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2. (Post)humanity

Animal Matters and Sublime Pets

Increasing unevenness in capitalist relations, which have led to the global financial crisis of 2007-08, have normalized an ethical turn in the humanities and led to 'new' theories that could account for the rising inequalities in cultural terms.1 Poststructuralism and the decentered theory of the social it authorized lost its explanatory power with the waning of the neoliberal consensus of deregulation and monetarist economics in the 1990s, which continue to be challenged around the world by various anti-globalization, anti-austerity, and people's and worker's movements for imposing measures that have produced greater global inequality. Hardt and Negri's theory of the 'multitude' that accounts for inequality as exclusion from the circuits of 'immaterial labor', Agamben's juridical account of inequality as a 'state of exception' to democratic norms, and Rancière's writings on democracy as the hegemonic cooptation of the proletariat as 'the part of no-part', are prominent among the 'new' theories to have emerged since the crash of 2007-08. What these theories highlight is the way that the 'knowledge economy' — the high-tech sector of production that manufactures the cultural products that shape people's consciousness — increases the alienation of labor and therefore the alienation of humans from humans. Insofar as these theories account for inequality immanently from within culture they heighten the awareness of differences within the taken for granted notions about what it means to be human and the way such commonsensical ideas naturalize inequality by the denial of the humanity of 'others' (as what Agamben calls 'bare life', e.g.). In more middle register writings, the discourses of (post)humanist cultural theory produce an uncomfortable sense of alienation that embraces the animal as a way to overcome it and, so, one finds Derrida and Haraway writing about

¹ Gary Hall, *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. by Clare Birchall (Athens: Georgia University Press, 2007).

how they commune with their pets. 'Pettism' is put forward in their writings as a therapeutic response that covers over a causal theory of the increasing inequality of cybercapitalism. It is within and between these various discourses that the 'posthumanities' — as the University of Minnesota Press series devoted to the field is called — finds its tutor-texts for thinking about the cultural disruptions of global capitalism. The 'post' of the (post)humanities signals awareness of not only the exclusionary basis of the concept of Man, as did (post)structuralist post-humanist philosophy, but also represents a new sentimental embrace of non-human otherness and a Heideggerian ethics of care as 'being-with' the animal(s) to respond to the growing social alienation of global capitalism. As in all 'posts' (postfordist, postindustrial, poststructuralism, postmodern,...), a cultural zone 'beyond' the conflict between capital and labor is announced that naturalizes class inequality as the basis of human societies.²

The 'post' of (post)structuralist post-humanism and the 'post' of the new-er (post)humanism are, despite their historical differences, ideologically the same: they attempt to 'solve' in the theoretical imaginary contradictions that have arisen from the conflict between capital and labor. The founding texts of (post)structuralism were of course post-humanist in their focus on textuality and discourse, but the opposition to humanism today has changed since Derrida and Foucault's critiques of humanism in the '60s and '70s and it is less concerned with deconstructing logocentrism and the languages of Man than it is with the cultural inscription of bodies around the human/animal distinction. These discursive changes are not driven by knowledge but instead reflect changes in the mode of production. Poststructuralism — the theories premised on linguistic play and the indeterminacy of meaning — was invested in demonstrating that the human is not the autonomous being cognitively self-identical to itself as represented by Humanist and Enlightenment philosophy because such humanist notions of identity and essence are always subject to mediation by language. It thus criticized as logocentric humanism any conception of thought that placed thought above discursive mediation because

² Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, 'Post-Ality: The (Dis)Simulations of Cybercapitalism', in *Transformation 1: Marxist Boundary Work in Theory, Economics, Politics and Culture* (Montreal: Maisonneuve Press, 1995), pp. 1–75 (p. 1).

the unsaid assumption of such an essentialist notion of the subject is that language is merely a medium of communication between abstract intelligences, as if language were simply a token or tool that delivers the pre-determined content of thought.³ This earlier post-humanism represented the philosophical position that cultural media are material and as such constitutive of the human rather than the opposite: the traditional Aristotelian humanist idea that media represent a passive and neutral medium through which is 'expressed' the spiritual essence of Man. However, the (post)structuralist critique of humanism has to be situated within the social relations in order to understand its hidden class politics.

The post-humanism of (post)structuralist theory was considered useful and 'made sense' under conditions in which the ruling class sought to deregulate the social-democratic welfare-state on a global scale as these regimes depended on the discourse of humanism to ideologically justify their particular distribution of social resources as serving the universal good. The humanism of welfare-state philosophy that was dominant at that time — which Cold Warriors and Western Marxist critics alike considered 'totalitarian' — was opposed for imposing a hegemonic unity that was exclusionary of cultural differences and that thereby deprived the margins of a voice, or, in more common language, individual rights. The post-humanism of difference theory thus served to legitimate in philosophy the re-distribution and privatization of the social resources of the state beginning in the late 1970s that has overwhelmingly strengthened the market forces. On the left, the neoliberal counter-revolution that was serving to commodify the globe was represented in terms of the politics of the sign as heralding 'new times' and laying the groundwork for a 'radical democracy' that was 'liberating' the 'popular' forces from 'totalitarian' power. Poststructuralism was the philosophical thug that was used to smash the welfare-state and to portray the privatization of social wealth during the 1980s as the basis for a new-found freedom, in much the same way that the CIA used abstract expressionism to undermine socialist ideology after World War II.4

³ Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), pp. 111–36.

⁴ Frances Stoner Saunders, The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts

(Post)humanism today, by contrast, is an attempt to reconstruct a social identity in common after the deconstruction of the human and the crisis of inequality promoted by the policies of neoliberalism and its post-al philosophy that announces the end of man, ideology, and class. Theory cannot go back to humanism, which has been delegitimated as an outdated 'state philosophy' by the market forces, but it cannot continue to defend radical difference either because of the association of difference theory with the hegemony of neoliberal power that helped to bring about the current global crisis of inequality and with the more general costs associated with global capitalism, such as the destruction to the environment, the escalation of imperialism and war, and the general degradation of the quality of life that come in their wake. What has emerged to contain the contradictions of capitalism today is the (post)humanism of Derrida, Haraway, Wolfe et. al. showcased by the Minnesota Press series, which critiques capitalism as an oppressive 'biopower' that subjugates life only to announce a new non-oppressive and co-operative being in common — what Donna Haraway calls the 'transspecies', Derrida calls l'animot, and Žižek, the 'biogenetic commons'. In this theory of a new post-exploitative present made of biopower and biopolitical cultural resistance, the concept of the human is still considered ideologically incoherent only it is not because of social mediations that defer and delay its self-presence through spacing which deny its purported autonomy. Rather, (post)humanism now announces the end of the human species as a distinct entity in nature because of the emergent knowledge that the human is biogenetically hybridized with non-human others (animals, microbes, etc.) — a condition taken to be enabled by biopower, especially the knowledge practices of biogenetics. Haraway bases her understanding of transspecies, for example, on the fact that biogenetics has discovered that 'human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 [...] are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such'.5 What contemporary (post)humanism thus

and Letters (New York: The New Press, 2001); Gabriel Rockhill, 'The CIA Reads French Theory: On the Intellectual Labor of Dismantling the Cultural Left', The Philosophical Salon: A Los Angeles Review of Books Channel, 28 February 2017, https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-cia-reads-french-theory-on-the-intellectual-labor-of-dismantling-the-cultural-left.

⁵ Donna Haraway, When Species Meet (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press,

rejects is not only the discourse of Man as a universalist cultural construct that marginalizes cultural differences but also, and more importantly, Marx's concept of human 'species being', on the claim that speciesbeing suppresses the biological difference inscribed within nature (in the genetic code) and thereby perpetuates the regime of what Derrida has called 'carnophallogocentrism': 'the interventionist violence that is practiced [...] in the service of or for the protection of the animal, but most often the human animal'.

And yet, the (post)humanism which 'makes sense' now in terms of legitimating class inequality is, as in the past, the one that serves the dominant sector of capital that, among other things, through its command of the resources of the state makes the most profits. The (post)humanism of transspeciesism and the biogenetic commons reflects changes in property. Specifically, it reflects the shift from forms of public wealth invested in social welfare programs to privatized wealth and speculative capital that are more and more invested in the biotech and 'green' industries and that, therefore, stand to make the biggest profits in the new millennium, as these industries represent the main avenues of capital valorization and accumulation through which capitalism is currently commodifying the environmental crisis. (Post) humanism, in short, is a social theory after the massive privatization of the social; the transspecies a 'commons' founded on the continuation of extracting surplus-value from labor and the suppression of the classconsciousness needed to end exploitation.

Species-Being and L'Animot

In his introduction to the Posthumanities series published by the University of Minnesota Press, Cary Wolfe gives a map of the (post) humanities that promises to go beyond what he considers the deadlock of contemporary cultural theory, specifically, because of its residual humanism. Central to Wolfe's story of the (post)humanities is Derrida's 'thinking concerning the animal' as if it marked a new moment in cultural theory beyond the regional conflicts of the past that opens

^{2008),} p. 3.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 25.

theory to more global horizons.⁷ Derrida is made to support Wolfe's view of (post)humanism as that which 'opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy inherited from humanism itself'.⁸ What Wolfe's (post)humanities series canonizes are the texts of Derrida's later 'ethical turn', such as *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, in which are found annotations of experience and the quotidian which are represented as sublime ('secret') moments of sensual embodiment that produce a 'pathetic' version of history as existential 'suffering'.⁹ This is in contrast to Derrida's earlier more analytically rigorous writings, such as his reading of Lacan, in which, for example, is found his critique of 'embodiment' as a support of logocentric thought. I will briefly rehearse Derrida's critique of Lacan in order to explain why Derrida's later ethical turn to embodiment is not, as Wolfe imagines, a 'new' cutting-edge discourse but represents the dumbing-down of theory in the service of capital.

In his response to Lacan, Derrida argued that the primacy of the signifier that developed within psycho-analytic thought after Saussure, posits a 'speaking-subject' that sustains the 'ontotheology' of 'Western metaphysics'. In other words, he argued that the 'materiality' of the signifier ('voice') is used as a subordinate and idealized ground for the telos (ends) of presence as 'speech', hence, as the condition of possibility for the traditional idealist autonomy of the subject in Western humanism, even if finally as a 'split-subject' in Lacan. 10 What Wolfe turns to in Derrida is not his earlier critique of the 'body' as central to humanist idealism, but his later more sentimental texts in which, as Derrida puts it, 'animal words' proliferate 'in proportion as my texts [...] become more autobiographical'. 11 In short, Wolfe privileges writings in which, rather than self-reflexively accounting for the conditions of theory, Derrida instead offers mere annotations of experience. If 'humanism' is premised on maintaining a split between the material ('voice') and the conceptual ('speech') in which the former is taken to be subordinate to the latter, as Derrida had previously argued against Lacan, then the later Derrida, whom Wolfe invokes and who turns to 'embodiment' as a basis for the

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ Cary Wolfe, What Is Posthumanism? (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2010), p. xv.

⁹ Derrida, Animal, p. 26.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, Positions (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), pp. 108–9.

¹¹ Derrida, Animal, p. 35.

ethical, is not (post)humanist but humanist with a vengeance; hence the easy sentimentality of his later texts and their quick canonization in religion departments. In other words, Derrida has engaged in a simple reversal of the mind/body binary, a binary which is central to Western humanist philosophy, that not only maintains its terms but, more importantly, advances a cultural politics that defines the good within the epistemic coordinates of the dominant ideology in which nature is sentimentalized (as the affective) and theory depoliticized (as ethics).

It is because of this accommodation of the dominant ideology that today the 'question of the animal' in Derrida's later writings is made a matter of embracing the 'passion of the animal'. 12 Rather than situate affective experience within the historical series, Derrida reifies experience by fetishizing the 'feelings' that overtake him when his pet cat looks at him naked in the bathroom, especially the feeling of 'shame' at 'seeing oneself seen naked under a gaze behind which there remains a bottomlessness [...] uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret'.13 'In these moments of nakedness' standing before his pet cat Derrida locates 'an "experience" of language about which one could say, even if it is not in itself "animal," that it is not something that the "animal" could be deprived of, which he puts forward as an ethical model of what he claims is 'the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals'.14 Leaving aside that what Derrida is here calling an experience of finitude is really not an experience but a trope for his commitment to Saussure's synchronic theory of language which understands language ahistorically rather than as 'an arena of class struggle', such an experience of bodily finitude is necessary, according to Derrida, so as to understand how the 'industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries' shapes the cultural 'inequality [...] between, on the one hand, those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion, and, on the other hand, those who appeal to an irrefutable testimony to this pity'. ¹⁵ In other

¹² Ibid., p. 12.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 4, 12.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 166, 28.

