

A HIPSTER MANIFESTO

Or, Theses for Existence

In the Anthropocene

Submitted for graduation from the

University Honors Program

at North Carolina State University

by Ishan Raval

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I - HOLOCENE

DEFEAT

[001] Let us not kid ourselves. We on the Left are losing. Away with the revolutionary giddiness of modernity! Away with all presumptions to some prophesied, radiant Zion! If there is any integrity to our ideas, we are now to expel all the hopes and assessments that we were bred to bear. Only thus may we begin.

[002] The recently ascended Greek Radical Left Party Syriza's Finance Minister, Yanis Varoufakis, one of the most prominent, not to mention incendiary, figures of the recent western Left, and among the most illustrious economists at large of recent times, had said the following words about the task at hand, the appropriate political program, during his lecture at the 6th Subversive Festival in Zagreb in 2013:

“Instead of radicalising British society, the recession that Thatcher’s government so carefully engineered, as part of its class war against organised labour and against the public institutions of social security and redistribution that had been established after the war, permanently destroyed the very possibility of radical, progressive politics in Britain. [Varoufakis was a student in the U.K. when Thatcher came to power.]

....

A Greek or a Portuguese or an Italian exit from the eurozone would soon lead to a fragmentation of European capitalism, yielding a seriously recessionary surplus region east of the Rhine and north of the Alps, while the rest of Europe is would be in the grip of vicious stagflation. Who do you think would benefit from this development? A progressive left, that will rise Phoenix-like from the ashes of Europe's public institutions? Or the Golden Dawn Nazis, the assorted neofascists, the xenophobes and the spivs? I have absolutely no doubt as to which of the two will do best from a disintegration of the eurozone.

I, for one, am not prepared to blow fresh wind into the sails of this postmodern version of the 1930s. If this means that it is we, the suitably erratic Marxists, who must try to save European capitalism from itself, so be it. Not out of love for European capitalism, for the eurozone, for Brussels, or for the European Central Bank, but just because we want to minimise the unnecessary human toll from this crisis.

....

[W]ith Europe's elites deep in denial and disarray, the left must admit that we are just not ready to plug the chasm that a collapse of

European capitalism would open up with a functioning socialist system. Our task should then be twofold. First, to put forward an analysis of the current state of play that non-Marxist, well meaning Europeans who have been lured by the sirens of neoliberalism, find insightful. Second, to follow this sound analysis up with proposals for stabilising Europe – for ending the downward spiral that, in the end, reinforces only the bigots.”¹

This same lecture was published in a revised form in *The Guardian* soon after Syriza's victory – Syriza, the party some of the Left regard as the harbingers of a turn in global politics. Which may well be the case. But here is the top representative of the Left's Greatest Hope saying we have to keep capitalism on its tottering feet, because if it falls, there will be no worthwhile social order left to hoist it—hoist anything—back onto its feet.

[003] Varoufakis, of course, is correct. Let us face it; the bailouts were, from a sane economic perspective, necessary. We are simply not in a position to allow or force capitalism to crumble, to “give way,” as we would have it, to anything better. Further denial of the blows we suffered in the last few decades will be fatal. If at all history was treating us well till the 1960's, the world since the 1970's, the world of neoliberalism*, has pulled the interlaced strands of the dialectic in what appears to be incontrovertible favor of capital.

1 Varoufakis, Yanis. "Yanis Varoufakis: How I Became an Erratic Marxist." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 18 Feb. 2015. Web. 15 Apr. 2015.

* “Neoliberalism,” signifying a resurgence of classical *laissez-faire* economic ideals, is the form of politico-economic policy and capitalist ideology currently dominant. It is defined by a push toward increased privatization, “free” transnational trade and reduction in government spending.

[004] For those of us who believe in the potential of a free, just world, if the dialectic is our God, Reagan is the devil. Reagan for us North Americans, and if we are European, particularly British, Thatcher. That decade also brought the oil shock of 1973, affecting the international stage of politics, where, Deng Xiaoping was beginning to steer China into a path of ruthless capitalism, and the Chinese and Soviet blocs were losing legitimacy as representations of leftist values and power, both within their constituencies, and certainly in the West. But Reagan-and-Thatcher-championed neoliberalism was a disaster to the Left's aspirations unlike any other. We are no longer the force we were. Neoliberalism and the finance industry it spawned and whose rise it oversaw to become king of the jungle—or should we say baron of the pigpen— have triumphed over social democracy and efforts towards anything grander.

[005] Finance in particular, capitalism's natural, jeering answer to the democratizing possibilities of the information age, has established itself as the lord to which all other sectors, be they other industries within capitalism or opposing elements, are subject and coercively answerable to. The sheer violence of reality placed under the eye of the fully abstracted dollar sign and under the speculation of the financial industry, combined with the lack of regulation on this industry, means that all reality itself exists in a state of precarity, needing stability in capitalism to avoid its own liquidation. Let us say to ourselves again: Neoliberalism won; we, the Left of the twentieth century, lost. If then, we are to proceed, if we are to continue fighting and playing out the dialectic, we must remember: the fight is no longer that of the capitalists versus the working class or its representatives in the Communists. That battle, let it be drilled in, is over, and we lost it.

[006] As we lost it, neither are we the same subjects (or non-subjects), nor is the world qualitatively the same. Today is the *result* of yesterday, not an expansion of it, in essence the same as yesterday. Existence in a condition of clearly defined possibility and hope is different from existence in what seems like in the endtimes, or at least, the seemingly endless times. As what existing itself feels like changes, so do the way in which we naturally act in the world, particularly the ways we would act *on* the world, to make it a stage for free, fair existence.

[007] We who are savvy as to the state of things, we who have an *a priori* sense of the social and existential situation, know this. Thus those of us who, when called on, do still show up for protests and rallies, have—consciously or unconsciously—the suspicion that we are wasting our time, that everyone around us is wasting their time. The old forms of politics lack the promise they used to. They seem unthreatening, a facade almost, or a guilt-relieving mechanism for the unimaginative organizers of the Left today. The Left was certainly strong in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century. Unions had a powerful mass of membership, and the working classes had political consciousness. Not today. Some workers may “Fight For \$15,” but unfortunately, they are a petty few, and even if there were more, the labor movement would still lack the fangs it needs if the approaches of the traditional Left—which now includes even the post-War New Left—are to have the slightest chance of realizing truly emancipatory horizons. The small conscious working class doesn't just need comrades; it needs comrades-in-arms. Workers today do not throw bricks, burn cars, attack scabs, even sit-down in their workplaces. Without such militancy, the Left in its old guise cannot be successful; the most it could force is meager moves toward social democracy, in which labor is yet exploited for surplus value, or

profit, by the ruling class. We who know the world for what it is know this.

[008] The point, the grave importance, of commencing with this is not to argue that we must give up. It is to say that though we should not give up on our ideals, we should maintain them intelligently, accounting for what is different, and accepting that a large part of our job will be disaster relief in context of the setbacks dealt to us in the last decades, “to arrest the freefall of European capitalism in order to buy the time we need to formulate its alternative,”² as Varoufakis puts it. It is to call for an acknowledgement that unconsciously, our outlook on reality is that of capitalist realism, one in which capitalism is accepted as reality, not just in the id—which already leads to discourse, for example, in which we bring up gender, sexuality and race all the time in discussions and forums about social justice, but seldom class—but also in our conscious minds, in our ego. Resisting the equation capitalism=reality is futile, and deep down, we have already accepted this. Mark Fisher describes this state of being in his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*:

“In the 1960s and 1970s, capitalism had to face the problem of how to contain and absorb energies from outside. It now, in fact, has the opposite problem; having all-too successfully incorporated externality, how can it function without an outside it can colonize and appropriate? For most people under twenty in Europe and North America, the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue. Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the

2 Varoufakis, *The Guardian*

thinkable. Jameson used to report in horror about the ways that capitalism had seeped into the very unconscious; now, the fact that capitalism has colonized the dreaming life of the population is so taken for granted that it is no longer worthy of comment.”³

Fisher, while describing with poignancy how we see and experience the world, still tries to conjure a means a way of realizing genuine resistance to capitalism. He thus stays wedded to the sentiments and sentimentality of the traditional Left, even after specifying just how unworkable the psychological assumptions of this Left now are. But indeed, any politics today has to proceed from the understanding that we cannot be *against* reality. We can dislike it, we can attempt to change it, but we cannot be against it. We can be against objects within reality, but if we desire our actions to not be misdirected and unsuccessful, we cannot be against reality itself, which, today, is capitalism, by all meaningful standards of the word “reality”: “The question of capitalism—precisely because the system itself is once again posing (agonising over) the question, and therefore its enormity emerges from behind the shadow play of parties—has to be bracket. It cannot be made political. The Left should turn its attention to what it can.”⁴

[009] And most existing efforts are, as we already sense on merely finding out about them, misguided and doomed to be unsuccessful, as resistance is still conceived by them in forms particular to the twentieth century. We need to find a tenor for politics that acknowledges our feeble condition, but through that, envisions a condition that can enable action, a condition that will necessarily entail a great from the identities and methods of yore: “[I]t does not follow that

3 Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: O Books, 2009), pp. 8-9.

4 Timothy J. Clark, “The Experience of Defeat,” in *The State of Things* (London: Koenig Books), p. 252

the Left should go on *exalting* its marginality, in the way it is constantly tempted to – exulting in the glamour of the great refusal, and consigning to outer darkness the rest of an unregenerate world (the pimps of their lives). That way literariness lies. The only Left politics worth the name is, as always, the one that looks its insignificance in the face, but whose whole interest is in what it might be that could *turn the vestige*, slowly or suddenly, *into the beginning of a 'movement'*. Many and bitter will be the things sacrificed—the big ideas, the revolutionary stylistics—in the process.”⁵ Thus the other point of commencing with a consideration of defeat is to realize that “we” are no longer the same “we” as we were; the experience of defeat, and the experience of living under a totalizing and finally totalized capitalism is existentially transformative. Capitalism, like all stages of history prior to it, has—fully, by this point—drawn on all its productive potentials to bring forth its own form of subjectivity. At the end of this process of fulfilling its potential, neither is it, capitalism as traditionally conceived, the same, nor are we what we were. As capitalism has passed from being a socio-economic contingency to being internalized in our psyches, leading to the fundamental alteration of both sides of the equation, a new historical stage has been inaugurated. The battle, thus, is a new one. We lost against capitalism, but where we find ourselves today, conflict still remains; indeed it must, in and through the dialectic, and so, the ambition is still valid and necessary, this one big idea, the foundational one, must yet remain: to resolve the dialectic, to wage the class conflict that will end all class war, and to wrest freedom from necessity.

