between base and superstructure because it is the one Jameson critiques. It should be noted, however, that Marx himself provided a more adequate and nuanced treatment of the relationship between culture and economics, especially with his concept of commodity fetishism wherein human relationships are mediated and transformed by capitalism to appear as relationships between things. See, in particular, Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. Penguin Classics, 1992. Print, 163-178.

research on “post-industrial society.”<sup>10</sup> In *Late Capitalism*, Mandel argues that the capitalist mode of production has been marked by three distinct periods: freely competitive capitalism (1700-1850), imperialist monopoly capitalism (1850-1940s), and late capitalism (post-World War II-present). For Mandel, the dominant features of late capitalism, which differentiate it from earlier forms of capitalism, are globalized labor markets, multi-national corporations, financial flows of liquid capital, and mass consumption. The economic period that Mandel examines as late capitalism is approached by Bell in sociological terms. In *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, Bell claims that society in the post-war period should be conceptualized as increasingly “post-industrial.” By post-industrial, Bell refers to global societal transformations wherein knowledge becomes a form of capital itself, and economies transform from primarily goods-based to service-based. In the post-industrial world, creativity and communication become the “centrality of theoretical knowledge as the source of innovation and policy formation for the society” (Bell 121). To be clear, Bell does not situate late capitalism as fully post-industrial; as the title of his book, published first in 1973, suggests: his theory of post-industrial society is a “forecast” for what is to come.

Jameson finds utility in Mandel and Bell’s concepts not merely for their historical periodization. Rather, he draws from their theories to produce his concept of

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<sup>10</sup> See: Bell, Daniel. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*. 1st Printing. Basic Books, 1976. Print; and Mandel, Ernest. *Late Capitalism*. 2nd ed. Verso, 1998. Print.

postmodernism as the “cultural logic” of these social and economic transformations on a global level. According to Jameson, the main features of postmodernism are: the waning of affect, the replacement of depth with superficiality, the subject’s transformation from alienated to fragmented, and the replacement of history with pastiche. While not every cultural product necessarily involves every attribute of postmodernism, for Jameson postmodernism is a global cultural dominant. That is to say, even though the development of post-industrial capitalism has occurred unevenly in what is called the first, second and third worlds and on both sides of the former Iron Curtain, like Jameson, I maintain that this uneven post-industrial development does not negate the fact that postmodernism has affected the entire globe since at least the beginning of the Cold War. However, this assertion does not mean that industrial production has ceased to exist. Increasingly, industrial production has been exported out of the gaze of Western eyes. Nevertheless, I argue that the cultural logic of late capitalism has spread globally more rapidly than post-industrial production has replaced the industrial capitalist form. The fact that industrial production continues to occur does not undo the cultural and discursive changes that postmodernism has made present in all places.

In order to understand how the Cold War functioned as a symptom of postmodernity, it is first necessary to position the Soviet economy within the framework of late capitalism. All too often the Cold War is approached simply as a struggle between capitalism and communism with the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. serving as representatives of these opposing economic systems. While I do not necessarily disagree with this position completely, very few historical studies on the Cold War adequately examine how the

mode of production of capitalism itself changed with the process of postmodernization. Therefore, I claim that to comprehend battles of truth fought throughout the Cold War, we must first understand the dominant cultural logic that served as their condition of possibility by positioning the Soviet economy as neither communist nor socialist, but rather state capitalist.

In “Lessons From the U.S.S.R: Taking Marxian Theory the Next Step,” Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff present a strong argument asserting the similarities between the late Soviet and late capitalist economies. Here, they describe the Soviet Union’s mode of production as state capitalist. Their argument forces us to reassess how we characterize both the Cold War and the Soviet/post-Soviet divide. It centers on the need for contemporary Marxian theory to return to Marx’s claim that class structures should be analyzed in relation to surplus value extraction. They allege that Marxian analyses have tended to focus on vaguely defined conceptions of power between classes rather than specific “organization[s] of surplus labor” (Resnick and Wolff 210). Regarding late Soviet labor extraction, Resnick and Wolff conclude: “[The] difference between those who produced and those who received the surplus stands in stark contrast to the identification of the two as the same that stands as the class *definition* of communism” (Resnick and Wolff 217). Because the Soviet state and its bureaucratic representatives hoarded the surplus value of both material and cognitive production throughout the Cold War, I characterize the Soviet Union not as a totalitarian socialist regime but instead as a monopolistic and exploitative state corporation. Following this reading of Soviet economics, then, it is no longer possible to reproduce the spurious links between

capitalism-democracy-freedom and communism-totalitarianism-censorship. Ultimately, I maintain, both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were capitalist countries unwittingly collaborating in late capitalism's attempts to usurp the means of (cultural) production from a common, global creative class.

Surely, my position is contentious: while many scholars (as well as Soviet politicians) point to the fact that the Soviet Union never fully realized the utopia of communism, it likely sounds naïve to argue that the U.S.S.R.'s economy was state capitalist and not socialist. To be clear, though, I am arguing that socialism and capitalism are simply two sides of the same coin. First in *The Labor of Dionysus* and later in *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make a similar claim regarding the Soviet economy. In the latter text, they draw parallels between the Soviet state's intervention and bureaucratization in the production circuit, and neoliberal capitalism's attempts to intervene in the so-called free market to privatize wealth. In the case of both socialism and neoliberalism, what is at stake is the *distribution*, not the *production* of value. Hardt and Negri write, "Socialism, in the final analysis, is a regime for the promotion and regulation of industrial capital, a regime of work discipline imposed through government and bureaucratic institutions" (*Commonwealth* 269). In other words, they differentiate neoliberalism from socialism not as economic opposites, but as diverse techniques for managing the same economic system: capitalism.

Instead of simply focusing on the transformation from industrial to post-industrial capitalism, Hardt and Negri also describe the process of postmodernization as the movement toward a completely biopolitical mode of production. By biopolitical

production, they refer to the concept Michel Foucault first coined in a 1974 Rio de Janeiro lecture entitled “The Birth of Social Medicine” and later expanded upon in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*.<sup>11</sup> In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes changes that began to occur in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when capitalist powers produced “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, *History* 140). With the advent of capitalist modernity, Foucault claims that dominant political power shifted its focus away from threatening death for people who did not submit to its directives to managing the intricacies of their everyday lives—through health initiatives, population controls, etc. Foucault argues that the radical shift to the era of biopolitical management accounts for “nothing less than the entry of life into history, that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques” (Foucault, *History* 141-142). That is not to say, however, that life was divorced from history before biopolitical regimes came to power. Instead, Foucault emphasizes how the concept of life, rather than death, became the primary regulatory mechanism of modern political power: “a normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (*History* 144).

While Foucault explicitly discusses the emergence of biopolitical management in relation to the birth of modern capitalism and the state powers that managed it, Hardt and Negri explore biopolitical domination and resistance primarily from the view that the

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<sup>11</sup> See: Michel Foucault, “The Birth of Social Medicine” in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 2000), 134-156; and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 133-159.

nation-state has lost much of its power as a political form in late capitalism. In particular, they claim that since at least the 1960s and 1970s, the act of producing has become increasingly based on “faculties, competencies, and knowledges...acquired on the job but, more important, those accumulated outside work” (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 132). While the nation-state works to capture these productive potentialities, it does so primarily in the interests of capitalism itself. Hardt and Negri posit the new political force that seeks to capture this creative potential as “Empire,” or rather, fully-subsumed, globalized late capitalism. Multitude, they contend, serves as the “living alternative that grows within Empire” as well as the global, common, creative class that produces biopolitical capital both for and against Empire (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* xiii). For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is the collective subject that can produce democracy (the common) through non-representative network power. In this formulation, the multitude is understood as something immanent to but other than Empire.<sup>12</sup>

With capitalism’s transformation to a fully biopolitical form, Hardt and Negri argue that the multitude produces a crisis for both neoliberalism and socialism. To be precise, the generation of value in late capitalist production comes primarily through knowledge production and social relations. However, while late capitalism is dependent

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that while many scholars have critiqued Hardt and Negri’s supposedly uncomplicated celebration of the multitude as necessarily revolutionary, both Hardt and Negri and a number of other thinkers ranging from Paolo Virno to Warren Montag have argued that we must approach the multitude as an ambivalent figure. For the best elaborations on the multitude as potentially revolutionary *and* self-defeating, see: Montag, Warren. “Who’s Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104.4 (2005): 655–673. Print; and Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Semiotext. First US ed. Trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, & Andrea Casson. Semiotext(e), 2004. Print.

on biopolitical labor, the labor it requires is also “increasingly autonomous from capitalist control since its schema of cooperation is no longer provided externally, by capital, as it is in the factory, but generated within the productive process” itself (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 270). For both socialist and neoliberal states, this transition in the form of labor poses a massive problem. Hardt and Negri write:

First, knowledge is no longer merely a means to the creation of value (in the commodity form), but rather the production of knowledge is itself value creation. Second, not only is this knowledge no longer a weapon of capitalist control, but also capital is in fact confronted with a paradoxical situation: the more it is forced to pursue valorization through knowledge production, the more that knowledge escapes its control. (*Commonwealth* 267-268)

In the case of both neoliberalism and socialism during the Cold War, neither state regime was able to adequately manage the productive forces that late capitalist managerial techniques—both neoliberal and socialist—depend on. In that regard, capitalism transformed at a much faster rate than either the United States or the Soviet Union was prepared to control. As a consequence of the inability of either state power to properly manage the forces of production, the multitude emerged on both sides of the Iron Curtain with a common goal: social autonomy and cultural creativity (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 270).

The authors and theorists I examine in this study are, in many ways, both products and producers of the emergence of the multitude in postmodernity. While many of these

authors were neither aligned with a Communist Party nor even recognized themselves as “communists,” I claim that their cultural production can be characterized as communist according to Marx and Engels’s definition of the term: “Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society: all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labor of others by means of such appropriation” (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto* 38). Following this definition of communism, I examine writers on both sides of the Iron Curtain who sought to resist cultural control by late capitalism—especially the ways that it sought to exploitatively refigure the notion of truth to maintain its own economic dominance.

Accordingly, I contend that the Cold War *was* a fight between capitalism and communism, yet not primarily a struggle between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. In fact, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were unwitting allies to maintain capitalist domination and secure the production of truth for this effort. That is, even though the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. each attempted to control domestic and global production by creating narratives, “truths,” and political policies to ensure that neither the other country nor their own citizens usurped this power, I claim that each of these nations were acting above all in the interest of capital, not the nation-state. In view of this historical orientation, throughout the dissertation I foreground the ontological conditions of production that affected the necessity for a refigured notion of truth in the first place.

## **II. Aesthetic Dissent and the Question of Truth in Postmodernity**

While the Cold War developed as a symptom of postmodernity, the parameters of truth and fiction also transformed dramatically. As a result, critics on both the right and left have waged similar critiques of postmodernism—specifically with regard to how skepticism towards metanarratives has relativized the concept of truth to such a degree that political discourse in general, and commitments to social change in particular, appear futile. My approach to this problematic is to take a position neither in favor nor against postmodernity as a viable political agenda. Rather than representing a political program, I understand postmodernity to be a global, discursive, and historical phenomenon requiring critical engagement if we are at all to understand the cultural logic of contemporary politics—especially concerning the category of truth and its use as a weapon for both domination and resistance. Furthermore, given the implosion of base and superstructure and the ensuing commodification of all cultural products, we must engage the concept of postmodernism to understand the political imperatives and potentialities of so-called “political” art since the emergence of the Cold War—especially art that seeks to posit new understandings of “truth” like the literary and critical works I examine in the present study.

The question of the ability to produce an oppositional cultural politics in light of the losses of both a semi-autonomous cultural sphere and the belief in Absolute Truth has been addressed by a number of theorists, even before the emergence of postmodernism proper. Most notably, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (as well as their Frankfurt School colleagues) theorized the relationship between consumer culture, aesthetics, and

economic production, arguing that “culture industries” exist in modern capitalism to standardize aesthetic objects as commodities, control consciousness, and enforce the dominant ethos of production. They argue that while “authentic art” is critical of establishment norms, typically only “elite” classes have access to this art; these classes have little interest in disrupting the status quo. An additional problem Adorno and Horkheimer cite with the culture industry "is not [simply] that [it] supplies amusement but that it ruins the fun by allowing business considerations to involve it in the ideological clichés of a culture in the process of self-liquidation" (Adorno and Horkheimer 142-43). Accordingly, Frankfurt School theorists privileged a political economic reading of consumer society and its relation to aesthetics. The most important contribution of Adorno and Horkheimer’s concept of the culture industry, however, is their identification of culture as the commodity *par excellence* for contemporary capitalism.

As capitalism transformed from primarily an industrial to a post-industrial mode of production, other theorists became interested in the semiological implications of consumer culture and the political stakes of art. For instance, in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, French theorist Jean Baudrillard extends Adorno and Horkheimer’s political economic critique of consumer culture to include an analysis of the sign, or rather, the ways in which (aesthetic) commodities signify. That is, like Adorno and Horkheimer, Baudrillard privileges a political economic reading of aesthetic objects; however, he argues that one cannot end her critique at the commodity itself, but must instead examine the affective, political, and ideological significations of the

commodity as well. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, whose analysis of aesthetics was based on a notion of a still relatively autonomous superstructure as well as a stable, unified subject who produces and consumes aesthetics, Baudrillard dismisses the notion of both a dialectical totality and a unified subject.

For Baudrillard, the fragmentation of the postmodern subject, as well as “the dissolution of the critical distance between the individual (the subjective psyche) and society (the social processes in which the subject is historically situated),” has produced a crisis of representation wherein subjects and signs are just “one intensity among a multiplicity of others” (Carson 110). This crisis of representation makes dialectical thinking, which seeks to reconcile opposites, no longer a viable method for thinking the relationship between political resistance and oppositional art. Baudrillard writes:

[Oppositional] art, midway between critical terrorism (ideological) and *de facto* structural integration, is quite exactly an *art of collusion vis-à-vis* this contemporary world. It plays with it, and is included in the game. It can parody this world, simulate it, alter it; it never disturbs the order, which is also its own. We are no longer dealing with the bourgeois art, which in its redundancy, presents beings and objects reconciled with their image (all “representation” carries this ideology of reconciliation).  
(Baudrillard 108)

The primary reason that oppositional art loses its political potentiality for Baudrillard is that postmodernism replaces reality as such with an endless series of simulacra.

Plato was the first to distinguish a “faithful” copy of reality from a simulacrum.

According to Plato, a simulacrum deliberately presents a false likeness to the original it purports to resemble; the simulacrum's author knows "nothing of reality" (*Republic X*, 601 c). Baudrillard draws on Plato's distinctions between essence and appearance, copy and simulacrum, to argue that in the postmodern period, the simulacrum is neither based in reality nor hides reality, but instead precedes and negates the construction of reality before it is ever produced. Baudrillard notes that while the simulacrum is not new to postmodernity—that is, he discusses its historical evolution from Plato through the European Renaissance to the present day—what is particularly important about its current form is that the postmodern simulacrum has no relationship to reality whatsoever. In other words, unlike simulacra in previous ages that began as copies of originals, the postmodern simulacrum does not represent a copy of reality, but rather stands in for signs that refer to other signs.

For Baudrillard, instead of attempting to replicate or represent reality, the postmodern simulacrum produces a hyperreality. Hyperreality, in the postmodern moment, serves as its own ungrounded truth. For art to stage a political critique by questioning reality or positing its own truth, then, it must start from the idea that truth is not representational, but is simulated. Yet, because all art is part of the cultural sphere—one that is fully subsumed within an inescapable capitalist hyperreality—for Baudrillard it is all but impossible to forge a politically oppositional aesthetic.

In response to the negative, apocalyptic Baudrillardian position on the difficulties of political aesthetics in postmodern culture, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed a theory of aesthetics that both returned to Marxism and shifted from a logic of culture

toward a logic of desire. That is, unlike Adorno, Horkheimer, and Baudrillard's focus on superstructure (i.e., culture), Deleuze and Guattari were mostly interested in the infrastructure that constitutes culture in the first place. For them, this infrastructure is constituted by desire itself. Unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari's practice of schizoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus* extends the examination of desire to include not only family structures, but also all organizing entities. The goal of schizoanalysis is to wrest desire from the concept of the ego and the structures of everyday life (political, familial, linguistic, religious, etc.) that restrict it from flowing without restraint.

For Deleuze and Guattari, aesthetics can aid in the process of deterritorialization—that is, the practice of liberating desire from structure and labor-power from repressive means of production. However, not all art is equally suited to this endeavor. In particular, they regard anti-realist, non-representational works of art as those with the greatest political potential because these works destabilize the notion of an unfeasibility “to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor* 17). In other words, they argue that oppositional art forces us to imagine different worlds, thereby opening up the possibility of producing different worlds as well. In that sense, Deleuze and Guattari stand in stark opposition to Baudrillard regarding the political possibilities and imperatives of oppositional aesthetics. Whereas Baudrillard is concerned with the process of simulation, Deleuze and Guattari locate resistance in deterritorialization and expression.

In a similar manner to Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari also maintain that

postmodern reality is constituted by simulacra. However, they do not view the simulacrum as essentially negative. To be precise, in the appendix to his *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze argues that Plato's privileging of the copy against the simulacrum works to contain difference. According to Deleuze, the resemblance of the simulacrum to that which it purports to represent (the model) is neither an illusion nor a forgery: "the simulacrum is an image without resemblance" that bears no relation to the model (Deleuze, *Logic* 257). That is not to say that the simulacrum does not produce the effect of a resemblance to the model. As Deleuze states, "Without doubt, it still produces an *effect* of resemblance; but this is an effect of the whole, completely external and produced by totally different means than those at work within the model. The simulacrum is built upon a disparity or upon a difference. It internalizes dissimilarity" (*Logic* 258). In other words, Deleuze's simulacrum is not a degraded copy incapable of representing reality, but an object that invites a relationship of creation. Put simply, for Deleuze, what the simulacrum produces and affirms is the ability for an object or reality to become different from itself. Here, in the very heart of dissimilarity and difference lies the essential divergence between the simulacrum and the copy.

With regard to oppositional aesthetics and its relationship to truth, then, Deleuze and Guattari's notions of schizoanalysis and the simulacrum engender an understanding of aesthetics wherein truth is to be expressed and proliferated rather than simply represented or contested. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the question of oppositional literature in particular. Here, they differentiate minor from major literature. For them, the terms minor and minority do not refer to what we

typically deem “minority” groups precisely because their concepts are antithetical to the category of identity—a category they argue belongs to the majoritarian, or molar, state apparatus. A minor literature, then, is one that seeks not to represent “minority” groups but instead to affirm alternatives that are ultimately uninterpretable. As such, minoritarian literature is experimental in its use of language. It uses language as a medium of force to produce lines of flight, of escape, outside of “the powerful signs which massacre desire” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor* 13). Put differently, what is at stake in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a minor literature is not the use of language as a signifying vehicle capable of producing representations of minority interests. Rather, they argue that a work of minor literature serves less as a book to be interpreted than a machine proliferating meaning; minor literature is constituted through a “willed poverty, pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Minor* 19). As Robert Brinkley states, “The result is not an interpretation but a map, a tool with which to find a way” (14).

To return to the question of truth, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a minor literature enables us to examine works of oppositional, postmodern literature not merely as negative simulacra of dominant attempts to distort or stretch truth, but instead to approach them as maps that proliferate different visions of what communism and capitalism have looked like since the emergence of the Cold War. If indeed postmodernity is the time in which reality is replaced by an endless series of simulacra, then the political role of literature and interpretation is not that of exposing, revealing, or representing truth; rather, its purpose is to produce maps to counteract visions that are,

like Acheson states, “clearer than truth.”

In that sense, the aim of oppositional aesthetics, especially within the spectacle of postmodernism, is not merely to de-bunk the claims made by those in power so as to *reveal* the truth. Instead, it is to produce cognitive maps that expose structures of domination and the cracks within these structures. This dissertation is one of the first studies to bring together Deleuze’s work on the concept of expression and Deleuze and Guattari’s writing on minoritarian literature to locate common intensities of resistance that fought, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, against the most powerful force of deterritorialization—capital itself—in the Cold War period. As works of literature containing vastly different narrative structures and interpretative strategies for understanding the Cold War than those put forth by both the American and Soviet state apparatuses, the texts I examine in this study map the Cold War not as a fight between U.S. and the U.S.S.R., but as a struggle between capitalism’s attempt to control our images of the world and anti-capitalist pursuits to re-appropriate and transform the means of (aesthetic) production and interpretation.

Throughout the Cold War—as the U.S. and U.S.S.R. sought to create “clearer than truth” representations of themselves and bypass the impenetrability and opacity of historical reality—literature acquired the role of both advancing and counterbalancing state narratives. For instance, science fictional texts from the early Cold War such as *Fahrenheit 451* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* have been read as allegories for Cold War repression and the possibility of domestic invasion. However, these are the more obvious examples of what we have come to know as Cold War Fiction. Many other

literary trends and genres ranging from New Journalism to Beat Literature to Feminist Fiction also fall under the general rubric of Cold War Literature and have redefined the parameters between fact and fiction as well as those between self and other.

In recent years—especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union—scholars of American literature have sought to assess the political efficacy of Cold War literature in relation to the failure of master narratives in postmodernity. For example, Alan Nadel argues that the state’s failed policy of “containment” was the condition of possibility for postmodern Cold War fiction (67). Marcel Cornis-Pope, on the other hand, disagrees with Nadel’s assessment that the state’s *failure* was the cause for narrative innovation. Rather, Cornis-Pope writes, “In order to become possible, postmodern fiction had to create an imaginative breach in the Cold War narratives of containment, turning a ‘crisis of representation’ into a successful narrative production” (22). In each of these cases, a breach with the Cold War Master Narrative—whether it preceded or followed the state’s failure to maintain a Cold War binary worldview—is seen as the impulsion of postmodern fiction. In that sense, the “story” of literary production is set against the backdrop of and as counter to “official” politics—in other words, against the Cold War.

While I agree with these arguments to a degree, missing in each of their texts is any discussion of economic changes in the capitalist form. Similarly, if postmodern fiction exceeded the state’s policy of containment, then both Nadel and Cornis-Pope overlook the fact that containment failed largely because of the process of postmodernization qua globalization. By failing to recognize shifts in capital and the waning of the nation-state’s power throughout the Cold War, Nadel and Cornis-Pope

repress what is fundamental to postmodernity: the collapse between base and superstructure and the globalization of biopolitical production. As Ban Wang argues, increased interest in the Cold War following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 “signal[s] the return of the repressed lurking beneath the discourse of globalization” (46).

Even though in many ways this dissertation makes totalizing claims regarding the position of the Cold War within postmodernity as well as the similarities of resistance to aesthetic control in both the U.S. and the Soviet Union, I would also like to point out that the role of literature in the formation of national identity differed in each of these contexts. Put differently, even though postmodernity existed on both sides of the Iron Curtain, I do not believe that the cultural products were identical. As a way to ground the specificity of late-Soviet literature in relation to American literature, it is important to call attention to Katerina Clark’s seminal study *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. In this text she does not discuss American fiction, however she does provide the best entrance into the ethos of Soviet literature that we have to date in the American academy. As such, it can be used to reveal just how different the role of fiction in the construction of national identity was within the American and Soviet Cold War contexts.

Unlike most scholars, Clark refuses to approach socialist realism as nothing more than a Master Narrative handed down by the state. She agrees with the fact that the state “fostered the canonization” of it both legally and stylistically (6). However, she argues that the role of literature as the site of passage between ideas and society was in no way new to Russian culture with the advent of socialist realism. She writes:

Westerners see this as an unnatural state of affairs, since they conceive it

as normal for literature to be fairly autonomous; in this view, Soviet literature, if it achieves the lofty role the Russian intelligentsia has *traditionally* prescribed for it, should itself 'hand down' ideas to society.

(6)

Thus, Clark reveals a stopgap in the West's thinking about Soviet literature and the role of dissidence in the Soviet Union. The "regime" and "intellectuals" have never been diametrically opposed and "the movement from politics and ideology to literature was far from being a one-way street" (Clark 7). It is important to note the *prescriptive* nature of the role of writings from the dissident intelligentsia, especially in lieu of the dominant Western narrative that separates Soviet dissidents from the Soviet state power. I will return to this point in my discussion of the samizdat movement in Chapter 3.

At the same time, while I believe the differences in the relationship between the state and literary producers in the U.S. and U.S.S.R. need to be identified, I also consider it important not to overlook the similarities between cultural dissidents in both national contexts. For instance, in Patrick Major and Rana Mitter's *Across the Bloc: Cold War Cultural and Social History*, the authors attempt to draw parallels between the cultural fronts of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. by moving away from the historiographical trappings of "international-relations" based cultural study. However, in their text they naively assert that society and culture are "autonomous spheres of historical interest" and that it is possible to "establish the Cold War 'home front' as a subfield in its own right" (xi). Here, the problem with this form of comparative study is its inability to grasp the fundamental characteristic of postmodernity: the implosion of base and superstructure and the ensuing

inability to separate society (as producers) from the culture they produce.

One final way in which Cold War literature has been read in relation to postmodernity is through the concept of allegory. In *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing*, Josh Cohen argues that there is an allegorical impulse to all postmodern literature. Very much in contradiction to Dean Acheson's insistence on a clarity in excess of truth—a propagandistic strategy, which, I believe, was both dominant and (unfortunately) very successful throughout the Cold War period—Cohen suggests that late capitalism brought about a surfeit of images causing the world to become opaque. For him, the allegorical character of postmodern literature is both that which is produced by its own opacity through a surplus of images, as well as the productive power of those images. In other words, he believes postmodern literature contests repressive state power not by valuing expression over representation, which is my argument, but instead by producing images of the world that are less opaque and clearer than propaganda, corporate advertisements, and the cultural products of dominant power.

Furthermore, he critiques “the logic of capital” as an explanatory principle for allegory by concluding that postmodern narrative forms are not instances of economic changes in the capitalist mode of production, but are instead enactments of their “own failure to make sense of that history” (Cohen 10). While Cohen does not disregard political economic readings of capitalism altogether, he critiques Richard Godden's method of reading postmodern allegory wherein narratives are “metaphorical condensations of primarily economic meanings” (Cohen 6). He is critical of Godden's

method for its implication that narratives are nothing more than an *effect* of capital. Instead, Cohen believes that allegory is that which “*resists* being rendered readable in terms of any privileged interpretive code such as the economic” (Cohen 7).

I am sympathetic to critical methodologies that resist the urge to fix and delimit meaning such as Paul de Man’s theory of “allegories of reading,” which scrutinizes a text to such a degree that the text’s internal assumptions about language, its inability to totalize its claims or narrative, and its incapacity to contain its own textual authority are revealed.<sup>13</sup> However, Cohen’s treatment of postmodern allegory not only privileges vision over expression in an extraordinarily reactionary manner, but also fails to show what postmodern narratives *can* do except point to their own inability to explain the historical world. Cohen never addresses how allegories can reposition that world, which is precisely the fundamental significance of Deleuze’s methodology of expression. By failing to identify the transformative potentialities of allegory as a resistant force to capitalist postmodernization, Cohen’s methodology risks “projecting a potentially mythic or totalitarian order on an already existing world” (Hanson 667).

That is not to say, however, that I reject the utility of allegory altogether. What I find especially compelling about it is Walter Benjamin’s assertion that allegory is a specific kind of ontological category as opposed to an epistemological one—one in which an apprehension of the world arises from the shock of its lack of permanence.<sup>14</sup> For

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<sup>13</sup> See: Man, Paul de. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. Yale University Press, 1982. Print.

<sup>14</sup> See Benjamin’s various writings on allegory in: *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. first Schocken paperback edition. Schocken, 1969. Print; *The Arcades Project*. Belknap Press of

Benjamin, allegory provides an ontological method to locate truth—a category that is, for him, impermanent—not through content or form, but *as form itself*. The foremost action of the production of allegory is when it “stands for what the commodity has made out of the experiences that people in this century have had” (Benjamin, *Arcades* 188).

A practice of reading focusing on ontology over epistemology is politically necessary because, as I detailed earlier in this chapter and in the introduction, during the Cold War period capitalism underwent a transformation to its late and present form—a global Empire from which there is no longer an “outside” (if there ever was one) to resist repression. Therefore, because an outside to the late capitalist productive circuit does not exist, the production of resistant forms of truth in both critical thought and oppositional aesthetics must be immanent to the system they oppose; they need not be “clearer” than that system. A Deleuzian methodology of expression utilizes a Spinozian ontology which values ontology over epistemology without overlooking the necessity of the latter; it produces its readings within a framework wherein the distinctions between inside and outside do not apply as there is only one substance. With regard to Cold War oppositional aesthetics, producing immanent analyses of domination and resistance allow us to produce lines of flight within the cultural logic of late capitalism; these lines of flight resist the urge to uphold symbolic boundaries, such as the Iron Curtain, which continues to serve as a conceptual limit to understanding how the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were “largely the same thing” (Jameson, *Third World* 67).

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Harvard University Press, 2002. Print; and *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Verso, 2009. Print.

### III. Oppositional Aesthetics in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.

During the Cold War period, a variety of subcultures emerged in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. In both national contexts, state powers sought not only to repress this creative energy, but also to capture and incorporate it within their own discursive regimes so as to weaken its resistant political power. In the North American context, the desire for social autonomy and cultural creativity are well known. One needs to look no farther than the hippy generation, the rise of identity politics, and various artistic subcultures including experimental film, hip hop, and punk as evidence of this phenomenon. In the Soviet context, the occurrence of citizens seeking social autonomy through the re-appropriation of cultural control was just as pronounced, although it is lesser known in the West.

For instance, between the early 1940s and the late 1960s, a highly illegal underground subculture known as *stilyagi* appeared in the Soviet Union. Members of this subculture rejected Soviet moralism, hosted their own jazz dancehalls, recorded their own music on x-ray paper, listened to censored American “boogie-woogie” and swing music, and dressed in zoot suits and brightly colored dresses.<sup>15</sup> While the *stilyagi* movement did not espouse a political program per se, it attacked the state at the level of aesthetic control. It did so by incorporating signifiers from its global compatriots to position itself within an international nexus of creative producers.

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<sup>15</sup> For an excellent docu-drama on the *stilyagi* movement, see Valeriy Todorovsky’s 2008 film, *Stilyagi*.



**Figure 1: Still shot from Valeriy Todorovsky's *Stilyagi***

Taking much of its inspiration from the *stilyagi* movement, from the late 1950s until the dissolution of the Soviet Empire, a self-publishing subculture called samizdat spread rapidly throughout the Eastern Bloc. Not only did samizdat participants publish their own works of literature and non-fiction, they also reproduced and distributed texts from abroad that had been banned by Soviet authorities. In chapter 3, I examine how the concept of truth was navigated throughout the samizdat underground. As we will see in that chapter, samizdat was a diverse movement aesthetically and politically. Many samizdat authors, though ostensibly opposed to the Soviet state, unconsciously incorporated the regime's logic of truth into their writing. Yet, there was a primary commonality between *samizdat* writers and publishers: the desire to re-appropriate the means of cultural production from the Soviet state.

During the period of "stagnation," the Soviet Union saw a third renaissance in music, art and literature. During this time, art-rock groups such as *Kino*, *Akvarium*, and

*Auktyon* defied Soviet censors by producing a hybrid of experimental, psychedelic rock and jazz. Many of these groups released their own albums in spite of the fact that the Soviet Union had only one state-sanctioned record label, *Melodia*. Even though their recordings were considered contraband by Soviet authorities, these groups achieved huge successes at home and abroad. While the lyrics of these “Ruskii Rock” groups were not typically considered as “political” as those of the 1960’s “bard” musicians such as Vladimir Vysotsky, their recordings generated such large fan bases throughout the Soviet Empire that the Soviet regime was eventually forced to release the recordings themselves. According to many scholars, the “Ruskii Rock” movement was also one of the primary forces responsible for prompting Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, many visual artists resisted the Soviet regime’s policy of socialist realism.<sup>17</sup> Socialist Realism was the official aesthetic policy of the Soviet Union from 1932 until its collapse. In reaction to earlier Soviet avant-garde movements, such as cubism and constructivism, socialist realism sought to display so-called realistic depictions of the purported soon-to-come communist future. The most notable threat to

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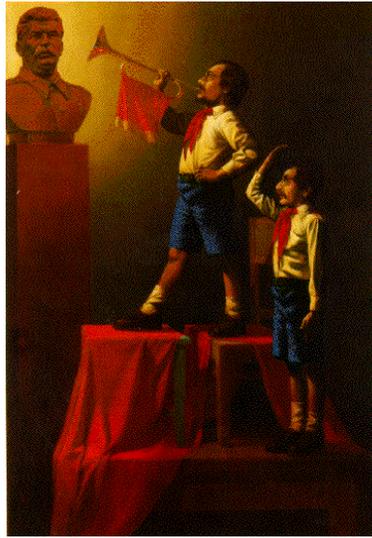
<sup>16</sup> See: Keeran, Roger, and Thomas Kenny. *Socialism Betrayed: Behind the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. iUniverse.com, 2010. Print; Marples, David. *The Collapse of the Soviet Union, 1985-1991*. 1st ed. Longman, 2004. Print; Ryback, Timothy W. *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, 1954-1988*. First. Oxford University Press, USA, 1990. Print; *Soviet rock: 25 years in the underground + 5 years of freedom*. Progress Publishers, 1990. Print; and Troitsky, Artemy. *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia*. Faber & Faber, 1988. Print.

<sup>17</sup> For two excellent critiques of common understandings of the socialist realist movement in the U.S.S.R., see: Dobrenko, Prof. Evgeny. *Political Economy of Socialist Realism*. 1st ed. Yale University Press, 2007. Print.; and Lahusen, Thomas, and Evgeny Dobrenko. *Socialist Realism without Shores*. Duke University Press Books, 1997. Print.

socialist realist ideology was the invention of the “Sots Art” movement (for short, Socialist Art) by Vitaly Komar and Aleksander Melamid in the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Sots Artists played with the happy imagery of socialist realism, distorting it to point to the hyperreality of dominant Soviet discourse. Komar and Melamid produced the first “Sots Art” piece when they were both working as advertisers. As employees of the Soviet state, Komar and Melamid were frequently forced to incorporate socialist realist aesthetics into their ad campaigns. In 1972, they were asked to design an advertisement for an upcoming Young Pioneer’s summer camp. Instead of constructing their ad with the typical socialist realist imagery, they subverted socialist realist tropes by both incorporating Soviet iconic imagery into their design and inserting the faces of everyday people they knew, including themselves and their wives. Later, they would rework their original Sots Art piece to produce their most famous work, *Double Self-Portrait As Young Pioneers* (1982-1983)

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<sup>18</sup> For an interesting review of the Sots-Art movement, see: Danto, Arthur C. *After the End of Art*. Princeton University Press, 1998. Print. In this text, Danto draws connections between Sots-Art, American Pop Art, and German Capitalist Realism.



**Figure 2: Komar and Melamid, *Double Self-Portrait As Young Pioneers* (1982-1983)<sup>19</sup>**

Following Komar and Melamid's example, many other artists began producing their own subversive pop art that mocked the Soviet regime as well. For instance, in 1974, a group of artists displayed some of their Sots Art works at an exhibition in Moscow. In response to this display, Soviet police chased artists and journalists through the streets with bulldozers. Images of the bulldozer chaos circulated widely throughout the international press. Drawing a connection between the "bulldozer event" and similar acts of police brutality in the United States, Arthur C. Danto writes:

It is worth mention that it was the worldwide coverage of the event which seemed to bring about a policy of artistic détente in the Soviet Union, allowing in principle everyone to do as they liked, just as it was the intense television coverage of civil rights protesters in Alabama which

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<sup>19</sup> Komar, Vitaly, and Aleksandr Melamid. *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*. 1982. Collection of Martin Sklar. Web.

stopped them, the South somehow not being able to tolerate the image of itself that was being internalized by the rest of the world. (127)

While this “artistic détente” did in fact occur for a brief moment in the 1970s, it was not until the second half of 1980s that Soviet restrictions on art and literature began to weaken significantly. As I previously stated, many scholars have argued that Gorbachev’s policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* were simply a last ditch effort to legalize and hence contain the productive forces within the U.S.S.R. I would add that these forces were also part of an emerging, global, common productive class. By the time Gorbachev’s reforms were put into place, socialist management techniques could no longer contain either late capitalism or the multitude that sought to destroy it.

In the American context, another strange phenomenon of cultural re-appropriation by the state occurred in the avant-garde art movement. Throughout the Cold War, many American art dealers suspected that the C.I.A. was deliberately disseminating American, leftist, avant-garde paintings by artists such as Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko inside the Soviet Empire. In the 1990s, former C.I.A. official Donald Jameson confirmed their suspicions.<sup>20</sup> According to journalist Frances Stonor Saunders:

The decision to include culture and art in the US Cold War arsenal was taken as soon as the CIA was founded in 1947. Dismayed at the appeal communism still had for many intellectuals and artists in the West, the

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<sup>20</sup> See: Saunders, Frances Stonor. “Modern Art Was CIA ‘Weapon’ Revealed: How the Spy Agency Used Unwitting Artists Such as Pollock and De Kooning in a Cultural Cold War.” *The Independent* 22 Oct. 1995.

new agency set up a division, the Propaganda Assets Inventory, which at its peak could influence more than 800 newspapers, magazines and public information organisations. They joked that it was like a Wurlitzer jukebox: when the CIA pushed a button it could hear whatever tune it wanted playing across the world. (par. 6)

For more than twenty years, the C.I.A. funneled money into touring exhibitions of avant-garde American art, organized by Harvard and Yale graduates who were themselves writing novels and producing paintings in their own free time.

However, the U.S. government deemed the art it covertly supported as offensive to its very own McCarthyist principles. If this art stood in opposition to American Cold War propagandistic efforts, why then would the U.S. government seek to disseminate it? Donald Jameson answers this question by stating:

Regarding Abstract Expressionism, I'd love to be able to say that the CIA invented it just to see what happens in New York and downtown SoHo tomorrow...But I think that what we did really was to recognise the difference. It was recognised that Abstract Expressionism was the kind of art that made Socialist Realism look even more stylised and more rigid and confined than it was. And that relationship was exploited in some of the exhibitions. (Saunders par. 10)

Here, we can find evidence for my claim that a second Cold War was fought by, in this instance, the U.S. against its own cultural producers. If the state could both capitalize from its own citizens' aesthetic dissent and simultaneously critique the repressive artistic

strictures of its purported enemy, then these exhibitions served to both appropriate and tame dissent on the home front and market a specific brand of capitalism to the multitude on the other side of the Iron Curtain. And the U.S. knew exactly what it was doing: usurping the political potential of its own creative producers, using the Iron Curtain as a pretext to advertise “creative freedom,” and crossing an ethical line of curatorial standards.

#### **IV. Across the Line: Critical Correspondence between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.**

From the very start of the Cold War, the question of truth was at the forefront of correspondence between Soviet and American officials and citizens. Only one year after World War II ended, the U.S. Treasury Department sent a memo to the State Department inquiring about the Soviet Union’s reluctance to support the newly formed International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Instead of responding to this question directly, on February 26, 1946, George Kennan, American *charge d’affaires* stationed in Moscow, sent a lengthy telegram detailing “the Kremlin’s neurotic view of world affairs” and the “very disrespect of Russians for objective truth—indeed, their disbelief in its existence” (Jensen 20, 22). In this “Long Telegram” as it later become known, Kennan argued that due of this ever developing sense of unreality in the U.S.S.R., the Soviet regime could no longer be reasoned with. Accordingly, Kennan claimed that the United States needed to abandon diplomatic efforts at cooperation with its former wartime ally and instead seek to “contain” Soviet interests.

