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**Презамислување на Oikos: Кон посткапиталистичко разбирање на  
поделбата производство/репродукција**

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Radicalizing the Oikos and Voiding Value: Towards a Materialist Conception of a  
Post-Capitalist Society

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## ABSTRACT

The topic of this thesis is primarily concerned with examining and defining several of the most prescient preconditions which are necessary for the construction of a post-capitalist, or we could even say communist, society on the basis of a total re-imaging of what constitutes both the *oikos* and *oikonomia*. Presently, both the *oikos* qua organizational (in the fullest possible sense) structure of society, and *oikonomia* qua economic reality, are currently dominated by the internal laws of global capitalism and value-production. Thus, this paper will thoroughly examine *oikos* not simply as a term referring to the household in a parochial sense, but, instead, the totality of the set of social/power relations which are generated and reproduced within a larger global scale. Likewise, this thesis treats *oikonomia* as not simply the management of the household, but as the entirety of the economic apparatuses within a given *oikos*. However, the distinct topological relations of what constitutes the precise space or parameters are not the primary concern. Rather, what is at issue is the current and general form of structuration itself. Of course there are myriad distinctions between different situations across geological, political, social, economic etc., landscapes within our current global situation which is ruled over by the reign of capitalism. Reimaging the *oikos* therefore also entails reimagining the structural dynamics, mechanisms and systems of oppression, which also critically includes patriarchal oppression. As will be explored throughout this thesis, some of the *sine qua nons* of establishing a post-capitalist society include: moving past or beyond the reification of workers and their immediate (but also simultaneously abstract) exploitation—in the double sense of the extraction of their congealed labour time qua surplus-value, as well as the abysmal working conditions which plague much of the world's workforce—whereby their labour is stripped from them and sold infinitely circulated on the market; doing away with the self-perpetuation, and self-valorization of value as the driving force behind not only markets, but also as an idealist, and ideological tool of oppression and domination; and moving towards a global society in which the state is no longer central, and in which workers are not submitted to the will and whim of capitalist fancy. In order to achieve a sort of prolegomena for a post-capitalist society, we will examine and analyze various materialist approaches in order to combat the idealist ideology of capitalism. This includes the materialism of Marx himself, but also other key contemporary figures and schools of thought. Chief among

them is Katerina Kolozova, and her entirely novel reappropriation of Marx's materialism in conjunction with the non-philosophy of French philosopher François Laruelle. Kolozova brutally critiques not only capitalism, but also the logic of value as it manifests itself in what she calls subjectivity-centered thinking. This is a mode of thought in which material is subsumed and subordinated to the subject as an idealist category, and where humans qua universal thinking subjects have access to a real which is more real than the real itself. This notion will be supported by, but also contrasted with, other contemporary materialists including Thomas Nail, Louis Althusser, and Nick Land, as well as more general materialist schools, such as New Materialism, and speculative realism. Likewise, if we are to envision a new society, it is absolutely pivotal to understand some of the failings of different leftist movements themselves, which is why this thesis will also critique certain representative modes of politics, as well as certain strains of post-structuralist or deconstructive theories, while also acknowledging the great progress they have achieved to date.

## 1.0 Introduction:

As Fredric Jameson famously stated, it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it seems now more than ever that capitalism has sunk its teeth into every facet of existence, into every mode of thought, becoming the unmatched, or even unopposed hegemonic force dominating the globe. If we were to believe the capitalist apologists, such as Francis Fukuyama, or Malcom Gladwell,<sup>2</sup> who rely inevitably on a sort of automatic teleology whereby progress is ever expanding within this global hegemony, this end of history, then human flourishing should be ever increasing. However, this couldn't be further from the case. During the first years of the Covid-pandemic alone, those who own and control the majority of the world's wealth, the one percent, have accumulatively amassed an additional \$10 trillion.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, new migrant crises are constantly occurring, and the environment continues to be treated as a mere material resource for extraction, despite the rhetoric around Cop25 and the European Green Deal, and, on top of it all, we are faced with the all too real prospect of an all-out world-war. Simultaneously, there has been an immense surge of right-wing and illiberal movements across the globe, and especially in Europe, in which even most basic tenets of equality are being eschewed in favour of nationalist and exclusionary discourses. Democracy itself, once seen to be the inextricable correlate of capitalism now appears as nothing more than a hindrance to the machine of capital itself, to its rhizomic spread.<sup>4</sup> We thus find ourselves thrown, to borrow language from both Heidegger and Derrida, into a world completely out of joint, a world in which the best we can hope for is, to paraphrase Churchill, the best worst case scenario. However, this seemingly cynical attitude should not in any way be seen as defeatist, quite to the contrary. To paraphrase Adrian Johnston, the true cynical stance is to state that what we have in front of us is the only thing that can exist, that there is no way out of our situation and that we should content ourselves with mild modifications, with variations on a theme.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this thesis will be

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Future City," *New Left Review* 21 (May/June 2003), 76.

<sup>2</sup> See: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 2006); Malcom Gladwell, *Outliers* (Back Bay Books, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Karen Petrou, "Only the Rich Could Love This Economic Recovery," *New York Times* (12 July 2021).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance, "Slavoj Žižek: Democracy and Capitalism Are Destined to Split Up," available here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXVENxtZe\\_w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXVENxtZe_w)

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Northwestern University Press, 2009), 34.

predominantly centered around the preconditions for the creation of a post-capitalist society on the basis of the complete re-imagining of the *oikos* and *oikonomia*, which is currently dominated by the internal laws of capitalism. Here I am using the terms *oikos* and *oikonomia* to not simply mean the management and administration of the household, but rather to the entire set of social relations which would be found therein, just as the *oikonomia* is not simply the management of the household, but the entirety of the economic apparatuses. Thus reimagining the *oikos* means reimagining the structural dynamics, mechanisms and systems of oppression, including patriarchal oppression. This means a society which does not exploit and reify workers through a process of exploitation (in the sense of surplus extraction, as well as the horrid conditions which often accompany said extraction), whereby their labour is stripped from them and sold on the market; a society which is no longer based on abstract labour and the infinite circulation and valorization of value without end, value which is in fact self-valorizing and removed from its original material conditions; and a society which does not bow before the state as an extension of these very laws. Furthermore, this new society must not be defined by borders, be they geographical, political, or socio-economic. The brutality of these borders in all three senses has been repeatedly shown by myriad contemporary thinkers, perhaps most prominent among them, especially as they relate to colonialism and migration, are Thomas Nail and Achille Mbembe.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, as Heidegger has so forcefully shown in *The Question Concerning Technology*, society can no longer be based on instrumentalist reason which gives way to ecological destruction whereby all of nature, and in fact, as we would extend his argument, all beings in nature itself are treated as a standing reserve readymade to be activated for both war and the production and circulation of value.<sup>7</sup> Finally, but certainly not less importantly, a society in which patriarchal logic is divested all of power. To rephrase all of this in a short but positive formalization, what we seek to achieve in this thesis, is to create a prolegomenon (or perhaps simply a prolegomena of a prolegomena) for a more universalist society, and thus a universalist *oikos and oikonomia* in which all beings, not simply human-beings, are treated with, for lack of a better word, dignity.

We will also explore throughout this paper how subjectivity must be liberated from identitarian and individualist constructions in favour of reimagined universal categories which are

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance: Thomas Nail, *Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford University Press, 2015); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (Garland Publishing, 1977).



not reducible to either whim, or capitalist over-determination, i.e., freed from any form of concretization, even if this concrete is anchored in any form of flux. In so doing, we will also seek to move away from anthropocentrism, but not towards a post-humanism per se, but rather towards a post-subjectivism. The insistence on the distinctions lies in the importance of allowing both a uniqueness of humanness, and a universality of (post)subjectivity (in the sense of a universal subject as the result of signification) without falling into the trap of technological messianism, or Prometheanism.

Now, while the act of re-conceptualizing what a post-capitalist future, and indeed, even the structure of *oikos* and *Oikonomia* could look like is certainly not a novel idea in and of itself, it is nonetheless both necessary and urgent if society as whole, and even the planet (including all of the beings on it), have a chance of surviving a life worth living. Thus, it is also crucial to add here that we are by no means aiming for a mollified capitalism, indeed, the arguments that will be put forth will be quite to the contrary, advocating for radical and large scale changes which are not reducible to minor fixes. That being said, we must also maintain that small steps and revisions will inevitably be a crucial function of any path towards such a post-capitalist society. In so doing we will attempt to move beyond, although not fully leave behind, many contemporary conceptions of what either a post-capitalist or at least a reimagined capitalist society could look like, in order to avoid being brutally crushed under the weight of capitalism's own contradictions. More specifically, we will examine the work of other prominent Marxist scholars, such as Alain Badiou, Louis Althusser, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, engaging in a constructive polemic.

## **1.1 Structure and Methodology**

Concerning the specific layout of this thesis, it will be comprised of 5 disparate but nonetheless interconnected chapters. The first chapter will function as a short but pivotal categorical introduction which will define both the importance of returning to the concepts of *Oikos* and *Oikonomia*, as well as define precisely which form of materialism is informing our materialist politics. For now, it is sufficient to state that any materialism worth its salt is utterly incompatible with capitalism which is based off of idealist abstractions, as emphasized innumerable times by

philosopher and political activist Katerina Kolozova, and her analysis of Laruelle and Marx. Indeed, the materialism which will be defined and pursued is of a fundamentally Marxist nature, or even, following Kolozova, a non-marxist nature.

The second chapter seeks to assert, through a lengthy explanatory excursion, a fundamental axiom of this thesis, a thesis which will be continuously present in all subsequent chapters. Thus, this chapter should be seen in some ways as a manual to interpreting the subsequent chapters themselves. This axiom, which draws immediate and direct inspiration from Katerina Kolozova and her novel readings of Marx is as follows: we must move away from any form of idealist or subjectivity-centered thought, and towards a materialist understanding of the body in pain, if we are to fully make the shift towards a post-capitalist society and radicalized *oikos*. Subjectivity-centered thought, or what Kolozova also refers to as subjectivity-centered knowledge<sup>8</sup> or subjectivity-centered philosophy,<sup>9</sup> is defined precisely by a rampant anthropocentrism, and, in direct correlation, an unavoidable and destructive idealism, as we will demonstrate throughout this dissertation. This section will focus largely, as stated above, on the work of Kolozova, and her novel adaptation, and creation of non-marxist and non-philosophical thought following the work of, most prevalently, Francois Laruelle, as well as Marx himself. However, methodologically it is crucial to note the following: while the work of Laruelle, and other Laruelle scholars, will be summoned on occasion to provide support and context to the work of Kolozova, this thesis has no pretension to be devoted either to Laruelle, nor to Laruelle studies more generally. Again, it is our argument here that the work of Kolozova opens enough of a novel space in the fields of theory and politics (neither are exclusive categories) more generally, and our focus will be directly on this, on the way this new economic, political, and theoretical apparatus functions, and how it can be deployed in service of the reimagining of the *Oikos*, and thus a reimagining of society as such. Thus, the reader should be aware that neither this chapter, nor this thesis as a whole is a polemic with or against Laruelle, while also being aware of the larger importance of the work of Laruelle on Kolozova's own writings, and the entire field of non-philosophy as such.

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<sup>8</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* (Bloomsbury, 2020), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Katerina Kolozova, "Examining the 'Principle of Philosophical Sufficiency': Of Ontology and Its Philosophical Limitations," *The Comparatist* 44 (2020), 183.

Following from this, the third chapter will work as a cursory examination of several key thinkers and contemporary schools of thought within and across various strains of materialism. Within this section four materialism will be examined and contrasted in order to better determine the form of materialism best suited to reimagine the *oikos*. This includes: Thomas Nail and his Kinetic Materialism, Louis Althusser and his general conception of science and raw material, and Nick Land, a radical-rightist who nonetheless lays forth a Deleuze/Guattari inspired virtual materialism. Likewise, while this will not be discussed as a disparate field, the figure of speculative realism will also be addressed in various ways within this section.

The fourth chapter will examine how the economy as such must be completely reimaged, not only in terms of production, but in terms of exchange. This means, simultaneously, the creation, or, at the very least, reconstruction of, a new form of currency (or perhaps currencies)—a form of medium for the operation of exchange itself. This form of exchange must be based on use-value instead of exchange value, which follows directly from our beginning axiom based on the work of Kolozova. Surplus-value, or simply value, as a self-valorizing activity has as at its core a direct reliance on the exclusion of the body in pain, and the usurpation of the real itself. Thus this chapter will examine the role of capitalist circulation, and its relation to value.

The sixth chapter will examine the relationship between the state, ideology, and capitalism more generally. More specifically, it will look at what the withering away of the state means, by focusing not only on Marx and Engels, but also on Althusser, Agamben, and Badiou. Likewise, and following from this, the chapter will also examine the function of law in relation to the state and capitalism, examining and critiquing what Rousseau laid out in his social contract, as well as focusing on all of the above thinkers.

From a methodological angle, we will, in order to examine all of this, need to situate ourselves both in current trends in political philosophy, psychoanalysis, linguistic theory, economic theory, feminist-philosophy, communication and studies of technology from the standpoint of humanities (and posthumanities), as well as various threads of Marxism in particular that are promulgated by Laruelle and Kolozova under the name of “non-philosophical Marxism,” as well as the writings of Marx himself. Thus, even though political and with a strong focus on philosophy, this thesis nonetheless takes a strong interdisciplinary stance. Likewise, as the concept

of imagining a post-capitalist society always-already also entails the transformation of an infinite plurality of concretely existing societies, or, at least, an infinite set of similarities and differences spanning the entire nexus of ever-changing societies, we will also need to examine, at least in part, concrete socio-economic-political examples, both past and present. This includes dealing with the general tide of right-wing movements (as they exist all across Europe, but also globally), as well as liberal particularism (in the sense of the hypostasis of individuality and progress which plagues Western democracy).

It is important to also add the point of this thesis is not to state that capitalism is the only or sole issue as such, rather that it is a universally existing structural formation that can't but be a part of more specific social-political-economic formations themselves, due precisely to its absolute ubiquity. Let us take a blunt example: all wars based on contemporary colonialism are driven by, at least partially, the accumulation of land and resources for the purpose of creating and circulating surplus-value. In other words, the primary function and effect of colonization is not simply the acquisition of use-values (regardless of whether the resources extracted did indeed have immediate use) but rather their transformation into abstract self-valorizing value (this, as will be explored more later on, is complicated by Marx's analysis of slave labour in relation to wage-labour and the generation of surplus, but it is nonetheless clear that slaves, even if not labourers in the strict sense, were acquired with currency, with the intent of generating profit) via the commodity-form itself. While it is abundantly clear that colonialism is a capitalist enterprise, it does not mean that all of its effects or motivations were purely capitalist or purely motivated by surplus. Indeed, the rampant sexism and racism inherent to colonialism predate capitalism as such, but the crucial point is that they are nonetheless expressed, or more generally, necessarily expressible within a capitalist framework, or to use the terminology of both Laruelle and Badiou, within a capitalist world. Let us formulate this rather simply: within capitalism there is no exception (nothing fully outside of it), or, as it were, no exception which would allow itself to be presented without being re-integrated.<sup>10</sup> In a certain sense its strength lies precisely in this, its infinite capacity for cancerous mutation, and its perpetual sublation machine which turns revolts into advertising campaigns, and discontent into an infinite sprawl of bureaucratic ameliorations hidden behind a cloak of nationalism and work ethic. Perhaps even more importantly, however, is understanding that

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance, Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (Continuum, 2005), 286-92.

capitalism itself is not simply an economic force, or rather, that capitalism as an *oikonomia* is not reducible to monetary profit or extraction. It is precisely an organizing mechanism based on abstraction and exploitation, not just of labour, but of the body, and, as will be explored, femininity as such. Thus, moving towards a post-capitalist society does not mean simply mean the liberation from monetary oppression, or precarity, but also liberation from an entire network of subjectivity-centered thought, which produces what Marx has called, critiquing Hegel, the universal egoist. Colonialism in this sense is not just the result of capitalism qua economic system, but also capitalism as the progeny and producer of subjectivity-centered thought.

Now, of course, it should also be said that not everything in capitalism is unique to capitalism, or was born out of capitalism and capitalism alone, and any form of post-capitalist society, regardless of its form, will still carry pieces of its dead carcass within it. Thus, we are not proclaiming a messianic utopia, but attempting to lay some of the groundwork for a democracy of freedom, in the sense that Marx used the term democracy, which allows for not only human flourishing, but the flourishing of all beings. Our focus is thus not simply economic, but concerns a much broader logic, and mode of understanding which although not fully reducible to capitalism or capitalist structures is nonetheless present within it. Likewise, as stated above, we are by no means ignoring historical shifts, nor, for that matter, are we ignoring the particularities that manifest themselves across the spectrum of situations, countries, continents or thought-worlds. Far from it, instead, as both a matter of brevity, and as a move towards a more universal understanding of the structural effects of capitalism, the focus will be more on its genericity, which does not mean that real concrete examples will not be examined.

Here, an additional methodological question must be posed. How are we to deal with the mutations within capitalism, its many varying historical instantiations without turning this genericity into a form of a-historical thought? Here, we will proceed precautiously on two fronts. On the one hand, it is far too easy to critique those who act as though today's capitalism is identical to the capitalism of the 1800s when Marx himself was writing—such a view is critiqued on the basis that it refuses to adapt to any variances in the function and form of capital, instead relying on axioms concerning labour and surplus etc. On the other hand, however, an over emphasis on the changing nature of capitalism runs the risk of obscuring its origins and doing away with much of the potency of Marx's initial critique. For instance, it would be equally reductionist to state that

increased advancements in technology and automation do away with the labour theory of value tout court (in fact, Marx deals with this precise issue specifically). What's needed is a particular form of conservation of the axioms of the critique of the form of capital itself, without, for all that, falling into the trap of viewing capitalism's dynamism as a purely internal function. According to Postone, what is crucial to understand is that Marx is not creating transcendent principles, but is rather working, immanently, within the logic of the appearance of capitalism in order to deduce the specific functions of specific manifestations of concepts modified for their historical emergence (value, labour etc).<sup>11</sup> This means that what is to be taken from Marx's categorizations are their relevance only for the form and content of what exists under capitalism. Furthermore, the concept of value, according to Postone, is for Marx tied directly to the concept of temporality, of the amount of time it takes to invest labour into a commodity (and, as it were, the working day). Therefore, the increase in technological automation, which does away with large amounts of labour, and streamlines the entire process, threatens to do away with the entire concept of value itself, that is, value as considered as a specific instantiation of the capitalist production process. Thus, a fundamental contradiction at the core of capitalism is its own relation to not only value, but the production of value as a form of self-negation<sup>12</sup>.

