

## **University and Radical Subjectivity: Discourse and Practice within Secular Capitalism**

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## Abbreviations

BSH – *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Dreyfus and Rabinow.

CBM – *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggles in High-Technology Capitalism*, Dyer-Witford.

DL – “Discourse on Language” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault.

DP – *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault.

F – *Foucault*, Deleuze.

FKC – *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, Raunig.

FMH – *Foucault, Marxism, and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information*, Poster.

INF – *Infoglut: How Too Much Information Is Changing the Way We Think and Know*, Andrejevic.

NSC – *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Bolstanski and Chiapello.

SAM – *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, Lazzarato.

TLC – *The Limits to Capital*, Harvey.

WSC – *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, London.

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## **Part 1: Capital, Discourse, and Subjectivity**

Perhaps an honest way to begin is by stating the normative position that animates an intellectual enquiry: the axioms, presuppositions, and assumptions regarding how the world is and should be. That we live in a world to a large extent dominated by capital and its cronies is one of the fundamental grounds of this particular paper; that we can – and should! – resist is another; that the struggle is primarily located within the terrain of the production of subjectivity is the last one. The initial, theoretical part of the paper will attempt to explain and justify this position by drawing chiefly on the following sources of critical thought: the modern contemporaries of Spinoza in French post-structuralism (in particular, the assemblage of Deleuze-Foucault-Guattari) and their legates, autonomist Marxism, and critical sociology. While these labels do little justice to the authors and schools of thought they denominate, their listing here is meant as a clumsy attempt at academic self-positioning.

Locating the emergence of capitalism is a contentious procedure. Longue durée historians, such as Fernand Braudel, and the exponents of world-systems analysis, such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi, would date it all the way back to the Genoese bankers of the sixteenth century. Others, like Eric Hobsbawm, would argue that capital really came into its own in the nineteenth century with the development of the British cotton industry. Whatever the overarching cycles of capital might be, and no matter how far back into history they might go, both groups could agree that each cycle has its own particularities, with the latest one that is broadly centered on the twentieth century being no exception. It is this current phase of capitalism, beginning with the industrial developments of the nineteenth century and stretching to the most immaterial forms of production in the twenty first, that constitutes the timeline of interest for this paper.

### *Classifying Capitalisms*

The capitalism of today is not the same one as experienced by the chimney sweeps of Charles Dickens. On the contrary, contemporary capitalism is made up of refined, happy curators of digital networks, parked snugly upon beanbags in fashionable ‘coffices’ – coffee shops doubling as working spaces that replace the dreary offices of yore – where creativity is churned out as fast as mocha lattes, or so the prevailing mythology would have us believe. In fact, investigating the changes in mythologies of capitalism is one way of tracking its development. Precisely such a method is

employed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in “The New Spirit of Capitalism,”<sup>1</sup> a 500 page strong sociological excursion into discourse analysis of managerial literature that aims to map the different justifications capital has employed since the late nineteenth century in order to mobilize participation. Accordingly, they identify three stages: the industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century, embodied by the intrepid Industrialist; the Fordist capitalism of the nineteen -30s and -60s, marked by the expansion of the welfare state, gigantic paternal firms, and the trope of the Manager; and the subsequent post-Fordism that developed as a response to the ’68 uprisings, characterized by the dismantling of social welfare, increasing labor precarity, and the image of the mobile, flexible, and independent Entrepreneur.

Roughly corresponding to these three stages, the autonomist Marxist tradition presented by Nick Dyer-Witheford in “Cyber-Marx: Circuits and Cycles in High Technology Capitalism”<sup>2</sup> has sketched out three cycles of capitalism within the period of the long twentieth century from two different perspectives: the role of the state in relation to capital, and the class recomposition that capital has attempted to carry out. Within the former perspective, the early twentieth century was characterized by the Rights State, whose primary purpose was ensuring the conditions for the functioning of the free-market; the Fordist era of the middle of the century saw the development of the Planner State, a gargantuan bureaucratic apparatus whose purpose was the reproduction of the labor force; and towards the end there emerged the Crisis State of post-Fordim, where the social functions of the state are minimized in favour of coercive policing activities on behalf of technological capitalism.<sup>3</sup> In terms of class recomposition, the labor force was moulded “from the “professional” worker of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the “mass” worker of capital’s Fordist era, to the emergent “socialized” worker of the current, post-Fordist informational period.”<sup>4</sup>

A third way of conceptualizing the changes within contemporary capitalism can be found in Frédéric Lordon’s work with the mistranslated title “Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire.”<sup>5</sup> This line of thought traces the regimes of desire that capital has employed in order to motivate employees to work. During the industrial period, employment was achieved primarily through the negative motivation of staving off hunger; in the Fordist model, consumption of commodities added positive motivations that were related but extrinsic to work; and finally, post-Fordism attempts to reconstruct labor itself as an intrinsically pleasurable activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Boltanski, Luc and Chiapello, Eve. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 2007. (NSC).

<sup>2</sup> Dyer-Witheford, Nick. *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggles in High-Technology Capitalism*, 1999. (CBM).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 100-104.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Lordon, Frédéric. *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, 2014. (WSC).

In spite of the differences in approaches, vantage points, and the resulting taxonomies, most contemporary critical analyses of capitalism seem to find common ground in that over the last century and a half, capital has undergone three distinct yet interconnected stages that could be classified as industrialism, Fordism, and post-Fordism. The effects of these stages are cumulative: the long twentieth century saw increasingly pervasive real subsumption of the social by capital, and its expansion from the work place towards society as a whole through the commodification of human activity in multiplicity of forms. To accomplish this, capital re-tailored the roles of states, redeployed various mythologies to make itself attractive, and increasingly attempted to find ways of integrating itself as a pleasurable activity. If this sounds alright, one should also keep in mind that these changes went hand in hand with the demolition of social security, labor protection, and increasing poverty gap amid record profits.

However, the cumulative shifts undergone by capital, whether from the point of view of mythology, state, or class should not be understood as a linear, progressive development, where the new state of affairs obliterates the previous one. In fact, the opposite is true: especially in the era of globalization, different forms of capitalist ideology and modes of accumulation co-exist, often in relations of tension and competition.<sup>6</sup> Nothing illustrates this more comically than the August issue of the Polish Airlines in-flight magazine, a quintessentially commercial publication, where the editorial piece urges flyers to abandon their focus on commodities and consumerist habits in order to focus on the truly important things in life, such as the formative experience of travelling, which the airline in question is handily ready to facilitate at a meager cost. Evidently, cultural capitalism has no qualms feasting on its distant cousins.

### *Changes and Justifications*

From the brief overviews above we can see that capital has a tendency towards reinventing itself, at least superficially. According to autonomist Marxism, this is because capital does not unfold (just) according to its inner, self-contained logic and contradictions, such as the tendency towards falling rates of profit; rather, it is driven by reaction to the antagonisms of the laboring subjects.<sup>7</sup> Whether these antagonisms happen because, as orthodox Marxism would have it, capitalist production alienates the working subject; or because capitalism produces anomie by upsetting the social order; or because “resistance comes first,”<sup>8</sup> is up for debate. As Foucault once succinctly put it, “people rise

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<sup>6</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, NSC, p. 456.

<sup>7</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, 2013. (F). p. 74.

up – it’s a fact,”<sup>9</sup> and capitalism must adapt to survive. How it does so, and why, the paper will explore below.

In their aforementioned opus “The New Spirit of Capitalism,” Boltanski and Chiapello provide a minimal definition of capitalism as “the imperative to unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means.”<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that war was not, and is not, an instrument in the toolkit of capitalism, or that capitalism does not employ other forms of violence in its circuits of accumulation. Rather, they argue that capitalism could not sustain itself exclusively through means of brutalization, coercion, and threats; it must furnish both the individual and society with positive motivations to enlist.

In other words, capitalism must make substantial promises to ensure its own survival. That is because capitalism could be said to function according to two different orders: the internal one, which is a formal mechanism of accumulation referencing nothing but itself, and the external, which can adopt any existing cultural structure to justify capital’s operations and mobilize support.<sup>11</sup> While this may appear to mimic the orthodox Marxist notion of base/superstructure, which argues that ideology is determined by and subordinated to economic relations, Boltanski and Chiapello claim that “the same justifications that make it possible to mobilize relevant parties also fetter accumulation.”<sup>12</sup> The formal logics of capitalist accumulation, being themselves amoral, produce alienation, or rather anomie; therefore, capital not only needs to draw on the outside for its appearance, but it also must conform to it in order to operate smoothly, without causing dissent. The guise adopted by capitalism, one which both justifies and shackles it and is appropriated entirely from the outside, they call “the spirit of capitalism.”<sup>13</sup>

The spirit of capitalism functions as a dynamic link between the internal logic of boundless accumulation and external structures of justification, between production and the subjects engaged in it. This relationship is one of tension, because capital’s tendency towards unlimited growth pits it against its own limit, and its need to incorporate outside cultural structures opens it up to critique. The spirit of capitalism is therefore a field of struggle, because if capital cannot attune its logic to meet its function, crisis ensues.<sup>14</sup> Crisis, however, does not bring collapse but a proliferation of resistance, meaning that capitalism does not have to fall apart; rather, its operations become more difficult. Resistance does not overcome capital by default, because, while the latter prefers to obtain

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, quoted in *Commonwealth*, 2011, by Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, NSC, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 20-25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 10-30; 516-519.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

willing participation, as this paper will argue later it does not rely on positive mobilization exclusively.

### *What is a Promise?*

It has been said that capitalism must make substantial promises – about the future, its own desirability, and the joys awaiting its subjects. But on what grounds can such promises be made and kept? How can the future be known in advance, and the whims of the participants maintained steady? Between the promise and its enactment lies “a world of new and strange things, circumstances, even acts,”<sup>15</sup> all of which have the potential to impinge and all of which capital must aim to neutralize. Between the conception of the subject’s desire and its fulfillment is the space of uncertainty, where vacillations of the mind can take place,<sup>16</sup> which capitalism must prevent. Such a tall order would seem to demand nothing less than the capacity to forecast the future. But how quickly the would-be seer arrives at the limits of knowledge! As was argued in “Man in the Modern Age”<sup>17</sup> by Karl Jaspers, “the only certain thing is the uncertainty of the possible.” Neither scientific nor historic knowledge can predict the future, because the former must assume its own incompleteness, while the latter serves only as a horizon of possible action. Prevented from knowing reality as anything but incomprehensible possibilities, we are left with a narrower question, “What sort of human beings will be alive in days to come?” But even here one is faced with the uncertainty of the possible, because the unpredictability of an individual free will does not allow for smooth forecasting.<sup>18</sup>

What is left for the forecast, then, is to seize a possibility and actively engage in bringing about its fulfillment. The future becomes subordinated not to contemplation, but to will: “If I endeavor to forecast it, it is precisely in order that I may modify the cause of events . . . The future has become something that can be foreseen because it is modifiable.”<sup>19</sup> Forecasting the future, or rather the future subject, means to endeavor in actualizing a specific possibility instead of passively waiting for the inevitable to manifest itself. And while Jaspers saw the authoritarian potential in such shaping of the future, he also posited it as a battle-field where free spirits could, in lacunae of resistance, solidarize to oppose the Nothingness of the encroaching world-apparatus.