Fearing that President Truman and U.S. policy makers were not responding to the Soviet threat adequately, in July of 1947 Kennan published a revised version of his “Long Telegram” entitled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” in *Foreign Affairs*. Written under the pseudonym “X,” Kennan outlined his policy of containment, arguing that, “Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence” (Kennan 567). Within months of the publication of “Article X,” word leaked that its author was, in fact, George Kennan. As a result of Kennan’s previous diplomatic involvement, the American public came to view the document as official policy toward the Soviet Union in the newly emerging Cold War.

In a 1996 interview with CNN, Kennan stated that when he authored “Article X,” he did not intend for his concept of containment to be read either as a prescription for official policy toward the Soviet Union or as an overarching tenet applicable to every situation of Soviet expansionism. Specifically, Kennan argued that his use of the term “counterforce” had been willfully misinterpreted throughout the Cold War as a militaristic concept. In reality, his intention had been to produce economic and political isolation in the Soviet Union, not military intervention in the communist world at large. Having lived in Moscow for ten years of Stalinist rule, Kennan hoped to isolate and enfeeble the Soviet regime not out of fear that the U.S.S.R. would attack the U.S., but to weaken the regime against purging its own citizens. In fact, Kennan was staunchly

opposed to the principle of containment as it was practiced throughout the Cold War, especially as it was used to justify the military invasions of Vietnam and Korea. Regardless of Kennan's own opposition to containment, however, the legacy of the concept became permanently and erroneously linked with Kennan himself.

As I previously noted, in his initial telegram to the State Department, Kennan did not respond to the Department's questions directly; instead, he remarked upon the "very disrespect of Russians for objective truth—indeed, their disbelief in its existence" (Kennan 22). The outcome of Kennan's warning was not an attempt on the part of the United States to fight "the Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs" (Jensen 20). More exactly, both Kennan's telegram and his subsequent "Article X" were misinterpreted to justify the invasion of sovereign foreign nations. As a result, the very same disbelief of "objective truth" that Kennan warned against in his missives came to characterize the policies he proposed originally as an antidote against the incredulity towards truth.

Only seven months after Kennan sent his "Long Telegram" from Moscow, Nikolai Novikov—Soviet Ambassador to the United States—sent his own telegram from Washington, D.C. to Joseph Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov where he warned against increasing psychological dysfunction amongst the American public and government. In many ways, Novikov's telegram mirrored Kennan's. That is, in a similarly urgent manner to Kennan's critiques of the pathological Soviet zeitgeist, Novikov wrote of both the U.S. government's increasing use of fallacious propaganda and the American public's eagerness to consume and believe in these manufactured realities. While it could be mere coincidence that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were waging nearly identical critiques against

each other in their internal diplomatic correspondences, it is widely assumed that both countries were intercepting each other's telegrams and deliberately "speaking" to their enemies through supposedly secret communications.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the Cold War was imagined and produced not simply by silent enemy states waging a battle between capitalism and communism, but also through conversations and collusion, conscious or otherwise, between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

At the center of early Cold War Soviet and American telegrams was the question of the relationship between democracy and truth. For instance, in Novikov's telegram he wrests the concept of democracy from its reified association with capitalism by providing a history of democracy in the United States throughout the regimes of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. He claims that under Roosevelt's administration, the United States sought cooperation with other peace-loving, democratic countries; exemplified by, of course, the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Novikov remarks that Truman's primary interest was not democracy at all, but rather military domination throughout the world. As evidence for this claim, Novikov points out that for the very first time in American history, the 1946 U.S. "Congress passed a law on the establishment of a peacetime army, not on a volunteer basis but on the basis of universal military service" (Jensen 6). According to Novikov, the United States' sole goal in creating mandatory military service was not to maintain democracy, but to ensure they had the ammunition necessary

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<sup>21</sup> For an explanation of the "conversations" between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in their supposedly internal communications, see the preface to: Jensen, Kenneth M. *Origins of the Cold War: The Novikov, Kennan, and Roberts "Long Telegrams" of 1946*. Revised Edition. United States Institute of Peace, 1993. Print.

to colonize the oil-producing world. From today's perspective, Novikov's critique seems indisputable.

While I believe neither the United States nor the Soviet Union should be commended on their "democratic" credentials during the Cold War, my purpose is not to ascertain who was better. Instead, I wish to simply illustrate how the question of truth and its relationship to democracy was at the forefront of governmental communication during the crafting of the Cold War. Besides the content of these cables, what is most interesting is the strange manner in which these cables were written both as critiques of enemy nations and, in many ways, interventions between friends.

As the Cold War developed, the cables became less central, while another surprisingly collusionary phenomenon appeared between the supposed enemies: the publications of *Amerika* in the Soviet Union and *Soviet Life* in the United States.<sup>22</sup> In October of 1956, *Soviet Life*, a 64-page, bimonthly magazine published in English appeared in major cities throughout the United States. That same year, *Amerika*, *Soviet Life's* Russian-language counterpart, hit newsstands in Moscow, Leningrad, Novosibirsk, and Kiev. The publication of both magazines was brought about through an intergovernmental agreement by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to sow trust for the "enemy" country within their own populations. However, in order to maintain enough ideological

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<sup>22</sup> Strangely, I became aware of *Soviet Life* in 2009 as I was searching for reading materials in the waiting room of the Twin Cities Spine Center. Behind the regular assortment of celebrity gossip and weight loss periodicals, I stumbled upon a stack of *Soviet Life* magazines published between 1972 and 1990. The reasons for why and how these magazines remained in this unexpected location for over thirty years continue to perplex me. When I asked the office staff if anyone ever looked at them, they responded that many patients of all ages continue to read them. Nevertheless, they were kind enough to indulge my excitement and allow me to leave the appointment with the entire collection.

competition between the supposed enemies, securing adherence to the neoliberal management of capitalism in the U.S. and socialist management in the U.S.S.R., the publication of both magazines was limited to 30,000 copies in each country.<sup>23</sup> Each of these magazines remained in print even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Enver Mamedov, the press secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Italy, initially edited *Soviet Life*. *Amerika* was published by the U.S. Department of State.

The content of both magazines aimed to portray the joys of everyday life in each magazine's titular country. The topic of *Amerika's* articles consisted of everything from popular fashion to corn production to motorcycle mechanics and baseball. *Soviet Life* tended to focus on ballet, architecture, pioneer camps, and monumental public works programs.

Both magazines functioned as government efforts to produce mass cultural visions of everyday life that were most definitely clearer than truth, although not necessarily untrue. The glossy print quality and exclusion of any content regarding victims of the Cold War at home or abroad enabled both governments to showcase their divergent methods of managing capital and producing the conditions for a happy life. In a sense, both magazines presented true portraits of the "better side" of the dialectic of capitalism being the best and worst thing to ever happen to the world. Almost every issue of each magazine sold out on the day it was released.

Historian Walter L. Hixon argues that these magazines represent examples of "polite propaganda" (118). While these magazines were most definitely produced as

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<sup>23</sup> For a more thorough history of *Soviet Life*, see the Russian Museum of Radio and Television's website at [www.tvmuseum.ru](http://www.tvmuseum.ru).

propagandistic weapons, they were, to my mind, anything but “polite.” That is not to say, however, that their producers were immune to believing in the propaganda they engineered. As Hixon points out, in 1959 Russian diplomats

...reported that “with the exception of personal contacts, *Amerika* magazine has made the greatest contribution to better understanding of America by Soviets and to provision of accurate information about the U.S., thus counteracting to some degree anti-American propaganda.” (119)

Here, we can see even representatives of the Soviet state began to believe that the propaganda produced by their “enemy” was somehow able to provide more clarity about the U.S. than the anti-American propaganda they themselves created.

Perhaps the strangest and most poignant example of unconscious collusion by the U.S. and U.S.S.R. is a May 1990 issue of *Soviet Life*. On the cover is a picture of a smiling Ted Turner with the caption “First Glasnost Award to Ted Turner.” Released only 20 months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union and in the midst of its demise, this issue celebrates the achievements of the very man who transformed the way the world defined both clarity and truth by inventing the 24-hour cable news network. However, Turner was popular in the U.S.S.R. not for his broadcast empire, but for creating the Goodwill Games, an international sports competition organized in response to the boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow by many Western countries.

Yet, tellingly (and bizarrely) *Soviet Life* published the story of Turner receiving the “first glasnost award” without such an award even existing in the Soviet Union. Rather, Turner was given this award by none other than NRA President, Charlton Heston.

According to a Los Angeles Times article about the event, it was co-sponsored by *Soviet Life* magazine: “Calling it the “first ever *glasnost* award,” Charlton Heston presented media titan Ted Turner with a plaque Thursday evening. The Regent Beverly Wilshire Hotel ballroom was bathed in red—tablecloths, roses, balloons—for the event co-sponsored by Soviet Life magazine and the Volunteers of America of Los Angeles” (Goodwin par. 1). Here we can see that *Soviet Life* magazine—one of the Soviet Union’s key ideological weapons—not only co-sponsored an event issuing an award that did not actually exist in their home country, but they also celebrated the communicational achievements of the American who was, arguably, shaping visions of truth throughout the world like no one before him. In effect, this was a pathetic, last ditch effort by the U.S.S.R. to both silence the creative energies of *glasnost* revolutionaries at home and admit to their American allies, finally, that they too were capitalists. The only remaining “communist” signifiers the Soviet Union chose to represent at this spectacle were the red tablecloths, roses, and balloons.

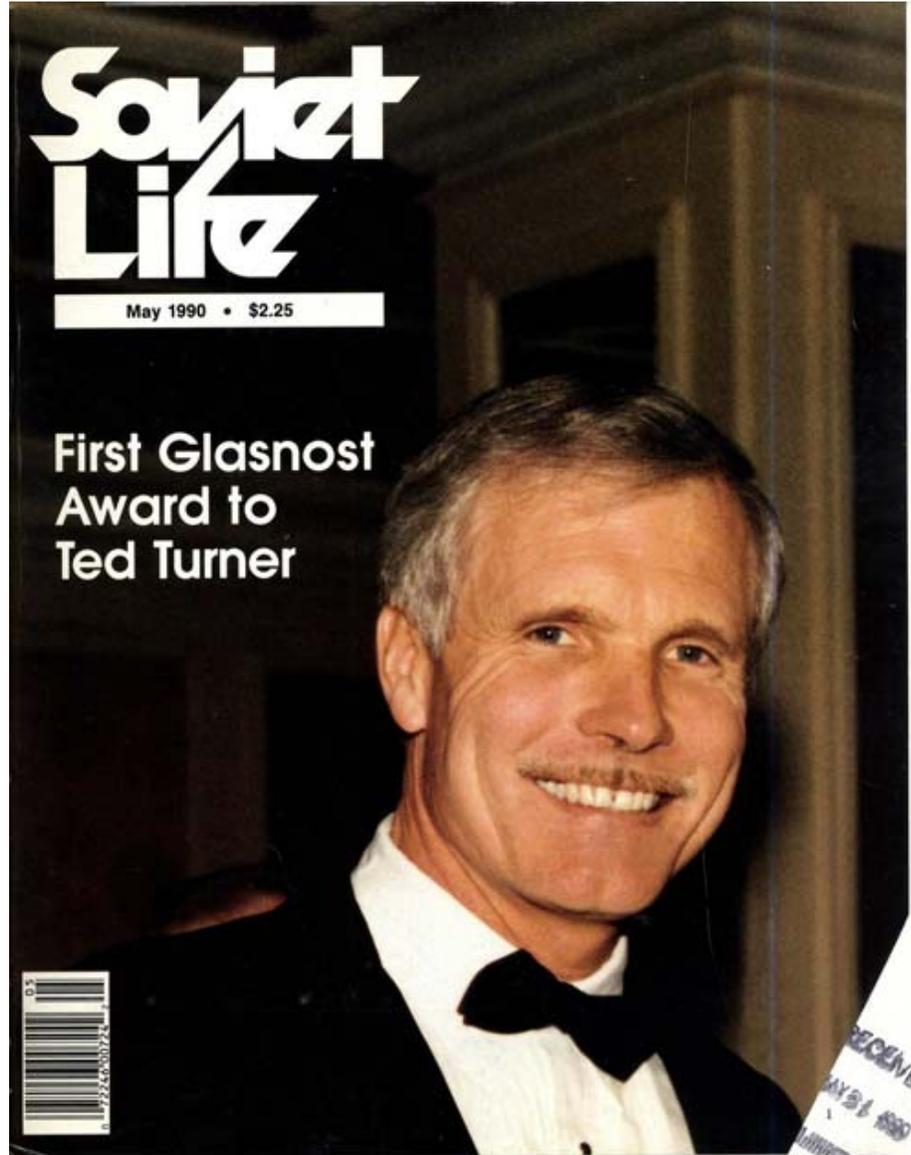


Figure 3: Cover of *Soviet Life* Magazine (May 1990)

The story of Ted Turner receiving the previously non-existent “glasnost award” also served to silence the courageous efforts for securing truth by Samantha Smith, the ten year-old girl from Manchester, Maine who wrote a letter to Yuri Andropov in 1982 asking about the state of American-Soviet relations. She wrote:

Dear Mr. Andropov,

My name is Samantha Smith. I am ten years old. Congratulations on your new job. I have been worrying about Russia and the United States getting into a nuclear war. Are you going to vote to have a war or not? If you aren't please tell me how you are going to help to not have a war. This question you do not have to answer, but I would like to know why you want to conquer the world or at least our country. God made the world for us to live together in peace and not to fight.

Sincerely,

Samantha Smith. (Smith 4)

Addressed only to "Mr. Yuri Andropov, The Kremlin, Moscow, USSR" and mailed with a 40-cent stamp, Smith's letter miraculously appeared in the hands of Andropov, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR. Within a few months, Andropov responded to Smith's letter, praising her as "a courageous and honest girl, resembling Becky, the friend of Tom Sawyer in the famous book of your compatriot Mark Twain...[a book] that is well known and loved in our country by all boys and girls" (Smith 6).

Andropov's response was serious and lengthy. Not only did he state that Smith's questions are "the most important of those that everything thinking man can pose," but he also explained that the Soviet Union desired nothing more than peace so that they could focus on what was important to them: "growing wheat, building and inventing, writing

books, and flying into space” (Smith 8). At the end of his letter, he invited her to visit the Soviet Union over the summer, should her parents allow it, to spend time at “Artek,” the U.S.S.R.’s most famous international children’s camp.

Smith’s parents consented to the visit and on July 7, 1983, Smith and her parents flew to the Soviet Union where they spent the next two weeks visiting Moscow, Leningrad, and Artek. Throughout their joyous visit, they were followed by Soviet media every step of the way. In the United States, the visit was skeptically characterized as an “American-style public relations stunt” (Moats A11). After the family’s return to the U.S., Samantha Smith took it upon herself to write a book, at the age of ten, about how her pre-existing notions of the U.S.S.R. had been transformed, her fundamental belief that Soviet citizens desired nothing more than peace, as well as her continued fears that government leaders might not be able to properly prevent nuclear catastrophe. In the book’s final passage, she writes: “Sometimes I still worry that the next day will be the last day of the Earth. But with more people thinking about the problems of the world, I hope that someday soon we will find the way to world peace. Maybe someone will show us the way” (Smith 119).

While Smith became a national hero in the Soviet Union, her book was never translated into Russian. Instead, the images and narratives of her visit were circulated and produced by the official Soviet press. Similarly, the American press’s interest in her story lasted only a brief moment after her trip. After the publication of her book, Smith visited the 1983 Children’s International Symposium in Kobe, Japan. There, she made the brilliant argument that for two weeks out of every year Soviet and American leaders

exchange granddaughters because no leader would “want to send a bomb to a country his granddaughter would be visiting” (Torricelli 353). Furthermore, she stated, “If we start with an International Granddaughter Exchange and keep expanding it and expanding it, then the year 2001 can be the year when all of us can look around and see only friends, no opposite nations, no enemies, and no bombs” (Torricelli 353). Unfortunately, as we all know, the International Granddaughter Exchange never occurred and the year 2001 proved to be far from internationally amicable.

Only two years after Smith visited the Soviet Union, she and her father died in a mysterious small plane crash. The U.S. government examined the cause of the crash and reported that no foul play had occurred. However, in popular Soviet discourse, citizens believed that Smith was murdered by the C.I.A.<sup>24</sup> She was memorialized throughout the U.S.S.R., which even issued a stamp in her honor.



**Figure 4: U.S.S.R. Samantha Smith Stamp (1985)**

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<sup>24</sup> See: Thomas, Evan. “The Great War of Words.” *Time Magazine* 9 Sept. 1985.

The Samantha Smith story interests me not merely as another conspiracy theory (which may or may not be true) about the U.S. government murdering its own truth-tellers. Instead, I am interested in how within the span of only five years official Soviet propaganda had shifted from representing the true intellectual pursuits of a ten-year-old girl to celebrating Ted Turner, the primary engineer of for-profit, capitalist information dissemination. This alteration in Soviet propaganda strategy points to the ever-increasing need throughout the Cold War for both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to conform to shifts in contemporary capitalism by producing images of reality that were both “clearer than truth” and served the interests of capital above the state. Ultimately, however, the story of Samantha Smith reveals that in spite of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.’s unconsciously collaborative and powerful attempts to harness creative energy to control the global multitude through frightening images of the world on the brink of nuclear disintegration, neither state power was entirely successful. Even a ten year-old child had the capacity to see through these images, circumvent the rules of political propriety, and creatively express a hope that—perhaps one day—the entire world would live in peace.

In this chapter I have attempted to historicize the conditions of aesthetic dissent as they were navigated within academic discourse, diplomatic memoranda, and popular culture during the Cold War period on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In the next chapter, I consider two texts—E.L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel* and Louis Althusser’s *The Future Lasts Forever*—that transform the question of dissent into a question of critical reading. In so doing, I explore how each of these authors figures the concepts of the

subject and history to illustrate the increasing complexity of determining subjective agency within the Cold War and postmodernity.

## Chapter Two

### **Absent Causality and Shocking Connections: Truth and Revolutionary Reading in Louis Althusser's Philosophy and E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel***

Then a herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. (Daniel, 3:4)

With music strong I come, with my cornets and  
My drums,  
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd and slain  
persons.

(Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*)

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing....  
I can't stand my own mind.  
America when will we end the human war?  
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.  
(A. Ginsberg, *America*)

-Epigraph, *The Book of Daniel*

On November 16, 1980, a shocked, agitated, and confused Louis Althusser ran into the courtyard of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris proclaiming he had strangled his wife to death while massaging her neck. Even though Althusser immediately took responsibility for Hélène's killing, his motives remained elusive to his colleagues, to himself, and to the police investigation that quickly ensued. In light of his obviously

impaired psychological state, Althusser's colleagues initially presumed that his confession served less as a testament to his guilt than as a symptom of the delirium induced by discovering the permanent loss of his life-long love. The director and the doctor of the university, therefore, decided to have him transported to the mental hospital of Sainte-Anne—the hospital where he had been treated on previous occasions for his ongoing struggle with manic depression.

Police were soon sent to Sainte-Anne to formally charge Althusser with voluntary homicide. However, upon arrival, doctors informed the magistrate that Althusser's mental condition had deteriorated to such a degree that he was incapable of understanding the charges levied against him. In turn, he could not be served an arrest warrant. After a few months of further psychological evaluation, the examining magistrate finally decided that Althusser would not be charged with the crime, as he was deemed mentally unfit to stand trial. His case was declared a juridical *non-lieu*, and he was, for the French state, no longer a subject capable of acquittal or conviction; for the state, the truth of Althusser's actions did not matter. As such, he remained unread.

Before his wife's death and his concomitant juridical-subjective disintegration, Althusser had made quite a name for himself within French intellectual and political circles. While it was no secret that he suffered from mental illness, his peers far from expected Hélène's murder. A motive for her murder was incomprehensible, especially considering the way that she was killed—a strangulation gentle enough to leave no visible, external marks. Like her murder, though, Althusser's persona had always been marked by a certain elusive nature: he was a member of the French Communist Party and

an unorthodox theorist of Marxism, a self-proclaimed scientist of analysis and a self-effacing intellectual fraud, a materialist theorist of history and a philosopher of structural contingency, a critic of human agency and an advocate for social change.

Three years after his wife's death, Althusser was released from Sainte-Anne to begin his life anew. In the following seven years until his death in 1990, he attempted to (re)compose his own subjectivity in light of these seeming contradictions by writing two versions of his autobiography under the titles *The Facts* (*Les Faits*) and *The Future Lasts Forever* (*L'Avenir dure Longtemps*). In the longer of the two texts, *The Future Lasts Forever*, Althusser composes his autobiography around the event of the murder, and he provides a critique of the assumption that he "benefited from being declared unfit to plead" (*Future* 13).

While I consider Althusser's memoir to be largely unsuccessful at elaborating an adequate critique of the category of the *non-lieu*, I will claim in this chapter that the juridical concept of the subject beyond culpability should *not* be read as the ideological crystallization of Althusser's philosophy of the subject as he elaborates it in his writings on aleatory materialism. Instead, I will make the case that Althusser fails to draw a distinction between his own subjective circumstance and the state's formulation of the *non-lieu* precisely because he does not read his life according to the methodology he produced in his earlier text, *Reading Capital*.

In Althusser's philosophy of aleatory materialism, history is a process without subjects—a process that occurs by chance, contingent encounters. Many critics of

structuralism, post-structuralism, non-Hegelian Marxism, and psychoanalysis have drawn from Althusser's philosophy of the subject to illustrate what they see as the absolute limit of each of these discourses—namely, the foreclosure of all political possibilities when the subject is construed as a non-agent of contingent or structural encounters.<sup>25</sup> By reading according to the methodology Althusser produced in his earlier text, however, I will argue that neither his late philosophy nor his autobiography evidences this limitation. The methodology of reading to which I refer affirms necessity as the immediate effect of contingency and not as its *a priori* or causal condition. In so doing, this methodology enables a reader (which I will define broadly as anyone who considers the stakes of meaning) to draw on inadequate encounters as the necessary conditions of possibility for thinking and producing more adequate worlds. Furthermore, this method provides a way to reconsider not only the utility of Althusser's life story, but also the supposed foreclosure of the political in postmodernity.

In opposition to the accusation that Althusser's methodology of reading disregards the role of action in history, I will argue also that reading the effects of absent, structural causes provides a privileged way to understand the historical effects of

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<sup>25</sup> For further elaboration of Althusser's notion of history as a process without subjects, see: Poster, Mark. "Althusser on History Without Man." *Political Theory* 2:4 (1974): 393-409; Smith, Steven B. "Althusser and the Overdetermined Self." *The Review of Politics* 46:4 (1984): 516-538; Smith, Steven B. "Althusser's Marxism without a Knowing Subject." *The American Political Science Review*. 79:3 (1985): 641-655. Some of the works most critical of Althusser's thought include: Judt, Tony. "Louis Althusser, The Paris Strangler." *New Republic* 210 (1994): 33; Ollman, Bertell. *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Sayer, Derek. "Science as Critique: Marx versus Althusser." *Issues in Marxist Philosophy, Vol. 3*. Ed. J. Mepham and J. H. Ruben. Brighton: Harvester, and Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 27-54; Thompson E.P. *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*. London: Merlin Press, 1978.

postmodernity. In the aftermath of Stalin's purges, the extermination of six million Jews, Joseph McCarthy's Red Scare, and the detonation of nuclear weapons, the question of how to determine truth when motives and causes are logically absent has plagued the post-war world. This question, however, is not merely one of historical events; it is also a strong undercurrent of postmodern and of post-humanist thought in general. I will claim also that the question of causality is what has most acutely divided the Old from the New (postmodern) Left.

It would be all too easy to read Althusser's act of murder and his philosophy as mere symptoms of this greater socioeconomic shift to a world where it is no longer adequate to read historical events and human actions as effects of idealist causes or of free will. Yet, I will show here that while Althusser's late work illustrates the void of thought between the modern and the postmodern, his work is not *merely* illustrative of this void. To the contrary, it is only by reading according to a cynical methodology that one is able to arrive at the conclusion that Althusser espouses the stereotypically postmodern ideology that disregards intentionality, responsibility, knowability—and most of all, the value of truth.

To examine this cynical reading methodology as it relates to postmodernism, the Cold War, and the question of truth, I will explore E.L. Doctorow's novel, *The Book of Daniel* (1972). In this meta-fictional text, the questions that implicitly plagued Althusser's life and his corpus with regard to reading, historical causality, and political agency are strikingly similar to the questions that also haunt Doctorow's characters. Doctorow's novel is based on Daniel Lewin's attempt to find form for the story of his

parents' electrocution as well as for the death of the Old Left. His deceased parents are Rochelle and Paul Isaacson—Doctorow's fictionalized version of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg—who were executed in 1953 for allegedly sharing the secret of the atomic bomb with the Soviets. While the specter of the bomb haunts the novel to some degree, the novel focuses less around discovering the guilt or innocence of Daniel's parents and more on how to locate the source from which to tell and transform Daniel's life story.<sup>26</sup>

In rejection of the Cold War narrative that has seemingly scripted his life, Daniel searches for solace in the pages of his own writing. But at the same time, he seeks complete ownership of his narrative and also distance from it as something he can write away. As such, his own position within the novel oscillates between author and critic, prophet and historian, subject and object. With the change in each of these roles, the form

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<sup>26</sup> It is not the purpose of this chapter to examine the relationship between fictional renditions of historical events and historical events as they were actually lived. However, because the events in *Daniel* are so closely related to those of the real Rosenberg story, I would like to note that in a recent workshop I attended, Robert Meeropol—the younger son of the Rosenbergs—said that he sees his parents' case specifically through the question of whether or not they were guilty of sharing the "secret of the atomic bomb" with the Soviet Union. In his younger years, he believed whole-heartedly in their innocence. After winning suit against the F.B.I., documents related to his parents' case were released, and he now believes that his father was guilty of non-atomic espionage and his mother was innocent of any form of espionage. While they were actually found guilty of the charge of "conspiracy to commit espionage," it is largely accepted by scholars that the Rosenbergs were executed for a crime for which they were neither actually guilty nor "legally" guilty—i.e., sharing "the secret of the bomb." I point this out to argue that Robert Meeropol differs considerably from the character of Daniel Lewin in that he believes it is fundamental to discern his parents' guilt or innocence. Yet, he has also become a staunch opponent of the death penalty. Today, he works to abolish the death penalty, and he is the founding member of the Rosenberg Fund for Children—a foundation that raises money for the children of incarcerated activists. See his autobiography: Meeropol, Robert. *An Execution in the Family: One Son's Journey*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003. Robert Meeropol has also written a book with his brother, Michael Meeropol: *We Are Your Sons: The Legacy of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg*. Champaign: University of Illinois, 1986. For recent developments in the Rosenberg case regarding Morton Sobell's admission that he was a co-conspirator with the Rosenbergs, see also: Roberts, Sam. "Father Was a Spy, Son's Conclude With Regret." *New York Times* 16 Sept. 2008.

of his writing within the novel changes as well. At times, it is his dissertation; at others, it is his poetry, political commentary, fiction, and—most important—his calling.

Like Althusser, however, Daniel is unable to narrate his own subjectivity consistently. Consequently, he struggles throughout the novel to determine his role within his family, his role within history, and his destiny. He cannot find a cause for his parents' execution, a cause for their political affinities, a cause for political action in the face of the failures of the Old Left, or a cause for his own desires and life choices. He is paralyzed by his lack of understanding and his inability to read what it is that he knows.

Yet, it is with the threat of mass annihilation and the responsibility to redeem, re-script, and re-envisage history and the subject's role within it that the novel begins and ends. Daniel utilizes a variety of reading methods to ascertain what this role consists of, but they each prove to be symptomatic of the failure of any methodology to adequately explain the importance of the subject for history and history for the subject. The primary existential problem of Daniel's life is thus the primary problematic of Althusser's late philosophy and of his wife's murder: Why does one act?

Daniel and Althusser are just as interested in finding a methodology for answering this question as they are in finding the actual answer to the question. In the following pages, I will argue that the theory of absent causality that Althusser both identifies in his sections of *Reading Capital* and alludes to in his later work is precisely the concept that Daniel is incapable of grasping in his own search for a methodology to understand material causes in the Cold War era. I will show how Daniel's text reveals contradictions

endemic to the dominant methodology of valuing clarity over truth during the Cold War, as well as how Daniel Lewin serves as a postmodern figure who, like the biblical Daniel, cannot find a method to comprehend the necessity or truth value of his own prophecies. While my examination of Doctorow's text will focus primarily on the character of Daniel Lewin, I will also consider the reading strategies employed by other characters in the text.

I bring together Doctorow's novel—a meta-fictional, autobiography about a fictionalized historical character—and Althusser's philosophically complex memoir because they each, implicitly and explicitly, engage similar discourses (structuralism, Marxism, psychoanalysis) to examine the question of historical truth in a world where transcendent causes are lacking and the distinction between subjects and objects has become increasingly complex. My attention will focus to a degree on the actual content of these discourses, but my primary purpose will be to consider the methodologies of reading that both texts complicate and make possible when read together. Without a method for reading, the status of the subject's role within history becomes tenuous at best. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to elaborate the “underground currents” that float through Althusser's thought and Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* that are able to push the reader to rethink the question looming in the post-war world: Why does the subject act? Ultimately, I will argue that to make this question constructive it must be transformed into a question of reading itself—a question that asks not where truth fundamentally lies, but how to utilize meaning in a late capitalist world that has become “clearer than truth.”

## I. Althusser's Origin-Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation

As the title for Althusser's *The Future Lasts Forever* suggests, this memoir involves the question of how history moves and persists. The title of Althusser's text encapsulates his anti-teleological understanding of history wherein the future is never an endpoint in the unfolding of life. While Althusser's title explicitly and succinctly condenses his philosophy of history, it tells us little of what role the past plays in shaping the present or of how the future is shaped when it is located in a perpetual present. More important, though, it tells us nothing about how to determine the difference, if there is any, between the subject and object of history.

To a large degree, the distinction, or lack thereof, between the subject and object of history is the primary question of *The Future Lasts Forever*. Ostensibly, Althusser's autobiography is a story about his wife's murder and the role that his previous life circumstances and unconscious fantasies played in shaping this historical event. However, as Althusser tells us, he is writing not merely to determine the truth of whether *he* was the subject that committed the murder. Instead, he wishes to have his status as a subject restored—the status that the state stripped from him in declaring him *non-lieu*. In so doing, he expresses a desire to make himself “more vulnerable to the judgment [that] the public is free to make” (*Future* 13). At the end of this text, he offers an explanation for his desire to be judged: “I hope those who think they know more or have more to say will not be afraid to do so. *They can only help me live*” (*Future* 286, italics mine).

By allowing himself to be an object of public scrutiny, Althusser's desire to be judged suggests that he has found a way around the issue that he encountered on the very

first page of *The Facts*, the autobiography he penned nine years prior. He begins *The Facts* by introducing himself to the reader as “Pierre Berger” (289). In the following sentence, he admits that this is actually untrue, that this is really his grandfather’s name. Yet, after this admission, he declares that he was born “at the age of four” (289). What he has discovered in his second autobiography is that while he may not be able to narrate his life accurately, he is able to maintain his own subjectivity to the degree that he is capable of being an object to be read. In order to be read, however, his subjectivity must maintain some sense of duration. Continued scrutiny by readers provides him the duration necessary to “help [him] live” and to (re)secure his subjectivity.

This discovery is really nothing less than the discovery that history, and hence life, is a process of relations—relations between subjects and objects, readers and texts, and encounters in general—that are radically unstable, yet perplexingly enduring. While this is a deceptively facile principle, Althusser arrived at this conclusion in its present form only after years of studying what he refers to as the “underground current of the materialism of the encounter” (“Underground” 163). In an essay bearing this name, he traces this “underground current” through thinkers such as Lucretius, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, and Heidegger in order to produce his theory of aleatory materialism. Aleatory materialism is the underlying principle not only of Althusser’s philosophy of history but of his philosophy of the subject as well.

In order to examine Althusser’s dense philosophy of aleatory materialism, I will first turn to Vittorio Morfino’s “An Althusserian Lexicon” because Morfino defines Althusser’s concept more succinctly than Althusser himself does. Here, Morfino

identifies five key concepts necessary to understand the “aleatory,” but he also states that “the term ‘aleatory’ does not appear in this list, precisely because its signification only emerges through the weaving together of these concepts” (par. 7). These concepts include: “a process without a subject and therefore the negation of every form of teleology, be it internal or external; the primacy of relations over the related elements; theoretical anti-humanism; the assertion that philosophy has no object; [and] the definition of the structure of metaphysics according to the schema Origin-Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation” (par. 3).

According to Morfino, taken together, this constellation of concepts allows Althusser to produce a theory of materialism where “things” do not precede their encounters, where matter is not substantiated until it is combined, and where truth has no meaning outside of the history of which it is a part. History is not guided by Cause, but neither is it simply contingent or accidental. There are brief encounters of matter that do not last, but there are also encounters that take hold: these encounters become worlds. These encounters—encounters between things as small as atoms to those as large as economic classes—gel not merely by chance, but by historical necessity. Here I quote Morfino at length:

[For Althusser], [this] necessity is...grounded in a contingency, namely the contingency of being able to be no longer...There is necessity, then, but this necessity cannot be identified with a sense, reason or a telos. The only necessity there is is the necessity of the absolute purity of contingency: a necessary *cum tangere* that is always an encounter rather

than the spontaneous generation of a necessary series whose origin would be a subject (whether it be God or a human will). The *cum tangere* is necessary, and it can assume the form of an encounter that doesn't "take," a brief encounter, or an encounter that lasts. In this last case, another form of necessity opens up: the necessity of the *fait accompli*, of the accomplished fact. But this fact cannot be mistaken for an eternal fact, since it rests on a necessary contingency, on the *cum tangere* from which it originates; it is solely through the repetition of the *cum tangere* that it can last and endure, without the security of a transcendent or transcendental guarantee. We can now understand and penetrate the enigma of Althusser's formula "the necessity of contingency"...The necessity of contingency is not a necessity that traverses and governs contingency, a necessity that contingency would "have"; it is, on the contrary, the necessity that contingency "is", its *esse in alio* (and not an abstract capacity to be this or that, that is, an abstract possibility that presupposes the *regio idearum* of a divine intellect that would sustain it). This *esse in alio* is a necessary reference to the other, a referral that alone gives rise to an encounter not programmed by some mode of teleology: "instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it, we must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies" (Althusser 1994a: 581). (Morfino par. 57)

The necessity of history with its dual nature—“the contingency of being able to be no longer,” and the necessity that contingency “is”—is precisely the necessity that, for lack of a better term, “belongs” to the subject (Morfino par. 57). Like history, the subject is grounded in the fact of finitude. With regard to the subject, one could substitute the fact of death for “the contingency of being able to be no longer” (Morfino par. 57). In the same regard, one could substitute the concept of the End of History for this finitude of which Althusser speaks. Yet, here, history and the subject are merely grounded in the fact of contingency.

Additionally, in both cases, the gravity of the possibility to be no longer, to be only briefly, or to not be at all still does not give meaning to history or to the subject. There is no meaning to history as a contingent fact or to the subject as a contingent fact precisely because, in this formulation, meaning is figured as something that *inheres* in an abstract capacity of contingency. There is no abstract capacity to Althusser’s materialism. What is critical to his concept of the necessity of contingency is precisely the argument that it “is not a necessity that traverses and governs contingency, a necessity that contingency would ‘have’” (Morfino par. 57). Instead, necessity simply *is*. Necessity is not Nothing; it is the “becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies” (qtd. in Morfino par. 57). Necessity is pure contingency insofar as it *is* only what it is at the moment it is encountered contingently.

As Althusserian aleatory concepts, history, the subject, and social formations are dynamic, materialist, substantive, and meaningful. They are not meaningful in a predestined sense; rather, they are meaningful because

...we are not—that we do not live—in Nothingness [*le Néant*]...there is no Meaning to history (an End which transcends it, from its origins to its term), [but] there can be meaning *in* history, since this meaning emerges from an encounter that was real, and really felicitous—or catastrophic, which is also a meaning. (Althusser, “Underground” 194)

It should be noted here that in the beginning of Althusser’s sentence, he argues both that “we are not” and that “we do not live” in Nothingness. Again, however, he says nothing explicitly to differentiate the subject from the place where it lives (i.e., in history). This is because, for him, the subject is the world, and history is the subject.

Specifically, the Althusserian world is one of encounter and not dependence. The schema that best defines it is what Morfino describes as “Origin-Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation” (par. 3). In this formulation, each encounter is a material, temporal, structural re-figuration of the terms “Origin-Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation.” However, while they are structural relations, they are not dependent terms. Instead, they are simultaneous effects of an always-refigured Spinozian substance that is One; they are not of a different substance from each other, and they do not derive from a cause that determines their relations to each other.

Stanislas Breton states this principle clearly when he argues then that we should read Althusser’s configuration as a “primacy of relations... [that] must be opposed to the substantialism of matter, to the unwitting reification of the substantive” (qtd. in Morfino

par. 5). The specific concept that Breton uses to illustrate this point is Althusser's critique of the "reformist principle" in Marx. He writes:

On this note, I recall Althusser's critique of the 'reformist' thesis that postulates an existence of classes prior to the struggle between them; for revolutionaries, "the class struggle and the existence of classes are one and the same thing" and struggle, rather than happening a posteriori, 'constitutes class division itself'. The same logic appears in aleatory materialism, where the atoms do not precede their encounters. (qtd. in Morfino par. 5)

The principle (i.e., Althusser's critique of a "reformist" thesis) that Breton uses to illustrate Althusser's relational ontology is equally suitable to explain the relation between the subject and history in Althusser's philosophy.

Like class struggle, there is no subject outside of its own constitution *of* history, and there is no subject outside of its own constitution *in* history. The subject is an effect, not a cause or rational historical agent of structures constituted by economic relationships and modes of production. Yet, neither history nor the subject reforms the other. Unlike György Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1920), which posits the proletariat as the identical subject-object of history capable of overcoming the reified bourgeois separation between social objects and cognizant subjects, Althusser abandons the idea of

a fully sovereign subject capable of grasping (and hence changing) the totality of social relations.<sup>27</sup>

Althusser thus rejects what he regards as the ideological historicist humanism of Hegel, the young Marx, and Lukács in favor of a “scientific” Marxism that actively generates concepts enabling history and society to be understood and transformed. Mark Poster argues that Althusser’s theory of the production of concepts is “strongly neo-Kantian” (394). Poster writes,

...concepts actively created by thinkers [are] preconditions for the knowledge of any experience. The strength of this scientific Marxism for Althusser [is] that, at the moment of the production of concepts, the scientist [is] disinterested beyond all attachment to or interest in the objects of the social world. Ideologies to him [are] those theories that [fail]

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<sup>27</sup> See: Lukács, György. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971. See especially Lukács’s 1967 preface to the new edition in which he describes how his notion of proletarian class-consciousness fell short when writing this text in his younger years. In this preface, he contextualizes his ideas in *History and Class Consciousness* and he argues, “Above all I was absolutely convinced of one thing: that the purely contemplative nature of bourgeois thought had to be radically overcome. As a result the conception of revolutionary praxis in this book takes on extravagant overtones that are more in keeping with the current messianic utopianism of the Communist left than with authentic Marxist doctrine. Comprehensibly enough in the context of the period, I attacked the bourgeois and opportunistic currents in the workers’ movement that glorified a conception of knowledge which was ostensibly objective but was in fact isolated from any form of praxis; with considerable justice I directed my polemics against the over-extension and over-valuation of contemplation. Marx’s critique of Feuerbach only reinforced my convictions. What I failed to realize, however, was that in the absence of a basis in real praxis, in labour as its original form and model, the over-extension of the concept of praxis would lead to its opposite: a relapse into idealistic contemplation” (xviii). For an especially interesting discussion regarding the relationship between Althusser and Lukács’ theories of history, the subject, and reading, see also: Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981, 48-59.

to observe this distinction. Hence, both empiricism and humanism [are] ideologies, since the former conflate[s] theoretical objects with real objects and the latter erase[s] the distinction between theory and practice. (394)<sup>28</sup>

While Althusser has been criticized on many fronts for his neo-Kantian disinterestedness, Althusser would maintain that changing the world is a much more complex matter than simply becoming cognizant of and acting against oppressive forces. In particular, in his essay, “Contradiction and Overdetermination” (1962), he points out that the economic and superstructural forces that constitute society are neither mutually determining nor dialectically bound. Rather, by examining the various factors that contributed to the Russian Revolution of 1917, Althusser contends that contradictions between forces and relations of production are necessary, but insufficient, to produce revolutionary ruptures. As such, the superstructure, according to Althusser, maintains a relative autonomy in social formation, but society is determined “in the last instance” by the economic mode of production (“Contradiction” 111). In other words, the social totality is not merely structured by dialectical tensions between economic classes, but is instead “overdetermined” by disparate yet related causes.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For an elaboration of Althusser’s concept of ideology, see: Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press: 1971, 121-176.