[010] The subjugated class under capitalism proper, the proletariat, was the first class to seriously strive to accomplish this goal. It failed, because at the time it sought to overcome

5 Clark 255

capitalism, capitalism itself had not yet done its job for humanity. It had unleashed the productive forces of nature, certainly, quite possibly to the extent that was needed for wresting freedom from *material* necessity. But where Marx and his followers were wrong was in focusing disproportionately on the material progress made in each mode of production, when in fact each mode is also a mode of production of subjectivity, and one mode passes over into the next only when both the material and subjective potential contained within that mode has been released to its maximum and run its course. Now only have we reached the stage wherein history has advanced enough not only to have generated material plenty, but also to have generated the existential conditions wherein which, if the means of production of subjectivity along with those of wealth are seized and liberated from the service of the ruling class, we may finally attain a society of material equity and a state of existential, experiential consummation – a state that has been as much a cause and result of the class war, even if the gross materialists of the Western intellectual tradition have never admitted the extent of this fact.

[011] We want not just communism, but also *nirvāṇa*; and, in fact, as both object and subject are inextricably tied in the same historical processes, we *cannot* have one without the other. The failure to realize this was bound to lead to the failure of the consequent attempt to accomplish communism when the current mode of production had not yet sufficiently developed the existential conditions it was meant to. A change in society must be in harmony with a change in subjectivity, and only now have we reached the point of possibly deriving, from the present society and subjectivity that have been formed by capitalism and all class war before and during it, a fully liberated society and subjectivity.

EDEN

[012] In the beginning there was equality – all owned all, took what they needed, and there was enough, in the most basic sense, for all. This is the prehistory we know as primitive communism. The means of production were commonly owned, of course, because all societies were formed of hunter-gatherers and foragers. This world was humanity's Eden, and of how it was then, and how history moved from there, much has been written: Out of certain ecological and biological conditions—arbitrary conditions, to be neither lauded nor denounced—about twelve thousand years ago, sedentary agriculture was initiated by some societies. This is the start of civilization; the rest, literally, is history. At this moment occurred the first instances of the private control of property – not in the sense particular to capitalism, but in the sense that no longer was everything controlled by everyone, and there was something, an excess controlled by a few, the first powers-that-be, the first “ruling class.” This excess enabled till-then unseen endeavors of and towards productivity, but created stratification in society—the formation of classes—where the ruling class exploited the earliest peasant classes, an exploitation fostering and fostered by domination along the familiar and still-thriving lines of race, gender, caste and sexuality, to point out only a few of the most obvious or pervasive. With this a process was set in motion, a process of the underclasses feeling the indignation of exploitation, and desiring full fruits of the society they were building out of the productive forces—including labor itself—isolated and harnessed by the corresponding ruling classes; a desire pushing the dialectic on further, carving history out of will and conflict. Thus did Marx say: “All hitherto history is the history of class struggle.”⁶

We must not look back on either the Eden from which we emerged as either loss or progress.

6 Marx, Karl, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 335.

That was how it was to happen, and that is what happened. Nostalgia or pride would be irrational. History cannot be rolled back up. The only task now is to fully realize society's productive forces—unleashed and unfolded by the original act of generating and withholding the first agricultural surplus—to the theoretically possible condition of communism: where all have plenty and (so) all are free. We may have fallen from our state of innocence and purity, our state of unity with and obedience to the ways of God, of Nature, but that was meant to happen; and in its place, though with the misery of class society, we have made amazing achievements— aesthetically, ethically and epistemologically—and we have realized the possibility of creating yet another liberated society, one of superior material and existential conditions than were present when the apple of the first surplus was bitten. Thus neither nostalgia nor repudiation of Eden is warranted; all that is warranted is work on the present. This much has been at the core of all hitherto Left theory, and it is known.

[013] What has not been focused on is the corresponding Eden of human existence itself, at the most fundamental, psychological level, which was lost much before the Eden of material equity. History has equally been a process of the dialectic steering a return to this former Eden, though better than it was before, through a long, dark process of finding our way through states of impurity and fallenness from an ideal subjective state, through a long age in which humans had lost control of the full extent of what it is to be human, to be subjects; just as, after the loss of our pre-civilizational Eden, humans had lost control of the full extent of what it is to live on Earth, in the world, *to be in reality*.

[014] The Eden to be described, then, is not the Eden of existence prior to civilization; it is the

Eden prior to being fully human, and the state that defined it was pure animality: A state of pure phenomenal experience* of reality, of pure, raw feeling of this magnificent world we—“we” before we were human—found ourselves in. Being animal was, surely, blissful, whether or not it was pleasant: there was consciousness, and consciousness was only of this profoundly beautiful world, of the sensations and pleasure and pain it could give, and this consciousness was unadulterated.

[015] Then, however—through natural processes that were, again, arbitrary and cannot legitimately be subject to any reasonable value judgments—then, we found ourselves with the capacity to represent ourselves to ourselves. We became self-conscious, and with that, our Eden of animality was lost, and also at this moment, thus, history began. Seeing ourselves and knowing it was us that was seen – that was also biting the Apple.

[016] It was bound to happen—the dialectic of all existence till that point had decreed so—we were bound to acquire self-consciousness; in fact, without that acquisition, we wouldn't be “we.” It is an amazing thing, too, being aware of oneself to the extent that humans are. The surplus of agricultural produce was a surplus of objectivity, allowing further productive activity on the objects of the world, and through that, subjects of the world. Similarly, this surplus, the acquisition of self-consciousness, was a surplus of consciousness, of subjectivity, which has since then allowed extents of productive activity in conceptualizing ourselves as subjects—subjects of thoughts, and so of sentences, and subjects of life-narratives—in and in relation to

* Phenomenal experience is the philosophical term to refer to conscious, felt experience. The phenomenal aspect of mind is “is the concept of mind as conscious experience, and of a mental state as a consciously experienced mental state.” [Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, pg 11.]

“objective” reality, and through that, allowed productive activity with the objects of the world.

[017] But just as material surplus led to the affliction of class society, the foray into existence with self-consciousness came with its afflictions as well. For one, though the ability to think of ourselves as having engagements with the world was acquired, which on first consideration seems better than having experiences and engagements but not being conscious of them, to go along with this ability, we did not gain the ability to think and be conscious of ourselves *as* we engaged with and experienced the world. Our existence became that of a double bind: As our minds and the ability to represent things in our minds still remained singular, so, while we were conscious of ourselves, we could not be conscious of anything else but ourselves, and while we would be conscious of anything but ourselves, we couldn't exercise self-consciousness. Thus we have existed since becoming human, in a scheme of representational exclusivity, with a surplus of subjective productivity, but unable to unite and co-utilize that—just as in the case of uniting our objective productivity with the pre-existing condition of material egalitarianism—with the phenomenal experience we already were in possession of.

[018] So, as the great majority of society found itself dispossessed of the material potential society as a whole had attained, humanity, in its very origin, found itself dispossessed of the subjective potential that it had attained, that evolution had conferred upon it. This dispossession was not of the same kind as the former material dispossession, where a few found themselves in control of the surplus history had made possible for humans to have. Instead, here, each individual human found herself dispossessed, at any given moment, of one of the two orientations of consciousness – toward the world or toward ourselves. This was a dispossession

that can be seen as a definitive aspect of the so-called “human condition.” For all the beauty—a sheer, transcendent beauty of being—there would be to existing in a situation of oneness with ourselves, in a state wherein which one experiences oneself as one is also, simultaneously, experiencing the world, for all the beauty of existing such, we have, since the birth of our species, *by* the birth of our species, been unable to do so.

[019] As we evolved, we developed means of representing ourselves to ourselves. We learned how to talk, we told stories; we mythologized ourselves and our worlds on walls of caves and domes of stars. All desperate attempts to be one with ourselves, to *own* our experiences. After all, it would be as amazing to be fully with ourselves as we went about our existences, to thus be the masters of our minds, in control of how, and to what extent, we feel what we confront in the world; it would be as amazing to be fully such, as it would be masters of the material products of what we do and what we create. The contrivance to try and reach this state was, and has since been, that of vain memory: We look back on phenomenal experience, and based on our recollection of what it was like to be at given points in our existence, we represent ourselves as experienc-ers, as exist-ers, as *beings*. With this, the hope went, we could store what we ourselves were into memory, and thus, while experiencing the world, have a quick reference to what it is like to be while having phenomenal experience, and unite mere consciousness with self-consciousness, self-consciousness of exercising consciousness. But of course, it was not to be in such a way. We still could not, as it is called, “be in the moment,” in a state of knowing what it is like to feel—to have qualia*—as or while one feels, and thereby gaining the utmost, full

* “Qualia” is another philosophical term closely related to “phenomenal experience.” “I run my fingers over sandpaper, smell a skunk, feel a sharp pain in my finger, seem to see bright purple, become extremely angry. In each of these cases, I am the subject of a mental state with a very distinctive subjective character. There is something it is *like* for me to undergo each state, some phenomenology that it has. Philosophers often use the term ‘qualia’ (singular ‘quale’) to refer to the

satisfaction of existence as would be derived from such a state. Yet, through the first many millennia of the existence of *homo sapiens*, the process of collective human existence had been set in motion – the process of finding oneself in a divided existential state, in a state bearing the marvelous possibility of existing as conscious of one's consciousness but presenting the attainment of that possibility as nigh impossible; the process of representing oneself to oneself in better and better ways, detaching from ourselves more and more, so to speak, the self as a representation, so that, once sufficiently detached, we could reach out our arms towards it and hold onto it as it went about its life, which is our life; the process of getting to the state that when we engage with the world, we concurrently represent ourselves, and as we represent ourselves, we can concurrently engage with the world.

[020] For all of human history, we have been alienated from ourselves, forced to represent ourselves in attempts to seek existential oneness, to the effect, as we kept on fleshing out our representations of ourselves, only of pushing the creation of a further and further detached double. However, since the state of civilization, since the foundation of class society, this alienation from full being—or rather, the potential of “full being,” as can be theoretically conceived, given our capacity for both consciousness and self-consciousness—has been compounded, itself been doubled: Humanity, or at least the subjugated classes in it, have been dispossessed and alienated not only of their conceivably full possible state of subjectivity—a condition true to the ruling and ruled class alike—but since the start of civilization, of class society, the subjugated class has even lost control over how it would represent itself, humanity, people. As the surplus of society, the means of production, came in control of a ruling class, and

introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives.” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qualia/>)

history was truly inaugurated, it wasn't just a case of the means of material production having come in control of the ruling classes. Through control of the superstructure*, the ruling class also found itself in control of the means of production of subjectivity, thus, control of shaping how people could be self-conscious (and conscious), how they—*we*—represented ourselves.

[021] The struggles that have developed since—the unfolding of history—have been about control over the means of representation and subjective production as much as they have been about control over the means of material production; for the former dispossession constitutes as, if not more, momentous a departure from Eden, and thus as, if not more, great a potential to attain, yet again, Paradise – an immanent kingdom, within us and around us, of God, of ourselves; and if the dialectic is to be trusted, an imminent kingdom as well.