Jaspers would turn over in his grave if he could see how well contemporary capital has learned these lessons! For capitalism to make promises about the future and keep them, it has to control the

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<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 1998. p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Lordon, WSC, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Jaspers, Karl. *Man in the Modern Age*, 1957.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 218-224.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 222-223.

gap between the promise and its enactment. “But how much all of this presupposes!” we could exclaim with Nietzsche.

To think in terms of causality, to see and anticipate from afar, to posit ends and means with certainty, to be able to above all reckon and calculate! For that to be the case, how much man himself must have become *calculable, regular, necessary*, even to his own mind, so that finally he would be able to vouch for himself *as a future*, in the way that making a promise does!<sup>20</sup>

Unable to foresee the future itself, capital must endeavor to actualize a specific possibility over all others. The only way to achieve this, is through active forecasting, a will to knowledge that aims to convert the uncertainty of the possible into a congealed, knowable, and predictable subject. The promise of capitalism entails controlling the subjective conditions of interpretation from which its success or failure could be judged.

### *Limits of the Spirit*

In order to function at its most efficient, with the least resistance, capitalism must constantly reinvent itself by “retuning” the link between its justifications and modes of accumulation. Or, as Mauricio Lazzarato argued in “Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity,”<sup>21</sup> capitalism must find ways of articulating the “economic, technological, and social flows with the production of subjectivity.”<sup>22</sup> It is not enough to put the subject to work by any means – the subject must not only accept his or her place within the system, but must be able to ‘flourish’ in it, to feel at home and content, otherwise disorder (and loss of profit) is likely to follow. In other words, “as work requires a laboring subject, so the market requires a consuming subject, a subject that needs what capitalism produces and believes that these needs can and must be satisfied in commodity form.”<sup>23</sup> And as capital expands into novel terrains of immaterial production, it must once again find ways of ‘harmonizing’ its multiple facets.

The effectiveness of the latest spirit of capitalism in achieving such harmonization between its politics, economy, and production of subjectivity is questionable, hence the supposedly tumultuous nature of the times we live in. Although post-Fordism relies on the discourse of creativity, mobility, and flexibility, embodied in the image of the Entrepreneur with the world as her oyster, critical theory has considerably demystified such glorifications. Bolstanski and Chiapello

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<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. p. 40 [italics in the original]

<sup>21</sup> Lazzarato, Maurizio. *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, 2014. (SAM)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 117.

argued that mobility of the few is predicated on the immobility of the many, and flexibility means that labor is increasingly tasked with its own reproduction without any security.<sup>24</sup> The work of Ulises Ali Mejias “Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World”<sup>25</sup> has shown how networks – the dominant metaphor of post-Fordism and its open pastures of entrepreneurialism – do not offer more possibilities for equal participation, but instead result in nodocentrism, a state of affairs where the strongest nodes of the network tend to accumulate wealth at the expense of the weaker ones.<sup>26</sup> The critique of the so-called creative industries by Gerald Raunig in his book “Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity”<sup>27</sup> argues how these discourses serve to further processes of gentrification and privatization of the public.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the disparity between the discourse of capital and its actual functioning is not particular to post-Fordism. Capitalism is exploitative by virtue of being capitalism, by the grace of its tendency towards unlimited accumulation at the expense of labor, the environment, and anything that happens to get in its way. The question is whether capital manages to “sell” its discourse and present itself as desirable. And the sell of post-Fordism is particularly hard, precisely because it attempts to make itself out not only as innocuous, but as genuinely pleasurable! No longer is one supposed to go to work in order to attain one’s pleasures afterwards; for the entrepreneurs, work and pleasure are co-extensive.

According to Lazzarato, the financial crisis of 2008 has revealed the shallowness of entrepreneurial discourse in particular and cognitive capital in general, because the primary mechanism of mobilizing participation turned out to be not beanbags, coffee shops, and the beauty of knowledge production, but the stern and only partially discursive method of debt and austerity.<sup>29</sup> However, in spite of increasing unrest, capitalism continues to survive, raking in as much profit as ever. This is where the limit of such notion as ‘the spirit of capitalism’ becomes apparent: it focuses almost exclusively on discourse as articulation, and of course discursive practices are important, but as Pierre Bourdieu rightfully stated, “the laws of the construction of discourse” do not reside in “discourse alone,” but rather in the laws of “the space of production” whence discourse originates.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the failure and demystification of the discourse of capital, and the simultaneous continuation of its post-Fordist accumulation without outright revolt of the masses shows that the production of subjects is more complex than simply articulation. Capitalism does need subjects to function at its best, but it produces them in ways that go beyond discourse understood simply as language.

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<sup>24</sup> Bolstanski and Chiapello, NSC, p. 362.

<sup>25</sup> Mejias, Ulises Ali. *Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World*, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Raunig, Gerald. *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, 2013. (FKC).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 105-110.

<sup>29</sup> Lazzarato, SAM, p. 10; 53.

<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. *Social Structures of the Economy*, 2008. p. 106 – 107.

The preferability of the willing subject is not an insight particular to contemporary Marxian analysis. Machiavelli advised the wise prince to aim for both fear and love, even if emphasizing the former. Etienne de la Boetie wrote about the bureaucratic techniques to attain willing servitude. Centuries later Gramsci argued how the bourgeoisie ruled through non-violent cultural hegemony and consent. These analyses, however, focused on the importance of the willing subject for the purposes of political governance. But with contemporary capitalism, the classical separation between politics, economics, and society becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Since the advent of Fordism, capital has expanded into the social through the commodity form. As was noted in the autonomist Marxist analysis of the role of the state in relation to capital and production, governance has increasingly become an extended mechanism of surplus value extraction, whether through the reproduction of labor or policing. But even the total subsumption of the state proved to be too little for capital to maintain its promises, whatever those were, as the uprisings of '68 clearly demonstrated. Subjectivity still leaked too much. Consequently, the move to post-Fordism entailed a much more extensive encroachment on the mechanism of subject production itself.

### *Foucault, Subject, and Power*

In his essay "The Subject and Power,"<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault states "there are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to some else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge," both of which "suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes a subject to."<sup>32</sup> In other words, the process of subjectivation entails not (only) direct applications of coercion, but the more subtle cultivation of the subject as an interior. It was this latter mode of subjectivation, becoming a subject through a relationship of the self to the self, that was of immense interest to Foucault, and constituted one of the main focuses of his intellectual research.

In the works leading up to his death – "The Will to Knowledge," "The Use of Pleasure," and "The Care of the Self" – Foucault explored the emergence of the so-called pastoral power, a process of subjectivation that "cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets."<sup>33</sup> In the broadest (that is, reductive) possible strokes, one could sketch the genealogy as follows: the practices of subjectivation originated in ancient Greece with various techniques for the care of the self that were meant to aid the individual in achieving self-mastery; such practices were expanded upon by the

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<sup>31</sup> Foucault, Michel. "Subject and Power" in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 214.

pastoral techniques of the Christian church, the primary of which was confession; and since the twentieth century, the version par excellence of this pastoral technique is psychoanalysis.

Foucault's analysis offers two insights: the part of subjectivation "in which an individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice"<sup>34</sup> increasingly came to rely on discourse, or rather on controlling the conditions under which enunciation happens; and the fact that these conditions were progressively institutionalized and diffused, culminating in the contemporary situation where man has become a "confessing animal,"<sup>35</sup> and the state performs both the totalizing and the individualizing role as the primary operator of secular pastoral power.<sup>36</sup>

Although the three volumes of the *History of Sexuality* explicitly take up the treatment of sexuality, sex, and desire, the implicit concern is precisely the genealogy of the doubling over of the subject upon himself. Individualizing pastoral techniques are meant not (just) to reveal the individual to the institution, but to himself as well, thereby constituting him as an autonomously functioning subject.

Considering, however, that such revelations of the self to the self, especially in their institutional form, require the mediation of a third party, such as the priest, the analyst, or even the bureaucrat, it would not be amiss to say that pastoral techniques endow the individual with an interiority that befits the purposes of such institutions. In other words, pastoral techniques could be said to fulfill what Nietzsche wrote of, namely the need to make the subject "calculable, regular, necessary, *even to his own mind*, so that finally he would be able to vouch for himself as a future."<sup>37</sup> If the subject can know itself, but precisely in the manner that is required of him, then his behavior becomes eminently more vouchable.

However, if we stopped here, we would be left with an incomplete picture that would contradict both what this paper has argued earlier, namely that discourse is not all there is to power, and the fact that Foucault treated power as consisting of non-discursive practices as much as the discursive ones.<sup>38</sup> Foucault was not into discourse analysis for the sake of content analysis; he investigated practices, exercises, and configurations of forces. Therefore, as important as controlling the conditions of enunciation might be, there is more to the process of subjectivation than solely articulation and speech.

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure*, 1992. p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Will to Knowledge*, 1998. p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, "Subject and Power." p. 214.

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*. p. 40. [italics added]

<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 27-30.

When Foucault wrote that “an important phenomenon took place around the eighteenth century,”<sup>39</sup> he was not just talking about the secularization of society whereby the ecclesiastical institutions gave way to the state as the primary pastoral power. Actually, in “Discipline and Punish” Foucault identified the period around the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of non-violent techniques of governance that were carried out under the auspices of humanitarian concerns, but were in fact concomitant to the needs of the emerging capitalism that demanded more efficient political technologies.<sup>40</sup> Advances in power techniques coincided with a need for increased productivity of variable labor at reduced cost. As a result, the public displays of the sovereign’s power, exuberantly violent and provocative of unrest, that used to be common currency, became substituted by “a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculable, but permanent economy.”<sup>41</sup> ‘Discipline’ was the name by which Foucault christened this new mode of power.

Just like the pastoral technique of confession, discipline functioned by targeting the soul as the “seat of habits.”<sup>42</sup> The novelty of discipline, however, lie with the fact that it reached the soul through the body, but only in order to manipulate the productive forces of that same body. Put differently, by arranging the actions of the body, the spaces in which it operated, and the visibility it was exposed to, discipline could mould the interiority of said body and, in turn, have access not just to its productive forces, but to its general behavior. Therefore, unlike slavery, discipline could “dispense with the costly and violent relation by obtaining effects of utility at least as great.”<sup>43</sup> The spread of this modest and suspicious political technology that invested the interiority of its object, and in such a way produced and maintained him as a subject, allowed for exceptional advances in obtaining productivity and docility of the population. But the limitations of disciplinary power resided in its applicability only to densities of bodies, such as prisons or factories. For capitalism that expands into the social, the kind of utility needed from bodies is different; it demands not only productive capabilities but also consumptive capacity, and, within the network paradigm, capacity to produce useful information while experiencing one’s labor as pleasure. Capitalist political technologies needed to become even quieter and more suspicious, and its subject more calculable.

Perhaps, continuing with Foucault, we could call this more pervasive and expansive political technology bio-power, “a great bipolar technology – anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed towards the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life,” whose overarching concern is to “invest life through and through.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, bio-power

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<sup>39</sup> Foucault, “Subject and Power,” p. 214.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1991. (DP). p. 75-84.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 170.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 128.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 139.

combines both the control of densities of bodies (discipline) and the processes of populations (biopolitics) in order to seize the totality of human life at all levels. And while Foucault identified the beginnings of bio-power in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – and called it “an indispensable element in the development of capitalism”<sup>45</sup> – it is clear that this political technology did not emerge ready-made and complete, but expanded and morphed over time. During the following centuries, power increasingly shifted from the juridical sphere towards normativity, the concern with behavior and ways of life. The most ‘advanced’ point of bio-power was constituted by the deployment of sexuality, a mode of bio-power whose operations rested on the establishment of “the desire for sex – the desire to have it, to have access to it, to discover it, to liberate it, to articulate it in discourse, to formulate it in truth.”<sup>46</sup> The point Foucault makes here is not that previously humanity was unconcerned with sex or sexuality, but that under the auspices of bio-power it became one of the primary means of articulating the subject.