## 2.0 Radical Materialism and the *Oikos*

### 2.1 Which *Oikos*?

Now, it must be said that the immediate connotation of the words *Oikos*, and with it *Oikonomia* do not necessarily convoke images of radicality, indeed, it is perhaps even the opposite. The word *Oikos* in Greek literally and, *prima facie* mundanely, means, house/household, and the is the root of the word *oikonomia*, literally household management, which is where we derive the word economy. However, we should take note of the importance of this not only linguistic, but real material connotation. If the economy is always already related to the household, to its management therein, it also necessarily implies that it is always-already based on distinct social

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<sup>11</sup> Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 123.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

relations, on relations of the household, and on relations of power and subjugation. More particularly, on the subjugation of the oppressed, of those who are subjected to the logic of patriarchy and domination, most notably of women and femininity as such. Now by femininity we are not referring to an essence of femaleness, but rather to the real lived existence of women, to their *Dasein* so to speak. Furthermore, and historically speaking, it should be noted that the *oikos* was, from its origins, defined not only by oppression or subjugation but literal slavery. According to Aristotle in *Politics*, slavery within the *oikos* is natural, that is, it is part of a well ordered structure which is line with the way things simply are by necessity. Likewise, while not equal to men, he also draws a line between slaves and women. Here it is worth quoting Aristotle at length:

If one were to see how these things develop naturally from the beginning, one would, in this case as in others, get the best view of them. First, then, those who cannot exist without each other necessarily form a couple, as female and male do for the sake of procreation (they do not do so from deliberate choice, but, like other animals and plants, because the urge to leave behind something of the same kind as themselves is natural), and as a natural ruler and what is naturally ruled do for the sake of survival. For if something is capable of rational foresight, it is a natural ruler and master, whereas whatever can use its body to labor is ruled and is a natural slave [...] There is a natural distinction, of course, between what is female and what is servile. For, unlike the blacksmiths who make the Delphian knife, nature produces nothing skimpily, but instead makes a single thing for a single task, because every tool will be made best if it serves to perform one task rather than many.<sup>13</sup>

According to Aristotle, a slave is thus determined as such when he is viewed as incapable of ruling over himself, that is, when, in accordance to nature he requires a master due to his natural incapacity and reliance on others for the sustaining of his own existence. Likewise, women, or simply the category of woman, while not being relegated to the same rung of slaves, to pure servility, are nonetheless reduced to a form of absolute un-freedom in which their primary purpose of existence is literal and metaphorical reproduction of the household. Thus, it should be absolutely clear that reimagining the *oikos* entails not simply reimagining the household, but reimagining power relations, subjectivity, the economy, gender, patriarchy, political organization, in short, the entire structure of not only society, but the space of society, and our role in it. Likewise,

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<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 2.

contemporary thinkers such as Agamben, Kolozova, and Haraway, have all put the terms to use in the form of radical critiques of how things are in order to point towards a more egalitarian future.

Two crucial elements are worth pointing here before going any further. Firstly, for Aristotle, the *oikos* should A) focus on the acquisition of wealth, but not self-begetting wealth, ie., money which generate itself from money, and secondly, slaves, which include animals, are defined as being a possession of their masters, and, according to Aristotle “[...]a possession may be defined as an instrument of action, separable from the possessor.”<sup>14</sup>

It should also be noted that while a new and radicalized conception of the *Oikos and Oikonomia* will be explored, this paper does not overly concern itself with the dense and corrugated philology of the term—while nonetheless respecting its myriad transformations and interpretations. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, this difficult work has already been carried out by many scholars to a degree that simply could not even be approximated here, to recreate such an analysis would devour the entire thrust of this paper and detract from its core. Thus, and secondly, this paper will be primarily focused on *Oikos* and *Oikonomia* as categorical and representative terms of a whole host of governing and administrative relations, as well as their overcoming, and thus rely on more contemporary interpretations from thinkers such as Donna Haraway, and Giorgio Agamben. Again, it is important to emphasize here, as Agamben does, that “[...] it is important not to forget that the *oikos* is not the modern single-family house or simply the extended family, but a complex organism composed of heterogeneous relations, entwined with each other,” these relations are fundamentally “economic” and “are linked by a paradigm that we could define as “administrative” [...] and not epistemic.”<sup>15</sup> These administrative or “economic” relations are, for Aristotle, one of the defining elements that constitutes *oikonomia*; the economy is always an economy of organizing relations, quite literally, “household management.” Thus, the economy of the household, its administrative relations, are not meant to be a stringent set of laws that govern the household, instead, these relations should be seen as situational and even ad hoc reactions to the complex and multitudinous problems which deserve unique and tailored responses.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, it is important to note, despite the manifold issues which arise from these relations, such as the concept of natural slavery or servitude in Aristotle’s *Politics*, that *oikonomia*

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford University Press, 2017), 387.

<sup>16</sup> *Idem*.



also has a more directly positive connotation. Again, as Agamben points out, the term also refers distinctly to care and health, to the way a doctor manages his patient, and can thus also mean “providing for the needs of life, nourishing”<sup>17</sup> This second definition lays the basic groundwork for an alternative formation of the *oikos*, of an *oikos* which first and foremost is centered around well-being instead of systems of control and exclusion.

## 2.2 Against Democratic Materialism

The term materialism has, in its philosophical sense, taken on many different meanings, some differing more substantially than others. Thus, when we speak of a materialist politics, it is incredibly important to clarify which form of materialism we mean, and thus what form of materialism is informing our politics. This is especially the case when considering, as Mladen Dolar has pointed out, that since its conception, the term materialism has always-already signified more than a simple classificatory distinction. In his own words,

[Materialism] was always a battle cry, a call to takes sides, to gather under a banner. Once introduced, it carried with it the implication that philosophy is to be viewed as a field of irresolvable antagonism, of warfare [...] The moment one says “materialism,” one always does more than apply a neutral, technical label to a certain position, classifying various types of approaches; the very way one proposes a classification or sets up a criterion is deeply imbued with the position one implicitly or explicitly takes.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, materialism has always been, regardless of form, a rejection of idealism, which also means a rejection of idealist structures and authorities, be they the state, the school or the church. However, if we simply define materialism as the rejection of religiosity, or the promotion of science and reason as opposed to myth and superstition, or simply the primacy of the body in relation to any conception of the soul, then it is easy to see that we are, in fact, living in a sort of materialist world, at least in the West. Indeed, and again as Dolar points out, this form of materialism (as we will see it is not much of a materialism at all), is so prevalent that Alain Badiou diagnoses the entire western hegemony of being encompassed by a form of what he calls

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 389

<sup>18</sup> Mladen Dolar “What’s the Matter?: On Matter and Related Matters,” in *Subject Lessons: Hegel, Lacan, and the Future of Materialism* eds. Russell Sbriglia and Slavoj Žižek (Northwestern University Press, 2020), 34.

“democratic materialism.”<sup>19</sup> Badiou defines democratic materialism by the mantra “there are only bodies and language.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, the reigning ideology of our times, is the reduction of all of being to individual corporeality, into a subject who enjoys only in and through the constructible universe of language, and who denies the possibility of any form of real, of any form of absolute.<sup>21</sup> We should also clarify here that, for Badiou, democracy itself has become a sort of fetish word, a battle cry of its own which simply reduces human beings to a numerical count, a count itself which is hardly representative of either the population it claims to represent, or any form of radical change. Liberal democracy in its contemporary sense is seen as hiding behind the stability of a system which automatically bars rupture, while simultaneously promoting the smooth functioning of capitalism and its ostensibly indelible connection. Further on in this thesis we will discuss more radical forms of democracy and liberalism, but for now we are simply pointing out the problematic of defeatist ideologies and defeatist materialisms.

Returning to Badiou more broadly, while we must be incredibly careful here not to fall back into an idealism, and indeed, it must be stated outright that we are by no means following Badiou’s own response to this via either his “materialist dialectic,” or his set-theoretical ontology, that this fundamental point must be affirmed. The correlate of this, as Alberto Toscano points out, is that capitalist-liberal ideology always functions as a form of non-ideology. In other words, under such a view point, the only thing that does not count as ideological is the submission to the concretized and constructible universe into which one finds themselves thrown. This is precisely why the oppressed who stand up are so often deemed as fanatic, as unruly mobs embodying an idea which is in excess of what currently exists.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is evident that this democratic materialism is nothing but a hegemony of the same, a hegemony of the status quo. Indeed, even Baraka Obama himself, bastion of Western liberal values, declared, when he wasn’t busy drone striking Yemen, that individuals protesting police brutality in 2015 were thugs.<sup>23</sup> Now, let us return

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event II: Logics of Worlds* (Continuum, 2009), 1.

<sup>21</sup> It should be noted here that the implication is not that we can simply exit language, exit the constructed universe, but rather that the ideology of non-ideology insists on the eternal specificity of what is constructed in any given linguistic universe as can be seen in later on. This can also be seen in Alain Badiou’s critique of Wittgenstein in: Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy* (Verso, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> See, Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (Verso, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted for the sake of fairness and clarity that he was more specifically referring to acts of looting and violence within these protests. Nonetheless, there was no consideration about the impetus for this violence, only condemnation. Violence, it would seem, is thus only condonable when done on a state level: See <https://nypost.com/2015/04/28/obama-calls-baltimore-rioters-criminals-and-thugs/>

to his conception of the real outside of language, or more accurately, the real which conditions language itself in relation to materialism so that we can move away from negative definitions and into a positive formulation. Let us also note here that we do not intend by any means to explore the entire history of materialism, or even a large section of its various contemporary instantiations so as not to be bogged down in philosophical speculations.

## **2.2 The Real of Matter and Matter as Real: Kolozova's Materialist Realism**

While we have, via Badiou, identified some of the failings of a particular form of materialism, via the rejection of any possibility of the real, we must now turn our focus onto a more concrete and positive definition of a material real, or of the real of materiality in relation to language and the body. Here we will examine Kolozova's approach to the real and materiality, before taking a slight detour through the work of Lacan and other prominent Lacanians.

As stated in the introduction, Katerina Kolozova is a radical materialist theorist who draws a large bulk of her inspiration from the work of Francois Laruelle, as well as directly from Karl Marx. Her (non)philosophical project, which will be briefly outlined in this section, and also taken as an absolutely fundamental inspiration for this thesis as a whole, is largely centered around surpassing tautological and idealist notions of subjectivity and thought, in favour of more radically materialist, anti-anthropocentric and universal conceptions. Here we will largely focus on precisely this critique, the critique of subjectivity-centered thought, which was originally produced by Marx, but which has been largely expanded upon by Katerina Kolozova, and in so doing lay the groundwork for much of the subsequent chapters, as well as function as a way to interpret and find commonality between the other thinkers covered in the proceeding chapter. Likewise, it will also explore what is unique in her approach to materialism, which is fundamental if we are to understand the broader concept in all of its complexity. Similarly, although taking Kolozova's interpretation as our starting point, throughout this thesis many other philosophical and theoretical angles will be explored in order to contrast and build upon it.

As we have stated, Kolozova's materialism, as much of her thought, is largely based around the work of both Marx and Laruelle. It is crucial to point out from the very beginning, however, that, following Marx directly, she shifts the focus from materiality, to the real and the

sensuous and the physical<sup>24</sup>. This shift may seem insignificant, but is foundational for reimagining what a politics and epistemology of matter could actually mean. Treating matter as something other than a purely inert resource for extraction, and instead seeing in it a form of sensuousness, a sensuousness which pre-dates our own experiences and attempts to master and synthesize it, already points to a more universal notion of materiality. Materiality is not simply that which is subjected to this or that, but rather itself already contains, and indeed, necessarily preconditions, the possibility of our own lived realities, to the corporality of our beings, which are not thought-constructions but testimonies to matter itself. Simultaneously, however, Kolozova also shows how matter itself, while sensuous, does not have a direct intentionality. In other words, matter has no direct *telos* or purpose, matter is rather constitutive of potential-purpose making, but also precedes, grounds and ultimately slips out of any direct sense-making—direct here meaning the total graspability, and attempted synthesis of it.<sup>25</sup> In other words, matter itself acts as the base-level real of all possible subjective relations as they transpire through linguistic and transcendental meditation. Nothing escapes matter, but matter is also always both behind us, disturbing us, escaping in some sense our egoistic attempts at mastery. Kolozova concisely describes this phenomenon in her summarizing of the foundations of non-Marxism:

A non-philosophical reading of Marx operates with the “use-value” of concepts that have been radicalized to expose their unilateral correlation with the effect of the real. In non-philosophy (also called non-standard philosophy), the “real” is the instance of unilateral, indifferent effect of a radical exteriority with respect to the signifying subject. In other words, one does not refer to the abstraction of “the Real,” but rather to concrete instances of an effect of the real, of that which always already escapes signification but is nonetheless out there.<sup>26</sup>

For the sake of clarity, Kolozova is not here reducing the real to simple materiality, at least not as we would ordinarily conceive of it. Rather, the real grounds language as such, it is

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<sup>24</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Capitalism's Holocaust of Animals: A Non-Marxist Critique of Capital, Philosophy and Patriarchy* (Bloomsbury, 2020), 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>26</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Towards a Radical Metaphysics of Socialism: Marx and Laruelle* (Punctum Books, 2015), 1.

the real in relation to language, but also the real in regards to our own perceptions of our own corporality. This so-called radicalization occurs through what, again following Laruelle, she refers to as the radical dyad. According to Kolozova, “[...]the identity in the last instance of the nonhuman is the radical dyad of the automaton and physicality (both natural and artificial).”<sup>27</sup> Automaton here is referring to the entire chain of signification. The radical dyad thus presupposes, without a reduction in either direction, a redoubling of the real. First there is the real as the impossibility of the self-enclosure of language, that language, as symbolic, always-already has a ‘non-expressed(able)’ —as non-relational— component which is nothing other than the symbolic’s own internal limit (this is a similar conception to Alenka Zupančič’s minus one, Alain Badiou’s use of Russell’s paradox of a set of all sets, and Lacan’s real as that which never stops not being written<sup>28</sup>) and secondly, the real appears as the impossibility of grasping the body in its pure objectivity. There is thus the primordial real, prior to all signification, and the linguistic real, which marks, to use Lacanian parlance, our entrance into parlêtre. The non-human is formed by this non-totalizable duality or dyad. It is not adequate to either side of the coin and it does not place in any form of sublation. It is rather the effect of a recursive process, of a non-sublatable dialectic which is constantly in flux. To quote Kolozova at length:

If the transcendence or the automaton is unilaterally related to the real as exteriority, it is also unilaterally related to the real of not only its own elusive physicality but also that of the interstice between the body and the automaton. The physical and the automaton are determined by the real drive to domesticate exteriority, not as determination in the last instance of the dyad they constitute but as another materiality of determining effect. It is one of the materialities or instances of the real of a determining character. It moves the two constituents of the radical dyad toward a common goal and that goal presents itself to be metaphysical<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Kolozova, *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> See: Alenka Zupančič, *What Is Sex?* (MIT Press, 2017); Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (Continuum, 2007); Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Norton, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Kolozova, *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals*, 44-45.

For the sake of clarity, metaphysics does not refer here to an idealist notion, nor to subjectivity-centered thought, rather a radical metaphysics is focused on this dyad, of this understanding of the material effects which nonetheless escape signification. We will return to this point briefly, but before going any further, it is helpful to further define subjectivity-centered thought itself.

Subjectivity-centered thought is defined primarily by this attempt to deem the subjective position to be over and above the real itself, subordinating it to the realm of passive material to be taken up and sublated in order to replace it with anthro-pocentric and subject-centric posturings which seek to devour it. Kolozova critiques this not only in idealism, but also in subject-centered thoughts that range throughout post-structuralism. Here there arises a distant double-problematic at the heart of subjectivity-centered thought. On the one hand, it deems the idea, what for Plato would be the *eidos*, to be more real than the real itself, while also jettisoning the real to the unknowable, to the *das ding an sich*, and in a certain sense, to the Freudian *das Ding*. Again, according to Kolozova, “[t]he inanity of the inhuman, or of the non-human, is the gaping real at the heart of a selfhood; the post-structuralist turn has reduced to an effect of the signifying automaton, i.e., the subject,” which denies “[...]the unruly, the absurd, [and] the unheimlich (uncanny and outlandish) [of the] out-there,” of matter as senseless.<sup>30</sup>

Here, while it would be inaccurate to simply place her work under the umbrella of speculative realism, or, more generally, as somehow constituting an element of the speculative turn, there is nonetheless a shared interest in overcoming particular confines of postmodern or poststructuralist thought which banishes the real to realm of the unknowable, and apotheosizes thought’s own auto-referentiality.<sup>31</sup> Here, Kolozova agrees with Quentin Meillassoux that postmodernism’s attempt to move past dogma, to move past absolutes or things in themselves, has had, in fact somewhat counterintuitively, the precise opposite effect, whereby the real is banished, but what replaces it is a fiction that claims to be more real than the real itself, a fiction which is said to divide fully the body and language from the real, to limit real material effects to always-already mediated and symbolic constructions. In Kolozova’s own words:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 3

Postmodernism's method of surpassing metaphysical thinking has consisted in the philosophical decision of not tackling what is probably the central classical dichotomy of metaphysics— that between the “real” and the “unreal” as the inaccurate mental representation of the real. Such a priori refusal to pose the question of the real speaks to what Quentin Meillassoux terms a “correlationist” axiom of thought.<sup>32</sup>

For Meillassoux, correlationist thought has as its advent Kant's attempt to de-ontologize being, or rather, to render everything as mediated by the transcendental subject such that thought can never think the real directly, think the thing in itself, but only think its subjective correlation. This creates a situation in which thought is automatically hemmed into itself, and any speculation concerning reality is already confined to certain mental, or symbolic configurations, which nonetheless cannot be traced without automatically re-relating them to a whole web of other correlates.<sup>33</sup> Of the utmost importance, this postmodern straightjacketing does not simply leave us in a position of caprice, that is to say, it is not a mere matter of decentering, and de-absolutizing thought, and thus creating a form of absolute relativism, but rather of simultaneously proclaiming thought to be superior to the real itself.