HISTORY

[022] That class war has been a guiding motor of history is known. That through history, the ruling classes have controlled the economic base of society, and that as the mode of production has been, so, corresponding to it, has been the superstructure of politics, ideology and culture; all that is also known. That modes of production have, through history, unleashed the potentials of nature, of the objective world, to the maximum extent possible under that mode of production, and thus given rise to material conditions for the emergence of yet another ruling class, yet

* “Superstructure” is the term used by Marx and theorists since to designate the institutions of society besides the economy, which is called the “base” of the society. In orthodox Marxian thought, it is the base that determines the superstructure; it is the way the means of production are controlled that determines the political and cultural aspects of a society.

another mode of production, containing the potential for more extraction of productivity from nature, yet another chapter in history – that too is known.

[023] What is not yet known is the extent to which this same process exists not just for material production, but also for subjective production, the production of human (self)representation. Shifts in representations of people have always been constructed as functions of the economic base, accompaniments to the great march of history unleashing the productivity of nature and making possible a society of plenty and liberty. But on understanding the fallenness or alienation of humanity as not just material, but predating that material dispossession, as an existential dividedness, we see history as a process whereby the productivity of subjectivity, via advancing means of representation, is also released, bringing us, with each chapter of history, closer to having within our grasp an existential state of oneness with ourselves, wherein which we can consciously experience experiencing, rather than merely having conscious experience, but not being conscious as that happens, of that happening.

[024] With the storage of agricultural surplus, we saw the development of permanent human settlements. The greater the surplus and the more successful its storage, the larger the settlements got, and soon, we were witnessing the rise of the earliest city states. Those possessing the key to the pantry, as it is still today, effectively had control over the governance of the city state. Belief systems—largely animistic and pantheistic through human history—now were manufactured to justify the power structure, under the guise of reflecting the natural order. As governance grew complex, writing systems developed. With respect to the progression of the means of representation, this now stands as one of the most important events in history.

[025] Writing allowed, for the first time ever, the storage of knowledge, of cognitive and cultural produce, in a facility besides memory. Multifarious consciousnesses and self-consciousnesses that had evolved through history could finally find manifestation in a physical form. This physical existence of written material facilitated faster communication of knowledge, of subjectivity, through space and time, providing a great boost to productive capacities at large, not only of material wealth, but also of culture. Thus writing proved to be the first great means of production of knowledge, which can be seen as the representation of subjectivity and objectivity. Thus, writing accelerated the historical process of representing selves to selves, and representing the world-apart-from-selves to selves. The latter of these processes allowed greater work by society on nature, allowing for a wider, and in many cases, more intense experience of reality. At the same time, though, because of the former, the process that was facilitated was of further disembodiment of our own selves *from our selves*, and being able to see them, or some generalized form of them, in front of our eyes, and thus also, more easily, abstracted in our minds. The abstraction of everything facilitated by writing includes that of the human being, and with that, the most significant step till that moment in history has been made in the direction of experiencing oneself at one remove, of thinking about how one is existing; indeed, in general, in the direction of abstracting reality, putting it symbolically, non-figuratively, as its own double. As thinking about one's existence is thus facilitated, the detachment of the self from the self, the formation of the complete double is furthered, though it is yet far from consummation, as the self has not been abstracted by the current means of representation to full duality.

[026] In the centuries that follow the invention of writing, which can roughly be characterized

as having a feudal mode of production, this means of representation remains under the control of a highly select class or caste – beyond the clergy or nobility, the priests and the princes, few can write or read. Still, the representations generated and allowed even in this limited pervasion of writing seep to a significant extent through the populaces. Advances in representation and abstraction, in subjectivity and knowledge, go far enough, though it takes centuries, that in conjunction with the advances made by feudalism in releasing the productivity of nature, the conditions eventually become ripe for a sweeping change in the mode of production. Land, held by feudal lords, and ruthlessly cultivated to produce sizable surpluses, over time has led to enough wealth generated in society to support the pursuit of other productive activities – small-scale manufacturing, leading soon enough to trade, birthing soon enough a merchant class, which begins to assert its interests in the sociopolitical order – its interests, and that of the nascent mode of production that is mercantile capitalism.

[027] Mercantilism soon flourished, first maintaining its interests through guilds and such trade associations, and eventually usurping the feudal order, challenging divine rights and heavenly mandates, sequestering, drop by drop, power from the nobility, and forming the capitalist government and an accompanying superstructure meant to protect private capital, on top of—and frequently in precedence to—private land, to maintain an extractive relation between capital and labor.

[028] A conjecture regarding the past: When feudalism was passing into capitalism, were the subjects struggling against the restrictive conditions of production talking about “feudalism” and how it had to be overcome? Doubtful. Similarly, can capitalism be overcome until it has so

thoroughly been internalized—as it has today, looking at the subjectivities of centrists and those left-of-center—that to talk about it amounts to pointing out the obvious? Only then has a mode of production developed subjectivities to the extent it is meant to.

[029] The printing press—a seminal instance of output of the till-then development of material and representational productivity—facilitated the intellectual and cultural moment we now call the Enlightenment, which itself facilitated the first bourgeois revolution in France, the bold attempt to form a society in which all political citizens had the liberty to own and trade. The printing press accentuated the effects of the representative force of writing. As the steam engine was invented, the productive forces of society were further enhanced, as surpluses of kinetic, chemical and thermal energy were derived from the exploitation of carbon. This was the start of the second great bourgeois revolution – the industrial revolution. As distances decreased and society gained the raw power to do and make more, to release the productivity of nature to ever-increasing extents, this was accompanied by greater representations of the world and of subjects, as material wealth allowed the production of greater culture, allowed more dedication to pursuits of knowledge, particularly of Others—animate or inanimate—that could be claimed as reserves of more and more surplus value. The definitions of Others that took place in the capitalist era, the lines that were drawn both of colonies and of colonized, allowed the global capitalist class, centered in Europe, to define and represent itself further. Those processes of self-definition and self-representation would, with time, be extended to or adopted by peoples around the worlds, as the world became smaller and smaller.

[030] Representations of subjects, along with productions of materiality, only increased as the

industrial revolution was no longer a revolution – as society is industrialized, it also finds itself more educated, and comes to understand itself as modern. It sees itself as part of a Grand Narrative. Thus, more and more, the existence of its members consists not of having phenomenal experiences of the world itself, directly, but of feeling themselves having a life in and as modernity, of representing their society, and experiencing themselves as experiencing this world, instead of directly experiencing the world and maintaining no appraisal of this. Thus, the division of self is enhanced under industrial capitalism, though the predominant means of representation is still writing. However, despite the bounds it has made, humanity is still floundering in some limbo outside a now so-long-lost Eden: While one is amid an experience of contemplating oneself—either in individual particularity or social generality—as experiencing the world, one is only exercising self-consciousness, and is not actually experiencing the world. There is yet no unity or salvation to the existential condition definitive of humanness.

[031] Capitalism is the first mode of production that not only has a superstructure that fashions culture, representation, knowledge to secure its preferred class relations – this operation of all class societies, whereby the exploited class is doubly dispossessed of shaping the destiny of its own representations and self-representations, has already been described. On top of this, capitalism privatizes culture itself. The subjugated class under capitalism—the proletariat—is the first subjugated class that sees itself be dispossessed of culture, as capital comes steadily to commodify and draw profit from everything under the sun. Thus, cultural production more and more is performed just to send the produced culture off to be packaged in the homogeneous shell of exchange value. Surely, culture with aesthetic value and communal significance is still produced, but the taint of existing for exchange, replaceable with anything of the same price,

rather than retaining its particular value as an ontologically unique piece of culture and exhausting the limits of its existence in just this value, comes to affect all culture.

[032] Thus—we are now arriving at the century before ours—mass culture, commodity culture, is established. But culture is yet an extension of us. And so, as culture—presentations and representations of society and subjectivity—is commodified, we come, by extension, to regard the representations of ourselves, which we already had been developing and engaging in more and more as our primary experience, we come to regard these representations as commodities. As we exist, or experience existence, as we had been, as vicariously experiencing the existence of our doubles that do not quite yet actually exist in autonomy, these doubles, our selves that we have abstracted that we feel ourselves to be, come across to us and are experienced by us as static and lacking dimension, for that is how commodities are. We already live to a large extent as feeling ourselves to be a certain way, but this certain way we feel ourselves to be now is a commodified way of being.

[033] As this process is going on, however, the proletariat also becomes the first subjugated class to attempt to abolish class rule altogether, finding the world to be finally of enough material plenty and no longer needing the directed, forced productivity, brought about by class rule. A political vanguard appears, claiming to represent the proletariat. This is the Communist vanguard. The Communists seek to organize the proletariat, seize control of the means of material production and hold the means of production in state control as wealth and opportunity are redistributed. The Communists succeed in taking power in Russia, China and elsewhere, but do not succeed in truly collectivizing the means of production. Instead, they merely take private

property from the bourgeoisie and put it under ownership of the state and its bureaucracy. The regimes that emerge are frequently worse than those under seemingly benign—but obviously only more subtle at iniquity—under seemingly benign capitalist regimes. Yet, the challenge to the ruling class has its merit, and for the first time the world can imagine itself as unexploited, in control of its own labor and ingenuity, and in material security. The Communist Idea has been born.

[034] Among the reasons why Communism is not realized is that while society may well have reached a level of material development to allow collective ownership of all products of society, it had not reached a level of development in the existential dialectic to permit a plunge into truly liberated subjectivity having transcended the tension in the human state that had existed since the emergence of the species itself. Even if this dialectical movement had been subject to and determined in the last instance by the economic base, it too was and is a dialectical movement requiring resolution just as much as the movement towards liberating nature's productivity, via class conflict, to undo the need for class itself. It requires resolution because it too—as the agricultural event marked a surplus at an objective level, a surplus that had to be accounted for, communalized—was born out of an arbitrary, irreversible and history-defining evolutionary-existential event that formed a psychical surplus that had to be accounted for – not by communalizing, as would be the case for a material surplus, but by conjoining with what there originally was, and recreating a single, cohered subject. As we have seen, history has been not just a process of us figuring out what to do with an original material surplus, and all that follows from conflicts arising from that. It has also been about us figuring out how to be, and knowing ourselves to be, the people we see when we think of “ourselves.” The existential is necessarily as

fundamental to human being as the bare material. Each stage of history allows for the development of material wealth and existential conditions, at the center of which is representation and self-representation, and each stage of history produces the materiality and subjectivity to allow its own overcoming. With industrial capitalism, only the former had sufficiently been produced. We cannot have new, liberated schemes of organizing objects without the same historical process—material and superstructural—having brought forth a new subject. As it has been the same historical processes that have been releasing the productivity of nature that have also been heightening and tightening the tension of the existential dialectic—both processes dialectically and dynamically informing each other—we cannot move from one historical stage to the next as long as that stage has not fully realized itself. If capitalism was not or has not been overcome, it is simply because it had or has not run its course.