What makes bio-power distinctive from discipline and, in a sense, more advanced, can be found in the statement that bio-power “constituted “sex” itself as something desirable.”<sup>47</sup> The key here is the insight that power could not only organize bodies and their environment, not only control the conditions of discourse and speech, but also arrange the order of desire, because for sex to become the primary object of desirability, power must first of all be capable of investing the very mechanism that conditions desire. It was only by accessing the order of desire that sex, or anything else, could be erected as “the fictitious point” that “exerts enough charm on everyone for them to accept the hearing the grumble of death with in.”<sup>48</sup> In order to investigate how desire is captured by political technologies, we will soon have to go beyond Foucault. But before that, it might be worthwhile to clarify why power needs a fictitious point to function.

In “Discipline and Punish,” Foucault famously argued that power is neither a possession nor a prohibition – “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.”<sup>49</sup> As such, neither consent nor violence are what define power, because, as its most abstract, power is “an action upon an action,”<sup>50</sup> or “a total structure of actions brought to bear upon actions.”<sup>51</sup> We could say, with Deleuze, that in the Foucauldian analysis “an exercise of power shows up as an affect,”<sup>52</sup> because power functions as a relationship between the active capacities of subjects. In this sense power is not extrinsically imposed upon human relations, but exists as the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 141.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 156.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>50</sup> Foucault, “Subject and Power,” p. 219.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>52</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 60.

very grounds of the social. Institutions, such as the state, do not create power relations from above, but congeal specific power relations through increasing formalization and rationalization. The treatment of power relations as congealed encounters between subjects as actions – in simplest terms, power as the capacity to induce behavior – does not mean exploitation has to be accepted as inevitable, or that all forms of power are the same. Rather, it leads to a different set of questions: for what purpose, and in what ways is power exercised?

Simply because power is inevitable and productive of reality, does not mean that its operations are easily tolerable, especially in a world where the exercise of power is employed on behalf of capital and for the purposes of the extraction of surplus value. In fact, within disciplinary regimes – whose purpose, remember, was to increase the productive forces of the body along with the docility of the subject – “as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized.”<sup>53</sup> Throughout “Discipline and Punish” Foucault traces the correlation between the efficiency of power and its anonymity to the subject, but it is in “The Will to Knowledge” that he provides an explanation: “power is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.”<sup>54</sup> And as political technologies attempt to invest the subject not just in the factory or at the store, but everywhere, the fictitious point through which power makes itself acceptable must operate on an increasingly abstract level. Power cannot function as a purely cynical operation – it must have a truth to tell, or a spirit to articulate promises.

None of this means that, were we to strip away the mask of power, we would find reality lurking, because fiction for Foucault does not hold a pejorative sense. “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society,” writes Foucault, “but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline.’”<sup>55</sup> One could say that contemporary power techniques developed in conjunction with the emergence of capitalism function in a manner of self-fulfilling prophecies: insofar as the interiority of the individual subject is a byproduct of political technologies, it could be said to be a fiction; but insofar as there is no interiority prior to the exercise of power, the fiction is productive of reality. The consequence of such thought is, amongst others, the problematization of the base/superstructure dichotomy, because the economic reality and the ideological subject are not only mutually determined, but both rely on an abstract kind of production of subjectivity.

Although centuries in the making, the political technology of desire production emerged full force with the coming of age of capital. It must be noted that in the works of Foucault the

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<sup>53</sup> Foucault, DP, p. 193.

<sup>54</sup> Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 86.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault, DP, p. 194.

development of capitalism always functions as a kind of a sidenote, a passing comment that he makes at one point or another of this or that book as something that has to be said and gotten over with. Usually, the comment involves stating that capitalism was part of the bigger picture somewhere, but not directly related to Foucault's analysis or the development of a particular political technology. Indeed, it seems like the development of capitalism and bio-power may have followed different routes historically, but eventually the two could not avoid converging. The intertwining of capital and bio-power took place somewhere between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, because it was around that time that the state became coupled with pastoral power in place of the Church, while capitalism gradually subsumed the state for its purposes. Nowadays, capitalism and bio-power are closer together than ever before.

### *Desire, Deleuze, and Spinoza*

So far, it has been argued that, as capital subsumes into its circuits more and more portions of previously uncommodified social life, it needs to produce subjects capable of willingly operating in such circumstances. The production of subjects, however, is not an ideological smoke curtain that masks reality, but an integral element in actualizing reality. As capitalist reality becomes the dominant form of organizing social life, it requires more efficient political technologies that would invest the subject more thoroughly. To this extent, they must capture the subject at its most abstract, because the efficiency of power is symmetrical to its anonymity. Up to this point we have seen various authors hint that the most abstract level at which the subject can be invested with the truth of capital, its point of fiction, is the level of desire. And because most of these authors are, through different degrees of separation, related to Spinoza, this paper will now turn to a Spinozian conception of desire.

In order to get a leg up without getting entangled in complex discussions about different ontologies of desire, let us simply start off with a summary of Deleuzian take on desire provided by Nick Dyer-Witheford:

In the universe of Deleuze and Guattari, all social reality is constituted by desire. Desire is not good or bad, just productive and dynamic. It is fair to say that Deleuze and Guattari's desire is the principle of transformative, constitutive action that Marx called "labor" – prior to its appropriation with a structure of surplus-value extraction.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 180.

It might also be fair to say that another connection, not just to Marx but to Foucault, is also evident, insofar as desire defined as an abstract productive capacity is exactly what constitutes the subject as an action. Perhaps it would also be acceptable to state that such definition of desire has a strong intellectual kinship with Spinoza, and we would not err to terribly by introducing Frédéric Lordon's definition of the conatus as the "generic desiring force" that functions as "pure momentum, and has no definite direction."<sup>57</sup> In such 'Spinozian-Deleuzian-Guattarian-Foucauldian-Marxian' sense, which is here obviously presented in the most reductive sense, desire functions as the undifferentiated human productive capacity to act, which makes the basis of the social.

However, desire as such an undifferentiated force exists only on the level of the virtual; in actuality, it is always already coupled and channeled. To properly understand this, even in the most succinct terms, we have to take a quick plunge into the Spinozist world-view. The simplest way to put it is that, for Spinoza (and his contemporaries), "an animal, a thing, is never separable from its relations to the world."<sup>58</sup> Humans are no exception – our ways of living are the result of always being in the middle of the things, surrounded by relations and constantly colliding with others. Any and all behavior "is precisely the effect of affects, since an affect is something an affectation (an encounter with something) does to me (causing joy or sadness), and consequently what it makes me do."<sup>59</sup> We do not bring with us into life any set of predetermined preferences, goals, or modes of behavior, other than the most general capacity to act and persevere – the conatus, or desire. Whatever form, shape, or expression our desire takes is a consequence of coming into contact with things other than ourselves, of being affected by them and affecting them in turn. It is this encounter with the external through affectations that "points the desire in a particular direction and gives it an object for its concrete exertion."<sup>60</sup> The paradoxical result of such a procedure, already so different from classical conceptions that posit desire either entirely within the subject or entirely within the object, is that "desire is never of me and yet always mine, in other words, it never originates exclusively within desiring individuals but is nevertheless absolutely theirs."<sup>61</sup> To paraphrase further, it could be said that desire is exogenously determined but endogenously experienced, and the whole process is constituted by mechanisms that create the conditions of possibility of desire.

The picture of desire as a result of collisions between bodies (affectations), and the consequences they produce on one another (affects) may present a deceptively chaotic picture of the world. While it is true to a certain extent, desire is never free to romp. Taking Spinoza seriously entails keeping in mind that we are always in the middle of things; consequently, our desires are

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<sup>57</sup> Lordon, WSC, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 125.

<sup>59</sup> Lordon, WSC, p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p. 92.

already captured from the very start. “It is social structures,” writes Lordon, “. . . that configure desires and predetermine the strategies for attaining them.”<sup>62</sup> Desire does not come about ex nihilo, because we do not function in a social vacuum. On the contrary, the world is filled with social structures and political technologies whose purpose is to create regimes of desire, that is enumerations of objects for pursuit, modes of relating, and the affects that go with each.<sup>63</sup> This is not a purely contemporary phenomenon – remember, Foucault traced regiments for “care of the self” to the ancient Greeks – but what is different now is the involvement of capital and the advancement of political technologies aimed at controlling desire more efficiently.

Boltanski and Chiapello claimed that capitalism must subsume external cultural structures to find means of justification and its own limits of accumulation. A similar point is made by Lazzarato, that “capitalism has always required a territory beyond the market and the corporation and a subjectivity that is not that of an entrepreneur.”<sup>64</sup> It could be said that previously, instituting regimes of desire fell upon structures independent of capitalism, and that capitalism incorporated them for its purposes. However, as capital gradually expanded into the social through the commodity form in the period of Fordism, and subsequently during post-Fordism it continues to encroach upon communications, leisure, and the imagination, there is and less of an outside to capitalism. The notion of Marx, that capital is primarily a social relation, today is becoming increasingly true.

Capitalism is shifting from a mechanism that swallows the outside to one that aims to produce the inside; that is, “it turns to moulding the desires and dispositions from which actions spring.”<sup>65</sup> While it is contestable whether we are at the point where there is no outside to capitalism, the regime of desire of capital is certainly becoming the dominant one. In order to tease out the most consequential implication of this change, we should inquire as to the ultimate desire of capital itself, the one it attempts to produce in its subjects. There is a danger here of anthropomorphizing, of reifying an abstract system, and of presenting capital as an almost conscious and omnipotent force. That, of course, would be nonsense; instead, the paper would like to use the definition provided by Nick Dyer-Witheford, that capitalism is “a-process-without-a-subject-but-with-a-purpose,” namely that of endless accumulation.<sup>66</sup> Therefore it could be said that ultimately, in spite of limitations and contestations and such, the desire of capital is capitalism itself, and the purpose of its regime of desire would be to produce a subject who too desires nothing but capitalism. What an easy task it would be to forecast the future and maintain promises, if one could just know in advance the subject of tomorrow and that his desires are entirely co-linear with those of the promise maker!

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 49-52.

<sup>64</sup> Lazzarato, SAM p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Lordon, WSC, p. 38.

<sup>66</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 68.

For various reasons it is dubious whether such a proposition is possible, but it is certainly being attempted, and not without some success; after all, it is nowadays easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.<sup>67</sup>

At this point Nietzsche can once again be heard exclaiming, “but how much all of this presupposes!” Indeed, the more this paper tries to assuage presuppositions, the more feverishly new ones pop up. Dealing with Spinoza, Deleuze, and capitalism is the philosophical equivalent of playing whack-a-mole! But one should never be daunted, and the paper will now plough on to the final leg of its theoretical section.

### *Subjectivation and Interiority*

It has been stated that contemporary capital aims to produce the interiority of the subject. However, within the postmodern Marxist philosophy, such discussions are a complex matter, because the lines between interior and exterior, subjective and objective, are blurry at best. So before moving on and introducing new points, let us parse and investigate some of the implications of what has already been said.