Before continuing, it is crucial to briefly clarify what could easily appear as a confusion concerning the term itself. Although we already touched upon this in the introduction, we should re-state that our deployment of subjectivity centered thought is not simply reducible to individuals or persons as such, nor for that matter individual mindsets. When considering the importance of doing away with subjectivity-centered thought it is thus crucial to understand that, as we will explore more later on, it does not simply concern individual subjects qua persons, but the entire mode of thought that is generated by and through (although not exclusively in) capitalism as a philosophical posturing of thought, and as such acts to perpetuate the structures of oppression therein and create an amphibology with the real.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, our goal is not simply a matter of critiquing rampant voluntarism, or the ethics of market values and competition, although these issues will certainly be addressed, but rather of the erosion of a shared and universal conception of truth. When we, following Kolozova, critique subjectivity-centered

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>33</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (Bloomsbury, 2006), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Kolozova, *Toward a Radical Metaphysics of Socialism*, 2.

thought, and with it capital P philosophy (which following Laruelle, she equates with this dominating tautology) we are thus doing so in order to create a universal space in which the pomposity of anthropocentric thought, and with it male-dominated and patriarchal thought, gives way to a new form of universality which neither dominated by hubris, class, nor gender, but instead divulges its power to the real of the body in pain, something universally shared by not only human beings, but all beings with any level of sentience.

This capital P philosophy is directly related to the concept of Philosophical sufficiency, which, in turn, is defined by a usurpation of the real by thought itself, thought which is first and foremost a self-reflexive tautology that systematically grounds its own starting point (its system and its axioms), while simultaneously denying the material for which it is meant to be acting and theorizing upon. For Kolozova, this philosophical sufficiency reproduces the particular universe of thought in which it inhabits at the expense of materiality, that is to say, it is self-valorizing. Thus, according to Kolozova, “[...] philosophy is constituted in a fashion perfectly analogous to the one which grounds capitalism—philosophy constitutes a reality in its own right and a reality that establishes an amphibology with the real (acts in its stead, posturing as “more real than the real”).<sup>35</sup> Likewise, for Kolozova, as she states in *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals*, “[t]he circularity in which post-structuralist philosophy remains trapped in—and, for that matter, the entire legacy of the linguistic turn too—is one defining philosophy rather than metaphysics. The principle of philosophical sufficiency as opposed to science’s acceptance of its own finitude, as Laruelle would put it, marks the difference between philosophy and science.”<sup>36</sup> What is real in philosophy is not immanent, nor can it escape the grasp of systematized thinking, but is rather that which is conceived of in minded and situated subjects, subjects who claim to have exclusive claims to the real—either as an exteriority irrelevant to thought, or as a mollified interiority.

The fantasy of covering the entire realm of reality with knowledge and that “true” knowledge would be the full penetration of the real, grasping and submitting the latter to its authority to the extent that the real becomes nothing but an image of knowledge and is fully transposed onto the plane of transcendence, and is, as we know, a philosophical tendency. The notion of the “principle of sufficient philosophy” (or PSP) proposed by

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<sup>35</sup> Idem.

<sup>36</sup> Katerina Kolozova, *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals*, 15.



Laruelle refers precisely to such a category of ambition in the endeavors of explaining reality that surrounds us and constitutes us, too.<sup>37</sup>

Now, this is of course not only an issue of postmodernism, but of the entire history of philosophy, or, we could even say, of thought (as philosophy) itself. The issue is not simply the dissolution of truth therefore, but the promotion of a derealized real as the true truth. One of the founding effects of not only postmodernism but of post-Kantian thought more generally is to move beyond matter through thought, that is, to rest upon a certain form of idealism, no matter how distant from outside absolutes. This is precisely why Kolozova claims that “[i]ndeed, Laruelle is right; nothing has changed in the old philosophico-metaphysical equation  $\text{real} = \text{fiction}$  except that [it] has been replaced by  $\text{fiction} = \text{real}$ . Apparently, the positions have been swapped but the equation remains unchanged.”<sup>38</sup> This relation of truth and untruth, of real and unreal, is at the heart of the subjectivity-centered thought which perpetuates itself as a form of drive, perhaps we could even say as a death drive, as it ceaselessly repeats the same, it is an entire mode of self-generated repetition. Before examining Kolozova’s theoretical, formal, and scientific method for existing this mode of thought, it is important to look at the concept of subjectivity more generally.

From a formal standpoint concerning subjectivity itself, while moving away from subjectivity centered thought means moving away from all forms of anthro-pocentrism and idealism, subjectivity as such, however, should not be directly conflated with the structural concept of *a* subject, such as it is defined in the work of Lacan, and many Lacanian scholars working today as we will explore more below. The subject of subjectivity-centered thought represents the absolutizing of particular processes in the human mind, it is a projection of an idea as rooted solely in a given subject, which exceeds the conditions that would ground the possibility of such reasoning in the first place. The structural subject, on the other hand, is perfectly adequate to its relations, or more specifically, its relation to any excess or lack is internal to its constitution, a constitution which is determined by languages own materiality. The real as such is not beyond, but rather an immanent torsion in relation to the symbolic. Indeed, according to Samo Tomsic in *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan* where he is

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 15.

discussing materialism and subjectivity in the work of Lacan in relation to language: “[t]he signifier, and consequently language as such, appears as transcendence within immanence, torsion within materiality. The causality of the signifier then does not consist in the simple scenario, where the signifier intervenes from some presupposed Outside but in the act of self-transcending, through which an autonomous system of differences emerges from materiality.”<sup>39</sup> Again, just as we should not view Kolozova’s use of term metaphysics as an idealist category, we must not see this apparent self-transcendence as such either. Rather, we should see it in direct relation to the materiality of the dyad which constitutes the radical non-human. The transcendence does not come from the Outside, it does come from beyond, the self in the self-transcendence of the signifier rather points to its radical (in the double sense of grounding as foundational, and as disruptive in regards to idealism) materiality. Let us take the Big Other qua symbolic order for example, which, even if taken as mechanism of interpellation and subjective over-determination (such as it is for Althusser, as we will discuss in chapter 5) still remains immanent to language as materiality, even if this very linguistic materiality appears as a form of what Julia Kristeva would call abjection, as something outside of the self, or outside of the body. The internal and the external are not opposed as spirit and matter, or subject and object such as they are in Hegel, but rather, are born out of the same substratum, raw materiality. Indeed, it is for precisely this reason that Kolozova entirely rejects any form of Hegelianism, and sees him as being the forbearer of idealist hubris and subjectivity-centered thought in which knowing spreads from the internal spirituality of the subject over the crude and stupid materiality of the external and subsumed outside. “This universal subject megalomaniacally expanded by Hegel to the universal principle defining all possible reality, morphed into the Spirit that cuts across history and ultimately manifests itself realized or materialized through the negation of its materiality, is a mere projection of the Human ideal, of enlightenment humanism taken to its infantile extremes bordering with the grotesque.”<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps this is the fundamental difference between the two categories of subjectivity, the structural subject is a material subject, if we stretch it a bit we could say that it is a material

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<sup>39</sup> Samo Tomšič, *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan* (Verso, 2015), 52.

<sup>40</sup> Katerina Kolozova, “The Radical Dyad of the Non-Human: Thinking Inequality Beyond Identity as Reification,” *Historical Materialism Conference Online*, (2020): available at: [https://www.academia.edu/44964430/The\\_Radical\\_Dyad\\_of\\_the\\_Non\\_Human\\_Thinking\\_Inequality\\_Beyond\\_Identity\\_as\\_Reification?email\\_work\\_card=view-paper](https://www.academia.edu/44964430/The_Radical_Dyad_of_the_Non_Human_Thinking_Inequality_Beyond_Identity_as_Reification?email_work_card=view-paper)

system, be it one of signifiers or sinews, while subjectivity qua subjectivity-centered thought is immaterial, and attempts to wield external excess over itself and the world. Succinctly, material systems, as modern mathematicians such as Paul Cockshott have pointed out, cannot produce more than their sum of parts, i.e., they cannot exceed the material put into them, which is one of the reasons why, for instance, perpetual motion is an impossibility.<sup>41</sup> Now, again, excess and lack are pivotal points for material constructions of subjectivity, but this excess or lack, too much or too little desire, the impossibility of reaching the stable Thing etc., are all immanently and materially constructed. What is in excess is produced as a gap, a gap which is created by and through its very constitution, which is why Slavoj Žižek states that ““subject” is the name for a crack in the edifice of Being.”<sup>42</sup> Now, again we must be careful here. The point is not to state that a subject, if it were theoretically possible, could move outside of itself, past its impasses, and understand the world fully. It is precisely the opposite, the construction of a subject is, just that, a construction and nothing more, a construction ruled over by the radical dyad. Understanding materially means understanding things as materially constituted and effected. The precision of the sciences (not only the hard sciences, but the social sciences as well) are the result of tracing the effects of material processes and modeling them, they are not the result of a priori knowledge, nor are they based on knowing as such, i.e., knowing things as they really and truly are. In a certain sense, this is a *sine qua non* of materialist politics, and is embodied by the politics of Marx himself. Let us take, for instance, Marx’s famous passage concerning commodity fetishism at the beginning of *Capital*:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists [...] simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See: Paul W. Cockshott, L. M. Mackenzie, and Greg Michaelson, *Computation and Its Limits* (Oxford University Press, 2015.).

<sup>42</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (Bloomsbury, 2019), 70.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (Penguin, 1992), 165.

The fetish is revealed to be a structural relation, one which obfuscates, through metonymy, the actual origin of value, and the status of what constitutes or creates the conception of value as such vis-à-vis the commodity form itself, or rather, and more specifically, it's valorization into value. What is taken as value is always a tautology which hides the materiality (congealed labour time) which enters into it. i.e., the system is always in excess of itself, it acts as though no material is needed, and that value works as a sort of perpetual motion freed from the otherwise finite resources—be it our bodies or the earth,<sup>44</sup> while nonetheless solely relying on these same resources, these same use-values, in order to produce excessive surplus.

It is crucial here to note that this dematerialization, this tautology of value also expresses itself in relation to female subjectivity. According to Kolozova, “[t]he pure value, femininity as abstracted and dematerialised femaleness, is exchanged in the same way as commodity adding value to the tautology of exchanging the same for the same: M-M or P-P in order to achieve M-M’ or P-P,”<sup>45</sup> adding that “[t]he exchange serves not only to increase and enforce the capital of masculinity but also to add sheer surplus-value to it, an excess in value (not libido) as a marker of erected phallic power. The power seen not as materiality but as value is a set of signifiers: a patriarch, the guardian of the household or *oikos*, individual and collective or of *oikos* and the *oikonomia* of a state.”<sup>46</sup> This value extraction works to bolster the male position both from a symbolic and repressive position, but what is gained is precisely an ideal position, a position in which the male position appears to be always-already in a position of power, in a position of maximal appearance within the symbolic order. This male *oikos*, this male *oikonomia* produce a cyclical and dominant ideological position directly analogous to that of capitalism. With that being said, a reimagined *oikos* cannot simply be the opposite of the this, an F-F instead of a P-P. This point is brilliantly elucidated by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. As Lefebvre states: “[t]he masculine virtues which gave rise to domination by this [capitalist] space can only lead, as we are only too well aware, to a generalized state of deprivation: from 'private' property to the Great Castration. It is inevitable in these circumstances that feminine revolts should occur, that the female principle should seek revenge. Were such a movement to take the form of a

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<sup>44</sup> David Harvey, “Rate and Mass: Perspectives from the Grundrisse,” *New Left Review* 130 (July/Aug 2021), 97.

<sup>45</sup> Kolozova, *Holocaust of Animals*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

feminine 'racism' which merely inverted the masculine version, it would be a pity.<sup>47</sup> The point is thus not to replace the masculine with the feminine, but to transform *oikos* such that the divide between the two ceases to present itself, or, at the very least, ceases to operate as an idealist duality of oppression.

Now, we are finally arriving at the process whereby we can see the possibility of moving past this mode of thought. For Kolozova, a non-philosophical, non-Marxist, or even simply Marxist approach to a scientific method of understanding is primarily correlated to minimalist formalism. Here her approach relies equally heavily on Saussure's formulation that language moves from the concrete, to the abstract, and back to the concrete again, so that by the end of an analysis we are left with simple but precise equations concerning both symbolic structures, and what can be said of the real.<sup>48</sup> Language itself is devoid of meaning except in relation to this real, to its grounding, and this grounding's signification. Since we cannot have unmitigated access to the real, this formal procedure proceeds by way of cloning, which according to Laruelle is a process whereby "formalism does not *describe* [emphasis mine] anything of the invisible Real, it is not in any way "realist" or even "idealist" or has none of these pretensions, it is the theoretical style that is adequate to the unthinkable and the unknowable, a form of theory made for what is radically invisible or imperceptible in the forms of representation, but it puts together and "calculates" the phenomena or symptoms."<sup>49</sup> Or again, in Kolozova's terminology, formalism acts according to a syntax of the real, a syntax which is directly affected but never consumes or directly represents the real for which it is the effect of. This formal cloning then is defined by a certain objective proximity to the real, while submitting to the real as a contextual generator of the automaton of signification itself. Materiality can and must be understood according to the real, and according to the radical dyad, instead of a hegemonic Other qua transcendental reductionism. This is further bolstered by Marx's conception of the third party perspective. What this perspective entails, in its simplest possible form, is a moving away entirely from the concept of objects as being constituted by subjects, or in our case, the self-objectification of subjects as formless objects, and instead insisting on viewing ourselves as objects amongst other objects, as

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<sup>47</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991), 410.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>49</sup> François Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*. Trans. Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press-Univocal Publishing), 179.

being viewed by other objects, and thus both materially, and as it were, universally connected. As Marx himself states: “To be objective, natural and sensuous, and at the same time to have object, nature and sense outside oneself, or oneself to be object, nature and sense for a third party, is one and the same thing.”<sup>50</sup> This cloning or syntax then must be understood as eschewing any notion of subject dominated thought, in favour of an objectivity which is not reducible to empiricism or positivism. Therefore, for Kolozova, questions of the real, or of metaphysics, must not be abandoned, but separated from philosophical speculation, thus, the issue is not that philosophy asks “about” the real, but that it unifies it in a system of thought which stands over and against materiality. Again, to quote Kolozova at length:

My subscription to the non-philosophical line of thinking consists primarily and fundamentally in the *mere* [emphasis mine] empty posture of thought that remains in fidelity to the real while always already facing the fact that what it has at hand is the transcendental chôra. While still adhering to the poststructuralist idea that we are living in a world of discursiveness and language, the empty non-philosophical posture of thought is a purposely created crack within the always already (con)textualized thought, an opening from within the text(ure) or the language we have been made of.<sup>51</sup>

Determining the real of the situation is thus always a matter of transferring the “mere empty posture of thought.” The emphasis here is crucial, it is not simply the empty posture of thought, but merely the empty posture of thought. In other words, it is thought devoid of its subjective over-determination opened up to the real brute existence of matter. Finally, to conclude this chapter, we will briefly compare this notion of the real and its syntax with that of a more general Lacanian, psychoanalytic conception.

### **2.2.1: Lacan and the Materiality of the Real**

For Lacan, the real has many definitions and is immanently and inextricably tied up with both the symbolic and the imaginary such that they form a Borromean knot.<sup>52</sup> According to Lacan, the real is not something outside of language, it is not some mystical beyond, but rather that which,

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<sup>50</sup> Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General,” *Manuscripts*: Available online here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm>

<sup>51</sup> Kolozova, *Cut of the Real*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Norton, 2005), 34.

as an immanent but grounding negation, allows for the unfolding of the symbolic itself. Thus the symbolic is always already tethered to the seemingly invisible real which grounds its possibility. This is precisely why Lacan claims that the “real is that which never stops not being written.”<sup>53</sup> The real in this context has absolutely nothing to do with the absolute in the sense of a Platonic ideal, or Kantian Ding an sich. The real is rather a hole, a gap, or, if we were to use Alenka Zupančič’s definition, “[t]he Real is precisely not being, but its inherent impasse.”<sup>54</sup> It is precisely because of this impasse, because of this gap, that subjectivity as such can emerge. The subject being finite is only possible under the condition of an unreachable limit, this limit is always subtracted from the symbolic configuration of the subject, so that a piece of the subject is always voided in excess of it (beyond language—an extra nothing). “The psychoanalytic subject is not infinite, it is finite, limited, and it is this limit that causes the infinity, or unsatisfiability, of its desire.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the infinite substitutability of language is only possible because it is structured by something ostensibly outside of language. The real qua gap inherent to the symbolic thus functions as the unruly foundation of subjectivity, as well as that which shapes the space of the symbolic itself, language is infinitely substitutable not because it always already describes our experience, and our description of our description of experience... but rather because the real—which is the ultimate symbolic exclusion—always interferes, so that the external excess is always internalized within language. The limit is thus what allows for the limitless.

This emphasis allows us to say not only that the signifying order is inconsistent and incomplete, but, in a stronger and more paradoxical phrasing, that the signifying order emerges as already lacking one signifier, that it appears with the lack of a signifier “built into it,” so to speak (a signifier which, if it existed, would be the “binary signifier”). In this precise sense the signifying order could be said to begin, not with One (nor with multiplicity), but with a “minus one” [...] It is in the place of this gap or negativity that appears the surplus-enjoyment which stains the signifying structure: the heterogeneous element pertaining to the signifying structure, yet irreducible to it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *What Is Sex?* (MIT, 2016), 24.

<sup>55</sup> Joan Copjec, *Read my Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Verso, 2008), 61.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

It is worth adding here that it is precisely this gap, this paradoxical self-inclusion which allows for both desire and resistance. According to Joan Copjec “[t]he subject is the product of history without being the fulfillment of a historical demand.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, the subject is never fully consumed by an imperative, nor fully inculcated by the Other. The gap created by the real is not a command, but an overdetermined opening that allows for the existence of desire itself. This means that desire cannot be a law within the symbolic. If it were, every command of the Other would imply its completion, desire would not be desire but rather actuality. The real thus cannot in anyway be filled in (just as philosophy cannot simply grasp or sublate the real in a form of egoism) it can merely affect the symbolic fallout. In a certain sense this is what prevents the Lacanian real from falling into an idealist trap.

Here, the overlaps with Kolozova’s work should be rather obvious, she herself even makes several references across her work to Lacan, and the Lacanian conception the real and the automaton.<sup>58</sup> However, if we look at the symbolic and its internal limit qua real, we are nonetheless presented with a) what appears as a sort of inevitable anthropocentrism based upon the primacy of the human animal, and its direct relation to language—there is a constant overemphasis on the particularity of the human;<sup>59</sup> b) an overemphasis of the image of the subject as such as the point of revolt—instead of more material and universal sites; and c) finally, Lacan fails to (as opposed to Kolozova), as Adrian Johnston points out, fully, or even really partially explain the rise of the symbolic order itself, it’s always-already status does away with any form of genesis, and runs the risk of inverting the radical dyad, or, in the end, simply privileging humans and our ostensibly unique language over other beings, while also, as a direct result, over-emphasizing the over-determining effects of the real as symbolic force via the transcendental, thus making materiality subservient to matter. To quote Johnston directly:

Despite my solidarity with many facets of Lacan’s thinking, I consider his accounts of the emergences of ego and subject to suffer from a major shortcoming [...] In line with his ban on raising queries regarding the historical origins of language and connected social

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> See for Instance: Kolozova, *Capitalism’s Holocaust of Animals*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> For a full critique of this within the work of Lacan and Badiou, see: Lorenzo Chisea, “The Body of Structural Dialectic: Badiou, Lacan, and the “Human Animal”” in *The Virtual Point of Freedom: Essays on Politics, Aesthetics, and Religion* (Northwestern University Press, 2016).



structures, he permits himself an affirmation of the statement “In the beginning was the Word.” He overtly portrays the advent of the symbolic order, a creative genesis obfuscated and mystified by the Lacanian law against all things phylogenetic, as the descent of the “Holy Spirit” down into the world.