<sup>29</sup> Althusser borrows his concept of “overdetermination” from Sigmund Freud’s writings on dreams. Freud argues that the meaning of dreams is overdetermined by multiple factors in the waking life of the dreamer. See: Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Avon, 1980.

Accordingly, because social configurations are overdetermined by the conjunction of somewhat incongruous factors, there is no real calculus for revolutionary action as each historical situation is singular in the factors that determine it. Steven B. Smith states that “if Althusser’s theory of overdetermination is correct, it can only be so because the self has been dissolved into a set of relationships in which there is literally no room left for such traditionally human attributes as free action, purposiveness, and responsibility” (518). While Smith’s assessment is correct insofar as Althusser is not interested in illusory categories such as free will, one should not be too hasty to conclude that Althusser’s concepts of overdetermination and history as a process without subjects foreclose the possibility of action *in toto*. As Smith himself states, “the self has been dissolved into a set of relationships” (518). Even though Smith’s semantics present a logical fallacy (i.e., something cannot “dissolve” into a set), it is precisely the *relations* between “subjects” that affords the potentiality of historical change, purposiveness and collective responsibility. Althusser himself makes this point clear when he argues that the subject can affirm as necessary what it is that she is actually capable of doing—that is, “catch[ing] a moving train without knowing where it has come from and where it is going” (*Future* 210). History and the subject do not exist except in their encounter—an encounter that is simultaneously a production of Origin-Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation, an encounter that is, in effect, a world.

The title of Althusser’s second autobiography, *The Future Lasts Forever*, sums up the temporal basis of this principle. That is, even more than signaling the faulty metaphysical notion of an End of History, it also points to the fact that the world is

nothing but an effect (i.e., a future). Yet, this effect is not one of a cause that preceded it; instead, it belongs to the future. The world is materially substantiated only in the moment that an encounter “sticks.” In turn, when an encounter becomes a world, it becomes an accomplished fact. Althusser states that “[b]efore the world, there is only *the non-accomplishment of the fact*, the non-world that is merely the *unreal* existence” (174). All of the elements of a world may precede it, “but they do not exist, [and] are only abstract, as long as the unity of a world has not united them in the Encounter that will endow them with existence” (Althusser, “Underground” 174). In this regard, then, history is nothing but a void that “permanent[ly] revo[kes] the accomplished fact by another undecipherable fact to be accomplished, without our knowing in advance whether, or when, or how the event that revokes it will come about” (“Underground” 174).

I began this section of the chapter arguing that in his second biography, *The Future Lasts Forever*, Althusser asks for his readers’ judgment so as to produce an encounter between himself and the reader that would endure long enough to restore his own status as a subject with meaning in the world. But as we have seen, to become a subject in Althusser’s universe is nothing less than becoming “Origin-Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation.” In being declared *non-lieu*, Althusser escaped judgment by the problematic category of juridical truth, but he was also banished from the world in which the certitude of his guilt or innocence would allow him to be a subject, an object of scrutiny, an origin of his actions, a foundational “I,” or even an agent of his own truth.

He thus describes his stay in Sainte-Anne as “living through that nameless time that does not pass,” but he also admits that at this time a new world had formed that he

“had never encountered before” (“Underground” 165). In a sense, he is describing his own non-life within an ontological void. It is for this reason that he asks at the end of his book to be (re)integrated into the world of judgment because it can “only help [him] live” (*Future* 286).

Althusser struggles throughout his text with the concept of an ontology of absent cause by elaborating critiques of the concepts of premeditation, unconscious fantasy, and deterministic desire as they relate to his own life. Interestingly, however, the conclusions he arrives at are not his own. For at the end of his text, he cites the answer that his doctor friend provided about his guilt or innocence after reading the autobiography. Essentially, the doctor translates Althusser’s philosophy of the encounter into psychoanalytic terms:

In reading what you have to say, it seems to me that this is extremely clear in your own case. How can one possibly invoke the ‘*causally*’ determining factor, the ambivalence, which expresses itself in the same phantasy as the radically opposing desire to that of killing, namely the desire for life, love, and salvation? In fact, it ought not to be described as *causal* determination at all, but as a welling-up of *ambivalent meaning* within the fractured unity of desire, which is only realized, in its wholly ambivalent ambiguity, because of some external ‘chance occurrence’ which enables it to gel...[I]n order to understand the incomprehensible, you have to take into account uncertain and imponderable factors (of which there were so many in your case) but also the ambivalent nature of phantasies, which introduces a whole host of opposing possibilities...I have, I believe, put all

the cards on the table, only some of which, the most obvious to any observer, are needed for one to argue that you were not responsible for your actions when you committed the murder...Anyway, I interpret this public account of your behaviour as a way of taking responsibility again for yourself, your grief, and your life. As they said in ancient times, it is an *actus essendi*: ‘an act of being’. (*Future* 285-286)

While the doctor only deems Althusser inculpable of the murder, his explanation of the ambivalence of the meaning of desire also, in a sense, suggests that there is no responsibility in the world except for decisions to act or not act in certain ways. At the same time, though, these actions result from “some external ‘chance occurrence[s]’ which enable [them] to gel” (*Future* 286). In practical terms, of course, actions do matter in that they determine effects as profound as human death. However, the categories of cause and motive here become useless in that they are cast as nothing more than a “wellspring of meaning” that is incapable of telling us anything more than the fact of ambivalence. Accordingly, the question of ethics becomes increasingly complex in this indetermination of meaning determined by contingency. More importantly, the subject here only gains its value by reading its past according to principles that are deemed obsolete before the process of reading even begins—principles such as truth, culpability, duty, guilt, agency, motive, determination, ethics, etc.

Still, the doctor does not do away with the category of subjective culpability. In fact, he argues that by writing the autobiography, Althusser is taking responsibility for his life; he even calls this an *actus essendi*. Althusser echoes this sentiment in his request that

the reader accompany him on this voyage of self-determination. In this sense, they each allude to the utility of reading in spite of the inadequacy of concepts to guide their reading. However, neither the doctor nor Althusser is able to provide a method for *how* to read in such a way that one can escape the trap of reading contingencies as meaningless. In other words, they fail to elaborate a method of reading that would maintain fidelity to Althusser's philosophy of the encounter where history is a process without subjects, but a process made of actions that are *necessary* nonetheless.

By leaving this question of methodology untouched, Althusser never explains how he is able to think of himself as a *necessary* subject in relation to the state's determination of his status as *non-lieu*. He also fails to explain how his philosophy of absent causality is qualitatively different from the ideology that allowed the state to declare him unfit to plead. In turn, he leaves it to the reader to do this work, and it is for the reader to decide how the question of reading can be transformed into a practical and political question of life when absent causes have profound, ideological effects.

## **II. Daniel's Genealogical Method**

Daniel's story is very similar to Althusser's autobiography in that he searches for the meaning of his life in an ideological world that seems to contain no cause or stable truth. As the son of the Isaacson's who were electrocuted for a crime that they may or may not have committed, Daniel serves as both the inheritor of their sins, and as the source that can ultimately reveal whether their fate was warranted. However, his knowledge of their guilt or innocence is not only speculative; it is also somewhat meaningless to him as he is a subject of the post-nuclear generation to whom the

categories of truth, guilt, innocence, and duty have become vacuous. He thus seeks to cynically separate himself from the Old Left, which, he believes, has failed to effect meaningful change precisely because of its teleological belief in the future. Simultaneously, however, he remains equally suspicious of the New Left because its “presentism” and tactics of figuring meaning through images without overt messages seems naïve. In turn, he retreats to solitary, scholarly pursuits in order to make sense of himself in a world in which he feels completely disconnected yet inextricably bound.

In Daniel Lewin’s narrative, we see the same problems emerge that affected the biblical Daniel’s book. Both Daniels serve as witnesses to histories with effects so profound that they affect entire nations, and they are also both incapable of comprehending what it is that they see. They both have prophetic vision, and they are both blind to the meaning of their prophecies. They both occupy varying narrative positions in their texts, and they both cannot find a structure for their narratives that is loyal to their chronology. Finally, and most important, they both predict an End to History, and they both believe it is their responsibility to determine its meaning.

As this is “his” book, though, Daniel Lewin must determine what role he, as a subject, plays in the history of postmodernism. He must also determine if the world is worth saving, and how to construct political commitments in the wake of atrocities committed in the name of politics—namely, his parents’ execution and the Cold War itself. As such, he faces the same task as Althusser: to produce a theory of the subject within a world where effects are powerful, but causes are absent. Similarly, in determining who/what “authors” history and bears responsibility for it, he is faced with

the problem of differentiating the subject and object of history. While he fails to explicitly detail an ontology of the postmodern that would account for peoples' actions and commitments, his philosophy of history is inherent in his critiques of other characters in his own text. In addition, Daniel's philosophy of history can be further grasped in the formal structure of Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*—the book that literally “contains” both Daniel Lewin's book and fragments from the biblical Book of Daniel, which precedes and follows Lewin's text.

The content of Daniel's philosophy of history emerges mainly through his critiques of others' political and emotional commitments. Throughout the novel, Daniel largely avoids the question of the guilt or innocence of his parents and focuses more on the affective effects of their politics. His main critique is of his father, Paul Isaacson, and the rigidity of his political program. Daniel explains that the utopian, teleological principles that drove his father's political commitments also drove him to act irrationally.

For instance, he recounts how his father listened to the radio at work and would become outraged at the loaded questions and right-wing analyses on the air. Yet, his father could not make himself turn it off and he instead “poked his soldering iron into the heart of the radio as if trying to repair the voice, trying to fix the errors of analysis and interpretation. He stabbed it in the tubes, like a primitive again, as if the machine was talking, as if trying to re-program the lie box” (Doctorow 39).<sup>30</sup> Here, Daniel distances himself from his father's “primitive” generation by critiquing his father's ideological

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<sup>30</sup> For an especially interesting approach to radio and the disembodied voices it transmits, see: Mowitz, John. *Radio: Essays in Bad Reception*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2011. Print.

commitments. Daniel shows that the utopian *telos* that Marxist-Leninist analytics claimed they could produce did little more than create Stalinist ideologues moved by passion instead of thoughtful analysis. Doctorow writes:

...the implication of all the things he used to flagellate himself was that American democracy wasn't democratic enough. He continued to be astonished, insulted, outraged, that it wasn't purer, freer, finer, more ideal. Finding proof of it over and over again—the struggle is still going on, Pop!—like a guy looking for confirmation. How much confirmation did he need? Why did he expect so much of a system he knew by definition could never satisfy his standards of justice? A system he was committed to opposing because he had a better one in mind. It's screwy. Lots of them were like that. They were Stalinists and every instance of Capitalist America fucking up drove them wild. My country! Why aren't you what you claim to be? If they were put on trial, they didn't say *Of course, what else could we expect*, they said *You are making a mockery of American justice!* And it was more than strategy, it was more than Lenin's advice to use the reactionary apparatus to defend yourself, it was passion. (40)

Paul Isaacson's character comes to signify the inability of the Old Left to construct a method of psychological analysis rigorous enough to make historical dialectics seem sensible. Here, then, the idea of a rational agent of history is undermined by the lived history of Paul Isaacson's political suicide for a cause that never revealed itself to be more than an oppressive ideology.

Daniel is less judgmental of his mother's political leanings, and he asserts that she "didn't have to go through the primer again and again. She knew the lesson. She was truer to the idea. In her way she was the more committed radical" (40). Still, Rochelle sacrificed herself for a vision that proved to be neither radical nor materialist. In fact, one could characterize his mother's view of history as unconsciously eschatological and hence blind to the present. This is illustrated nowhere more clearly than at the site of her electrocution. In the last forty-eight hours before her death, she refused all religious ministrations from the prison rabbi. However, the last words she uttered before her death were: "Let my son be bar mitzvah today. Let our death be his bar mitzvah" (298). As Julian Levinson states, "Within the framework of the novel, this gruesome image associates Daniel's mission with the act of bearing witness to his parents' murder in the name of divine justice" (196). Here, Rochelle cannot separate political sacrifice from the religious traditions of coming of age.

One could further understand the way that Rochelle both rejects religious ministrations and posits her death within a religious meta-narrative by examining Fredric Jameson's critique of historical allegories as "theological" (Jameson, *Political* 28-29). In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson claims that idealist-Marxist historical narratives can be located within the late-antiquity tradition of "rewriting the Jewish textual and cultural heritage in a form usable for Gentiles" (29). From this attempt at allegorical rewriting, he claims that medieval theorists produced four levels of interpretation—anagogical, moral, allegorical, and literal—that "constituted a methodological upper limit and a virtual exhaustion of interpretive possibilities" (Jameson, *Political* 32). Ultimately, he draws

upon Althusser's critique of "expressive causality" to assert that this religious interpretive tradition found its way into so-called secular Marxism via Hegelian idealism in that the vulgar Marxist distinction between base and superstructure has a "deep kinship" with the allegorical systems that seek to "assimilate levels to one another and affirm their ultimate identity" (32). Here, we can read Rochelle Isaacson's simultaneous Marxist refusal of religious sacrament and her appeal to a master narrative of divine justice within Jameson's elaboration of the complex relationship between dialectical materialism and Judaic interpretation.

The character that Daniel is both most drawn to and most repelled by is Artie Sternlicht—a Jerry Ruben-esque figure who comes to signify the problems of 1960s counter culture, the New Left's political (dis)organizing, and postmodern narcissism. Unlike the Isaacsons' politics, Sternlicht's politics lack a program. Instead of focusing on creating a more just future, Sternlicht operates within an unexamined discourse of "the here and now." His politics take the form of cynical, satirical, and individualistic mockery of everyday life in which critical analysis is rejected in favor of forging a consciously artificial connection with the visual spectacle of postmodernism.

Daniel meets Sternlicht when he visits him to discuss his sister, Susan, in Sternlicht's Lower East Side apartment. When Daniel arrives, there is a *Cosmopolitan* photographer shooting a collage of pop cultural images on the walls of the apartment that he and his girlfriend refer to as "EVERYTHING THAT CAME BEFORE IS ALL THE SAME" (136). His girlfriend has collected the images in what she calls a "binge"—a binge that she is unable to recognize as itself a consumerist act (135).

Sternlicht is smarter about his own position within “the revolution” as he tries to implicate himself within the system as a way of absolving himself of the guilt of being unable to escape it. Specifically, he purports to incriminate himself in his pastiche of celebrities by posing like Jesus Christ for the photographer. For he argues, “Legitimacy is illegitimate. Make it show its ass. Hit and run. You got forty seconds, man. The media need material. Like Abbie says, anyone who does anything in this country is a celebrity...We’re gonna overthrow the United States with images!” (Doctorow 140). While Sternlicht points to the real fact that postmodernism is a society of the spectacle in which authenticity is but an ideological veneer, he cannot locate his own feelings of enlightenment in the lineage of Old Left vanguardism from which he seeks distance. Additionally, he lacks the self-reflexivity to see the narcissism that a politics of “being in the know” engenders. Consequently, he fails to differentiate his own affective detachment from the lived struggles of subjects who bear the burden of the histories that created them. Specifically, I am referring to Daniel’s sister Susan who shares Sternlicht’s world-view, but cannot overcome the depressive and political burdens she carries from being the daughter of the Isaacsons. Daniel’s book begins with her failed suicide attempt; it ends when another attempt is successful.

In posing for the *Cosmopolitan* collage, Sternlicht seeks to place himself directly at the center of the spectacle that he calls the present. However, his philosophy of history—namely, “EVERYTHING THAT CAME BEFORE IS JUST THE SAME”—is premised both on a lack of distinction between past, present, and future, as well as on a notion of the subject as impotent to effect social change. While one could mistakenly

interpret Sternlicht's notion of history to be a synchronic one not unlike Althusser's, it is more accurate to conceptualize it as an infinite regress in the way the infinite regress is understood within the optical sciences.

According to this theory, an infinite regress is produced when two mirrors are placed facing each other, and a series of infinite receding images appears. While a subject stands between these two mirrors, this set of images is produced *ad infinitum* with the subject doing nothing more than occupying the space between that which is behind and that which is front of her. Sternlicht's view of history fits into this model of the infinite regress in that the images of history and the future are the same as those produced in the present. Additionally, the production of these images has little, if anything, to do with the actual efforts of the subject.

Daniel recognizes this much when Sternlicht tells the photographer the name of his collage: "The reporter looks at the photographer, and you know she has her lead now, the piece is writing itself. Everyone gets happy" (136). Here, the piece writes itself because it melds into history as a qualitatively uniform narrative authored by everyone and no one at all. For Sternlicht, there is something euphoric and liberating about understanding history in this way: the repetitions of history require no real interpretation because interpretation can reveal nothing more than the structural impossibility of subjective agency and change as such.

One could argue that like Althusser, Sternlicht believes that history is a process without subjects. This is true. However, their philosophies stand in radical opposition to each other with regard to the relationship between epistemology and ontology, as well as

the role of necessity in history. For Sternlicht, knowledge is located in vision and clarity—namely, in the ability to see history as infinite regress. In contrast, Althusser rejects an epistemology of knowledge as vision in favor of an ontology of production wherein concepts that allow us to know are actively produced in the act of reading. So far as the subject is concerned, producing necessary concepts in reading is the condition of possibility for “class struggle in theory” (Althusser, *Essays* 142).

Daniel’s view of history is quite similar to Sternlicht’s, but he does not find it liberatory at all until the end of the novel. This similarity becomes clear in the book he is writing. Daniel is unable to sustain a first-person narrative voice, he switches modes constantly because he does not believe in the validity of any discourse to represent history, and he makes connections between past and present from seemingly dissimilar events. Unlike Sternlicht, however, Daniel actually wants to analyze the connections he makes. In fact, Susan shared his view of history and he blames her death on a “failure of analysis” (301).

Genealogy is the method Daniel turns to in order to redeem history not guided by cause and his own role within it. The question of genealogy surrounds Daniel’s text thematically, formally, and repetitiously. In the first sense, Daniel’s story is vaguely connected by a series of narratives that are at once implicated in other narratives and incomplete in their own tellings. For instance, Daniel oscillates between different narrative subject-positions to tell a story that is at times fully autobiographical and at others a master narrative (Marxism, Freudianism, Patriotism, etc.) completely detached from his life. He also traces the questions of history and belief back to the Old Testament

and to the biblical Daniel's quest to understand them. Finally, his book is a family genealogy, as well as a genealogy of the American Left.

Formally, Daniel Lewin's book is both preceded by a series of epigraphs beginning with a passage from the biblical Book of Daniel and followed by another passage from that same book. Here, the question of the limits of narrative is not only built into the conflicting and overlapping discourses that structure Daniel Lewin's own story; his story is also literally surrounded by a series of fragments that are linearly arranged but unnarrativized in any connected manner. There are three different endings to the book and the last concludes with a biblical passage. These biblical fragments seemingly connect the various narrative threads surrounding and located within Lewin's text in that they are derived from the same source. However, disconnected from each other and decontextualized from their biblical source, they, in fact, engender two very different positions on the necessity of belief.

To begin with, there are three epigraphs that precede Daniel Lewin's text and provide a genealogy of his perceived calling as it has unfolded chronologically from biblical times to the present. In the first, Daniel 3:4, the subjugated Babylonians are called upon to fall to their knees and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has erected. This fragment comes from the bible story where Daniel's three friends refuse to worship the idol, they are thrown into the fiery furnace, and God miraculously saves them. In this story, King Nebuchadnezzar converts to belief in Daniel's God and makes Daniel his spiritual advisor and dream analyst. This biblical fragment is used to show Daniel's role as both a prophet and a witness to history and

oppression. It also foreshadows his parents who are condemned to death for their refusal to revere American democracy and capitalism as well as the death of over six million Jews in the gas chambers.

In the second epigraph, an excerpt from Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, the speaker commemorates the defeated by playing the same instruments that were used in the first epigraph to move people towards belief in a false deity. As in the previous passage, the speaker also celebrates the oppressed, but he loses the individual importance that he held in the first fragment. Here, he is merely a witness to history, and he loses his prophetic role.

Finally, in the third epigraph, an excerpt from Allen Ginsberg's *America*, the speaker also serves as a witness to history and to oppression, but he loses his own necessity and is now "nothing" at all. He has a strong vision of what history is, but he can "no longer stand it." Here, his prophecy and his belief in the promise of historical redemption are deemed useless. He is no longer the "Beacon of Faith in a Time of Persecution" as he was in the biblical passage.

Taken together, these three epigraphs mark a sequence of starts and stops that occur within Doctorow's novel in which Daniel Lewin becomes both reliant on and liberated from other narratives that are necessary to fulfill his role. But the epigraphical sequence of devolving faith does not exactly mirror the conceptual chronology of Daniel Lewin's text. Instead, four books and three endings constitute Daniel's text. These books—"Memorial Day," "Halloween," "Starfish," and "Christmas"—are each constituted on tropes of death *and* resurrection.

Memorial Day marks the national commemoration of those who have died for the country. Halloween brings the dead to life in a collective celebration of death for the living. Starfish points to regenerative potential because it is almost impossible for another organism to kill a starfish. The final book, “Christmas,” though, marks a different kind of resurrection than the previous books.

In this book, Daniel must make the choice whether or not he will abandon an old testament of politics requiring real sacrifice and ethics for a new kind politics that does not require total submission to a cause. Incidentally, Daniel becomes not only a postmodern secular Jewish prophet who predicts the end of teleological politics; he is also offered a similar fate to Jesus Christ—to be sacrificed as the son of the father, and as the son/father, and reborn. In the last of the three endings of “Christmas” that concludes Daniel’s narrative, he learns that the University from which he is writing is being shut down and that he is being liberated by Artie Sternlicht’s political group, a faction around which much of his previous critique in the book revolves.

As he leaves behind his desk and scholarly pursuits, he comments that he “ha[s] to smile” and he proceeds to abandon his book. He writes: “DANIEL’S BOOK: A Life Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctoral Degree in Social Biology, Gross Entomology, Women’s Anatomy, Children’s Cacophony, Arch Demonology, Eschatology, and Thermal Pollution” (302). The words that follow his partially submitted, hedonistic life-text are the last words of Doctorow’s *Daniel* as well. Like the first epigraph, these words come directly from the biblical Book of Daniel: “*But*

*though, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end... Go thy way Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end*" (303).

Even though these final words seemingly supersede Daniel's "partially submitted life" and render useless any and all of the possible connections he has made in his book, Daniel does not completely surrender narrative authority and the ability to pass judgment on the living. Instead, he only "partially submits" his life to the cause of knowledge and in so doing he admits that he "ha[s] to smile" because "[this ending] has not been unexpected" (393). We do not know if this smile is joyful or cynical and he names no subject who has been expecting this end. Yet, the narrative appears to have reached completion in a full circle: the questions of belief and truth that preceded his text in the form of a biblical crisis have returned as Daniel closes the book and abandons the project of prophesying the future by mastering knowledge of the past. Here, he perceives himself as impotent to change history, as did the subject in the Ginsberg fragment. If one is to read the ending in this way, Daniel is critical of transcendence, but he also understands its inescapability in the world (i.e., religious traditions, notions of political liberation, truth, etc.). In discovering that his genealogical method has failed to produce a theory of the subject in history that would provide him a *tabula rasa* to cleanse himself of the genealogies that find connection in his body, he decides that the closest thing to liberation from these connections is partial submission to them. He thus decides that his attempt to write his life is futile; he lets the bible have the first and the last word.

Literary critics Virginia Carmichael and T.V. Reed also argue that *Daniel* is a book of genealogy. In different ways, Reed and Carmichael's treatment of *Daniel's*

end(s) imply the same conclusion. For Carmichael, Daniel's partially submitted life story is one of both fidelity and abandon: he must go on living but abandon his search for the one and only truth about the potentialities of social action. However, she fails to explain what the utility of his book is at all except that its conclusion allows for a different beginning. In a sense, what she is arguing is that the exercise of writing it was therapeutic enough to sublimate the neuroses that led to its writing.<sup>31</sup> For Reed, by contrast, this final ending leaves both Daniel and the reader duped.<sup>32</sup> He writes: "We have been 'liberated' by coercion, by a story we are in but try to pretend we are authoring... This knowledge is liberating, but in and of itself it leaves things largely unchanged" (Reed 302). I should

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<sup>31</sup> Virginia Carmichael examines the relationship between literary narratives and history under the threat of nuclear explosion and explains that although "the real Rosenberg story is undecidable," its effects have "played a crucial explanatory and justifying role in the formulation of the Cold War" (xi). Instead of rehearsing the hackneyed argument that fiction has replaced truth in the postmodern period, Carmichael maintains that what gives the Rosenberg story its power is not that it reveals the collapse of truth endemic to post-war America. Rather, it demonstrates the "theoretical knowab[ility]" of truth even if it is undecidable (Carmichael xiv). She tries to show that Doctorow's rejection of a linear, causal narrative structure still allows for a qualitatively different kind of "theoretical knowability" than does the official story of the Rosenbergs. This "theoretical knowability" is located in both the compositional nature of Daniel's character and in the text's generic collision. Her argument concerning "theoretical knowability" is, therefore, largely one in which form trumps content. She uses *The Book of Daniel* to produce a theory of a "frame-narrative" in which narrative, form, content, and history simultaneously structure readings and house the architecture for meta-commentary on these individual elements. For further elaboration on her interesting concept of "frame-narrative," see: Carmichael, Virginia. *Framing History: The Rosenberg Story and the Cold War*. Vol 6. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

<sup>32</sup> In his reading of Daniel, Reed discovers a kind of realism that falls outside of Carmichael's frame-narrative. He writes, "The Book of Daniel seems to claim to tell the Isaacson/Rosenberg story more fully than is possible through the codes of narrative realism in conventional fiction or historiography by incorporating those codes as one of its moments, thus reinscribing realism on another plane" (289). See also his rejection of historicism in his essay, "Genealogy/Narrative/Power: Questions of Postmodernity in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *American Literary History* 4.2 (1992): 288-304.

note that Reed's critique of Daniel is the same one that Daniel levies against Artie Sternlicht.

What Carmichael finds liberating about Daniel's narrative is that he leaves his genealogies incomplete. This interests her not because his task has been altogether futile, but rather because he abandons mastery and steps out of the library to connect with what contingency has made possible—a radical politics located within the genealogy of his book, but discontinuous with the traditions he seeks to abandon. For Reed, on the other hand, it is not a matter of contingency that is at stake in *Daniel*. What is at stake is the *necessity* of acting within the discontinuous and contingent.

I agree with Reed that the importance of *Daniel* is the question of the subject's *necessity* in the face of contingency. As I argued before, this is the same question that Althusser faced in his autobiography, the same question that required he produce a method of reading for determining the subject's *necessity* in light of the ideological effects of a world structured on absent causes. But while I agree that *Daniel* is a book of radical genealogy, what I glean from these passages, as well as from the genealogical structure(s) of the text, is not a celebration of genealogical production at all. Daniel himself states this most clearly when he argues that “what is most monstrous is sequence” itself (245).

By surrounding Daniel Lewin's genealogical text with fragments from the biblical Book of Daniel, and by “containing” all of this text in his own novel (which is itself a pastiche of what it “contains”), Doctorow elucidates two distinct, yet inextricably linked

concepts: first, what is monstrous about sequence is that it is repetitious; second, it is impossible to contain meaning. Sequence is monstrous for the sheer fact that there is no repetition without a difference. This is why it is so difficult for Daniel to analyze the political, familial, and spiritual genealogies that he traces. Therefore, the monstrosity of sequence for Daniel is not about the persistence of an origin at all. Instead, the limit of Daniel's genealogies is that once he has created a series of sequences and has made connections between the events, stories, and fantasies that inhabit his life, he finds that meaning neither inheres in these sequences, nor can it be contained by them.

Because the *production* of genealogical sequence is the necessary precondition for locating meaning, and meaning does not pre-exist in sequence per se, Daniel must find a method for reading his genealogies. This method must neither foreclose the possibility for future connections nor prohibit the opportunity to determine his personal necessity. In positioning his narratives in relation to a world with meaning always already in flux, in the end, his book is nothing more than the biblical Book of Daniel if he cannot read the connections he makes with it.

I would argue here that Daniel's conundrum results from producing poorly constructed genealogies that do not align with the purpose of a Foucaultian genealogical method: to "transform" the present by "grasping (more fully) what it is" (Foucault, Enlightenment 50). For Foucault, genealogy is at odds with interpretation. He writes:

The isolation of different points of emergence does not conform to the successive configurations of an identical meaning; rather, they result from

substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals. If interpretation were the slow exposure of meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. (151)

Even though Foucault also explains that “the role of genealogy is to record history” so that concepts that have been made transcendental appear “as events on the stage of historical processes,” he never really explains at what point analysis should intervene in the genealogical process or how this analysis might differ from an *a posteriori* method of interpretation (Enlightenment 152). That is not to say, however, that Foucault is uninterested in questioning the effects of genealogical inquiry. Rather, the purpose of genealogy for Foucault is not to interpret the past per se, but to allow the contingencies of the past to question the present so as to produce a critical ontology of our subjectivities today.

Daniel misunderstands the Foucaultian critique of interpretation and writes a plethora of genealogies hoping that he will find a “slow exposure of meaning hidden in an origin” (Foucault, Enlightenment 151). In so doing, he simply partakes in a continual process of the genealogical recording, but does not use the opportunity of hindsight to interpret the writing of his genealogies or their silences and exclusions. He approaches genealogy as if it is a form-without-a-method and a method-without-a-form. This is precisely the problem that Daniel is unable to circumvent when he walks away from his genealogies and closes his book. To merely point to the genealogical, non-teleological structure of *Daniel* as indicative of the book’s sacred message—namely, that the

ceaseless production of genealogical narratives is the only way that truth (a concept more or less equated with genealogy) will be recognized—does nothing to provide a method of reading these genealogies that would be capable of producing a real transformation in his life.

When Daniel walks out of the library and leaves behind his partially submitted life, he is able to, in a sense, remove his body from the circuits of thought that inhere in him. One should not, however, read this ending as the sign of a better future. Instead, earlier in the text Daniel tells us that electrocution is really nothing more than completing the circuit “by the human body” (297). Following his logic, one can read his betrayal of these connections—that is, the closure of his book—as the text’s final execution. In other words, by closing his own book, Daniel serves as his own and as his book’s final executioner. With this metaphorical suicide, the reader is left only with the book and with no way to differentiate Daniel’s story from his father’s story as they are both “portrait[s] of electric current, normally invisible, moving through a field of resistance” (Doctorow 298). As he is aware of his own status as an effect of history in a world without cause, origin, or inherent meaning, Daniel does not know how to prove his own necessity if he cannot understand the transformative potentials of his visions.

Strangely enough, in his writings on aleatory materialism and in his autobiography, Althusser describes quite aptly why the biblical Daniel fails to understand his own visions. Althusser’s critiques could also easily be applied to the genealogies Daniel Lewin composes and to the prophecies he disavows. In “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” Althusser elaborates how his own

materialism of the encounter fits into a Spinozist ontology, and how it is from this ontology that we can understand Daniel's conundrum. He describes Spinoza's ontology in the following way:

[It is] a strange theory, which people tend to present as a theory of knowledge...[However,] *the imagination is not by any means a faculty, but, fundamentally, only the only world itself in its 'givenness'*. With this slide [*glissement*], Spinoza not only turns his back on all theories of knowledge, but also clears a path for the recognition of the 'world' as that-beyond-which-there-is-nothing, not even a theory of nature—for the recognition of the 'world' as a unique totality that is *not totalized, but experienced in its dispersion*, and experienced as the 'give' into which we are 'thrown' and on the basis of which we forge all our illusions [*fabricae*]...("Underground" 179, italics original)

Here, we can see that Althusser's world of encounter is similar to Spinoza's in that it is a totality that is not totalized. But more important, what Althusser confirms is that Spinoza's ontology is easily mistakable as a theory of knowledge because "*the imagination is not by any means a faculty, but, fundamentally, only the only world itself in its 'givenness'*" (Althusser, "Underground" 179).

Althusser uses his elaboration of Spinoza's critique of knowledge to produce a critique of the biblical Daniel:

But the theory of the imaginary as a world allows Spinoza to think the ‘singular essence’ of the third kind which finds its representation *par excellence* in the history of an individual or a people, such as Moses or the Jewish people. The fact that it is necessary means simply that it has been accomplished, but everything in it could have swung the other way, depending on the encounter or non-encounter of Moses and God, or the encounter of the comprehension or non-comprehension of the prophets. The proof is that it was necessary to explain to the prophets the meaning of what they reported of their conversations with God!—with the following limit-situation, of nothingness itself, which was Daniel’s: you could explain everything to him for as long as you liked, he never understood a thing. A proof by nothingness of nothingness itself, as a limit-situation. (“Underground” 179)

Daniel employs a genealogical method in the hope that by tracing his fragmented and dispersed life through all of its connections and contingencies, he will ultimately arrive at an understanding of his past that will prove himself necessary beyond his lack of comprehension of that past that has left him feeling unimportant despite his close relation to monumental historical events. In other words, he hopes that he can prove that he is something more than nothing in a chain of events if only he can understand the events into which contingency threw him. But while he has an (imperfect) epistemology for making these connections, he lacks an ontology that would give meaning to his being or to his prophecies. In turn, he reads according to an epistemological model that fails to

recognize what Spinoza made clear—the fact that anything is necessary means simply that it has been accomplished, that it is directly lived, and that it is; one need not understand it for it to be necessary and hence always already beyond nothingness. However, to be necessary does not necessarily mean to be adequate.

In *The Future Lasts Forever*, Althusser translates the limit-situation of Daniel's (mis)comprehension of nothingness into a theory of ideology. He writes,

What I discovered in Spinoza (as well as the well-known Appendix to Tractus Book I) was a formidable theory of religious ideology, an 'apparatus of thought' which turns the world upside down and takes causes as ends; the whole elaborated in terms of its relationship to social subjectivity. What a 'cleansing' operation it proved to be!...I was absolutely fascinated by [Spinoza's] theory of the prophets, which reinforced my view that Spinoza had attained an incredible understanding of the nature of ideology. Everyone knows, of course, that the prophets climbed mountains to hear the word of God. What they actually heard was the din of thunder and lightning together with a few words, which they took back, *without having understood them*, to the people awaiting them on the plains. The extraordinary thing is that the people themselves, with their self-consciousness and knowledge, then explained to these deaf, blind prophets the meaning of God's message! They explained it to all of them, except that idiot Daniel who not only failed to understand what God said to him (the lot of all prophets) but even the explanation provided for

him! This simply proves that ideology can, in certain cases, and maybe naturally does, remain totally impenetrable to those subjected to it. (217, italics original)

Like the biblical prophets, Daniel Lewin perceives the world through what Spinoza calls “parables and allegories, and clothed spiritual truths in bodily forms” (Spinoza par. 121). Unlike the biblical prophets, however, Daniel Lewin tries to compose his prophecies through discourses of reason because he does not believe in the certitude of his prophecies by morality alone. In this regard, he also differs from the unwavering moralistic political program of the Old Left.

Daniel Lewin understands what the biblical Daniel does not: that his visions are ideology-effects and that they are not causally driven. This is why he rejects a methodology that searches for causes and why he employs the genealogical method to elucidate encounters between the ideologies that traverse and intersect his family, his politics, and his life. In fact, his understanding of ideology is not that different from that of Althusser. With regard to Althusser’s reading of the biblical Daniel, Morfino writes,

This prophetic knowledge is not, therefore, taken as a sign of destiny or fate. It is instead seen as the effect of an encounter between imaginaries that take hold, sometimes despite the prophet himself, taking hold even when (as in Daniel’s case) there is a total inability of the prophet to understand the sense or meaning that emerges from the encounter. (par. 31)

Daniel Lewin recognizes himself for what he is—merely a figure of the intersection and encounter of ideologies. But while he understands himself in this manner, he cannot escape ideology because he is incapable of comprehending the visions that are, in a sense, so clear to him—even clearer than truth. What he is lacking is a method for reading his genealogies that would not escape ideology, but would still expose “*a certain relation of necessity...between the visible and the invisible*” (Althusser, *Reading* 26). Without this method, he fails to locate his own necessity or arrive at an understanding of how his prophecies could be put to use for political purposes despite their ideological underpinnings and lack of determinable sense. Put differently, he does not understand that the visions that constitute him are necessary and are useful despite their inadequacy.

Following Tobin Siebers’ definition of politics as “the need...to form an interpretation at the level of particular consequences and to make visible the conflicts of interpretation,” I would argue that Daniel is only partially a postmodern political failure (13). On the one hand, while Daniel fails to interpret the text he writes, his text is, nevertheless, a portrait of the *historical consequences* of conflicting historical, psychoanalytic, and political interpretations. On the other hand, while Doctorow does not provide an interpretation of Daniel’s text, the meta-fictional novel Doctorow writes at once illustrates the impossibility of genealogical containment and encloses what it knows about the genealogies it traces. That is, unlike Daniel, who abandons his interminable book to history and allows the bible to have the first and last word, Doctorow appropriates history and calls it his own production—for this is, after all, Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel*.

As such, Doctorow's novel simultaneously posits itself as epistemologically inadequate, historically necessary, and politically useful. Doctorow's appropriation of history, however, is neither relativist nor the same as Sternlicht's. In particular, even though Doctorow does not (and is most likely unable to) elucidate a method for understanding the causal relationships of the links he forges between the Cold War, the Old Testament, psychoanalysis, and the life of a Columbia University graduate student, his novel illustrates the necessity of these encounters at the level of singular *effects* themselves. That is, he demonstrates the explosions of power that are inseparable from these effects—personal (e.g., Susan's suicide), political (e.g., the Issacson's electrocutions), and world historical (e.g., the postmodernization of leftist politics). In addition, while he continuously registers repetitions in history, his text's false starts, multiple endings, and disconnected biblical fragments reveal the spurious nature of historical inevitability and of Sternlicht's slogan—namely, “EVERYTHING THAT CAME BEFORE IS THE SAME” (Doctorow 136). Accordingly, when Doctorow closes his own book, he offers up what Daniel Lewin's cynical reading method forecloses—the opportunity to interpret imperfect prophecies so as to produce more adequate visions of history and the future.