While discussing Foucault and power, an observation by Deleuze was cited, that power shows up an affect. In the simplest terms it means that power is “an art of making others do things.”<sup>68</sup> An obvious enough statement, but one that takes on additional significance if we remember that power is not a possession exercised in limited circumstances, but the general condition of how the social works; power is productive. That is why, throughout his works, Foucault insists that power is not a limitation, but only presents itself as such to remain tolerable. Instead of limiting, power acts on desire – the soul, the seat of habits – and makes us act. Power in this sense is an imposition of a master-desire, an attempt at co-linearizing the desire of the subject to match the demands of the overall process. Therefore, to mobilize participation on behalf of capital means nothing other than capturing desire in order to get “bodies to set themselves in motion in the service of the capturer”<sup>69</sup> through the manipulation of affects. And now we can finally unravel Foucault’s statement that the efficiency of power is symmetrical to its anonymity and masking of itself: for the subject, by necessary illusion of consciousness, mistakes the effects for causes and construes itself as the cause of its own actions;\* therefore, power must represent itself as something else – a limitation, a prohibition, a hidden sexual truth – in order to maintain the illusion of the subject as being endowed with autonomous desire.

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<sup>67</sup> Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Lordon, WSC, p. 61.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

Pierre Bourdieu's study into the real estate habits of the modern French middle-class, titled "Social Structures of the Economy," is perhaps the most sublime example of the whole mechanism at work. The subjects experience a desire to own a house, unaware of how the mythology of the private dwelling is historically determined, commercially encouraged, and propagated through public policy; all the subjects are aware of is dreaming of a house. They bring this dream of a singular home to professional builders, who, through negotiations, sales tactics, and a ruthless imposition of the reality principle, substitute it with mass-produced, catalogue version, carbon-copy of a house. And so the subjects end up with a home they did not originally want, often in a location that is very far from optimal, typically saddled with mortgages for years to come. Yet throughout the whole endeavor, from beginning to end, they see themselves as masters of their own desire. Incredible!

It can only be affirmed again that desire is paradoxically always ours and yet never of us. And our behavior, strategies of action, and modes of relating to one another – the supposed kernel of us as individuals – is a necessary product of political technologies, "of the incessant work that society carries out on itself."<sup>70</sup> Such notions appear to profoundly question the traditional metaphysics of subjectivity and its ideas of autonomous agents, universal preferences, and freedom of choice; instead, we are left to affirm that the "interior [of a subject] is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior."<sup>71</sup> But where does this leave us? If desire is not of us or of objects, but a result of an encounter between the two in social reality, and agency is the product of the myopia of consciousness, what does this all add up to?

If such analysis deprivileges both subjects (they are acted on) and structures (subjects act back), if it almost makes the social disappear, at least in its classical conception, it does so in order to reveal a world of social machines. Although the notion of social machines originates with Marx and his analysis of 19<sup>th</sup> century factory labor, the concept was greatly expanded by the Italian Marxist currents of *operaismo* and *autonomia* in the seventies, and could be said to have been given its general philosophical contours by Deleuze and Guattari in the eighties.<sup>72</sup> It began as an exploration of how factory labor affected the workers, who entered into relations of production with machines, and how factory work required broader social reorganization, not just on the level of workers themselves who had to readjust to the rhythms of production, but in other social spheres as well, such as labor reproduction at home. "The factory is," writes Gerald Raunig, " . . . the container of partial machines, their assemblage . . . it grows into a machine that is more than the sum of its parts."<sup>73</sup> In other words, the factory does not stay confined to itself, but extends into the social,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 1988. p. 125.

<sup>72</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 65-69; 180-184.

<sup>73</sup> Raunig, FKC, p. 21.

demanding its reorganization as a *fabbrica diffusa*. Such reorganization of the social functions objectively, in terms of arrangements of bodies, housing, schedules and sleeping and waking hours, but also subjectively, in terms of habits and behaviors. Seen this way, the factory becomes much less a physical location and more of a composition involving “multi-dimensional exchanges among bodies, apparatuses and their environments.”<sup>74</sup> Put differently, the factory appears as a social machine.

Conceptualizing society in terms of machinic thinking involves deprivileging the notion of the subject as the locus of action in favour of subjectivity as a complex assemblage of bodies, both human and non-human, that condition the possibilities of acting. This is, in general, not something particular to capitalism; in the Spinoza-inspired thought of Deleuze and Guattari, “any assemblage of desire – at a subjective or social level – is a “machine.””<sup>75</sup> The particularity of capitalist machinism has everything to do with its factory logic: increasing the productivity and docility of bodies by capturing and moulding their desire. And as post-Fordist capitalism expands into the previously independent social spheres, the factory serves as a metaphor that can “translate oppressive aspects of mechanical production contexts into the largely immaterial spheres of culture and knowledge production.”<sup>76</sup> The unhappy effects of mechanic factory labor are common currency: the alienation of the Marxist subject both from himself and his labor, the anonymization and componentiality of social life explored by the sociology of knowledge, the increasing surveillance and regimentation of bodies analyzed by Foucault, and so on.

Therefore, based on the factory logic, we can already identify one aspect of how contemporary capital functions: by engaging the purely “functional and operational” forces of bodies (broadly conceived), it treats the individual not as a specified subject, whether in gender or political or any terms, but as “a gear, a cog, a component part in the “business” and “financial system” assemblages, in the media assemblages, and the “welfare-state” assemblage and its collective institutions.”<sup>77</sup> This is the mode of capitalism that brings human and technical elements into relations of production, turning particulars into abstractions and flows, decomposing identities, and deterritorializing symbolic orders and regimes of desire. It is this mode that stokes most ardently the forces of resistance and dissent, because it breaches the illusion of the sovereign self and provokes sad affects. In postmodern Marxism, this primarily non-discursive process of capitalism is called machinic enslavement, or subservience.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 181.

<sup>76</sup> Raunig, FKC, p. 92.

<sup>77</sup> Lazzarato, SAM, p. 25.

If such blatant subsumption of productive forces was all capitalism could accomplish, it would be fairly easy to resist. However, in order to compensate it must have a spirit to articulate promises, regimes of desire that would mobilize the joyful affects, and a subject that would passionately accept whatever capitalism had to offer. Unlike machinic subservience, which is primarily non-discursive and functions through asignifying semiotics, this other mode of capital employs discourse and signification: “By assigning an individual a subjectivity, an identity, sex, profession, nationality, and so forth, social subjection produces and distributes places and roles within and for the social division of labor. Through language, it creates a signifying and representational web from which no one escapes.”<sup>78</sup> It is the purpose of social subjection, also called subjugation, to employ discourse and various means of its propagation – media, social sciences, psychoanalysis – to reterritorialize the symbolic and fix regimes of desire, to assign hierarchies and roles with the vast machines of production. The most efficient way to accomplish this is through the mobilization of joyful affects – we are the entrepreneurs, mobility and precarity is our game! – but failing that, there is also the possibility of negative subjection – you are the indebted man, and must bear your own guilt.<sup>79</sup>

Together, the complimentary practices of machinic subservience and social subjection make up the overall subjectivation process of contemporary capitalism. Accordingly, subjectivity does not originate exclusively with language, but instead also involves non-linguistic and even non-human elements. Nor does subjectivity reside solely with the individual, insofar as she is subservient to processes bigger than herself, her actions are facilitated and conditioned by technological mediums, and her behavior a result of affectations she neither chooses nor is aware of. Instead, subjectivity and agency are displaced from the ‘autonomous self’ towards assemblages made up of multiplicity of components, making us capable of acting only as much as the conditions of the possibility of action allow us to be.

Even if it is true that “it is in the work apparatus that we first experience the dual processing of subjectivity,” the factory has long moved beyond the large buildings of red bricks that used to be its exclusive sites of operation, and expanded into various spheres of society, to the point where today the dual regime of subjectivity “is how every apparatus and institution works.”<sup>80</sup> But the displacement of agency and the expansion of social machines is not meant as a lament for some lost originary unity; if we peel away capitalism, we will find no “virginal, immaculate subjectivities”<sup>81</sup> lying comatose like sleeping beauties, awaiting the kiss of the revolutionary prince. Assemblages and

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

their effects are the 'nature' of the world: "The forces with man enter into relations with forces from the outside, those of silicon which supersedes carbon, or genetic components which supersede the organism, or agrammaticalities which supersede the signifier."<sup>82</sup> According to Deleuze, the philosophical concept of "man" has always referred to complex compositions of relations between multiple human and non-human forces. Capitalism did not invent assemblages; rather, it could be said to have intensified the machinic nature of social life for the purposes of productivity and surplus value extraction.

This is one of the reasons why capitalism has been so difficult to overcome: not just because of its tendency towards mobility and transformation, but because it is a combination of diagrammatic assemblages that is not reducible to specific individuals, groups, or institutions; capitalism is difficult to locate. And it is through these diagrams, both "molar and molecular, individual and preindividual, representational and pre-representation"<sup>83</sup> that capital as a process-without-a-subject-but-with-a-purpose creates the "reliable man," the subject who knows, implicitly and explicitly, that submission to capital is in his best interest.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, the efficacy of the subjectivation processes of contemporary capital relies on the "merging of discipline society and control society" – the molecular and the molar, subjection and subservience – in a technique of "modulation."<sup>85</sup> Modulation could be said to be the way in which capitalism attempts to carry out seemingly contradictory processes, such as deterritorialization and reterritorialization, in a complimentary, non-dialectical fashion within the confines of a single body, whether individual or social. Actually, it may be more useful to conceptualize modulation not in terms of bipolarity or dualism, but as two parallel lines that, instead of existing in tension, never overlap or come into direct contact; rather, they make up the same body, the capitalist body as an assemblage, and affect it with varying degrees of intensity.

The parallel functioning of modulation allows us to understand the relationship between the active forecast and the promise. The active forecast, insofar as it is an attempt by capital to grasp a particular virtuality and realize it in the actual, entails "a constant reforming and deforming of our times,"<sup>86</sup> to the point where "you never stop beginning, and at the same time you never finish learning."<sup>87</sup> Capitalism is constantly shifting the very ground under our feet in order to stay one step ahead of the opposition and diminution of profits, and it does so through the use of asignifying semiotics – "stock listings, currencies, corporate accounting, national budgets, computer languages,

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<sup>82</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 109.

<sup>83</sup> Lazzarato, SAM, p. 32.

<sup>84</sup> Raunig, FK, p. 94.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 46.

mathematics, scientific functions and equations”<sup>88</sup> – that bypass significations and representations and act directly on the real circumstances of people. Such actively morphous terrain produces fertile grounds for self-fulfilling prophecies of vested social sciences, media, and other discourses that promise us that what we have is what we wanted all along. When the conditions of the possibility of action and change are reigned in, man is indeed calculable, the future forecastable, and promises easily mendible.

All this theory comes together all too neatly; so neatly, in fact, that its reductions and omissions are glaringly obvious. While capitalist subjectivation attempts to function as a parallelism, and sometimes succeeds, for the most part it does not proceed without contradictions and resistance. Actually, the point of resistance is what is missing the most in this paper – without it, capital falsely appears as an irresistible and immovable force, and one risks taking up residence in the hotel of doom that the members of the Frankfurt school used to frequent. The capitalist reality principle, however, sometimes prevents one from exploring all angles before the publication deadline. But, so long as one keeps in mind that resistance is always present and primary, the analysis of power from the point of view of capital can reveal insights about its functioning that in better days might contribute to the struggle against it.