[035] Indeed, history continued its release, and in the decades since the first (un)successful Communist revolution, we have seen the emergence of the most transformative means of representation since writing. As all reality got more fully commodified, capitalism put forth another realm of reality altogether – a realm *for* representation, but one that made representation so powerful, that this realm became naught but an alternative, doubling realm of reality itself, or, as some would have it, a realm negating the realm of reality. The age of electronic representation had commenced, or, the society of the spectacle.

[036] “In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into

representation.” Thus begins Guy Debord.⁷ Along with all its productive advances, society has reached a stage of being able to represent reality so well, that representation itself comes to acquire the reality of reality. The effect of representing human being, not just in written words, but as moving, graphic images, is nothing short of radical. As what we see on the screen is *us*, and as we still consider ourselves *real*, the syllogistic effect is that we come to regard what is on the screen as real: “Each of these seemingly fixed concepts has no other basis than its transformation into its opposite: reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real.”⁸ A great leap forward is thus made in the subjective historical process, the seemingly irresolvable exclusivity between consciousness and self-consciousness: Until now, though it was the case that our experience often consisted not of qualia derived directly from the objective world, but from qualia that the contemplation of ourselves as specific or general subjects would bring about, the self-conceptualizations were of active subjects. That changed with the development of mass consumer society, as what was represented as and through culture came to exude wafts of commodified mustiness, ourselves included. But the effect of spectacular society, of electronic representation, surpasses these prior effects not just in quantity but also in quality.

[037] For in the spectacle, objects—including subjects, objectified as images, as representations—no longer even play a primary role of providing qualia directly. The world, after all, has become spectacle; reality has become representation. Of course, “in itself,” in an empiricist sense, if one were to do a chemical analysis of reality then and now, it will not have changed in a fundamental way. The point of saying that reality has now become representation is that as what occurs on screen—out of such a phenomenon's sheer potency—comes to feel real; so as that

⁷ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press), p. 7

⁸ Debord pp. 8-9

happens, as a corollary, what feels (and is!) real comes to be unconsciously regarded by us also as having the same kind of character—the same attribute, in particular, of not being directly able to cause qualia—as that on screens.

[038] But it also cannot be that we could be confronted with an object—even if our phenomenal experience of it is as a spectacular entity—and not have any qualia at all. If the object exists in some capacity, and we are still conscious, it will have some effect on us and will generate some affect within us. The way objects now have an effect on us, in conditions of pervasive spectacularity, is by taking on a feel, an impression, an essence that is conveyed to us immaterially, and experienced by us without any direct interaction with what the object is in itself. This “feel” acquired by objects we shall refer to by the Indian-language term “*ras*,”* both because of the novelty of the phenomenon and the baggage associated with the aforementioned terms. In any case, the effect is as follows: All objects in the spectacle—and the spectacle is not a screen, it is a “social relation between people that is mediated by images”⁹—make us feel a certain way, just because of a certain “feel” they themselves possess. They come to possess this feel not because of any essential, true nature of theirs; rather, it is generated by discourse, by a constantly, dynamically interacting play of objects, conceptualizations, effects and affects, impossible to hold steady or pin down. The attempt to deconstruct meaning can only result in its construction.

[039] And, indeed, it is meaning that we are dealing with. When an object is felt without

* This term, originally from Sanskrit and literally meaning “juice,” has been used from classical Indian philosophy onward to refer something akin to essence, flavor or sentiment, particularly as pertains to that of music, literature or drama; it rhymes with “bus,” not with “gas” or “vase” or, in any of the possible pronunciations of this last word, “pass.”

9 Debord p. 7

interaction with it, the only possibility for what has been conveyed is information, meaning, devoid of any potential for generating any qualia except by being interpreted in a mind. This effect is especially true for the most recent development capitalism has reached – the digital stage. With digitized society, or the information age, the radical effects of mere spectacular society are compounded: Images can not only be produced and made a double to reality, to nature. With digitization, and the communicational possibilities enclosed therein, the world is not just blurred with a double, but it is spliced in with a third, a fourth, a fifth, a potential infinity of worlds. There remains no single, truly real world. There also remains, thus, no truly real “you” or “I” or “we.” When *everything* can be abstracted into information, Truth, as a standalone characteristic, not of propositions, but of being qua being – Truth itself is lost.

[040] The century that saw the developments of the spectacle and the Internet also saw plenty of events, or perhaps, it should be said, anti-events. While the capitalist powers and the Communist bloc did have a struggle going, there was yet some sense of movement to history. But with the weakening and subsequent fall of the Soviet Union, the dialectic itself seemed to have lost, or at least we found ourselves lost, in postmodernity. We found ourselves, by the turn of the century, not only in an existence in which space seemed to have not just been flattened, with progress in communications and information technology, but one in which space had at once been shattered and liquidated by virtuality *and* raised into being the dominating quality of reality – non-presence being made omnipresent, and thus omnipresent being made. Temporality, however, seemed to have come to a close, with the end of the struggle between the Western and Eastern political blocs, with Lyotard's “end of the grand narrative.” In all, capitalism seemed to have won, taken over reality completely, commodified everything, reduced all to slaves under

some debt, and developed the planet to apocalypse. “Postmodern,” they called the moment half a century ago, before even the emergence of the virtual realm, before the end of the Cold War, before global warming. As capitalism has become a realism, today could be called “late postmodernism,” in the way capitalism with postmodernism was called “late capitalism.” Or, simply, we cannot name Today.

HIPSTER

[041] Even as capitalism was rapidly commodifying culture in the middle of the previous century, we still sought intact pockets of autonomy, where what we did and who we made ourselves to be had authenticity; which is to say, in (anti-)economic terms, a distinct use value as an inherent object, rather than qualitative equivalence to all others under exchange value; or understood yet alternatively, when a signifier x_1 , resembling x , doesn't signify y_1 , though x signified y .

[042] As culture at large was rapidly being wrecked, authenticity was retained in and by subcultures. Subcultures emerged and yet emerge more among disenfranchised and oppressed groups, to whom non-economically-equalized, authentic culture matters more than to the privileged, and for whom the production and retention of culture not subsumed by capital is an inherent gesture of resistance to disenfranchisement and oppression. Thus emerged the original hipster in the late 1940's out of black culture, as described by Anatole Broyard:

“The hipster began his inevitable quest for self-definition by sulking in a kind of inchoate delinquency. But this delinquency was merely a negative expression of his needs, and, since it led only into the waiting arms of the ubiquitous law, he was finally forced to *formalize* his resentment and express it *symbolically*. This was the birth of a philosophy—a philosophy of *somewhereness* called *jive*, from *jibe*: to agree or harmonize. By discharging his would-be aggressions *symbolically*, the hipster harmonized or reconciled himself with society.”¹⁰

Broyard's most significant characterization and contribution from that essay was that of “*a priorism*”: “The hipster, both in black and white incarnations, in his essence, had been about superior knowledge Broyard insisted that black hipsterism was developed from a sense that black people in America were subject to decisions made about their lives by conspiracies of power which held a monopoly on information and knowledge that they *could never* possibly know. The “hip” reaction was to insist, purely symbolically, on forms of knowledge which you, the black knower, possessed before anyone else, and in fact before the creation of positive knowledge – *a priori*.”¹¹

[043] The hipster in the 1950's, though, became white, “explicitly defined by the desire of a white avant-garde to disaffiliate from whiteness, and achieve the “cool” knowledge and

10 Anatole Broyard, *Portrait of a Hipster*, originally published in *Partisan Review*, June 1948, online version on <http://karakorak.blogspot.com/2010/11/portrait-of-hipster-by-anatole-broyard.html>, accessed April 22, 2015.

11 Greif, “Positions,” in *What Was the Hipster: A Sociological Investigation*, edited by Dayna Tortorici, Kathleen Ross and Mark Greif, transcribed by Avner Davis (New York: n+1 Foundation), p. 8.

exoticized energy, and lust, and violence, of black Americans.”¹² Normal Mailer's essay “The White Negro” stands as a reference point for this hipster. In the 1950's also came the beatniks, and then the hippies. And then the punks and others through the 1970's, 80's and 90's. And then returned the hipster.

[044] “The matrix from which the contemporary hipster emerged included that 1990's culture which the sociologist Richard Lloyd called 'neobohemia' in his ethnography of Wicker Park in Chicago—that is, a culture of artists who primarily work in bars and coffee shops and rock clubs, while providing an unintentional milieu for 'late capitalist' commerce in design, marketing, web development, and the so-called 'experience economy'—and also the '90's culture called 'indie' or 'indie rock.’”¹³ So explained Mark Greif in his opening talk at a forum organized by n+1 in New York in 2009 – a place that could arguably be considered the birthplace, or at least a birthplace, of the hipster as we know her or him; a time when they debated whether “hipster” was still a relevant sociological or cultural category, or whether the hipster moment had already passed.

[045] The moment has not passed. Indeed, it may have expanded further out of New York and other metropolitan centers of North America into the hinterlands and suburbs of American culture. If one regards solely the palpable, the moment is still here; among traits that were always included in the visualization of the turn-of-the-century hipster, or have since come to be regarded as timeless, quintessential elements of the hipster, the following still can be seen being sported, in various combinations, by men and women—usually white—from their late teens to their 30's, frequently also 40's: Skinny jeans, fixed gear bicycles, Pabst Blue Ribbon (PBR) beer, trucker

¹² Greif p. 7.

¹³ Greif p. 5.

hats, undershirts called “wifebeaters,” American Spirit or Camel cigarettes, *Vice* and *Vice*-like magazines, American Apparel or H&M, tattoos, “porno” or “pedophile” mustaches or otherwise outdated-seeming or ironic facial hair. Or if one considers what is not palpable, looking instead at taste and attitudes, they also yet persist from the turn of the century to today: there exists yet a subculture among which indie music, vintage technology, extreme self-consciousness and irony all feature.