In other words, there was no evolutionary becoming or process of language, no material explanation for its origin, the symbolic order simply appears, in a Hegelian fashion, like spirit. Likewise, and to use Badiou’s terminology mentioned earlier, within this conception of the symbolic order there is a real possibility of relapsing into a variant of democratic materialism—after all, it was Lacan himself that famously pointed out that a revolution is also that which simply spins in circles.

### **3.0 Surveying Current Materialisms**

This chapter will begin by analyzing several key contemporary figures in the thought of materialism, and thus open up the space to further determine which form of materialism is best suited to a form of new-material politics, or, which form of materialism allows us to lay the foundation for a post-capitalist society, for a transformed *oikos*. More specifically, this section will focus on four key thinkers/broader schools of thought which will be named below. It should be noted that we are not advocating here for the absolute adoption of any of these, nor are we attempting a complete systematization or synthetic unity either. Rather, we are trying to trace positive and negative trajectories in order to construct a non-fixed axiology of a politics of the future. The figures in this section are: Thomas Nail (who represents a return to Marx in a radical way which moves beyond post-structuralist strictures, and towards a novel (and continuous) reading of both his earliest and latest texts); Louis Althusser (who in many ways epitomizes the (post)structuralist turn in Marx away from what he himself would deem humanism) and Nick Land (a radical right-wing thinker who nonetheless disavows anthropocentrism and critiques capitalism, thus allowing us to contrast and compare his work with the other self-avowed leftist thinkers). We will also briefly cover some of the more wide ranging implications of the field of speculative realism, as we have done in the previous chapter, although this term has become so expansive that it seemingly encompasses any contemporary attempt at a materialist theory, or any theory which attempts in any way to bridge, surpass, synthesize or even annihilate the

subject-object relation altogether. This can be seen rather easily if we simply examine the diverse list of authors in the anthology *The Speculative Turn*. Within this collection we find authors such as Adrian Johnston (a Hegelian and Lacanian), Alain Badiou (a materialist Platonist), and Graham Harman (who founded the theory of object oriented ontology but who remains essentially Heideggerian), and so on and so on.<sup>60</sup> Thus, if we speak of speculative realism it is important not to do so with the idea of a conceptual unity in mind. Indeed, even so-called French post-structuralism contains more unity (Nancy, Deleuze, Foucault, Althusser etc.). Nonetheless, speculative realists do share the common goal of attempting to grasp, outside of infinite relationality, some form of the real without recourse to idealism. In other words, by reformulating the distinction between the subject and object they wish to gain access to the way things “really” are. This same drive, which in some sense is the basic drive of all philosophy (to discover, or perhaps even create, truth) is also present in many ways in all of the other figures featured in this section. Thus, although a formal analysis of the field will not be made, the shadow of speculative-realism will certainly still linger over not only this chapter, but the thesis as a whole.

### 3.1. Thomas Nail and Kinetic Materialism

Thomas Nail’s materialism attempts to overcome the anthropocentric leanings, or perhaps even inevitable structural results of not only various rampant and blatant idealisms and reductionary scientisms, but also of certain streams of post-structuralist Marxism in order to arrive at materialist and scientifically consistent theory of matter in movement. This is what his entire philosophical oeuvre is centered around, and his influences range all the way from Lucretius (*Lucretius I, II and III*) through Marx (*Marx in Motion*), and up to contemporary theories of quantum physics and various logical models and configurations, such as category theory (*Theory of the Object*). We should also clarify that while he sees certain flaws, or certain out-right anthropocentrisms in certain strains of Marxist thought,<sup>61</sup> that he by absolutely no means wants to throw the theoretical baby out with the bath water. Indeed, Nail’s move here in regards to Marxism is to show that from Marx’s earliest work, his doctoral thesis, all the way up

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<sup>60</sup> Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (re.press, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Nail, *Marx in Motion: A New Materialist Marxism* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 3.

to and including the whole of *Capital*, and its various emphases on materialism and motion, that Marx was neither an anthropocentric thinker, nor a thinker of stasis, but, conversely, a thinker of movement, matter, and contingency.<sup>62</sup> Nail himself uses the term kinetic materialism to summarize this project<sup>63</sup>

Thus, for Thomas Nail, movement always-already was and is present in matter. This is precisely how he interprets Lucretius, as well as Marx's writings on him in his dissertation. What does this mean on a general level? It means that there are no discrete and isolated actions which lead to movement. There is no originary prime-mover of movement, so to speak. Rather, at its basest possible level matter was and is always-already moving, folding back onto itself, and transforming. In *Theory of the Object*, Nail concisely summarizes the fundamental principle of a philosophy of movement, of a philosophy of kinetic materialism: "There is no determinate 'something' that is at the heart of the reduction [...] Movement is indeterminate and relations are indeterminate relations. The movement of matter, in my view, has no higher or exterior causal explanation, or at least there is no experimentally verified one or hint of one yet."<sup>64</sup> In other words, there is nothing perfectly stable, or unmoving at any level. Thus, to briefly point towards his critique of the so called atomists, or even contemporary so called materialists such as Badiou and Althusser, it is not as though atoms fall in a void and then encounter some sort of turbulence, some disturbance in their trajectory which causes an infinite chain reaction of energetic dispersion whereby movement is the direct result of the movement of a separate entity. Let us take a rather rudimentary analogy in order to illustrate this. Matter did not begin as a set of dominos in which one was tipped over, causing a reaction in every other domino. This would simply return us to the theory of the prime-mover. We could perhaps then say that the dominoes were always-already toppling, that the sequence was always-already in motion. However, this still is not quite correct. Rather, for Nail, following Lucretius and Marx, dominos as such do not exist, the very notion of the domino is predicated upon vast interdeterminacies and connections, to understand the falling of a domino it is necessary first to understand movement as such, how movement creates expressibly concrete notions of singularities, while these singularities

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Object* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 8.

themselves are nothing more than indeterminately fluctuating matter whose perceivability owes itself to particular metastable states. To borrow a direct illustration of what constitutes a metastable state from Nail,<sup>65</sup> one can think of an eddy or a stream. These objects appear to have a complete observable consistency, we can directly point out where this objective phenomenon is taking place, however these ‘objects’ are nothing more than the constant flow of matter, just as for Heraclitus one never steps thorough the same river twice.

An object in this regard is a constantly changing, moving, and interconnected conglomerate of recursive and folding matter. This does not mean that objects as such, or even singular objects as such do not exist, rather, that we must understand them, at a core level, as not being reducible to stasis, nor, and importantly, to their mere relationality. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that objects cannot simply be categorized into a singular, clean-cut category. Rather, according to Nail: “[...]there is not just one kind of object. Instead, there are several prevailing processes or patterns that converge and diverge through history. Science does not discover pre-existing objects but co-creates them and then uses them to reorganize the world of things.”<sup>66</sup> What is important for us here is not the precise configuration of the different forms or categorizations of objects, their precise lexical and logical construction, what is pivotal is rather two things. Firstly, as we have already stated, matter, and its objectification is itself a process, or rather series of processes. Secondly, that these processes are affected by our (humans) investigation of them, us being nothing more than folding matter.

Continuing along this line of what we could call the synchronous, or always-already nature of matter in movement, we can see that this is fully expandable to the cosmological level. For instance, this notion of movement is very much in line with how Nobel Prize winning mathematician and physicist Roger Penrose describes the phenomenon of the big bang. If the big bang were to have happened, if this theory really holds water, it is likely (it is still a hypothesis based on mathematical extrapolations) only possible on the premise of an infinite series of other big bangs which have preceded *the* big bang as such.<sup>67</sup> Or, more directly, there is no road at the

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Nail, *Lucretius I: An Ontology of Motion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 107.

<sup>66</sup> Nail, *Theory of the Object*, 213.

<sup>67</sup> Vahagn Gurzadyan and Roger Penrose, "Concentric circles in WMAP data may provide evidence of violent pre-Big-Bang activity," (2010). Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1011.3706>

end of the tunnel in which we could ecstatically state that we have found the end, here is stasis, here is where it all started. No, movement is possible because it always was in fact moving. Now, it should be addressed here that it may appear as though this is simply a metaphysical, and *ad infinitum* regression back to first causes. However, what this shows, rather, is the absence of a first or final cause, the eventual creation of the universe(s) was not bound to occur in any particular way, nor was it predicated upon anything except immanent motion. Two points are worth making here. Firstly, that we can only go back so far, that we can only deal with the material/historical emergence and observation of concrete situations and phenomena, and derive from this, logical conclusions on how things were and will be. Thus, we must make axiomatic decisions based upon what can be derived from these situations themselves. It is of course, on a theoretical and metaphysical level, possible that matter was static and then began moving, it is possible that the so called laws of nature are entirely contingent, and that anything is possible, even the creation of God is possible (as Meillassoux has claimed, and as Nail has excoriated him for<sup>68</sup>) but these are only true as metaphysical claims, claims in which their validity is granted by the mere impossibility of applying even an apagogic logic to them.

Now, this leads us to the next and incredibly important point for Nail. Matter may indeed always be in motion, always swerving, but it is not in any way random. As he states in *Figure of the Migrant*: “Specific movements appear random only from the perspective of those who do not understand or see the enormous number of complex collisions and vectors that determine a given motion.”<sup>69</sup> Things do not *just* happen. Rather, as in quantum entanglement, on some level matter is always self-relating, self-connecting, self-unfolding. It is easy to imagine a bunch of chaotic molecules bouncing back and forth, but there is nothing chaotic (in the contemporary use of the word) about it, nor for that matter, is there anything entirely determinant about it. It is crucial here to move away from old distinctions between materialism as mechanistic and deterministic, and materialism as this sort of pure abundant openness. Neither are true. Things are determined by relations, by movement, by intervention, yes, there is a radical openness to materialism, yes material has properties, even self-perpetuating properties which can be used to determine the future cause and effect of other matter, but this is not to say that anything is possible, or that

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<sup>68</sup> See: Quentin Meillassoux, *L'inexistence divine* (Lille theses, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford University Press, 2015), 126.

everything is determined. Another way to put this, and this will lead us further into Nail's theory, is that matter itself is creative (we can think of this in a double sense, in the sense of production, of creating something — matter begets transformed matter — and in its more everyday use i.e., it has a form of imagination. This is not to say that it thinks, at least not in the way that animals (or even forms of plants) think, rather its creative capacity is not fully-determined and certainly not fully determined by humans. Furthermore, this means, according to Nail's interpretation of Marx "[...]that nature, without human intervention, is productive, and when humans are involved, they are never the only source of material wealth and use-value—since they produce only as nature does."<sup>70</sup> This is perfectly analogous to his conception of death and human uniqueness, nature itself produces value, just as nature itself is the same matter that we are. Now, we will turn to this question of death and exceptionalism momentarily, first, however, let us point out a simple fact, a fact itself which should be obvious but is nonetheless crucial to once again highlight, as it has been obscured in both materialist and idealist forms for centuries. Simply put: anything that exists is composed of matter, matter as the particular instantiation of different material connections (and as we have seen, moving connections). Thus, regardless of whether it is a rock, a plant, an ape, or a human, it must be said that it is derived from matter, or rather, it is derived from nature, which is itself matter. Human beings are this very matter, just as the tree is this very matter. We are birthed and remain tied through a sort of infinite umbilical cord to nature, but this does not mean we are above it or somehow abstractly superior to the (ostensibly of course) passivity, or non-thinking of nature. Now, to be absolutely clear, Nail here is not promoting a form of pantheism. There is no complete unity, no oneness to the being of matter, to nature, we do not all take place in the being of Nature, of capital N nature, rather we are all simply material constructs, complex and folding objects.

Thus, according to Nail, Matter is meaningless in the sense that it is not constrained to the imparted meaning which human beings endow it with, but is instead just what is, and this *is*, as we have stated, is a constant process of movement. Death, or at least how we traditionally conceive of biological death is, in a sense, thus nothing more than the shift of matter from one

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<sup>70</sup> Nail, *Marx in Motion*, 104.

state or configuration to another.<sup>71</sup> Again, this is not to say that we as humans move forward to some transcendent post-material stage. It is the precise opposite. Our humanity, our apparent but ultimately specious, or at least arbitrary, uniqueness is nothing more than matter, a particular configuration of matter. As Nail states in his first of three books discussing the materialism of Lucretius:

While things may appear discrete or discontinuous from their surroundings, they are in fact relatively continuous with them. For example, living organisms are only relatively stable pools or junctions in a continuous flow of expenditure and transformation of energy moving from the sun, conjoined [coniunctum] by the organism, reproduced in its offspring, and disjoined [seiungi] in death. Life is only an eddy in a corporeal stream.<sup>72</sup>

We as humans are thus, from a micro level (and even from a macro level), nothing more than a series of meta-stable states which are neither really alive or dead, but rather constantly regenerating and shifting. Importantly, this is both a stance that allows for a strong anti-anthropocentric position, and a stance which does not succumb to either destructive, nihilist, or anti-natalist conceptions of human beings. That we are reducible to matter, or that we are not unique in the universe does not take away in any way from the beauty or substance (substance here referring to our experience of what is substantial for us, in our lived lives, and not substance as *ousia*) of our existence. Conversely, the fact we are materially constructed and, that matter organizes itself in a such a way that we are capable of any form of experience, let alone the massive spectrum of emotions, thoughts, pleasures, pains etc. is in a sense more miraculous than any philosophical or metaphysical theorizations about our purpose or *telos* in the world. It However, understanding that we are not so different from other material configurations, be it other animals, or even, on a much larger scale, the earth, means that we also have a particular responsibility to not reduce them to a waste product. They are not lesser forms of material, they are not deprived of some special ability which only exists due to some precise firing of neurons

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<sup>71</sup> I owe this observation to an online Intensive Study Course taught by Thomas Nail at the School of Materialist Research, in December 2022, entitled “The Philosophy of Matter, Death, and Extinction.” Currently there are no recordings or transcripts of the talk available. See: <https://schoolofmaterialistresearch.org/Intensive-Study-Program-Fall-Winter-2022-23> for more information.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Nail, *Lucretius I*, 107.

between distinct parts of the human brain (which itself is nothing more than an evolutionary accident), of some thought that grants them superiority.

Now, to cut down to brass tacks, what are the political implications of a philosophy of movement, of a kinetic materialism? What does the primacy of movement add to class struggle, to revolution, or, even more fundamentally, how we understand the logic of capitalism? At this point we should acknowledge the elephant in the room. Motion, or movement by itself is no more a guarantor of radical politics or even political change than is stasis. Indeed, somewhat self-evidently, capitalism itself is obsessed with movement, with exchange, with the destruction and constant recreation of traditions to fall in line with the fungibility of value, with its constant need to create value itself, to extract, to mobilize etc. For Nail, then, it is critical to note two things, as he points out throughout his work, but most prominently in *Marx in Motion*, and *Figure of the Migrant*. Firstly, and as we have just stated, capitalism is structured around movement, but it is a specific type of movement, a movement which is simultaneously a stricture.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, that these strictures are an absolutely indispensable condition for the sustaining of capitalism. Several key examples are helpful in illustrating this. Firstly, if we look at the migrant, we can see that the massive flows of individuals from devastated areas (whether they are caused by climate change, the destruction of local economies etc.) constantly need to both be created and to be stored. Indeed, the recent war in Ukraine shows perfectly how forced migration allows for both the circulation of capitalism (which is also the effect of colonial capitalism), and the precarious pseudo-stability in which these migrants find themselves. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR), the war in Ukraine has already caused an almost inconceivable 3,626,546 refugees to flee the country and set up temporary shop in neighboring ones.<sup>74</sup> Simultaneously, this caused a massive shift in the global economy and the flow of capital as Russia and Ukraine export almost a quarter of the world's wheat. Returning to the migrant more specifically, we can see a similar phenomenon to Nail's analysis of its function in relation to what Joshua Clover deems to be the result of parties of order. For Clover, placement itself, and the ordering of individuals, especially of 'surplus populations,' is an absolutely necessary element to prevent revolt, and to sustain a certain form

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<sup>73</sup> Nail, *Figure of the Migrant*, 153.

<sup>74</sup> See: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>



of global hegemony. Everything must rest in its place, even if this is place is always moving, and constantly threatening to tear apart the infrastructure and logic of capitalism through the inside.

To quote Clover directly,

[i]n some sense placement is everything. That's what makes order. It is constitutive of the party of order that they put things in their place. By "things" I mean people. If capital makes things of people — as Marx suggests in the section on the fetish character of the commodity — then the party of order carries out the work of putting these particular kinds of things in their place with brutal zeal. In an ultra-formalist sense, one could almost say that the specific place doesn't matter as long as everyone is put in one.<sup>75</sup>

This same phenomenon can also be seen by examining the role of the global proletariat, or what Butler refers to as the 'precariat,' the worker whose only fixed reality is the dissolution of stability, it is fixed (through what Nail calls a junction) into a position whereby it is placed into a form of groundlessness.<sup>76</sup> This is also directly analogous to the phenomenon of what David Harvey refers to as spatial and temporal fixes of capital. These fixes, of which there are countless historical and contemporary examples, are defined by the transfer of the production and circulations of goods from areas of high-levels of either taxation, or union support, into areas with lower taxation, and more relaxed labour laws.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps even more importantly, and as Nail shows throughout his oeuvre, but most prominently in *Marx and Motion*, that a radical, instead of capitalist or reactionary, concept of movement completely disturbs the logic of private ownership, and of resource extraction more generally. How so? His primary mode of analysis here is to rely on the concept of social metabolism in Marx, of societies internal relations and our relations to nature.<sup>78</sup> To fix and denote a certain plot of land for the express process of either resource extraction, or, simply as shows of wealth and power, and, as such, also as a form of fixed capital, promotes movement only in the sense of the production and circulation of capital at the complete and utter expense of the earth as we know it as well as all of its inhabitants. Again, what is key is not simply

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<sup>75</sup> Joshua Clover, "Parties of Order Right and Left," *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* 19:2 (2022), 31.