## **Part 2: Against the Flood – Discourse, Meaning, and Technology**

We are, supposedly, besieged by language, enmeshed in speech, swarmed by commentary, and no longer abreast of words and things. In such conditions, why would one speak at all? Perhaps one should focus instead on contributing to silence, in the hopes of evading, if only for an instant, the endless droning of words, in order to take a deep draught of stillness and, purified, catch a glimpse of how the world used to look before.

Before what, exactly? Possibly before cheap technological means for creating, storing, and sharing data had “placed far more information within our reach than ever before,” to the point where “information overload has become a permanent affliction.”<sup>89</sup> Or perhaps before Information Theory supposedly divorced meaning from communication, turning the world into an embodiment of Borges’ Library of Babel, in whose “mirrored galleries, on countless shelves, can be found everything and nothing . . . [the] perfect case of information glut.”<sup>90</sup> Definitely before this information deluge brought about “a general breakdown in psychic tranquillity and social purpose”

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<sup>88</sup> Lazzarato, SAM, p. 80.

<sup>89</sup> Carr, Nicholas. *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way We Think, Read, and Remember*, 2010. p. 170.

<sup>90</sup> Gleick, James. *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood*, 2012. p. 373.

through the decline of social institutions responsible for information control such as the family, the Church, or the party.<sup>91</sup> Before the pluralization of life-worlds engendered “a permanent identity crisis, a condition conducive to considerable nervousness.”<sup>92</sup> Finally, before the proliferation of “endless narratives of debunkery and counter-debunkery” castrated critique and the role of experts and intellectuals.<sup>93</sup> What a sad state of affairs! It is a wonder the butcher and the baker still provideth, and the sun still rises.

The above is but a sampling of the growing literature on the modern condition of information overload. Although the proponents of this line of thought tend to be, in keeping with the pluralization of life-worlds and loss of psychic stability, a very diverse lot, one can find amongst them a common thread of concern: there has been too much of something, and not enough of something else. Such an equation sounds rather vague, but that is because of the diversity of terminology in describing the two variables. Nonetheless, one could probably single out ‘information’ and ‘meaning’ as the two most frequently recurring significations, with the supposed rise of the former and diminution of the latter. The consequences of such disequilibrium, we are told, are nothing short of disaster: society is schizophrenic, discourse has lost its anchoring, and any possibility of making sense of the world has fled the orbit.

The definitions for both ‘information’ and ‘meaning’ tend to be rather shaky, however. The former has a narrow technical definition of bits and bytes, but the critics deplore it, tending instead towards a much broader and poetic use. At the same time, the latter is given cosmic significance without a clear outline and is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘narratives’ or ‘grand narratives’ or ‘meta-narratives’, but in general ‘meaning’ tends to stand as a nostalgic monument to a lost world of beautiful unity.

A cogent example of the information glut position and its struggles can be found in an essay “Deciderization 2007”<sup>94</sup> by David Foster Wallace. In this oft-quoted text, Wallace refers to information as “the seething static of every particular thing and experience . . . the tsunami of available facts, context, and perspective.” This explosion of Total Noise demands an “anentropic and mostly exclusionary” function, a kind of “professional filtering/winnowing . . . that we citizens and consumers now depend on more and more.”<sup>95</sup> The problem, it appears, is a proliferation of speakers and things said, a proliferation that has overpowered principles of exclusion, creating the impression of an overabundance of discourse without sense – a state where (discursively) anything goes.

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<sup>91</sup> Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 1993. p. 72.

<sup>92</sup> Berger et al. *The Homeless Mind*, 1974. p. 74.

<sup>93</sup> Andrejevic, Mark. *Infoglut: How Too Much Information Is Changing the Way We Think and Know*, 2013. (INF) p. 90.

<sup>94</sup> Wallace, David Foster. “Deciderization 2007—A Special Report” in *Both Flesh and Not*, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302 – 307.

If the tone of this essay has so far been a little hostile towards the aforementioned proponents of the information glut approach, let the matter be clarified: on the level of the apparent, their analysis is entirely correct – there does seem to be a great expansion of ‘information’ in the broad sense of the term. However, this paper does not agree with the implication or conclusion that the contemporary state of affairs constitutes a lack of meaning or sense in the world, because, as Foucault argued in the “*Archaeology of Knowledge*,” “*everything is never said*”<sup>96</sup> – there is always control of discourse in the sense that it is positively delimited, and even Total Noise is a form of organization. Bringing the analysis of the information glut under the auspices of Foucauldian thinking and critique makes sense, insofar as the exceptionally expansive categories of ‘information’ and ‘meaning’ more often than not refer to discourse and its (supposed lack of) rarification. Moreover, it is the position of this essay that accepting the apparent surplus of discourse and lack of filtering at face value would leave unexposed the power relations underneath, and might even contribute towards their further obfuscation.

The force attributed to discourse by the proponents of the information glut is mighty indeed, if the proliferation of discourse can cause all the aforementioned symptoms – nervousness, loss of psychic tranquillity, social instability, permanent identity crisis, and so on. “But,” counters Foucault, “it seems to me a certain fear hides behind this apparent supremacy accorded, this apparent logophilia.” He continues:

There is undoubtedly in our society . . . a profound logophobia, a sort of dumb fear of these events, of this mass of spoken things, of everything that could be violent, discontinuous, querulous, disordered even and perilous in it, of the incessant, disorderly buzzing of discourse.<sup>97</sup>

Instead of being taken in by this fear of discourse, Foucault proposes we look past it, not in order to discover a deep hidden meaning or to uncover a conspiracy, but to investigate the principles for the organization of discourse. Such an inquiry would lead one to find that “these taboos, these barriers, thresholds and limits were deliberately disposed in order, at least partly, to master and control the great proliferation of discourse, in such a way to relieve its richness of its most dangerous elements; to organize its disorder so as to skate rounds its most uncontrollable elements.”<sup>98</sup> To understand how disorder may function as an ordering force in terms of discourse, one must take into account that rarification and affirmation – exclusion of and incitement to discourse – are complimentary

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<sup>96</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2010. p. 119.

<sup>97</sup> Foucault, Michel. “Discourse on Language” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (DL) p. 228-229.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p. 228.

rather than mutually exclusive functions. Sometimes “there is more . . . in order that there may be less.”<sup>99</sup>

Foucault explores this relation further in the “Will to Knowledge.” Writing about the state of discourse regarding sex since the seventeenth century up to the present, Foucault claims that while there was “policing of statements” and “control of enunciation” which constituted “a whole restrictive economy,” there took place at the same time “a veritable discursive explosion,” “the multiplication of discourses concerning sex,” and an “institutional incitement to talk about it.”<sup>100</sup> What the argument made by Foucault points to is that rarification works on a different level from the content of discourse, which consists of words, phrases, and propositions; instead, rarification affects that which makes the content itself possible, the conditions of enunciation. What needs to be established, then, is the mechanism by which subterranean rarification and apparent proliferation interconnect.

“From the depths of the Middle Ages,” recounts Foucault, “a man was mad if his speech could not be said to form part of the common discourse of men.”<sup>101</sup> Conforming to some at least implicit form of enunciation has always been a measure of inclusion and exclusion. But whereas in the Middle Ages the organizing principle of rarification was the opposition between madness and reason, it is now increasingly based on “the prodigious machinery of the will to truth” and its corollary institutions and disciplines that define the procedures and modes for expressing the true. In fact, expressing truth about oneself, the society, and the world is both a limitation and a drive. That which proliferates and multiplies, then, is the number of subject positions and domains of objects, but always within the boundary of the true which defines the conditions of what, and how, is to be said.

What allows for the reconciliation of the two seemingly opposed functions of rarification and affirmation under the mechanism of the true is the emergence of a new form of power in the eighteenth century, one that is not based on prohibition but regulation of behaviour through normativity: “the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it also individualizes . . . the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces . . . all the shading of individual different.”<sup>102</sup> For Foucault, normativity as an organizing principle is inseparable from surveillance and knowledge, with the former revealing for examination, analysis, and classification vast domains of objects which can then be neatly categorized by the machine of truth production. But whereas in “Discipline and Punish” Foucault

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 223.

<sup>100</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Will To Knowledge*, 1998. p. 17-18.

<sup>101</sup> Foucault, DL, 217.

<sup>102</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (DP). p. 184.

focused on normativity achieved through the organization of bodies, the first part of the “History of Sexuality” seems to explore the role and purpose of discursive surveillance and the imposition of the norm through incitement to discourse.

### *Discursive Surveillance*

Subjectivation functions by establishing a relationship of the self to the self.<sup>103</sup> This is achieved by non-discursive disciplinary techniques that invest the body, and by discursive pastoral techniques of self-affectation via the mediation of a representative of power. But according to Maurizio Lazzarato, in the production of subjectivity discourse also plays another, ‘existential’ role, because “the subject is not constituted through a pre-existent linguistic structure but through a self-positioning, a self-affirmation, matched with words, others, and the world.”<sup>104</sup> Discourse functions as a placement mechanism that locks one into a specific position in relation to processes bigger than oneself, and in relation to other cogs. And while words, phrases, and propositions are involved, the semantic content is secondary to the transformative or existential mechanism of discourse, which is only partially discursive. Put differently, discourse cannot be fully understood without its non-discursive counter-parts. All of this allows Lazzarato to make the claim that “discursive machines are something other than language.”<sup>105</sup> The purpose of such discursive machines is not content production per se but repetition, because “repetition gives consistency to the relation to the self” and “produces a change in subjective state.”<sup>106</sup> It is becoming clear how the discursive surveillance works: by subjecting everyone to discourse, it locks and maintains the subjects in their positioning within the diagrams of power while at the same time rendering them visible and burying further the rarification of the actual machine of truth.

Such discursive panopticism meets all the criteria set out by Foucault for normative power: it reveals while anonymizing power itself, it functions as a network of relations instituted between subjects, and as a consequence of the two it transfers the maintenance of the self in relation to the Norm upon the self. Therefore, in today’s normative society,

access to shared semiotics is not only not denied, it is imperative: one must join in, one must take an active part. The exclusion of the governed and the neutralization of their singular speech result from the inclusion of their form of expression within a given

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<sup>103</sup> The discursive aspect Foucault’s subjectivation theory is explored by Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power*.

<sup>104</sup> Lazzarato, Maurizio. *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, 2014. (SAM). p. 192.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 169.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 208.

common semiotic space. In surveillance societies, a shortage of speech is not the problem but rather its overabundance, the consensus and conformism that its circulation presupposes and produces.<sup>107</sup>

The stance adopted by Lazzarato is radically different from the problems usually provided by information glut proponents; in fact, the problems are almost diametrically opposite. There is not too much pluralization, but rather too much homogeneity imposed by the levelling of modes of expression. And there is not an absence of meaning as a sort of vacuum or chaos, but rather the constant incitement to discourse and the discursive refrain it produces tends to anchor people even more firmly to their social positions. Underneath the apparent uncertainty, tight mechanisms of control abound.

“The point is not to devalue language and signifying semiotics,” writes Lazzarato,<sup>108</sup> but rather, as opposed to what linguists and analytic philosophy do, to place ourselves between the discursive and non-discursive in order to make enunciation and subjectivation grow from the middle. The discursive and non-discursive processes – social subjection and machinic enslavement – must be grasped not only in relation to one another, but also as complimentary functions within a larger process of subjectivation. In other words, instead of treating the discursive and non-discursive in linear or dialectical fashion, one must instead approach them diagrammatically.