[046] The task, then, is to understand hipsters in their historical context, and to see whether they carry the subjectivity, in their material productions or their existential postures and sentiments, to signify the advancement of subjectivity of society at large to a level that could break with cultural capitalism, and thus contribute to breaking with capitalism. When gauging the potential of the hipster class, The reason behind focusing on hipsters to gauge this is that where capitalism itself is most advanced, they constitute one of the only subcultures that at least *seem* to have aspects counter to that of dominant culture; and because of—as will be explained ahead—their engagements with certain artifacts of past cultures and their tenor in doing so today. And to those who regard present-day hipsters as too well-off and integrated into the establishment to ever constitute a genuine counterculture, consider the kind of charges that were thrown against an incipient hippie culture, that is, of course, in hindsight, considered to have been a genuine counterculture: “Another grievance was that while Beats were always down and out, the hippies seemed to have money What was unique to hippies was their attitude—an expansive, theatrical attitude of being cool enough to have fun. They called themselves dudes and ladies rather than cats and chicks. Unlike Beats in their existential black and folkies in their homespun and denim, they wore flashy Mod clothes Hippies were scattered around in other

places in the country, too, mostly near college campuses.”¹⁴

[047] To the question of whether they constitute a genuine antithesis to dominant culture, the answer that seems most naturally to come up is that the way hipsters, in indie culture, set themselves apart from the masses at large, in “mainstream” culture, is pure posturing, and if dominant culture were looked at as consumer culture, then hipsters are as much part of dominant culture as any other cultural category, containing no seed of difference from the status quo that could burgeon into extensively alternative ways of living. And certainly, if looked at as participants in consumer culture, even if theirs is not “mass culture,” it is still part of the great mass of capitalist culture; theirs is but the recuperated and branded-as-refined version of it, or perhaps, an even worse than normal version of consumption, because it entails the commodification of authentic signifiers of past working class culture. A subculture so well identified by consumption of particular products, such as particular kinds of beers, hats and pants, engaging in conspicuous consumption of vinyl records, polaroid cameras and other commodities that create an image of itself for others to see – such a subculture, it could be said, epitomizes the dominant order.

[048] Or so would say Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno. But this is not their world; nor is what identifies something truly what defines it. So, looking at the hipster as a product of a more advanced form of capitalism is called for. It has been seen that in spectacular society, objects and subjects in “reality” acquire the status of objects and subjects on the screen, in representation. So, in the interaction of subjects and objects, there is but a conveyance of the *ras*. It has,

¹⁴ Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Random House, 1984), pp. 5-6.

however, not yet been seen precisely what kind of subject—or lack thereof—is produced in these conditions: The answer, in a word – the subject produced is a passive subject, hardly a subject at all.

[049] Through history, as we have seen, existence has consisted not just of experiencing the world, but of experiencing ourselves. But the two could never take place together, leading to an existential discrepancy wherein which we could not cohere and be certain of ourselves as subjects in interaction with the world. As representation advanced from mere self-consciousness to be able to conceptualize and visualize the self in different ways—either our own particular selves, or our selves as a generalized sample of the social whole—we set off a dialectical process of two contradictory forces moulding each other: On one hand, we could exist more and more with self-knowledge and a feeling of “this is what we are like”; but the more we represented ourselves in various ways to achieve this state, the more we created a double that was *not* us. In thinking the self to be able to grasp it and be one with it, we pushed a process of alienating self from the self. This process has today found its culmination in spectacular consciousness. Until now, when we looked to our self-representations and tried to “be ourselves,” the selves we emulated were still subjects in history, having earnest actions that could be taken on the individual self or the social whole or the transcendental order. Now, as existence becomes that what is or can be represented on a screen, “to be” is to be passive, to not have a real role in any real happening or process, because after all, the screen is an unreality, having no bearing on the world as existing in time, in history.

[050] All that remains to being, instead, is feeling a certain way about oneself. As all objects

and subjects take on a *ras*, to be is to be passively by having only a *ras*: “The spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. Its sole message is 'What appears is good; what is good appears.’”¹⁵ As we come to find ourselves as parts of the Spectacle, our existential task also becomes to acquire a *ras*. The way we do this is by fashioning ourselves into perfect objects, which we (and others) can contemplate and get a certain qualia from. We seek a self-image, a feeling about and for ourselves – that is the crux of spectacular capitalism.

[051] The hipster typifies this. Who else, after all, is as self-conscious and image-obsessed as the members of this group who craft themselves as special, who derive such latent pleasure from feeling themselves to be refined, unique and, simply, hip? In the essence of the hipster there is thus yet the *a priorism* that Broyard wrote about. In the 21st century, whose material and subjective conditions have decreed that being must be just that—mere being, disassociated from doing, setting oneself up as an image and living in qualia of one's images' *ras*—in this century, our lives consist of claiming our stake in the spectacle as distinctive images, as stand-out beings. So *a priorism* is necessary – we must be in the know, have a sense of what is cool and special, and how we can best *be*. In fact, our *a priorism* exists at a level deeper than merely knowing how to be the most self-relishable image. It exists also at the level of being savvy of how the world actually exists, of having an unconscious or conscious *a priori* knowledge of what the capitalism of the day is like. Were it not for an embedded realization that we are living in spectacular capitalism, we would not even be attempting to craft ourselves as spectacular being in accordance with it.

15 Debord pp. 9-10

[052] Knowledge of reality as such reveals an even more penetrating frame of reference into what hipsters really are, allows us to account for further traits of hipsters. For we are aware not just of living in spectacular society, but also in postmodernity, which is related to the former, but entails different subjectivities and responses in self-representation. The feeling that nothing new can happen in postmodernity is also possessed, *a priori*, by hipsters. Thus, products and aesthetic styles adopted by hipsters can be seen as the natural response of highly cognizant inhabitants of postmodernity: If nothing can be authentic anymore, since it would, immediately, on its advent into existence, be snatched into the realm of circulation of commodities, under the logic of the dollar; if nothing can be new, since modernism did everything was to be done, or at least said it was doing everything there was to be done, and since it said so, was believed to have done that, *why do anything?* And even if something new could be done, what would be the point of doing it with any genuine commitment to it as an inherently meaningful endeavor, after the tragedies of capitalism, colonialism and nationalism in the 20th century, what would be the point of doing anything with a sense of belief in it—“ah, yes, I am *doing* this!”—in the context of capitalist realism, when nothing else seems even faintly around the corner, when it feels farcical to have any hope for a life that is not boring, tedious, debt-ridden, promotion-less, precarious, homogenous and stale... how! in such conditions, can there be an earnest gesture? How can there be anything but pastiche and parody? If we are not to caricature or redo the past, how can we produce anything that is not subdued or has a vein of mildness to it? How can we speak, but with a voice of irony? How can we stand in a political rally and chant a slogan with a straight face?

[053] This, then, is how the situation stands: If a given mode of production generates forms of subjectivity and being particular to it, which, along with material conditions particular to it as

well, bring about a new mode of production, we do certainly seem to have the modes of being that seem most directly emerged from capitalism—from reality—and thus manifesting the potential for reality proceeding into another mode of being. But as appeared on the side of history, so it appears on the side of the subject: the dialectic appears to be caught awry, in a seeming standstill, with no apparent resolution.

[054] Spectacular capitalism brought the existential situation of one remove to its maximal state of tension: From a component of existence being the contemplation of oneself and the emulation of that self, we are now in a situation where the principal component of existence is the contemplation and experience of oneself as a completely Othered image, as a self seen-on-the-screen. Our double is more real—even if, given the material conditions of the present, it would be inaccurate to say “fleshed out”—than ever before. Such a condition would, in theory, allow for the easiest, most successful application of self-consciousness, of knowing what and how one is, as one is. For the first time in history, more so—far more so—than not, our experience of the world is our experience of ourselves as beings in the world, doubles, autonomous and separate. Until now, our double only yet existed as a representation that did not exist outside our contemplation of it. And if we contemplated it, we could not engage simultaneously with any other aspect of reality. Yet the force(s) of history kept pushing representation forward. To the situation we have today—one in which representation has realness, the image is real, and so, we, the “original” we, whose representation (we) formed, are able to experience the representation, that is, experience ourselves, as the representation or the image, as ourselves as beings in the spectacle. But the problem is that this double, the representation, does not actually *do* anything. It is, after all, an image, a passive being, whose only point is to have a *ras*. So, we find ourselves

in a deadlock: When finally we can be one with ourselves, “in the moment,” having, presumably, control over ourselves; this self with which we can be one is a self that by its very nature does *nothing*.

[055] As, with the advancement of technology into the time of the Internet, we come to acquire virtual identities, this situation is further accentuated. Our online profiles are completely about the image we project, not just to others, but to ourselves. These personas, obviously, can themselves do nothing; they are incapable of action. Yet, we come to identify ourselves with them, and thus foster an understanding of the self that is passive, that does nothing, that is *supposed* to do nothing as a condition of existence.

[056] This passivity is compounded, as noted, by our awareness of the bleakness and stillness of postmodernity, and the nihilism and lack of earnest desire resultant therefrom. But the psychic effect of facts we live with regarding our physical and social world cannot be stressed enough. In the latter half of the previous century, we saw, for the first time, populations acquiring—on material, scientific grounds—the impression for the first time that because of human activities, the world might just end. The menace during the Cold War was nuclear proliferation, and the possibility of a capricious, ill-judged decision by a world leader to annihilate all of civilization. On the conscious mind coming across such a monstrous, sweeping fact, repression must, quickly, follow – that is the only way we could maintain normalcy and calm.

[057] Toward the end of the last century, the traumatic fact of the potential of nuclear annihilation got replaced by that of ecological annihilation. The anxiety and resultant repression

caused by this is arguably worse, for at least with the nuclear crisis we knew that we were only subject to human agency, which is, however faultily and unreliably, subject to rationality and morality; the crisis could be averted if we just did the right things. But with the ecological crisis, we are faced with a deaf judge – the Earth will listen to no pleas, and past a certain point of ecological disruption, no matter what we do, we will face the consequences. The effect of the repression caused by this prospect, so hard to live with in our day-to-day lives, is that of, first, denial of the full magnitude of the problem, a comforting attitude that what needs to get done will get done regarding the matter, despite all evidence to the contrary; and second, denial of time. Time itself has to be repressed, as to think about time involves thinking about the future, and to think about a future that might not be there, very soon, anytime, is far too traumatic even in the present moment. As we lost time, we lost the will to think in terms of a narrative, to think earnestly about tomorrow, to act as if there may well be a tomorrow. The unconscious took care of all of this. And here we are, nursed for our world situation by repression that has the side-effect of making for shrewd social action known, deep within us, to be future-oriented, and so to be avoided at all costs; a repression that replaced all will toward action with a psychic necessity to have a life of having an image, a *ras*—conditions existing only in the present moment, not having any real effect on the world, thus having no bearing on the future, thus allowing the very existence of the future to stay repressed—a comfortable state to live in.

[058] Whether it be by the inherent nature of the spectacle or the historical situation of capitalist realism that has been reached, despite it seeming now, for the first time, that history, through industrial, and then electronic or informational capitalism, has brought us to a socio-existential threshold beyond which a state of comprehensive liberation lies, it is this same

historical stage that seems, necessarily, to forbid it. We, despite seeming to have reached an existential situation ready to take a great leap forward, and comprising perhaps the only (sub)culture with the *a priori* epistemological sense of where we are leaping from, and thus of where we could leap to, despite reaching here, we also embody the existential situation that forbids taking this leap. A seemingly irresolvable contradiction.

[059] It appears that the hipster is a futile culmination of the workings of millennia of modes of material and subjective production. Not to be, not to be...