¹⁵ V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 23; Derrida, pp. 26, 28–29.

words, it is only by embracing our animal mortality as embodied beings with singular experiences that inequality becomes intelligible, not as a material antagonism, but as a cultural 'war [...] waged over the matter of pity'.¹6 On these pathetic terms, what is to be opposed most of all is speciesism because it establishes a hierarchical binary that puts 'the whole animal kingdom with the exception of the human' into a 'vast encampment' for the purpose of industrial 'genocide' and thus foments the culture wars over values.¹7 In nakedly communing with his pet cat, Derrida thus experiences a moment of animal liberation from humanist thought in which he apparently believes 'everything can happen' and indulges in a kind of thinking without thinking ('the passion of the animal') that, following Heidegger's 'need to strike out "being"', dismisses thinking in materialist terms about inequalities of power, which are at root class conflicts over the resources of labor inscribed in what Marx calls human 'species-being'.¹8

Derrida understands the 'question of the animal' in strictly immaterial (emotional and ethical) terms, occulting the actual relation of humans to nature. He does this work of occulting the material labor relations that make up the human species by inventing a hybrid 'animal-word' (*l'animot*) through which to interpret the social conflicts over inequality, which he considers to be primarily cultural as they are the result of unethical practices: 'the interventionist violence that is practiced [...] in the service of or for the protection of the animal, but most often the human animal'.19 L'animot is a portmanteau combining the French terms for 'animal' and 'words' which sounds the same as the plural of 'animal'. What this term does in Derrida's writing is to represent recent 'developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic forms of knowledge' — knowledges which are, in other words, productive of the hi-tech commodification of hybrid forms of life that for Haraway defy species classification and lay the basis for a 'transspecies' consciousness — as the basis for a new ethical awareness he calls the 'passion of the animal', or, 'embodied knowledge' (that is made 'naked, vulnerable, and

¹⁶ Derrida, Animal, p. 29.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 41, 34, 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 12, 39; Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844', Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 3, pp. 229–346.

¹⁹ Derrida, Animal, p. 25.

unfathomable'). 20 L'animot, in other words, marks a 'double session' that, to begin with, inverts the material (species-being) with the immaterial (biogenetics) by showing how they include rather than oppose each other so as to reveal their dependence on a disavowed third term — the 'passion of the animal', which is represented as a type of "experience" of language about which one could say, even if it is not in itself "animal," that it is not something that the "animal" could be deprived of'. 21 This 'experience of language', although marked in emotional terms and inscribed within the affective, is of course not a spontaneous feeling brought about by humans tampering with nature, nor is it simply an insight that came to Derrida as he nakedly communed with his pet cat in the bathroom. In fact, the concept that the experience of language here that is not in itself, but is also not something we can be sure animals do not posses, is Derrida's (post)humanist ethical gloss on the differential concept of language that he takes from Saussure but presents in less alienating language: language as a structure without a subject because, '[i]n language there are only differences without positive terms'.²² Derrida, in other words, is defining animal life as inherently decentered because it is subject to cultural processes of meaning production, in which case any differences between humans and animals is a language effect (e.g., as in the difference between philosophical and poetic discourses about animals that Derrida discusses).

Nevertheless, although Derrida is not so crudely biologically literal as Haraway in his notion of human-animal hybridity that in the (post) humanities signals the arrival of a post-exploitative being in common, he still puts forward a notion of the animal that functions as an ethical limit-text within the discourse of theory in which the 'passion of the animal' marks a liberated zone of affective experience as if it existed outside the history of class struggle. By 'striking out being' in the 'abyssal rupture' of communing with his pet cat and experiencing the passion of the animal, Derrida reinscribes a notion of history as the determination of the material by the immaterial, as if 'spirit' moves the world rather

²⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

²¹ On 'double session' see, Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), pp. 191–207; Derrida, *Animal*, p. 166.

²² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Balley and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Wade Baskin (McGraw Hill, 1966), p. 120.

than labor.²³ Accordingly, what he calls 'thought', 'logocentrism', or the 'dominant form of consensus' (because it puts 'the whole animal kingdom with the exception of the human' into a 'vast encampment'), is made responsible for industrial 'genocide'.²⁴ And yet, the 'experience of language' that Derrida's 'animal words' embody is itself a form of 'thinking the animal' more ethically as finitude, passion, shame, vulnerability, rather than instrumentally and genocidally in the culture 'war [...] waged over the matter of pity'.²⁵ In other words, Derrida reinscribes the human/animal binary as an ethical difference within knowledge and, therefore, in the terms of his text, maintains the same domination of the animal by the human that perpetuates the 'veritable war of the species' he laments.²⁶ As always, deconstruction reinscribes what it opens to question by failing to go outside the epistemological and implicating knowledge within the historical series of class practices.

Insofar as l'animot marks the animal as essentially unknowable (the sublime 'secret' of the pet), it privatizes animal life, fixing it, for ethical reasons, as a singularity unconnected to labor relations, and this despite the fact that animal life is historical and evolves along with changes in the human life which dominates the earth. As Marx explains, '[t]he whole character of a species, its species-character, is contained in the character of its life activity [...]. Admittedly animals also produce [...] [b]ut an animal only produces what it immediately needs [...], whilst man produces universally'.27 On Marx's dialectical materialist logic, *l'animot* therefore indexes a change in the social relations of production rather than simply marking a singular experience humans have come to share with animals as a result of the technological intervention into nature. How we interact with and conceive of animal life, including our own species-being, always reflects our practical interaction with nature within necessary social relations at a certain level of development. Derrida's opposition of 'thinking' as the liberation of (animal) passion from the 'dominant thought' of human speciesism reinscribes the human/animal binary as internal to knowledge and occults human

²³ Derrida, Animal, p. 30.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 26-27, 34, 40-41.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁷ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 276.

species being as the universal production of life, what Marx calls 'life-engendering life'.²⁸ By 'striking out' Marx's concept of species-being as the universal production of life and reinscribing (non)knowledge as the basis of life, Derrida fixes the animal in the dumb muteness of an 'uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal [...] secret' and mystifies the labor relations upon which all life on earth depends.²⁹ This is not merely a logical contradiction, however, considering that what is being put forward as a 'new' (posthumanist) ethical thought is actually a reinscription of the body as the biological basis of life and culture as the primary zone of conflicts. More importantly it testifies to ongoing material conflicts in the economic base and takes the side of the ruling class against the workers.

While the dehierachization and reinscription of the human/animal binary in Derrida is represented as a self-enclosed movement within culture (knowledge, ethics, affect), it is actually a mode of side-taking in the class struggles of global capitalism against the workers who need 'outside' knowledge — the positive and reliable knowledge of class inequality that critiques ideology — for their emancipation from capital. Furthermore, without such class-consciousness, humanity will not be able to realize a more sustainable relation to nature. It is not the devaluing 'thought' of animals in humanism that produces their subjugation by humans — although such a 'violent' understanding of thought is necessary for deconstruction to represent the animal as liberated by 'thinking the animal' — but it is instead the exploitation of human species-being by humans for profit that does so. More exactly, it is the estrangement of human species-being through the capitalist exploitation of human labor-power that produces the reified 'thought' of human superiority over nature through the exercise of pure reason on the one hand, as well as the ethical 'thinking' of the embodied 'passion' of the animal as its corrective on the other. The closed circuit of knowledge (species thought/embodied thinking of the animal) in Derrida's text is itself a reification of human labor activity which considers human species-being in a one-sided way, as 'knowledge' of the body (animal life). Making animal life into an unfathomable abyssal secret of embodiment may seem like a challenge to the interventionist

²⁸ Ibid., p. 276.

²⁹ Derrida, Animal, p. 12.

violence of 'carnophallogocentrism' (Derrida), but in its culturalism it underwrites the idea that inequality is an effect of knowledge rather than the reverse, that all knowledge (even the 'secret' thinking that is taken to be not thinking but feeling the passion of the animal) is rooted in the class inequality of the capitalist mode of production and reflects it at the level of theory — either for or against capital or labor. By inscribing 'thought' as dominant and 'embodiment' as subjected (but secretly free 'thinking') Derrida normalizes the class relations which in actuality reify knowledge of species-being as a whole, not by humanity intellectually imposing on animals, but by imposing animality on humans, that is, by reducing the life activity of humans to animal life, which is the 'dominion of immediate physical need' imposed on humanity by capitalism.³⁰

And yet, the one-sided production of estranged labor undertaken for wages which reduces the worker to immediate physical need so as to increase surplus-value for the capitalist is what is today everywhere in crisis. Behind the succession of financial bubbles and crashes at the millennial turn (which go under the names of 'Savings & Loan', 'dot com', 'Enron', 'the housing bubble', and now, the 'pandemic crash') is the overproduction endemic to capitalism as it 'rationalizes' production so as to increase profits: the technical innovations introduced in production to increase the surplus-value of labor have the overall effect of decreasing the abstract socially necessary labor-time overall, which is the source of value, and this is what encourages speculation in the financial markets because of the low rate of return on industrial capital investment. What the crisis shows is that the private consumption of social wealth that regulates production for profit is coming into contradiction with the global mass of labor which has transformed the planet, the very process of accumulation that has 'simplified the class antagonisms' and confronts humanity with the necessity for socialism, as even the likes of Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan was finally forced to recognize after the crash of 2007–08.31 Marx's concept of 'species-being'

³⁰ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 276.

³¹ Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 485; Accoring to Greenspan: 'Clearly the increased concentrations of income that have emerged under technological advance and global competition, have rekindled the battle between the cultures of socialism and of capitalism — a battle some thought had ended once and for all with the disgrace of central planning. But over the past year, some of the critical pillars underlying

as the 'life activity' of humans is crucial for understanding and changing the world and it therefore necessarily comes into conflict with the dissimulations of capitalism such as the 'abyssal difference' of the (post) humanist transspeciesism that reifies life as embodied knowledge found in Derrida. In short, what the world is confronted with is not a cultural 'war [...] waged over the matter of pity' due to the normalization of 'genetic violence' against animal life, which is a secondary cultural effect of the exploitation of labor.³² Rather, the question is will the human species be ruled by the law of profit so as to enrich a few or realize a world free from need by producing in accordance with the needs of life as a whole?

As Engels explains in *Dialectics of Nature*, it is the exploitation of human labor — which is what is at the center of capitalism and not 'genetic violence' (Derrida) — that produces 'the idealist world outlook', which defines the human in a one-sided way as 'outside' or 'above' nature, such that human nature is understood as 'arising out of thought instead of [human] needs'.33 Engels' observation that the spiritual humanism of the bourgeoisie 'dominates men's mind' to such an extent that even the 'materialistic natural scientists' are 'unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man' in labor has proven prescient for understanding the cyber ideology of today in which knowledge is made the source of value. 34 Engels' account of the dominance of ideology is embedded in a materialist understanding of the contradictions of capitalism. He explains that while the mastery of nature by the human species 'consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly' in material production, this economic 'mastery', however, by no means is meant to suggest that men 'rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature'.35 Rather, to the contrary, as he goes on to clarify, the more social labor takes control of natural processes the more 'men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature',

market competition arguably have failed' ('Markets and the Judiciary', *Patently-O Blog*, 2 October 2008, https://patentlyo.com/media/docs/2009/03/Greenspan.pdf).

³² Derrida, Animal, p. 29.

³³ Frederick Engels, 'Dialectics of Nature', *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 25, pp. 452–65 (p. 459).

³⁴ Ibid., p. 459.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 461.

and, furthermore, 'the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contrast between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body'. Capitalism, however, despite its compelling humans to realize their relation to the social world and nature and thus making them potentially free to 'produce in accordance with the standard of every species', represents a material obstacle to such universal development. While on the one hand capitalism 'advances [...] the natural sciences' and puts us in 'a position to realize, and hence to control, also the more remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities', on the other it 'is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result' of production so that 'the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, are mostly quite the opposite in character'.

Derrida, in opposition to Engels, places species-being under erasure and mystifies the relation between human and non-human life, instead inscribing the contradictions as internal to knowledge practices. In an initial move, he locates the question of the animal as part of an ongoing culture war between anthropocentric discourses on the one side that define animals in general against an unquestioned human norm and the discourses of 'thinking' on the other, which 'strike out being' (following Heidegger) and destabilize the traditional binary between human/animal by posing the question of animal 'suffering'.³⁹ He frames the cultural debate as a 'war waged over the matter of pity' emergent in the wake of the biotech revolution of the last two centuries because it confronts humanity with the ethical dilemma of the mass production of living organisms for the sole purpose of being consumed (for food, fashion, experiments, etc.).40 Having been made aware by the biogenetic intervention into animal life that thinking is always embodied, the ensuing cultural war necessarily 'concerns what we call "thinking" as the West has understood 'reason' to be the essence of what it means to be human. The sides in this culture war are thus not 'for' or 'against' animal rights on Derrida's framing, but for or against

³⁶ Ibid., p. 461.

³⁷ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 277.

³⁸ Engels, 'Dialectics of Nature', pp. 461, 463-64.

³⁹ Derrida, Animal, pp. 25–28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

thinking what Derrida calls the 'abyssal difference' that structures the surface 'inequality [...] between, on the one hand, those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion, and, on the other hand, those who appeal to an irrefutable testimony to this pity'. The difference that matters, 'the most radical means of thinking' on these terms, is purely a linguistic matter: how to formulate 'an "experience" of language about which one could say, even if it is not in itself "animal", that it is not something that the "animal" could be deprived of and thereby bear witness to 'the passion of the animal' as resistant to thought. 12

L'animot is Derrida's neologism to describe how bioengineered life deconstructs the binary of human/animal from within and produces a 'thinking' (that is not a thinking but a feeling) of 'the abyssal limits of the human', a 'passion' (without thinking) to be found in 'those moments of nakedness' in the 'eyes' (body) of the animal.⁴³ The new forms of life produced by biogenetic capitalism (*l'animot*) are thus held to 'necessitate' new forms of thinking animal life that go beyond the surface difference of inequality to uncover 'abyssal difference', a thinking without thinking, the 'passion of the animal', or 'embodied thinking', 'naked', 'open', 'vulnerable', the 'nonpower at the heart of power', 'the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals', and 'all the living things that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers'.44 L'animot marks a zone of thinking without thinking (the affective) as the ethical basis of whatever life beyond inequality that Derrida represents as coming from communing with one's pet at a time of global genocidal genetic violence. 45 However, what this 'pathetic' framing of the question silently assumes is that 'knowledge' work, the production of hybrid transspecies life-forms produced by biogenetic industries, has displaced human species-being (labor) as the base of the social. In actuality, the production of *l'animot*, whether discursively by deconstruction or concretely in biogenetics, is itself an effect of the social relations of production as a whole, the

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 28–29.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 28, 166.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 28–29, 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

labor arrangements which determine our place in nature as a collective species-being. Without the knowledge of labor as species-being ('life-engendering life': Marx) there can be no fundamental transformation of capitalism but only cultural reforms of its more obviously outdated practices (what Derrida calls 'violence').