According to Deleuze, a diagram “is a machine that is almost blind and mute, even though it makes others see and speak.”<sup>109</sup> The diagram, or what Foucault called *dispositif*, is a set of relations between institutions and discourses, an arrangement of spatial, temporal, and linguistic elements whose purpose is to produce behaviours by assigning individuals speaking positions, modes of speech, and habits of behaviour. The most famous diagram identified by Foucault was the aforementioned Panopticon, an abstract machine with a purpose of creating docile and productive bodies through techniques of surveillance. But one should not see the Panopticon as a special case, “because there are as many diagrams as there are social fields in history.”<sup>110</sup> Autonomist Marxists, for example, might argue that the factory is precisely such a diagram, one that is moving increasingly from the production of physical commodities towards realms of culture and knowledge. Or one could speak about the Plantation as another diagram, one that still characterizes a lot of contemporary (and immaterial) production that is supposed to have become much more egalitarian.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 108.

<sup>109</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. Foucault, 1988. (F). p. 30.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

Therefore, the diagram is not a static representation; rather, it is eminently functional because it “produces a new kind of reality, a new model of truth”<sup>111</sup> by organizing the microphysics of relations. The peculiarity of diagrams stems from the fact that these abstract schemes of arranging different elements for the production of subjectivity, while existing in many particular situations, have no constituent subject behind them to refer to. Instead, writes Deleuze, “the diagram acts as a non-unifying immanent cause . . . a cause which is realized, integrated, and distinguished in its effects.”<sup>112</sup> One could paraphrase that a diagram is intentional but non-subjective, that is, it produces real conditions of action but does not itself ‘act’ the way a subject would. If this seems far-fetched, it is only because we, immersed in the metaphysics of the sovereign subject, tend to largely underestimate the human capacity for instituting independently functioning processes that are bigger than ourselves.

This paper has so far attempted to challenge the superficially phenomenological approach employed by the proponents of the information glut theory, arguing instead that discursive and non-discursive practices should be treated as parts of a more intricate topography of power. Specifically, it has been said that the discursive information glut does not constitute a situation where meaning or sense have abandoned the world, because there is always meaning, if by meaning we understand not some transcendent truth but principles for the control and organization of discourse within the production of subjectivity. But there is more to be said: for what purpose, or based on which interests is discourse organized?

### *Andrejevic and the Liberal Fallacy*

A polemical and interesting version of the information overload argument is presented by Mark Andrejevic in his book “Infoglut: How Too much Information is Changing the Way We Think and Know.” Hopefully without doing too much violence, the argument can be summarized as follows: as the amount of mediated information – “that which we self-consciously reflect upon as information presented to us in constructed and contrived fashion”– increases substantially, so does our “reflexive recognition of the constructed and partial nature of representation.”<sup>113</sup> The result is twofold: on the one hand, a denigration of discourse and its capacity to convey the truth ensues, creating atmosphere of savvy mistrust where critique and expertise are radically deprivileged, upsetting the traditional model of speaking truth to power; on the other hand, there “emerges a series of substitutes for discursive expressions: bets, blood flows in the brain, involuntary micro-

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>113</sup> Andrejevic, INF, p. 3.

expressions, and aggregations of quantified sentiment correlated with desired outcomes,”<sup>114</sup> which are meant to “bypass mediation and its vagaries by gaining direct access to a prediscursive “truth” not yet caught up in the tangles of representation.”<sup>115</sup> The upshot is a reconfiguration of power relations, because “the thorough debunking of deliberation and dismantling of truth claims”<sup>116</sup> encourages the continuation of the status quo while stymieing effective opposition, and the fantasy of “direct access to knowledge in the real”<sup>117</sup> produces new cleavages of exploitation between those with access to data and those without.

Notwithstanding Andrejevic’s rather simplistic tendency to ascribe the blame for the supposed demise of truth exclusively to the United States’ far-right media, he seems to intuit correctly that the proliferation of discourses and data mining techniques is less the result of some existential lack brought about by technology, and more a consequence of changes in the configuration of power and knowledge. One could say that Andrejevic, like many theoreticians of the information glut, identifies correctly many apparent issues, but has little to say about the order of causality. In fact, Andrejevic’s analysis falls short on at least two counts.

First, by attributing so much reflexive capacity to the subjects of media, he buys into what Frédéric Lordon calls “the metaphysics of subjectivity,” the whole notion of there being autonomous individuals endowed with free will to make sovereign choices. Under such a premise, “voluntary servitude is bound to remain an insoluble enigma,”<sup>118</sup> because while the critic identifies how undesirable, negative, or anxiety-inducing the current situation is, he must nonetheless maintain that the subjects ‘choose’ this state of affairs, for else why would these autonomous agents persist in misery? Critique then “can go no further politically than a call for raising consciousness . . . what it is absolutely incapable of producing is a causal understanding.”<sup>119</sup> Identifying the culprits responsible for an implied false consciousness becomes the game of the day, something that the privileged intellectual can do. What such an analysis ignores entirely is how subjects and their behaviour are a matter of production within a larger machinic arrangement wherein the relationship between the individual and the media is itself but one constituted part; in other words, while it can describe apparent reality in great detail, its conditions of possibility remain mysterious.

The second issue in the order of causality in Andrejevic’s analysis has to do with the relation between discourse and the so-called tendencies for direct access to the real. There seems to be a chain of events: first came the glut, then the depreciation of discourse and symbolic efficiency, and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 73.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p. 146.

<sup>118</sup> Lordon, Frédéric. *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, 2014. p. 13.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

finally attempts to “cut through the clutter.” This is a simplification, but the point is that for Andrejevic, the proliferation of discourse and recedence of narratives is what causes direct data techniques to come to the fore. Such an analysis is only possible, however, if one focuses on truth as an independent and primary organizing factor, and not as element within a larger configuration of capital, profit, *and* truth. Reading Andrejevic it seems like the billion euro profits extracted from data mining and subsequent trading are only a sidenote to the constituent, primordial process of truth and meaning building. First came the populist postmodernism, and then somebody accidentally made some money out of it while looking for a new way to speak the Truth.

### *The Demands of Capital*

In order not to get lost in superficial phenomenology of discourse, we must inquire into what is behind the apparent in terms of organization. The axiom animating the upcoming part of the essay is that we live in a world to a large extent structured by capital and its demands. Therefore, to understand the role of discourse, we should have an idea how capitalism works. For that, it is necessary to survey the relationship between labour, value, and technology.

“As the classics of political economy tell us,” write Hardt and Negri, “all value [could] be traced back to labor as its source.”<sup>120</sup> No matter what specific economic activity is engaged in, that which creates value is the productive human capacity at the bottom of it. Therefore, in the sense that capital tends “to subordinate all activity to the law of value,” it could be said to be “a system that operates by a process of massive reduction – Marx called it “abstraction” – that perceives and processes the world solely as an array of economic factors.”<sup>121</sup> This totalizing and reductionist logic of capital could not be accomplished without money, the “necessary condition for the separation and distillation of abstract out of concrete labour.”<sup>122</sup> With all of this in mind, the value extraction upon which capitalism rests can be seen as an immense mechanism of levelling specificities into generalizations by way of subjecting any thing to exchange value represented by money and enacted by its corollaries of privatization, commodification, and marketization.

The aforementioned classical economists – Smith, Ricardo, Mill – „all depicted capitalism gradually running out of steam until it lapsed into a ‚stationary state‘ with zero rate of accumulation.”<sup>123</sup> The classical perspective tended to find these limits to accumulation outside of capital, for example in the finitude of nature and resources. For Marx and his legatees, on the other

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<sup>120</sup> Hardt, Michael, and Negri, Antonio. *Commonwealth*, 2011. p. 312.

<sup>121</sup> Dyer-Witthford, Nick. *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggles in High-Technology Capitalism*, 1999. p. 9. (CBM)

<sup>122</sup> Harvey, David. *The Limits to Capital*, 2007. p. 16. (TLC)

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p. 177.

hand, the limits to capital lie entirely within its own logic and cannot be understood separately from the production of surplus value. According to Dyer-Witheford, “Marxist theory of surplus value holds that the source of surplus value is the exploitation of living labor.”<sup>124</sup> This is because living labor as a commodity under the wage relationship, that is a labor power, can “produce greater value than it itself has.”<sup>125</sup> In other words, by extracting more value from labor power than its remuneration is worth, capital produces surplus value, which allows for the Marxian argument that “the rate of profit varies . . . positively with a rising rate of exploitation.”<sup>126</sup> The limits to capital would have to come from a diminished capacity to expropriate surplus value.

A particularly important variable in the relation between capital, labor, and surplus value extraction is technology. “Marxists have always emphasized that capital is a system that tends to supplant living labor with dead labor,” argues Dyer-Witheford, “replacing the variable capital of human workers with the fixed capital of machinery.”<sup>127</sup> The reasons behind this are debatable, but the main imperatives could be summarized as the need to expand productivity and keep the labor struggles in check. On the one hand, introducing advanced machinery and more efficient organizational techniques allows individual capitalists to attain temporary advantage over competition in the short-term. On the other hand, technological innovations can enable further deskilling of labor and even outright replacement of rebellious workers – machines do not dissent.

The limits to this strategy come from the fact that fixed capital of machines devalues quicker over time, and the labor force requires a modicum of income in order to consume the goods produced. The upshot is that “individual capitalists, acting in their own self-interest under social relations of capitalist production and exchange, generate a technological mix that threatens further accumulation, destroys the potentiality for balanced growth, and puts the reproduction of capitalist class as a whole in jeopardy.”<sup>128</sup> The technological changes in capitalist societies, all checks notwithstanding, play a volatile and contested role, leading ultimately towards stagnating rates of profit as living labor is replaced by machines, consequently fanning social unrest.

The contradictions at the heart of capital between labor, technology, and surplus value result in crisis, or “forced re-structuring of the labour process so as to bring the system as a whole back into something that roughly conforms to the conditions of balanced accumulation.”<sup>129</sup> Since, however, de-technologization does not, or at least has not happened yet, the re-structuring of labor and accumulation tends to result in increasing subsumption of previously unterritorialized spheres of

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<sup>124</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 44.

<sup>125</sup> Harvey, TLC, p. 24.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 177.

<sup>127</sup> Dyer-Witheford, CBM, p. 179.

<sup>128</sup> Harvey, TLC, p. 188.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p. 135.

social life. And, as Hardt and Negri argue, under the conditions of post-Fordism, the expropriation of surplus value “takes place not so much from the individual worker . . . but more clearly from the field of the social, operating on the level of information flows, communication networks, social codes, linguistic innovations, and practices of affects and passions.”<sup>130</sup> With the rise of finance markets and immaterial production, capital moves into a whole new realm of abstraction where the capture of surplus value takes place increasingly further and further from the realm of ‘classical’ industry, to the point where all sorts of data mining and trading techniques treat individuals as variables of information to be processed.

In this light the argument by Andrejevic – that direct access to the real through affects, betting, and data gathering techniques is a result of devaluation of symbolic efficiency – seems to miss the crucial dimension that capital plays in organizing the relation between discursive and non-discursive practices, that is between social subjection and machinic subservience. A good example is provided by Gerald Raunig, who argues that “the interplay of the two regimes is particularly evident in the phenomenon of the creative industries . . . whereby the components of machinic subservience grow in significance due to a surplus of subjectivation.”<sup>131</sup> In other words, the particular effectiveness of the discourse of creativity and entrepreneurialism enabled the expansion of capitalist surplus value production techniques into spheres previously resistant to it. In a sense one could see here both an affirmation and a contestation of Andrejevic’s argument: on the one hand discourse has primacy, because its proliferation brings in its wake an increase in machinic exploitation; on the other hand, the expansion of machinic subservience does not happen as an unfortunate consequence of discursive glut, but as a concomitant process.