AN/AESTHETIC

[060] Art, on the side of its creation, expresses feeling, and on the side of its experience, causes feeling. This is the aesthetic nature of art, taken in the original sense of the word – *aesthesia* as would today be counterposed to anesthesia, a word still prevailing in this original sense.

[061] Objects at large, however, do not cause feeling in today's socio-existential conditions as they used to. Qualia are derived from information about an object being received in consciousness. This is true for objects whose function was to occasion feeling, as well as for objects not created or present for the production of human qualia—things either created for some other utility, or present in their own right, for themselves—but which, by the sheer efficacy of the phenomenon of objects coming in contact with subjects, did incidentally occasion qualia. In today's world, be they of the former category, such as what we call “art,” or of the latter, things

have a *ras*, which make us feel a certain way (including, as seen, about ourselves).

[062] Art-objects, then, are the only objects that exist purely to produce qualia and self-image, rather than for some other utility or for no “purpose” at all. So, if there is a bleakness and stillness to postmodernity, particularly the “late” postmodernity of the capitalist realism in effect today, which leads to a nihilism, and a lack of earnest desire or hope that anything meaningful could be said or done—if, indeed, this is the dominating feeling of living today—then the aesthetic objects made or engaged with today by those with the *a priori* sense of this condition, the epistemological *avant-garde* of the day, should reflect this feeling.

[063] This, indeed, is the dominant tenor of indie culture: both indie music, and the literature and film engaged with by members of indie culture. Both at the level of creation and reception of art, at expressing it and experiencing it—and with experiencing it, feeling oneself to be a certain way, and so, through one's image and self-image, expressing oneself—there is an underlying consensus that the world is a dead place. There is concurrence that nothing grand or profoundly beautiful—let alone anything of resistance or dissent—can be done or said in this soul-sucking, life-wearing world of flawed, cruel humans, this tragic world, on the constant brink of nuclear devastation, on the imminent brink of ecological collapse, of a literal “the end.”

[064] Some say that indie rock, the most central part of indie culture, the aesthetic wing of our hipster existence, is simply not that great music. That it's “decent” art, “not bad,” but that nothing of the aesthetic level of Bob Dylan or Jimi Hendrix could come from it. This is absolutely true, and in fact, it is meant to be this way; it is written into the very DNA of indie culture – the

unconscious disavowal of making *excellent* music. Of course, music is sought to be made with aesthetic merit—otherwise no one would like to listen to it—but the fact is that it cannot be too perfect or powerful.

[065] Perfection, at least as used here, refers to formal musical elements, the particulars within a piece of music, rather than the overall effect and affect as created by the workings and interworkings of these elements. Lo-fi sound, for example, is an obvious case of imperfection taken up by indie culture. It emerged from punk culture and music, which has been a great influence on indie culture; but in both cases, the underlying ethos of lo-fi was the same; it was, put simply, “fuck it.” To have a full, precise, perfect sound is not only—especially for the punks—an economic ask, but it is also a violation of consistency with the seriousness life should be engaged with today. Perfection is an earnest gesture, one too earnest for this world – thus the prevalence of lo-fi production in indie, traceable through the transmission of punk culture—along with DIY ethics at large—into indie culture, most prominently illustrated by Sonic Youth.

[066] More than such formal choices, or lack of choices, regarding perfection, indie music finds it difficult to have an intensity to its overall expression that could be found in other times or in other genres today. A mildness in sound or energy is apparent when the subject matter is something serious, such as one's love life or other equivalent sources of emotion and anxiety. Thus, as an example, we have in the music of Angel Olsen, a mildness in both the power of the instruments and the vocals. Consider the song “Windows,” the last track from her 2014 record *Burn Your Fire for No Witness*. It is clear from listening to the song that there is profound emotion—sorrow and yearning—in the words and their musical expression. But the emotion has

to be contained; it cannot be expressed in fullness; if, through the cumulative elements of the song such as melody, instrumental power, rhythm, etc. the overall earnestness generated was past a certain extent, the effect would seem insincere or an attempt at irony. So, for most of “Windows,” the instruments are mere accompaniments, a minimal background, rather than having any power or presence of their own: Out of the whole song, which is just over four minutes, for the first minute-and-a-half, there are only two mild guitars; at this point, light percussion is introduced, and only in the last seventy seconds, through drums and an electronic tone, is instrumentally derived earnestness enabled. As for her vocals, they are high-pitched, which, if sung with power, can come across as very earnest. So, she sings them somewhat delicately, almost wispily, employing frequently a fraught vibrato when holding a note to do away with the earnest effect of the continuity of a single voice uninterrupted on a single note. The overall effect of the musical choices is of being able to convey all the force contained in the lyrical expression—that is, of conveying all her most direct thoughts—while not stepping beyond the degree of earnestness that any expression as a whole can have.

[067] Such an effect is not only true of indie music; as mentioned above, other forms of contemporary art engaged with by “indie people” also often show such a mildness or disavowal of emotion. Consider, for example, Don DeLillo's 2001 novel *The Body Artist*. Like Olsen's album, then novel is full of underlying emotion – the immediate context of the story is of the protagonist's husband having killed himself. But if DeLillo had drawn on bombastic shows of grief, either through the direct meaning of his words or the way he arranges and expresses them, the work would have seemed, again, ironic or insincere. For example, we have the following passage:

“Something is happening. It has happened. It will happen.
This is what she believed. There is a story, a flow of consciousness
and possibility. The future comes into being.

But not for him.

He hasn't learned the language. There has to be an
imaginary point, a nonplace where language intersects with our
perceptions of time and space, and he is a stranger at this crossing,
without words or bearings.

But what did she know? Nothing. This is the rule of time. It
is the thing you know nothing about.

She listened to him say it, on the tape, in a voice that was
probably hers.

But she could have made it up, much of it. Not from scratch.
But in retrospect, in memory.

But she had it on tape and it was him and he was saying it.

Then she said it herself but so what. So what if she said the
same thing in the same words.

Means nothing. People saying the same thing.”¹⁶

The lack of earnest power is most conveyed by the short sentences. Why even expend the
energy, the language tells us, to come up with compound sentences? Even complete sentences

¹⁶ Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, (New York: Scribner, 2001), pp. 98-99.

are too much effort, would show too much commitment to the narrative project, to the very activity of thought, on the protagonist's (or writer's) part. Thus we have sentences like “Then she said it herself but so what.” Through the work, DeLillo makes sure passion is not conveyed via the language, the style, and so, the story based around a husband's death is made possible.

[068] Mildness blends into or works with irony to limit the effective passion of a work. Going back to Angel Olsen, we can think of her song “White Fire,” likely the saddest song from this already melancholic album. It begins with the following words: “Everything is tragic, it all just falls apart / But when I look into your eyes, it pieces up my heart.” The instruments accompanying this are minimal – two string instruments, both guitars or a guitar and a cello, contribute to little expressiveness. The tune of the song is also hardly a tune; Olsen sings on a low note, literally and figuratively, but there is little melody to be talked of through the verses. Still, the low, subdued notes, particularly her usage of a minor note (*komal-q* in Hindustani classical terminology; or in Western terms, what could be described as an A-flat on a C-scale) makes the song exude an overt doleful feeling, one almost too earnest for the limits set by postmodernity. In the moments the overall emotion conveyed by her song seems to spill over, one wonders whether she is trying to be ironic. The moment when this most happens, in fact, is in the opening line: “Everything is tragic, it all just falls apart.” Contextualizing this line in the full album, it seems she does mean this with a straight face when she sings it; but at the moment one confronts this line, it is hard to see it so. Irony, too, thus exists in opposition to earnestness. And if the effect of “it can't be this earnest; it has to be irony” exists, then irony itself can also be used to make a piece of art not come across as overstepping a boundary of earnestness, beyond which it would seem a mockery of the times, the past, the audience or the artist herself.

[069] Devendra Banhart can be used as an example of effective use of irony in indie music. While his songs also have the mildness worked into them that Angel Olsen does, he makes more use of ironic arrangements of notes, sounds or even lyrics to allow the earnest emotion he does wish to convey to be conveyed in full, to only allow that earnest emotion to be conveyed. Thus, for example, from his 2013 album *Mala*, in the song “Won't You Come Over,” in which he sings about, simply, him wanting someone he has fallen in love with to come over and love him—a serious, non-ironic desire in and of itself—we can listen to the series of double notes that is first heard at 17 seconds into the song, which seem ironic, playful, lightening the atmosphere of the song – almost the kind of sequence one would expect to hear if a child got on stage with Banhart and behind his keyboard, and got her or his fingers going over some keys out of pure whim, a few times during the song. (This song also contains the mildness and vibrato described earlier for Angel Olsen.)

[070] A song with much more overt irony throughout is “Your Fine Petting Duck,” from the same album, in which Banhart expresses regret over an ended relationship in which he was not a very good partner. First, there is the title of the song itself, which is kind of funny, and seems either sarcastic or tongue-in-cheek. Within the first fifteen seconds of the song, the beat is laid, which, though slow, is just slightly upbeat – the kind of beat which could elicit slight head movements or foot-tapping with the beat, but nothing more than that. It is also somewhat playful, and feels like a slow foxtrot. The next element that comes in is of a female voice with a non-native-English-speaking accent starting to sing the following lines: “I'll take you back / Cuz I don't really love him / no no no, give me that, won't you gimme gimme / Gimme all your loving

... ” Next come Banhart's lines: “If he ever treats you bad, please remember how much worse I treated you / If he doesn't try his best, please remember I never tried at all...” And so it goes on, but with little melody, almost flatly, in terms of tune, but yet corresponding and keeping up meticulously with the rhythm in place. The effect of this too is ironic, that he would be “singing” of such hurtful things in a such an assiduous, unembarrassed way. Then returns the foreign accented ladies briefly, before Banhart returns with more reminders to his ex-lover about how horrible a partner he was. And so it goes on till about three-and-a-half minutes into the song (which is almost six minutes long) when it amps up with electric beats into a pop sound that one might expect to hear in a plush lounge restaurant, and for the remainder of the song the woman and Banhart sing in German. They both still sing as they were in English, in a deadpan, serious-seeming tone. Then, at the end, for about ten seconds, Banhart returns to English for the last words of the song, which he repeats: “I've been feeling it too.” Ah, the common experience of two parted lovers! A bond after the break-up! Themes that we would expect to find in a post-grunge song and hastily switch the station away from. The pain is obviously real, for us on listening to the Staind song, and for Banhart, regarding his separation. But can Banhart convey it? As a song today can convey only a limited amount of earnestness, given the pain and raw, confused emotion to be conveyed, which we sense lyrically and sublyrically, Banhart introduces ironic elements and designs. Mildness could only have gone so far, but irony creates even more space for the desired earnest emotions to be felt. The song appears ironic in design, almost overbearingly, but only due to that can real emotion come through, without appearing a facade.