For all his opposition to 'historicism', Derrida ascribes the agency of history to the history of ideas (biogenetics, philosophy, thought, thinking, passion, Heidegger, Saussure,...) and assumes a bottom-line technological 'necessity' of coming to an ethical accommodation with inequality, rather than producing a critique-al knowledge of the social totality as estranged labor, for social change. 46 Critique, unlike ethics, entails a knowledge of the totality of the social relations of production as a whole and how they shape signs, meanings, values, subjectivity, etc. For instance, biogenetic technology is not an autonomous activity driven by human egoism (whether conceived in terms of thought, knowledge, passion, or domination), but a part of capitalist production driven by profit which is realized from the extraction of surpluslabor from wage-labor. Speculating on 'the question of the animal' — thinking about thought about animals but from their mysterious embodied perspective — is not a 'radical' thinking that gets at the 'root' of inequality. 'The root', as Marx says, is 'man himself': humans, that is, not as 'setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived' but as 'real, active men [...], on the basis of their real life-process', in short, as social animals whose life activity (labor) is universal in scope.⁴⁷ In fact, Derrida's 'animal-words' (*l'animot*) themselves display the profit to be had in the production of ideological hybrids and how this alienated intellectual production that puts individual profit making before meeting people's needs naturalizes the estranged species life of capitalism that produces the inequality and environmental destruction in the first place, making it seem unchangeable (because of unfathomable 'abyssal differences' in Derrida's discourse).

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 29. On 'critque-al' in opposition to 'critical' see, Teresa L. Ebert, *The Task of Cultural Critique* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Law', Karl Marx/ Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 3, pp. 3–129 (p. 182); Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 36.

What Wolfe is unable to account for in his mapping of the (post) humanities with Derrida at its center is how ideas of the material and materiality have changed in cultural theory under the impact of changes in the structure of property. Contemporary discourses on (post)humanism represent a further fold in the canonical post-humanist discourses found in the earlier writings of Derrida ('The Ends of Man'), Foucault ('the end of Man' announced in The Order of Things), and Barthes ('Death of the Author'). 48 While the texts of poststructuralist theory placed Man under erasure as a discursive construct and found Western humanism to be a coerced consensus that undermined its purported project of universal enlightenment, the contemporary discourses of (post)humanism affirm the body as a post-ideological zone of opacity and subversive singularity (bare life, passion of the animal, transspecies) that escapes all norms and testifies to a 'coming community' (Agamben), or, a 'democracy to come' (Derrida).49 The turn to the body is justified in 'ethical' terms as addressing contemporary biopower, the cultural impact of biotech engineering and cybertech industries, on the argument that in the wake of a new 'knowledge economy' the material has changed: textuality has hybridized with corporeality (biogenetic life) and, as a result, the dogmas of (post)structuralist theory are made to circulate as the self-evidencies of 'experience'. 50 The 'materiality of the signifier' (de Man) or the 'materiality of the letter' (Lacan) has been displaced by 'incorporeal materiality' (Foucault) or the 'materiality of ideology' (Žižek) in which knowledge is held to be a singularly sublime and excessive drive that both constitutes and disrupts the phenomenal in a mysterious contingent way.⁵¹ This is the 'materialism without substance

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973); Jacques Derrida, 'The Ends of Man', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), pp. 111–36; Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142–48.

⁴⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. by Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993); Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority", in *Acts of Religion*, trans. and intro. by Gil Anidjar (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 228–98.

⁵⁰ Sherry Turkel, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁵¹ Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977); Michel Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum', in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. with an intro. by Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F.

[or] the concept of social class' (Derrida) of an 'event'-al historiography centered around the 'Messianic cessation of happening' (Benjamin) in the everyday in which power intervenes in the daily in the form of what Agamben calls the 'state of exception' and reduces the human to 'bare life' (Agamben).⁵² What actually has changed, however, is not the rise of knowledge as a constitutive power over the social but the way the State — which as Marx and Engels say is nothing but 'a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' in their struggle against the workers — is being used to normalize the process of capital accumulation on a world scale.⁵³

Deconstruction was useful under neoliberalism when the question for the ruling class was how to privatize the state and increase surplusvalue from within the territory of the nation because of its opposition to the welfare-state as a 'totalitarian' imposition upon cultural differences. But now that the state has become relatively 'deterritorialized' by being subordinated to multinational corporations whose interests are no longer limited to exploiting the territory of a nation but to amassing surplusvalue around the world, deconstruction has proven to be irrelevant in containing the contradictions of transnational capitalism and new-er more 'ethical' theories have emerged to do so. What changed in theory is the concept of the material.⁵⁴ Previously primarily understood as a purely textual matter (the 'materiality of the signifier': de Man), the material is now 'immaterial', a power over life that is held to exceed positive and reliable knowledge and that can thus only be experienced bodily as a sensual affect: whether as what Agamben calls 'bare life', or as the 'biogenetic life' of Haraway's 'transspecies', or, the 'multitude' of

Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 165–98 (p. 169); Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986); Slavoj Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso Books, 2012).

⁵² Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 69, 212; Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Illuminations (New York: Schocken, 1977), p. 263; Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁵³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'The Manifesto of the Communist Party', Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 6, p. 486.

⁵⁴ This shift was officially formalized at the 'The Idea of Communism' conference in London on March 2009 at which Žižek, Badiou, and Negri participated.

affective labor (Hardt and Negri), or in terms of personal (in)fidelity to an unrepresentable 'truth-event' (Badiou), or, as in Žižek's notion of the Real as sublime 'social substance' whose unequal coverage constitutes class as a pathological death drive in his texts. In these terms, what (post)humanism investigates, unlike the theoretical post-humanism dominant under early neoliberalism, is 'biopower', which, as Foucault argued, demands thick description of the technological conditions that call into question the human mastery of nature and that often times seems to place humanity's 'existence as a living being in question'.⁵⁵ Žižek has taken to calling such an approach 'dialectical materialism' because of its focus on 'the 'inhuman' core of the human' as 'the gap between humanity and its own inhuman excess', which he calls the 'materiality of ideology' coincident with the 'desubstantialization' of the 'commons' by the market.⁵⁶ The result in terms of Žižek's understanding

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 143.

⁵⁶ Slavoj Žižek, The Parallax View (MIT Press, 2006), p. 5; Slavoj Žižek, 'Ecology — A New Opium for the Masses', Next Nature, 16 February 2009, https://nextnature.net/ story/2009/ecology-a-new-opium-for-the-masses. Žižek's 'dialectical materialism' is the opposite of the dialectical materialism of Engels. Dialectical materialism in Engels' writings is the philosophical basis of Marxism because it represents the only consistent understanding of materialism which explains how change enters being not from a spiritual 'beyond', as Hegel imagined, but from the motion of matter itself, which is thought to be static and inert in 'mechanical materialism' (empiricism). It represents the principle that 'the concept of a thing and its reality, run side by side like two asymptotes, always approaching each other yet never meeting' ('Letter to Conrad Schmidt'), or, in other words, that our concepts are abstractions of material reality with which they do not 'coincide' but nevertheless 'correspond' in a 'circuitous' way ('asymptotically'). As Engels explains, such an approach is necessary so as not to fall into the false consciousness that our concepts are merely pragmatic 'fictions'. As Lenin put it: dialectical materialism is a 'guard against mistakes and rigidity' ('Once Again on the Trade Unions', pp. 70–107), such as the dogma that the relation of concepts to reality is arbitrary (i.e., eclecticism), because dialectical materialism maintains the principle that although truth 'is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely' the continual approximations made toward it are an 'indicator of its connection with human wants', its 'use and connection with the surrounding world'. In other words, it demonstrates how the 'thing-in-itself' is always a 'thing-for-us'. Žižek's 'dialectical materialism' should more accurately be called an 'eclectical immaterialism' because behind all the examples, jokes, films, biographies, philosophers, etc. he rehearses to illustrate the (gray-on-gray) theme of the traumatic Real, is the principle that 'a reduction of the higher intellectual content to its lower economic [...] cause' (Parallax, p. ix) is 'bad' epistemology because it covers over the 'absent cause' of ontology (the Lacanian 'lack' that drives desire) which 'eludes' representation, or, put differently, 'the materiality of ideology'. Such an interpretation makes 'dialectical materialism' a

of history is devastating as he makes a fetish of alienation, of how, in Marx's words, 'an inhuman power rules over everything' in capitalism, whereby, as Engels adds, 'the more remote effects of actions [...] turn out to be [...] quite the opposite in character' of what was intended by the producers.⁵⁷ In doing so, Žižek redefines humanity as the unconscious rather than conscious species-being, driven by desire rather than need, and re-conceives history in Benjamin's messianic terms as an inevitable path to global catastrophe from which the only escape is a religious leap of faith — what Žižek calls 'pure voluntarism'.⁵⁸ And yet, what is strangely missing from these discussions, hence the continuation of the 'post', is a materialist understanding of the material as what Marx calls 'species-being' (or 'life activity, productive life').⁵⁹

As Marx and Engels explain: 'Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence'.60 This needs to be read literally. What they are saying is not, as is so often claimed, that labor, tools, production, or economics distinguishes humans from animals instead of consciousness, religion, or anything else you like, but rather that humans can be discursively distinguished from animals by anything (including labor, tools, production, economics,...) and yet whatever that 'thing' is thought to be, it necessarily is a product of human life activity, or, human species-being, rather than merely a fixed idea. As Marx acknowledges elsewhere: 'animals also produce' and 'the life of the species, both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on organic nature', so it is not simply production as such which distinguishes humans from nonhuman animals for Marx.⁶¹ Nevertheless, despite Marx's recognition of the commonality, he yet maintains that human life activity is different than animal life activity because the life activity of humans is not

trope of desire that occults need in his writing that, as in all ideology, mystifies the social.

⁵⁷ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 314; Engels, *Dialectics*, pp. 463–64.

⁵⁸ Slavoj Žižek, First as Tragedy, Then as Farce (New York: Verso Books, 2009), p. 154.

⁵⁹ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 275.

^{60 &#}x27;German Ideology', p. 31.

^{61 &#}x27;Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 275–76.

completely determined for them as it is for animals by purely biological and environmental conditions:

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity.⁶²

It is important to note that it is not the natural possession of 'consciousness' that distinguishes human beings from the rest of animal life for Marx here. Rather, it is the social mode of activity through which human beings produce their life under diverse and changing conditions that they have learned not only to consciously adapt to, but also to transform, that does so. Human beings confront their life activity — the 'metabolism' of their own labor mixed with natural resources — in practice as well as an object of thought, as something they are necessarily made aware of themselves having produced through their own labor practices over time. Human beings in their life activity, therefore, confront nature not as something given that subsists in-itself but always as a material basis for the realization of their own purposes:

[W]hat distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement.⁶³

This objectification of human life is of course a result of the fact that human life activity (i.e., labor) transforms nature, including human nature (e.g., language as an adaptation of natural sounds for the purpose of communication), whereas animal life activity does not. In other words, humans socially produce a transformation within the material conditions they inhabit in the very process of producing what is immediately necessary to sustain themselves, whereas the other animals do not. Consequently humans also produce and transform *themselves* in order to adapt to the ever changing conditions. The difference between the human and the animal to which Marx draws attention throughout

⁶² Ibid., p. 276.

⁶³ Karl Marx, Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, vol. I, Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 35, p. 188.

his writings is concretely demonstrable in the fact that 'an animal forms only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species'.64 More importantly, however, this is also a critique-al distinction to make between humans and animals in order to produce awareness of the way in which human labor, which is imposed by material necessity and productive of the 'know how' to produce all life, is 'estranged' under capitalism; the mode of production in which 'all things are other than themselves' because 'an inhuman power rules over everything' due to the law of value that emerges from out of the commodification of labor. 65 The objectification and transformation of our species-being may be the basis of human life, but the commodification of labor is the objectification of human life itself that reduces the subject of labor herself into an object on the market that is consumed by another who owns the means of production, for the purpose of accumulating capital. Capitalism thus 'makes man's specieslife a means to his physical existence' so that humanity 'produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need' rather than 'produce in freedom' from necessity.66 In other words, capitalism systematically expropriates abstract social labor and privatizes it in the hands of a few, and thus turns labor, the life activity of the species, into physical work undertaken for mere subsistence (wage-labor). The result is that capitalism 'humanizes' nature, turning it into material wealth, and in the process 'dehumanizes' humanity by reducing labor to a means of capital accumulation by the capitalist and a task undertaken by the worker for wages merely to maintain their physical existence.

It is important to clarify Marx's theory of species-being because today — as Engels said of the 'materialistic natural scientists' of his day who were 'unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man' owing to the fact that 'under ideological influence' they did 'not recognize the part played by labor therein' — even the marxists fail to grasp it.⁶⁷ Terry Eagleton, for instance, has defended Marx's concept of speciesbeing but, echoing Weber's understanding of capitalism as 'spiritual'

⁶⁴ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 277.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 68–69.