<sup>76</sup> Nail, *Figure of the Migrant*, 154.

<sup>77</sup> David Harvey, "Globalization and the "Spatial Fix,"" *geographische revue* (2001).

<sup>78</sup> Nail, *Marx in Motion*, 74.

movement, just as for certain religious idealists there are wrathful and peaceful gods, rather the point is to devise new conceptions of movement which do not rely on the hegemonic and well-ordering of the planet, but instead promotes forms of movement which attack conceptions of the logic of capital. In short, subversive movements. To quote Nail directly: “[...] social movements are not formally or kinopolitically different from many nomadic, barbarian, or vagabond struggles against the state. All are defined by a continuous or free oscillation outside the limits of the dominant regime of social motion. All of them are interpreted historically as chaotic and disorganized (just as pedesis is), but they also express their own form of irregular social order.”<sup>79</sup> This irregularity is a counter-movement, a counter-hegemony which brings to the fore the true meaning of movement, of process, it restores to the notion of the political movement the idea of material movement, of contingency, of the disbanding of the false naturalization of the laws of capital, and replaces them with a novel framework in which to conceive of a new theories of change. We will introduce a more thorough analysis of Nail’s conception of value in the next chapter.

### 3.1.2 Althusser and the Raw Material of Abstraction

While Louis Althusser might be best known for his essays on the functioning of ideology, and his interpretation of Marx in *Reading Marx*, and *Reading Capital*, his later works on the concept of matérialisme aléatoire in *Philosophy of the Encounter* (which is literally translated in the text as aleatory materialism), or, according to Paul Cockshott’s updated translation, stochastic materialism,<sup>80</sup> as well as his concise and summarizing text, *Philosophy for Non-philosophers*, are also worth examining here. *Philosophy of the Encounter*, which is comprised of various works between 1978-87, sketches out his own updated view of how matter functions, and, to an extent, how this functioning of matter lends itself to various political practices. Much like Nail, Althusser reads Lucretius and Epicurus and attempts to understand and bring to the fore the importance of the tradition of the swerve, of the importance of a certain non-necessity and contingency of matter, and thus the contingency and non-necessity of the world as such. To quote Althusser at length:

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Cockshott, “On Althusser’s Philosophy of the Encounter,” *World Review of Political Economy*, 4:1 (Spring, 2013), 39.

The world may be called the accomplished fact [...] in which, once the fact has been accomplished, is established the reign of Reason, Meaning, Necessity and End [....] But the accomplishment of the fact is just a pure effect of contingency, since it depends on the aleatory encounter of the atoms due to the swerve of the clinamen. Before the accomplishment of the fact, before the world, there is only the non-accomplishment of the fact, the non-world that is merely the unreal existence of the atoms. What becomes of philosophy under these circumstances? It is no longer a statement of the Reason and Origin of things, but a theory of their contingency and a recognition of fact, of the fact of contingency, the fact of the subordination of necessity to contingency, and the fact of the forms which 'gives form' to the effect of the encounter.<sup>81</sup>

Let us unpack this quote. The first and primary point to take away from it is the primacy of contingency, it is not in any way a form of mechanistic or deterministic materialism, it allows for randomness and chance. Secondly, and directly related, it removes any notion of teleology, that is, the world, or humanity as such, is not destined for any particular end, it is not designed for any particular end, its apparent well-orderedness is the result of an aleatory and unnecessary encounter, a swerve. Thirdly, this would also appear to take us fully away from the notion of idealism, what existed before the world was the “non accomplishment of the fact” of the encounter of the swerve. This means that the apparent eternity of truth, of forms, of any variant of anamnesis is entirely impossible, there is no stasis to contemplate, no gods to ponder over, no absolute to idea to wield over mater. Fourthly, and again correlatively, this allows Althusser to take, at least to some degree, a non-anthropocentric stance (although we will also problematize this below) whereby humans themselves are not in anyway ordained, and where the hubristic questions of origin are done away-with. Fifthly, this contingency is historically and materially grounded. Or, in other words, what is does not have to be, or rather, its necessity only comes into being retroactively as the ‘accomplished fact’ of its being there, being there according to a specific ‘reign of reason.’ Capitalism then, although appearing as always already present from an

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<sup>81</sup> Louis Althusser, “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” in *Philosophy of the Encounter Later Writings, 1978-87* (Verso, 2006), 169.

ideological point of view, is only justified on its contingent emergence. This means that the ideological structure of capitalism, its effects, its hegemony do not need to exist, and capitalist subjects as such are themselves the result of a contingency, a contingency which falsely proclaims itself to be absolute (we will return more fully to this point in chapter 5). This philosophical materialism of the encounter thus proceeds with a certain emptying out of philosophy as such, stripping it of its entirely too speculative power, and subordinating itself to the contingency of the world, a world which is no longer rigidly determined. However, and as we have stated briefly in the previous section, Nail has strongly criticized Althusser for completely getting the concept of the swerve incorrect. How so? According to Althusser, for Epicurus atoms simply fall through a void like “rain,” the encounter of the swerve is thus seen as random and external event, there was a before and an after, a world before and after, the swerve itself (and not just the eventual coming into being of a given accomplished fact) is thus in one sense a historical event, or recurring historical event in which discrete processes are always underway in order to ensure the randomness of the atom itself.<sup>82</sup> Of course, for Nail, who is following Marx’s interpretation in his doctoral thesis, this motion is immanent, internal, and continuous. There is no introduction of the swerve, and no complete randomness of the swerve. Yes, the swerve introduces a strong form of contingency, but it is not so much an encounter as it is a quality of matter itself, which is why Nail claims that Althusser “[...] ends up oddly emphasizing the ‘aleatory’ over the ‘materialist’ implications of atomism more than is accurate for Lucretius.”<sup>83</sup> While this critique may seem relatively banal, it is far from this. As we have said, Althusser’s encounter is not so much akin to the swerve as either Nail or Lucretius describes to it, but rather, much closer to what his student Alain Badiou would later deem the event. In other words, it is more of an unforeseeable and unpredictable collision between forces which manage to escape the control of a particular ordering. While this is indeed a critical point that allows us to theorize a certain exiting of political and ideological ossifications, one which Althusser sketches out through disparate figures such as Machiavelli, Rousseau, and Marx, it nonetheless does not manage to free itself from the form of anthropocentrism and stasis which Nail was rightfully criticizing. Thus, this form of exceptional material encounter is indeed important for political projects writ large, it also runs the very real risk of collapsing back into certain idealist

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>83</sup> Nail, *Lucretius I*, 10.

configurations. We will explore this topic more when we examine the notion of his *Ideological State Apparatuses* later on in this thesis. For now, however, it is worth examining more closely how he has conceived of the relationship between science and matter throughout his work.

In order to understand the relation between science and matter, or between a scientific materialism and a form of abstract materialism, it is crucial to look at what Althusser refers to as the concept of raw material which is necessary for the production of knowledge itself. In its most basic form raw material is simply the object which an instrument of production works on or “experiments” with.<sup>84</sup> More broadly however, raw material is a complex configuration of matter which, in order to be theorized upon, is already abstracted and placed into the realm of theory of knowledge. Thus it is defined by matter which is:

[...] already elaborated and transformed, precisely by the imposition of the complex (sensuous-technical-ideological) structure which constitutes it as an object of knowledge, however crude, which constitutes it as the object it will transform, whose forms it will change in the course of its development process in order to produce knowledges which are constantly transformed but will always apply to its object, in the sense of object of knowledge.<sup>85</sup>

Science in this sense, as Althusser also states, takes itself as an object (for Althusser this is true not only for abstract sciences, such as pure mathematics, but also all forms of science and theory as such), such that it is working on itself, working on the reflection which its imposition brings.

Fascinatingly here, we can see a formula in Althusser which concerns the general construction of scientific processes in relation to the abstract and the concrete, which is an incredibly similar but ostensibly reversed version of the formula that we find in the work of Kolozova concerning her syntax of the real. It is worth quoting the passage from Althusser at length below, so that we can properly juxtapose the two positions. It should also be noted that

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<sup>84</sup> Louis Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers* (Bloomsbury, 2017), 99.

<sup>85</sup> Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition* (Verso, 2015), 14.

Althusser here is affirming this point through his reading of a specific passage of *Capital*, and thus takes this position to be fundamentally Marxist. According to Althusser, science does not move from the concrete to the abstract, but, conversely:

[...] proceeds from the abstract to the concrete; it gradually refines abstraction, the existing abstractions, moving from ideological abstractions to the abstractions of technical-practical knowledge and, ultimately, scientific abstractions, and, after exactly combining them, to a definite abstraction bearing on a concrete object. This definite abstraction thus becomes the concrete knowledge of a concrete object. It must be said that the majority of philosophers and even scientists are unaware of this fundamental materialist truth; yet, without it, it is impossible to understand what occurs in scientific practice.<sup>86</sup>

So, what does moving from the abstract to the concrete mean here, and why is it apparently so often misunderstood? The move Althusser is making here is in many ways dialectical, it is not simply that the abstract becomes increasingly lucid and definable, although this also occurs, it is more so that the abstract object of inquiry becomes a form of concrete-abstraction, so from abstract-concrete, to concrete-abstract. This procedure takes place by slowly substituting the broader contextualizations of a given object of inquiry so that the object can be understood within its framework of appearance. The further the scientist examines and probes his object, the more dependable and predictable it becomes. The materiality is thus the concretization of the abstract, of making the abstractions real in a certain sense in so far as they become repeatable and digestible bits of information. In other words, the “raw material” is subject to ever greater materializations through its abstract formalization. Does this then imply a hyper-subjective or hyper-anthropocentric position whereby humans are responsible for matter itself, or have in one way or another a unique capacity to comprehend it? Surprisingly, and as if entirely anticipating this question himself, Althusser forcefully declares almost immediately after that, that: “The process of the practice – that is to say, of scientific production – is [...] a ‘process without a subject’. This does not mean that it can dispense with the researcher’s labour-

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<sup>86</sup> Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 101.

power or his intelligence, talent, etc.; it means that this process is subject to objective laws which also determine the agent's – the scientific researcher's – nature and role.”<sup>87</sup> In other words, what the researcher is working on through his labour power is the raw materiality of the object, which exists and informs the existence of the research itself, starting from the already abstract notion of the production of knowledge. Concerning subjectivity-centered thinking, as well as the concept of Principle of Sufficient Philosophy, it is also worth pointing out here that Althusser himself, in *For Marx*, distinctly ascribes the general term “philosophy” to “ideological philosophy” and uses the phrase Theory (with a capital T) to refer to Marxist “philosophy.”<sup>88</sup> Interestingly enough, the term philosophy itself still remains, Theory is thus still a form of philosophy, but a philosophy which has been “ruptured,” or in other words, it has been affected by the Marxist ‘encounter,’ even if this encounter has not reached the level of an accomplished fact. Marxist philosophy as Theory then must always be seen in relation to the scientific process of theory, of an analysis of raw material. However, the primary problematic with Althusser in relation to Kolzova would be that this raw material begins with an abstracted notion, its determination in the last instance is not simply matter, but subsumed matter. The similarity in the processes should thus not be taken as a direct proximity. Althusser here too remains all too anthropocentric despite his best efforts to do otherwise, as matter still remains a passive material to be worked upon by humans, regardless of its objectivity. As I said in the beginning of this sections however, there is still much of use and interest in Althusser's analysis of the encounter, and of ideology (although here too he makes a similar move) which will be explored later on.

### 3.1.3 Nick Land and Virtual Materialism

Now, so far throughout this thesis I have addressed, at least minimally, the problematic of particular postmodern or post-structuralist discourses on the left that often lead to nothing more than a straight-jacketing of discourse, and a reduction of subjects to the effects of language, which, in a certain sense itself relies on a form of dematerialization, of moving away from more collective and concrete material struggles in favor of more abstract and individual ones. However, as I will now briefly show, critiquing the limited and ultimately self-defeating and

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>88</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (Verso, 2005), 168.

self-referential circles of particular postmodern discourses which are still consumed by subjectivity-centered thinking is by no means an automatically leftist nor materialist pursuit. To state that we must move beyond the correlationist circle, or, alternatively, the tautology of subjectivity-centered thought, in order to structure new modes of thought, even modes of non-anthropocentric thought, traverses, crucially, the left-right divide. It is pivotal therefore to understand the precise method of overcoming this dilemma so that we do not find ourselves in an equally dubious position. Let us turn now to the work of Nick Land, who finds himself on the far-right of the political spectrum, in order to show how this phenomenon can ultimately manifest along right-leaning lines.

For Land, deconstruction as a form of postmodern discourse reduces negativity to difference, to the structuring of binary terms, positivity is thus not only the result of negativity but negativity itself is constituted only in relation to itself, to the positive logical constructions which come into being only through negation. The result, for Land, is that any radical deployment of negativity within postmodern discourse is always already neutered—that the only position deconstruction can take is one of indifference—a petty deferral of a foregone conclusion:

All uses, references, connotations of the negative are referred back to a bilateral opposition as if to an inescapable destination, so that every 'de-', 'un-', 'dis-', or 'anti-' is speculatively imprisoned within the mirror space of the concept. If we were to follow deconstruction to the letter here it would follow that atheism, antihumanism, and antilogic, far from being virulent pestilential swamps, had no force except through their determinate relations to their enemies, which had thus always already bilateralized them into docility.<sup>89</sup>

Here, Land is distinctly critiquing the entire structure of the deconstructive model itself, not merely as an epistemological mode of understanding, but as a force of potential change, including of course political change. The automatic reduction to the binding term that is meant to be negated is nothing more than its inevitable and inextricable pairing. In the same way that

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<sup>89</sup> Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* (Routledge, 1992), 19.



dialectical logic is forced into a relation of relationality, whereby the negativity inherent in the concept is sublated according to the contradictions present, and thus into a preset horizon of knowing, deconstruction remains trapped in the ‘mirror space of the concept,’ or, in other words, its power is stripped away due to its own tautological structure. Thus, we could also state (although Land does not make this point himself) that this postmodern conception of deconstruction, not only does not signal a radical critique of how things are, but also does not transcend a particular philosophy of presence which it fought, historically, so hard to bury. Indeed, if presence is thought of as ascribing a certain *is*, a certain being to being-there, then deconstruction in this sense merely states that this *is*, ought to exist as a confinement without offering any possible way out. In regards to this way out, it is crucial to note that Land’s ultimate proposal, although this idea only fully manifests in his later essays, is to propose a form of absolute zero. Land thus rejects the strictures of academic/lo-gical discourse, which is to say, any barring, by way of pseudo inclusion of the negative, the radical negative qua zero.<sup>90</sup> Put more simply, against ideas of absence and the absolute, Land promotes a more primitive escape by recourse to a real outside of discourse, to the negative not as a concept, but as a driving force, not as a sublation (Hegel) but as an escape. This escape, however, is not idealist in the traditional sense (but is nonetheless idealist in a more abstract sense).

While Land unequivocally asserts a sort of absolute zero which is not simply the negation of what exists, it is neither the presence of absence nor the absence of presence, he does so in a way that is both anti-anthropocentric, and anti-thought itself. Negativity is thus seen as the annihilation of the subject, and not it’s affirmation, or apotheoization, it simply is not something special for humanity. As Vincent Le perfectly articulates in his analysis and comparison of/between Land and Brassier:

[...] if thought cannot grasp reality’s radical alterity without reducing it to a thing for us, the only way to access the real is at the limit or even death of thought itself. Death, after all, marks precisely the cessation of subjectivity. [...] For Land as for Brassier, our mortality is not a fact to be bemoaned or repressed; instead, death should become the

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<sup>90</sup> Nick Land, “Meat (or How to Kill Oedipus in Cyberspace),” in *Nick Land, Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987 – 2007* eds. Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (Urbanomic, 2011), 412.

transcendental horizon for the critique of all anthropocentric [...] philosophies, so as to set the stage for the real's recession from the clutches of reason.<sup>91</sup>

For Land, this subjective self-destruction is a direct result of capitalism's unmitigated erasure of relations, its melting into air of all which preceded it, or again in his own words: "The limit of capital is the point at which transcendent identity snaps, where the same is nothing but the absolutely abstract reproduction of difference, produced alongside difference, with utter plasticity."<sup>92</sup> Capitalism, for Land, thus leads to the infinite reproduction of self-related difference. Capitalism is pure flux, constant change, but what changes, changes the same. What is allowed to exist is only the same as difference and vice versa. Far from mourning this banality, Land actively pursues its acceleration. Again, to quote Le: "[...] Land sees humanity's annihilation as a solution to accessing the real rather than as a problem as it is for Deleuze and Guattari, he affirms that we should actively strive to become bodies without organs, not even if it kills us, but precisely because it kills us"<sup>93</sup> What replaces human hubris in Land is thus the complete abolition of the human mind (as uniquely privileged in any way) in favour of the infinite sprawl of multiplicity perfectly exemplified in his take on Deleuze and Guattari, and his dystopian vision of complete machine take over in which humans are reduced to nothing. Land thus manages to assert a sort of (un)radical (as ungrounded) but nonetheless staunchly anti-anthropocentric materialism. What appears as ontological negativity for humans isn't stripped of material referents for the sake of simplicity, but is taken as irrelevant and second order. It simply doesn't matter where negativity comes from for us, because us does not matter. Only that which eludes our relation to matter matters, and we must escape ourselves into negativity, into the unfolding of ecstatic multiplicity. What's banished is not the thing in itself, some absolute idea, but our co-relation to it. For Land the real is thus the real without humanity, there is always something unknown, but that unknown is not fundamentally a qualitative difference, there is not pure truth, riddled with invisible value, but truth itself is stupidity, graspable only by the sheer computational power of advanced machines. What's also crucial to note here is that the opposite of not only materialism, but also anti-anthropocentrism is not anti-idealism. The absolutizing of

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<sup>91</sup> Vincent Le, "The Decline of Politics in the Name of Science? Constellations and Collisions between Nick Land and Ray Brassier," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 14:3 (2018), 33-34.

<sup>92</sup> Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings* (Urbanomic, 2011), 276.

<sup>93</sup> Vincent Le, "The Decline of Politics in the Name of Science?," 35.

machines, and the wish for the acceleration and death of humanity as such is nonetheless a form of idealist hubris (no matter how anti-anthropocentric, and apparently materialist) because it does not take into consideration humanities material and organic bodily constitution in relation to the real itself which constitutes it. Of course, we are not saying that humanity, the human, should be privileged in any way whatsoever, it is the precise opposite, rather that its material construction is grounded in a material real, a real which is nonetheless not (just as it is not for any other beings) reducible to computational power, nor is it meant to be submitted to technocratic and bureaucratic control. Through Land we can see that anti-anthropocentrism, anti-correlationism as well as an attempt at materialism does not automatically deliver us to any form of radical critique, or radical horizon of change.