### **III. Althusser's Guilty Reading**

Two decades before composing his autobiography, Althusser wrote *Reading Capital* together with Étienne Balibar. In this text, he outlines a methodology of reading that does not stand in contradiction to the philosophy of aleatory materialism as he defines it at the end of his life. Interestingly, this is precisely the methodology that he

fails to spell out in the conclusion of his autobiography, but that he asserts will “help [him] live” and give meaning to his life (*Future* 286). In other words, this is the methodology which, I argued, he leaves to the reader to discover in order to determine *necessity* in a world where the categories of truth, guilt, innocence, and responsibility are determined to be little more than a well-spring of contingent, ambivalent forces without predetermined cause. I also argued that determining such a methodology would be a feat tantamount to transforming the question of reading into a practical and political question of life. This is the same task of Daniel’s text/life, but unlike Daniel, Althusser does not turn to the genealogical method for the answer.

With regard to Althusser’s reading practice, I refer to more than the interaction between a reader and what is commonly understood as a text in its printed form. While he does not explicitly define reading practice in such a way, one can infer from his Spinozian politics that a reading practice for Althusser could be construed as any interaction between a human mode and another mode of any sort in which an understanding—visible or invisible—is produced in the realm of speech, thought, or gesture. When we are reading, we are always reading the world.

Althusser names his methodology “symptomatic reading.” While Althusser does not claim to have produced this methodology himself, he articulates explicitly the way that its creator, Karl Marx, put it to work. Rather than simply detailing it, though, Althusser explains what he understands this method to be by performing such a reading of Marx’s *Capital*. Specifically, he performs such a reading by showing how it was that Marx read classical political economy from Adam Smith to David Ricardo.

Althusser notes that classical economists were successful in producing a concept of the “value of labor.” Yet, within the very answers to the question of what the value of labor is, a point of emptiness emerges whereby the concept of labor reveals something that is lacking: Is labor an action or a pool of laborers? In the statement “the value of *labor* is equal to the value of the subsistence goods necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of *labor*,” Marx himself locates a problem of *content* in the concept of labor. This semiotic indeterminacy allows Marx to produce his own concept of *labor-power* from the presence of the absence of the necessary not-yet-discursively-extant-concept of labor-power in the aforementioned question.

Althusser thus *reads* into Marx’s reading, thereby producing his own theory of reading that seeks to expose “*a certain relation of necessity...between the visible and the invisible*” (*Reading* 26). The invisible is not outside the text, however. There is *never* an outside to the text for Althusser, only an inner darkness that is present, yet blinding. The limit to the text is the text itself; the limit to the world is the world itself. It should be noted here that this is the same limit-situation of nothingness that Althusser describes in relation to the biblical Daniel with regard to how he looks outside of himself for a meaning to his prophecies.

Althusser also contends that a stable subject does not perform the act of reading. In the case of Marx, Althusser argues that we should not read his vision of the invisible in such a way that simply positions him as an attentive reader. Instead, Marx *produces* a new, and what Althusser calls, “*informed gaze*,” “itself produced by a reflection of the ‘change of terrain’ on the exercise of vision, in which Marx pictures the transformation of

the problematic” (*Reading 27*). The implications of Marx’s “sighting” show us that he, as reader, was not a free willing subject that simply changed points of view, but rather a reader thus transformed on a new terrain by the act of reading itself—a terrain that reveals “the process of real transformation of the means of production of knowledge” by an informed gaze in the conjunction between a reader and a world (*Reading 27*).

Althusser explains this method in both psychoanalytic and “scientific” terms. His method is psychoanalytic in that it is based on a notion that the unconscious produces blind spots in a text. The precondition of a productive and hence “scientific” reading of the text is to approach these blind spots as “symptoms.” His science of reading, then, seeks to locate where blindness occurs not in order to find an underlying *a priori* form of sight, but rather to produce different visions, each conceptual in its own right. These new visions, with new readings, extend *ad infinitum* as do signifiers in the signifying chain of the unconscious. Locating symptoms and hence producing new ones in each subsequent reading brings us no closer to the unconscious though. It does, however, like psychoanalysis, show us the *excess* of what is said. From what is said, we see what is not said, which produces the symptom-as-answer of the necessary problem to work through.

Althusser maintains that this is the method through which Marx read the classical economists, and in so doing, Marx “shows us in a thousand ways the presence of a concept essential to his thought, but absent from his discourse” (*Reading 30*). If this kind of reading can never get at a truth, it can at least reveal to us that concepts are producible. Accordingly, Althusser reads Marx’s concept of production to show that its relevance extends farther beyond what Marx ever knew: by understanding knowledge as a raw

material that is constantly reshaped both in the quest for new knowledge and also in the different historically specific conceptions of what knowledge is, Marx's concept of the mode of production of knowledges allows Althusser, among others, to see a relation between a result and its conditions of existence—in other words, the relation of production in history (Althusser, *Reading* 45).

One could argue not only that Althusser's individual readings are symptomatic in themselves, but also that his entire theory of reading is symptomatic of the historical process of production's dependency on an immanent ontology. That is, by refusing the genesis, completion, or teleology of any text and thus maintaining the necessity of engaging his *predecessors'* symptoms for any adequate reading, Althusser reveals a necessary *dependency* on the symptom itself—not as a hindrance, but as a necessity for *any* real knowledge production process. Reading cannot discover the truth of an already whole object. Instead, it is itself a process of work—a process that reads history's always changing traces and produces new ones in its wake, thereby producing a world that did not exist before it was read. The fact that a new world is produced in writing and reading is precisely what Daniel Lewin cannot understand in his own autobiographical assessment of history in which he attempts to write himself away through mastering his past.

Interestingly, this is where we can return to the question of subjective culpability in Althusser's autobiography with regard to his own immanentist methodology of reading absent causes. Althusser knows that desire is a wellspring of meaning and that no action results from a pure motive or desire with an *a priori* meaning. Still, without ever

explaining what methodology would make this pursuit meaningful, he asks the reader to judge his guilt or innocence with regard to his wife's murder in order to help him live. In *Reading Capital*, however, he explains that his methodology is not about *determining* guilt at all. Rather, *it is itself a guilty method.*

That is, while Althusser argues that it is necessary to read *Capital* "to the letter," he also tells us that literal readings are impossible (*Reading* 13). As such, each reading is guilty—guilty of searching for clues, which, one could argue, are not really there, guilty of seeking a clarity beyond truth. Readers, then, are guilty of deriving meaning from something other than a text as an originary source. In the case of Althusser's role in Hélène's murder, that would mean searching for clues outside of conscious fact. However, Althusser points to the necessity of this endeavor and demands that readers

take responsibility for [their] crime as a 'justified crime' and defend it by proving its necessity. It is therefore a special reading which exculpates itself as a reading by posing every guilty reading the very question that unmasks its innocence, the mere question of its innocence: *what is it to read?* (*Reading* 15)

Without understanding Althusser's formulation of guilt regarding his methodology of reading, one could easily assume that by asking the reader to evaluate his role in the murder, Althusser is simply attempting, cynically, to dupe the reader into subscribing to transcendent categories so as to elevate his own intellectual position in relation to the gullible reader. But to the contrary, I argue that Althusser's method is neither simply

narcissistic nor relativist. It is one that is guilty in that asks the reader to consider *stakes* and *effects* of quests for meaning in a world where meaning has no stability. To read Althusser's life is to partake in an encounter that contributes to its necessity.

As I previously stated, this method does not look for answers outside of the text, but for the blind spots within it. In that sense, reading Althusser's past as a way to understand his culpability is not merely an act of imposing guilt upon him even when the reader believes that she is reading objectively. Instead, the reader and writer become one as they are each transformed on a new terrain that reveals "the process of real transformation of the means of production of knowledge" by an informed gaze in the conjunction between a reader and a world (*Reading 27*).

Even though this transformation is productive and transformative for both the reader and for Althusser, it is rehabilitative for neither. One does not overcome one's guilt or escape ideology in such a reading precisely because reading by this method reveals the necessary *dependency* on the symptom itself for a world to persist. Neither is this kind of reading pejorative in the sense that it expects readers to be repentant for attempting to ascertain knowledge that has no permanent foundation or transcendent cause. Instead, it is guilty for the sheer fact that it engages, *as necessary*, what it discovers to be the darkest parts of the text, the most unfamiliar parts of the world. One could characterize this darkness as the unconscious.

Althusser did not "benefit from being declared unfit to plead" when the state characterized his motives as lacking a cause and thus merely contingent upon factors over

which he had no control. To the contrary, in so doing, the state also determined that his entire being was no longer necessary as a result of contingency. The responsibility that Althusser gives implicitly to the reader, then, at the end of his text is to figure out the question that he asks with regard to guilty reading in *Reading Capital*: “the very question that unmasks its innocence, the mere question of its innocence: *what is it to read?*” (15).

#### **IV. Daniel’s Shocked and Guilty Readers**

Throughout the novel, Daniel alleges that those around him—his parents, his sister, his wife, Artie Sternlicht, and even himself—are guilty of reading in uninformed and uncritical ways. Shocking motifs of electricity circulate inside his text connecting the ideological, material, and ethical problems associated with these reading strategies. As his narrative begins, Daniel is sitting in the library at Columbia University writing his dissertation. The light in the library allows him vision to write, but his dissertation changes forms, authors, and time periods as he makes more and more connections with the past, present, and future. As his text proceeds, these connections and electrical motifs become increasingly more dangerous—not only for the bodies they harm in his text, but also for the readers that he interpellates along the way.

For instance, Daniel’s text is interspersed with various notes to the reader accusing her of reading in an elementary manner by judging Daniel for his crassness of form and material: “If it is that elementary, then reader, I am reading you. And together we may rend our clothes in the morning” (Doctorow 54). Further, after he essentially rapes his wife, Daniel burns her with the car cigarette lighter and asks the reader: “Do you believe it? Shall I continue? Do you want to know the effect of three concentric

circles of heating element glowing orange in a black night of rain upon the tender white girlflesh of my wife's ass? Who are you anyway? Who told you you could read this? Is nothing sacred?" (Doctorow 60). This line of questioning continues up to the point that the reader and the executioner are virtually indistinguishable. Daniel tells the reader that it is really "YOUR CAREER IN ELECTRICITY" (Doctorow 295). He then asks if we think he can do the electrocution because he "know[s] there is a you. There has always been a you. YOU: I will show you that I can do [it]" (Doctorow 295-297). There is an us, a reader, and by acting as the "monstrous reader[s] who go on from one word to the next" without making our own connections to divert Daniel's precarious logic, we serve merely as the conduits for the electrical connections that Daniel has exposed to be so dangerous.

Daniel tells us: "Electricity flows in circuits. If the circuit is open or incomplete electricity cannot flow" (297). Like electricity, thought requires a resistance to closure; however, the *power* of thought lies in its connections and one must give up one's own resistances to make those connections possible. What *Daniel* reveals, therefore, is that the revolutionary power of thought lies in allowing oneself to be shocked by that which it engages; reading in this way is fundamentally risky. Electricity thus functions here as a metaphor for thought and its inescapable ideological, dialectical relationship between resistance and complicity. This metaphor serves also as an especially apt critique of the cynical, postmodern notion that nothing is shocking anymore.

Even though throughout his text Daniel repeatedly calls attention to the fact that his narrative is simultaneously total and incomplete, omniscient and deficient, sacred and cursed, he never truly questions the degree to which he himself is a guilty reader. Part of

what is most interesting about his narrative is the fact that he routinely dismisses the question of the truth of his parents' guilt by calling attention to the ludicrousness of such a question. For instance, Daniel makes statements like, "*The Isaacsons are arrested for conspiring to give the secret of television to the Soviet Union...*" (Doctorow 117). In turn, he replaces the question of his parent's guilt with the meta-question of interpretation in general so as to ask: How are analyses guilty and who is guilty of making them?

Daniel derides his parents' generation for putting too much stock in Marxian analytics. He ridicules Sternlicht for expressing a politics that naively dismisses a rigorous analysis of revolution and espouses the possibility of a total overhaul of life. And as previously stated, he argues that Susan died from a lack of analysis—in other words, from a lack of being able to analyze the connections she cannot help but make. In each of these cases, the reader tries to be free from the guilt of believing in the world by connecting with the world.

Like those just mentioned, Daniel too tries to justify his existence in his own way—by reading himself into and writing himself out of his own guilt. However, his method differs in that he views innocence—not guilt—as complicity (Doctorow 225). Guilt and innocence really cannot be separated from each other in any of the aforementioned methods of reading, yet Daniel's formulation differs from the others insofar as it mistakes the innocence of responsibly reading the world and positioning oneself within its reproductive power relations for the guilt of the act of reading itself. Daniel states: "It is complicity in the system to be appalled with the moral structure of the system" (Doctorow 226). His method thus requires that he implicate himself in the

system so as to render himself less complicit in it, not to wrench himself away from it. This method looks nearly identical to Althusser's immanentist method of reading for absent causes. It differs from it radically, however, in that Daniel seeks to absolve himself of *analyzing* his own reading because he simply locates his method in the ideological world and does not see that reading is not merely reproductive of ideological conditions of existence, but that it is transformative as well.<sup>33</sup> In short, he is cynical.

Daniel's prophetic visions illustrate remarkably well how reading is able to locate the invisible connections of past and present, discourse and silence. The primary symptom of Daniel's readings, though, is that even while he dismisses the question of his parents' guilt, he mistakes his knowledge of the absence of transcendent causes for an underlying *a priori* form of sight capable of reading hidden content. He thus reads others' methods as symptomatic of a lack of understanding of human agency and he utilizes his own guilty reading as the proper form to illustrate their symptoms. In so doing, Daniel is unable to recognize that even though he is a guilty reader, his reading is *not guilty enough* to produce a true transgression. At the end of his story that he partially submits and walks away from, he fails to interpret his genealogies and to elaborate the transgressive conclusion that his symptom makes possible: *To have an absent cause does not mean to lack a purpose necessarily.*

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<sup>33</sup> For a detailed account of the evolution of Althusser's concept of reproduction, see: Vatter, Miguel. "Althusser and Machiavelli: Politics After the Critique of Marx." *Multitudes* Web 13 (2003). See also Warren Montag's response to Vatter's essay: Montag, Warren. "Politics: Transcendent or Immanent? A response to Miguel Vatter." *Theory and Event* 7:4 (2004).

Unlike the biblical Daniel, who Althusser describes as a figure who “proves that ideology can, in certain cases, and maybe naturally does, remain totally impenetrable to those subjected to it,” Daniel Lewin cannot *fully* implicate himself within, and hence penetrate, the world that he knows is always already ideological. His genealogies serve as mirrors of ideology in which he thinks he sees himself very clearly, but he cannot subject himself to these visions—a subjection that would, ultimately, render him a subject of truth. The fact that to have an absent cause does not mean to lack a purpose is precisely what Althusser’s doctor referred to when he argued that by exposing himself to readers’ judgment Althusser was committing an *actus essendi*. This is also the concept that the juridical category of *non-lieu* is incapable of grasping—namely, that *all* actions/actors are necessary regardless of their motive—and that Althusser leaves to the reader to figure out in order to “help [him] live” (*Future* 286).

The most poignant example of the question of guilty reading with regard to life and death in *Daniel* is the death by suicide of his younger sister Susan due to a “failure of analysis” (Doctorow 301). In the novel, Susan’s history of reading stretches back to the time when, as children, they go to visit their parents in prison. On the way to the prison, Susan asserts that her parents are dead. When questioned on how she arrived at this conclusion, Susan explains that she has learned how to read, is a good reader, and can read everything (239). In fact, the Isaacsons are not yet dead and Susan has not yet learned to read in the literal sense. However, this scene illustrates a method of reading that largely comes to script her life and also continually bothers Daniel because she

“sound[s] so sure of herself” (239). This method is constituted by a pragmatics of intuition, but also by a failure of analysis—a failure that is surely not only her own.

Throughout the novel, Susan maintains a fidelity to the innocence of her parents and an intuitive knowledge of the world’s injustice. Unlike Daniel, though, she finds herself clinging to belief in the transcendental certitude of categories such as agency and responsibility. Unlike Susan, Daniel’s social investment is sustained by maintaining the indetermination of guilt and innocence. At one point, Susan derides Daniel for failing to attach his name to the Isaacsons’ foundation; in so doing, she composes a letter to him which states that she is “writing [him] out of [her mind]” and that he “no longer exist[s]” (Doctorow 77). Daniel later comments, “There is some evidence that she was driven finally to eradicate him from her consciousness by the radical means of eradicating her consciousness” (Doctorow 82). The eradication of her consciousness is symptomatic of the fact that she reads as a starfish.

Interestingly, Susan’s death occurs in “Book Three: Starfish,” a book whose namesake inadvertently calls attention to Susan’s method of reading, which is indistinguishable from her way of living. As a species, starfish exhibit a superficial radial symmetry. Radial symmetry means that there is only one plane in which symmetry exists. As a radially symmetrical being, Susan reads the world on a singular plane of absolute meanings of innocence and duty; she cannot read in a way that is asymmetrical with her being.

Paradoxically, however, through their ability to reproduce by asexual fragmentation, starfish are able to, literally, come out of themselves by themselves. For Susan, then, the question of purging her past and her enemies, especially writing Daniel out of her mind, is tantamount to the curse of starfish. Just as the starfish is symmetrical with itself but always already on the verge of fragmenting into something that is both the same and something altogether new, Susan's rejection of non-totalizing narratives—narratives that deny the connections between the world that electrocuted her parents and the world of academics who sit complicitly in libraries—totalizes her life in a web of connections, but also fragments her life as she is pulled in various directions by these connections. By making those connections, her life is fragmented to the point at which she can no longer live. She thus kills herself by literally cutting herself apart. Because she is a starfish, however, one could also argue that she actually kills herself in order to start her life anew.

Daniel's reading is also not guilty enough to understand that reading still has a purpose even though, as Althusser suggests, locating symptoms and producing new ones shows us the excess of what is said, but does nothing to move us toward the unconscious. What infuriates and repulses Daniel about Susan is that she "sound[s] so sure of herself" because she says so much (239). At the same time, he is drawn to her for her radical self-sufficiency: "This is undoubtedly because modern man can conceive of nothing more frightening than the self-sufficiency of being of the beautiful Starfish: he mistakes it for death" (250).

Daniel reads Susan's politics as symptomatic of a failure of analysis but never explains what kind of analysis her life is lacking. Instead, he merely misreads the surplus of her unanalyzed thought as a lack and not as a potentiality of meaning. In failing to elaborate whose responsibility it is to analyze Susan or what kind of analysis is adequate for her historical condition as a starfish, he overlooks a connection he himself makes but is absent from his discourse. That is, by calling attention to the fact that modern man mistakes for death the self-sufficiency of the beautiful Starfish because he "can conceive of nothing more frightening," Daniel unconsciously points to one of the key symptoms of radical thought: namely, the inability to produce a figure of the free radical that is not mistaken for the martyr, the political figure of death.

Susan here serves as the limit to the political concept of the free radical. Much like a free radical of electricity, she is highly reactive and is capable, like the martyr, of showing the true power of the death drive as a power immanent to life.<sup>34</sup> However, unlike the martyr whose value is constituted by making the final connection, the free radical must maintain the potential of future connections to ensure her own significance. Unfortunately, maintaining this potential is what diffuses it as well. Here, Daniel describes this impotence of the figure of the free radical:

With each cycle of radical thought there is a stage of genuine creative excitement during which the connections are made. The radical discovers

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<sup>34</sup> In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud claims that the death drive is always already operating within the reality principle and the pleasure principle. Accordingly, death is not in opposition to, but is rather immanent within, life. See: Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990.

connections between available data and the root responsibility. Finally he connects everything. At this point he begins to lose his following. It is not that he has incorrectly connected everything, it is that he has connected everything. Nothing is left outside the connections. At this point society becomes bored with the radical. Fully connected in his characterization it has achieved the counter-insurgent rationale to destroy him. (Doctorow 140)

While I obviously reject Daniel's claim that any radical can connect "everything," what Doctorow points to in this passage is the political necessity of developing a method of analysis that maintains the inter-dependency between free radicals and society as such. I argue that one could characterize this maintenance as a deferred connection in common.

#### **V. Deferred Connections, Shocking Conclusions, Grounding Circuitry**

By deferred connection in common, I point to a method of reading that is resolutely anti-dialectical, that does not seek answers in the form of synthetic certainty, and that preserves the necessary relationship between the singular being and the common multitude. Such a method of reading acknowledges the political necessity of rethinking the question of synthesis so as to produce a non-dialectical concept of the relationship between singularity and the common that is relevant to the historical conditions of late capitalism.

According to Arkady Plotnitsky in his *In the Shadow of Hegel: Complementarity, History, and the Unconscious*, the aforementioned method for reading history and the

subject can be extrapolated from the concept of complementarity that was first produced by quantum physicist, Niels Bohr. Bohr's concept of complementarity is based on the notion that the complexity of physical—and, by extension, theoretical—objects cannot be accounted for by the totalizing theories of classical physics. Bohr claimed that, depending on the conditions of observation, fundamental properties of physical entities manifest themselves differently.<sup>35</sup> Whereas classical physics sought to synthesize all properties of physical objects and phenomena into unifying theoretical systems, Bohr claimed that classical methods obscure the fact that objects are composed of seemingly mutually exclusive properties that cannot be reconciled through totalizing epistemologies. When one applies certain classical concepts to objects in order to understand the totality of a physical entity, other meaningful properties of the object become hidden.

The example Bohr uses to illustrate the complementarity principle is that of wave-particle duality. In classical physics, space-time location and energy-momentum were synthesized into a single theory. Bohr claims that the classical theory overlooked the fact that while electrons are both waves and particles simultaneously, each of these properties of light are comprehensible only when examined from a particular point of view. Concerning the concept of complementarity and its relation to light, Albert Einstein and Leopold Infeld write:

But what is light really? Is it a wave or a shower of photons? There seems no likelihood for forming a consistent description of the phenomena of

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<sup>35</sup> See, Bohr, Niels. "Discussions with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Science." *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*. Ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp. MJF Books, 2001. Print.

light by a choice of only one of the two languages. It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do. (262-263)

The point that Bohr, Einstein, and Infeld make is not that objects are composed of contradictory elements that cannot be reconciled, but rather that when one attempts to view an object in its totality from a single point of focus, certain aspects of the totality are lost. Accordingly, one must examine objects from varying points of view while also recognizing that pairs of seemingly contradictory properties exist simultaneously even if only one of the properties is manifest through a particular theoretical apparatus.

Plotnitsky extends Bohr's concept of complementarity into the realm of philosophy by examining it alongside Georges Bataille's notion of general economy.<sup>36</sup> He summarizes Bataille's concept of general economy as "a mode of theory that deals with the production, material or intellectual, of excess that cannot be utilized" (10). Plotnitsky claims that Bataille's theory of general economy is especially apt to consider alongside complementarity because it serves as a theory of the supplement, or rather, a theory of that which exceeds comprehension in complementarity.

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<sup>36</sup> See: Bataille, Georges. "The Meaning of General Economy." *Accursed Share*, Vol. 1: *Consumption*. Zone Books, 1991. 19-26. Print.

In the case of both general economy and complementarity, Plotnitsky notes that non-recoverable expenditures signify “above all, loss of the absolute” (19). At the same time, however, he explains that the loss of the absolute is not actually a loss at all:

Strictly speaking, the radical loss at issue in general economy may not be loss at all; that which has been “lost” may never have “been there” before the point at which it appears to have been lost, although such more restricted economic forms of loss do occur, too, and must be accounted for. The general economic “loss” is never present, so that it is there to be found, either as conscious or as unconscious, even though it produces effects such as presence—a recovered present or a recaptured past. (29)

Plotnitsky’s description here of a “loss [that] is never present” is, simply, another way of stating what Althusser made clear with his theory of absent causality: what is missing is only present as an experienced effect, not as the appearance of an essence, but rather as the actualization of an immanent cause (29).

Plotnitsky traces a genealogy of complementarity’s role in philosophy through Nietzsche, Bataille, and—finally—Derrida to argue that the defining feature of complementarity is its “profoundly anti-Hegelian...suspension of a grounding synthesis” (37). He ultimately contends that while both complementarity and general economy demand a textualization of loss, the task of textualization is especially difficult. He writes:

This textualization...can no longer be a representation, or only representation, in the classical sense, but only a relation, by means of oblique and multiply complementary inscriptions, to that which cannot be *re-presented*—presented *as* present or as deferred presence, as something that has been present somewhere at some point. (Plotnitsky 29)

Plotnitsky goes on to argue that Derrida is the thinker who most adequately theorizes the textualization of this anti-Hegelian complementarity. He cites Derrida's theories of trace, *différance*, and deferral to make this point.

It is beyond the scope or interest of this chapter to affirm or contest Plotnitsky's claim regarding Derrida's singular importance for complementarity's use in the present theoretical moment. What interests me about Plotnitsky's treatment of Derrida is that Plotnitsky cites the concept of deferral as indispensable to both Derrida's work and to the concept of complementarity. As I argued before, in order to circumvent the problematic of knowledge exhaustion—the problematic Daniel Lewin pointed to when he claimed that, inevitably, society becomes bored by theoretical connections made by free radicals—it is necessary to find a methodology for reading in common that does not preclude the possibility of future connections. I referred to this method as deferred connection in common and I linked it with the concept of complementarity.

The concept of deferral is important for our purposes insofar as it provides a way to think of theoretical connections as relational and non-representational, never finite and present as such. Daniel Lewin painfully discovers the inescapability of deferral through

his inability to finish his book. In other words, he finds it impossible to *re-present* himself or history through a conclusive textualization. While he does not discuss deferral per se, Althusser also understands the concept as his philosophy of aleatory materialism hinges on the notion of deferred subjecthood constituted on a void, or rather, history as a process without subjects, a process that *produces* subjects who are never fully actual.

What Daniel Lewin fails to grasp, however, is that one cannot simply disengage from or abandon the question of synthesis (as he does when he abandons his book) without simultaneously ignoring the question of *common* production. Althusser, on the other hand, grasped the common nature of conceptual production with his theory of symptomatic reading in *Reading Capital*. Yet, with his request in *The Future Lasts Forever* that the reader judge him so as to restore his subjectivity, he reverts to a method of reading that searches for finality in the form of synthesis instead of an ongoing conceptual metamorphosis. He wants to know who he is, what he means, and that he simply exists.

Even though each of their texts point to both the political and emotional necessity of finding an adequate reading methodology, a similar component of both Lewin and Althusser's autobiographical texts is their reliance on shock value as an attempt to arrest the analytic process. I previously cited examples of shocking statements they make, such as Althusser's claim that he was "born at the age of four" and Lewin's multiple interpellations of the reader regarding his sadistic urges to inflict violence on his wife. These are but a few illustrations of the many shocking statements that make up each of their texts respectively. What I would like to argue is that the "shocking" statements

Lewin and Althusser make are not “throwaways” in the sense of Bataille’s general economic non-productive expenditures. Rather, the purpose of these claims by Lewin and Althusser is to arrest the analytic process at the moments in their narratives when the author cannot understand what it is he is writing. Both of these authors frequently make scandalous statements, only to change the topic in the very next sentence. In a sense, it is a way of positing and disregarding that which is being written, for fear that it cannot be understood by the reader.

In psychoanalytic terms, one could call this a form of disavowal—a concept that Jacques Lacan links to perversion and fear of castration of the Other.<sup>37</sup> Lacan maintains that disavowal is the fundamental operation of perversion in which the subject realizes that the cause of his or her desire is centered on a lack. In the case of Lewin and Althusser, this lack is knowledge itself—knowledge of what they are writing, and presumed lack in the reader to understand the text they are reading. The use of shock in each of their texts serves as a fetishistic and inadequate attempt to simultaneously present their narratives as endowed with the presence of meaning and prevent the reader from analyzing this supposed presence. In other words, the use of shock in their texts is an attempt to produce value—quite literally, shock value—in the places where the author faces a void.

Even though these shocking statements serve as a form of regressive self-anesthetization for the writer, they also have the potential to politicize the reader. Walter Benjamin argues that the modern period is constituted by a series of shocks—wars,

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<sup>37</sup> See: Lacan, Jacques. *Séminaire, tome 4 : la Relation d'objet*. Seuil, 1998. Print.

collisions of bodies in densely populated cities, accidents with machinery—which at once stun the subject to the conditions of her existence and localize that consciousness to a specific place and time at which “the integrity of its contents” are diffused (Buck-Morss 18). For Benjamin, it is the job of aesthetics to re-awaken the numbed capitalist subject to the effects of these shocks. I am far from convinced that Benjamin’s assessment of the dialectical (and potentially revolutionary) nature of shock is entirely relevant to the conditions of late capitalism—the period about and in which Althusser and Daniel were writing.<sup>38</sup>

One could argue (though I would not) that the passages of shock and subsequent abandon in their texts have a potentially jarring effect on their reader that is capable of arousing her from the slumber of thoughtless reading. My claim, however, is that the ever-present shock of postmodernity no longer represents the repressed trauma of lived historical events, but instead registers repetitions of the void. It has become somewhat of a cliché to say that, in the present, nothing is shocking. What is commonly overlooked in the meaning of this supposed cliché, though, is that the present is made up of endless shock: for what is shocking is *the nothing itself*.

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<sup>38</sup> See Benjamin’s discussion of shock in the following texts: Benjamin. “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire.” *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. 155-200. Print; Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1986. 217-251. Print.

Daniel Lewin and Althusser's texts register a fully postmodern shock of the nothing. By constantly seeking to shock his audience so as to avoid "los[ing] his following" (the plight of all free radicals), Daniel's use of shock-as-conclusion serves to limit conceptual production in common with the reader (Doctorow 140). In a different manner, the shock therapy Susan receives is also an attempt to limit conceptual production in that her psychiatric team deems her political analyses and commitments unattainable and hence detrimental to her mental health. Accordingly, Susan's shock treatments are an attempt to arrest the analytic process altogether so that she will finally stop thinking about her obligations to history. In that regard, Daniel is correct: Susan dies from a failure of analysis.

Ultimately, Althusser, Daniel, and Susan each suffer from the postmodern shock of facing the void. Their shared symptom is the failure to produce or find a "ground" in common with their interlocutors and readers that is situated on this void. The moments of shock in their narratives thus reproduce the very problem that Lewin identifies in his text, but is absent from his discourse: namely, the inability to produce a figure of the free radical that is not mistaken for the political figure of death. In Althusser's case, his wife's murder can (and has) been read as the unavoidable outcome of subscribing to a theory of aleatory materialism. In the case of *Daniel*, each of the following serve as examples of a free radical becoming equated with the political figure of death: the Isaacsons' electrocutions, Susan's death by a failure of analysis, and Daniel's incapacity to complete his book or be present in the political movements about which he writes. In order to surmount the postmodern shock that creates the illusion that free radicals necessarily

serve as political figures of death, I argue that one must read according to the method I previously referred to as deferred connection in common—the method I later linked with the concept of complementarity.

In their *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics*, Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri discuss the question of common production alongside the concept of complementarity. Negri states that even though Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's non-dialectical ontology is indispensable to his own work, their refusal to engage the concept of synthesis prevented them from creating "a producing product of the common" (Casarino and Negri 119). For Negri, this producing product, however, is not a synthesis, but is rather "a relation of complementarity [that] is not a dialectical relation" (120). He states further, "And this is another way of saying that a relation of complementarity marks a transformation rather than a dialectical synthesis, that each and every process of conceptual production is a metamorphosis rather than an *Aufhebung*" (121). It is here, in this complementary relation between singular beings, that both the activity and the product of producing the common are materialized.

While Casarino and Negri never discuss deferral per se, they build upon Negri's critique of sublation to elucidate both this process of metamorphosis and the place at which the "producing product of the common" occurs. Negri contends that the complementary relation does not go through negation, but is rather built on a void that at once always exists and is also a "nonontological absolute" (121). In particular, Casarino clarifies that "the void reveals itself to be there only to the extent to which we throw something in it, the void makes itself felt—that is, becomes perceivable, palpable—only

to the extent to which we affirm, build, produce something” (121). In other words, the void is felt only as a material effect of an absent cause. This formulation has striking resemblances to Althusser’s formulation of aleatory materialism—a point which Casarino himself makes later in the discussion.

A “nonontological absolute” from which both the common and a “producing product of the common” are created is precisely the concept that the characters in Doctorow’s *Book of Daniel* and Althusser (in his autobiography, though not in his earlier work) fail to grasp. They do not know how to produce a complementary reading that at once avails itself to future readings and produces a ground, situated on a void, that is stable enough to sustain a community capable of effecting change through the production of new concepts.

It is in view of both the indistinction between subject and object in the work of Doctorow and Althusser and its possible solution—the concept of a “producing product of the common”—that I have chosen to read together these two texts from seemingly disparate genres: “autobiographical” metafiction and memoir. Rather than separating my examination of Daniel, a fictional character who “stands in” for a real historical person, from Althusser, a real historical figure who cannot identify the truth of his being, I have read these characters simultaneously—and as occupants of a common postmodern world made up of fictional texts and real people—to demonstrate how the ontological conditions for locating truth on both a personal and political level can not be attained by simply “representing” one’s life or seeking clarity through the lens of the individual. Truth cannot be divorced from the conceptual production of what Morfino calls “Origin-

Subject-Object-Truth-End-Foundation”—an ontology that refuses the distinction between a world that is produced and the producers of that world (par. 3). Put simply, if the common goal of Daniel and Althusser is to ascertain the truth and value of their own life stories within a postmodern historical and theoretical milieu, then it makes little sense to separate the question of truth from the troubled relationship between subject and object or to perpetuate the increasingly inadequate distinction between fact and fiction. Reading these two seemingly disparate texts and “characters” concurrently and complementarily, therefore, enables a repositioning of the void of understanding represented in both texts to emerge not as an infinite regress bereft of truth, but as a producing product of the common in which truths are generative effects of aleatory encounters between texts, readers, writers, historical conditions, and ontological potentialities.

Furthermore, as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, the fundamental questions that plague Althusser’s thought, trouble Daniel’s family, and perplex the New Left are: For what, whom, and why does the subject act? Throughout the chapter, I demonstrated how the reading strategies of each of these figures highlight the ideological problems that postmodern subjects encounter when confronted with the role of intellectual production in historical agency and social change. While I explained that according to Althusser’s ontology it has always been the case that history is a process without subjects and a process without cause, I would also argue that postmodernity and its symptom, the Cold War, have brought this fact into focus like no other time in history. In a more adequate manner than any historical study of the period, Doctorow’s novelistic treatment of Daniel’s inability to compose himself—literally and figuratively—as a

secular messianic prophet and a critic of dominant Cold War discourses demonstrates the common postmodern condition of the subject's difficulty in locating a ground on which to effect social and individual transformations and contest dominant ideologies.

Finally, Althusser's reading methodology of engaging other thinkers' symptoms reveals that symptoms are not merely hindrances to comprehension, but also necessities for *any* real knowledge production process—a process that can neutralize and transform dominant ideologies. Althusser's inability to put his own method to work in order to “help [him] live,” Daniel's failure to grasp the fact that to have an absent cause does not mean to lack a purpose necessarily, and Susan's death from a “failure of analysis” all serve as examples of the practical and political stakes of the necessity of asking “the very question that unmasks its innocence, the mere question of its innocence: *what is it to read?*” (Althusser, *Reading* 15).

In the next chapter, I will continue my examination of the concept of truth in the Cold War period by examining how truth was defined and contested in the Soviet samizdat movement. In particular, I will focus on the production of non-realist forms of truth as acts of political defiance against the Soviet state. In so doing, I will consider the concept of literary communism and how it functioned in relation to “real communism.”

### Chapter Three

#### **Literary Communism in the Creative Bloc: Samizdat, *Metropol*, and the Aesthetics of Poverty**

“The irresistible proliferation of graphomania among politicians, taxi drivers, childbearers, lovers, murderers, thieves, prostitutes, officials, doctors, and patients shows me that everyone without exception bears a potential writer within him, so that the entire human species has good reason to go down the streets and shout: ‘We are all writers!’”  
-Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

“‘Communication,’ such as it reveals itself in private human relations and such as it withdraws itself in the works that we still call works of art, perhaps does not indicate to us the horizon of a world free of deceptive relations but helps us to challenge the authority that founds these relations, forcing us to reach a position from which it would be possible to have no part in ‘values.’”  
-Maurice Blanchot, “On One Approach to Communism”

In a 1997 article entitled “Dissidents on Dissidence” (*“Dissidenty o dissidentstve”*), prominent Soviet dissident and human rights activist Sergei Kovalev argues that samizdat—the underground publishing phenomenon that materialized in the 1950s Soviet Union and persisted until the collapse of the U.S.S.R.—can be characterized as an “internet-for-the-poor” (179).<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the Internet as we know it today emerged at

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<sup>39</sup> All Russian transliterations have been formatted according to the Library of Congress system. As is standard in academic publications, in the body of this chapter I have removed diacritical marks and have formatted proper names with conventional English spellings when they differ from the Library of Congress spellings. All proper names in the bibliography have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress system.

the very same time the samizdat movement grew in the Eastern bloc: the period of the Cold War. After all, it was in response to the U.S.S.R.'s launch of Sputnik that the U.S. government formed the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA)—the agency that would eventually create the first linked computer network for Pentagon telecommunications.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as Kovalev points out, unlike the Internet, which was funded by and developed through a partnership between corporations, universities, and governmental intelligence agencies, samizdat required virtually no capital investment or technological ingenuity. In short, all that was necessary for the reproduction and dissemination of samizdat was a hand that could write and a willingness to break the law. Thus, samizdat, an information network requiring very little money, was an “internet-for-the-poor” (Kovalev 179).<sup>41</sup>

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, historians, literary critics, and political scientists have maintained the controversial claim that the samizdat movement was one of the primary forces leading to the U.S.S.R.'s downfall.<sup>42</sup> The movement provided not only

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<sup>40</sup> For a historical elaboration on the development of the Internet as a Cold War phenomenon, see: Banks, Michael A. *On the Way to the Web: The Secret History of the Internet and Its Founders*. 1st ed. A press, 2008. Print; Berners-Lee, Tim. *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web*. 1st ed. Harper Paperbacks, 2000. Print; Hafner, Katie. *Where Wizards Stay Up Late: The Origins Of The Internet*. Simon & Schuster, 1998. Print.

<sup>41</sup> For an interesting discussion of the relationship between samizdat, money, circulation, and exchange value, see: Johnston, Gordon. “What Is the History of Samizdat?.” *Social History* 24.2 (1999): 115-133.

<sup>42</sup> See: Feldbrugge, F. J. M. (Ferdinand Joseph Maria). *Samizdat and Political Dissent in the Soviet Union*. Leyden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1975. Print; Forrester, Sibelan E. S. (Sibelan Elizabeth S. ) et al. *Over the Wall/after the Fall Post-communist Cultures Through an East-West Gaze*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. Print; Scammell, Michael comp. *Russia's Other Writers; Selections from Samizdat Literature*. New York, Praeger, 1971. Print; *Eastern European Journalism* □: *Before, During and After Communism*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 1999. Print.

an avenue to circumvent state censorship; it also produced a network of truth seekers for whom the very acts of reading and writing were exercises in political agency. In the liberal democratic West, samizdat is most often associated with Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, the official weakening of communicational restrictions that accompanied perestroika (restructuring). Yet, as Serguei Oushakine notes, glasnost should not be translated simply as "openness" or "transparency" (192). For he writes:

While being basically right, this translation misses one essential point. Etymologically glasnost derives from the Russian word *glas* (voice). Thus to exercise glasnost means to become a subject of public speech or, to put it differently, to conduct one's activity in the form of a publicly available discourse. (192)

In other words, when glasnost is defined simply as "openness" or "transparency," it comes to be associated primarily with an oppositional openness to the Soviet state itself. The act of becoming a subject of public speech, understood in this way, is positioned as necessarily democratic or resistant to tyrannical power.