⁶⁷ Engels, Dialectics, p. 178.

in essence, he turns it into the useless romantic idea that human nature inherently 'resists' the ethos of capitalism.⁶⁸ According to Eagleton, capitalism depends on a 'ruthlessly instrumental logic' that demands 'everything [...] must have its point and purpose', so as to build up the expectation of a 'reward' for 'acting well' and, moreover, it reserves punishments for acting in ways that do 'not have a goal'.⁶⁹ In response to his culturalist theory of capitalism, he posits an equally culturalist understanding of what is to be done to transform capitalism. When he argues that defending the idea of 'the material "species being" of humanity' is a radical act of transgression, he actually puts forward a pseudo-materialist understanding of 'species-being' by representing humanity as having a cultural root and, in turn, representing culture as purposeless activity for its own sake.⁷⁰

Leaving aside for the moment the 'spiritual' way Eagleton discusses capitalism, is 'the idea of fulfilling your nature' that he finds exemplified in culture really 'inimical to the capitalist success ethic'?⁷¹ Capitalism after all depends on constant technical innovation because individual capitals realize relative surplus value by cutting the amount of time workers engage in necessary labor to reproduce the value equivalent of their wages and increasing the amount of time spent in unpaid surplus labor which forms the basis of the capitalist's profit.72 To argue that 'it is in our nature to go beyond ourselves' and 'give birth to culture, which is always changeable, diverse and open ended' and thus 'resistant' to instrumentality, is to naturalize the law of value that drives capitalism by embedding the drive for innovation in human nature. 73 Making culture the root of humanity also homogenizes culture as reflecting a universal 'sense of belonging' that 'humanizes' both oppressor and oppressed rather than a site of class antagonism over the material resources that determine whose needs are being met and whose are not, who is 'humanized' by capital and feels at home in the world as it is, and who is 'dehumanized' by it and has nothing to lose.74

⁶⁸ Terry Eagleton, After Theory (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 120.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 115–19.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 119-20.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁷² Marx, Capital, I, Chapt. 10, 'The Working Day', pp. 239–43.

⁷³ Eagleton, After Theory, p. 119.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

But what about Eagleton's argument that culture is not only essentially anti-capitalist, but is also the material root of human nature and as such an incontestable 'absolute truth'?75 On this argument, he claims that in the same way that 'you cannot ask why a giraffe should do the things it does', one cannot ask why humanity produces culture, or, in other words, ask 'what is the purpose of culture?'.76 In both cases, however, nature is taken to be a static and unchanging thing, as if giraffes ever existed outside an ever changing and evolving material environment which, actually, always does explain why they should do what they do and not something else, which is, of course, what Darwin's theory of natural selection is all about. Not only does Eagleton assume that what makes a giraffe is immanent to the giraffe outside the material environment in which it must find food, shelter and other giraffes, thus effectively giving the giraffe in place of its actual nature a normative cultural identity (a kind of Aristotelian soul inscribed in its genes, supposedly), but he also naturalizes culture by treating it as a kind of secretion that is spontaneously produced by human beings naturally. Eagleton, following an aesthetic tradition within Western (Hegelian) Marxism since Adorno, defends 'the concept of culture' as 'the cultivation of human powers as ends in themselves' on the argument that not only is an immanent understanding of culture 'resistant' to the law of value, but, furthermore, that it is embedded in human nature. 77 And yet, such a self-reflexive concept of culture is not coincident with humanity as a species: a long period of natural evolution from bipedalism and the opposable thumb to economic (i.e., conscious) organization and toolmaking precedes language and 'art', the first cultural practices which take on the formation of the subject specifically as their purpose. It is only by suppressing knowledge of human evolution and the origins of culture in labor that culture can be made to seem 'purposeless' (i.e., something naturally subjective rather than socially objective). But, not only is culture always purposeful ('language is practical, real consciousness', as Marx and Engels say) because it is economic in essence — it produces a consciousness of the material process necessary to sustain life and helps wrest control over the material world so that humans are not the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

slaves of chance and necessity — it also has cross-purposes that arise, for instance, when short and long term purposes come into conflict, such as when the needs of immediate survival conflict with long term sustainability, or, as when culture serves to 'contain' conflicting class interests (ideology).⁷⁸

What is radical about the theory of humanism that Marx advances in his early writings is how it foresees the need of overcoming alienation, the negative activity of humanity that consists of endless 're-appropriation' of our estranged 'essence', if we are ever to become truly human. He argues, 'Only through the supersession of this mediation — which is itself, however, a necessary premise — does positively self-deriving humanism, *positive* humanism, come into being'.⁷⁹ For Marx, human nature is not as Eagleton imagines: a given, static, and inert thing that 'resists' the outside world. Instead, humanity is a part of nature that, even if no longer quite an animal like any other, nevertheless remains something less than fully human, an 'instrument of labor' like any other used as a means to an end, until such time that it acquires 'control and conscious mastery of these powers, which, born of the action of men on one another, have till now overawed and ruled men as powers completely alien to them'.⁸⁰

Without an understanding of what makes the human and why (the mode of production), it is impossible to make a fundamental critique of the capitalist exploitation of human labor-power — the estranged labor that produces and 'humanizes' wealth for the capitalist and impoverishes and 'dehumanizes' the worker — and instead things appear topsy-turvy so that inequality appears to be the result of a 'bad' consciousness — 'instrumental reason' (Adorno); 'ready-to-hand thought' (Heidegger); 'the spirit of capitalism' (Weber); 'carnophallogocentrism' (Derrida); 'privatization of the commons' (Badiou, Negri, Žižek) — to be re-formed through more ethical discourses, or, in other words, through spiritual idealization ('learning to live well'). But this inversion of the material relations into ideology is itself an act of estranged labor inserted into the division of labor and represents the product of professional ideologists. In short, it is another instance of how labor power is exchanged for

⁷⁸ Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 44.

⁷⁹ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 341–42.

⁸⁰ Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', pp. 51–52.

wages (means of consumption) rather than to meet human needs as a whole. Ethical discourses and 'spiritual' fixes are commodified ways of individually learning to come to terms with the exploitation of labor by capital, rather than a way to socially change the world for the good of all.

It is the domination of capital that subjects labor to meeting physical needs (wages) and that makes culture into ideology, a reified activity to rationalize production and normalize the worker to her own subjection, rather than a material force for social emancipation from inequality. This is why although Marx argues that 'the initial stage of the movement [the re-appropriation of estranged human life [...] depends on whether the true recognized life of the people manifests itself more in consciousness or in the external world — is more ideal or real', he nevertheless maintains that the abolition of 'real' estrangement (private property), as distinct from the negation of estranged 'ideas' (reified thought), 'embraces both aspects' while the contrary is not the case. 81 In other words, the Hegelian inversion of 'substance' as 'subject' which negates the estrangement of ideas from their material basis when they are considered self-caused (as forms of 'thought') is itself an ideological false consciousness, what Marx calls an 'occult' or 'mystifing critique', precisely in the sense that it does not 'embrace' the universal estrangement of labor under capitalism, but only concerns itself with the alienated 'labor of thought' (Hegel).82 In the same way, the deconstruction of the human/animal binary inscribed within what Derrida calls 'carnophallogecentric thought' that is effected by 'thinking (the passion) of the animal' as it surfaces bodily in all inscriptions of knowledge does not 'embrace' the material as the estrangement of human species-being as a whole but only contests the 'ideal' subjection of 'thinking' and necessarily reifies the material as ahistorical 'matter' (the body as a certain 'experience of language'). In other words, Derrida simply rehearses how 'thought' too is 'other than itself' but does not surface the social forces that explain why 'an inhuman power rules over everything'.83 Without a materialist explanation, thinking remains alienated and blissfully at home with social inequality. The critique of 'ideal' estrangement (ideological

^{81 &#}x27;Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 297, 332.

⁸² Ibid., p. 345; G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), pp. 90–91, 128.

⁸³ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 314.

'thought') necessarily leaves intact the estrangement of human powers as alien powers embodied in capital which does not change due to changes in discourse and which 'always exceed the fate of signs'.⁸⁴

Other (Post)human Stories

(Post)humanism is a regime of knowing that represents the material, which is at root class inequality, as an effect of the immaterial (knowledge) and advocates for change as a spiritual movement of ideas (ethics). It for instance argues that at the root of injustice and inequality is biogenetic 'violence' that renders species undecidable from within and liberates thinking the 'passion of the animal' as the experience of language ('language about which one could say, even if it is not in itself "animal," that it is not something that the "animal" could be deprived of'), or what Derrida calls 'animal writing'.85 Humanism on this view is 'speciesism', a mode of policing the 'ontological divide' between the human and nonhuman (animal) others in 'thought'. It seems that in (post)humanist discourses, the more science advances the understanding of nature and the more life on earth depends on understanding human species-being as the universal production of the whole earth ('life-engendering life': Marx), the more impossible it becomes to know with any certainty what is human, and yet, such developments actually prove Marx's materialist theory that 'productive life is the life of the species'. 86 It follows that if, during their productive lives, human beings are reduced to the mere maintenance of physical life while the value of labor is transferred to the commodity, then humanity, and along with it everything else, will appear 'other than itself' and 'inhuman'. In place of a materialist theory of species as productive life, the social is represented in (post)humanist cultural theory in an alienated way, as an inhuman 'hauntology' of ghostly traces, a hybrid creation of 'immaterial labor' embodied in transspecies form.87 In actuality the immaterial (knowledge) is determined by the material (class) and the ethical turn of the (post)humanities is nothing

⁸⁴ Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton, *Theory*, (Post)Modernity, Opposition (Montreal: Maisonneuve Press, 1991).

⁸⁵ Derrida, Animal, pp. 25–26.

^{86 &#}x27;Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 276.

⁸⁷ On 'hauntology' see, Derrida, Specters.

more than a justification of the new more profitable forms of global capital today. 88

The 'question of the animal' (Derrida) is part of a broader 'ethical' turn in the humanities that frames issues of injustice and inequality, which are rooted in class, in cultural terms (knowledge) that accommodate capitalism as the normal basis of human societies. On the one hand it shows a concern to extend to animals the awareness of difference that social movements have brought to questions of gender, race, and sexuality, and on the other it represents sensuality and sentimental attachments as an emergent animal perspective that will transvalue all values, and so one finds Derrida nakedly communing with his cat and Haraway writing about making love with her dog through 'oral intercourse' as if such sentimental attachments could remake 'reality'.⁸⁹ In (post)humanist writings, the agency of change is 'animal writing'; what Derrida does when he writes 'l'animot' is to 'liberate [...] animal words' and is an example of what Haraway calls 'dog-writing', a kind of writing that

brings together the human and non-human, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways. ⁹⁰

(Post)humanist writing consists of telling stories of 'co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied crossspecies sociality' on the assumption that such 'stories are bigger than ideologies' and determine 'the world we might yet live in' because 'reality is an active verb'. ⁹¹ Central to the (post) humanities is the kind of 'animal writing' performed by Derrida and Haraway as the limit of the radical now, which has consolidated itself into an academic discipline known as 'animal studies'. Animal studies is committed to raising awareness of how humanity has conceived of and related to animals and, as well, prioritizes the question of how animals

⁸⁸ *e2: The Economies of Being Environmentally Conscious* (PBS, 2006).

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Ralph R. Acampora, Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Donna Haraway, The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), pp. 2–3, 6.

⁹⁰ Derrida, Animal, p. 37; Haraway, Companion Species, pp. 3–4.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 3, 4, 6, 17.

experience the world in non-human ways that are held to provide an 'other' awareness (embodied knowledge) through which to change the ways humans relate to animals, the world, and each other so as to be more respectful of differences ('love'). The question of the question of the animal, however, is not exhausted by such ethical concerns, nor is it produced immanently within cultural discourses. The ethical turn to the consideration of the animal is a question because capitalism is now transforming the biosphere and developing newer forms of property and class conflict in ways that put the exploitation of human speciesbeing itself in question and raise awareness of the necessity of the class struggle for socialism. The 'question of the animal' is the reformist answer to the class inequalities of capitalism that serves the ruling class which wants a 'sustainable' capitalism with less overt injustice but with class inequality as the root of the system in exploited labor still intact.