#### **4.0 Value, Abstraction and Exchange: Moving towards an Economy of the Real**

This chapter will be primarily concerned with three topics. The production of value, the circulation of value, and the general role of money in relation to both of these topics. As is well known, throughout Marx's work, but especially within *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, we can see a detailed analysis of the birth of the capitalist conception of value, as well as its historical transformation into such. While this transformation of material production and circulation away from use-value and towards surplus-value is evident for any even casual reader of Marx, it is nonetheless important to remind ourselves of the basic process. For Marx, the historical shift, as described in *Capital Volume 1*, moved from CMC to MCM to MCM' (Money, Commodity, Money with surplus)<sup>94</sup> and eventually, in its truncated and fully speculative form as described in detail in *Capital Volume 3*, to M-M' (money that begets surplus without the material commodity being exchanged).<sup>95</sup> In other words, there was a complete reversal whereby use-value was valued only for the sheer sake of producing surplus-value. Surplus-value, of course, which makes itself present, or, more accurately, exchangeable, through money qua universal equivalent. A topic which we will return too momentarily. Let us first, however, examine how Marx himself conceives of the notion of self-valorization in relation to the process of commodity circulation, so that we can relate it to his conception of value more generally, and then lend this conception

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<sup>94</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 200.

<sup>95</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy* (Penguin Books, 1993), 438.

of value to Kolozova' conception (following Marx) of subjectivity-centered thought. It is worth here quoting Marx at some length, as the entire process is not only summed up in a singular passage, but this passage also allows us to further our previous analysis.

The independent form, i.e. the monetary form, which the value of commodities assumes in simple circulation, does nothing but mediate the exchange of commodities, and it vanishes in the final result of the movement. On the other hand, in the circulation M-C-M both the money and the commodity function only as different modes of existence of value itself, the money as its general mode of existence, the commodity as its particular or, so to speak, disguised mode. It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. If we pin down the specific forms of appearance assumed in turn by self-valorizing value in the course of its life, we reach the following elucidation: capital is money, capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorizes itself independently

Now, we should not take this passage for granted. What Marx reveals here is not only that value begets value, that the value of the monetary form detaches itself from the use-value of the product that it is meant to embody, but that value also exceeds its manifestation into money. Furthermore, and of crucial note, this constant metamorphosis also reveals the process whereby materiality (as use-value) is first subordinated to the production process of value, before then fully subsuming use-value itself. In other words, at the end of the process of valorization, use-value is not simply being exploited, but in a certain sense erased, just as for Kolozova subjectivity-centered thought denies the materiality of the real, valorization acts if though the materiality of use-value is something not only secondary, but that should be done away with altogether. Again, to repeat, this is how we inevitably come to the hyper-formalized declaration of M-M', or as Kolozova rephrases it, M-M-M. In *Towards a Radical Metaphysics of Socialism* she drives this exact point home in relation to the speculative finance industry, and indeed, the general nature of a capitalist *oikonomia* more generally:

Since the investment and finance industry have assumed the status of an industry in their own right, and their speculative activity has been assigned the quality of products exchanged on the market, Marx's M-C-M has turned into M-M-M. Commodities produced by the apparently self-sufficient banking industry are purely financial phenomena because they originate in the register of speculation that produces pure signification (money).<sup>96</sup>

Here, the signification of money works analogously to language via the automaton. In other words, the value itself is reduced to the tautological structure of valorization outside of which the real real (use-value) cannot present itself, and in which the "real economy" is thrown by the wayside. What we are left with instead, is a redundant and destructive formulation whereby use-value has lost all significance in the dual sense that it does not signify anything except its dissolution into money, and that it is rendered insignificant in regards to the pure production of excess wealth. This is of course done via a process of de-materialization, which, as we will see, can only be countered by a materialization of both the concept of value, and its primary medium, money.

Now, this dematerialization of course extends into the realm of not only human labour qua use-value, but also to resources themselves, or, more directly, to nature as the producer of use-values itself. Therefore, the dematerializing of the origin of value is reflected in the domination of the environment, and even advanced technological machinery is thought of abstractly, as existing purely in the cloud, separate from the servers, underwater tubes, satellites and power lines that make all of it possible. Indeed, as Thomas Nail points out in *Theory of the Earth*:

By acting as if a commodity were strictly identical to its exchange value (how much money someone exchanges for it), capitalist economics has failed to consider the environmental impacts of deforestation, pollution, and climate change. It has also ignored

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<sup>96</sup> Kolozova, *Towards a Radical Metaphysics of Socialism*, 42

the human implications of social devalorization (in such forms as racism, sexism, and classism) as integral and constitutive aspects of the economic process.<sup>97</sup>

Now, of course, and as we can derive from the above quote, even the most rudimentary Marxist analysis, and for that matter, basic capitalist economic calculations would force us to examine not only the variable but fixed capital in this scenario. The capital which is stored in the machines, objects, and infrastructures (as well as roads, bridges etc.) which are fundamental for the production and flow of capital. Things become even more complicated when we consider, as David Harvey points out, and as Marx insists in the *Grundrisse*, that the growing rate of the mass of surplus is dialectically linked to falling rates of profit (i.e., the percentage of total profit made in relation to labour).<sup>98</sup> This owes itself largely to the link between the drive to minimize the amount of physical labour necessary through the use of machines/technology, and the simultaneous drive to increase both the mass of the labour force at lower wages in order to extract maximal amounts of surplus, and the amount of consumers in general (as prices lower the amount purchased must increase). According to Harvey, “The quest to produce the greatest mass of surplus-value by employing more labourers contradicts capital’s tendency to reduce as much as possible the number of labourers it employs. Out of this contradiction arises the pressure to create and grow the world market while putting more and more stress on the metabolic relation to nature.”<sup>99</sup> This also creates a second contradiction as it regards the working day and surplus-value. For Marx, there are two distinct modes of surplus-value which can be extracted on the part of the capitalists. Relative and Absolute. Absolute surplus-value refers simply to the total time of the working day, and thus the total amount of surplus that can be taken over and above what the worker needs for subsistence. In order to increase absolute surplus-value, it is thus as simple as increasing the working day. In order to gain relative surplus-value, however, it is necessary to either decrease wages, which has a distinct finite limit as it concerns necessary labour, or lowering the prices through an increase in intensity and efficiency in labour in order to avoid raising wages. With the advent of ever-increasingly automated machines all of this is thrust into question. While it becomes immediately possible to decrease the price of goods

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<sup>97</sup> Thomas Nail, *Theory of the Earth*, (Stanford University Press, 2021), 262.

<sup>98</sup> Harvey, “Rate and Mass,” 92.

<sup>99</sup> Harvey, “Rate and Mass,” 79-80.

necessary to reproduce the total mass of the labour force, it also immediately decreases the total necessity of labourers in the first place. Ironically, this contradiction points directly to a common sense solution on the part of the workers. Radically shorten the working day in order to call into question the actual origin of value, while also lessening the environmental impact.

It is also important to be attentive of an additional dilemma which arises here concerning subjectivity and absolute surplus-value. While the working day was traditionally restricted to the amount a given subject could physically exert themselves within a finite amount of time, the nature of technological labour has also called into question the normal temporal limits of the day itself. As we can see in the work of both Shoshana Zuboff<sup>100</sup> and Ewa Ziarek,<sup>101</sup> capitalism now also functions on the basis of both data and surveillance. Data and surveillance which has no natural cessation. If a given subject is constantly being mined, the well of absolute surplus-value begins becoming less and less restricted to bodily constraints. In other words, there is no finite limit outside of the biological death of the physical subject which would prevent its constant exploitation. Likewise, it would not be entirely correct to deem this form of surveillance or mining passive. Instead, it would be better seen as the breaking down of the wall between work and leisure, or more accurately, the time spent actively producing value, and the exceptional time as excess in relation to this production. As a prime of example of this, during the global Covid 19 pandemic, there was a constant bombardment of messages and articles telling us that we should liberate ourselves from the crushing freedom of free time, and instead submit ourselves to new hobbies, new creations, new productions, new means of self-regulating our own labour. In terms of more direct usage of social media, we could state that it appears as though the subject is in a position whereby they are compelled to engage in a platform such that their data-labour can be extracted. The *oikos* then, correlatively, exceeds both geographic and temporal bounds. The digitalization of the individual and its agora is an extension of the extraction of surplus, and the regulation of the body. Here we must absolutely refute any utopian considerations concerning the apparently non-problematic and liberatory function of specific forms of advanced technology. Lest we turn ourselves into auto-precariats, we must insist that this medium is not merely a medium, just as money is not merely a medium. We will explore more below how this

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<sup>100</sup> See: Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Public Affairs, 2019).

<sup>101</sup> See: Ewa Ziarek, "Against Digital Worldlessness: Arendt, Narrative, and the Onto-Politics of Big Data/AI Technologies," *Postmodern Culture* 32:2 (2022).

technological shift has created various modes of un-freedom, but has not, as many have claimed, fundamentally altered the brute logic of capitalist surplus creation, and capitalist accumulation more generally. Similarly, and to use Nail's terminology, these creates new "flows" of capital, flows in which use-value is determined not by the creation of one's own products, but of an already abstracted notion of value and movement. Finally, simply to briefly conclude this examination of absolute-value, we should also note that technical advancements in health-care and medicine, as well as the need to extract maximum amounts of surplus, has also led in many cases (including in Macron's France) to the extension of the base retirement age.<sup>102</sup> So, not only is value taken from us even when we do not view ourselves as laboring, but we are forced to labour for ever increasing amounts time. All of this, as Marx would say (and as Harvey and Nail have both emphasized) puts incredible pressure on the metabolism of capitalism. This is true not only in relation to nature, but in the relation to, to again use the terminology of Joshua Clover, the growing and unruly mass of surplus population.

Let us now return to, and extend our conversation on value and money. By reading Marx we can see that money itself becomes a sort of pseudo ontological category, that is, its abstraction from materiality is not only self-valorizing, but self-grounding, it is thus taken as a thing in itself. Now, if this is merely a myth, i.e., if it is a matter of ideological distortion which hides the fact that it is in reality a medium, or a function emulating a medium, then why should we insist on recreating or reimagining money as such, would this not mean that we are ourselves falling for the trap of believing that it walks on its own two feet? Somewhat counterintuitively the answer is no. Money as such, money as we know it as universal equivalent, always already represents the mark of value. To think of it merely as a medium betrays the fact that it also represents an entire mode of exchange, exchange which is not determined by material nor use. Money in its capitalist sense, we could say, is subjectivity-centered money, in that precisely the same forgetting of forgetting present in subjectivity-centered thinking is present in the money relation. It is not just that we treat it as a "metaphysical sensuous thing"<sup>103</sup> as Marx famously said but that it is a self-centered tautology which reflects and is reflected in us through its

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<sup>102</sup> Matt Clinch, "'Risky but it's a necessity': Macron wants to push back France's retirement age to 65," *CNBC* (March 25, 2022). Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/24/macron-wants-to-push-back-frances-retirement-age-to-65-.html>

<sup>103</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 128.



dematerialized matter. Now, at this point it might seem reasonable for the reader to object to this formulation of subjectivity-centered money as representing a confusion and false extrapolation of subjectivity onto a material good, thus reentering the circle, only this time in the reverse order. Of course money itself does not think, nor does it act. Our relation to it however is not simply one of superstructural interpellation. Money qua capital in the capitalist sense may be treated as God, but it is treated not only as omnipotent, but as omniscient as well. The logic of money and its relation to value production qua the circulation of capital is viewed under capitalism as an essentially self-regulating and autonomous process.<sup>104</sup>

Likewise, for Marx, while money itself is the general equivalent, the medium for which all exchange is possible, its distinction from other forms of goods in fact owes to the division of the possession of labour. Money, as well as commodities, are not distinct in their capacity to be transformed into value qua capital, but rather reflect the conditions of possibility of the capitalist system of production and exchange itself. In other words, the hierarchical, empirical, and even formal distinctions between owner and labourer, between producer and exploiter, transform the relation of money into a metaphysical concept. According to Marx:

“In themselves money and commodities are no more capital than are the means of production and of subsistence. They need to be transformed into capital. But this transformation itself can only take place under certain circumstances that centre in this, viz., that two very different kinds of commodity-possessors must come face to face and into contact; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production, means of subsistence, who are eager to increase the sum of values they possess, by buying other people’s labour power; on the other hand, free labourers, the sellers of their own labour power, and therefore the sellers of labour.”<sup>105</sup>

Now, what does this mean for our present discussion concerning the role of money in contemporary capitalist society? Firstly, it is important to point out that this quote is taken from Marx’s analysis of primitive accumulation from capital volume one, i.e., the process whereby

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 860.

capitalism as a system of production and exchange is born, or, at the very least, where its germ lies. There are two pivotal things that must be drawn from this passage. Firstly, that money in and of itself is not equatable with capital, that capital's power relies on its capacity to mutate everything it touches into value. The issue is thus not simply money in and of itself. Secondly, that money itself ceased (if it ever actually was) to be simply a medium of exchange, as it was meant to be apropos Aristotle, and has instead become a founding condition of capitalism itself. Both of these point to the possibility of creating more equitable forms of currency in relation to price and use-value.

Indeed, we can see a direct and discrete process of continuation from Kolozova, to Nail to Althusser (all relying on Marx) in terms of determining the nature of capitalist value production in relation to both prices and money. What we first see is the philosopher-capitalist obscure and reduce materiality to an abstraction which serves the production of ideal meaning outside of its relation to its dyadic relation. (Kolozova) We can then observe that use-value itself is already found in nature, it is not produced simply by humans (Nail). This use-value is then determined on the market by a form of stochastic fluctuation (Althusser). Here it is necessary to supplement all of this with the work of Emmanuel Farjoun and Moshé Machover, who have shown through probabilistic modeling, the direct relation between price and the labour theory of value.

Let us first define what a probabilistic model is and how it differs from deterministic models according to Farjoun and Machover. To define the two models as simply as possible, we could say that probabilistic models function on large scales with large amounts of variables and deal with the scenarios which are most likely to occur over time. Deterministic models, on the other hand, look for unchanging and direct one to one relations, in our case this means that deterministic models do not take into account the entire metabolism of capitalism. In other words, a probabilistic model, as opposed to a deterministic one, does not say that for every act of X, Y will be the result. Rather, it shows that the probability of X resulting in Y is more likely than X resulting in Z, for instance, while acknowledging the entirely real possibility of Z indeed occurring (no matter how slim or not that may be). Probabilistic models thus act to predict and determine a wide range of varied results without stating the necessity of their happening. Statements such as, if the prices rise in X region, they will cause an absolute fall in prices in Y

region are thus rejected. Probabilistic models are thus more apt at taking into account changing and varied phenomena.<sup>106</sup> This probabilistic modeling allows us to see that while it does not necessarily occur in absolutely every instance, that there is nonetheless a direct correlation between labour content and prices.<sup>107</sup> This allows us to further see that value is indeed tied to use, as is price, which means that we should also be able to conceive of a new form of currency reflective of this. In other words, Marx's direct line of thought as expounded upon by all of the aforementioned authors reveals the concreteness of the labour processes role in not only cost of products, their approximation of the relative value entered in, but that value qua surplus is itself, as Marx never stopped proclaiming, fundamentally nothing more than the stripping bare of material struggle itself. The real economy is a sensuous economy, real prices are prices which reflect this sensuousness of both the labour and raw materials which enter into the circulation process. Money, in this regard, as both commodity and medium, is the groundless ground of the economy. Or, put otherwise, it is both reflective of the true relationality between labour and cost, labour and value, and also acts as its direct obscurement. Money, again, is a tautology, it must be, but it is also a contradiction, whose own production as a commodity is auto-obscured. We must then call for the creation of a currency which is reflective of the uniformity of use-value. Probabilistic models in this sense are a good starting point to begin reimagining what money could therefore be, and how this money, for instance, could act not simply as fungible across varying markets, but simultaneously reflective and immediately materially representative of the diversity of the labour process itself. The exchange of currencies, just as the exchange of stocks, is indicative of M-M',<sup>108</sup> but if M no longer holds the germinal seed for M', or at least M' then the process simply becomes M-M. This tautology is entirely different, and should perhaps go under a different sign. Instead of money as both abstract value and commodity, turned into more of the same, we have Money as use-value transferred over to money as use-value. Money in this sense cannot be considered as self-valorizing, as, just as we have discussed concerning the structural subject, it is adequate to its relations or inputs. Profit making in this aspect is thus returned to a more primordial mode of exchange, something closer to the original formula of CMC. Value,

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<sup>106</sup> Emmanuel Farjoun and Moshe Machover, "Probability, Economics and the Labour Theory of Value," *New Left Review* 152:1 (July/Aug 1985), 97-101.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>108</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume 3*, 464.

likewise, is reduced to agglomeration, money no longer begets more money, so value can exist only in relations of hoarding and scarcity.

Now, where do we stand in relation to new forms of currency, and how does this relate to our previous discussion on digitality? In a recent collection of essays resulting from a research project at MIT comprised of several leading authors in the fields of data-science and technology, it is argued that the primary issue of data capital is its redistribution, or put differently, the primary issue with data-capital is that it remains in the hands of the few.<sup>109</sup> Now, while there is certainly nothing wrong with this notion, and we certainly shouldn't be anti-data itself, we should note that redistribution without changing the method of extraction does not necessitate a strong level of productive change. In relation to currency more generally, unfortunately it appears as though there are no immediate options which could allow for a large scale change. There are various forms of stable coins and cryptos based off of block-chain technology, but all of these remain either internal to banking systems as mere efficiency upgrades, decentralized but only exchangeable within limited markets (which ends up serving mostly large trading and holding firms), or exchangeable for other forms of fiat currency.<sup>110</sup> While the authors themselves are not nearly as pessimistic but this reality, it drives home the point that a shift in money itself, or even its circulatory processes, is not enough to combat capitalist exploitation. This, of course, is why changes in the formulation of money, or changes in the model of determining value are not at all sufficient without pushing forward a critique of the ownership of the means of production themselves. Money does not make capitalism, rather capitalism transforms the money-function, a function whose ostensible purpose is mere exchange. The of currency in general does allow for a form of universality, even, we could say, of a certain universal communication, but it is also directly reflective of the system which is deploying it. Ever since the first mass uses of fiat-money it has already become divorced from a direct material referent, what is in common within money is thus not a singular substratum, a singular material resource, but rather its abstract and self-standing nature. Decentralized currencies thus offer us a (hopefully not unresolvable) paradox moving forward. On the hand they can be more accurately based on data and thus be more reflective of use-value. Likewise, it allows for the power of

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<sup>109</sup> Alex Pentland et al., *Building the New Economy: Data as Capital* (MIT Press, 2021), 2.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 313-15.

money to move away from both the states and the banks, and into the hands of the people. Nonetheless, if this currency remains abstract and floating, then we are once again no closer to achieving a materialist form of currency for exchange.