Western liberals have not failed to recognize glasnost's association with voice and free speech. In fact, the typical liberal democratic claim is that the samizdat movement, as the pinnacle of glasnost, directly opposed the Soviet project sheerly as a performance of free speech. Put differently, from a post-Soviet Western perspective, samizdat is characteristically considered anti-totalitarian, and by (no logical) extension, anti-communist because of its association with free speech. Accordingly, samizdat texts that

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were well known in the Soviet Union, such as “Is a Non-Totalitarian Type of Socialism Possible?,” do not tend to make their way into the revisionist histories that view samizdat and glasnost as collaborators in the United States’ mission to destroy the Soviet state.

Oushakine also notes, however, that a dominant discursive trend among samizdat authors of the 1960s and 1970s was to seek to play an equal and active role in the official discursive field by, oftentimes unwittingly, “imitat[ing] and reproduc[ing]” the state’s “authoritarian compulsion” by writing in the same voice and style as legally sanctioned authors (195). Consequently, when Oushakine remarks that we must remind ourselves of glasnost’s overlooked meaning—that is, “to conduct one’s activity in the form of a publicly available discourse”—he is arguing not simply that samizdat and glasnost produced (and were produced by) politically engaged subjects. Rather, he also points out that, frequently, these movements discursively echoed the dominant social order; to enter dominant discourse does not necessarily imply contestation.

Oushakine’s discussion of the mimetic character of samizdat provides a useful lens through which to consider Kovalev’s claim that samizdat functioned as an “internet-for-the-poor.” From our present historical moment, the dialectical nature of the Internet is clear: it is a force that both unites and atomizes. On the one hand, we see the extraordinary role the Internet played in recent revolutionary struggles in North Africa, the Middle East, and various “Occupy” movements across the globe. The fact that disparate protest groups have united globally illustrates the Internet’s potential to cross national boundaries, producing proletarian networks of self-interested communicational exchanges. On the other hand, the Internet is also the site of corporate ad campaigns,

inarticulate writing, and narcissistic social networking sites that atomize and de-politicize individuals.

While the samizdat movement preceded these new media phenomena by half a century, it suffered a similarly positive and negative fate. What began as a movement to preserve community, literature and critical thought ended as a mass cultural phenomenon overtaken by what Milan Kundera calls “the irresistible proliferation of graphomania” (147). By the time glasnost had become national policy, samizdat was no longer primarily a movement dedicated to critique and the perseverance of art: it morphed into a mass cultural phenomenon producing everything from high poetry to neo-Stalinist newspapers. In short, everyone was writing and the interests of the poor were far from being met.

Considering that the vast majority of Eastern bloc citizens were “poor” by the standards of bourgeois consumption, one could rightfully agree that the samizdat movement was, in fact, an internet-for-the-poor. However, it would be a stretch to say that samizdat always operated in the *interests* of the poor. Indeed, samizdat was an uneven movement in terms of political content, aesthetic quality, and readership. Nevertheless, as a mass cultural phenomenon, samizdat was a truly postmodern communication network bringing into focus questions regarding what constitutes poverty, political agency, aesthetic value, ownership of cultural production, freedom, surveillance, and the relationship between domination and subordination—questions that are all relevant to our present cultural-economic conditions. As such, samizdat serves as both a precursor to the present conditions of postmodern communication and an apt movement

for considering the exigencies, possibilities, and limitations of a communication network for the poor.

Rather than approaching samizdat from James Scott's perspective of "voices under domination"—the notion that oppressed peoples accept domination publicly but maintain resistant lives in private—I argue in this chapter that samizdat forces us to reassess the binary categories of private and public, freedom and oppression, as well as the very category of contestation itself.<sup>43</sup> To do so, I first provide a brief history of the samizdat movement in order to outline its beginnings as an underground phenomenon and its eventual transformation into what Serguei Oushakine calls a postmodern "surface" movement (192). I then link Oushakine's discussion of samizdat as a surface phenomenon with writings by Soviet and Russian theorists of postmodernity to argue that while samizdat was the first fully postmodern mass communicational network, Western theories of postmodernism cannot simply be applied to it retrospectively. In many ways, Soviet postmodernism emerged not only contemporaneously with its Western counterpart, but even *before* it. Accordingly, samizdat did not simply illustrate the tenets of western postmodernism; it produced them as well.

As a case study, I consider the 1979 publication of *Metropol*, a literary almanac in which twenty-four prominent Soviet writers first published their works in the samizdat press and then demanded, on artistic grounds, that the Writer's Union publish their anthology through official channels. While many claim *Metropol* was primarily an anti-political publication in that its content did not contain overt political messages, I argue

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<sup>43</sup> See: Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press, 1990.

that *Metropol* made a critical intervention into the growing postmodern, graphophilic nature of samizdat movement not only by rejecting anonymity and reclaiming the surface, so to speak, but also by insisting that the questions of literature and ethics can not be separated. For as the editors of *Metropol* assert, one cannot differentiate the “fear of literature” from the “hostility to differentness” (Aksenov ix). Finally, I argue that even though the Soviet state sought to hold the monopoly on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics through socialist realism, *Metropol* represents an instance of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “literary communism.” I examine literary communism as a response to the “creative block” produced by the Soviet regime.

### **I. Samizdat’s Origins, or, Writing in the Creative Bloc**

The neologism samizdat is an abbreviated form of the word *samsebiaizdat*, first coined in the 1940s by Russian poet Nikolai Glazkov. On the front page of his self-typed poetry collections, Glazkov playfully wrote the word *samsebiaizdat*, which translates loosely as “myself, by my own making.” Glazkov’s term punned on the names of official publishing organs such as *politizdat* (political publishing house) and *gosizdat* (state publishing house). Even though Glazkov’s collections of *samsebiaizdat* poetry informed the name of the dissident movement that followed it, his poetry collections did not receive the same kind of repressive state attention as later samizdat texts. Consequently, one could argue that Glazkov’s poetry did not belong to the samizdat movement per se.

Samizdat, the colloquial short form of *samsebiaizdat*, is composed of the Russian root *sam* (self, by oneself) and the noun *izdatel’stvo* (publishing house). The root *dat* can be isolated from *izdatl’stvo*; *dat* forms the verb *dat’* (to do, to make). Taken together, *sam*

and *izdat* (an abbreviation of *izdatel'stvo*) have come to mean both self-published and self-made. Other terms that belong to this movement are *magnitizdat*, referring to illegal sound recordings made on magnetic tape, and *tamizdat*, contraband literature published abroad (*tam*, “there”) that was either smuggled out of or into the Soviet Union.

While it is possible to designate Glazkov’s poetry collections as the founding documents of the samizdat movement, it was not until the mid-1950s—in the aftermath of Joseph Stalin’s death—that samizdat emerged in the Soviet Union as a mass cultural phenomenon. Initially, samizdat served as a medium for the reproduction and dissemination of texts previously censored by, or unavailable in, the Soviet Union. The vast majority of these texts were literary in nature. In particular, the two authors whose work was most widely circulated through samizdat networks in the movement’s early years were poets Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak. During this period, works of early Soviet avant-garde writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Mikhail Bulgakov, and Evgeny Zamyatin were also disseminated widely. The movement at this time, therefore, was largely one based on the *reproduction* of already existing literary texts—texts that had once been published but were later censored.

As Nikita Khrushchev’s “thaw” spread to the mainstream, poetry became increasingly popular; more and more people were both reading and writing it. In 1958, a monument to Vladimir Mayakovsky was erected in Northern Moscow that quickly became the site for popular weekly poetry readings of both published and forbidden authors. While the authorities tolerated these readings initially, by 1960 they began arresting participants and charging them with “anti-Soviet Agitation and Propaganda.”

During the 1960s, arrests on a mass scale occurred within samizdat movement. Accordingly, famous Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky came to define samizdat as: “I myself create it, edit it, censor it, publish it, distribute it, and get imprisoned for it” (Bukovsky 126). However, the unintended effect of these arrests was a growing popularization of samizdat both within the Eastern bloc and abroad. For instance, in 1963, poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky was arrested and denounced by Soviet authorities as “a pseudo-poet in velveteen trousers;” yet, that very same year he was granted the Nobel Prize abroad (*NYT* 4-6). Similarly, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s novel about life in the gulags, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, was initially published in *Noviy Mir*—an officially sanctioned literary journal—but was later banned when it gained an amount of popularity that state authorities perceived to be threatening. In 1970, Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature as well.

From the early 1960s until Gorbachev’s rise to power in the early 1980s, the scope of the samizdat movement broadened beyond the realm of literature to also include political writings. As Oushakine notes, the process of “copying and disseminating literary work among friends was a major function of samizdat only until the mid-1960s” (195). From then on, the major focus of the movement shifted to political pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, petitions, etc. Perhaps the most highly disseminated political samizdat document was *The Chronicle of Current Events (Khronika tekushchikh sobyt)*, a periodical that circulated both within the U.S.S.R. and abroad between 1963 and 1983. In this publication, human rights abuses, religious persecutions, and updates on political prisoners were detailed at length.

Many political samizdat documents such as *The Chronicle of Current Events* featured instances in which Soviet authorities had broken their own laws. These texts were, however, critical of Soviet authorities, not of Soviet laws per se. Just as American liberals criticize the establishment for betraying the “American Dream” without also criticizing the dream itself, political samizdat oftentimes urged the state to be responsible to its citizens and uphold the very tenets of Soviet-style Marxism. Consequently, one could argue that political samizdat authors wrote within the same discursive and symbolic field as the state.

Oushakine draws a qualitative distinction between these literary and political documents. He writes:

As many participants in artistic samizdat pointed out, criticism of the Soviet regime was not their primary aim. Rather, artistic samizdat was an attempt to overcome stylistic restrictions of socialist realism by creating a “close circle of like-minded people who spoke their own language, inconceivable to others” (Krivulin 346). Recalling his experience of the 1970s, Soviet artist Ilia Kabakov wrote: “There was a new situation that until then seemed improbable: it had become possible not to follow the direction of the pointing finger of propaganda but to turn around in order to look at the very pointing finger itself; [it became possible] not to accept the music from the loudspeaker as one’s inescapable accompaniment but to look at, even gaze at, this loudspeaker...Put briefly, all these horrifying means of propaganda that used to constantly gaze at us without allowing

us to gaze at them became the objects of the gaze itself” (Kabakov 75). This return of the gaze did not happen in political samizdat: the pointing finger of the regime was not scrutinized, nor was the origin of the propagandistic music. Instead, the authoritarian compulsion to direct was closely imitated and reproduced. (195)

Later in his article, Oushakine claims that the mimetic style of political samizdat was subversive and resistant because it stayed “within the boundaries of the politically acceptable and sayable while simultaneously subverting the monopoly of the authorities to utter, to produce, and to reproduce the dominant discourse” (200). Though Oushakine’s assessment of the mimetic character of political samizdat is not incorrect, the distinction he draws between literary and political samizdat fails to account for the mimetic genre of some of the most famous literary samizdat works—namely, Solzhenitsyn’s works of literary realism and their insistence on truth as a stable historiographical category. Additionally, Oushakine’s description of the differences between artistic and political samizdat draws a spurious distinction between aesthetics, politics, and ethics.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, perhaps the most famous samizdat author in the West, emphasized the role of truth in literature nowhere more clearly than in his Nobel Lecture. Regarding his own literary attempts to tell the truth of the horrors of Stalinism in his novels, he proclaimed, “One word of truth will change the course of the entire world” (Solzhenitsyn 23). Solzhenitsyn’s definition of truth and his brand of samizdat largely came to shape the way Westerners perceived samizdat. For as Peter Steiner points out,

samizdat was “presented in the West as a rebirth of free speech behind the Iron Curtain, defying ideological brainwashing by the Darth Vadars of the ‘Evil Empire.’ These were texts ‘which draw on the truth’ (Solzhenitsyn 1972:7) by those not afraid of ‘living in truth’ (Havel 1991: 147)” (617). Solzhenitsyn thus became the voice of truth, and erroneously, the voice of democracy for the dominant capitalist Cold War narrative.<sup>44</sup>

In the Soviet bloc, however, many literary samizdat writers sought to radically refigure the parameters of truth. In her article, “The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat,” Ann Komaromi examines this other truth-telling trend in samizdat, claiming that avant-garde literary samizdat produced a truth more suited for post-Stalinist reality than the oppositional truth provided by political samizdat and literary realism. She writes:

From the beginning, samizdat derived its identity via its parodic difference from official publishing. Samizdat self-consciously aped “serious” censored publications, challenging the Soviet publishing industry’s self-proclaimed monopoly on truth (as in the official newspaper Pravda [Truth]). Traditional political dissidents offered an alternative, “real” truth in samizdat. Others challenged the worth and possibility of one integral “truth,” a project waged on the level of content and of form. Critic and writer Andrei Sinyavsky (Abram Tertz) was one of the first in the samizdat era to articulate clearly a dissident challenge to monolithic

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<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that while Westerners have erroneously cast Solzhenitsyn as the father of Soviet democracy, his political views were not in line with democracy at all. He was equally critical of Stalinism and capitalist decadence. In fact, after his repatriation and return to post-Soviet Russia, he called for a restoration of the Russian monarchy. See: Solzhenitsyn, Aleksander. “The End of Art-Speech.” *Edgeways Miscellany* 8 Aug. 2008: n. page. Print.

political truth, and to uphold literature's independence from it. ("Material"  
606)

Andrei Sinyavsky, Soviet writer, gulag survivor, and samizdat dissident, defined the Soviet movement against the realist concept of truth in literature. Unlike Solzhenitsyn, whose work was based on "traditional logocentric values," Sinyavsky wrote from the perspective that truth, in and of itself, was suspect at best and dangerous at worst (Komaromi "Extra-Gutenberg" 631). As Komaromi points out, in Sinyavsky's article (written under the pseudonym Abram Tertz), "Chto Takoe Sotsialisticheskii Realizm" ("What is Socialist Realism," 1959), he draws a parallel between the official policy of socialist realism and the realistic literary writings of Solzhenitsyn and Vladimir Maksimov. In this article, Sinyavsky ultimately claims that both forms of discourse—socialist realism and literary realism—are ideologically dogmatic and hence qualitatively similar (Komaromi, "Material" 607). Accordingly, Sinyavsky proposes "a phantasmagoric mode of writing, with hypotheses rather than goals and grotesquery in place of a reflection of everyday life" counterbalancing and disrupting "reality" (Komaromi, "Material" 607). In fact, other Soviet critics drew on Sinyavsky's critique of samizdat realist writers to claim that they were no better than "inverted socialist realists" (Komaromi, "Material" 607).

The category of anti-realist truth and its relationship with "freedom of speech" might best be understood in relation to Sinyavsky according to the concept of *parrhesia* that Michel Foucault delineated in his 1983 lecture series entitled *Fearless Speech*. According to Foucault, the concept of *parrhesia*, which is typically translated as "free

speech,” first appeared in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. in the work of Euripides. Initially, *parrhesia* referred to a speaker who at once provided his own opinion and said everything that was on his mind. There were thus two types of *parrhesiastes* in ancient Greece: those who said everything that was on their mind regardless of its stupidity and possible negative effects, and those who told the truth in order to live life in a sincere and moral manner. The second type of *parrhesiastes* came to be associated with the concept of truth and its risks because he chose frankness over persuasion.

Foucault remarks that initially the practice of *parrhesia* was linked to monarchic rule because these speakers frequently told their “truths” to the ruling class in the form of advice. After the Peloponnesian War, however, *parrhesia* became connected with democratic institutions and speakers who questioned what was best for the *polis*. Plato, in fact, made the claim that *parrhesia* represents an assault on democracy because it ultimately leads to anarchic individualism. In response to Plato's critique, Foucault writes,

For Plato, the primary danger of *parrhesia* is not that it leads to bad decisions in government, or provides the means for some ignorant or corrupt leader to gain power, to become a tyrant. The primary danger of liberty and free speech in a democracy is what results when everyone has his own manner of life, his own style of life. For then there can be no common logos, no possible unity, for the city. (*Fearless* 85)

Against Plato's warnings, Foucault is most interested in the revolutionary potentialities of the “style of life” that results from *parrhesiastic* activity. In order for a

community to function ethically, Foucault argues that the citizen must practice a “care of the self” that demonstrates a harmony between his “logos and his bios” (Foucault, *Fearless* 100). One achieves this harmony by elaborating the relationship between truth and an “ethics and aesthetics of the self” (Foucault, *Fearless* 106). In other words, for Foucault, one cannot truly practice “free speech” as a democratically efficacious truth-telling activity without also styling oneself in such a way that one’s discourse aligns with his or her aesthetic presentation.

Writing under the alter-ego Abram Tertz, Sinyavsky practiced free speech in line with Foucault’s concept of revolutionary *parrhesia*. Sinyavsky not only examined the category of truth as it applied to literature and politics, he also brought into question the very category of the omniscient author through his demonstration of his own aesthetics of the self. For the name Abram Tertz had nothing to do with Sinyavsky: it was, in fact, the name of a 19<sup>th</sup> century folkloric Ukrainian-Jewish gangster to whom Sinyavsky had no relation (Room 471). Even though Sinyavsky appropriated this penname, he was neither Jewish nor Ukrainian. Rather, he used this *nom de plum* to distance himself from the literary establishment that sought to vest itself with authority. By distancing himself from his own text, he thus beckoned readers to act as productive agents in the reading process. Comparing Sinyavsky’s strategy to Roland Barthes’s invocation of the “Death of the Author,” Catharine Theimer Nepomnyashchy writes:

[The Tertz writings] are texts that challenge the reader to fill the gap left by the Author’s open abdication of *authority*, texts that are, to use Roland Barthes’s terminology “writerly,” that make the reader no longer a

consumer of the text but a producer of the text. Viewed within their particular cultural context then, the Tertz writings represent a challenge to the “readerly” texts of Socialist Realism, writings that allow the reader only “the poor freedom to either accept or reject the text” (Barthes 4), and in a larger sense to reading as an institutionalized process in Soviet society, which dictated that all readers interpret a text in a single prescribed way. Tertz as text thus seeks to subvert the state’s claims to be the defining point of reference and thereby to return to the reader his or her right to find him- or herself in the text, to affirm the infinitude of meaning. (39)

While Sinyavsky compels the reader to take an active role in the reading process, Nepomnyashchy also points out Sinyavsky’s view of the “Death of the Author” was not identical with that of Roland Barthes. For Barthes, literature (or “writing,” as he prefers to call it) refuses to fix absolute meanings to both the world and the world-as-text. In so doing, Barthes’s method “liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science law” (Barthes 147). Sinyavsky, however, believed there was a fundamental difference between a text and the world-as-text. In fact, he claimed that it was precisely the Soviet state and its symbolic regime that conflated the world and text, thus turning the country into a counter-revolutionary world of slogans bereft of content. In particular, Nepomnyashchy states that Sinyavsky draws a distinction “between the function of language in the literary text and the discourse of law, politics,

and everyday life. At the core of his critique of totalitarian society lies a horrific vision of the world transformed into text, the word divorced from its consequences to the body, the discourse of politics turned into a literary trope” (39). The purpose of the birth of the reader for Sinyavsky, then, was to find oneself within the world of tropes while simultaneously rejecting the state as the locus and owner of meaning.

In 1965, Sinyavsky and his co-author, Yuli Daniel (writing under the pseudonym Nikolai Arzhak), were arrested for their samizdat activities and charged with slandering the Soviet system.<sup>45</sup> Between 1965 and 1966, they were placed on trial for their supposed seditious activities. In their famous show trial, they defended themselves against all allegations. Eventually, they were found guilty and sentenced to 5-7 years hard labor. Paradoxically, although they were placed on trial for their literary and literary critical writings (which were deeply critical of politics altogether), the effect of their trial was the birth of the so-called “political” samizdat movement. In response to their arrests, huge public protests erupted, a massive petition campaign for their exoneration was organized, and *The Chronicle of Current Events* was released for the very first time. As Brezhnev took control of the country and reversed Khrushchev’s liberalizing reforms, replacing them with his own neo-Stalinist policies, samizdat became dominated by political writings until the movement’s eventual legalization in the 1980s.

Even though the last twenty years of the samizdat movement were dominated by political writings, literary works did continue to circulate. As I stated earlier, *Metropol*

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<sup>45</sup> For a complete account of the Sinyavsky-Daniel trial, see: Hayward, Max (ed). *On Trial: The Soviet State versus Abram Tertz and Nikolai Arzhak*. Revised & Enlarged Edition. Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967. Print.

was released in 1979 in the samizdat press and later presented to the Writer's Union and Leonid Brezhnev personally. Shortly, I will turn my attention to *Metropol* specifically. Before doing so, however, I would like to return to Oushakine's claim that political samizdat was a surface movement. I will examine his assertion in relation to the concept of postmodernism and its emergence in the Soviet Union.

## **II. Writing on the Surface: Samizdat and Soviet Postmodernism**

Typically, samizdat is approached as an underground phenomenon—one in which dissidents carve out a space of freedom separate from dominant culture, a space where resistance does not co-mingle with domination. In this section of the chapter, I examine various ways in which scholars of samizdat and postmodernity have contested the notions of depth and an underground. For example, Oushakine is quick to note that from the very beginning, samizdat was a public phenomenon and was “actively engaged in production, reproduction, and transformation of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the ‘legitimate’ linguistic practices, the ‘practices’ of those who are dominant” (Oushakine 196).<sup>46</sup> As I previously acknowledged, samizdat began as a system for the reproduction and dissemination of already existing texts. Nevertheless, while the focus of the movement at that time was on the text itself and not the author per se, its very purpose was to publicize that which it circulated. Additionally, Oushakine notes that popular uncensored texts frequently made their way into the samizdat press, not because of their illegality, but rather because of their obscurity (202). In other words, samizdat never functioned simply as a subculture in which participants sought separation from dominant power and mainstream culture; to

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<sup>46</sup> See Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.

the contrary, readers and writers of samizdat texts actively attempted to gain access to their rightful place within dominant public culture.

While Oushakine claims that we must reassess our notions of “the underground” as well as the distinction between public and private in order to accurately grasp the samizdat movement at large, he does not argue that the entire movement was a surface phenomenon. Instead, he focuses specifically on political writings that circulated in the aftermath of the Sinyavsky/Daniel Trial. He views only these texts as indicative of the movement’s “surface” nature.

In order to make his claim regarding the surface, he first critiques common notions of domination and thus proposes a Foucaultian reading of power and resistance wherein domination and subordination “belong to the same discursive field...and relate to each other intradiscursively rather than interdiscursively” (Oushakine 207). He also reminds us of the stakes of political samizdat: dissidents were producing rights-based discourse in the face of being unable to function legally as “producers of the dominant regime of truth” (Oushakine 209).

By “surface” phenomenon, then, he refers to the mimetic character of political documents that appealed to the law as well as the public nature of these texts. In short, he argues that political samizdat writers “borrowed from the discursive repository of the dominant regime” so as to gain “starting capital” for the accumulation of their own power (Oushakine 213). Consequently, for Oushakine, political samizdat was neither an underground phenomenon nor an untarnished discourse; it mingled with power and thus operated on the surface.

Even though Oushakine's assessment of political samizdat is useful, his definition of the surface overlooks the material, physical, and ephemeral nature of samizdat texts themselves as well as the historical emergence of postmodernism—a phenomenon that Fredric Jameson claims has replaced depth with surface (Postmodernism 12). Extending Oushakine's definition of the surface, then, I refer not simply to the previously "underground" nature of dissent returning to the official public sphere, but also to the lack of conceptual depth that occurred in many "political" samizdat texts. I attribute both of these surface phenomena to the process of postmodernization.

Komaromi does not discuss the surface per se, but she focuses on both the material manifestations of samizdat texts and the collapse of master narratives, which served as the condition of possibility for "aesthetic" samizdat. She makes two critical points regarding the physical body of the samizdat text. First, in her article "Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon," she remarks that, due to its methods of production and reproduction (printing on carbon paper, photographs, etchings, etc.), a key feature of the samizdat text was its epistemological instability. She asserts that with the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the early modern period, "the stability and truth of print had to be negotiated, created, and invested in texts by those who contributed to the texts' production and distribution"(Komaromi, "Extra-Gutenberg" 633). Over time, she states that the book as a stable entity came to be equated with material and epistemological boundedness. Accordingly, the text was endowed with Meaning. Her claim, however, is that both the ephemeral character of samizdat and the lack of editorial standards involved in its reproduction called into question the samizdat text's stability as an object of truth;

samizdat, therefore, forced a renegotiation of the very category of truth. In turn, following Anna Akhmatova's assertion that the Soviet period was "pre-Gutenberg," Komaromi contends that samizdat was an "extra-Gutenberg" phenomenon (632).

Secondly, in "The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat," Komaromi points out that the physical body of the samizdat text was frequently filled with typos, torn pages, and blurred typescript and thus often barely legible. As a result of the "technological exigencies" and the "idiosyncratic editorial license" involved in the reproduction and dissemination of samizdat, she states that the message was sometimes significantly altered ("Material" 604). As such, the physical medium of samizdat oftentimes "said more" than the content of the text itself. She writes:

A curious feature of this attitude involves decoupling the signifier from the "actual" message it bears. Dissident ideology reduced the text to a text-object or "object-sign" within a hierarchical system of cultural exchange in the Soviet underground. Like the "object-signs" described by Baudrillard in a consumer economy, these textual "object-signs" acquired value in this specific context of cultural exchange on the basis of difference coded as physical form. Thus, the amateur typescript, the deformity of the text, the characteristic mistakes, corrections, fragile paper, and degraded print quality had value because they marked the difference between samizdat and official publications...The message carried on the samizdat page ceased to matter. ("Material" 609)

Although she never engages with Oushakine's claim regarding the surface nature of

samizdat, Komaromi's discussion of the materiality of the samizdat text arrives at a similar conclusion: materiality and externality hold more signifying potential in the samizdat (postmodern) cultural text than in the actual content of the text itself.

Unlike Oushakine, who limits his assessment of the surface to political samizdat, Komaromi maintains that it was literary samizdat authors who illustrated and played with this surface quality more than anyone else. To be clear, Komaromi does not use the word "surface" in her assessment of samizdat. She focuses instead on form and material production. Nevertheless, a parallel can be drawn between her discussion and Oushakine's notion of the surface. Both authors examine the materiality of samizdat as well as its circulation beyond the underground, or rather, on the surface.

In particular, she cites Andrei Sinyavsky and Dmitrii Prigov—two authors to whom she attributes the emergence of Soviet postmodernism. I have already discussed Siniavsky's use of the pseudonym Abram Tertz as a means to question authorial control. Komaromi claims that he served as a bridge between older "aesthetic dissidents" and a newer generation of authors who "explored the significance of samizdat as a physical medium" ("Material" 608). Prigov, a popular 1970s conceptual artist and poet, functioned as the voice of the new generation of postmodern writers.

Specifically, she cites Prigov's *Pushkin's Eugene Onegin* and the massive collections of poetry he published in the 1970s. In *Pushkin's Eugene Onegin*, Prigov appropriates Pushkin's popular text and reproduces it in a vulgarized form. Rather than copying and binding it carefully so as to maintain its sacred message, Komaromi notes that he deliberately "simulated typed pages and translucent, dog-eared tissue paper with

abundant mistakes and typeovers. He [took] idiosyncratic editorial license with the work, rendering all modifiers as a form of ‘mad’ (*bezumnyi*)” (“Material” 610-611). Additionally, Prigov consciously mimicked the main character, Galkin, from Sinyavsky’s 1960 story “Graphomaniacs” in order to produce his own unedited, long-winded poetry collections. He likened the garrulous nature of his poetry collections to an effect of Soviet censorship.

As Komaromi notes, Galkin, a boxer-turned-writer, comments on the role of censorship within the samizdat movement. Galkin declares: “We are all born for [poetry]. A general national penchant for refined letters. And do you know what we have to thank? Censorship!...The government itself, damn it, gives you the right-the inalienable right!-to consider yourself an unacknowledged genius” (qtd in “Material” 612).<sup>47</sup> Acting as the graphomaniac himself, Prigov produced tens of thousands of poems, which he sloppily published in the samizdat press in order to call attention to both the material nature of the texts themselves and the conditions of production (i.e., censorship) that led to their imprecision.

Even though Oushakine and Komaromi disagree about which types of samizdat texts operate on the surface, they concur that surface writing was both politically subversive and an effect of postmodernism. Many Western theorists of postmodernism claim that postmodernism is characterized by an aestheticization of the discursive-political field and the ensuing flattening of affect resulting from the fragmentation of knowledge and multiplication of meaning. In recent years, American and French post-

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<sup>47</sup> See Sinyavsky’s story in: Tertz, Abram. *Sobranies ochineniiv dvukht omakh*. Moscow: 1992. Print.

structuralist definitions of postmodernism have been applied to the Soviet situation. While postmodernism is a global cultural dominant that is applicable to both the West and the former U.S.S.R., one must still account for the historical specificity of the Soviet Union in order to fully grasp the peculiar surface on which samizdat was circulating. In particular, following Russian critic Mikhail Epstein, I claim that Soviet postmodernism *preceded* its counterpart in the West as both an aesthetic movement and a historical period.

In his *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism & Contemporary Russian Culture*, Mikhail Epstein—foremost theorist of Russian postmodernism—argues that Soviet postmodernism is not simply “a response to its Western counterpart,” but rather “a new developmental stage of the same artistic mentality that generated socialist realism” (189). Further, he contends that “both of these movements, socialist realism and postmodernism, are actually components of a single ideological paradigm deeply rooted in the Russian cultural tradition” (189). He claims specifically that Russia has encountered two distinct periods of postmodernism—one beginning in the 1930s with socialist realism and the second with its roots in the 1970s conceptual art movement.

Epstein’s definition of postmodernism is reworked from Jean Baudrillard’s notion of simulation and simulacra.<sup>48</sup> In his delineation of the postmodern, Epstein writes, “... I would single out as most important the production of reality as a series of plausible copies” (189). He contends that other elements of postmodernism such as the death of the Grand Narrative and the erasure of distinction between high and low cultures are also

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<sup>48</sup> See: Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. University of Michigan Press, 1995.

derived from this phenomenon of hyperreality (189). According to Epstein's model of postmodernism, then, "models of reality replace reality itself," thus rendering truth and reality not only irrecoverable, but obsolete altogether (Epstein 189).

Epstein argues that other Soviet movements preceding postmodernism, such as avant-gardism and modernism, tended to be elitist, turning their backs to the realities of mass society (189). This took place, he claims, because they strove to either transform this reality to revolutionary ends or they were thoroughly alienated from it. Even though meta-narratives such as Freudianism and Marxism sought to bring to the fore the reality of material production and "unmask the illusions, or ideological perversions, of consciousness," Epstein claims that, during the Twentieth Century

...an unexpected twist transformed these highly realistic and even materialistic theories into their own opposites. While Marxism, Freudianism, and Nietzscheanism all appealed to reality as such, they simultaneously produced their own ideologized and aestheticized versions of reality along with new, sophisticated tools of political and psychological manipulation. Reality itself disappeared, yielding to these refined and provocative theories of reality and, moreover, to practical modes of producing reality. (190)

Ultimately, I find Epstein's definition of postmodernism sorely lacking both historically and theoretically. For instance, in his description of simulation and simulacra as the defining features of postmodernism, Epstein overlooks the fact that Plato described these very same phenomena over two thousand years earlier. While I do not disagree that

postmodernism has brought into view the fact that reality is constituted by simulation and simulacra like no other time in history (as I have discussed in chapter one), these are not especially new phenomena. Furthermore, his characterizations of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud's conceptions of "reality" is categorically incorrect in that he claims these three theorists "appealed to reality as such" (190). In the case of each of these thinkers, they were well aware that reality is always mediated.

Nevertheless, what is compelling about Epstein's argument is the claim that while Marxism in the West preserved its identity as a meta-narrative, Soviet Marxism became a pastiche—an all-encompassing doctrine with a mixture of all possible interpretations and outlooks. Epstein asserts, therefore, that the aim of socialist realist aesthetics was not simply to promote what existed in the material world, but rather "to demonstrate the complete reality of ideological signs in a world of spectral and annulled realities" (Epstein 193). Although the Soviet rhetoric of the 1930s-1950s appeared predominantly modern, its aesthetics represent "an essentially postmodern trend destined to balance all opposites and create a new space for the interaction of all possible stylistic devices, including romantic, realist, and classicist models" (Epstein 195). For Epstein, then, the common link between these two postmodernisms—the postmodernism of socialist realism and the postmodernism of the samizdat movement—was thus the hyperreal aestheticization of reality as such. Accordingly, Epstein's characterization of socialist realism is the same as Komaromi's view of "aesthetic" samizdat: to replace bankrupt signifiers of the "real world" (which is itself annulled by this aestheticization) with a signifying system more desirable for those who live within it.

While Epstein bases his definition of postmodernism primarily on the works of Jean Baudrillard, the temporality of his theory falls within the parameters outlined by Jean-François Lyotard. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard claims that “postmodernism...is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this is a constant state” (79). According to Lyotard there is no break from modernism in postmodernism. Whereas Lyotard’s historicization, in my mind, confuses aesthetic styles (modernism and postmodernism) with historical periods (modernity and postmodernity), he is correct to claim that these aesthetic movements are not separate phenomena, but rather located together on a historical/aesthetic continuum.

Lyotard’s work on postmodernism is useful for understanding the Soviet situation—and samizdat in particular—insofar as it is based on a theory of knowledge production, distribution, and circulation. Indeed, in the U.S.S.R., the politics of knowledge circulation played out nowhere more strongly than in the samizdat movement. For Lyotard, as the subtitle of his book suggests, postmodernism is the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed post-industrial societies (xxiii). Through technological achievements, or rather, the computerization of society, knowledge, for him, becomes exteriorized such that “the relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume—that is, the form of value” (4). What Lyotard articulates as the problem of knowledge in postmodernism is that what stands out as important is no longer its use-value but instead its productive power (5).

Therefore, knowledge ceases to be an end in itself. This commodified form of knowledge, then, becomes “a major—perhaps *the* major—stake in the worldwide competition for power” (5). Even though I would not characterize the Soviet Union as post-industrial (although the global economy was moving in that direction), Lyotard’s concept of postmodernism applies directly to the Soviet situation for two reasons: the Soviet state was deeply invested in winning the Cold War through technological advancement and the samizdat movement was contesting state domination through the re-appropriation of actual technology—typewriters, x-ray machines, printing presses.

Lyotard designates science and narrative as the two competing, and oftentimes conflicting, forms of knowledge in postmodernism. In many ways, Lyotard’s discussion of science and narrative aligns directly with Oushakine’s differentiation between political and aesthetic samizdat dissidence. Lyotard remarks that truth and legitimacy are obtained in both these modes of knowledge through the practice of language games. These pragmatic games allow for different types of utterances to be made in both discourses—denotative, prescriptive, and performative.

Whereas narratives “allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed,” science is expected to speak with and for truth. For a scientific statement to be deemed compelling, verifiable and true, it must end in a denotative statement. Narrative statements, on the other hand, are “legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do” (23). That is, they determine criteria of competence and illustrate how they are to be applied. They must not, therefore, simply

end in a denotative statement. In other words, they require no clarity beyond truth. In the narrative, denotative, prescriptive, and performative statements are all legitimated. Like so-called “aesthetic” samizdat—whose value was produced through circulation rather than content—Lyotard’s narrative knowledge values the fact of communication as truth itself.

Lyotard argues that in postmodernism, the set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond is transmitted through narrative. He claims that from the modern perspective “there are two basic representational models for society: society either forms a functional whole or it is divided in two” (Lyotard 11). The former model came into being in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. From this positivist perspective, “society forms an organic whole, in the absence of which it ceases to be a society” (11). The goal for this model is performativity and its only alternative is entropy. The second model, “society as divided in two,” or, the critical, hermeneutic model as he calls it, is based on Marxist divisions such as class.

Regarding these two representational models for society, Lyotard writes, “It is a choice between the homogeneity and intrinsic duality of the social, between functional and critical knowledge. But the decision seems difficult or arbitrary” (13). For Lyotard, the postmodern social bond is no longer based on this oppositional mode of thinking (14). Rather, he argues that “functions of regulation, and therefore of reproduction, are being and will be further withdrawn from administrators and entrusted to machines” (14). Hence, the question one must now ask is: “who will have access to the information these machines must have in storage to guarantee that the right decisions are made?” (14). I

argue that the samizdat movement recognized and responded directly to this technologization of power. By producing, reproducing, and circulating samizdat with the limited technology of stolen typewriters and clandestine copy machines, samizdat participants practiced dissent not merely through the content of the texts they distributed, but primarily through their appropriation of the actual machinery of power. In many ways, one could argue that samizdat participants enacted a truly Leninist politics wherein they laid claim to the ownership of the *means* of production.

To return to the issue of the surface and its relationship to Soviet postmodernity, contra Oushakine, both so-called political and aesthetic samizdat demonstrated a mimetic relationship with dominant power insofar as they each sought to appropriate the *means* of production for their own ends. As such, I maintain that it is mistaken to carve out a sacrosanct “underground” for literary samizdat.<sup>49</sup> Both political and literary samizdat wrestled with and tried to re-appropriate the means of production of dominant power; they did not seek to destroy these means. Nevertheless, the content of samizdat should not be ignored. In particular, postmodern literary samizdat—those works that emerged in response to both the Sinyavsky/Daniel Trial and Solzhenitsyn’s uncomplicated literary realism—presented a greater political threat to Soviet domination than did political samizdat works. The political threat of literary works was greater because they simultaneously re-appropriated the technological means of communication and questioned the symbolism of the apparatus itself.

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<sup>49</sup> Here, I would like to note that the very idea of an underground space, separate from dominant power, has been dispelled not only by the spatial politics of postmodernity itself, but also by earlier nihilist Russian authors such as Fyodor Dostoevsky. See: Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes From the Underground*. Tribeca Books, 2011. Print.

### III. *Metropol* and the Aesthetics of Poverty

One of the literary samizdat texts that confronted the Soviet state's attempt to monopolize the technological and discursive apparatus of communication most directly was *Metropol: A Literary Almanac*. In this almanac, twenty-three Soviet writers, most of whom had at one time or other been published through official channels, came together to contest what Vassily Aksenov, editor of the text, calls "the most unusual of colonial empires: the Soviet literary establishment" ("Metropol Affair" 154). The collection consists of poems, novellas, essays, and short stories written by—among others—popular authors such as Andrei Voznesensky, Semyon Lipkin, Vladimir Vysotsky, Viktor Yerofeyev, Fazil Iksander, and Yvegeny Popov. Included in this collection are competing philosophical treatises, neo-futurist and neo-Pushkinist poems, dark ironic prose and erotic short stories. In addition, the editors included the work of one foreign author: John Updike. In short, as Aksenov acknowledges, *Metropol* contained "multitudes" ("Metropol Affair" 154).