[071] Irony is particularly useful in spectacular society, particularly in the information age, because of the world of this moment having the character of seeming screen-like, and because

we feel ourselves at all times in these times. The effect of being aware of representation as a fact of the world, and with that, of being aware of oneself as representation in forms upon forms everywhere, is that of acute self-consciousness. Because of the degree to which we are aware of ourselves, we have the need to downplay our existence, to not seem overbearing to ourselves, and not seem pompous with the amount of sheer existence we take up. The best way to accomplish this is by being ironic as we go about life. Irony is the cultural logic of late postmodernism.

[072] The use of irony is not restricted merely to products of indie culture, such as music. It also prevails in much contemporary art made by practitioners cognizant of the socio-existential situation. To take another example from literature, we have the work of W.G. Sebald. His early novels—which is the same as saying all his novels till *Austerlitz*, the novel that brought the most fame and after which he died—have not much of a plot; in fact, he once described his work, rather than “fiction,” for lack of a better term, as “extended prose narratives.” Instead of a plot, his works feature very intense, troubled protagonists going about their lives, bringing more anxiety and intensity to their activity than would be normal for the situation. His protagonists are also frequently mysterious first-person narrators who may or may not be Sebald himself, such as in the book *The Rings of Saturn*, which begins as follows: “In August 1992, when the dog days were drawing to an end, I set off to walk the county of Suffolk, in the hopes of dispelling the emptiness that takes hold of me whenever I have completed a long stint of work.”¹⁷ Indeed, the novel then records a curious walking tour, with voluminous accounts of seemingly random things that happen to come up in the journey or in the narrator's mind, and accounts of extreme

17 W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (New York: New Directions Books, 1998), p. 3

incidents of anxiety or despair: when Sebald, or his narrator, is not completely absorbed in something, he is either severely depressed or hospitalized. If the novel, now, were filled with only such intense accounts, many of which rise to truly sublime description and conveyance of emotion, then a reader possessing socio-existential *a priorism* would wonder what Sebald was up to. “Is this expected to be taken seriously? Or is it some kind of parody of a Nietzsche-Beckett neuroticism?” If the Sebald-narrator spoke unvaryingly in the same intense or lofty voice, it would, in our times, simply seem unrealistic.

[073] So, Sebald makes his language ironic. He does this in two ways: First, more straightforwardly, he uses formations of language that by their very structure are archaic or old-fashioned, and thus make the work come across as ironic. For example, “Ditchingham churchyard was very the last stop on any walk through the county of Suffolk.”¹⁸ Here, both “very the last” and “county of Suffolk” (rather than “Suffolk County”) strike us as mock-dignified formulations that reduce the overall gravitas of the work and let passages like the following one convey the sincerity and true depth of feeling they actually have:

“After this painful parting I spent long hours shut away in my study at the embassy and, with repeated interruptions for vain reflection and brooding, committed our unhappy story to paper. As I did so, I was troubled by the question of whether in the writing I should not once again betray and lose Charlotte Ives, and this time for ever. But the fact is that writing is the only way in which I am able to

18 Sebald p. 261

cope with the memories which overwhelm me so frequently and so unexpectedly. If they remained locked away, they would become heavier and heavier as time went on, so that in the end I would succumb under their mounting weight. Memories lie slumbering within us for months and years, quietly proliferating, until they are woken by some trifle and in some strange way blind us to life. How often this has caused me to feel that my memories, and the labours expended in writing them down are all part of the same humiliating and, at bottom, contemptible business! And yet, what would we be without memory? We would not be capable of ordering the simplest thoughts, the most sensitive heart would lose the ability to show affection, our existence would be a mere neverending chain of meaningless moments, and there would not be the faintest trace of a past. How wretched this life of ours is! – so full of false conceits, so futile, that it is little more than the shadow of the chimeras loosed by memory. My sense of estrangement is becoming more and more dreadful.”¹⁹

Sometimes Sebald incorporates phrases and formulations whose cumulative effect of cliché and intensity is so much that for the brief moment of registering them, they and the narrator behind them can be held in jest. So, we have:

19 Sebald p. 254-55

“It is difficult to imagine the depths of despair into which those can be driven who, even after the end of the working day, are engrossed in their intricate designs and who are pursued, into their dreams, by the feeling that they have got hold of the wrong thread.”²⁰

The phrase “depths of despair” allows a brief respite from the sentence, superlative itself in its content.

[074] The second way Sebald introduces irony is by presenting concepts or thoughts that occupy a strange, liminal space of earnestness of which it is difficult to extract a clear judgment of “ironic” or “earnest.” For example:

“I have always kept ducks, he said, even as a child, and the colours of their plumage, in particular the dark green and snow white, seemed to me the only possible answer to the questions that are on my mind.”²¹

“Is this person for real?” we may think, while regarding that sentence and thought that is, in itself, profound and beautiful. Here, while the thought or sentiment cannot be regarded as fully earnest or sincere, the mysterious effect engendered by this liminal space of doubt contributes to a net effect of greater beauty and ethereality about the work. It is as if the total energy it takes us as readers today to think “Is this person for real?” and to doubt the sincerity of the lines, is less

20 Sebald p. 283

21 Sebald p. 248

than the energy it would take were the lines doubtlessly earnest and we would thus have to think “This person is for real.” And with that slight preservation of energy there, we have more energy to take in the beauty and profundity of the thought.

[075] Thus, we see, all the irony that we overtly see in art in or associated with indie culture can be seen through or around for a kernel of earnestness present underneath or elsewhere in the work. It is not that hipsters lack all earnest feeling; it is more a matter of expression. When it seems that we are living in the endtimes, or in ended time, we have to be very careful in not making our expression seem too wide-eyed or hopeful about the prospects of believing in doing anything. If we want to say heartfelt things, they must be cushioned in an artistic form containing enough elements of mildness or irony to make ourselves appear worth taking seriously, to make it clear that we aren't here to fool around.

[076] It is possible, of course, to go too far with caution, and that is arguably worse than being cautionless. Take, for example, the films of Wes Anderson – very popular in indie circles. There is almost no earnestness to them, next to none in their stylistic elements, and only very rarely and beneath the surface can earnestness be felt in their “substance,” in the narratives. They contain fairly *interesting* and frequently very *entertaining* stories, but these stories are laden with irony, because, as per Anderson's ethos, even to tell a story, apparently, is such an earnest gesture that it has to be done with total irony—for example, his solemn, unnaturally symmetrical shots, as if the visuals were diagrams rather than felt observations of people—and with a “retro,” old-fashioned aesthetic about them – the old-fashioned elements can be explained by the fact that more earnestness was possible then, so the act of telling a story itself, a story about sincere

personal desires and problems, has scope for operation when with and within such a *ras*. However, levels of overall earnestness are still possible in our experience and being than Anderson lets there be in his films – we do not feel overdramatic or anachronistic when we feel the emotion that we do feel in our lives, but if our lives were set in Anderson's films, we would. His works, then, situated in the spectacle, have the effect—by our natural confusion in this era between reality and representation—of making it seem as if *reality* has less space now for earnestness; his films, insincere in themselves, by presenting themselves as real representations, lower the capacity of society to be even as sincere as we still can be in a time when every drop of sincerity is vitally important for actually *doing* things in and with the world, the real world that needs to be tended to. So fuck Wes Anderson.

[077] When and if indie music does rise to a level of perfection or power that feels “against the rules,” it conveniently often becomes integrated into the mainstream. Thus we have The Strokes' 2001 album *Is This It*, which is, plain and simple, a very good rock record – it has been ranked at number 199 on *Rolling Stone's* 2012 updated list of “The 500 Greatest Albums,”²² at number one in *NME's* 2009 list of “The Top 100 Greatest Albums of This Decade,”²³ number two in *Rolling Stone's* corresponding list²⁴, and number seven in *Pitchfork's* list of “The Top 200 Albums of the 2000s,”²⁵ to name but a few of its accolades. Music of its calibre seems to go against the ethic of indie music of not achieving the level of perfection that some of the songs in that album reach, or in reaching the level of perfect genre-sound, though this may be a hindsight bias: *Is This It* has,

22 *Rolling Stone* staff. "The RS 500 Greatest Albums of All Time: The Strokes, 'Is This It'". *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved April 20, 2014.

23 *NME* staff and music industry contributors. "The Top 100 Greatest Albums Of The Decade: 10–01". *NME*. Retrieved April 20, 2014.

24 *Rolling Stone* staff and music industry contributors (December 9, 2009). "100 Best Albums of the Decade". *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved April 20, 2014.

25 *Pitchfork* staff (September 28, 2009). "The Top 200 Albums of the 2000s: 20–1". Pitchfork Media. Retrieved April 20, 2014.

perhaps more than any other album, such a quintessential indie sound and tone about it, that it is, paradoxically, too perfectly indie to remain truly indie.

[078] A similar story exists for Arcade Fire. Again, really well-written and executed music got taken in by the mainstream. Arcade Fire especially lost its indie credibility after its 2009 album *The Suburbs*, which became the first indie album to win the Grammy for Album of the Year. But it didn't stop being a hipster album out of causality as simple as hitting the mainstream and winning a Grammy. Rather, both Arcade Fire's lack of devoted fandom (everyone *appreciates* Arcade Fire; there is no choice but to) among hipsters and its ascendancy to the mainstream and Grammy-success stem from the same attributes about it: Arcade Fire, aesthetically, compositionally, simply makes music that is really good, as related already, which drives both these processes; but along with that, it also writes songs about themes so charged and serious, and then sings them so sincerely, that hipsters simply can't take it. How can a band, we think, not only write about the alienation and tedium of modern life, but then also play them so passionately and with so much belief in them, in oneself, in the action being taken, with, for crying out loud, a marching drum and brass?

[079] The openness to earnest expression welcome in mainstream culture suggests a fact about it that has thus far only been implied, as a corollary of what has been said about indie culture – this is mainstream culture's lack of *a priorism*: Partakers in mainstream culture, who come from the same or similar demographic backgrounds as those of indie culture, would, presumably, experience the same world as the latter. However, through sheer false consciousness, they believe the world to be something that it very much is not. They come to see modes of being and

passionate, elevated subjectivities possible that are inconsistent with what the world holds for us – economically, politically and physically.

[080] Where indie sentiments turn to outright repudiation are towards music that expresses not just earnest attitudes about daily life and love, such as with Arcade Fire and The Strokes, but attitudes about a magnitude of exalted being that seem indubitably out of question and immature right now. Hence hipsters' resentment towards Coldplay. First, Coldplay, even more than The Strokes, reached a very high level of commercial success, and was regarded as amazing, one-of-a-kind rock music when in fact, of course, there was much lesser-known music of the same calibre as Coldplay. This led to all the talk about Coldplay, and by association Coldplay itself, coming across as annoying to people with indie sensibilities. But with signs of the decay beginning with *X&Y* in 2005, increasing with *Viva La Vida or Death and All His Friends* in 2008, and finally going over the edge with *Mylo Xyloto* in 2011, Coldplay now only makes music about being in an utterly fantastical territory of exaltation. For example, the song “Viva La Vida” itself, which is either about being, and particularly, dying as, Napoleon; or about a more general being reaching heavenly transcendence. With *Mylo Xylotos*, Coldplay was firmly in a hopeless state of starry being, as can be seen with songs such as “Paradise,” in which Chris Martin displayed his lyrical standards having fallen from the actually moving and deep, such as in “The Scientist” from 2001's *A Rush of Blood to the Head*, to irremediably lowbrow with lines such as “I'd rather be a comma than a full stop.”