To conclude, this essay has attempted to raise questions against simplistic treatments of the relationship between discourse, meaning, and technology. The proponents of information glut theory tend to argue that technological innovations have, almost in and of themselves, exploded the existential foundations of the social by removing limits to discourse. Against this view the essay proposed that the expansion of discursive content can go hand-in-hand with even more dominant control of the principles of rarification that delimit conditions of enunciation. The other point the essay contested was that proliferation of discourse results in the devaluation of discourse in favour of data-based techniques for truth-production. It was contested that, under post-Fordist capitalism, technology-driven expansion of machinic subsumption can work in rapport with proliferation of discourse. In fact, if discourse is the existentially stabilizing activity that allows the subject to articulate itself and its relations to the world, that is to become situated, while the relentless expansion of capital into new realms of abstraction is the alienating nullification of any specificity,

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<sup>130</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, p. 140.

<sup>131</sup> Raunig, Gerald. *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, 2013. p. 188.

then the discursive glut could be perceived as an attempt to keep apace with the increasingly abstract and anomic nature of contemporary life. In other words, machinic subservience can precede social subjection, in which case the subsequent proliferation of discourse would work as an attempt at mastering the alienating effects of increasingly technological mode of surplus value extraction.

This would seem to reverse the causality established by the critics of society's ills at the beginning of this essay: the anomie, the sense of meaninglessness, the social discord are not consequences of discursive proliferation, but discursive proliferation itself is an attempt at mastering the alienating effects of increasingly technological mode of surplus value extraction. Or perhaps instead of theorizing discourse and practice as categories opposed to one another or engaged in a form of dialectical negation, the more productive route would be to treat them as simultaneously existing processes in a world characterized by abstract diagrams of subjectivity. Either way, instead of asking if there is a way to get meaning back we would be better served by asking, whose meaning? Which one?

### **Part 3: Normalization, Sciences, and Archaeology**

The previous part of the paper argued that the so-called information glut amounts to something other than loss of meaning and sense-making which results in a de-anchored society where anything goes. Instead, it was suggested that discursive proliferation is a mode of power, or rather one of the tools for establishing normativity. Within the normalizing mode of power, information in general and its particular incarnations as specific types of knowledge perform a key function within the machine of truth-production. The paper will now survey some aspects of this mechanism.

According to Mark Poster, "normalization is disseminated throughout daily life and secured through surveillance monitoring."<sup>132</sup> It is the epitome of the suspicious and anonymous power that Foucault began tracing in "Discipline and Punish," a power that functions not through the focal point of the sovereign but as a diffuse network of examinations, biographies, and confessions whose purpose is to make the subject legible to authority and to itself. In this broad sense, surveillance "is accomplished by setting in place a flow of information from the object under scrutiny to the authorities and to the collection of that information in files or memory banks."<sup>133</sup> Under the conditions where normativity is becoming the hegemonic form of control, incitement to discourse and information production are paramount. The accompanying data processing techniques have

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<sup>132</sup> Poster, Mark. *Foucault, Marxism, and History: Mode of Production versus Mode of Information*, 1984. P. 114. (FMH).

<sup>133</sup> FMH, p. 163.

very little to do with evading the loss of symbolic efficiency or decreasing the clutter – *the clutter is the whole point*. There is not a serious attempt by anybody to decrease the level of information, no anentropic function, because the entire machine depends on the existence of the clutter. ‘Cutting through it’ would dismantle the cutters themselves, along with their profits and the control that can be exerted on surveilled subjects. All of this rests on discourse and its production, which would suggest its “efficiency,” symbolic or otherwise, is as strong as ever.

Information gathered and unprocessed is just bits and bytes, virtual knowledge at best. While there are numerous modes for actualizing it in specific contexts and for specific purposes, an important technique within the diagram of normativity belongs to the disciplines, “a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an ideality taking the form of a permanent reactivation of rules.”<sup>134</sup> It should be noted immediately, the way many commentators on Foucault do, often in vain, to ward off the most totalizing and reductionist interpretations, that Foucault was not referring to the totality of all knowledge and sciences in general. Rather, he was focused on the dubious sciences of man, or what would now pass for the social sciences. The point is not to relegate them to mere ideology in the orthodox Marxist sense or to discard the entirety of their insights but to investigate the inevitable overlap between social sciences and domination.

Foucault defines domination as “a strategic situation more or less taken for granted and consolidated by means of long-term confrontation between adversaries.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, domination cannot be understood in simply moralistic terms as repression, which could be a technique with the larger scheme, but one that is increasingly inefficient within the normative diagram. Instead, domination functions as an imposition of an ideality through repetition within a field of struggle. That is a rather obtuse formulation, one that deserves to be parsed out.

Domination does not exist everywhere and at all times – it does not permeate the air. It can happen only in cases of clashes, in moments of collision between desires and perspectives and actions. However, we will only speak of domination when there is a recurrence – a field of struggle exists only when the clash or the possibility of it is repeated. The aim of domination, then, is to establish, to institutionalize in a sense, an outcome within that field of struggle that can be safely repeated. Domination produces behavior by loading the dice to eliminate chance in confrontation. It may appear as a limit, but it is meant to induce behavior, a procedure to a large extent intertwined with knowledge.

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<sup>134</sup> Foucault, DL, p. 224.

<sup>135</sup> Foucault, “Subject and Power”, p. 226.

“Foucault argues that systematic social sciences,” Poster writes, “especially awful theoretical elaboration, contains within itself an element of domination of a technology of power.”<sup>136</sup> The social sciences deal with problems – that which is contested, unclear, and troublesome, that is, they insert themselves into fields of struggle. Their domination-effect comes in three ways: the social sciences tend to produce the objects they claim to be describing by opening up a flow of information for surveillance; they play a constituent role in the formation of practices, the way an economic model may change a policy or research in criminology might shape laws; and ultimately, the social sciences enact or perform the subjects whose deep truth they claim to be simply revealing.

The social sciences tend towards domination, then, because they seek to introduce identities where previously existed battlefields. By taking up a problem and approaching it under the veneer of formalization and neutrality, values thus absconded, the sociologist or the economist or the criminologist makes his contribution towards legitimating one outcome amongst many, guided in his neutrality by methodological assumptions, research grants, and the pressure to conform to the values enforced by peer-reviewed journals. The social sciences congeal outcomes, and often in favour of the institutionalized power which trains, funds, and sustains them.

### *Situating the Dubious Sciences*

To understand how the above mechanism works, one has to situate the sciences of man. Genealogically speaking, Foucault argues that “these sciences, which have so delighted ‘humanity’ for over a century, have their technical matrix in the petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigation.”<sup>137</sup> Obviously, one should not be reductive and equate the phenomenon with its point of emergence, but the question is, have the social sciences managed to shake off their techniques which were partly inspired by prisons and asylums?

Of importance are not only the political needs that spawned the social sciences, such as management of populations, but whether their mode of functioning can escape its nature of domination. This seems dubious, if we situate the social sciences methodologically and socially. The objective or positivistic social sciences that rely on observation, examination, and statistical analysis are hardly neutral, because methodological choices function as a grid of interpretation that lights up, delimits, and obscures – “to state what the world is composed of is always to confer a nature upon it.”<sup>138</sup> The assumptions, implications, hypotheses that inform a method are biased to confirm

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<sup>136</sup> Poster, FMH, p. 149.

<sup>137</sup> Foucault, DP, 226.

<sup>138</sup> Bolstanski and Chiapello, NSC, 185.

themselves in its results, creating a tautological loop. Knowledge produces its own justification by acting on the world.

The field of research for the social sciences is human behavior and its causes. However, as Foucault noted, they tend to function “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak,”<sup>139</sup> thus contributing towards producing the behavior which they claim to describe. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, pointed this out in his critique of utilitarian economic thought and its incapacity to explain the origin of preferences that drive supposedly rational actors. Submergence in a particular field produces behavior, he argued, meaning one could well have been something else before entering a business school, but one may certainly leave it as the rational maximiser that theory had merely “observed.”

The interpretive social sciences do not fare much better, insofar as their hermeneutic techniques tend to discover in subjects the deep secrets they themselves have hidden by endowing the speaking subject with a voice and expression tailored to fit the purpose. The latter is not necessarily a result of an ideology embedded within the scientists but a consequence of the social and historical situatedness of the social sciences themselves – while claiming to analyze the social, they are themselves located in and a result of it. Therefore, as Dreyfus and Rabinow argue,

The objective social sciences cannot account for their own possibility, legitimacy, and access to their object because the practices which make objectification possible fall out of their range of investigation. So too, the “subject” social sciences must remain unstable, and can never become normal, because they attribute the final explanatory power either to everyday meaning or to deep meaning, while that which makes subjectivity and meaning possible escapes them.<sup>140</sup>

The ‘natural’ sciences, that is the sciences of nature rather than people, by locating their object outside of the social, can evade questions as to the social conditions of their own possibility. This does not free them entirely of political influence, especially insofar as the sciences justify themselves through the applicability of their research, but it does provide them with an epistemological ground that is not available to their social cousins. And instead of accounting for themselves in their own practices and results the social sciences seek refuge ever deeper within mathematical formalization, only increasing the amnesia of genesis that plagues them.

And so the social sciences drift between the rocks of subjectivity and objectivity, at times navigating the dire straits in the middle, and at others launching themselves proudly towards one while cursing the other. In their quest to articulate the true discourse on man, or on the social or the

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<sup>139</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 40.

<sup>140</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 1982. (BSH) p. 182-183.

political or what have you, unaware of themselves, they miss entirely what drives them and the role they play in diagrams of normativity production. Perhaps this ignorance is unsurprising, given that the “will to truth, having imposed itself upon us for so long, is such that the truth it seeks to reveal cannot fail to mask it.”<sup>141</sup> A social science which has truth as the sole measure of knowledge cannot help but speak the false, that is, the universalized position of a particular sovereign. This is because, to put it in the words of Kiarina Kordela, “every truth, whether political, artistic, scientific, or amorous, presupposes, therefore a (ideological) gaze – a belief that it itself is not part of the truth it states, but its presupposition.”<sup>142</sup> So long as this self-reflexivity continues to be submitted to the margins in favour of physics envy, the social scientists can dream their fantasies of autonomy, meanwhile performing their function of surveilling, examining, and dominating.

In slightly less poetic terms, the upshot of the social sciences is a contribution towards the appearance of the “knowable man,” that greatly desired “object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination—observation.”<sup>143</sup> If the philosopher cannot answer what man is, then the social scientist will, even if she has to invent the man first. After the invention is complete – the flow of information is opened from the object to the institution, identities and categories are formalized and rationalized – its product can be exported across all borders; the social sciences are the “liquefying” machine of the globalizing world, standardizing the specific, making it transferable, and contributing towards the normative grid of contemporary capital.<sup>144</sup> Man as a promise is inseparable from the will to truth, which posits her in both the hypothesis and its confirmation, producing a reversal: capitalism does not promise but is promised; rather than being part of the truth or its presupposition, capital becomes the outside to its own interior.