In an attempt to force a meeting with Soviet authorities demanding publication of the almanac in the mainstream press, *Metropol's* editors decided to produce only twelve volumes of the almanac. Twelve was the magic number that remained within legal limits; publishing thirteen or more copies would have constituted illegal book production. In January 1979, after two years of working diligently with only limited resources to publish these twelve copies, editors planned an opening brunch for their collection. They invited not only friends and family of the authors, but also famous Soviet models and foreign

journalists. After the brunch, they planned to deliver their collection in person to Boris Stukalin, Chairman of the State Committee of Publishing, whereupon they would demand their almanac be published without censorship on the grounds of artistic merit alone (“Metropol Affair” 156). They planned to give the collection directly to Stukalin in order to circumvent “the Writer’s Union—that 8,000 member bureaucracy-within-a-bureaucracy” (“Metropol Affair” 155). Before this affair was set to take place, two copies of the collection were smuggled into France by an anonymous transporter. *Metropol’s* opening extravaganza never took place, however, as authorities shut down the restaurant at which it was supposed to occur, supposedly for reasons related to “sanitation” (*Metropol* xiii). In the following two years, *Metropol* gained notoriety within the Soviet Union and abroad; many of its writers were put on trial, expelled from the Writer’s Union, or, in the case of Aksenov, banished from the country outright.

In his forward to the collection, Kevin Klose claims that the primary threats *Metropol* posed were its insistence that Soviet authorities follow their own laws and the attention the text (as well as the regime) garnered in the West. Much like Oushakine’s treatment of political samizdat, Klose asserts that “the writers [of *Metropol*] sought to force the state to observe freedom of expression which the 1977 Brezhnev Constitution, successor to the debased 1936 Stalin Constitution, affirm[ed] as the law of the land in the USSR, but which in fact exist[ed] only in the pluralistic West” (xiii). While *Metropol* writers used legality as one of their tactics to increase attention at home and abroad, this was not their primary political intervention. Needless to say, Klose’s view of the “pluralistic West” is naïve and opportunistic, perpetuating the dominant Western Cold

War narrative that *Metropol* writers also contested in their own way. In fact, Aksenov himself states that authorities “were far less upset by the content of the almanac than by [the writers’] action, [their] solidarity, and [their] disregard for the usual official channels (“Metropol Affair” 156).

First and foremost, *Metropol’s* most important political intervention was its production of, in Aksenov’s own words, an “aesthetic of poverty” (“Metropol Affair” 156). Unlike much of the samizdat movement that tried to publish anything subversive regardless of its aesthetic merits, *Metropol* editors turned away contributions that were nothing more than a challenge to the state (“Metropol Affair” 156). Aksenov claims that the editors primary goal was thus “to show the rich variety of Russian literature, whether above or under ground, and to underline its distinctiveness from monotonous official Soviet literature (“Metropol Affair” 156). At the same time, however, Aksenov distances himself from the literary innovators of the 1920s by claiming that the *Metropol* writers were united more by ethics than aesthetics: “Our ethic was simple: opposition to the totalitarian state of mind, and commitment to overcoming it” (“Metropol Affair” 155).

Even though Aksenov never clearly defines what he means by “totalitarian state of mind,” his concept of totalitarianism seems to defy traditional understandings of the term. The concept of totalitarianism was first delineated by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). In this text, her concern is with the novel appearance of state terror, which combined unprecedented coercion with an all-embracing secular ideology in both Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. In contrast to previous autocratic political forms, Arendt claims totalitarianism is a novel type of governance that seeks not

only absolute political power, but also total control over everyday life. In and of itself, Arendt's treatment of totalitarianism is primarily descriptive. The effect of her concept, however, was that it was taken up by Western Cold War powers as a key weapon in the ideological battle against communism itself; totalitarianism was equated with the economic system of communism and liberal democracy was touted as its absolute opposite.

In *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the Mis(use) of a Notion*, Slavoj Žižek remarks that although Arendt's political leanings were Leftist in nature, the "elevation of Arendt [in the West] is perhaps the clearest sign of the theoretical defeat of the Left – of how the Left has accepted the basic co-ordinates of liberal democracy ('democracy' versus 'totalitarianism', etc.), and is now trying to redefine its (op)position *within* this space" (Žižek 3). As such, Žižek argues that the concept of totalitarianism is irrecoverable and must be abandoned.

For the most part, I agree with Žižek regarding the ideological reification of the concept of totalitarianism. At the same time, however, Aksenov's use of the term neither fetishizes Western democracy nor reproduces the myth that communism and totalitarianism are necessarily linked. Instead, Aksenov's invocation of the "totalitarian state of mind" posits totalitarianism as both an existing political phenomenon and a state of mind that is never total. In other words, Aksenov's use of the term implies that totalitarianism is a phenomenon that oppressive state regimes seek to cultivate, but one that citizens also *choose* to adhere to. His solution to overcoming this state of mind is to usurp the state's means of cultural production; it is not to abandon of the principles of

economic equality altogether.

*Metropol* editors chose to overcome both the graphophilic tendency in samizdat and the “totalitarian state of mind” by presenting their collection as a respectable object of art, in both its content and form, as an affirmation of an “aesthetics of poverty” (*Metropol* 156). Aksenov writes,

Unlike a typical samizdat (underground publication), *Metropol* was intended to be more than a stack of papers secretly circulated among the “right” readers. We wanted it to be an attractive public object—and to that end, working according to the “aesthetic of poverty,” we had the almanac bound with the best “high chic” shoelaces” (*Metropol* Affair 156).

While Aksenov’s reference to these “high chic shoelaces” might indeed sound funny, the truth of the matter is that *Metropol*’s editors did, in fact, choose prominent visual artists David Borovsky and Boris Messerer to design the text’s binding and cover work (“*Metropol* Affair” 156). For the editors generally viewed the samizdat underground not as a free, creative space operating in opposition to the dominant regime, but rather as a cesspool of aesthetic schlock produced as an effect of the same “totalitarian state of mind” that created the necessity for an “underground” (operating in plain sight) in the first place. Accordingly, in their introduction, the editors claim that they are “literary professionals;” the entire object they present is thus polished and refined (xx).

The “aesthetics of poverty” that *Metropol* contributors enacted in their text is based on an absolute rejection of the fetishization of poverty. Rather than accepting the condition that their text appear in a degraded form, they prioritized the aesthetic

presentation of both its content and external manifestation. At the same time, however, they rejected the notion that a respectable aesthetic presentation require a substantial sum of capital investment or endorsement by an official press. Consequently, *Metropol* presented a critique of both the samizdat underground's tendency to accept its socio-economic plight by presenting itself and its work as "damaged goods" and the Soviet authorities' capitalistic monopoly over economic and cultural affairs.

The title itself, *Metropol*, succinctly sums up the editors' "aesthetics of poverty" as well as their critique of the concept of an "underground" separated from dominant power. The choice of title is a tri-part play on words. First, *Metropol* refers to Moscow, the metropolis where the collection was produced. This signification of the collection's title exposes the "homeless stratum" of Soviet literature lurking within the supposedly classless capital (*Metropol* ix). Second, *Metropol* reminds readers of the Metropole, Soviet Moscow's second largest hotel which served as a gathering space for Russian writers and artists. The fact that artists needed to gather in a hotel points to their homeless nature in Soviet society. Third, *Metropol* suggests a link to the Moscow Metropolitan Subway System, colloquially referred to as "the Metro." The lavish Moscow Metro, built by Stalin in the early 1930s, functioned in Soviet society not only as a vehicle for physical mobility but also as an official space for Soviet aesthetic and ideological culture. Indeed, this socialist realist, monumental public works project was designed, in part, to display an evolutionary history of Soviet socialism. This connotation of *Metropol* calls attention to Stalinist and socialist realist elements skulking within the supposedly politically untarnished space of "the underground."

*Metropol's* editors maintain that their collection functions as a home for the dispossessed. They write: “The dream of the homeless is a roof overhead. That is why *Metropol* is a convenient shelter, a hunter’s cabin in the capital, situated above the best ‘metro’ in the world” (ix-xx). Yet, while they depict their collection as a homeless shelter situated above the underground, they do not claim that it constitutes a permanent residence or stable community. To the contrary, they state:

The contributors to *Metropol* are literary professionals who are entirely independent (of one another). The one thing that binds them together under this roof is the awareness that the author bears the sole responsibility for a work. The right to have that responsibility seems to us sacred. It is not impossible that the strengthening of that sense of responsibility will benefit our culture as a whole (*Metropol* ix-xx).

While it initially appears that the *Metropol* writers espoused a theory of authorship that rejects the proclaimed “Death of the Author,” I argue to the contrary that they were not advocating an individualist notion of writing and reading based on authorial intent per se. Rather, they were fighting against the “chronic ailment” they define as “‘hostility toward differentness’ or simply ‘fear of literature’” by declaring the right to the responsibility to create and determine meaning—a responsibility stolen by Soviet literary authorities and disavowed by the graphomaniacal underground (ix).

As I previously stated, Aksenov claims that *Metropol* contains “multitudes” (“Metropol Affair” 154). Despite preceding the publication of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude* by more than two decades, I would argue that Aksenov’s

concepts of the multitude and the aesthetics of poverty are premised on similar notions of poverty and multitude as Hardt and Negri's. In *Empire*, the prequel to *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri argue that the productive forces of postmodern capitalism (including Soviet state capitalism) ushered in new forms of sovereignty and subjectivity. They name the new global power "Empire" and posit its adversary in the subjective social force called the "multitude"—the same subjective force, they claim, "called Empire into being" (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 43). For them, Empire is not a metaphor; it is a particular form of late capitalist sovereignty that operates according to an imperial model.

Unlike theories of imperialism that posit world leadership in nation-states, Hardt and Negri's concept of "the imperial" locates sovereignty in a single supranational power—one bigger than and beyond the limits of the nation-state: capital. While they posit the multitude as the potential of an equally large counter-force to Empire, their theory does not automatically suggest that the multitude is revolutionary. They claim, instead, that the multitude is an ambivalent force composed of always changing singularities and desires. As they write: "The deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction" (*Empire* 61). Without the multitude, Empire bears no power at all. As such, Empire seeks to capture and harness the multitude's creative, vital power by refiguring it into easily manipulatable and exploitable forms such as political representation and economic subordination.

At the core of Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude is the collective social subject known as the poor. They argue that the concept of the poor has been under-

theorized and overlooked by contemporary authors. Rather than locating productive power in the rich or castigating the poor as disorganized, Hardt and Negri claim that the rich are “merely partial and localized figures” who lack productive potential (*Empire* 156). The poor, on the other hand, represent “in a certain respect an eternal postmodern figure: the figure of a transversal, omnipresent, different, mobile subject; the testament to the irrepressible aleatory character of existence” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 156). In other words, in opposition to the notion that the poor are merely dispossessed, powerless, and lazy, Hardt and Negri argue that a change in perspective on how we categorize the poor is necessary within late capitalist economic conditions—conditions that have subsumed the poor into a totalizing economic process from which it is no longer possible to define an outside or an underground.<sup>50</sup> The entire poor, regardless of employment or resident status, is involved in the production circuit at all times. Wealth is located in the creative, productive capacity of the poor; the rich merely usurp this potential.

In particular, Hardt and Negri claim that social production in the postmodern era has become increasingly dominated by immaterial labor and linguistic communication. While linguistic systems undeniably involve a variety of hierarchies—from specific discriminatory signifiers used against minority groups to global languages of commerce that benefit native speakers in economically dominant countries—the poor, they claim, are “often the most creative agents of a linguistic community, developing new linguistic forms and mixtures and communicating them to the community as a whole” (*Multitude* 132). As an example of the creative use of language by the poor, Hardt and Negri refer to

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<sup>50</sup> In the following chapter, I will outline the changes in the productive process that Hardt and Negri refer to variously as postmodernism, post-Fordism, and real subsumption.

African American slang. For our purposes, we need not look farther than *Metropol* as itself a case in point of linguistic experimentation by the poor.

Ultimately, Hardt and Negri maintain that by examining the creative use of communication—that is, the essence of postmodern production—we are able to transform our common notions of the poor as merely dispossessed and excluded from society into a vision of the poor as the very life force of capitalism as well as the primary point of resistance to it. They write,

...[S]ince the poor participate in and help generate the linguistic community by which they are then excluded or subordinated, the poor are not only active and productive but also antagonistic and potentially rebellious. The paradoxical position of the poor within the linguistic community is indicative of their position in social production more generally. And, in fact, the poor can serve in this regard as the representative or, better, the common expression of all creative social activity. To complete the inversion of the traditional image [of the poor], then, we can say that *the poor embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also of productive life itself.* (*Multitude* 132-133, italics original).

Aksenov's concept of the totalitarian state of mind is best understood as a mindset that denies what Hardt and Negri call the ontological condition of productive life itself. The antidote to this condition is an "aesthetics of poverty"—an aesthetic that values and cultivates the creative potential of the poor as the proper form of resistance to social and

economic domination.

Hardt and Negri also maintain that while the multitude—and, in particular, the poor—represents difference, mobility, hybridity, and creativity, the liberatory potential of these characteristics tends to resonate not with the poor itself, but with “an elite population that enjoys certain rights, a certain level of wealth, and a certain position in the global hierarchy” (*Empire* 174). For the poor, difference, mobility, hybridity, and creativity are burdens of life; we should thus be careful not to romanticize the condition of poverty. Similarly, Hardt and Negri contend that postmodern discourses that attack Enlightenment concepts such as master narratives and truth oftentimes do so at the expense of the poor. Specifically, they refer to the necessity of Truth Commissions that emerged in the aftermath of South African apartheid and the civil war in El Salvador; for the poor who were killed or tortured at the hands of these brutal regimes, it was absolutely imperative that truth be acknowledged.

Accordingly, Hardt and Negri argue that under postmodern conditions of production, we need not abandon the category of truth altogether. To do so would only benefit those who hold dominant positions of power. Rather, they acknowledge that truth in and of itself does exist as well as the fact that truth is always narrated, mediated, and socially constructed. Therefore, they locate revolutionary potential not in truth as a fixed and stable entity, but instead at the level of the *production* of truth. Because the poor “embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also of productive life itself,” the poor occupy the privileged position of *producing* truth. Hardt and Negri write: “Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will. Mobility

and hybridity are not liberatory, but taking control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixtures is. The real truth commissions of Empire will be constituent assemblies of the multitude” (*Empire* 174).

As I previously stated, the samizdat movement was split between authors such as Solzhenitsyn, who viewed truth as fixed and stable, and Sinyavsky, who understood truth to be a performance and production. *Metropol’s* editors and authors fall into the latter category. However, in addition to viewing the concept of truth through an oppositional lens, *Metropol’s* editors also critiqued the notion of a unified political voice; in effect, they demonstrated what Hardt and Negri call the “real truth commissions of Empire...constituent assemblies of the multitude” (*Empire* 174). Specifically, by producing *Metropol* as a volume of “multitudes” housing the singular, disparate “homeless stratum” of Soviet literature, *Metropol’s* editors model an aesthetics of poverty which does not reify its contents under a single identity or political platform. Rather, *Metropol* is an example of being united by a principle—the responsibility to produce an ethical “aesthetics of poverty” in the open, outside of the underground. Such a principle does not constitute a community based on identity, but one whose social bond is premised on abolishing “hostility toward differentness,” which bears the same name as the “fear of literature” (ix).

It would be impossible to discuss each of the twenty-four authors who contributed to *Metropol* in the limited space of this chapter. Therefore, I limit my discussion here to two of the works in *Metropol* that illustrate directly or symbolically the multitudinous nature of the collection itself. Indeed, in many ways it is a risky endeavor to attempt to

characterize the meaning of the collection at all; such an effort both gambles with the possibility of universalizing the individual works under a single platform and goes against the editors' claim that the individual works are entirely independent of each other. With the caveat that the works I discuss are singular and should be read neither as espousing a unified meaning nor merely for their express content, failing to engage with the particular works in the collection perpetuates a "hostility to differentness" that Aksenov warns against.

While most of the pieces in *Metropol* do not address the question of difference explicitly, Leonid Batkin's essay, "The Uncomfortableness of Culture," examines the concept of cultural value directly and puts forth an argument for an anti-utilitarian understanding of culture. In this piece, Batkin analyzes various trends in Soviet Culturology including preservationism, traditionalism, dialectical materialism, Futurism, and dialogism. He critiques cultural preservationists who bemoan the end of high art as well as mass cultural movements that are concerned only with moral precepts. Here, Batkin claims that we cannot simply abandon tradition in favor of creation or vice versa. Instead, we must approach existing cultural products as if they are able to answer questions for which "no answers had previously been found" (Batkin 629). In that sense, producers and consumers of cultural products are both equally active in the creative process. Culture is not something from which meaning is derived; culture is the realm in which meaning is produced without end.

Following Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, Batkin argues that in order to interact with culture, a certain impossible relationship between forgetting and

remembering is necessary. That is, even though it is impossible to forget what we know already, Batkin contends that we must be open to the new answers culture can engender. He writes, “The essential thing is neither the approval or rejection of the new, nor the approval or rejection of the old, but the occurrence of dialogue, i.e., the recognition of another position, even one which is antipathetic, as a real, unsolved *problem*, as another’s *truth* and, as a corollary, the acceptance of one’s own pet truth as open and incomplete” (631). Ultimately, the argument here is a Marxist one: to create historical change and new culture, we need to engage and transform the antagonisms of all previous cultures. Truth can always be redefined.

Batkin’s argument is set against the Soviet regime’s dual practices of generating nationalist sentiment by elevating Russian classics to the status of timeless and seeking to produce a monumental proletarian socialist realist culture. With each of these practices, the Soviet regime attempted to arrest, control, dominate, and own the generative potential of cultural and historical innovation under the premise of “defending culture.” Batkin’s essay critiques the regime’s elevation of the notion of culture by claiming that any effort to defend culture has no other effect than killing it. He writes, “Culture finds some use and benefit in everything, provided it has some sort of living sense. Only with dead things can it do nothing. Let us not defend culture. Rather, let us try not to hinder it” (636). Accordingly, Batkin puts forth an anti-utilitarian argument against the concept of culture, thus claiming we need to rethink the notion of cultural utility altogether.

Batkin’s essay serves as the collection’s most explicit critique of the Soviet state’s purported monopoly on the utility of culture. In addition, his text re-appropriates Marx to

claim that the regime's orientation toward controlling culture was, in fact, antithetical to a proper reading of Marx. In a similar manner to Hardt and Negri's argument about the synchronic nature of the multitude (an argument I will elaborate in detail in chapter 4), Batkin cites Marx's concept of trans-historical "fundamental forces" to argue that "the paradox of culture lies only in the attractions and antagonisms of these forces, in their mutual provocation with the human mind, which provides the stimulus for historical movement" (Batkin 633). In effect, Batkin's essay not only suggests that the Soviet regime's stance on culture was anti-Marxist, but it also serves as a precursor to contemporary Marxian works that engage the question of utilitarianism and so-called non-productive labor.

Albeit in a less direct manner, Viktor Yerofeyev's short story contribution to *Metropol*, "A Fin de Siècle Orgasm," also engages questions of production, cultural pluralism, temporality, and creation. Unlike Batkin, who examines the generative potentiality of unhindered cultural production, Yerofeyev illustrates life under stagnation. For Yerofeyev, stagnation is not merely an effect of governmental domination; stagnation is the result of adherence to all structures and cultural norms, including the very structure of language itself.

In this story, Yerofeyev crafts a world in which disparate discursive categories, historical periods, and structures of classification collide in nearly every single sentence. In particular, Yerofeyev illustrates the intersection of animals and humans, nature and humanity, past and present, high and low culture. In each of these cases, the figure that stands in for an element reveals itself to defy the limits of its own figuration: animals do

not follow animal instincts, humans act more animalistic than animals, “cultured” individuals appear more boorish than do the poor, and the past does not necessarily precede the present. As Mark Lipovitsky writes, “in Yerofeyev’s work the clash of various languages of culture and history invariable leads not to synthesis, not to a universal metalanguage, but to a dissonance that saturates the entire text and displays a clumsiness and contempt for [the] logic of structures” (165). The effect of these various collisions between seeming binaries does not undo the structures that produce the binaries in the first place, but instead reveals the spurious nature of discourse itself.

Rather than simply pointing to the problems with discourse and structure, however, Yerofeyev places his portraits of discursive limitations within a larger rhizomatic configuration, allowing the reader to see both the limiting effects of structure on the characters and the points at which the structures fall apart. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a rhizome is an “image of thought” that can be likened to a non-hierarchical map with multiple points of interconnection. Unlike root-tree systems, which chart origins and chronologies, rhizomes present history and culture in the form of multiplicities with no beginning or end. The rhizome also differs from a structure insofar as a structure is “defined by a set of points and positions, [and] the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand 21). Throughout “A Fin de Siècle Orgasm,” Yerofeyev demonstrates the “maximum dimension” of deterritorialization in his rhizomatic world. He does so by both elucidating the

fragmentary nature of the structures that confine his characters and revealing the fact that the structures make little sense beyond peoples' adherence to them.

In the first few lines of the story—before the plot begins to unfold—Yerofeyev's narrator directs the reader to question not only the structures of syntax, grammar, and subordinate clauses, but also very notion of the pronoun "I." The narrator states: "Do not trust, dear readers, do not trust subordinate clauses!...You say that syntax guarantees sanitation and healthy imagery? Spare me, please! The pronoun "I" is constantly being transformed before one's very eyes, even in the most innocent letters home or in a picture postcard from the Black Sea...but it is never, never on target" (Yerofeyev 457). Here, the narrator suggests that both the structures that organize linguistic communication and the individual subjects that communicate within these structures operate as nothing more than illusions of rationality. After questioning the three-dimensionality of the pronoun "I," Yerofeyev explains that there is a fourth dimension to the "I" that "multiplies like an amoeba" (457). In this regard, the fourth dimension of the "I" functions as the temporal component of the fragmented subject who is never fully present.

Following his description of the subject, Yerofeyev introduces the story's main character—a four-dimensional, bearded, nameless man who embarks on a vacation to a dacha town in the outskirts of Moscow by "driving off into the past with deferred honors" (Yerofeyev 457). Unlike typical dacha towns that are known for their geniality and bliss, this post-apocalyptic dacha town is plagued by an intense summer heat that has caused food to decay and "the repair of all possible systems and types of clocks and watches [to be] temporarily suspended" (Yerofeyev 457-458). As a result of his inability to make

sense of time, the unshaven man can no longer remember how long it has been since he has shaved. Neither can he recognize whether he has “gotten enough sleep or ha[s] overslept” (Yerofeyev 459). Regardless of the breakdown of temporal measurement and all types of systems, however, life continues to go on. The nameless man still loves watermelons and peaches. Trains pass through the town, blowing men’s neatly combed hair to reveal their bald spots, serving as evidence that they still age. And teenagers still to flirt with each other on leisurely boat rides even though they have been “transformed into a poster advertising the pleasure-boat station” (Yerofeyev 458). In other words, even though the town’s systems have become stagnant and joy has become reified into an image of itself, the residents continue to live their lives. The end of century represents neither the end of history nor the end of life.

One morning the unshaven man leaves the dacha town for a day of work in Moscow. Upon his return, he realizes his cottage has been robbed by what appears to be a group of children. Each of his remaining working clocks and radios has been stolen and the only item of value not taken from his cottage is his typewriter. Throughout the remaining pages of the story, the nameless man spends his day pounding away on his typewriter and questioning the merits of art.

In his ramblings on the utility of art, the nameless man both forgets the reasons behind his own aesthetic tastes and begins to wonder if he is a prophet; he “imagines that he is the one who has been chosen to hear and arrest in language the lethargic arrival of the end of the century” (Yerofeyev 462). He compares himself to the contemporary

Nikolai Fyodorov, thus likening the end of art to the unifying force of death.<sup>51</sup> Yerofeyev remarks that the nameless man would visit the symphony two to three times a year even though he “had no memory for music and could not tell Beethoven from Brahms” (461). He also “felt a strange [and inexplicable] compulsion to feel an aversion for Tchaikovsky” (Yerofeyev 461). In addition, the main character claims “the itch of art, the itch to create” comes from “depletion not surplus. Because that is all there was LITERATURE—PUTRE-TURE” (Yerofeyev 462). In sum, the nameless man still grasps the importance of creation, but cannot remember how the content of supposed high art relates to his impoverished circumstances. Aesthetics, for him, result from the condition of poverty alone.

The nameless man escapes the herd mentality of the other dacha-town dwellers precisely because he has lost his memory. Even though systems of measurement have broken down for all of the town residents, the nameless man is the only character in the story to question the structures that impoverish the town’s existence. Regardless of the fact that food is decaying, dogs have begun to walk sideways, and time is no longer measurable, the other characters continue to function as if the world has not changed. In a sense, they are so enmeshed in history they cannot see that their own historical reality has become stagnant.

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<sup>51</sup> Nikolai Fyodorov was a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, utopian Christian philosopher who put forth a theory of death as the uniting force of all people. He argued that death is the Common Cause of humanity.

Here, Yerofeyev demonstrates Friedrich Nietzsche's concept that both human happiness and the production of the new are contingent on a forgetting of the past.<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche writes, "In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness...it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel unhistorically during its duration"(Nietzsche 62). The nameless man—through his loss of memory, loss of property, and loss of a proper name—is left with nothing other than the ability to create. As a result, he can, in a sense, step outside of the stagnant late-Soviet historical reality and experience the fourth-dimension of the "I"—that is, temporality. For the nameless man, temporality and poverty are the conditions of possibility for both creation and historical change.

Batkin's essay and Yerofeyev's short story serve as only two examples of *Metropol's* "multitudes". By calling attention to the socio-economic problematic of poverty as an effect of Soviet state capitalism, rejecting the maniacal pursuit to produce literature without regard to its presentation, and questioning the very premise of an underground community, *Metropol's* authors enact an aesthetics of poverty based not on the privative aspects of poverty alone, but also on the generative potential of "the ontological condition of productive life itself" (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 132-133). Accordingly, *Metropol* represents an instance of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "literary communism." As a work of literary communism that put forth a revolutionary "aesthetics

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<sup>52</sup> See: Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche The Use and Abuse of History 2nd Revised Edition*. 2nd ed. Macmillan for The Library of Liberal Arts, 1957. Print.

of poverty,” *Metropol* succeeded at both disrupting the mythologizing discourse of Soviet “communism” and creating an alter-globalizing archetype of an internet-for-the-poor.

#### **IV. Literary Communism in the Creative Bloc**

In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy engages the work of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot to develop his theory of literary communism. Rethinking concepts of community, communism, and political fusion, he produces a theory of being-together that defies the limitations of identity politics and the reified definition of communism, finding its most adequate form in the plurality of shared finitude(s). Unlike most radical thinkers and samizdat writers who locate the apex of radical potentiality in communities constituted in common against shared repression, Nancy locates the most radical form of being-in-common in the undoing of communities as such. As I suggested above, Nancy’s formulation of being-in-common directly aligns with the *Metropol* editors’ claim that their text is composed by authors entirely independent of each other, but united by a sense of responsibility to contest the “hostility to differentness” (*Metropol* ix).

Nancy’s philosophy is centered on a notion of myth as a grounding concept wherein the former serves as the principle through which shared sense and existence are organized. For him, myth gives meaning to the world, and to community, and is thus inseparable from them. There is no outside to myth, only the interruptions accompanying the creation of new myths and communities. With regard to the way Nancy’s concept of myth structures historical conditions, Ian James writes:

This does not necessarily imply that the founding fictions of myth function as causes of events such that any one event can only be understood in terms of its mythic foundation. Rather, it implies that a fundamental articulation of sense (existence) and the formalizing of that sense into the signifying discourses of myth (the communication of an “in-common”) gives an overall context of sense and meaning which would underpin historical causality (and agency) per se...The interruption of myth in this context would be its exposure to the plurality of finite sense for which it cannot account, and thus its exposure to new forms of sense or meaning...[Consequently,] historical change cannot be conceived in terms of a dialectical or teleological process, but rather in terms of a constant birth or becoming of singular-plural sense that interrupts established foundational narratives and opens the way for future narratives to emerge.

(197)

In this formulation of myth, then, literature serves as the interruption to myth *par excellence*. To be clear, even though for Nancy there is no outside to myth in the historical world, literature-as-interruption “does not make up a myth” (Nancy 64). It does not make up a myth precisely because it “does not come to an end” that could be reified into a contained mythic structure; rather, literature is composed of nothing more than difference itself (Nancy 64). In elucidating “defying ends,” Nancy refers neither to Blanchot’s notion of “unworking” nor to the romantic notion of an “infinite poetry” (65). Instead, he argues that it is “unended and “unending” precisely because,

it does not come to an end at the place where the work passes from an author to a reader, and from this reader to another reader or to another author. It does not come to an end at the place where it passes into other works of other authors. It does not come to an end where its narrative passes into other narratives, its poem into other poems, its thought into other thoughts, or into the inevitable suspension of the thought or the poem. (65)

In short, literature is a sharing of the unrestricted nature of sense-making; a sharing that never constitutes a stable community. Literature does not produce stable communities because literature can never be contained.

Accordingly, Nancy argues that unlike literature, myth communicates itself to itself within its own discursive limits. In so doing, it communicates the communion of its community by containing and reifying the contents of its “sense.” Literature, on the other hand, communicates nothing other than communication and sharing as such. It should be noted here that Nancy’s concept of literature extends beyond its frequently limited definition within academic and state-repressive disciplinary structures. He characterizes literature in the following manner: “...it is literature if it is speech (a language, an idiom, a writing)—whatever kind of speech it may be, written or not, fictive or discursive, literature or not—that puts into play nothing other than being *in common*” (65). If literature is the interruption of myth, “literary communism” *affirms* this interruption.

Nancy's provocative concept of literary communism is based upon the potentialities of "being-in-common" literature affords the singular being. Literary communism "articulates our shared being beyond any figure of identity, and ...affirms the singular plurality of sense as the very stuff of our finite becoming" (James 200). The singular being is, for Nancy, neither an individual nor a subject; the singular being defies the limitations of identity. Specifically, Nancy argues that the nature of the singular being is literary: "A singular being ("you" or "me") has the precise structure and nature of a being of writing, of a "literary" being: it resides only in the communication—which does not commune—of its advance and its retreat. It offers itself, it holds itself in suspense" (Nancy 78).

What is most important for our purposes is that, in communication, Nancy's singular being is nothing other than "its own truth, it becomes simply *the truth*" (Nancy 78). Unlike mythic communication that prescribes exemplary figures (the character, the author, literature, etc.)—or, for our purposes, the communist, the citizen, the dissident, the writer—the singular being exceeds the limitations of remainderless truth and unworks any impulse towards containment. Literary being is, in short, an uncapturable truth; it is not a surplus of clarity.

In his formulations of literary communism and literary being, Nancy also addresses the question of value. At the same time, though, he circumvents the question of the relationship between economic and social value almost entirely. Surely, Nancy's elision of the economic implications of literary communism stems from traditional Marxism's politically reductive tendency to relegate all relations to the economic field.

He claims that a community organized around a single idea such as economic equality, “necessarily loses the *in* of being-*in*-common. Or, it loses the *with* or the *together* that defines it. It yields its being-together to a being *of* togetherness. The truth of community, on the contrary, resides in the retreat of such a being” (Nancy xxxix).

In short piece entitled “On One Approach to Communism,” (Nancy’s long-time inspiration) Maurice Blanchot argues that despite traditional Marxism’s failure to account for the emotional and communicational needs of individuals, one can not simply disavow the economic realm. Therefore, Blanchot puts forth a theory of communism that accounts for both communicational and economic needs. On the one hand, Blanchot cites the work of Dionys Mascolo, claiming that “communism is the process of the materialist search for communication” (Blanchot 93). On the other hand, he argues that communism is the “movement of the satisfaction of needs” (Blanchot 93).

Much like Nancy, Blanchot contends that meeting one of these disparate needs often leads to the negation of the other. For instance, from the perspective of economic needs, “the liberator would thus be the man who is already at this moment the most purely thing, the man-tool who is already reduced, without travesty, to his material condition, who is ‘nothing’ except useful, the man of necessity, the necessitous, the man of need” (Blanchot 94). In this sense, man would be liberated from things and their exploitative relations by erasing the distinction between man-as-labor and the products he produces. By meeting economic needs in this way, however, collective relations would seemingly have “no other existence but the one that makes possible the movement by which the man of need is brought to power” (Blanchot 95). Here, relations between men

become merely “useful” and we risk losing “ourselves” in this process. Regardless of the possible effect of producing a “collective impersonality” through meeting economic needs in this way, though, Blanchot argues that we must take the risk of meeting both of these irreconcilable needs at the same time (Blanchot 95).

In order to practice communism by living a life of communication and a life of economic need in tandem, Blanchot suggests that we need to abandon the mystificatory category of value completely. While communication as such will not free us from deceptive economic value relations, it will “help us to challenge the authority that founds these relations, forcing us to reach a position from which it would be possible to have no part in “values”” (Blanchot 96). For Blanchot, communication is able to bring forth a life beyond values because it “alone affirms itself”—not in a distant future that promises a “world without separation” or exploitation, but in the immediate moment, the moment it disrupts (Blanchot 96). Ultimately, he maintains that even though it is both necessary and nearly impossible to reconcile the private life of communication and the common life of needs, the proper place for uniting these needs is in artistic experience itself. In particular, he cites the poetic work as the object most suited to this endeavor: “The poetic work, the artistic work, if it speaks to us of something, speaks to us of what is outside any value or what rejects all valuation, proclaims the exigency of the beginning (again) that loses and obscures itself as soon as it is satisfied in value” (Blanchot 97).

Overall, I agree with Blanchot’s assessment that in order to enact something like literary communism or a materialist form of communication, it is necessary to undertake the risks associated with fulfilling economic needs. Furthermore, he is correct to insist

that the only way to do this is by abandoning values altogether. While artistic experience or the poetic work are certainly sites that potentially “speak to us of what is outside any value,” he does not push his analysis of the distinction between objects and subjects far enough. As Lars Iyer notes, “Communism, for Blanchot, names the practice that responds to the communitarian exigence in the affirmation of a relation to the other, to what is outside the ‘cum’ or ‘with’ that is held in common” (61). Yet, it is precisely this relation of otherness between objects and subjects that is missing from Blanchot’s approach to communism.

In “Communist Objects and the Values of Printed Matter,” Nicholas Thoburn examines the relationship between readers and political pamphlets to demonstrate what a communist relationship between subjects and objects looks like. To do so, Thoburn proposes the concept of the communist object. He defines a communist object as “an inorganic material entity that destabilizes the commodity attributes of property *and* utility and their correlated patterns of subjectivity and association. It posits instead an excessive materiality in a communism of organic and inorganic process” (Thoburn 2). Arguing against traditional readings of Marx, Thoburn insists the relationship between subjects and objects in Marx’s writing have been misunderstood and obscured by Soviet “ascetic socialism” (Thoburn 2).

Thoburn notes that according to the dominant Soviet reading of Marx’s *Capital*, the fetish character of commodities is understood to produce a dichotomous relationship between humans and objects wherein “social relations between things determine thinglike relations between people” (3). As a result of such a reading, Thoburn claims Marxists

have attempted to strip objects of their seductive capacities so as wrest value from the object and return it to the subject. While he does not disagree with readings that posit commodity fetishism as a phenomenon in which objects are rendered dead and subjects are estranged from the sensorium by their sense of “having,” he argues that early Soviet constructivist writings express a concept of production that neither disavows the object realm nor reproduces the binary between objects and subjects.<sup>53</sup> In a similar manner, *Metropol* also deconstructs this binary by privileging its own material conditions and expressions.

In particular, Thoburn engages the work of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Boris Aratov to show how early Russian constructivists sought to defeat commodity fetishism by creating a material equality between subjects and objects. Thoburn claims Rodchenko and Aratov demonstrated that both objects *and* subjects are exploited by capitalism. As such, we need not reduce objects to mere, inert matter, but only change our possessive relation to them. In order to understand how constructivists imagined a non-possessive relationship between subjects and objects, Thoburn details the structures of feeling that commodity fetishism produces in the first place. He writes:

*As a structure of feeling*, commodity fetishism here is not veneration of the object per se, but of the object as private-property, a foreclosed, isolated entity sundered from dynamic relations with humans and machines. In turn...the love of property in commodity fetishism is the

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<sup>53</sup> See: Arvatov, Boris, and Christina Kiaer. “Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing. (Toward the formulation of the question).” *October* 81 (1997): 119. Print.

affective structure of *human* isolation, isolation not just from a fully social relation with other humans but also from the expansive world of inorganic matter. (Thoburn 4)

Following Aratov, Thoburn argues that within commodity fetishism, an object's material production is obscured so that exchange value, not the object's material quality, becomes its defining feature. As such, what is valued in commodity fetishism are not the material aspects of the object itself, but rather its expression of an abstract value. As an antidote to commodity fetishism, Thoburn takes up Aratov's argument, claiming that to produce a truly communist material culture, we must eliminate the distinction between people and things allowing them to dynamically and sensuously interact.

Not only does Thoburn turn to these constructivist thinkers to elucidate his argument, he also contends that such a reading of the material realm is exactly in line with what Marx himself argued. Thoburn writes,

From the foreclosed sensorial scope of the commodity thing, communism here, in Marx's ecstatic expression, is "the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes" as enabled precisely through an experience of the object: "To be *sensuous*, i.e. to be real, is to be an object of sense, a *sensuous* object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one's sense perception. To be sensuous is to *suffer* (to be subjected to the actions of another)" (qtd Marx, "Economic" 352, 390). (Thoburn 5)

The key for Thoburn is that Marx did not at all exclude the possibility that we can have sensuous relations with objects. In other words, for Marx, emancipatory sensuous

relations exist not only between two or more subjects, but also between humans and things.

Ultimately, Thoburn contends that Marx and early constructivists, despite their revolutionary valorization of objects, did not push their arguments far enough. Specifically, he notes that both Marx and Aratov remained too interested in the utility of objects. For this reason, Thoburn turns to Walter Benjamin's writing on the figures of the useless object and the collector to detail his own concept of the communist object. Citing Benjamin, Thoburn states that a collection constitutes a community of objects whose value extends beyond any utility. The collector does not associate with her objects as someone who inserts value into them; to the contrary, "[a collection] is a 'circumscribed area' within which a sensorial field is opened that overtakes the collector" (Thoburn 7). This is important for Thoburn not because he thinks that the appropriate revolutionary model is a communism of collectors, but rather because Benjamin's concept of the collection suspends an object's *use* thus allowing its "rich singularity" to come to the fore (Thoburn 7). Without this suspension, an object cannot adequately ward off exchange value or exploitative patterns of capitalist work. A communist object is, therefore, one that both circulates outside of predetermined capitalist exchange patterns and exists on a plane of equality with a subject.

In his theorization of communist objects, Thoburn foregoes a reading of content. He does not find content to be unimportant, but he is more concerned with the material qualities of the object itself. It is precisely the material intersection between objects and subjects that allows for communist relations of production to emerge. In addition, he

argues that no object is ever communist in and of itself. In fact, he remarks, “the communist object is not a fully achieved entity, but a moment in the life of an object. And it is in turn enmeshed with, and shaped by, the singular properties of the particular object in which it is instantiated...the communist object is existent, then, only in its manifold concrete expressions” (Thoburn 9). While his treatment of communist objects is limited to the circulation of contemporary political pamphlets, this conception of the communist object serves as a useful supplement to Nancy’s theory of literary communism as well as an apt notion through which to consider *Metropol* and its aesthetics of poverty.

In particular, Thoburn’s concept of the communist object as a never fully achieved entity aligns particularly well with Nancy’s notion of the uncapturable surplus of literary communism. Thoburn’s concept also supplements Nancy’s “literary being” by positing a relationship of equality, transformation, and reciprocity between subjects and the objects they consume. In addition, the concept of the communist object addresses the indistinction between subjects and objects that is missing in Blanchot’s work and offers a way to analyze the sensuous and affective potentialities of economic relations.