The 'question of the animal' is not a questioning of capitalism. Rather, it is a questioning of the humanist legitimation of an outdated ('modern', 'industrial', 'nationalist') capitalism and on the side of a newer (post)humanist global capitalism. This is why one finds that the new (post)humanist capitalists speak the same (post)humanist animal language of a Derrida or Haraway, as when Joel Salatin, a farm owner/activist, remarks:

A culture that views a pig as a pile of protoplasmic inanimate structure to be manipulated by whatever creative design the human can foist on that critter will probably view individuals within its community and other cultures in the community of nations with the same kind of disdain, disrespect and controlling-type mentality.⁹³

Humanist capitalism is a 'controlling-type mentality' (carnophallogocentrism; speciesism); (post)humanist capitalism is more 'in touch' with the 'commons' (critter life, transspecies, pettism). In other words, humanist capitalism is 'violently' industrial, nationalist, and monocultural: it penetrates local cultures and causes them to destroy their forests for export or to hunt species to extinction for trade, for example. In contrast, (post)humanist capitalism is more 'ethical',

⁹² See, e.g., Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁹³ Food, Inc., dir. Robert Kenner (Magnolia Pictures, 2008).

postindustrial, transnational and multicultural: it cooperates with local growers to preserve their ecospheres and invents sustainable forms of agriculture and urbanism and protects wildlife for the knowledges they may give to future generations. Humanist capitalism is gray. (Post) humanist capitalism is green. But green capitalism, like gray capitalism, is still a rejection of the red — the emancipatory theory of labor in which 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' is the rule, and 'men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature' because they 'produce in accordance with the standard of every species' universally.⁹⁴

The (post)humanities advocates the standpoint of the animal as 'resistant' in its opacity to the systematic use of animals for profit (speciesism) because it values the singularity and difference of the animal, but global capitalism itself necessitates such an ethical awareness because of the new forms of property, such as the genetic engineering of food or the protection of ecospheres for pharmaceuticals research and development. On the left these new forms of capital are made into 'immaterial' forms of 'biopower' (Foucault, Agamben), or, ironically, in more (neo)marxist terms, as the privatization of the commons of 'general intellect' (Negri, Wark, Žižek), as if knowledge were the source of wealth. Biopower represents the commodification of labor by capital as the result of a compulsive acquisitive drive for material resources, a will-to-power to control the 'commons' and regulate 'life', and not the class practice of the capitalist to accumulate more surplus-labor from human labor-power. The displacement of the material by the immaterial as the underlying logic of the system in (post)humanist theory is an argument for an ethical capitalism that focuses on the effects of capitalism (social domination) rather than its cause (labor exploitation) and in this way makes individuals seem responsible for its inequalities and justifies a volunteerism to reform it in localities (pettism) rather than critique the logic of class relations.

But capitalism today realizes the most surplus-value precisely through such ethical practices, through, for instance, the exercise of 'soft power' in 'humanitarian aid' missions by US military forces in response

⁹⁴ Karl Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: Collected Works, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), 24, p. 87; Engels, Dialectics, p. 461; Marx, Manuscripts, p. 277.

to so-called 'natural disasters' as in Haiti in 2010, and the development of 'green alternatives' for industry:

A new poetry of buildings [...] born of a deeper beauty — not merely sleek design but rather part of its DNA, ingrained in the materials, its source, its inner workings, possessing an unseen soul [...] a building can do more than stand [...] it can live and contribute.⁹⁵

These newer forms of property, unlike the old forms, are represented as the outcome of immaterial processes (knowledge-work) that are inherently 'clean' (i.e., more efficient, less-wasteful and therefore ethical or 'smart') and therefore 'green' (more just). And yet these forms of property do not lessen but actually deepen class exploitation by, for example, using the material resources of the state to first subsidize their development and then to protect their monopoly on the new products (as Monsanto does with the patents on its genetically modified seeds for example or as Pfizer does with the patents on its medicine). They commodify the environmental crisis into marketable products and polarize the social even more between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. These new forms of exploitation are ideologically enabled by the new '(post) humanist' theories of the material which I will now turn to consider more closely.

Materialist (Post)humanism

The canonical figuration of the (post)humanities with Derrida at the center marginalizes theories of (post)humanism that regard it as the dominant ideology of global capitalism, such as Žižek's for instance. Turning to Žižek's writings, one finds a very different way of making sense of (post)humanism according to its 'outside'. On Žižek's framing, the (post)humanities is really the terrain in which 'we should locate today's struggle between idealism and materialism' as 'class struggle' over the Real.⁹⁶ The 'idealists' are the contemporary 'immaterialists' who reduce phenomena to an absolute plane of immanence without an outside

^{95 &#}x27;The Green Apple', nar. by Brad Pitt, e2: The Economies of Being Environmentally Conscious (PBS, 2006).

⁹⁶ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 166; Slavoj Žižek and V. I. Lenin, 'Afterword: Lenin's Choice', *Revolution at the Gates: The 1917 Writings* (New York: Verso Books, 2014), p. 190.

cause, such as Heidegger (Being), Derrida (Text), Deleuze (Flows) and Negri (Multitude). Without accounting for an outside cause, such views produce an 'unconditional voluntarism' that is at home in the world as it is, following the dictates of compulsory consumption heedless of the social costs. The 'materialists', conversely, are those who 'embed' the 'immaterial' phenomena of culture within its underlying preconditions — capitalism. Leaving aside for the moment the question of Žižek's understanding of the outside, class, capitalism, and materialism, how does his theory lead us to understand the 'question of the animal' that is central to Derrida's formulation of the (post)humanities?

Žižek has stated his agreement with Fukuyama's assessment of the possibility of the imminent demise of capitalism by allowing markets deregulated access to the 'lifeworld': 'We are in danger of losing everything: the threat is that we will be reduced to abstract subjects devoid of all substantial content, dispossessed of our symbolic substance, our genetic base heavily manipulated, vegetating in an unlivable environment'.98 Despite this agreement, Žižek does not share Fukuyama's idea of human freedom as cultural competition for status or his global regulatory fantasies. Žižek is opposed to the essentialist account of human nature that underlies Fukuyama's writings which figure as properly human the 'struggle for recognition' (culture) as an extension of the animal struggle for existence (need). According to Žižek, all struggles are 'surplus' struggles at the root of which is the class struggle over surplus-value, which gives form to the cultural struggles beyond the economic struggle and makes it impossible to ideologically close the gap between 'what is' (inequality) and what 'should be' (democracy). 99 Class struggle, in short, is the 'absent cause' (Althusser) at the center of existence that generates ideological 'solutions' but that itself 'eludes symbolization' and explanation. The question for Žižek is how to figure this gap between the 'symbolic' surface conflicts and the underlying structural contradiction of capitalism in such a way as to resist its recuperative suturing in the Symbolic edifice of the culture, a strategy

⁹⁷ Žižek, Parallax, p. 165.

⁹⁸ Francis Fukuyama, Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution (London: Picador, 2003); Žižek, Tragedy, p. 97.

⁹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism (New York: Verso Books, 2012), p. 246.

he calls 'Bartleby politics' (i.e., as in 'I prefer not to' repeat the ideology). In other words, his project is how to 'resist' attachment to a 'big Other' or 'grand narrative' of history that would seem to 'guarantee' a progressive outcome and thereby promote the usual politics that support the system rather than provoke a 'leap of faith' outside the logic of history. 100 Žižek thus opposes 'traditional history' with 'effective history' as in Foucault's reading of Nietzsche, which dissolves the ongoing historicity of labor in the 'event'-fulness of ideology (reversal of values). 101 What this does to the concept of class in Žižek's writings is crucial for understanding their ideological function. Žižek turns class into a marker of cultural status. His 'class' is not a matter of 'oppressor and oppressed' but of symbolic 'inclusion and exclusion' from the dominant culture: 'slum dwellers [...] are "free" in the double meaning of the word even more than the classic proletariat ("freed" from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside the police regulations of the state)'. 102 His writings have become so popular in the left theory market and on the Internet because of the way they turn class from an economic structure of inequality to an empty political trope, citing Rancière's ideological gloss on the proletariat as 'the part of no-part' that whitewashes exploitation and alibis capitalism. 103 His answer to social injustice and inequality is, as in market criteria, how to construct an 'effective' (which always means popular in terms of marketing) understanding of class by representing class as disavowed desire and perverse pleasure rather than alienated

¹⁰⁰ Such a voluntarist leap 'outside' history is of course already 'inside' the discourse of anarchism, which can be traced through the writings of the Young Hegelians, to Stirner, Nietzsche, and Sorel, through the Surrealists, the College of Sociology (Bataille, Benjamin), and the Situationists, as a text that, moreover, has always put itself forward as dissenting from the 'orthodoxies' of dissent and as offering a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism and whose libertarian discourse has itself become the official ideology of the neoliberal state (deregulation). Žižek, however, has taken to cloaking it as revolutionary Marxism ('Repeating Lenin' n. pag.). But for Marxism, 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' between 'oppressor and oppressed' ('Manifesto', p. 482). Hence it follows that 'there is no middle way (for mankind has not developed any 'third' ideology), and generally speaking, in a society torn by class opposition there could never be a non-class or an above-class ideology' (Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement', V. I. Lenin Collected Works, 45 vols [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977], 5, pp. 347–529 [p. 384]).

¹⁰¹ Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice.

¹⁰² Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 482; Žižek, 'Ecology', n. pag.

¹⁰³ Žižek, Tragedy, p. 99.

labor and unmet need. In other words, class is posited as a site of 'surplus-enjoyment' in the culture in which the term is either invested with negative or affirmative pleasure rather than class as a matter of who is clothed, fed, housed, educated, healthy, and why. In this way he makes class into a market identity as in bourgeois sociology. So, on the one hand, class is a negative Real that eludes symbolization at the level of culture ('the part of no-part') and, on the other, it is a positive call to action to struggle against the privatization of the 'commons' (what he calls communism) on the part of 'egalitarian collectives' united by the categorical imperative that 'truth is partial' rather than 'objective'. 104 In terms of ideology, what this situating of class in relation to culture rather than production entails is the insistence that behind the symbolic humanization and naturalization of capitalism as the horizon of struggle is an 'inhuman' excess ('the materiality of ideology'), a death-drive implanted in human beings by the market that produces a 'surplus-pleasure' to be found both in the sacrifice of one's normal identity as a consumer and symbolic rebirth as an ethical subject. For Žižek, the contemporary represents the moment when the inhuman drive of capitalism that enslaves the individual to the loop of desire and prioritizes it before the social good is extended into the Symbolic (the cultural sphere), which puts it up for contestation and resignification in ways that may challenge the consumerism and technocratic reason of the dominant ideology such as to make possible a truly authentic ethical act to commit oneself to the overthrow of capitalism.

Clearly, in Žižek's terms, Haraway's 'transspecies' and Derrida's 'l'animot' are as equally problematic as Fukuyama's defense of the human because they all ideologically obscure a real contradiction between the inside (capitalism) and the outside (communism). They all reduce the class struggle, which structures culture, to the terms of the cultural as a plane of immanence in which (class) antagonism is normalized as the self-difference within class, and disappear the struggle between classes over the 'inhuman' social Real (the 'commons'). And yet Žižek's understanding of the outside is also not outside but inside, what he calls

¹⁰⁴ Žižek, 'Repeating Lenin', n. pag.

¹⁰⁵ Class and Its Others, J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff (eds), foreword by Amitava Kumar (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000).

the ethical Act, or, following Badiou, 'fidelity to the event' or the 'idea of communism' (i.e., defense of the commons), that makes class into a marker of different lifestyles: the 'working class' is thus a plurality of market identities that consists of 'intellectual laborers, the old manual working class, and the outcasts' each with their own 'identity politics' ('multiculturalism'/'populist fundamentalism'/'gangs') formed in response to state 'privatization' that 'desubstantializes' the 'commons' (the 'general intellect') and thus makes them 'free [...] to invent some mode of being-together'. 106

Žižek's opposition to the humanism of 'state philosophy', which he locates both in the Fukuyamian attempt to delimit a properly human sphere of ethics from an encroaching 'inhuman' otherness and in the postmodern left who fetishize a sublime otherness (pettism), is finally not so radical because he represents capitalism as an 'inhuman' drive that nullifies the revolutionary agency of the proletariat, which is the material, not symbolic, critique of everything existing, and 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things' because of its centrality to capitalism.107 Žižek rejects what he calls the 'old' and 'naïve' theory of surplus-value of Marx and in place of Marx's class theory of culture, he puts his own cultural theory of class as a matter of who is included/excluded from the hegemonic form of 'enjoyment'. 108 He claims that the proletariat no longer exists as the mass of workers exploited at the point of production and that Marx's theory of value as the exploitation of labor is out of date because there is no more exploitation now that knowledge is the source of value ('general intellect') and profit is not made from surplus-labor but 'rent' (of copyrighted software for example). 109 Leaving aside that what he

¹⁰⁶ Žižek, Tragedy 147; 'Ecology', n. pag.

¹⁰⁷ Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ Slavoj Žižek, 'The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?', YouTube, 21 September 2009 https://youtu.be/RqVAiBbSjbI?t=4202 [accessed 8 June 2024].

¹⁰⁹ Tragedy, p. 145; The result of Žižek's rejection of Marx's labor theory of value is bourgeois ideology: 'I don't believe Bill Gates is exploiting his workers because he pays them relatively well' ('Monstrosity of Christ', n. pag.). In short, exploitation is not a matter of production but market exchange that disappears when the terms of exchange are 'fair'. I leave aside how Žižek has already undermined the logic of 'fair' that allows him to conclude there is no exploitation when he says that the logic of profit is 'arbitrary' because it is determined through the use of juridical force (copyright). What is behind Žižek's (il)logic is the (ideo)logic of capital that mystifies the source of value in human labor.

describes is actually double profit — not only does the capitalist own the labor embodied in the commodity but also the wages to access it through monopoly control of the market — in place of the proletariat as 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things', Žižek instead substitutes those he calls 'toxic subjects', 'outcasts', or 'slum dwellers' basing this on their exclusion from authentic recognition by the culture for what is in effect, on his reading, their cynical nonaffirmative consumption, which he romanticizes as 'Bartleby politics'. 110 Žižek rewrites 'class' in cultural terms as those who are not 'included' in the 'symbolic social substance' (i.e. 'commons', 'general intellect') and whose exclusion becomes its own source of pleasure: "freed" from all substantial ties [...] they have to invent some mode of being-together'. 111 In Žižek's psycho-marxist theory, in contrast to classical Marxist theory, 'toxic subjects' are not understood as subjects of history whose agency is material and the effect of the structure of capitalism that exploits them. Instead, they are subjects understood as 'free agents', conscientious objectors to the class war between exploiters and exploited, who act spontaneously in the market as counter-hegemonic ethical agents and who never question the exploitation of labor by capital at the root of capitalism but simply question its ideological supremacy because they feel alienated from it. In short, they are good petty-bourgeois subjects who see themselves as free individuals, as in bourgeois ideology. Capital of course depends on these 'free subjects' to normalize the exchange of labor for wages as a relation that is freely entered into and to mystify the exploitation of labor by capital. For all his denouncing of the 'resistance' politics (Laclau, Butler, Critchley, et al.) which fundamentally accepts capitalism as the silent and unquestioned 'background', Žižek's notion of politics is finally no different. It amounts to resisting the privatization of the 'commons', which in his writings means resisting the 'private' (instrumental) use of reason by the State (citing Kant), so that the 'immediate universal' substance ('general intellect') may display itself unhindered, without representation and regulation, as a screen on which to project more 'authentic' images of surplus-enjoyment. In short, he wants a de-regulated symbolic economy, or, more commonly,

¹¹⁰ Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 49; Slavoj Žižek, 'Learn to Live Without Masters', *Naked Punch*, 3 October 2009, http://www.nakedpunch.com/articles/34.