## **5.0 The Withering Away of which State**

### **5.1. Hegel and Pure Negativity**

When considering the problematic of subjectivity-centered thinking raised earlier (both from Marx and more directly from Kolozova) in regards to Hegel, it is important now to examine how Hegel himself conceives of freedom and externality and how it relates to the conceptions of subjectivity discussed thus far so that we may better understand his conception of the state, and its relation to the *oikos* more generally. In order to do so it is worth quite briefly going over some of the basics of his systematized philosophy at the outset—primarily as it is discussed in his *Philosophy of Right*. At the core of this is understanding, at least at a rudimentary level, what is meant by his distinction between the objective and the subjective and thus the determinacy and indeterminacy of the “I.” The will as the embodiment of spirit (or *Geist*) is the union of both. In its pure indeterminacy the will wills nothing, which is to say, it wills pure generality without any content or direction.<sup>111</sup> This means that the will has the capacity of pure negation, that it is the “freedom of the void”,<sup>112</sup> of the capacity to void all appearance.

This freedom [...] which has taken actual shape, and is stirred to passion [...] assumes both in politics and religion the form of a fanaticism, which would destroy the established social order, remove all individuals suspected of desiring any kind of order, and demolish any organization which then sought to rise out of the ruins. Only in devastation does the negative will feel that it has reality.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, trans. T.M. Knox, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 30.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>113</sup> Idem.

This freedom is purely negative and self-reflexive. It represents the subjective side of freedom for the will, and takes into account only its own will, as a universal and infinite capacity to abstract, while denying itself any objectivity. Without an actually existing object in which to manifest itself it is not free. As a result, the will must concretize itself in actual representation, it must intentionally put itself in a place of stricture and thus finitude; or else deny itself actualization. “Through this establishment of itself as a definite thing the I becomes a reality. This is the absolute element of the finitude or specialization of the I.”<sup>114</sup> The will however, being (in its subjective position) infinite and universal, is not content with contingent objects, but rather must have itself as its object--and aim-- in order to be free (not over-determined by arbitrariness). “It is the will in and for itself which is truly infinite because its object is itself and so is not for it an ‘other’ or a limitation; on the contrary, in its object this will has simply turned back into itself.”<sup>115</sup> This means that for the will to be free for itself, it must present itself in an object, and have this object reflected back into it, so that what is willed is not merely the object but the will itself contained therein. We should note here too that the particularity of the will--the objects willed, or actions taken place--if not returned to the universality of the will, remain abstract, or as Hegel would say, arbitrary: “When the particular will is actually different from the universal, it is led by caprice, random insight and desire [...].”<sup>116</sup> “For Hegel, this universality cannot simply be chained to a self-relation, to an isolated individual, but must take into account the broader set of socio-historic relations. In this sense the subject-object relation is treated speculatively, that is to say, it is not reduced to either individual term, but rather in a combinatory and dialectal fashion. This dialectal progression of pure negativity, contingent actuality, and the return into the will as infinite is at the center of Hegel’s systematic thinking, and is, within his *Philosophy of Right*, constantly repeated across various, ever self-perfecting forms of social formation, we could even say, towards a continued externalization of the *oikos*, which manifests itself in the state. Indeed, for Hegel the family relation holds the germinal seeds for both the civic society as well as the state, and in this sense it is not surprising that his vision of politics reflects the oppressive apparatuses found within the *oikos*. Let us now, examine the conception of the purely negative

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 83.

will in relation to subjectivity-centered thought more generally, before examining the problems of Hegel's view of objectivity and subjectivity more specifically.

A prime example of such a manifestation for Hegel is the French revolution, which is seen as merely an instantiation of a purely negative will, what he terms the void of the will, and which is seen as embodying, as opposed to a productive structure and idealist reflection, a form of destruction and pure caprice of negative freedom which merely subtracts, or in other words, it does not positively re-affirm itself and instead remains trapped in, ironically, a purely ideal state.<sup>117</sup> In direct opposition to this chaotic, contingent, and historical rupture, Hegel, as is well known, insists on a strong state with a strong leader, which although a stepping stone to an apparently more universal conception of societies as such, is steeped in mitigation and control. Why? Because subjectivity is not conceived of as a universal capacity or structural effect. Being in common, which, for Hegel, begins with the family, moves to a *quid pro quo* society in which reciprocity is simply pragmatic, and reaches its peak in a state that is not fundamentally concerned with the particular abandonment of the structures of individual subjectivity, but rather their integration. Let us put it another way, the material manifestation of a will does not create a situation whereby the subject is seen as a universal effect of matter, but conversely, the precise opposite, an ideal and abstracted notion whereby the apparent universality of the will manifests itself in a dominant leader, itself the result of the dialectical movement of spirit, which, again, is nothing more than the manifestation of an abstract will. The ruler, as Marx as demonstrated, is thus mystically ordained as exceeding the apparently material and democratic process of state formation itself. Hegel's universal state is thus not only not democratic in any serious way, it is also radically universal and idealist. While some authors, such as Frank Ruda offers a more leftist reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, insisting that, for instance, the rabble is a revolutionary and proletarian force, and that the dialectical process is not so much a subsumption of matter, but a constant dissolution it still seems rather clear that Hegel's entire philosophical apparatus is incapable of producing anything other than a dictatorial state, with a dictatorial ruler at the helm.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, As Karatani points out, Hegel refuses in any way to transcend the triplet capital-nation-state, instead insisting on their (at least relative) necessity. Furthermore, he

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>118</sup> See: Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Continuum, 2011).

correctly points out how economic change is itself not sufficient to cause large scale shifts in the structure or existence of the state itself which is witnessed by the various failed instantiations of communist experiments which, in fact, doubled down on the necessity of the strength of the state. So, not only does the state not dissolve, it is in fact strengthened.<sup>119</sup> Thus, any leftist reading of Hegel, or any attempt to resuscitate his philosophical project must reckon with this.

## 5.2 State as *Status*

The word state itself, at least in English, is a term whose political meaning, however nebulous, is entirely taken for granted. It is common to conceive of the state as nothing more than the ruling body (and the diverse amount of bodies therein) of a particular territory. That is, the entire structure of governance and control, whether it be through law and force, or, simply through the force of law itself. Yet, the origin of the word (again in English) is very definitive. The word state derives from the Latin word *status*, which simply means "condition or circumstances." In turn, *status* itself derives from *stare*, "to stand," or to be "permanent." Thus, at its origins, the state can be seen, at least in an abstract way, as a permanent perpetuation of current circumstances, or, as it were, the reproduction of a particular set of conditions, and thus also the divisions therein. It is also crucial to note from the outset that the state is materially determined. That is, that the state cannot be simply seen as divorced from matter, rather it was and continues to be distinctly created, artificially created. Here, we should oppose, as Katerina Kolozova does, Hegel's abstract notion of the state, which itself relies on a form of abstract subjectivity, whereby the material world is subsumed, picked up, into the real world of thought, the in itself, for itself, for us. This dematerialization results in an absence of material politics, which often leads us into a politics of recognition (which is embodied by philosophers such as: Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas etc.). This recognition, if not submitted to material practice, however, amounts to nothing more than a form of individual voluntarism. This is precisely why, as Walter Benjamin states in regards to the rise of Fascism:

Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in

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<sup>119</sup>Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange* (Duke University Press, 2014), 3.



giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property.<sup>120</sup>

Benjamin's critique is also true, in a certain sense, of liberalism— not in the radical or originary sense, however— as well as particular post-structuralist discourses, which insist on the primacy of individuation. This is not to say in any way whatsoever that post-structuralism carries some form of fascist seed. Benjamin was of course writing in a very particular historical (and as such materially constituted) time, but rather that the emphasis of the rights of subjects has moved away from real material change, into more abstract and diffuse forms of change in which representation and recognition have often taken a primary role. I am also here not rejecting the progress, and liberating aspects of much of post-structuralist theory, but rather simply pointing out the danger of the hierarchy itself. Especially as identitarian politics can take on their own form of discrimination, producing and ruling by cultural and social capital, and, as such, running the risk of doing away with more broad and universal conceptions of change.

It follows rather naturally from this, and we will again return to this later, that a Marxist critique of the state cannot simply be an abstract critique of an entity, but rather a concrete critique of actually existing material social conditions, which are produced and reproduced within a given state of affairs, by a given body or series of bodies. Thus, the title of this chapter, which summons Engels famous dictum, already implies the withering away of a body and a reproductive function, or, the bureaucratic management, violent control, and ideological components of a global capitalist society (itself of course a term that could be unpacked). State in this sense is also then a meta-state. However, we should not be so quick to reduce the state to either point, as either the ideological mass, or the violent and organizing governing body.

As Marx has famously shown (and as briefly explored in the previous chapter), capitalism itself, and thus capitalism as form of state, or at its lowest possible form, a key

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<sup>120</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 19.

component of the state's organizing principle, is itself formed on primitive accumulation, acquired through legal thievery. For instance, according to Marx in the mid 1600's laws were enacted in England which mandated that each pasture have a minimum amount of land attached, maintaining that property should be held in the hands of the few.<sup>121</sup> He likewise details how similar mandates were put in place after the dissolution of Church property (in England), which was then divided up primarily amongst rich or royal families;<sup>122</sup> so that what was once held, generally speaking, in common was now all but monopolized by wealthy landowners (Marx 885).<sup>123</sup> Indeed, there is nothing fundamentally illegal about capitalism itself, capitalism is the result and generator of its own laws, of its own internal drive for growth, exploitation and division, which is entirely linked to the state. According to Marx, primitive accumulation required an almost arbitrary interference on the part of the state. Arbitrary here not meaning accidental, or without purpose, but rather devoid of any true universal reasoning. Or in other words, it was neither a natural nor equal process. Indeed, it is critical to maintain, as Koložova does, that "there is no such thing as a natural or apolitical economy. The economy is always already political, as it is the economy's material core of power, control, and its main mechanisms – i.e. exploitation and oppression."<sup>124</sup> It is crucial to take from this is two things. Firstly, the modern conception of private property, and with it an intensified division of classes was carried out by the state itself, under what Marx deemed an act of "ruthless terrorism," that is to say, the state and capitalism are always-already tied together. Secondly, that the entire structuring of capitalist society, at its core lever, is anchored by a form of legal fraudulence. Not unlike the concept of State Capture in relation to illiberalism as expounded upon by Katerina Koložova and the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Skopje. Lawlessness is indeed the law, which is also why, in a certain sense, merely legal changes within the state offer little recourse to more radical forms of change, and what is needed is full-scale change. Crucially, this means that if we are to reimagine what a post-capitalist society could be, what governs what a post-capitalist society could be appear as, it is also necessary to dissolve the state itself, the state which is always-already a state of permanent exception, which is grounded and reinforced by the

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<sup>121</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 883

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 884

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 885.

<sup>124</sup> Katerina Koložova, "Philosophy as capitalism and the socialist radically metaphysical response to it," *Labyrinth* 19 (2017): 54.

reciprocal relations of capitalism to the point where it is almost impossible to parse where the state ends and industry begins. The state and capitalism appear, at this point, as nothing more than a pornographic display, a beast with two backs, where everything is constantly exposed, and yet this very exposure appears almost as a mutual cover up.

### 5.3 Althusser and the Dematerialization of Subjectivity

Shifting now to the notion of subjectivity and state apparatuses, I would claim that the state and subjectivity are both intrinsically and extrinsically linked. Intrinsically in the dual sense that a subject is (at least partially) interpellated, or to speak more generally, formed by the ideological and non-ideological (in the sense of not merely ideological) aspects of the state, while also contributing to the formation of the hegemonic function of the state via the willingness of the subject as such. In other words, interpellation is neither a directly one-way function, nor is it determined in a way that exceeds the subjects who are said to be interpellated as such. Extrinsically, as Karatani points out, the state is self-alienated from itself as a form of global actor, what we could also call a sort of global externality, which grants it internal legitimacy and in turn allows for national subjects, for state subjects, as well as subjects of value.<sup>125</sup> Now, if we look at Althusser's foundational text on the issue of *State Apparatuses*, we immediately observe a clean distinction between two forms, Ideological and Repressive. To state it in a somewhat tautological fashion, Ideological State Apparatuses function ideally, that is, according to the reproduction of the *eidos* of the state itself, and, as it were, the states' complicity in the functioning of capitalism. The subject, who, to borrow Lacanian language, acts as the detritus of being, as a sort of empty husk, but who nonetheless has the freedom to revolt, accepts their posturing as naturally internal, while nonetheless 'voluntarily' engaging with these apparatuses themselves. This process of interpellation therefore entails the dematerialization of the subject as such, and its retransformation into an ideal structural effect which is nonetheless, in the last instance, nothing more than matter itself. That is, the subject in this sense becomes an ideal ego of the state, and its ego ideal is reciprocally constructed. Repressive State Apparatuses, however, are direct forms of oppression qua violent actions from the state, they are direct material interventions into the bodies of the citizens, the subjects who refuse to be proper

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<sup>125</sup> Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 85.

subjects; if they do not relinquish their matter it will be beaten out of them until they bow at the bloody altar of capitalism and state. Here, it is also crucial to clarify, as Althusser himself does, that ideological state apparatuses do not belong to the state qua legal governing body, but rather are the result of the ruling class, of the bourgeois class. The reason this distinct relation is so crucial is because the implication is that any withering away of the state would, or at least could, also automatically signal the withering away of the ruling class. However, it simultaneously raises the following question: if the ruling class were not in fact the bourgeois, or perhaps more accurately, if class distinction as such did not exist, would the ISAs themselves inevitably reflect this, reflect this new relation? In more general Marxist terminology, we could ask: can the superstructural effects of capitalism be shifted into superstructural effects of the working class? Here we should be wary about falling into the trap of the naïve distinction between base and superstructure, as well as being overly optimistic about any form of state, or ideological apparatus. However, this not our main point. More importantly here, we should call into question the entire notion of this apparent dual split of the apparatuses. Here, it seems as though Althusser wants to fully disconnect the direct material violence, from the abstract ideological violence. However, and as we will explore more below, these two categories can be contemporaneous, continuous, and reciprocal. The drive to make this distinction could very well be seen as the same drive to start the abstract notion of raw material. Thus, the primary apparatus is already the synthesized knowledge form of an object whose material has been reflected backwards onto the state. This distinction, then, carries the same apparent a-subjective posturing that his scientific analyses do, but in the last instance both analyses conform to an inverted hierarchy in which matter is first taken as the abstract notion informing the actual potentiality of the pleasure or pain of the body as such. We will return to these distinctions momentarily, but it first it is useful to examine the role of the state in Althusser's student, Alain Badiou.

### **5.3 Badiou and the State as Politico-Ontology**

In a similar fashion to Althusser, the State in Badiou is also conceived of as a meta-structure. Badiou, in the first volume of *Being and Event* develops a set-theoretical conception of the state in relation to the presentable. Presentable here being quite simply what is and is not allowed to appear in any given situation. Situation here is used in technical sense to mean the entire field for which appearance is structured and formed according to various guidelines, both

general and ontological in the sense of the literally visible, and more specifically, and epistemologically what form of ideas are allowed or barred from being presented.<sup>126</sup> Situations, which are later conceived of as worlds in the *Being and Event II*, are also multiple and local. For instance, everything which occurred during the Bolshevik revolution would be included in a specific situation. Now, before moving forward, and without delving too far into the set-theoretical justifications for the current discussion, as we have already declared that we are not endorsing this line of abstraction, it is important to briefly explain the distinction between the one and the multiple in Badiou's work in order to understand the structural basis of his state.

For Badiou the only thing that exist are multiplicities, or infinite multiples of multiplicities, the entire conception of the one in regards to general presentation is thus nothing more than a structural effect that allows appearing to appear. As Badiou says in a short and axiomatic declaration, "the one is not."<sup>127</sup> Multiplicities however, are broken down into two categories, consistent and inconsistent. Inconsistent multiplicities are structurally transformed into consistent multiplicities through the operation of the count-as-one, that is, they are made to appear as singular to any given situation. Now, what does this have to do with the state. The count-as-one as just mentioned operates to allow for consistency, the state on the other hand functions as a meta operation to ensure that the count-as-one as such, the entire mode of structuration, is itself secured: "...the State pursues the integrality of the one-effect beyond the terms which belong to the situation, to the point of the mastery, which it ensures, of included multiples: so that the void and the gap between the count and the counted do not become identifiable, so that the inconsistency that consistency is does not come to pass."<sup>128</sup> The State then, for Badiou, if it is to be successful must also be responsible for counting the count. Because the count is simply that which creates a one effect, it would be subtracted from this effect itself, i.e., it cannot self-operate. Now, at this point in Badiou's theory we remain entirely trapped in a form of materialist phenomenology, an ontological and entirely axiomatic explanation for how things are for us, or rather how things are structurally present for us. However, the State in Badiou is also entirely related to the state as apparatus, as the state as a dominating and hegemonic force. The meta-structure of the State does not simply secure presentation, but

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<sup>126</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 81.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 112.

actively works to prohibit any form of rupture or event. This is due to the fact that because the one is not, there is no absolute consistency, any given situation always has a particular void, a form of real that allows for eventual rupture which would otherwise be concealed. As Ray Brassier elucidates in regards to Badiou:

Metastructure is required in order to stave off the threat posed to presentation by this underlying indiscernibility between the ‘nonbeing’ (non-être) of the One and the ‘being-nothing’ (être-rien) of inconsistency. It is necessary in order to preclude the presentation of nothing and ‘the ruin of the One’. For the ‘beingnothing’ of inconsistent multiplicity not only designates the gap between unified presentation and ‘that on the basis of which’ there is presentation; it is ‘the nothing proper to the situation, the empty and un-localizable point which avers that the situation is sutured to being, and that what is presented roams in presentation as a subtraction from the count.’<sup>129</sup>

Thus, if not subordinated to a second count (and thus have recourse to say, that the void wasn’t in the count itself), a count which would ensure that the first count remain stable, then the political order, and indeed order as such would be immediately threatened. “In order for the void to be prohibited from presentation, it is necessary that structure be structured, that the ‘there is Oneness’ be valid for the count-as-one.”<sup>130</sup> We must also note, that for the state not to become a mere tautology of the count, that is, to recount what the count presents exactly, it is necessary to remember that parts and elements are not the same. What is of crucial importance here is undoubtedly one thing. Ontology essentially has one job, stop at all costs that which is not counted as one, in order to retain the integrity of structure. It must therefore “...prohibit that catastrophe of presentation which would be its encounter with its own void, the presentational occurrence of inconsistency as such, or the ruin of the One.”<sup>131</sup> We could put it another way. Ontology at all costs wants to prevent that which is chaotic, that which is not easily categorized in the situation.