To return to *Metropol* and the question of literary communism, then, I would argue that *Metropol* functioned as a literary communist object in that it was produced and circulated outside of typical capitalist exchange patterns and it disrupted the grounding myths of dominant power. Broadly speaking, one can claim the entire samizdat movement was literary communist insofar as samizdat’s very existence brought into question the state’s attempts to manage and control cultural exchange. Without

discounting authors who wrote what Oushakine calls “political” samizdat or literary samizdat authors (such as Solzhenitsyn) who focused on representing the Truth—for these are all authors who bravely and brazenly contested unethical economic and social domination—I would argue that the most effective samizdat texts were those that challenged the postmodernization of late Soviet society through an “aesthetics of poverty.” The greatest threat of *Metropol* to Soviet state (capitalist) power was the sheer fact that it actively intermingled with repressive Soviet power on its own terms by presenting a multitude of singular works whose common nature was their affirmation of the poor as the locus of productive power.

As a work of literary communism, *Metropol* provided a temporary home for literary beings who, by eluding capture by the aesthetic and economic restraints of (state) capitalist power, functioned as a surplus. As a result of their shared affirmation of the “sacred responsibility” to produce an aesthetic of poverty, *Metropol* contributors not only broke through the “creative block” of socialist realist ideology in the Eastern bloc, they also produced a vision of what an internet-for-the-poor might look like today. Moreover, as a (literary) communism within “communism,” and hence an altered portrait of the real battles being waged within the Cold War, *Metropol* enables us to radically refigure common notions of what the Cold War was as well as by whom and how it was fought.

In the following chapter, I will turn my attention to the autobiography of Assata Shakur, ex-Black Panther and escaped Cold War political prisoner—a figure who managed to effect substantial historical change in spite of (and because of) her understanding of late capitalism’s repressive structures being structured like a prison. I

will examine how she manipulates language in order to navigate the same void that Althusser and Doctorow describe in their texts. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how her understanding of capitalism and her method of reading enable her to refigure the discursive parameters of the prison and escape from it.

## Chapter Four

### **Literature of Conviction, Communist Chronotopography: Assata Shakur's Captive Liberation**

So it is that our possession by language, which 'writes' us even as we imagine ourselves to be writing it, is not so much some ultimate release from bourgeois subjectivism, but rather a limiting situation against which we must struggle at every instant.

– Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*

Love is my sword and truth is my compass.

– Assata Shakur

I awaited you at seven

But we had no watch

Neither you

Nor I

For there are no watches

But something's ticking

Deep down inside

Just look at that something

And neither for you

Nor for me

Are any words needed.

– Ilya Kabakov

On August 23, 1971 in Queens, New York, an African American woman robbed a bank at gunpoint. Within months of the robbery, a poster with a picture of the alleged assailant was plastered in every post office, subway station and bank in the state of New York offering a \$10,000 reward for her capture. The same poster appeared as a full-page ad in the *New York Daily News*. Printed under the picture of the alleged assailant was the

name Joanne Deborah Chesimard, the name that Assata Shakur—ex-Black Panther, Marxist revolutionary, and member of the Black Liberation Army—refers to in her autobiography, *Assata*, as her “slave name” (Shakur 7). While the posters alleged that the photograph of Shakur had been taken at the site of the crime, during one of her trials, which ended in acquittal, it was revealed that the photograph “had been released by the FBI and the U.S. Attorney’s office to the New York Clearing House Association (a bank’s association), which placed the ad and posters” as part of carefully orchestrated FBI counter-insurgency program to “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, and otherwise neutralize” black nationalist and Marxist liberation groups during the Cold War (Hinds xiv).

Between 1971 and 1973, Shakur was accused of two other bank robberies, conspiracy, assault with a deadly weapon, a hand grenade attack on a police vehicle, armed robbery, kidnapping, illegal possession of a weapon, and, most notably, the murder of multiple police officers. During this period, Shakur went underground and the FBI and CIA embarked on Operation CHESROB, a nation-wide manhunt to capture her and neutralize the anti-capitalist, Black Nationalist movement at large. She was finally captured in 1973 while traveling on the New Jersey Turnpike with fellow Black Liberation Army soldiers Zayd Shakur and Sundiata Acoli. After having been pulled over for missing a taillight, a shootout ensued which left Zayd Shakur and Trooper Werner Foerster dead, and Assata Shakur and Trooper James Harper with serious gunshot wounds. In the four years after her arrest, Shakur stood trial for seven of her ten indictments and was convicted at only one of these trials—the trial for the alleged murder

of Trooper Foerster in the turnpike shootout. In spite of the fact that medical evidence showed that Shakur could not have pulled the trigger because she herself had been assaulted while holding her hands in the air, jurors found her guilty and she received a mandatory life sentence.

While imprisoned, Shakur claims that she suffered various forms of abuse including regular beatings, twenty-one months in solitary confinement, and anal and vaginal searches. In fact, in 1979, even the United Nations Commission on Human Rights declared that the conditions of her confinement were “totally unbecoming any prisoner” (Browder 159). As a consequence of this alleged abuse, on November 2, 1979 Shakur escaped from New Jersey’s Clinton Correctional Facility for Women with the help of Silvia Baraldini, Marilyn Buck, Mutulu Shakur, and Sekou Odinga. Until 1984, she lived as a fugitive in the U.S. before her final escape to Cuba, where Fidel Castro granted her political asylum. It is in Cuba that she wrote her first book, *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987), in which she combines prose and poetry to detail the development of her political ideas, the conditions of her incarceration, and her experiences of finally living in “real socialism.”

Even though Shakur never received a death sentence, she writes from the perspective that such an outcome was guaranteed. She bases her claim not merely on the illegitimate nature of her legal battle, but also on the fact that she was born into a violent and racist capitalist system—a system, which, she believes, seeks to foreclose the possibility of living from the very moment one is born. Despite her seemingly pessimistic worldview, however, she locates, in her captivity, forms of resistance that can be neither

completely eradicated nor captured by the prison industrial complex.<sup>54</sup> This resistance is located on a moving horizon she calls communism—a horizon that is simultaneously material and virtual, temporal and spatial, inappropriable and in plain sight.

In *Assata*, Shakur’s understanding of this horizon becomes more nuanced as a result of her visceral experience of spatio-temporal confinement. That is, she presents her time in prison not as an aberration from her life on the outside of the prison walls, but as an extreme instance of the totalizing effect that capitalism has on life in general. Because Shakur believes that contemporary society is structured around what Michel Foucault calls a “carceral continuum,” she suggests that freedom cannot be achieved simply by breaking down the prison walls; capitalism itself, which lays claim to both space and time, must be destroyed.<sup>55</sup> But while she desperately seeks (and succeeds in finding) an escape from prison, Shakur reveals that even at the most extreme site of capitalist captivity—the prison—there is resistance in captivity that cannot be denigrated as

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<sup>54</sup> For a more thorough understanding of the concept of the prison industrial complex and the movements that seek to abolish it, see the following texts: Critical Resistance: A National Grassroots Organization Committed to Ending Society’s Use of Prisons and Policing as an Answer to Social Problems, *Critical Resistance Homepage*, 10 February 2010 <http://www.criticalresistance.org/>; Davis, Angela. “Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex,” *Color Lines: The National Newspaper on Race and Politics* Fall 1998; and Schlosser, Eric. “The Prison-Industrial Complex,” *Atlantic Monthly* December 1998: 51-77.

<sup>55</sup> As is well known, according to Foucault, a dramatic shift in practices of punishment took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At this time, “disciplinary” forms of punishment superseded the “monarchical” form, which had involved public displays of torture and execution. Foucault argues that under “disciplinary” regimes, subjects move through a “carceral continuum,” a series of closed spaces—schools, hospitals, barracks—that are managed by “disciplinary” professionals (doctors, psychologists, teachers, etc.) whose function is to “normalize” subjects. Additionally, whereas punishment was previously administered externally, Foucault claims that under “disciplinary” regimes, subjects now police themselves. See: Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995). See also Gilles Deleuze’s argument that in the post-war period, disciplinary society has transformed to control society: Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59. Winter (1992): 3-7.

metaphysical escapism. “Love is [her] sword, truth is [her] compass,” and intuition is her method of escape (Shakur 147).

Even though her text serves as a testimony to the potential of literature to resist repressive capitalist state power, *Assata* also documents the semiotic limitations of language itself. In particular, it illustrates the ways in which dominant power colonizes the words with which we speak. In another idiom, one could argue that Shakur’s text simultaneously seeks refuge within and fights against what Fredric Jameson calls the “prison-house of language.”<sup>56</sup> The complexity of Shakur’s autobiography—including its theoretical insights, experimental combinations of narrative and poetry, and linguistic intricacies—demands an equally multifaceted interpretive framework. The theories I bring together to examine *Assata*—those of Jameson, Hardt, Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Deleuze—are each historically situated within the Cold War, speak to the discursive and ontological conditions of late capitalism, and correspond to the concepts Shakur herself elaborates.

There is a long tradition of prisoners taking up the pen while incarcerated or after their release. In fact, it is possible to trace a genealogy of writing by currently incarcerated or former prisoners as far back as Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (524), which was written in prison, or Miguel de Cervantes *Don Quixote* (1605), a novel based on the author’s experiences as a galley slave.<sup>57</sup> In the American context, one might

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<sup>56</sup> See: Jameson, Fredric. *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

<sup>57</sup> See: Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Victor Watts (New York: Penguin Classics, 2000); and de Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).

look to African American slave narratives as the foundation for American literature of imprisonment. It was not until the 1960s-1980s, however, that the U.S. saw an explosion of writing by prisoners and the popularization of these texts. What is now commonly understood to be the genre of prison literature is comprised primarily of works by political prisoners such as Malcolm X, Leonard Peltier, Angela Davis, and Mumia Abu Jamal.<sup>58</sup> While all of the aforementioned insurrectionist writers wrestle with language in their own right, *Assata* interests me particularly because it connects the process of overcoming semiotic limitations with communist liberation itself. By understanding that her struggle to escape prison had to be figured in temporal rather than spatial terms as well as by refusing to narrate her flight from prison, I argue that Shakur's text constitutes an example of what Deleuze calls a Bergsonian methodology of intuition. As I will detail later in the chapter, for Deleuze, intuition is a trans-subjective methodology of synchronic temporal analysis which distinguishes between differences in degree and differences in kind to enable a reframing of poorly posited questions, and by extension, a transformation of lived realities.

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<sup>58</sup> Some of the more popular American texts written by prisoners include: Abbott, Jack. *In the Belly of the Beast* (New York: Vintage, 1991); Abu-Jamal, Mumia. *All Things Censored* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); ---. *Death Blossoms: Reflections From a Prisoner of Conscience* (New York: South End Press, 2003); ---. *Live From Death Row* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996); Davis, Angela, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988); Jackson, George. *Blood In My Eye* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990). George Jackson, *Soledad Brother* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994). Peltier, Leonard. *Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000); X, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001). Jack Abbott's text is an especially interesting compilation of letters he exchanged with Norman Mailer during his incarceration. See also Bell Gale Chevigny's compilation of prison writings that have won awards from the prestigious PEN Prison Writing Program: Chevigny, Bell Gale ed., *Doing Time: 25 Years of Prison Writing* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999). More information on PEN can be found at: PEN American Center, *Pen American Center: A Global Literary Community Protecting Free Expression and Celebrating Literature*, 2004-2010, 12 February 2010 <[www.pen.org](http://www.pen.org)>.

During the Cold War period, other Marxist thinkers considered the political nature of the structure of language and its relationship to truth, history, and social change. Most notably, Fredric Jameson, in his *The Prison-House of Language*, attempts to critically analyze Russian formalism and structuralism in order to “clarify the relationships possible between the synchronic methods of Saussurean linguistics and the realities of time and history itself” (Jameson x). An analysis of synchronic structures became especially important during this period as capitalism was rapidly transforming from a system of formal subsumption to a system of real subsumption.

Marx describes formal subsumption as the point at which “the labour process becomes the instrument of the valorization process, the process of the self-valorization of capital—the manufacture of surplus-value” (Marx, *Capital* 1019). In this early form of capitalism, production processes developed outside of or prior to capitalism are incorporated into it. Examples of the process of formal subsumption include the transition from slave labor and peasant-labor to labor that is itself bought and sold. In this manner, “a mystification inherent in the *capital-relation*” emerges whereby labor is objectified and capital seizes the power of labor by calling that power its own (Marx, *Capital* 1020). Conversely, Marx predicted that under real subsumption, laboring processes would not be incorporated into capitalism by imperialist measures and therefore made “proper.” Rather, new forms of labor would themselves be *created* by capital. In other words, real subsumption would be a further intensification and constitution of labor within capital as opposed to an integration of pre-capitalist labor forms.

With the economic shift to real subsumption, which contemporary thinkers such as Antonio Negri have claimed occurred at precisely the same time as the emergence of postmodernity, came a concomitant reorganization of spatio-temporal relationships. As Jameson states, “We have often been told...that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time” (Postmodernism 16). If, indeed, the spatio-temporal structure of late capitalism is supposedly synchronic, then the postmodern relationship between time and space is especially suited to the synchronic analyses enabled by structuralism and Russian formalism.<sup>59</sup>

To be clear, I do not wish to imply that late capitalist temporality is itself synchronic. Rather, by seeking to erase history and portray itself as a perpetual present, late capitalism merely illuminates the condition of infinite duration. According to Spinoza, infinite duration and eternity (which pertains to synchronic time) can be defined in the following manner: “*Duration* is only applicable to the existence of modes; *eternity* is applicable to the existence of substance, that is, the infinite faculty of existence or being” (Correspondence 319). Synchronic time is experienced, diachronically, as a cut or fold into eternity. On the one hand, with its erasure of the distinction between the time of work and the time of life, postmodernity presents itself as a perpetual present, pretending to represent eternity rather than a deadening duration that is historically contingent. On the other hand, by positing itself as synchronic, postmodernity *exposes* the ontological

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<sup>59</sup> See: Negri, Antonio. *Time for Revolution*. Continuum, 2005. Print.

condition of synchronic eternity that long preceded the historical emergence of postmodernity. In effect, postmodernity accidentally foregrounds the ontological condition of eternity and its political possibilities without being able to fully capture them.

Later, Michael Hardt would reframe Jameson's reading of late capitalism to argue that the seemingly synchronic nature of late capitalism has rendered the time of life in general qualitatively identical to prison time. In that sense, Hardt agrees with Jameson that postmodernity exposes a synchronic spatio-temporal relationship; where he differs from Jameson is in his insistence that we examine the phenomenon of the synchronic from the standpoint of temporality. In a similar manner to Shakur, Hardt claims that the prison is "not really a site of exclusion, separate from society, but rather a focal point, the site of the highest concentration of a logic of power that is generally diffused throughout the world" (66).<sup>60</sup> Hardt writes, "power in our society is above all power over our time" (65). In this respect, he draws a connection between the banality and fluidity of the contemporary workday and the repetitious temporal sequences of life behind bars. Ultimately, he argues that both the ontological voids produced by late capitalist temporal organization and prison sentences are qualitatively identical and intended to exile the subject from the time of life. He looks to the prison writings of Jean Genet to ascertain the revolutionary potentialities of synchronic temporality in general.

Like Hardt's analysis of Genet, my examination of Shakur's text will focus on the relationship of prison literature to revolutionary experiences of imprisoned time.

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<sup>60</sup> See: Hardt, Michael. "Prison Time," *Yale French Studies* 91 (1997): 64-79.

However, my examination will center more exactly on the concept of liberation in captivity as it relates to language in the context of the Cold War—a war of words whose battlefield, it could be argued, was language itself. Following Jameson and Hardt’s respective claims that language and late capitalist temporality are structured like a prison, the purpose of this chapter will be to show how *Assata*—a Marxian work of prison literature—is privileged site from which to understand the connections between language and spatio-temporal relations in late capitalism. Furthermore, as Shakur’s text produces communist horizons within the imprisoning structures of language and incarceration, I will also argue that it refigures the dominant discursive parameters of the Cold War by concluding that freedom and truth can be found within intuition, not representation (political or literary).

### **I. Imprisoned Language and Convicted Literature**

Before proceeding with my examination of Shakur’s text, it is first necessary to address the issue of terminology with regard to both the concept of the political prisoner and the generic category of prison writing. While it is indisputable that Shakur was railroaded and incarcerated for her communist political activities during the Cold War, I believe that the term “political prisoner” is both problematic and necessary to use regarding her confinement. On the one hand, the term underestimates the political, repressive nature of imprisonment. As Dylan Rodríguez states in his *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime*, the term “political prisoner” tends to “address a specific telos of incarceration that privileges the existence of the liberationist/radical insurrectionist/revolutionary political subject *prior to* her or his

encounter with formal juridical criminalization, police bodily apprehension, and state captivity” (4). When one defines political prisoner according to the logic Rodríguez critiques, the revolutionary potential of “common” prisoners who become “politicized” behind bars, as well as inmates whose politics are “unprogrammatic,” tends to be overlooked or disregarded (Rodríguez 5). In addition, the term generally does not include prisoners of war—prisoners who are clearly incarcerated for political purposes, albeit not always the politics the particular prisoner espouses. Furthermore, it obscures the racist, classist, patriarchal, and hence political nature of the prison industrial complex’s dependency on laws that criminalize non-violent “crimes” of poverty such as petty theft, drug use, and prostitution.

On the other hand, if it is true that there is nothing that stands outside the realm of the political, it could also be argued that the term “political prisoner” should be abandoned because it is redundant. While I partially agree with this sentiment, I would also add that when such an inclusive conception of “the political” is extended to life as such, we run the risk of relativizing the repressive conditions of life behind bars with those of “the free world.” Moreover, if one forsakes the qualifier “political” when referring to inmates who are confined by the state as a consequence of their political activities, the intrepid nature and transformative potential of the prisoner’s political praxis becomes obscured. Accordingly, I do believe that the term “political prisoner” is useful insofar as it indexes the degree of both state violence and political dissent. However, I also think it is necessary to qualify the nature of (political) imprisonment so as to identify the range of resistant possibilities and political effects of state captivity.

A similar issue of terminology arises when one attempts to determine what constitutes prison literature and who qualifies as a prison writer. In connection with the specific role of revolutionary writers within prisons, Rodríguez rejects the terms “prison intellectual,” “prison writer,” and “radical prisoner” in favor of “imprisoned radical intellectual.” He argues that his designation “foregrounds the term ‘imprisoned’ in order to bring attention to the conditions of possibility, that is, the changing regime of rituals, practices, and juridical procedures, that structure this category of intellectual and cultural production” (3). What is more, he does not delimit his discussion of the cultural production of imprisoned radical intellectuals to literature itself. Instead, he reads specific works of “prison literature” (a term he repudiates) as “(radical) prison praxis,” which he defines as:

...fundamentally an institutional and discursive antagonism, that is, an insurgent or insurrectionist formation of critique, dissent, and rebellion that (1) elaborates a conception of political subjectivity—its context, possibilities, and historicity—specific to the formation of the prison as a particular regime of power; (2) conceptualizes praxis through the terms with which it is organically linked and historically “belongs” to, a lineage of imprisoned radical intellectuals; and (3) shifts the presumptive political geography of praxis by examining its formation at the site of imprisonment, a disjuncture from the juridical cultural domains of civil society. (76)

While I wish neither to deny the existence of a genealogy of texts that falls under Rodríguez's rubric of "radical prison praxis" nor to rebuff the composite antagonistic force that these texts present, I find his definition prohibitively limiting for understanding the structural limitations of language in prisons, in politics, and in the constitution of the subject. By restricting his conception of "radical prison praxis" to a content that explicitly fits within the model he elaborates, Rodríguez excludes from his definition the specific kind of "unprogrammable" and non-representational politics and that are at the core of some of the most imaginative and revolutionary literary works. In addition, by merging radical prison writing (as an act and as a product) into a general concept of "radical prison praxis" as an intellectual pursuit, the particular possibilities specific to extra-linguistic forms of knowledge—such as intuition—lose their significance.

In large part, the same critiques I have raised with Rodríguez's insistence on radical content could also be levied against Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of "committed literature" and his preference for prose over poetry. In a 1947 series of essays entitled "What is Literature?," Sartre argues that, unlike poetry, which uses objects of language as images, prose communicates through the signification of words. Because poetry cannot signify, Sartre makes the highly dubious assertion that it cannot be committed.<sup>61</sup> He also claims that due to prose's singular ability to communicate ideas and concepts, prose writers have an ethical imperative to impart political commitments in their texts. Christina M. Howells is quick to note that in "What is Literature?" Sartre provides "two

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<sup>61</sup> Here, it should be noted that Sartre's concept of "poetry" pertains not only to poetry in its written or oral forms, but also to non-linguistic arts such as painting and music. See: Sartre, Jean-Paul. *What Is Literature? and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 1988. Print.

crucial footnotes indi[cating] that it is possible to see the poet as committed in a different way; precisely because of his failure to communicate conceptually, he stands outside the language, and therefore the ideology of bourgeois society” (Howells 572). While these footnotes do provide a more nuanced view of language and of writing, however, nowhere else in these essays does Sartre expand upon the political possibilities of figurative language.

It could also be argued that, like Rodríguez’s notion of “radical prison praxis,” Sartre’s concept of “committed literature” minimizes the reader’s political responsibility. As such, if the goal of both “radical prison praxis” and “committed literature” is to make transparent the oppressive conditions of social relations, then the transparency demanded by each of these writing practices eliminates the need for interpretation. While Jameson argues that in Sartre’s formulation of committed writing, the reader, or as he calls it, “the public,” is “implicit in the writer himself, and follows logically from the choices of material and the stylistic formulations which are the acts of his own solitude,” I maintain that even if the (imagined) reader inheres in Sartre’s committed writer, it still stands that Sartre’s early formulation of committed literature negates the necessity of interpretation (Jameson, *Prison-House* 28). Here, critical engagement, the very purpose of committed literature, becomes an individual pursuit of writers alone; in other words, the writer remains imprisoned, cordoned off from the reader.

Later in his career—especially in *Black Orpheus* (1948) and *Saint Genet* (1952)—Sartre would rethink his earlier notion of transparent communication and his distinction

between committed prose and non-politically efficacious poetry.<sup>62</sup> In the former text, he examines the alienating effect that white bourgeois language has on the black listener. In the latter text, he considers how Jean Genet, himself a prison writer, transformed prose into a “*false* prose, based on a poetic attitude towards language, a concentration on the word itself at the expense of the objects signified...[which] erect[s] a barrier of images to shield [Genet’s] own inwardness from the bourgeois reader” (Howells 573). It is in Genet’s literary works, then, that Sartre begins to recognize that, like poetry, prose is oblique. The conclusion he draws from this discovery is dialectical: content is less capable of communicating commitment than he had previously thought; literary style, and not merely content alone, communicates commitment in texts.

I find it telling that it is with an imprisoned writer that Sartre began to seriously rethink the possibility of transparent communication, freedom of expression, and unfettered reception. My purpose, however, is not merely to critique his concept of committed literature, but instead to point out that it is within the confines of prison literature that the imprisoning nature of language and communication became most clear to him. The fact that his engagement with prison literature enabled Sartre to revise his earlier concept of committed literature is due not only to the fact that the prison materially delimits what one can say, how they can say it, and to whom it can be said. Instead, it was also with Genet’s experience of extreme social alienation in prison that Sartre recognized how the structure of language renders it impossible for the subject to adequately express what she wishes to say. Far from rejecting the concept of committed

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<sup>62</sup> See: Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Black Orpheus* (New York: French & European Publications Inc.; 1972); and ---. *Saint Genet* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

literature, then, I would argue that in its most mature conception, Sartre's revised concept of committed literature is useful for our purposes insofar as it complicates the fetishization of content with which I take issue in Rodríguez's work. At the same time, though, I believe that Rodríguez's taxonomy is constructive in that it highlights the material conditions of the prison that enable and inhibit writers' resistance.

What interests me in particular about *Assata* as both an autobiography and a theoretical text, however, is that it complicates Rodríguez and Sartre's concepts by calling attention to the material conditions within which it was written and by foregrounding the captive nature of language without producing a false binary between prose and poetry. Furthermore, Shakur's text simultaneously positions the concept of conviction—with its dual significations of criminality and principle—within the imprisoning nature of language, but does not disavow the category of conviction altogether. Instead, Shakur's autobiography weaves together discourse analysis and poetic ruptures to reveal, ultimately, that even though neither of these writing strategies is able to break free from repressive structural and subjective constraints completely, another methodology of conviction is possible, one that utilizes, but does not stop at, language to arrive at its beliefs. This methodology is intuition—a methodology that moves past the constraints of language by engaging memory and synchronic time to actualize the virtual point “where the *élan vital* [vital impetus] gains self-consciousness” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 113). As I will elaborate in the final section of this chapter, the form of self-consciousness achieved by intuition does not belong to the individual

subject; instead, it corresponds to the actualization of “the coexistence of all the *degrees of difference*” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 113, italics original).

## **II. Temporal Cartographies of Imprisoned Life: Shakur’s Chronotopic Strategies**

Shakur’s autobiography functions simultaneously as a map and a timeline of her personal quest to find the virtual point where she will eventually employ her knowledge of self-consciousness as a pursuit of communism. On the one hand, her text maps the various places at which Shakur begins to locate self-consciousness as well as the points at which she loses her way. However, these points are not merely geographic (the home, the school, the underground, the prison, socialist Cuba); they are also semiotic and methodological. The intersections of prose, poetry, and silence in her autobiography chart the strategic turns she is both forced to make and chooses to take in her writing when language fails to serve as an unimpeded terrain open to all possible routes of expression.

On the other hand, her text serves as a timeline illustrating her search for freedom and truth in so far as it opens with a preface detailing the chronology of her eight trials; the text concludes with a postscript beginning with a single-word, “freedom,” and ending with a description of her life in socialist Cuba five years after her escape from prison. Between the preface and the postscript, however, Shakur’s timeline neither follows a linear trajectory nor explicitly narrates how she understands the concepts of freedom and truth in relation to temporality. Her text is, instead, marked by a series of discursive analyses of her life circumstances and criminal trials leading up to and

including her imprisonment. It also includes poetic interludes—sometimes within chapters, sometimes between chapters—in which she disavows the very logic she herself uses to elucidate the structural conditions of her experiences of incarceration, gender discrimination, and racial prejudice.

While there is no clear formal continuity as to where the poems are placed within the chapters, there is commonality present in each of the poems. The poems scattered throughout her text signal a different temporality, one that is not restricted to her own subjectivity. This temporality is, instead, located in a common struggle to affirm life in spite of the trans-historical tensions between love and hatred, freedom and slavery. In these poems, freedom is expressed in a variety of ways: freedom from dominant structures of knowledge, freedom *from* history, and freedom *in* history.

For example, Shakur ends her prose narrative with the following words: “...to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave” (Shakur 262). She becomes “acutely aware” of this conviction, however, not merely through her critiques of the late capitalist world or the prison (Shakur 262). Instead, it is through the poetic ruptures in her text that she is able to narrate her awareness of this freedom, even if that is not the method by which she discovers her freedom. That is to say, even though the final words of her prose narrative are “to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave,” she explains in the beginning paragraph of her first chapter that there is a difference between intellectually knowing and affectively knowing.

In the opening of her first chapter, Shakur writes, “There were lights and sirens. Zayd was dead. My mind knew that Zayd was dead. The air was like cold glass. Huge

bubbles rose and burst. Each one felt like an explosion in my chest. My mouth tasted like blood and dirt. The car spun around me and then something like sleep overtook me...But I was fading and dreaming” (Shakur 3). Here, she is describing the scene of the Turnpike shootout and her subsequent arrest and hospitalization. At this point, she understands intellectually that her comrade, Zayd, is dead. As far as her affective and corporeal knowledge are concerned, however, she has entered a dreamlike state wherein her primary knowledge is of herself in relation to her own physical pain; she knows that Zayd is dead, but she does not feel his death nor can she represent it in prose. She writes of, instead, nothing but the world around her acting upon her own body: blood and dirt in her mouth, air as cold as glass, etc.

Even though one could easily attribute the confusion Shakur describes to the fact that she had just been shot, I argue that the poem preceding the first chapter reveals, instead, that her affective-political communist convictions do not necessarily align with a prosaic diachronic temporality precisely because diachrony is incapable of representing the absolute, or that which is impossible to understand through the intellect—death, freedom, etc. Here, I quote the first, second and final stanza’s of her poem, “Affirmation,” to show how Shakur weaves together her historical experiences of oppression with her seemingly incongruous belief in a world of infinite possibility:

I believe in the spectrum  
of Beta days and Gamma people.  
I believe in sunshine.  
In windmills and waterfalls,  
Tricycles and rocking chairs.  
And I believe that seeds grow into sprouts.

And sprouts grow into trees.  
I believe in the magic of the hands.  
And in the wisdom of the eyes.  
I believe in rain and tears.  
And in the blood of infinity.  
...  
I believe in living.  
I believe in birth.  
I believe in the sweat of love  
And in the fire of truth.  
And I believe that a lost ship,  
Steered by tired, seasick sailors,  
Can still be guided home  
To port. (Shakur 1)

In the final stanza of “Affirmation,” Shakur states that she “believe[s] in living;” in the first stanza she writes of the “spectrum” of forms of life that she accepts as true. The first of her examples, “Beta days and Gamma people,” refers to the fictional world of John Gilling’s 1956 science-fiction horror film, *The Gamma People*. This film takes place in a nameless totalitarian country located behind the Iron Curtain. In the film, the government uses “gamma rays” to control the minds of its citizens and manipulate their thoughts. By beginning her poem with a reference to *The Gamma People*, Shakur at once acknowledges that state repression is not confined to the Western capitalist world alone and recognizes the historical consciousness of hyperbolized, fictional discourses surrounding communism as a reality. The first stanza ends with a description of the objects of movement from different stages of human life (tricycles and rocking chairs) as well as forms of non-human growth (seeds that grow into sprouts). In sum, this stanza

links together a variety of modal existences (fictional, human, non-human) as true, which constitute the world she affirms through her declarations of belief.

Rather than only pointing to the verity of this lived historical time, however, Shakur also states later in the poem that she “believes in the blood of infinity” (1). The “blood of infinity” to which she refers is located within a synchronic temporality, a feeling of all-at-onceness, not infinite duration in the Spinozian sense. It represents the vital substance that pulses through a lineage of freedom fighters, dead and alive, who occupy a common social body of resistance throughout her text. Figures of this synchronic temporality and common body will re-emerge in her other poems repeatedly as she cites the ongoing struggle for human freedom through the “sweat[y]” “love” of production and the “fire of truth” (Shakur 1).

For example, in a poem dedicated to her comrade, Rema Olugbala, who had died the previous day trying to escape from the Brooklyn House of Detention, Shakur writes again of the blood of infinity and a common social body:

For Rema Olugbala—Youngblood  
They think they killed you.  
But i saw you yesterday,  
standing with your hands in your pockets  
waiting for the real deal to go down.  
I saw you smiling your “fuck it” smile, blood in your eyes,  
your heart pumping freedom  
Youngblood!

They think they killed you.  
But i saw you yesterday  
with your back against the wall,  
muscles bulging against the chains,  
eyes absorbing truth.  
Lips speaking it.

Heart learning how to love.  
Head learning who to hate.  
Blood ready to flow  
towards freedom.  
Youngblood!

Youngbloods ain't got no blood to waste  
In no syringes, on no barroom floors,  
in no strange lands  
delaying other youngblood's freedom.  
We don't need no tired blood.  
No anemic blood. No blood clots  
in our new body. (Shakur 164)

In this poem, the figure of blood re-emerges as that which circulates through a common substance recomposed by each and every birth, death, and memory of revolutionary force. When Shakur describes seeing Olugbala on the previous day, she is not referring to an actual sighting (as they were incarcerated in different facilities). Instead, she beckons his memory to describe “youngblood” as the blood that is always already young, never old, because the social body is transformed into “our new body” with every metamorphosis of radical potentiality (Shakur 164). That is to say, for Shakur, death constitutes but a diachronic punctuation within a synchronic temporality that affirms the infinite possibilities of living. For that reason, she precedes her first chapter (wherein she speaks of only intellectually understanding Zayd's death) with a poem called “Affirmation” in which she refuses a concept of life as individual duration and transforms it into a common struggle between “seasick sailors” to find a port within a groundless world at sea (Shakur 1).

To understand the relationship between the diachronic and synchronic temporalities Shakur's text moves between, an examination of Fredric Jameson's *The Prison-House of*

*Language* is in order. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, Fredric Jameson and Michael Hardt claim respectively that linguistics and late capitalism are structured like a prison. In particular, Jameson argues, “There is therefore a profound consonance between linguistics as a method and that systematized and disembodied nightmare which is our culture today” (Prison-House ix). Shakur demonstrates these sentiments not only in the formal structure of her autobiography, but also in her eventual refusal to narrate her escape from the prison.

In *The Prison-House of Language*, Jameson brings together the work of structuralist thinkers and Russian formalists in order to “clarify the relationships possible between the synchronic methods of Saussurean linguistics and the realities of time and history itself” (x). To make this point, he begins with an examination of Ferdinand de Saussure’s differentiation between diachrony and synchrony in the *Course in General Linguistics* (1916).<sup>63</sup> For Saussure, language is both trans-historical (synchronic) and historical (diachronic). On the one hand, it is synchronic or rather, structural, in the sense that it is “...complete at every moment, no matter what happens to have been altered in it a moment before. This is to say that the [synchronic] temporal model proposed by Saussure is that of a series of complete systems succeeding each other in time; that language is for him a perpetual present with all the possibilities of meaning implicit in its every moment” (Jameson, Prison-House 6). On the other hand, language is diachronic, or historical, in that words mean certain things at certain times; words and discourses have

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<sup>63</sup> See, de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. Perry Meisel & Haun Saussy. Trans. Wade Baskin. Columbia University Press, 2011. Print.

histories. Jameson also argues that we can understand the differences between the ontological foundations of the synchronic and the diachronic in the following way:

The former lies in the immediate lived experience of the native speaker; the latter rests on a kind of intellectual construction, the result of comparisons between one moment of lived time and another by someone who stands outside, who has thus substituted a purely intellectual continuity for a lived one. (6)

Here, what interests Jameson most is identifying a way to capture the synchronic experience of lived time. He argues: “Nowhere has such a relationship proved more paradoxical than in that realm of literary analysis in which the most tangible and lasting achievements of Formalism and Structuralism have been made...The paradox is, of course, that a synchronic method should yield so rich and suggestive a view of the very forms through which the mind sees change and events in time” (Jameson, *Prison-House* x-xi). Even though Jameson turns to Saussure’s linguistic model to study literature because, unlike other analytic methods, it accounts for both ontological and historical realities, he also claims that once we have separated the diachronic from the synchronic “you can never really put them back together again. If the opposition in the long run proves to be a false or misleading one, then the only way to suppress it is by throwing the entire discussion onto a higher dialectical plane, choosing a new starting point, utterly recasting the problems involved in new terms” (Jameson, *Prison-House* 16).

Recasting problems in new terms is but one of the methods Shakur employs. However, in the final instance, it is not through discourse analysis or poetic language that

she transforms problems to escape either the prison or the prison-house of language. Instead, it is by employing a methodology of intuition, which both differentiates true problems from false problems and refuses “solutions” to poorly stated previously posited problems, that she finds freedom. Nevertheless, her autobiography, like all forms of writing, remains trapped—inevitably—within the prison-house of language.

In his examination of literary forms, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that “[t]he process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature has a complicated and erratic history, as does the articulation of actual historical persons in such a time and space” (Bakhtin 84). While the focus of his “Notes toward a Historical Poetics” is on the novelistic form, he claims that all literature connects time and space into a “chronotope [literally, ‘time space’]” (Bakhtin 84). The literary artistic chronotope, he claims, tends to privilege time over space. Bakhtin writes,

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic *generic* significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man

in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.

(Bakhtin 84-85)

While I agree with Bakhtin that “the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic,” what I believe sets Shakur’s autobiography apart from other works of prison and postmodern literature is precisely the fact that it locates resistance in time rather than space. That is to say, even though Bakhtin’s insistence that “time takes on flesh” in Hellenistic and nineteenth century Russian novels is surely not incorrect, I would argue that postmodern chronotopes have tended to use spatial constructs to describe the temporality of late capitalism as trapped within a seeming perpetual present. As Jameson states, “I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience...are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time” (Postmodernism 16). Shakur’s autobiography is unique insofar as it moves between three modes of writing—discourse analysis, poetry, and silence—to reveal that in order to break through postmodern structures of confinement (the prison, the structure of language), one must implement resistance within a synchronic temporality—a temporality that is ontologically identical to the temporality of the fully subsumed capitalism that Marx predicted.

In his essay, “Prison Time,” Michael Hardt examines real subsumption in relation to the abstract nature of prison sentences to argue that “power in our [postmodern] society is above all power over our time” (65). Not unlike many other examinations of the prison-time economy, Hardt describes the repetitious temporal sequences of life behind bars as an ontological void intended to exile the prisoner from the time of life. He

writes, “Time spent seems to have no duration, no substance because of the precise repetition of its component parts, its homogeneity, the lack of novelty” (Hardt 65). In order to escape this monstrous void, he claims that inmates frequently search for their “essential” subjectivities either by reaching out for extra-corporeal religious conversions, or by turning inward so as to find solace in that most private possession—one’s soul, one’s essence—the imaginary space that even the most repressive state machinery can never wrest away. While Hardt does not purport to have experienced and hence understand the intensity of life behind bars, he is highly critical of prisoners’ metaphysical attempts to find freedom.

Hardt’s unique contribution to elaborations on the “empty time” of incarceration and real subsumption is his characterization of the logic that prisoners are “forced to grapple with” in their existential quests to escape their spatio-temporal confinement (66). That is to say, he critiques prisoners who seek knowledge and relief for “a properly ontological malady” through purely metaphysical principles (i.e., freedom, the self, essence) (Hardt 68). What is most interesting about Hardt’s delineation of this form of logic, though, is that he extends its relevance beyond the walls of prison to argue that the prison is “not really a site of exclusion, separate from society, but rather a focal point, the site of the highest concentration of a logic of power that is generally diffused throughout the world” (66). In fact, because the prison serves as a crystallized site of the same power relations that constitute the world at large, Hardt argues that by meditating upon the questions that prisoners face, those of us on the ‘outside’ “cannot but doubt the quality of [our] own existence[s]” (66).

While explicit in his rejection of fetishizing life behind bars, Hardt likens the process of onto-existential self-examination to a materialist exploration of temporality itself. In other words, he argues that the question of the postmodern subject corresponds directly to how she utilizes her time. Metaphysical concepts such as freedom and essence are, for Hardt, simply a waste of time. In the prison writings of Jean Genet, however, Hardt finds an anti-metaphysical vocabulary and resolutely anti-teleological configuration of time that enables Genet to produce an unprecedented critique of the prison and late capitalism. For our purposes, it is no coincidence that Hardt locates in Genet this anti-metaphysical vocabulary and concept of time. As Michelle Koerner demonstrates in her essay, “Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze’s Encounter with George Jackson,” the work of both Genet and Deleuze and Guattari was strongly influenced by their encounter with Black Panther writing of the 1970s, particularly the prison letters of George Jackson.<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, I agree with Hardt’s claim that the prisoners of postmodernity (both incarcerated and “free”) tend to resort to metaphysical solutions for “a properly ontological malady” (Hardt 68). Yet, in Shakur’s text, I argue that the concepts of self, freedom, truth, and intuition are divested from the metaphysical realm and reconstructed within a synchronic temporality that is both “properly ontological” and well-suited to the material conditions of late capitalism. Even though Shakur utilizes a variety of writing strategies—some more successful than others—to position her own historical search for

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<sup>64</sup> See: Koerner, Michelle. “Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze’s Encounter with George Jackson.” *Genre* 44.2 (2011): 157–180. Web. 12 Apr. 2012; and Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994.

self, freedom and truth in a trans-historical common struggle to produce a world “transformed by the powers of love and desire,” it is the combination and juxtaposition of these writing strategies that enables the reader to identify the imprisoning structures of language and late capitalism (Hardt 64).