¹¹¹ Žižek, 'Ecology', n. pag.

freedom of speech. His insistence on the 'materiality of ideology' as the limit of the possible is done so as to figure movement to the outside in libertarian terms, as simply opting out ('I prefer not to') or 'demanding the impossible' (as in the old May '68 slogan). It is the lack of a materialist theory of value that leads Žižek, like Negri, into spiritualism and voluntarism as a political strategy and to the embrace of bourgeois ideology; as when he claims that Paul of Tarsus is a true Leninist for such moral platitudes as that radical change begins as 'a change in you'.112 Žižek fetishizes the 'encounter with the Real' as identification with that which is not yet culturally 'schematized' and thereby holds out the hope of an alternative schematization; 'When the normal run of things is traumatically interrupted the field is opened up for discursive ideological competition'. 113 What is ruled out by such an adventurist cultural politics of the spectacle (which led Žižek to support the fascist populism of the Trump campaign in 2016) is the advancement of revolutionary politics based on the class struggle over material resources and meeting people's needs. 114

Žižek 'surpasses' Negri on the transpatriotic left by saying that it is those who are excluded from the commons of 'general intellect' that are

¹¹² Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), p. 9; Slavoj Žižek, 'An Interview with Slavoj Žižek: "On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love", with Joshua Delpech-Ramey, *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, 1:2, Spring (2004), pp. 32–38 (p. 36).

¹¹³ Žižek, Tragedy, p. 17.

¹¹⁴ This is perhaps most obvious in Žižek's justification of the 2008 bank bailouts, which, he argued, was necessary given that the 'real economy' depends on the 'virtual economy' in the sense that everything has first to be financed in order to be produced (Tragedy, p. 14): an ideological inversion characteristic of the capitalist system that in fact makes exchange-value a priority over use-value and thereby gives finance capital executive power in determining the social distribution of resources. Leaving aside the fact that the bailout did not stimulate the 'real economy' and unemployment continued to grow at an unprecedented rate, financial capital is not productive capital that is invested in labor and machinery to realize surplusvalue but is instead speculative capital that simply shifts money around and redistributes already produced surplus-value. Žižek's inversion of the 'real' into the 'virtual' economy dissolves labor as the source of value into speculative financial transactions as if capital were the source of value. What is Real is thus the 'bottom line' incontestable Truth of the market ('virtual economy') over meeting people's needs for health care, education, housing, communications, and economic stability ('real economy'). The reality remains, however, that the 'virtual economy' of financial speculation emerges out of the 'real economy' due to the falling rate of profit relative to investment in the production process, which is why the bailout did not stimulate investment and produce jobs as advertised.

revolutionary, not those who participate in it by producing new ideas of sociality. These 'outcasts' are the ones whose consumption does not add value — because they do not affirm the political ideology of ethical capitalism through which products are marketed today — and therefore does not support the 'new' cultural capitalism which unlike the 'old' capitalism is based not on surplus-labor but surplus-pleasure. By withholding their affirmation, they practice a cynical consumption that then marks them symbolically for exclusion (as 'toxic subjects', 'outcasts', 'terrorists', etc.). This is of course a meta-cynical theory which finds spontaneously in the market a disaffected lifestyle that offers a ready-made model of revolution without the need for theory ('I prefer not to') and the hard task of building a revolutionary party. But, as Lenin argues in his critique of spontaneity, 'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'. The

Žižek is meta-cynically playing with the concrete surfaces of meaning in culture which on his own terms is a way to 'privatize the commons' and justify an ethical capitalism. The value Žižek adds to the 'general intellect' is the idea that cynical (non-affirmative) consumption spontaneously undermines capitalism, an idea which simply makes its peace with the ongoing exploitation of labor embodied in the commodity. The 'idea of communism' he defends (following Badiou) is a romantic sublime indebted to Heidegger's ethos of 'letting being be' which, like the 'refusal of work' doctrine of the autonomist marxists, is a theology of crisis in which the 'weak' are represented as 'strong in spirit' and in which we see the intellectuals abandon their social duty to educate the laboring masses (the exploited) in their struggle against the exploiter (capital) by becoming cheerleaders for whatever is popular at the time. On this logic 'the poor are actually extraordinarily wealthy' because 'despite the myriad mechanisms of hierarchy and subordination' they are 'creative' and 'express an enormous power of life', or, in Žižek's terms, "freed" from all substantial ties' they are "free" [...] to invent some mode of being-together'.¹¹⁷ Unlike Hardt, Negri, and Starbucks, however, Žižek does not insist that spiritual values necessarily lead to a good society

¹¹⁵ Žižek, *Tragedy*, pp. 39–41.

¹¹⁶ V. I. Lenin, 'What Is To Be Done?', p 369.

¹¹⁷ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 131, 129; Žižek, 'Ecology', n. pag.

because there are no guarantees that it will (now that history has been 'desubstantialized'), and it may just as well strengthen the State. When one considers the role of the state in the 'authoritarian capitalism' he locates in The People's Republic of China, the normalization of which he sees as inevitable, his passionate embrace of 'the Cross of the postrevolutionary present' as an example of how the 'lowest' is the 'highest' (Hegel's 'infinite judgment') is particularly cynical. 118 Žižek's messianic embrace of the oppressed is, in other words, conditional upon their remaining oppressed. Hence all the awkward and oft-repeated Gulag jokes at the expense of his 'enemies' to lighten things up, as if to say, 'I am not really serious, I would not take power and incarcerate and indoctrinate you like them'. But the jokes have a serious message; they signal the cynical belief in an eternal capitalism and are a mark of class belonging among those who are engrossed in inventing pleasures above and beyond the struggle over material need, which they are allowed to enjoy because as bourgeois apologists they justify consuming the labor of the other.

Žižek finds, in the indirect style of deconstruction in which materiality is reduced to textual mediations, a hidden belief in substantial 'reality' that indicates its silent complicity with the dominant ideology, what he calls'objective belief'. 119 Objective belief functions by taking the subject out of the picture as if the Real simply exists without the active participation of subjects who normalize it precisely by disavowing the complicity of their attempts to ameliorate things through such mechanisms as activism, charity, and ethical consumption, which support the status quo. Žižek embraces the 'monstrosity of Christ' and 'Bartleby politics' as marginalized figures of non-participation in the dominant ideology who embody the self-sacrificing ideals of egalitarian collectivity by 'doing nothing' but 'thinking' during moments of social crisis. But how effective is this counter-strategy? Žižek reverses Marx's eleventh thesis when he argues that 'the first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act [...] but to question the hegemonic'. 120 In doing so, he leaves intact the ideological notion that the eleventh thesis is the formula for an ethical calling (i.e., Badiou's 'fidelity to the Event'). By contrast, Marx's argument about philosophers interpreting the world

¹¹⁸ Parallax, p. 5

¹¹⁹ Slavoj Žižek, On Belief (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

^{120 &#}x27;Repeating Lenin', n. pag.

rather than changing it is not an ethical call to spontaneous activism, but a materialist guide for praxis based on the recognition that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'. 121 In other words, Marx is not posing the question of whether one should choose to think or act, as Žižek imagines, but revealing the complicity of thought in social praxis. Žižek's view is exactly the opposite: it invites one to imagine that theory and practice are separate self-enclosed activities which allow for the possibility of the choice of one of them, and that by choosing 'thinking' and rejecting ideology ('I prefer not to') silently assumes that consciousness determines social existence. In other words, he apparently believes that by 'combating solely the phrases of this world' he is changing it, or as he puts it, 'When the normal run of things is traumatically interrupted the field is opened up for discursive ideological competition'. 122 Žižek's 'dialectical materialism' is really a version of Hegel's objective idealism in which ideas determine the material, which is why he rejects ideology critique as 'a reduction of the higher intellectual content to its lower economic [...] cause' for immanent critique which aims at 'the inherent decentering of the interpreted text' by surfacing 'its 'unthought' [...] disavowed presuppositions and consequences'. 123 Thinking the unthought and disavowed (i.e., encountering the traumatic Real that contradicts ideology in daily life) is represented by Žižek as more important than surfacing the determination of thought by the social totality (class). In short, Žižek substitutes ideological inversion for a materialist critique that uncovers the economic forces that structure the totality as a guide to praxis. His understanding of 'class' as inclusion/ exclusion in the 'social substance of ideology' is itself a dissimulation of class privilege in that it assumes the world is shaped by ideas, the material by the immaterial, as in all bourgeois ideology.

What people think and believe, however, whether the dominant ideology or revolutionary ideas, are always a reflection of the class relations that determine the limits of the possible. If the world appears

¹²¹ Karl Marx, 'Preface' to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Karl Marx/ Frederick Engels: Collected Works, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987), 29, pp. 261–65 (p. 263).

¹²² Marx and Engels, 'German Ideology', p. 30; Žižek, Tragedy, pp. 39–41.

¹²³ Parallax, p. ix.

determined by ideology, this is simply a result of the fact that in practice labor is itself 'estranged' at the point of production, and what appears to be an equal and fair exchange of labor for wages is in actuality the exploitative extraction of surplus-labor from the worker by the capitalist, which subordinates labor to capital. The objective appearance of the exchange of labor for wages in the market is itself already ideological and disguises the class inequality between capital and labor without the need of any extra cultural reinforcement (i.e., surplus-pleasure). Moreover, this objective ideology, which is daily reproduced in material practice, can only be penetrated by Marx's labor theory of value, which explains that what the worker sells to the capitalist is not her labor (a commodity like any other) but her labor-power — a 'special commodity whose use value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value'. 124 Žižek's 'surplus' theory of ideology in which ideology is made into a phantom value, a surplus-pleasure beyond normal pleasure, which he places as the object (a) of all struggles, does what bourgeois ideology has always done which is to disguise the outright theft of laborpower by the capitalist, not in the everyday surfaces of consumption but daily at the point of production, in the 'working day'. 125

For Žižek, species-being (i.e., Marx's explanation of 'life activity', 'productive life', 'life-engendering life'), which explains labor as the source of value, is a piece of New Age-y mysticism ('cosmic awareness' or 'holistic immersion') that must be dismissed because 'nature doesn't exist', 'there is no Evolution', and 'one should thus learn to accept the utter groundlessness of our existence'. ¹²⁶ In this he is echoing Badiou who rejects any 'figure which makes man into a species' on the grounds that to do so reduces politics to the mere maintenance of animal life as in the biopolitics of 'state philosophy'. ¹²⁷ Species-being is thus posited as a 'new opium of the masses' through which late capitalism manages its contradictions by adopting a 'co-operative' ontology (humanist speciesism). On this view, species-being (labor) is a socialist ideology that has been incorporated into the maintenance of capitalism and what is really radical is commitment to the 'idea of communism', not

¹²⁴ Marx, Capital, I, p. 177.

¹²⁵ Marx, Capital, I, pp. 239-43.

¹²⁶ Tragedy, p. 94; 'Ecology', n. pag.

¹²⁷ Alain Badiou, The Century (Boston and New York: Polity Press, 2007), p. 174.

as the movement of history, but as a categorical imperative that 'truth is partial' and cannot be grounded in any 'big Other' because now that the 'commons' has been privatized 'substance is subject', as Hegel thought, and we are 'free [...] to invent some mode of being-together'. 128 On Žižek's view, class is thus a 'sublime object' of ideology, with all of its religious aroma, rather than the material basis of what exists. Desire and not need is at the center of the social. Desire, however, not as human but as inhuman. It is not, in other words, desire as it arises out of the social relations through which men and women meet their needs, but desire as a trope to mark the fact that his analytics remains immanent to the dominant ideology of compulsory consumption (the law of enjoyment). Desire is 'inhuman' because Žižek considers it a 'compulsive' force that negates the autonomy of the ego (will, reason, etc.), pace Freud ('death drive'). Yet in this way 'desire' is de-humanized — it is not understood as emerging from the social relations — and becomes in fact an ideology or 'false consciousness': a way to 'imagine [...] false or seeming motive forces' in place of 'the real motive forces' that compel individuals. 129 In short, Žižek's notion of death drive as the inhuman compulsion of desire is simply a mystification of what Marx calls 'the silent compulsion of economic relations'. 130 It is libidinal economy masquerading as political economy in the attempt to imagine a (post)humanist reversal of values in which the human being embodies the 'passion of the animal' (Derrida), which is a trope that mystifies the actual reduction of humans by capital to bare animal existence.