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<sup>129</sup> Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 103.

<sup>130</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, 97.

<sup>131</sup> Idem.

For Badiou, the mode of resistance to this is state domination is dependent on subjective intervention. A subject being the embodiment of a universal exception, that is, that which exists but is not reducible to the current situation. Similarly, for Badiou, a work, as opposed to waste, is an infinite relation that grounds the finite situation itself. Infinities are themselves infinite, and function as a hierarchical index of the ascension towards ideals. That is, work is defined by the universal overcoming of the particular hegemony of a finite situation, a situation which is only capable of producing waste products. A work is incorporated by subjective action, subjective not referring to any individual subject, but rather the mass who dares defy the order as it is, the order which is dominated by the infinite finitism of capitalism.<sup>132</sup> A work is to be carried out through a careful and structural procedure whereby the truth of a situation, what exceeds the situation through formal subtraction therein, is discovered and transmitted. We could say then, that what it requires is a certain novel syntax, a syntax which adheres to the real of the situation, but does not stop merely on the level of transmission. Political syntax is, in the strong sense, akin to revelation, but also revolution. The subjective embodiment of a political work is nothing short of the dismantling of an entire order through the universalization of the means of production, and the creation of new forms of thought. However, we also encounter here the issue of the idea as an idealist category. Here we must move away from Badiou's formulations, while acknowledging the general importance of his axioms concerning the restructuring of society. While the inability to imagine anything outside of a given situation can certainly be metaphorically compared to a form of finitude, of fatalism and defeatism, the result should not be infinity as such, but the universalization of finitudes. What we always already have, even according to Badiou, are an infinite set of multiplicities which are structured hegemonically in order to produce any given localized situation qua finitude. The infinite, even if it is taken as pure metaphor, is seen as the grounding principle that allows for the possibility of the creation of finitudes, but also their overcoming. The issue with this metaphor is it presupposes, at least unconsciously, a form of materialized anamensis, much like Hegel's attempt to materialize the conditions for the transcendental which inevitably remains trapped in a form of subjective thinking. Likewise, it worth pointing out that Badiou's conception of multiplicity is not necessarily a philosophy of movement. Indeed, we can see incredibly problematically within the work of Badiou that Nature remains some form of stable and outside side in reaction to being, so much so that Badiou all but

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 234.

refuses to engage not only in the life sciences, but even rejects even the possibility of a big bang because it would not coincide with his ontological and axiomatic work. Now, following from this brief analysis of Althusser and Badiou we should say the following, which is not meant as pure polemic, or to say that there are not real and important political extrapolations to be made here.

In short, for Althusser the subject is interpellated in a rather rudimentary way, and the division between subject and person, or subject and body is indeed far too blurry, and runs the risk of reinstating the hierarchy of PSP. While accurately revealing the effects of ideological inculcation through various apparatuses, he nonetheless remains trapped in a form of Hegelianism. For Badiou, while he correctly identifies the need for an eventual shift away from the hegemony of any given situation and its state (not entirely dissimilar to Althusser's encounter), nonetheless insists on the primacy of the subject as an integral battleground for truth. Thus, while both attempt to create structural and materialist forms of subjectivity and corresponding political exegeses, both fail to properly escape subjectivity-centered thinking. Althusser is too quick to deny the materiality of the body, and Badiou remains mired in Platonic reflections in which the idea as a certain correlate to the event is meant to exceed the crude materiality of a situation. With that being said, the theories of Badiou and Althusser presented here cannot simply be reduced to a naïve idealism, nor to a more complex version à la Hegel. Indeed, their rejection of the state, and their complete rejection of the order as it is, is enough to show their absence of true proximity to the likes of either Plato or Hegel. This is all true despite the fact that Badiou attempts to resuscitate the materialist notion of the idea against idealist notion of the idea; that is to say, for Badiou we cannot reduce ourselves to mere minor changes, but must assert the idea of communism, of absolute and international commonality, this, however, also has its direct opposite side, which we will explore momentarily.

Returning first, however, to the question of State Apparatuses especially in relation to legality we should ask the following: if the state is not simply a legal function according to Althusser, then what is a non-state apparatus which serves the same principles of the state itself, that is, the reproductions of the conditions of capitalism, and the reproduction of the reproduction of ideology. If we look at the apparent phenomenon of manufacturing consent, made famous by Noam Chomsky, we can immediately notice something peculiar that's going on in today's media (something Chomsky himself later admitted). If the media is meant to be an ISA, and yet, what is



under constant attack is in fact main stream media itself, then what precisely are those other outlets, podcasts, blogs, etc. We see here how the full meaning of state (as *status*) must extend far beyond the narrow confines of a particular organizational structure, and must instead be seen primarily as an entire mode of organization itself. This is precisely why Foucault states that:

We can't defeat the system through isolated actions; we must engage it on all fronts – the university, the prisons, and the domain of psychiatry – one after another since our forces are not strong enough for a simultaneous attack. We strike and knock against the most solid obstacles; the system cracks at another point; we persist. It seems that we're winning, but then the institution is rebuilt; we must start again. It is a long struggle; it is repetitive and seemingly incoherent. But the system it opposes, as well as the power exercised through the system, supplies its unity.<sup>133</sup>

That being said, these disparate and varied modes of transference must not make us lose sight of the more traditional notion of state itself. That is, the state as the securer of the means of production, or, at the very least, that which allows for, and promotes, a particular form of unified organization, even if this organization is itself diffuse. This is why we should not be overly tempted by Foucault's anti-hegemonic conceptions, or in other words, his insistence on the absence of a core, quilting point, or real generator of ideology and power, be it capital or otherwise. De-centering power, rendering it nothing more than a series of interconnected processes, inevitably leads to a form of forgetting, as if such and such power relations existed *ex-nihilo*, without having direct reason. Reason in this sense being the logic internal to the preservation of an idea, in this context the idea of capital, or, even more simply, the idea of value.

A perfect example of this is Covid-19. So much of the philosophical and theoretical discourse surrounding Covid had to do with the diffuse and rhizomic nature of the virus, of its status of being both dead alive, or undead even. Yet, what the Covid era showed, no matter your opinion on the regulations and responses themselves, was a direct, unequivocal abuse of state power, in contra-distinction to not only democratic values, but the democratic count itself. The crushing power of the state, of the permanent state of exception imposed upon citizens, turning

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<sup>133</sup> Michel Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: "Until Now"", in Donald Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 230.

them into subjects of, and subjected to, the state, while simultaneously creating diffuse effects and inevitably establishing and creating modes of micro politics, of micro-inequalities, was nonetheless carried out by a form of mega-state, a conglomeration of individual states, of individual exceptional states. A prime example of this, as well as a prime example of the relations between Althusser's classic distinction between ISAs and RSAs can be seen in the violent reaction against peaceful, largely working class protesters in Canada. Not only were the protests deemed to be racist, fascist even (an ideological reductionism and Othering), but Trudeau attempted to employ the War Measures Act (which he politely referred to as the emergencies act instead), which had not been deployed since the terrorist act of the radical Quebecois group the FLQ. Likewise, he literally froze (or attempted to) the assets of those who refused to desist (a clear sign of repressive economic violence). Now, why was this an emergency, what was the emergent dilemma? The answer is simple; it is precisely the loss of profit. Now, of course there were other jobs at stake other than the truckers', but this was nonetheless an anti-democratic suspension in which the will of the minorities, representing the universal majority, was immediately stifled. Here again, status as *status* is critical. They were meant to remain silent, to, and again I will reference Foucault, act as "docile bodies" who were meant to reproduce a machine, yet their absence of work, in a completely radical way, was the dismantling of part of the machine itself, a revealing of its fragility. The class divide is something that can never be forgotten during this era. It was, if not the crystallization of, then at least the pulling away of, the thinly veiled curtain pretending to hide the complicity of capital and state. According to a Financial Times article from 2021:

As the virus spread, central banks injected \$9 trillion into economies worldwide, aiming to keep the world economy afloat. Much of that stimulus has gone into financial markets, and from there into the net worth of the ultra-rich. The US Federal Reserve, for example, has put \$8.1 trillion into the economy through quantitative easing, about one third of gross domestic product. The total wealth of billionaires worldwide rose by \$5 trillion to \$13 trillion in twelve months, the most dramatic increase ever registered.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ruchir Sharma, "The Billionaire Boom: How the Super-Rich Soaked Up Covid Cash," *Financial Times* (May 14, 2021). <https://www.ft.com/content/747a76dd-f018-4d0d-a9f3-4069bf2f5a93>

Now, this ideological move is not reducible down to purely economic qua monetary oppression. Rather it is always based on an idea, on the Idea, as the Idea as *eidos*. In capitalism this Idea that stands over and above matter is value, pure value. If we look at the radical right thinker Aleksandar Dugin's analysis of Putin in relation to the state and sovereignty (far before the current invasion of Ukraine) we can see this conceptualization of the Idea perfectly: "As both the formal and informal pinnacle of the power pyramid, how could anything exist above Putin? Inherent in the very notion of sovereignty is that above him stands no other institution of authority. That is the point. So what exists above Putin, if everything (in Russia) exists below or beside him? The idea stands above."<sup>135</sup> The idea always stands above matter, it makes matter subservient to it, it is, in a certain sense, that which cannot be questioned, that which embodies the real real of any given situation and holds more power than even the most tyrannical rulers.

Now, to return properly to the question of the state, of the withering or disappearance of a particular state, what we have tried to show is that we can neither reduce things down to a level of discursive defeatism or amelioration, nor can we simply critique the particular failings of particular aspects of postmodern thought. Indeed, what should define a rejection of the state is a universal notion of humanity (as beings amongst other beings, including plants and animals), centered around fundamental axioms. The dialectic of too little or too much (full blown revolution or minute changes in policies), which always results in the too little being declared too much by the state, is itself a form of subreption, an illusion whereby unity is itself deemed impossible. In reality things are much more simple, pragmatically what all leftist movements should share in common is a rejection of the exploitation of not only human beings but beings as such. This also means a return to the materiality of existence, not in the sense of some inane hierarchy of this or that material trait, but to our own material conditions, conditions that are shared not only by humans, but beings as such.

## 6.0 Beyond the State and its Liberal Democracy

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<sup>135</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Putin vs Putin: Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right* (Arktos, 2014), 545.

Let us now move towards a more dialed in analysis of the state of exception in relation to the possibility of a renewed democracy, a renewed liberalism, and a more in depth look at how law plays a foundational role (especially through the work of Kolozova and Benjamin). In Agamben's analysis of the state of exception he draws heavily from the work of Carl Schmitt in order to better define its paradoxical function, especially as it concerns the law. According to Agamben, for Schmitt the state of exception is subtractive in relation to the law, that is to say, it is in excess of the law. What is subtracted in the form of an exception, however, does not lead to either chaos or anarchy, but rather a new form of order, an extra-judicial order.<sup>136</sup> To quote Schmitt himself: "Because the exception is different from anarchy and chaos, order in the juristic sense still prevails even if it is not of the ordinary kind."<sup>137</sup> Agamben, taking this logic to its conclusion, remarks that for Schmitt

The sovereign, who can decide on the state of exception, guarantees its anchorage to the juridical order. But precisely because the decision here concerns the very annulment of the norm, that is, because the state of exception represents the inclusion and capture of a space that is neither outside nor inside (the space that corresponds to the annulled and suspended norm) [and thus the sovereign is both inside and outside of the juridical order]<sup>138</sup>

If we dissect this quote, we can see that the state of exception is simultaneously inside and outside of the law. It grounds the law by its very exception to it, and occupies a space which is thus both entirely juridical and extra juridical at the same time. Thus, any given state under a state of exception is both repressive and ideological, its legality is an auto-suspension which gives rise to the possibility of violence and repression.

Interestingly enough, Agamben's analysis here of Schmitt's state of exception in relation to the sovereign bares an eerie resemblance to the role of the legislator (*On the Social Contract*) or Magistrate (*Second Discourse*) in Rousseau. Indeed, although not equating the two directly, Schmitt excoriates Rousseau for insisting that the legislator can change the nature of man, while

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<sup>136</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception* (The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>137</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>138</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*

ignoring entirely that the legislator himself is an absolute point of exception in Rousseau's social contract.<sup>139</sup> His messianic role as being able "change man," does not in any way negate this, and is, in a certain sense, a very parochial view of the issue. However, what Schmitt does do here, is unwittingly reveal the most problematic point of Rousseau's entire theory concerning the social contract. The dictatorial exception which he rejects in Rousseau, is precisely the dictatorial element of the state of exception he insists on. Ironically, Schmitt's more severe critique in *Political Theology* is aimed at Rousseau's supposed conflation of the sovereign with the general will, thus rendering, in his eyes, the general will to be more nothing than the composition of particular wills which creates a seething mass of infallible stupidity. Rousseau's sovereign according to Schmitt thus both removes individual agency, while simultaneously creating a form of auto-deification of the will itself, and thus of the bodies determining the sovereign.<sup>140</sup> While this critique is not entirely without merit, it misses the key fact that the general will's supposed deification is in fact only possibly due to the legislator, which he himself states again, is responsible for changing man. However, our point here is not to get caught in semantics, but rather to examine the possibility of an alternative to this state of exception, which nonetheless retains a democratic core. For all of Rousseau's flaws, he nonetheless points us in the right direction by insisting on the liberation of the individualized proclivity of the will, and its turn towards a common and universal goal of self-determined communal politics. For Rousseau, there is in fact two states of exception. The exceptional status of the legislator, and the exceptional stance of the general will in regards to the mass of particular wills therein. This is precisely why Rousseau makes a critical distinction between the will of all, which is nothing more than the totality of individual wills, and the general will as that which is the universal remainder. As Rousseau states, "[t]here is often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will; the latter considers only the common interest, while the former takes private interest into account, and is no more than a sum of particular wills: but take away from these same wills the pluses and minuses that cancel one another, and the general will remains as the sum of the differences."<sup>141</sup> This generality of the will is meant to lead to a higher form of freedom, a freedom, it should be added, that is not dominated by the accumulation of wealth. Indeed,

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>140</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 48.

<sup>141</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (Everyman's Library, 1986), 185-5.

Rousseau, in the *Second Discourse*, even puts forth an equivalent theory of primitive accumulation whereby the owning class comes into being by a form of trickery, and subordinates the general will to the particular power of the rich and their state, setting up a system in which commodities are no longer valued for their use, and in which those who are producing them must work to buy them.<sup>142</sup> However, with that being said we must still be incredibly careful here on two fronts. Firstly, while we should insist on a universality of a communal will against mere particularity, we must also not fall into the realm of moralism, or raise this will into such a generality that it becomes the embodiment of a Hegelian style subjectivity. Indeed, as Kolozova points out, in her article “After Liberalism,” Marx himself was in no way a moralist, and using moralism as an attack on liberalism, on individual consumer society etc., can act as an actual ideological block to uncovering more radical and even communist conceptions of what liberalism can actually mean. This is why she states “that the whole problem of why we cannot conceive any form of revolution or radical change [...] is the fact that the [only] discourse we can operate with has its hands so tied by this moralist discourse that it cannot think politically.”<sup>143</sup> Ironically then, critiquing liberalism as a form of particularity can actually lead to a form of hyper-particularity, whereby we are focused on matters of individual representation, while simultaneously critiquing the individuality of capitalism, and thus ignoring the power of revolutionary chance.

Secondly, and correlatively, we must be very cautious in regards to the tautological nature of such a conception of the will as a political force, or as a mechanism for representation. If it is merely self-reflexive then it has the real possibility of becoming idealist, ideological, and taking such a course that it appears as though this will is more real than the real itself, more real than the historical and materialist basis that constitutes it. Again, this is precisely why the basis of any social contract on which would serve the creation of a post-capitalist society must not simply be based upon the will, nor on the negation of particularity (or even its sublation). This in a certain sense would be to fill in the real with content, or rather, saturate the real with a *telos*. According to Kolozova. “The precondition for such order [actually existing socialism] is the “right” to life that is pre-legal and yet again law enabling: the establishment of the new social

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<sup>142</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses* (St. Martin's Press, 1964), 149.

<sup>143</sup> Katerina Kolozova, “After Liberalism,” *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture*, Vol. 19, No. 1-2 (2022), 43.

contract relies on the axiom according to which value is materially determined and is thus nonalienated from physicality and without the tendency to subjugate and exploit it for the production of “value”<sup>144</sup>. In this sense we can see room for a radicalized liberalism within a radicalized *oikos* and *oikonomia*. This liberalism, however, is neither strictly particular nor anarchic, it derives its laws from the real as materiality, and from the body in pain, from the body as universal and pre-lingual yet entirely bombarded by the immanence of language. Democracy itself should be based upon this form of social contract; a democracy which subordinates citizens to the law of value is not in fact a democracy, but this does not mean, as we have already stated in the introduction, that democracy and capitalism need to be linked.<sup>145</sup> Nor for that matter, does law need to be determined by capitalism. A stateless society is not a lawless society, it is a society whose norms are constructed based upon the universality of the materiality of a certain pain, of a certain pre-lingual impossibility that grounds all of our existence.

## 7.0 Conclusion

To conclude this thesis, we should simply reiterate that the *oikos* cannot be seen simply as the household, it, alongside *oikonomia*, constitute the entire set of socio-economic, political and gendered struggles on a global level. Moving away from the originary and patriarchal constitution of the *oikos*, means moving away from a society which submits itself to the law of value, not simply surplus-value, but value extraction and valorization on a subjective and political level as well. This can only be done by adopting a radical form of materialism which does not tolerate any form of idealism. To combat the hegemonic function of capitalism what is necessary is the construction of a society which is conversely based around the pre-lingual, upon the materiality of our existence. Furthermore, it is simply not enough to make small scale changes, whether this be mass reform, or reform leading to revolution, the material grounds of production and exchange must be absolutely transformed, otherwise a whole host of potential catastrophes await us. This is not a utopian conclusion, this is a possible reality, a reality which can only come about if shed the cloth of capitalism, without simultaneously throwing away the

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<sup>144</sup> Kolozova, *Holocaust of Animals*, 104.

<sup>145</sup> Karatani shows how this is the case in a detailed historical analysis of various Greek City-States. See: Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 101-5.

values of a radicalized democracy and liberalism as well. The point is not simply to move away from representation, but to reimagine it in a collective and universal way.

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