### **III. Structures of Confinement: Discourse Analysis in *Assata***

Shakur’s autobiography neither begins nor ends in the prison, but in many ways it can be read as an exploration of Shakur’s life-long struggle with the imprisoning nature of discursive and extra-discursive structures. Her examination of these structures is what ultimately shapes her communist, juridical, and literary convictions even though it does not provide adequate solutions to her questions. As we will later see in my discussion of intuition, she cannot find an escape from the prison or the prison-house of language precisely because she poses questions in terms of solutions; she does not question her questions. As far as her prose narrative is concerned, Shakur discusses her personal struggles with racial identity and language, her growing contempt for the ways in which knowledge is compartmentalized, and her insistence that one must focus on both the content of discourse and the manner in which it is relayed. Rather than simply detailing her observations as they unfolded chronologically, however, her text switches between prose and poetry to reveal not only the discursive limitations of narrative and of diachronic temporality, but also the specific ways that poetic language allows one to express the force of her affective and political convictions. What ultimately becomes clear in *Assata* is that the only escape from repressive structures—an escape that is only

ever partial—is communism itself; in order to make this escape, one must produce a communist poetics through a methodology of intuition. I will discuss Shakur’s communist poetics after first examining how she illustrates this necessity in the prose portions of her text.

Throughout her prose narrative, Shakur shows how her experience of racial oppression informed her eventual conversion to communism. In particular, she discusses the racial prejudice she experienced through language, but she analyzes this semiotic violence from the perspective of class relations. For example, she explains that, as a child growing up in the segregated South, her grandmother claimed that “[w]hite people don’t want to see us with nothing” (Shakur 20). Implicit in her grandmother’s suggestion was the idea that Black people were largely to blame for their own economic plight because they chose to speak “[dis]respectfully,” like “alley rat” children who said “ain’t” (Shakur 21). Shakur writes:

Although my grandmother taught me more about being proud and strong than anyone i know, she had a lot of Booker T. Washington, pull yourself up by the bootstraps, “talented tenth” ideas. She had worked hard and had made a decent living as a pieceworker in a factory, but she had other ideas for me. She was determined that i would become part of Wilmington’s talented tenth—the privileged class—part of the so-called Black bourgeoisie. (21)

Instead of simply mocking her grandmother for internalizing these racist sentiments, however, Shakur uses a Black vernacular to show how, even when espousing bourgeois

ideology, her grandmother continued to maintain a Black voice: “Decent children, to my grandmother, were a whole ‘notha story” (Shakur 21). Here, Shakur’s use of free indirect discourse renders the boundary between her own discourse and her grandmother’s speech indistinct; as such, their subjectivities become united.<sup>65</sup> At the end of her text, she will praise her grandmother’s tenacity to hold on to that voice. For it is in conversation with her grandmother that Shakur comes to believe she will one day be free.

In addition to her critiques of the Black bourgeoisie, Shakur also describes her own alienation from Black revolutionary groups and their manner of speech. Soon after becoming a student and politicized at Manhattan Community College, she began volunteering for the Black Panther Party’s free breakfast program in New York City. She states that part of what drew her to the Panthers in the first place was that they “didn’t try to sound all intellectual, talking about the national bourgeoisie, the military-industrial complex, the reactionary ruling class. They simply called a pig a pig. They didn’t refer to the repressive domestic army or the state repressive apparatus” (Shakur 203). Yet, while Shakur was enamored with the scope of the Panther’s outreach and the directness with which they spoke, she was also turned off by their hierarchical tone. As a result, she never actually joined the Panthers until moving to Oakland.

In Oakland, she told the Panthers about her experience with the New York branch:

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<sup>65</sup> For an excellent discussion of various forms of free indirect discourse, see: Banfield, Ann. “Narrative Style and the Grammar of Direct and Indirect Speech.” *Foundations of Language* 10.1 (1973): 1–39. Print.

i had been turned off by the way spokesmen for the Party talked to people, that their attitude had often been arrogant, flippant, and disrespectful. I told them i preferred the polite and respectful manner in which civil rights workers and Black Muslims talked to the people rather than the arrogant, fuck-you style that used to be popular in New York. (Shakur 204)

Even though she was drawn to the communicational style of Black Muslims and civil rights organizations, she perceived their beliefs to be reactionary in nature. Of religion, she asks, “[H]ow could i be expected to love and worship a god whose ‘master plan’ included the enslavement, torture, and murder of Black people?” (Shakur 92). Her attraction to the Black Panther Party in particular was thus three-fold: their speech was direct, their platform was explicitly materialist, and they conceived of the enemy “not [as] the white people, but [as] the capitalistic, imperialistic oppressors. They took the Black liberation struggle out of a national context and put it in an international context” (Shakur 203). For Shakur, in order to have a revolution, one must communicate in a way that is simultaneously direct and not overly-threatening, global and engaged with the particular struggles of specific identity groups.

Although Shakur does not at all separate the question of race from that of communism, she also illustrates the complexity of racial identity and racial interpellation. As her prose narrative begins, she is in a hospital room, surrounded by sadistic detectives attempting to beat a confession out of her regarding the New Jersey Turnpike shootout. Soon after the detectives leave the room to take a phone call, she writes, “Another pig comes in. A Black pig. In uniform” (Shakur 6). While this “pig” provides her with a

sense of hope and of solidarity by raising his clenched fist in the air as a sign of black power, his presence is short lived and he is soon replaced by the white cops. The rest of her day is interspersed with beatings, medical procedures, and interrogations.

Shakur next writes of a black nurse who is given the task of interrogating her. Like her experience with the “Black pig,” Shakur is both relieved by the nurse’s presence and alienated by the nurse’s submission to a system that scapegoats Black people. Instead of critiquing the nurse’s willingness to interrogate her, however, Shakur comments on the nurse’s own estrangement from re-appropriated Black language:

The Black nurse comes back and starts her questions again. Before she can get started good, i beckon her to come closer. There is no one else around. I ask her to get in contact with my lawyer (who is also my aunt). I give her my name and ask her to make the call herself. She has a hard time understanding me and keeps asking me to repeat my name. I can barely talk, and each time she asks me to repeat myself, i feel like screaming. Then it occurs to me that Assata is foreign to her ears. She has probably never heard the name before. So i give her my slave name... (Shakur 7)

Like many other Black revolutionaries at the time, Shakur had changed her name to something that sounded more authentically African. Even if the nurse did not intend to take sides with the violent, white establishment, though, Shakur suggests that the only way the Black nurse could understand her was through the language of white imperialism.

On the surface, some of Shakur's writing strategies and discursive analyses appear to be the result of under-examined identity politics. For example, not only does she change her name, but throughout her text she also refers to herself in the lower-case "i," she refuses to capitalize America, and she even spells it "amerika" to both make it sound more Germanic and call attention to the history of the Ku Klux Klan in the U.S. Additionally, Shakur alludes to Nazis in other ways by, for instance, referring to her doctor as "Herr," and stating that some of the police on duty in her hospital room "saluted like the Nazis did in Germany" (Shakur 10).

However, Shakur's apparent approach to politics through representational categories of identity is more complex than it appears on the surface. For instance, her use of the lower-case "i" signifies not simply the fact that she is a victim of race, class and gender oppression. It also positions her subjectivity as a single mode constituting the totality of "the blood of infinity" (Shakur 1). Moreover, Shakur's text weaves together the speech and narratives of four generations of women in her family—four generations fighting a common struggle against slavery in all its forms. Her complicated relationship with identity politics is further evidenced in her description of an encounter with a German nurse. She writes:

On the third or fourth day, most of my troubles came to an end. Well, not really, but the punch, bang, poke, and prod part of my troubles ended. A nurse with a German accent came to my aid. She was one of the morning nurses, very professional and exacting, to the point that she could be a pain in the neck. But she was a lifesaver. It was she who had first

protested the tightness of the handcuff on my leg. My leg had begun to swell and she had insisted they loosen it and that the cuff be covered with gauze. Of course, as soon as she was gone they tightened it again, but the gauze helped somewhat. I could tell by the little things she said and did that she knew what was going on. One morning she came in as usual and, after she had finished her normal routine, she reached behind the bed, pulled at something, and then handed me an electric call button on a cord. "Anytime you need me or need anything from the nurses, just press this button," she said. "Don't be afraid to use it," she added, giving me a knowing look. I could have kissed her. Later, when she returned to the room, after the troopers realized I had the call button, one came in behind her. "Is there any way to disconnect that thing?" he asked. "She might hurt someone with it or hurt herself." "No," she said, "there is no way to remove it. If you pull it out, it will just keep ringing the nurses' station. She is having difficulty breathing and she needs it." "Right on!" I thought. "Das ist richtig." (9-10)

Only sentences after this passage, Shakur returns to her description of the Nazi-like qualities of her captors. Yet, with her declaration that "Das ist richtig," Shakur illustrates her understanding of internationalist politics as they relate to language: there is no better way to express her solidarity here than through a language that is alien to her. Furthermore, it is through the language of her benefactor (who may or may not have

actually been German) that language becomes—by virtue of being the language of her benefactor—no longer completely alien to Shakur.

In addition to the ways that Shakur demonstrates how specific words simultaneously bond and separate people, she also explains how broader categories of knowledge are discursively organized to divide and conquer. In particular, she critiques the concept of science. The examples of the disconnecting nature of “science” she provides range from the state’s appropriation of it to the Black Panther Party’s insistence that politics adhere to a scientific system. For example, she questions the validity of the concept of an “expert” by noting that “in sciences commonly known as ‘police sciences’...the police can virtually write up a report saying anything they want” so long as they provide “experts” (Shakur 245). She also states that the FBI sought her conviction by providing the jury with a doctored photo of her as “scientific evidence,” although the “scientific” part of their case “was based on nothing more than ‘all niggers look alike’” (Shakur 213). Finally, she extends her critique of science to the Black Panther Party by describing a Panther meeting where her partner, Zayd Malik Shakur, asked for funds to bail out Sundiata Acoli, who was jailed (and later found not guilty) as a result of the alleged Panther 21 conspiracy to blow up the New York Botanical Gardens.<sup>66</sup> At this meeting, a Panther argued that Zayd was “being subjective and dealing from an emotional rather than a scientific objective analysis” (Shakur 225). She cites this Panther meeting to illustrate the naïve notion that emotion can ever be detached from analysis.

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<sup>66</sup> For information on the Panther 21 trial, which was the longest political trial in New York’s history, see: Kempton, Murray. *The Briar Patch: The Trial of the Panther 21* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997).

While Shakur is quick to critique the category of science, she does not dismiss knowledge or education as a whole. In fact, she makes very clear throughout her text that communism is a question of making connections. Accordingly, *Assata* could be read as a coming of age story about making connections between people; social structures; words and the things they signify; as well as affects and ways of knowing that ultimately defy representation altogether. Her concept of communism depends not only upon the connection between prose and poetry, but also on intuition as a method to make connections when critical discourse fails to move the subject from the experience of her conditions to the conditions of her experience.

Regarding her own education, Shakur describes one of her first college courses where she learned that “history was connected to art, that philosophy was connected to science, and so on” (Shakur 35). Later in her text, she will take this knowledge of the connectedness of seemingly disparate discourses to provide a critique of the Black Panther Party’s educational program. In particular, she explains that even though certain revolutionary thinkers—Mao Zedung, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Harriet Tubman, Kim Il Sung, and Che Guevara—were studied by the Black Panthers, it was impossible to understand these authors without an understanding of their historical contexts (Shakur 221). Much of her text, then, is an elaboration of these contexts. Most notably, she provides historiographical rewritings of narratives about the American Civil War and African socialisms. Yet, even though Shakur produces revisionist histories throughout her autobiography, her insistence on history is not merely historiographical. Instead, her text could be read as a commentary on the impossible, albeit necessary, relationship between

language, history, and truth. To be exact, Shakur's text illustrates that historical narrativization is a useful heuristic for understanding social structures, and that material, historical change requires an awareness that exceeds narrative. Ultimately, she herself develops this consciousness when she decides to escape from prison, when she comes to realize that "to become free, you have to be acutely aware of being a slave" (Shakur 262).

While I contend that this awareness exceeds what is possible within the confines of narrative, I do not wish to suggest that Shakur rejects either language or narrative as socially insignificant. In fact, she shows the captivating and corporeal effect of language itself in her statement to the jury in one of her final trials. After having suffered through a multi-year series of legal hearings as well as the supposed assassination of her lawyer, Shakur finally decides that she will serve as her own legal counsel. Behind bars, she composes a statement to the jury, which she delivers as her opening statement. In this text, she re-appropriates the discourse of freedom from the federal government by both expressing her admiration for the Declaration of Independence and arguing that "this government has put everyone else in jail who spoke up for freedom, who said give me liberty or give me death" (Shakur 167).

Most important, though, she talks to the jury about the conceptual nature of language and of discourse. She reminds them that before they were sworn in as jurors, they were asked about their previous knowledge of the Black Liberation Army (BLA). Shakur notes that, of those who had knowledge of the BLA, they all answered that it was a "'militant' organization" (167). She goes on to explain that "The Black Liberation Army is not an organization: it goes beyond that. It is a concept, a people's movement, an

idea”—a concept that “stands for freedom and justice for all people” (Shakur 167). After having both referenced the conceptual nature of words and produced a re-signification of the concept of freedom, Shakur asks the jurors to consider the manner of witnesses’ testimony against her. She states:

*Although this court considers us peers, many of you have had different backgrounds and different learning and life experiences. It is important that you understand some of those differences. I only ask that you listen carefully. I only ask that you listen, not only to what these witnesses say, but to how they say it.* (Shakur 170, italics original)

In the end, her appeal to the jury was successful. Shakur convinced jurors that truth cannot be contained by the content of speech alone; truth is also an effect of the form of speech. Instead of believing the “truths” presented by witnesses, Shakur compelled jurors to judge the imprisoning effects of language used against her instead of the “facts” that witnesses presented. Yet, after four months of trial and a subsequent acquittal, she still remained in prison. As we will see, though, both in her text and her time spent in prison, her poetry offers a kind of liberation in captivity, an escape *within* the prison-house of language.

#### **IV. Shakur’s Revolution in Poetic Language**

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva examines the infinite possibilities of signification as well as the ways that language resists intelligibility so as to produce a dialectical theory of the totality of signifying processes. The processes of language, she argues, position the subject so that she is always “in process/on trial [*en*

*procès*]" (Kristeva 91). In order to account for the processes of language which place the subject "on trial," Kristeva draws a distinction between two heterogeneous aspects of language—the semiotic and the symbolic—that are always functioning together in the acts of enunciation and identification.

Kristeva's concept of the semiotic entails the part of language that includes "drives and their articulations" and manifests itself in both the speech of the subject and the tones and rhythms of her speech (Kristeva 98). The semiotic, she claims, precedes "the establishment of the sign...and is not, therefore, cognitive in the sense of being assumed by a knowing, already constituted subject" (Kristeva 95). The symbolic, on the other hand, "is structured as a break in the signifying process, establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality" (Kristeva 98). Unlike the symbolic—the area of language that is governed by rules of grammar and syntax, the realm of "positions"—the semiotic is a space that does not signify, but through which a body "speaks." Without the ordering functions of the symbolic, speech would be rendered incomprehensible. However, the symbolic depends upon the semiotic to give meaning to the significations expressed through the arbitrary rules of language.

According to Kristeva, preceding the development of the symbolic there exists the semiotic *chora*, "a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic" (94). By "the absence of an object," Kristeva refers to the fact that a sign always points away from itself and towards an object. In the *chora*, there is no lack. For Kristeva, the *chora* is the limitless space which all discourse moves up against as its condition of

motility (94). Opposed to the uniting multiplicity of the *chora* is the concept of the *thetic*, the divisive phase of all enunciation where a “subject must separate from and through his image, and through his objects” (Kristeva 98).

Kristeva’s concept of the *chora* differentiates her work from other semioticians and psychoanalysts in so far as she locates the space of the semiotic *chora*, first and foremost, in the maternal body during pregnancy and infancy. The rhythms, tones, and movements of the maternal body “speak” to the child before the laws of signification enter the child’s life; similarly, the child “speaks” to the mother through its own movements. Rather than locating the generation of subjectivity in either the Freudian oedipal situation or the Lacanian mirror-stage—both of which pertain to paternal law—Kristeva’s concept of the *chora* enables a feminist concept of the subject that is both corporeal and governed by maternal regulation.

The notion of the maternal body is important for her concept of “the subject in process/on trial” because it figures the subject as two-in-one, a subject that is always negotiating its relationship with the other within us. Put differently, the subject is never purely autonomous because it is founded on an experience that is neither private nor detached from another being; the subject is inter-textual. She writes, “This is to say that the semiotic *chora* is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produces him” (Kristeva 95-96). As the pre-linguistic space of communication that precedes the laws of the symbolic, the *chora* marks a non-representational, though fully expressive, totality occupied by each and every being.

Poetic language, for Kristeva, engages the *chora* to attack the codifications of symbolic language, thereby enabling a qualitatively distinct form of truth-telling from dominant discourse. Rather than following denotative sequences, “which would lead, from one judgment to another, to the knowledge of a real object,” poetic language explores the very structure of enunciation (Kristeva 94). It seeks to express the unspeakable, meaning that cannot be posited in the symbolic order. For Kristeva, poetic language is a revolutionary praxis because it transgresses the conventions of significance and pressures the so-called law by allowing the *chora* to flow back into discourse. Regarding the form of truth produced by poetic language, Kristeva writes:

Poetic mimesis maintains and transgresses *thetic* unicity by making it undergo a kind of anamnesis, by introducing into the *thetic* position a stream of semiotic drives and making it signify. This telescoping of the symbolic and the semiotic pluralizes signification or denotation: it pluralizes the *thetic* doxy. Mimesis and poetic language do not therefore disavow the *thetic*, instead they go through its truth (signification, denotation) to tell the “truth” about it...Poetic language with its connotations assume[s] the right to enter into the social debate, which is an ideological debate, on the strength of [its] confrontation with *Bedeutung* (signification and denotation) but also with all meaning, and hence all enunciation produced by a posited subject. (Kristeva 112)

Here, poetic language not only summons and transgresses the *thetic* phase of language, which separates subjects from objects; poetic language also tells the *whole* truth about the

ideological foundation of symbolization and the suppression of the *chora*. What is revolutionary about poetic language, then, is that it illustrates a hostility towards constructions of individual identity and brings into the foreground the *chora* as the common ground of all communication, the space which “precedes evidence” (Kristeva 95).

While the prose portions of Shakur’s autobiography evidence the spurious nature of her criminal conviction as well as the repressive life conditions that structured her various forms of captivity since the time of her birth, the poems in her text emerge to tell another story about her subjectivity—a story that neither belongs to her as an individual nor requires evidence. Shakur’s poems register both a desire for resistance that is not located in the individual alone and the maternal, *choric* foundation of signification.

For example, when describing her first romantic feelings as well as her adolescent desire to be “grown up” so she “could do anything [she] wanted to,” Shakur moves into a poem in which her subjectivity becomes multiple. She writes:

#### CRACKERJACKS

I coulda told you,  
in the old days,  
in the park,  
or skating down some hill  
what it was all about.

I coulda sat next to you  
on some stairway  
and gave you half my bubblegum,  
and, in between the bubbles  
and the giggles  
I coulda told you.

But we are grown up now.  
And it is all so complicated  
When you dig somebody.

Now, when i open up my crackerjacks,  
I find no heart-shaped ring.  
Only a puzzle  
that i don't wanna solve. (Shakur 44)

The “I” of Shakur’s poem refers not merely to her old self speaking to her young self, a single subjectivity occupying two points in time located within the same body. Instead, the “I” functions as a potentiality, a “coulda,” which emerges within the rhythms of corporeality—skating down a hill, bubble gum popping, giggles. The “I” also serves as a force external to Shakur, another “I” who occupies the same *choric* space, an “I” who can share, an “I” who “coulda sat next to you on some stairway and gave you half my bubble gum” (Shakur 44). What the “I” did not seek to share, however, is a form of knowledge that is utterly inexpressible, knowledge of the complexity of love and pain that can never be adequately represented in language.

Shakur does not state what that “I” “coulda told her” and did not tell her. Instead, she affirms the fact of sharing as such. At the end of her poem, Shakur uses the lower-case “i” to return to the desire which led her to write this specific poetic rupture in the first place—the desire for resistance. By refusing to decipher “only a puzzle that [she doesn’t] wanna solve,” Shakur simultaneously affirms the complexity of relationality—for she doesn’t want to solve the puzzle; its solution would ultimately unravel connections—and posits resistance in the refusal to solve questions in language that are

not capable of being properly answered. I will return to the question of poorly stated questions in my discussion of intuition.

While on trial with her co-defendant Kamau Sadiki, both Shakur and Sadiki were banished from the courtroom for their unwillingness to remain silent. Through the many weeks that they were locked together in a small room, they began to develop romantic feelings for each other. Before acting sexually on those feelings, however, Shakur and Sadiki discussed the risk of pregnancy. Shakur had never before desired a child, and with no access to birth control and both defendants facing life sentences, they had to face the possibility that a child could be produced with no parents to care for it. Eventually, Shakur agreed with Sadiki's proclamation that "our people will not let the child grow up like a weed" and she pursued a sexual relationship with her friend (Shakur 92).

Shakur never describes the sexual relations between herself and her lover. However, after having discovered that she had, in fact, become pregnant—a pregnancy that the judicial system attempted, unsuccessfully, to force her to terminate—Shakur writes a poem entitled "Love." In the sentences that come before this poem, she speaks to her soon-to-be-born daughter, telling her, "Don't worry...you're gonna be all right" (Shakur 129). In the poem that follows, Shakur speaks of the revolutionary potency of love. She writes,

LOVE

Love is contraband in Hell,  
cause love is an acid  
that eats away bars.

But you, me, and tomorrow

hold hands and make vows  
that struggle will multiply.

The hacksaw has two blades.

The shotgun has two barrels.

We are pregnant with freedom.

We are a conspiracy. (Shakur 130)

Here, love is positioned as a substance antithetical to the capitalist hell on earth that Shakur lives in because it serves as “contraband,” or rather, non-sanctioned property (Shakur 130). At the same time that love stands in opposition to the status quo, however, it is also a potentially painful substance; it is “an acid that eats away bars,” but also an acid that could burn the lover. Love, in this formulation, is an essentially risky weapon—the other side of the hacksaw that bludgeons opposition, the other barrel of the shotgun that executes citizens. In this poem, therefore, Shakur not only exposes the power of love, but also its ambivalent nature.

Following her description of the dialectics of love, Shakur writes of submitting to its power in spite of the potential consequences. That is to say, she begins her second stanza with the word “but” (Shakur 130). Instead of describing the subject and objects of love as human, however, Shakur introduces a third term into love relations: time. By asserting that “you, me, and *tomorrow* hold hands and make vows that struggle will multiply,” Shakur does not simply reproduce the imagery of the nuclear family (her lover, herself, and her fetus). Shakur literally and figuratively makes time matter; tomorrow can hold hands with you and me. The multiplicity of Shakur’s figuration of

love also gestures towards Kristeva's concept of the *chora*—a synchronic, common, maternal temporality that enables the motility of struggles for liberation within language and against repression (Shakur 130). Furthermore, Shakur's claim that "*we* are pregnant with freedom" locates the maternal temporality of pregnancy in a subject that is not individual (Shakur 130, italics mine). Yet, the "*we*" that occupies this pregnancy is united in "*a* conspiracy"—a condition that is both common and multiple (Shakur 130, italics mine).

Shakur's use of poetic language, therefore, reveals a temporality of all-at-once-ness, of being-together, that both the prison and late capitalism expose but seek to foreclose. Although Shakur composed the majority of the poems that appear in her autobiography during her time in captivity, thereby offering her a kind of escape from both the banality of prison time and the language of "appeal" she was constantly forced to speak while representing herself as her own legal defense, it was neither through prose nor poetry that she eventually came to know that it was time to escape from prison. As Kristeva makes clear, poetic language, while resistant to structures of the law, cannot escape those structures; poetic language can only offer liberation in captivity. Poetic language is still language.

### **V. Shakur's Intuitive Escape from the Prison of False Problems**

At the very end of her text, Shakur abandons her previous writing strategies when she discusses her successful break from prison—a break that she refuses to represent in her text except as a silence. It is through intuition that Shakur, for the very first time,

arrives at the knowledge she must leave the prison. However, this intuitive knowledge does not belong to Shakur as an individual subject. This knowledge was generated in a conversation with her then four year-old daughter, Kakuya, whom “[Shakur’s] people had [indeed] not...let grow up like a weed” (Shakur 139).

Shakur describes a painful visit at the Clinton Correctional Facility with her mother and daughter. Nearly every week since Kakuya’s birth, Shakur’s mother had brought her daughter for a visit. Nevertheless, Shakur states that her daughter “ha[d] never been with her mother” and her daughter was justifiably angry (Shakur 257). Shakur writes:

I try talking to her, but she is puffed up and sullen. I go over and try to hug her. In a hot second she is all over me. All i can feel are these little four-year-old fists banging away at me. Every bit of her force is in those punches, they really hurt. I let her hit me until she is tired. “It’s all right,” i tell her. “Let it all out.” She is standing in front of me, her face contorted with anger, looking spent. She backs away and leans against the wall. “It’s okay,” i tell her. “Mommy understands.” “You’re not my mother,” she screams, the tears rolling down her face. “You’re not my mother and I hate you.” I feel like crying too. I know she is confused about who i am. She calls me Mommy Assata and she calls my mother Mommy.

I try to pick her up. She knocks my hand away. “You can get out of here, if you want to,” she screams. “You just don’t want to.” No, i can’t, i say, weakly. “Yes you can.” she accuses. “You just don’t want to.”

I look helplessly at my mother. Her face is choked with pain. “Tell her to try to open the bars,” she says in a whisper.

“I can’t open the door,” i tell my daughter. “I can’t get through the bars. You try and open the bars.”

My daughter goes over to the barred door that leads to the visiting room. She pulls and she pushes. She yanks and she hits and she kicks the bars until she falls on the floor, a heap of exhaustion. I go over and pick her up. I hold and rock and kiss her. There is a look of resignation on her face that i can’t stand. We spend the rest of the visit talking and playing quietly on the floor. When the guard says the visit is over, i cling to her for dear life. She holds her head high, and her back straight as she walks out of the prison. She waves good-bye to me, her face clouded and worried, looking like a little adult. I go back to my cage and cry until i vomit. I decide that it is time to leave. (Shakur 257-258)

Shakur is able to make the decision that it is time to leave precisely because, as her daughter reveals to her, the question of escaping the prison cannot be adequately posited in spatial terms. By Kakuya’s refusal to believe that her mother’s incarceration was merely the result of some unshakeable bars as well as her assertion that her mother remained imprisoned simply because she “just d[idn]’t want to leave,” Shakur comes to

intuitively know, for the very first time, that her statements to the court of appeals will not set her free. People have been escaping spaces of prison throughout the entire history of incarceration. Leaving the prison for Shakur, then, is transformed from a question of space to a question of time, one of harnessing the trans-historical forces of resistance and transforming the contingent moment of possibility into the necessary moment of flight.

The form of intuition to which I refer is explicated as a method in Deleuze's book on Henri Bergson's concept of intuition. In this text, Deleuze argues, "Intuition is neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method, one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy" (Bergsonism 13). That is to say, intuition does not belong to what I described in the introduction to the dissertation as Spinoza's first type of knowledge—knowledge of the world in relation to our own bodies—but is rather a rigorous method that reveals our fundamental common ontological condition of duration as "essentially memory, consciousness, and freedom" (Deleuze, Bergsonism 51). To be clear, Deleuze and Bergson's concept of duration is not the same as Spinoza's infinite duration; rather, duration in this formulation corresponds to Spinoza's concept of eternity. The concept of intuition, which is typically characterized as merely an individual affect or belief, is conceived by Bergson and Deleuze as an onto-epistemological method that produces new links in the world.

According to Deleuze, Bergson's method of intuition is constituted by three rules that concern the questions of truth and falsity, illusion and reality, time and space. These rules include: (1) "Apply the test of true and false to problems themselves. Condemn false problems and reconcile truth and creation at the level of problems;" (2) "Struggle

against illusion, rediscover the true differences in kind or articulations of the real;” and (3) “State problems and solve them in terms of time rather than space” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 15, 21, 31). The ultimate goal of these three procedures of intuition is to discover “differences in kind” that will “lead us to go beyond the state of experience toward the conditions of experience” (Bergsonism 26).

By false problems, Deleuze does not refer to problems that do not exist in reality; instead, he focuses on what he calls a “set up” in philosophy that keeps “us in a kind of slavery”—that is, the belief that inquiry should seek solutions for problems as givens without questioning how the problems have been constructed in the first place (Deleuze, Bergsonism 15). Therefore, against this philosophical “social prejudice” which naturalizes the circumstances of inquiry, Deleuze claims, “We are wrong to believe that the true and the false can only be brought to bear on solutions, that they only begin with solutions... True freedom lies in a power to decide, to constitute problems themselves” (Bergsonism 15). To constitute a problem, however, is not the same endeavor as merely uncovering, finding, or positing a problem that already exists virtually or actually. Instead, truth is “discovered” in the act of inventing problems that would not otherwise exist. Solutions to true problems are immanent in the questions they posit.

In order to elaborate how problems can be constituted within this methodology of intuition, Deleuze first defines the two types of false problems that we must detect and think against. These include “nonexistent problems...whose very terms contain a confusion of the ‘more’ and the ‘less’; and ‘badly stated’ questions, so defined because their terms represent badly analyzed composites” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 17). In the case

of the former, he cites questions such as “Why is there something rather than nothing?” and “Why is there order rather than disorder?” to argue that these types of problems present “a fundamental illusion, a ‘retrograde movement of the true,’ according to which being, order and the existent are supposed to precede themselves, or to precede the creative act that constitutes them, by projecting an image of themselves back into a possibility, a disorder, a nonbeing which are supposed to be primordial” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 18). The fundamental issue with this type of false problem is the notion that negativity precedes creation, a void preexists becoming. For Deleuze, negativity and the void are simultaneous and co-existent. Against the negative ontology that I critiqued, Deleuze argues that, for Bergson, truth is positioned not as the possibility of being solved, but as the potentiality of creation as such: “it is here that humanity makes its own history, and the becoming conscious of that activity is like the conquest of freedom” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 16).

The second type of false problem consists of those questions that fail to differentiate differences in degree from differences in kind. For Bergson, experience and reality are constituted by composites of dualisms—duration-space, quality-quantity, memory-matter, instinct-intelligence—that contain “pure presences” and tendencies (Deleuze, Bergsonism 22). When we approach composites, however, we tend to analyze them in terms of quantitative questions of more or less instead of identifying the qualitative differences between the “pure presences” that comprise the mixtures. In so doing, we simply formulate questions of degree and fail to discover the true differences

in kind that exist in the composites—the very differences that constitute our world and the truth.

The most important example of the second type of false problem Deleuze articulates involves our inability to differentiate time from space. He writes,

We make time into a representation imbued with space. The awkward thing is that we no longer know how to distinguish in that *representation* the two component elements which differ in kind, the two pure *presences* of duration and extensity...In short, we measure the mixtures with a unit that is itself impure and already mixed. We have lost the ground of composites” (Bergsonism 22).

By failing to distinguish extension from duration, we remain trapped in the illusionary representational world of the intellect, which only knows how to think in generalities. Deleuze is clear to state that “intuition is not duration” (Bergsonism 32). He does argue, however, that intuition is “the movement by which we emerge from our own duration, by which we make use of our own duration to affirm and immediately recognize the existence of other durations, above or below us” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 32-33). While it may seem that this method of dividing composites into difference in kind and differences in degree is merely a form of non-transformative critique, the real purpose of this type of differentiation is to follow these divergent “lines of fact” to a point where they “converge again to give us this time the virtual image or the distinct reason of the common point...Dualism is therefore only a moment, which must lead to the re-formation of a monism” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 29). Here, at this monistic intersection, located within a

synchronic temporality, lies the point of precision where the conditions of truth and the experience of truth converge.

In order to arrive at this intersection, Deleuze claims that we must follow the third rule of Bergson's method—to think in terms of time rather than space. Deleuze prioritizes a theorization of time over space because “[d]uration is always the location and the environment of differences in kind; it is even their totality and multiplicity. There are no differences in kind except in duration—while space is nothing other than the location, the environment, the totality of differences in degree” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 32). Put simply, to seek freedom and truth one must think within the realm of duration, where real transformations in kind can occur. To think in terms of differences in kind is a mode of thought that seeks totalities instead of generalities.

In many ways, intuition as a method is antithetical to the idea of a cognizant subject because it disavows intelligence as “the faculty that states problems in general” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 21). It draws on a different type of knowledge than intelligence to distinguish between true and false problems “even if this means driving the intelligence to turn back against itself” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 21). Accordingly, in contrast to the idea that intuition is but a personal, individual epistemology based on nothing but subjective feelings, Deleuze reveals that Bergson's method of intuition is primarily a method of inquiry whose objective is to move past the world of generalities and binary determinations to a world where the multiplicity of differences is self-evident in history.

After having described how she arrived at her intuitive knowledge that it was time to leave the prison, Shakur presents one more poem dedicated to her daughter. In this

poem, Shakur states, “i have shabby dreams for you of some vague freedom i have never known” (Shakur 259). Following this poem, Shakur writes one final chapter in which she revisits the concept of a dream. Here, she discusses a final visit to the prison from her grandmother, who had traveled all the way from North Carolina to tell Shakur about a dream she had recently had.

At their meeting, Shakur’s grandmother reveals that in her dream, she saw her granddaughter in their old home. Her grandmother asserts, “You’re coming home soon...I don’t know when it will be, but you’re coming home. You’re getting out of here. It won’t be too long, though. It will be much less time than you’ve already been here...Don’t ask me to explain it anymore, because I can’t. I just know you’re going to come home and that you’re going to be all right” (Shakur 260-261). Even though Shakur expresses her anxiety about the possible failures of escape, she also presents the content of her grandmother’s dreams and intuitions as true. She writes, “My grandmother’s dreams have always come when they were needed and have always meant what we needed them to mean...She did her part. The rest was up to us. We had to make it real. Dreams and reality are opposites. Actions synthesizes them.” (Shakur 260).

In this regard, Shakur posits dreams in a synchronic temporality of struggle that includes, first, her own “shabby” dreams for her daughter; these dreams are “shabby” precisely because they register a long history of class, race, and gender oppression through their “conspicuous signs of wear and neglect.”<sup>67</sup> The other dreams that exist in a synchronic temporality are the dreams of slaves who had “fed Missy arsenic apple pies,

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<sup>67</sup> See dictionary.com definition for “shabby.”

stole the axes from the shed, went and chopped off the master's head" (Shakur 263). Here, the temporality of the unconscious fuses historical struggles into a synchronicity in which the subject experiences them as an all-at-onceness. In Shakur's words, this feeling of synchronic time is virtually identical to becoming "acutely aware of being a slave" (Shakur 262). The experience of this knowledge can be simultaneously exhilarating (as it merges the individual "I" into a trans-historical common force for freedom) and devastating (as it cannot be represented in language; it produces a break with language—one of the very definitions of psychosis). Rather than seeking to represent the unrepresentable, Shakur demonstrates that trusting one's intuition is how "humanity makes its own history, and the becoming conscious of that activity is like the conquest of freedom" (Deleuze, Bergsonism 16). She provides no information on how she escaped or who aided her in her breakout. Instead, she ends her final chapter with the content of a phone call she made to her grandparents on her last day in prison. She made the call to hear her grandmother's intuitive knowledge just one last time:

I was feeling kind of mush and, so as not to sound suspicious, I wanted to hear some more about the family's history, tracing the ties back to slavery. All too soon it was time to hang up. "Your grandmother wants to say something else to you," my grandfather told me.

"I love you," my grandmother said. "We don't want you to get used to that place, do you hear? Don't let yourself get used to it."

"No grandmommy, I won't." (Shakur 261-262)

## VI. Islands of Refuge: Shakur's Escape to the Red Frontier

Shakur's autobiography ends with a postscript in Havana—the city where she eventually transforms from a “wide-eyed, young romantic revolutionary” to a thinker for whom “generalities were no longer enough” (Shakur 267). She describes Cuba not in utopian terms, but as a country in transition—a nation actively seeking to overcome centuries of institutionalized racism and class division. Even though she celebrates the real-life structural changes made possible by the Cuban revolution, Shakur also notes that she finds herself, again, in a troubled relationship with language—this time Spanish.

While she asserts that *institutionalized* racism had been almost entirely eradicated by Castro's regime, she also argues that the generalized terminology of race employed by Cubans tends to erase historical struggles. She writes,

I was shocked to learn that a lot of Cubans who looked Black to me didn't consider themselves Black. They called themselves mulattos, colorados, jabaos, and a whole bunch of other names. It seemed to me that anyone who wasn't jet black was considered a mulatto. The first time someone called me a “mulatta,” i was so insulted that if i had been able to express myself in Spanish, we would have had a heated argument right there on the spot.

“Yo no soy una mulatta. Yo soy una mujer negra, y orgullosa soy una mujer negra,” i would tell people as soon as i learned a little Spanish. “I'm not a mulatto, but a Black woman, and I'm proud to be Black.” Some

people understood where i was coming from, but others thought i was too hung up on the race question. To them, “mulatto” was just a color, like red, green, or blue. But, to me, it represented a historical relationship. (Shakur 271)

Shakur’s insistence that racial categories not become white-washed represents not simply her own experience of racial discrimination in the U.S. or the fact that she is a native English speaker for whom foreign language categories seem obscure. Ultimately, her resolve is representative of her continued struggle to call a spade a spade, to refuse a logic in which clarity trumps truth.

Truth, for Shakur, is not located in ideological paradigms or a representational clarity that exceeds truth. Truth lies in the connection of durations, which bears the same name as communism. Communism is not located in a space (i.e., Cuba, the Eastern bloc); communism is a shared temporality—accessible to a degree in poetic language, not entirely representable by it, and ultimately conceived through intuition as the methodology that “affirm[s] and immediately recognize[s] the existence of other durations, above or below us” (Deleuze, Bergsonism 32-33).

At the end of her postscript, Shakur experiences this communist time on her island of refuge as she is re-united with her daughter, mother, and aunt who have flown to Cuba to visit her in exile. She writes, “How much we had all gone through. Our fight had started on a slave ship years before we were born...Ten million people had stood up to the monster. Ten million people only ninety miles away. We were here together in their land, my small little family, holding each other after so long” (Shakur 274). Shakur’s

position as a fighter in the Cold War began, therefore, long before 1946, long before the political geography of late capitalism produced a clearer-than-truth vision of the world as divided in two. “Steered by [the] tired, seasick sailors” of history and equipped with “love [as her] sword and truth [as her] compass,” Shakur had finally been guided home, “to port” on an island where she would compose her communist poetics and bestow what was un-representable to “the seeds of time” (Shakur 147, 1; Jameson, *Prison-House* 189).

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