Because capitalism has clearly become destructive in its effects and cannot meet the needs of the masses (the primary producers of wealth), the dominant ideology of bourgeois society has become (post) humanist and inscribes the notions that, (1) the human is not a unique and singular being but a shifting construct made from out of spectral values, affects, desires, etc. that emerges from the 'ontological divide' in Western discourse erected between the 'human' and 'non-human' in culture and (2) culture as a realm of values cannot be considered distinct from nature as 'not culture' and 'value-less' because such distinctions

^{128 &#}x27;Ecology', n. pag.

¹²⁹ Frederick Engels, 'Letters on Historical Materialism', *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 760–68 (p. 766).

¹³⁰ Capital, I, p. 726.

are always 'embodied': value hierarchies mark subjects by inhabiting the 'matter' of bodies and are always 'lived' by (human, non-human, posthuman) individuals.

What the first premise denies is that labor (human species-being) is the unique and singular source of value because it is only due to social labor that humans have the special capacity to know and transform nature as a whole, not only in accordance with human needs but also the needs of nature. This quality of human laboring activity being 'lifeengendering life' (Marx) and not merely a life-maintaining activity is what makes humans not simply a species like any other but also one whose form of activity takes historically specific forms ('modes of production'). It also explains why labor in its current form, as the commodity whose consumption in the production process increases value beyond its immediate use, is a transitional and historical form of species-life. Making the human a spectral category whose internal displacements reveal the impossibility of positive and reliable knowledge of the real is to disappear the surplus-value extracted from human labor that comprises all value in commodity culture (even the value of so-called 'natural resources' which cannot be utilized without the application of labor).

The second premise erases the distinction between culture and nature through the category of 'embodiment' — as in Foucault's 'materialism of the incorporeal' in which knowledge is always an effect of how power inscribes bodies. In doing so, this premise further assumes that 'matter' is a 'thing' (body). But while what is material is always bound up with a conception of value, such a conception is itself always valued relative to the development of the forces of production. If today, for instance, it is 'bodies that matter' (Butler, Grosz) rather than 'textuality' (Barthes, Derrida, de Man), it is not simply the result of an ethical turn but the result of textual materialism appearing outdated in the transnational cyber-economy of smartphones, social media, the Internet of things, deep learning, artificial intelligence, and Web 4.0. The international language of the televisual economy, what one cultural critic calls the 'iconomy', is visual literacy (just look at international airport signage or IKEA instructions), and, as any global blockbuster film will show (e.g., Avatar), visual literacy must be discursively formulaic and appeal to the

immediacy of the senses (embodiment) in order to realize a profit.¹³¹ Embodiment, the matter of the body as the limit-text of thinking materiality in (post)humanist cultural theory, is valued now because it reflects in ideology the new global property forms developed to commodify the environmental crisis by re-tooling industry through what is being called 'sustainable design' on the grounds that with existing technologies it is possible to reduce the human footprint by 90%.¹³² On this market logic, 'All of life is actually a design project today' and what matters most is thus the sensual 'interface' between the consumer and the new products.¹³³ In short, the notion of matter changes not simply because of a cultural change in values but because of changes in the mode of production and the forms of property.¹³⁴

The material is a social relation not a 'thing'. In other words, what is material is the structure of need, which is inscribed in the relation between wage-labor and capital; labor at a certain level of historical development is embodied in private property (capital) to which there corresponds an ideological form of consciousness. In this sense, the material is not simply 'matter' — whether conceived as 'sensuous' 'thingness', or, as in the (post)humanist logic, the embodiment of knowledge, codes, affects, and so forth. Making the limit of the material the matter of bodies is really just a way to make reliable knowledge of these material relations — and their limits — conceptually unattainable by defining the material in terms of its opacity to consciousness (the unfathomable secret core of matter that Kant called the 'thing-in-itself' and Graham Harman the 'withdrawn object') and thereby authorizing lived experience (the phenomenal) as the limit-text of knowing. 135 However, "lived" experience is not a given [...] but the spontaneous "lived experience" of ideology in its peculiar relationship to the real'. 136 More specifically,

¹³¹ On 'iconomy' see, Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).

¹³² *The 11th Hour*, dir. by Nadia Conners and Leila Conners Petersen (Warner Bros., 2007).

¹³³ Bruce Mau, The 11th Hour.

¹³⁴ Kimberly DeFazio, 'Designing Class: Ikea and Democracy as Furniture', *The Red Critique*, No. 7, November/December 2002, http://redcritique.org/NovDec02/designingclass.htm.

¹³⁵ Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (New Orleans: Pelican, 2018).

¹³⁶ Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971),

lived experience is the logic of consumption that serves big business by encouraging 'alternative' consumption in the time of overproduction.

Today materialism is being discussed in terms of its effects at the level of consciousness — that is, as 'materialism of the incorporeal' (Foucault) or the 'materiality of ideology' (Žižek) — on the assumption that the material is the 'matter' perceived by the senses, behind which lies the 'immaterial' ideas that determine its form. However, what is being called 'immaterial' and 'emotional labor' and made into the formgiving agency that Hardt and Negri call the 'multitude' and Žižek calls the 'commons' is simply a trope for that moment of production in which the object of labor is the subject herself that has always been a part of the labor process now as ever. This is, by the way, why Hardt and Negri can attribute this reflexive idea to Marx by citing his phrase, 'l'homme produit *l'homme'*. ¹³⁷ This simply means that labor is a dialectical activity. Labor, in other words, is not a 'one-sided' working upon things but an 'all-sided' activity that produces the subject as well as the object. Furthermore, it is a social process of production that is undertaken in accordance with material necessity:

Production not only supplies a material for the need, but it also supplies a need for the material [...] [it] not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object [...] Production thus creates the consumer. ¹³⁸

Obviously, calling the production of subjectivity 'immaterial' simply maintains an ideological distinction between mental and manual labor, one that presupposes an empiricist understanding of the material as matter. In this matterist view, labor is defined by the type of 'thing' it produces and hence 'immaterial' when the 'thing' produced is subjectivity or affective attachments ('emotional labor' or services). When Hardt and Negri say that they agree with Marx that 'humans produce and humans are produced' but follow Foucault in rejecting Marx's 'humanism' and, moreover, when they reject Marx's dialectical

p. 223.

¹³⁷ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Commonwealth (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009), p. 136.

¹³⁸ Karl Marx, Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft) (London: Penguin Books, 1993) p. 92; 'Economic Manuscripts of 1857–8', Karl Marx/ Frederick Engels: Collected Works, 50 vols (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 28, pp. 17–537 (pp. 29–30).

critique for Kant's transcendental critique, this is their way of denying that labor is more than a 'thing' — it is what Marx calls species-being ('life activity, productive life'). ¹³⁹

Labor (species-being, life activity, productive life) is the structure of necessity that explains the seemingly disparate and apparently concrete as an effect of the social transformation of nature. Labor is the determinate relation behind any explanation of the world we see and it can only be ignored in the imaginary: What is 'imagined' however is also explained by labor. In short, labor is dialectical — what is usually 'ascribed to the mind', or, 'to the development and activity of the brain', is in actuality a product of the 'idealistic world outlook' which has emerged and is maintained due to advances in labor from simple and straightforward practices to more complex and opaque combinations. 140 Marx's concept of species being is root knowledge for uncovering the 'part played by labor' (Engels) in the so-called 'posthumanist' culture because 'labor is the unique and singular source of value' that is being 'resignified' in 'imaginative' ways to reform capitalism in localities but that yet explains contemporary culture in all its forms as alienated and exploited labor demanding transformation of the totality.

Badiou's 'formalized in-humanism' for instance, takes the 'inhuman' effects of social praxis under the existing capitalist relations of production as the basis upon which to adopt Foucault's anti-humanism against the 'anthropology' of Marx: 'the man of inhuman beginning, who installs his thought in what happens and abides in the discontinuity of this arrival'. What is regarded as human on these terms is always the projection of agency onto the past, a retroactive application of identity into the contingent events, forces, and wills that make up history, following Nietzsche's reversal of causality from an objective determination into an affective one. Yet, what is being marked as 'inhuman' here, the 'event'-fulness of history, is in actuality a testimony to the materiality of labor, and not of discontinuity. The 'lag' between 'what happens' and how it is 'thought' is explained not by 'discontinuity' but by the process of the

¹³⁹ Commonwealth, pp. 6, 136.

¹⁴⁰ Engels, Dialectics, p. 459.

¹⁴¹ Badiou, The Century, pp. 174, 178.

¹⁴² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Arnold Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 293–300.

material causation of thought as humanity

inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. ¹⁴³

What is being called 'in-human' is in actuality the product of human labor at a certain point of historical development in which the 'needs of nature' (Marx) are currently being ignored because of the immediate imperative to profit a few from the exploitation of human labor-power. In other words, thinking humanity as an 'in-human' projection is simply to re-turn the human to a figure of free thinking (the messianic) and to disappear the labor relations that always shape thinking. What is taking place in (post)humanist cultural theory are more stories that perform in their folds a willful ignorance about labor, the universal species-being that is alone the agent of history.

Popular (Post)humanism: Wendy and Lucy

The 'question of the animal' in the (post)humanities is a sign of a deep cynicism toward global explanations and a compulsive naïveté, a making do with less so as to feel at home in the world as part of the 'vulnerable' 'pathos' of the commons — 'the nonpower at the heart of power', 'the passion of the animal'. It codifies in theory the species-friendly consumer practices of the upper middle class that justifies capital investments in environmental solutions for industry as heralding a green capitalism. Behind it there is rehearsed a series of assumptions that suggest the world is a harsh, dehumanized place from which springs the need for human contact but, as no one can be trusted without consensus as to the social good, one must connect with the animal(s) as a way back to 'commonality' with nature as well as with human others. 144 With

¹⁴³ Marx, 'Preface', p. 263.

^{144 &#}x27;Pettism' is an example of how bourgeois ideology 'affects the nerves', as Lenin is reported to have said regarding music, and portrays animal life in such a way that 'makes you want to say kind, silly things, to stroke the heads of the people' under conditions in which 'you mustn't stroke anyone's head, you'd get your hand bitten off', so instead you (buy and) pet a companion animal (Maxim Gorky, Lenin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967], pp. 44–45).

one's pet — which, arguably, all animals are today in the sense that their existence depends on human species-being (labor) — one comes to a subtle communion with whatever nature and the world looks new. Its alienated appearance is transformed from a digital wasteland bereft of life into a cooperative organism in a constant flux of becoming. What has been wasted, such is the messianic promise, will be recycled and made anew. Exploitation is past and has been replaced by caring, service, and cooperation. This series of ideological assumptions is found across the cultural spectrum from the discourses of 'high theory' (Derrida) to 'popular culture' (e.g., films such as *Okja*, *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, and *Etienne!*). The result is an 'eco-fiction' whose stories 'take[] place in a world where cooperation and mutual aid have replaced the ruthless self-interest of capitalism, and where the decisive binary, and hierarchy, between humans and the nonhuman world has dissolved'.¹⁴⁵

Take the 'indie' film *Wendy and Lucy*, for instance. The 'meaning' of the film cannot be separated from its 'poetics'. ¹⁴⁶ The minimal dialogue, the low-fi sound (the humming on the soundtrack) and image production values, the trendy androgyny of its main character, her DIY lifestyle as she crosses the northwest looking for work, hipster superstar Will Oldham's cameo appearance as a crusty anarcho-punk (Icky),... are all strategically designed to signal to the audience the 'alternative' credentials of the film in relation to mainstream commercial film-making — it is not an 'industry' film but a postindustrial film with a 'heart'. The story as well is also concerned to show how alternative forms of culture (lifestyles) emerge from out of impoverished conditions, not only across cultural lines (as with Wendy's friendship with the security guard), but across species as well.

Wendy and her dog Lucy are driving from Indiana, where she had been living with her sister Deb and Deb's boyfriend Dan, to Alaska because she's heard 'they need people' to work. The story picks up with Wendy and Lucy as they are crossing Oregon and mainly centers around their separation when Wendy is arrested for shoplifting dog food. The fact that Wendy has money to purchase the dog food is an ironic emphasis of the point made by the store employee who aggressively detains her and

¹⁴⁵ Lynne Feeley, 'How Eco-Fiction Became Realer Than Realism', *The Nation*, 18 August 2022, https://www.thenation.com/article/culture/elvia-wilk-death-landscape

¹⁴⁶ Wendy and Lucy, dir. by Kelly Reichardt (Warner Bros., 2008).

insists she be made an 'example' of by having her arrested: 'if a person can't afford dog food, they shouldn't have a dog'. On this market logic Wendy's attachment to Lucy must submit to a coldly dispassionate costbenefit analysis so as to avoid transgressing the law of profit. Wendy's evident anxiety throughout the film to be reunited with Lucy is partially to be explained no doubt by her own guilty complicity with this common sense morality: If she valued Lucy so much why did she not just pay for the dog food? The film deploys a series of binary oppositions that underline the same point that, on the one hand, the logic of the market and authentic feelings are antithetical but, on the other, the authenticity of feelings can only be expressed through market transactions. Icky, the crust punk who tells the story of how he recklessly destroyed an expensive piece of machinery working in the Alaskan fisheries, represents the inhuman other who has rejected the market while other (equally unattractive) characters in the film are meant to represent those whom the market has failed (e.g., the cyborgian figure in the wheelchair who is briefly glimpsed while the Walgreens guard muses in voiceover about how people 'waste' their days since the mill closed).