### *Archaeology*

If it is true that “all knowledge rests upon injustice . . . and . . . the instinct for knowledge is malicious,”<sup>145</sup> the question becomes whether knowledge production can be organized differently, along lines less dominating. It has been argued that any social science that posits itself outside of power and within the realm of truth is easily co-opted into the existing diagram of normativity enforcement. A more ‘egalitarian’ approach to knowledge, for lack of a better adjective, would have to ground itself in something other than truth. It would also have to avoid the position of the

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<sup>141</sup> Foucault, DL, 219.

<sup>142</sup> Kordela, Kiarina. *Surplus: Spinoza, Lacan*, 2007. p. 114.

<sup>143</sup> Foucault, DP, 305.

<sup>144</sup> Lakoff, Andrew. *Pharmaceutical Reason: Knowledge and Value in Global Psychiatry*, 2006.

<sup>145</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 1977. p. 163.

detached observer or the liberating voice. In other words, a less malicious knowledge would have to avoid the tendency to dominate through impartial description, deep interpretation, and borderless intrusion.

The beginnings, according to some, for such an undertaking can be found in the works of Foucault. The Foucauldian project links a number of movements in an attempt to create a new grid: a parallelism instead of a couple, a different reason, and a changed attitude. In the “Order of Things” Foucault proposed that social sciences tend to revolve, for a time, around one or a few transcendental couplets that organize their inquiry, before those are exhausted and replaced with different ones. The most recent couplet, one whose utter exhaustion we are perhaps witnessing now, is the subject/object division, the endless dialectic between idealism and materialism and all their permutations. Instead, Foucault proposes to shift it for the parallel duo of discourse-practice, one that would not privilege action over thought or vice versa, but, by studying both separately and in their overlap, would trace the dispersion of subject and object positions within society by diagrams and machines made up of language and action.

Consequently, the will to truth becomes radically deprivileged by becoming situated. There is a twist, however, to how Foucault accomplishes such a social historicizing:

Foucault ironically defends the reason-in-history thesis by giving it up. Foucault’s Nietzschean skepticism about truth enables him to take a radical stance with respect to reason; there is not truth, only truths, and there is no epistemological ground upon which one can stand to ontologize reason, to grasp the totality and claim all leads to this or that.<sup>146</sup>

Within the Foucauldian project history serves to denaturalize the present and to dethrone any notion of ahistorical, transcendental conditions of thought. Instead, he investigates conditions of existence – what were the puny battles, the driven interests, the contingent outcomes that have made today possible? Truth does not disappear in Foucauldian analytics, but it does become contested. Rather than assuming the place of the organizing principle of history and human life, truth is relegated to the status of a tool.

### *The Attitude of the Researcher*

What allows Foucault to unseat truth as the organizing principle of all knowledge while still keeping a place for it is not even a question of method, but of attitude. The attitude of the researcher

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<sup>146</sup> Poster, FMH, 12.

towards her topic in particular and towards knowledge in general is not discussed enough. Perhaps it is simply assumed that a scientist is either a disinterested professional, which is not only an attitude itself but also an absurdity, or that she is reverent. Nothing could be more alien to Foucault, who wished to radically break with the idea of the impersonal, disinterested gaze – the “apocalyptic objectivity” – of the social scientist. “Great epochs lacked this curiosity,” writes Foucault, “lacked our excessive deference; they ignored their predecessors.”<sup>147</sup> Foucault proposes to combat the humorless, neutered solemnity and self-effacement before the will to truth, which never fails to leave truth itself as the one unquestionable value, with a countenance “not vindictive but joyous,” one that, paradoxically, can see more than the myopic scientist.

The apparent perplexity of the Tao of Foucault is not lost on Dreyfus and Rabinow in their excellent study “Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.” Therein they claim that such attitude leads to a contradictory position: “one has to take the world of serious discourse seriously, because it is the one we are in, and yet one can’t take it seriously, first because we have arduously divorced ourselves from it, and second because it is not grounded.”<sup>148</sup> Foucault’s insistence on not taking truth and social sciences too seriously places him in a rather problematic position: How can Foucault justify the position from which he himself speaks?

“Having bracketed truth, meaning, and seriousness,” Dreyfus and Rabinow lament, “there seems to be no way to get them back.” According to the aforementioned authors, Foucault’s radical archaeology encourages us “to abandon a certain naïve conception of truth as the correspondence of a theory to the way things are in themselves, and a naïve conception of the disciplines as engaged in the gradual approximation of this truth.” This leads either to “a kind of nihilism” or even to “extreme nihilism,” because it purports to show that the “belief in meaning is illusory.” They go on to argue that there is nevertheless a tendency in Foucault, in spite of himself, to take things seriously, because “if all discourse was, for the archaeologist, mere meaningless noise, he could not even catalogue statements.” Therefore the archaeologist must be invested, she must partake in and recognize the importance of expertly seriousness, which is why, Dreyfus and Rabinow assure us, Foucault will later come to his senses and accept that “seriousness is not naïve but inevitable.”<sup>149</sup> Accordingly, Foucault’s nihilism is downgraded from “extreme” to “qualified” – what a relief!

So we end up with a vision of Foucault the metaphenomenologist, wrapped in his cloak of nihilism, who stands aside and laughs at the creatures who invented knowledge, even though he is one of them, before he breaks down, repents, and rejoins them. But whence this need for seriousness understood as the infallible belief in the superiority of one’s theory? Foucault introduces

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<sup>147</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, p. 159.

<sup>148</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, BSH, p. 105.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. p. 86-88.

fiction and chance as epistemological elements in the production of knowledge – does that obliterate seriousness in totality, or does it demand a different *kind* of seriousness? And who are afraid of laughing at themselves? Only those who have not divorced themselves from teleology and privilege of the intellectual, those who dream of bringing to end the interminable labor of knowledge and resting their heads against the pearly gates of omnipotence. In other words, the very people Foucault spent his intellectual career upsetting!

The remnants of Enlightenment thought in Dreyfus and Rabinow are further emphasized by their claim that, in order for Foucault's archaeological project to become sustainable without reference to seriousness, it would have to become "interminable" like "therapy or phenomenology."<sup>150</sup> But why this need for termination? Although Dreyfus and Rabinow often praise Foucault for opposing the search for origins which often morphs into a desire for an end to history, they themselves seem to implicitly subscribe to it, just like the entire Western academic tradition. Therefore, in order to make Foucault attractive to the "serious" Western scholar, they go to lengths to declaw his radicalism and provide him with a modicum of academic respectability.

But if there is no deep meaning or seriousness, 'nihilism' is by no means the default outcome – for Foucault, at least, there remains the battle, the struggle against all forms of domination. The Nietzschean perspectivism is not a surrender of arms, as if the only thing that could motivate one to action was the Word of God in any of its guises. In fact, to appreciate Foucault fully, one must look for a source for action outside of the will to truth, thus depriving it of its last bastion, and instead taking the necessity of illusion seriously. As this essay has argued previously, truth is the result of the interaction between discourse and practice, not its presupposition.

### *Archaeology Revisited*

For his new constituent couplet of discourse-practice, Foucault proposed two approaches, archaeology for the former and genealogy for the latter. It is important to note that the differences between the two "is not one of the object or field, but of the point of attack, perspective and delimitation."<sup>151</sup> Simply because the orders of words and things are not reducible to one another does not mean that one can treat either as being autonomous from the other in the realm of knowledge where the two overlap. One can, however, choose to approach each separately for the purposes of dissection, even if the most thorough work would account for both. This paper, which does not belong to such esteemed group, will briefly focus only on archaeology.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>151</sup> Foucault, DL, 233.

Archaeology is not a study of all discourse; rather, it studies “what experts say when they are speaking as experts.”<sup>152</sup> And, again, it is not concerned with all experts, but only with the dubious ones from the sciences of man. Therefore, archaeology could be said to turn the tables on social sciences by taking their discourse as its object.

But the point of archaeology is not to evaluate whether they are right or wrong – instead, by performing a “double reduction,” the archaeologist not only must “bracket the truth claims, he must also bracket the meaning.”<sup>153</sup> To evaluate truth would be to partake in the will to truth which one is placing on the operating theatre, and to investigate sense would be no different than hermeneutic commentary. Instead, archaeology carries out a radicalized historical phenomenology whose purpose is to describe difference within the same field of a social science between multiple eras. It is a search for discontinuities.

When the archaeologist looks at the discourse of experts in this way, she looks for statements, or rather groups of statements that make up a discursive formation by referencing one another. What interests the archaeologist at this level is that “on the basis of grammar and of the wealth of vocabulary available at a given period, there are, in total, relatively few things said.”<sup>154</sup> What archaeology looks for is the positive delimitation of discourse that assigns speaking positions, objects for investigation, modes of description, and so on. As such, “the statement is neither visible nor hidden.”<sup>155</sup> Rather, the statement is what words, phrases, and prepositions, subjects, objects, and signifiers add up to in terms of their implicit rules of organization. Indeed, this is a rather obtuse definition of statements, one that may be easier to understand if we consider that archaeology is not related to content analysis, structural analysis, or transcendental analysis – archaeology studies the conditions of existence, how discourse *is*, and that is only visible when discourse changes. The discontinuity, the break, is a moment of illumination that allows for a broader perspective of functioning when truth and sense are suspended.

It would not be amiss to ask now what – if anything – can be accomplished by such archaeological digging of discourse. As Foucault explained, “at this level it's not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification.”<sup>156</sup> The Archaeological approach is not concerned with what transpired on the level of non-discursive practices, what affirmatory

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<sup>152</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, BSH, p. XX.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>154</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 119.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p. 109.

<sup>156</sup> Foucault, “Truth and Power” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. p. 112-113.

mechanisms were deployed within the domain of objects, what institutions co-opted social science – it is a radicalized historical description of language congealed into discourse, and what effects took place exclusively within the realm of discursive formations. This constitutes its strength and its limit; the level of affirmation from “outside” the science has to await the genealogical approach. The archaeology, thus, is both a sustained if limited approach in and of itself, and a possible groundwork for an inquiry of a larger scope.

### **In Place of a Conclusion: Why Speak of Any of This?**

The belabored point of this paper, which was not evident to me at the start but became so in the course of writing, could be summarized as such: while many relations between objects are set up as dualisms, and are argued to function dualistically by the human cogs of the machine of truth, on the level of ontology they are, in fact, parallelisms. It is only under the rule of secular capitalism that what is parallel is perceived as dual, leading to institutionalized repression of whatever the “passive” element is supposed to be. The slippage from parallelism to dualism, however, is not a necessary one under the species of eternity. In fact, in spite of endless procedures of justification by some of the most established brains, even empirically not everything perceived as a dualism actually plays out that way.

The struggle, then, consists of two fronts: to oppose dualistic thought as the default mode of perceiving reality, and to imagine how parallel thinking could contribute towards a revolutionary politics that would not be predicated on repression as the natural outcome. This paper attempted to contribute towards the former imperative by taking up the question of the relation between discourse and practice within secular capitalism.

The reason why it is important to speak about capitalism is because one is best served by starting from where one is rather than where one would wish to be. This does not have to mean that there is no outside to capitalism – doesn’t it at least produce its own outsides? – but certainly all of “us” in advanced study centers are contaminated by it, and should acknowledge that as our starting point. Thankfully, being contaminated by capitalism is not an eternal disorder; one can work it off of one’s self, one can identify its mechanisms in theory, and one can certainly overturn its forms of domination and repression in practice.

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