Not only is Wendy alienated from Deb and Dan — who, despite the fact that she has not asked for anything and only wants some expression of kindness and sympathy, can only repeat that they cannot help her when in emotional desperation she calls them long distance — but Wendy is also shown to be alienated from her peers, both the cluelessly lawless crust punks she encounters on her travels, as well as the zealously lawful store employee who busts her. The social alienation that is depicted — where the logic of the market disrupts a shared sense of common humanity and empathy with others — has the effect of an inversion that humanizes Lucy the dog while making pet ownership seem like a radically transgressive act. Wendy's ownership of Lucy, the logic of the film suggests, represents 'caring' for the other at a time when it has become socially impossible for people to care for each other. Significantly, the only people Wendy is able to talk to in non-instrumental terms are those who show feelings for Lucy — the crust punk girl and the Walgreens security guard — suggesting that more important than socio-political divisions, such as between Law (protection of property) and Anarchy (disregard for property), is the moral divide between those who feel a connection with animals and those who do not. It is perhaps to the same point that work in a

fishery in Alaska seems to be the only industrial work left in America. In other words, 'they need people' in Alaska... to kill animals. In short, the problem with capitalism is alienation from others and the natural world, a problem that the film suggests can be fixed by bonding with (by personally owning) animals at a time when capital is indifferent to the social costs it inflicts and people are made redundant and no longer able to care for themselves. The fact that Wendy leaves Lucy with a foster home also suggests, however, that caring for the other and private ownership are synonymous and can yet provide a way to compensate for the brutal violation of shared feelings, which is due after all to Wendy's personal lack of resources. Even though Wendy and Lucy both cry when separating, viewers are reassured it is what is best for Lucy and that Wendy is acting like a mature and responsible person by sacrificing her only friendship to the logic of the market. The viewer is then ideologically reconciled to submitting to exploitation by being reassured that in future Wendy will assume greater personal responsibly so as to avoid such heart-wrenching separations from her loved ones.

Wendy and Lucy is a '(post)humanist' text for two reasons: firstly, it represents society as 'dehumanized' and the dehumanization as the outcome of industrial production, and, secondly, it proposes as a solution to the spiritual deadening of humanity forming emotional attachments with non-human creatures (pettism). Pettism, in actuality, is the ideology of a green capitalism in which the biggest profits stand to be made from retro-fitting industry to be more environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, it reinforces the division of labor, between 'hi- 'and 'lo-tech' workers for example, through the inculcation of more upto-date cultural values — treating animals humanely as life companions becomes a sign of ethical distinction. What is elided by such a lifestyle politics of course is how class inequality underlies values.

Wendy and Lucy is also a 'post-apocalyptic' tale in which human beings have lost all semblance of 'humanity' and can no longer form connections with others and is in this way similar to the other post-apocalyptic tales currently on the market. ¹⁴⁷ In *The Road* the ultimate

¹⁴⁷ Wendy and Lucy is part of a new genre of writings/films like The Road (Cormac McCarthy/dir. John Hillcoat), Never Let Me Go (Kazuo Ishiguro/dir. Mark Romanek), Time of the Wolf (dir. Michael Haneke), and Children of Men (P.D. James/dir. Alfonso Cuarón), that deal with traditional science fiction themes (post-

expression of inhumanity is to be treated like so much meat by those who have reverted to cannibalism.¹⁴⁸ Significantly, in the film based on the book the last scene in which The Boy is united with The Family on the beach assures the audience of the humanity of these characters by a series of close-ups that move from the parents to the children and, lastly, their dog. What this image of the dog represents of course is that these post-human characters are truly human (they 'carry the fire' in the parlance of The Boy) because not only do they not treat people like animals (for food) but they treat animals humanely as equals despite being reduced to absolute poverty themselves. Similarly, Wendy's abandonment of Lucy to a foster home that can provide for her because

apocalyptic world, cloning, etc.) but in the codes of realism, which have as their primary effectivity the defamiliarization of the present and the immediate in terms of an overdetermining but 'absent cause'. Like much of contemporary art, the new hybrid-genre of 'sci-lit' throws the audience in medias res and compels the viewer to make sense of a fundamentally ambiguous narrative in a ruined world full of the ghosts of narratives past all of which have lost their substantive power to compel belief. It is as if the sci-lit text puts the viewer in the place of a child who, while pressured to make sense of their surroundings, is not in a position to have the means to do so and is thus compelled to invent their own framework of understanding. Such an intelligibility can also be seen to be at work in the 'twee' aesthetic that has become so iconic in contemporary pop art (Mark Ryden, Marcel Dzama, Anthony Goicolea,...) — traceable to the 'outsider' art of Henry Darger — that depicts adult themes in a naïve way, as if all previous frames of reference of those 'supposed to know' have ossified and yet because events still demand to be made sense of by being given a narrative form it must at the least be modest and humble. The insistence on narrative having a 'meaning' in the wake of the impossibility of substantive consensus in a media saturated environment is what makes contemporary art, at least at a formal level, post-postmodern, or, 'metamodern' (Van den Akker). It is not massive 'incredulity' toward 'grand narratives' that makes it impossible for them to secure belief, as Lyotard defined the postmodern condition. Rather, it is the opacity that ideology must of necessity assume as it is forced to manage the unmet needs of the many which is compelling them to believe that another world is needed that militates against any substantive, decided, consensual, meaning. And yet, the left's insistence on the invention of an 'imagined' narrative of community in the context of its estranged forms in its willful ignorance of labor reflects the ideology of contemporary cyber-capitalism as a regime of 'immateriality' in which knowledge rather than labor is considered productive of value. The 'immaterial' ideology is itself, however, a reflection of the increasing ratio of 'constant' (dead objectified labor) to 'variable' (living productive labor) capital in the production process (Marx, Capital, I, pp. 307–316). In other words, it is the estrangement and appropriation of labor that explains the alienation of human agency in social consciousness which imagines agency as being 'immaterial' and change as merely a change in ideology. In the immaterial ideology the material is an effect of knowledge (techne) — it is 'spirit' that moves the world, not labor.

¹⁴⁸ The Road, dir. by John Hilcoat (Dimension Films, 2009).

she is too poor to do so herself is also meant to signal her humanity in a de-humanized world (the 'strength of the weak', 'the passion of the animal'). Unlike *The Road*, however, in which the source of the (post) humanist 'apocalypse' is not directly represented or explained, *Wendy and Lucy* does, in a way, give a 'crisis diagnosis' of the dehumanization of the social in its depiction of human beings as having lost control of technology.¹⁴⁹

The point of Icky's story about wrecking an expensive piece of machinery at work while on drugs is that he was unable to stop the machine; the drawn out details and seemingly pointless repetition of Wendy's arrest are clearly shown to be due to the police not having mastered their technology; the de-industrialization of the town is shown to be producing 'monsters' (e.g., the 'creepy' man in the woods, the 'mutant' wheelchair figure); and the playful way the film doubles the lofi music of the soundtrack (which seems to represent Wendy humming a tune in her head) in the digitized muzak of the grocery store in which she is arrested suggests that the most intimate and authentic part of a person is really a scripted reflex of mass consumer culture. In these ways the film argues that the dehumanization of the social is due to the negation of the human by technology, and it represents humans as having lost control of the machine which now controls them.

However, in its crisis diagnosis that technological dehumanization is at the root of the social crisis *Wendy and Lucy* also makes a material explanation impossible and proposes instead a spiritual solution to the crisis ('pettism') that goes along with an 'alternative' consumerist ideology. But, as Engels makes clear in *Dialectics of Nature* the destructiveness of capitalism on the environment is not primarily a problem with technology or a technological problem. Primarily it is a problem with the use of technology by capital for the short-term realization of profit in the context of market competition which does not concern itself with the long-term results to the biosphere (the 'social

¹⁴⁹ Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia. A Study in the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 109.

¹⁵⁰ *The Road* also alibis capitalism in the way it, through its many product placement ads, represents the products of consumer culture (Coca-Cola, Cheetos, Vitaminwater, etc.) as 'life saving' and fails to show the connection of commodity production with the causes of the apocalyptic event in the wake of which the story takes place (Sarah Berman, 'The Year in Film', *Adbusters*, January/February [2010], p. 87).

metabolism' between labor and nature in Marx's terms). By ascribing the social crisis to a loss of humanity caused by technology, *Wendy and Lucy* blocks awareness of the social basis (the class arrangements) that explains why technology under capitalism is not an emancipatory but an enslaving and destructive force in the long run and, thus, why the working class alone is the agent of history in a material position and with a material interest to abolish capitalism.

Wendy and Lucy reifies the effects of the exploitation of labor by capital by representing technology as the material base instead and in this way produces a spiritual interpretation of technology (it is 'dehumanizing') for which there is a false spiritual solution (pettism) that stimulates further consumption (ownership of 'companion' animals). The film's occulting of labor, however, is the primary means for immunizing capitalism from social critique and thus blocks changing it. The (post) humanist critique of dehumanization is itself dehumanizing because it understands the social as 'immaterial' at root rather than material — it is the disappearance of jobs and the end of meaningful work in the post-industrial economy rather than the commodification of labor in the production process that explains the existing social relations. In actuality, the 'loss of control' over technology that is supposed to explain the (post)humanist world as a world of immaterial production is really a local effect of exploited and estranged labor in general. Even the idea that emotionally connecting with pets represents the basis of an alternative immaterial economy forgets that dogs are embodied labor.¹⁵¹ It is because labor has been socialized and the world is 'more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat', while control of the production process is privatized in the hands of a few to make profit from unpaid surplus-labor, that industry is enslaving humanity on a self-destructive course. 152 The solution begins with producing awareness

^{151 &#}x27;The dog and the horse, by association with man, have developed such a good ear for articulate speech that they easily learn to understand any language within their range of concept. Moreover they have acquired the capacity for feelings such as affection for man, gratitude, etc., which were previously foreign to them. Anyone who has had much to do with such animals will hardly be able to escape the conviction that in many cases they now feel their inability to speak as a defect, although, unfortunately, it is one that can no longer be remedied because their vocal organs are too specialized in a definite direction' (Engels, *Dialectics*, p. 173).

¹⁵² Marx and Engels, 'Manifesto', p. 485.

of the social power of labor to transform the existing in accordance with human needs, which includes understanding the needs of the biosphere as a whole, and engaging in a critique of the 'immaterial' (post)humanist ideology that negates labor in the cultural imaginary. Pettism, rather than representing a realistic solution for immaterial times, actually reflects a bourgeois relation with animals that negates in the imaginary the labor relations that shape the human interaction with non-human nature. It is the distortion of needs by private property that reduces animals to food for the 'all too human' masses on the one side and 'companions' for the privileged '(post)humanists' on the other who because their needs have already been met through the labor of the other are free to 'feel' the 'passion of the animal'.

The 'question of the animal' is a desire-al and affective form of knowing (embodied knowledge) that immunizes global capitalism from critique by representing its alternative as a new transspecies commons (pettism). But, the 'passion of the animal' always leads to one conclusion: 'The real difference between cat-lovers and dog-lovers has nothing to do with income, education or habits of work. It is [...] a matter of morals'. It presents class inequality as affective cultural differences and considers it is thereby respecting animal difference, but it actually thus insures the continued production/use of animals for profit which will only end when production is carried out in accordance with meeting human needs, which includes the needs of nature as Engels says, rather than the exchange of labor for wages.

The most radical means of thinking the existence that we share with animals is not some 'abyssal' knowing beyond knowing ('passion') ourselves as sublimely (post)humanist animal-others, but knowing the root of our species-being which 'both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on organic nature'. As Marx argues, a 'species-character is contained in the character of its life activity' — which for humans is not only a matter of how physical existence demands labor in the transformation of inorganic nature 'in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling, etc'., but also, as well, requires

¹⁵³ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, 'A dog's dinner of an idea', *Times Higher Education*, 18 February 2010, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/columnists/a-dogs-dinner-of-an-idea/410391.article.

¹⁵⁴ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 275.

'spiritual nourishment' that must be realized through the processing of 'plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc'. by 'human consciousness' into 'objects of natural science [and] objects of art'. ¹⁵⁵ It is only in knowing species-being in these terms that we become aware of our relation with the natural world and thus are in a position to live in a non-destructive relation to the environment as well as other species. As Engels explains, the more 'men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature [...] the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contrast between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body' and humanity will be in 'a position to realize, and hence to control, also the more remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities'. ¹⁵⁶

As Marx explained, it is the activity of labor that distinguishes the human species from all others and 'makes all nature his *inorganic* body' because the 'life activity' of the human species is 'universal' ('life-engendering life')

The life of the species, both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on organic nature; and the more universal man (or the animal) is, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic nature on which he lives. ¹⁵⁷

According to the (post)humanist left, to produce a critique-al knowledge of production as species-being can only be 'speciesism' that perpetuates violence on the other ('carnophallogocentrism'). Yet, without such a concept what cannot be explained is the material basis that underlies and connects humanity with the rest of nature nor, therefore, 'how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species' given that humans produce universally by transforming all of nature into their 'inorganic body' and a means to reproduce their own life. When Marx and Engels write that men are distinguished from animals, not by some abstract principle ('consciousness, religion, anything else you like'), but by their mode of production, it is because the human species is maintained in its existence by and through the production of animal life,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 275.

¹⁵⁶ Engels, Dialectics, p. 461.

¹⁵⁷ Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 275–76.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 275, 277.

including our own material life ruled by objective necessity. The human species is the underlying mode of production that in capitalism produces the appearance of a division between man and animal as well as undoes this opposition by producing new forms of life and organization beyond mere animal life that can only be fully emancipated under communist production (conscious life activity).