[081] Other examples thoroughly from the mainstream of such music include Imagine Dragons and Fun. The Image Dragons song “Radioactive,” for example, fills one, or attempts to fill one

with, a sense of tremendous excitement and power about one's being, which we find miscued and vulgar for certain, but also possibly fake and abject. Fun, in its most successful song, "We Are Young," sings a chorus of "Tonight / We are young / So let's set the world of fire / We can burn brighter than the sun" to a debt-ridden and precarious generation unsure of all its social safety nets. Either the song is simply nihilistic and about mass suicide in the face of a prospect-less world; or, if it is about a lofty and invincible state of being, to sincerely enjoy the song, one would have to be living in blissful ignorance, blissful credit card debt, be drunk when listening to the song, or simply be well-off and white-collar. Of course, we do not consciously weigh these realities when faced with this song; rather, we contain an understanding of how things are within us, and are always unconsciously viewing the world through this innate understanding.

[082] But while we know life today isn't so exciting, we do wish it was. Just as artists like Devendra Banhart and Angel Olsen do yet have clear sincere feelings they wish to convey, we do have a deep, though largely repressed, longing for being earnest beings, with lives that were not captured by *OK Computer* and *Kid A*. The desire to be beings with the possibility of exciting lives, of being *subjects*, which is to say *active* subjects, exists in us, and will likely exist in us—for reasons explained ahead—so long as we are conscious entities living a life with the existential surplus of self-consciousness and living in a world with productive social surplus.

[083] This deep desire in us explains the other category of art we enjoy and artifacts we engage with. As laid forth before, all objects—art and artifacts at the center of this effect—have their own *ras*, convey it to us, and in spectacular conditions, not just contribute to our qualia of that *ras*, but also contribute to our qualia of ourselves as associated with or carrying a scent of that

ras. So, we seek art and artifacts which have elements to them that in the past had genuine earnestness.

[084] But the fact is that typewriters, record players and old-fashioned bicycles emanate *rases* that have an extra-capitalist earnestness and authenticity that almost nothing made today has. And we enjoy vicariously experiencing that earnestness and authenticity. Briefly, when engaging with these objects, our self-image and *ras* about ourselves becomes that of people from the age these artifacts originate from, from an age with a greater sense of historical movement and modern(ist) optimism. If we lose ourselves in these objects, however briefly, we can feel ourselves to be subjects in a time when subjects lived actively, fully and sincerely. Our wanting to use a typewriter, sitting at the window looking onto the street, smoking a cigarette, is a return of the repressed – a repressed desire to be earnest in the given social conditions, to have an existential state-of-being of yore that was unabashedly proud.

[085] The same desires motivate our listening to music such as Tom Waits, who sings of a working class, soldier's, or loafer's life, and conveys a *ras* of what it was like to live “authentically”—or so constructed now—in America. His blues-influenced sound perfectly complements his reminiscences on diners, old houses, mules, roughing it out in Chicago in hopes for a better life, or being kicked out of home as a grown man for trying to be an actor. The *ras* created is of an unerring Americana-in-the-superlative, which we can soak in, feeling ourselves to have authentic lives for the duration we are absorbed in his music, which is, not to imply otherwise, certainly compositionally and lyrically impressive and enjoyable in its own right. But if we need to feel like a bohemian, a romantic or a down-and-outer, in a pre-post-industrial time,

in an America still unblemished by the omnipresence of capital, an America where, thus, if one was a white man, one could still lead a life of great romance and adventure and—frequently disappointed in his songs—passion – if we wish to immerse ourselves in such being, we could do little better than listen to Tom Waits.

[086] Sun Kil Moon, the project of the San Francisco-based, but originally and brazenly midwestern Mark Kozelek, makes use more so of a minimalist folk sound, as opposed to Tom Waits' blues influences. Unlike Waits, again, he doesn't write songs about a past and a life he himself has never lived – his music is about a life that many, if not most of us, could relate to; indeed, parts of some of his songs almost all of us could relate to, such as the songs “I Love My Dad” and “I Can't Live Without My Mother's Love” from his 2014 album *Benji*, and the part about his grandmother in the song “Micheline” from the same album. Kozelek writes about his own life, his childhood, people he knew growing up, his family, friends; in general, life with authentic feeling and tenderness in an America well subject to neoliberalism and its curse. His artistry lies not in a nostalgia for lives that none of us had, as Tom Waits does, but a life that all of us had, to some degree – growing up and suffering the indignations of growing up, and remembering the tenderness of those bittersweet years. His expression is drop-dead earnest in singing of these things. Given the instrumental minimalism that puts his vocals and his words to the fore, his singing that rises and falls in melody and intensity—indicating thought, a gesture of sincerity, to his art—and his full-bodied, strong voice, everything about his music is earnest and sincere. Even when, for example, in the aforementioned part from the song “Micheline,” when he croons “My grandma” seven times in a tone full of tenderness and remembrance (or for that matter when he similarly croons “My friend Brett” or “Micheline” seven times), it does not seem

in the slightest insincere or tongue-in-cheek. There is something about Kozelek's personality and persona that allows this level of undaunted sincerity in singing about his grandma, or Richard Ramirez “who died today of natural causes,” or even about eating ramen and drinking green tea, or about being ignored, the following day in school, by the first girl whose body he explored when a teenager. However, it is also a function of his subject matter, all matter that can be subject to nostalgia, that makes this level of sincerity possible. Childhood was invariably a time for all of us in which we were not aware of the socio-existential situation. So by going there, by letting ourselves be transported to even *another's* childhood—his songs are so detailed that one cannot abstract from them and find oneself in one's own childhood, while listening to them at the same time—we can feel our existence to be earnest again.

[087] For a portentous politics, we need to be able to feel this level of sincerity and commitment not just towards our childhood, but towards our world and situation as a whole. We need to find ourselves as active beings, because the task of creating a free, just socio-existential order—an order whose bud has sufficiently developed in today's order—is a thoroughly active process, requiring action, not paltry passive being as *ras*-bearing images. But, we have seen, where subjectivity has been fully developed by the means of representation, to bring our selves at a sufficient degree of *detachment* from ourselves, to be able to grasp and follow ourselves, these selves that could be grasped have become passive selves, because of both the nature of the means—the spectacle—via which the representation occurred, and because of the fact that those whose subjectivities have most efficaciously been subject to society's productive and representative motors have also been subject to these in such a way that an ardent, active form of being seems a charade.

[088] This is where we are today. The thralls of postmodernity, of an internalized capitalist realism, hold us captive in a state where our natural state of mind is one in which escape, or any action, seems indecorous. The art we create, accordingly, also happens to be such that we feel only anachronistically full subjects, or which expresses and reinforces the mildness and passivity of how we feel our existence to be – living in yesterday, or living with a whisper, that is the nature of so much of our art. Anesthetic is this effect of this aesthetic. Yet, it shows, we yearn for the time when our being was oriented not only towards experience of the self, but of the self being active.

[089] We have reached the end of an epoch. From here, we can either press and struggle towards states of being wherein—finally—we have fused experience of the self and a self to which there is something to be experienced; or we can continue existing in timid passivity as history itself stagnates, and we remain passive beings, non-subjects, while—the one necessitates the other—the world, all the natural and social evolution that has been accomplished by the dialectic of all Reality, this world, our world, crumbles.

[090] The missing link is that of an active self, a subject that acts, that is worth experiencing and being one with. Our new epoch will be one in which our states of being will be hardly being, but will be states of doing – or, it shall not be at all.

ANTHROPOCENE

SUBJECT

[091] Subject: of a narrative – a sentence or a life. A subject *under* a social order. Subject as under representation in a narrative. Through the narrative the subject must alter in some fundamental way; must go from subject S_1 to subject S_2 . Otherwise the narrative is not about S_1 ; it is about something misconstrued as a subject. Or, if at the start and end, nothing has changed, if through the narrative, nothing happens, it is not a narrative at all.

[092] Things must happen for a narrative to be a narrative. Let us take a man in a thunderstorm. In the beginning, a man is standing in a field. The clouds roll in. The man still stands there. A downpour begins; man does nothing. Through a storm, through thunder and lightning, the man does nothing. The storm subsides, the clouds clear; the man has done nothing.

[093] The same story could have been told without the man, and it still would have been a narrative. The subject could have been construed to be the storm. “The storm came and left.” The storm, obviously, altered in that it is no longer how or where (or when, of course, but that would be true for any narrative) it was. But as soon as the man comes in, it makes far more sense for the narrative to be *about* the man; we immediately start framing it around the man. Even if, as in the representation above, the man does nothing. But even this “doing nothing” is a doing; it

is an earnest action to find oneself in a storm and do absolutely nothing.

[094] Moreover, it is more of a “doing” than the storm's, which is why, with the man in the picture, the narrative immediately becomes about him. Before the onset of a conscious entity into the picture, one could go along with “the storm did...” But as soon as a conscious entity arrives, the doings of all other entities but the conscious entity's no longer seem these former entities' doings; they, the non-conscious entities' doings, become part of a natural process where there is no meaningful difference between these entities' being and their doing. (Their existence is the same as their essence.) The conscious entity, now, “does” in a purer sense than all else, because—even if one denies free will to this conscious entity, and views it and everything else from a deterministic framework—the doing came *from* it in a way that the storm's coming and going did not come *from* the storm.

[095] Whether because of the storm or something(s) else, the conscious entity has conjured within it a *desire* to stay where it is. Its doing, its action, then, is a fulfillment of this desire. It is because of this originating space that is the conscious entity's subjectivity, the man's desire, it is because of this space where causes are concentrated and an effect emerges with surely, a “natural” causal relation to the cause, but a complex, non-linear one, it is because of this space that what comes via this entity is a doing, rather than, as now appears in the case of the storm, a happening.

[096] As for the subject as a subject of a narrative, under a narrative representation, the conscious entity has undergone a fundamental alteration over the course of the narrative, through

what has happened, in a way the storm did not. The conscious entity, once its existence is posited, has the one necessary essence on the basis of being a “conscious entity,” of being conscious, and has undergone a qualitative alteration in and of its consciousness. With its conscious regard of its desire and with acting on its desire, its consciousness is no longer of that desire—indeed, it feels the world as well differently now, otherwise, the desire was a phantom, or pointless—it is of something else. So, with respect to its fundamental, only, essence, it has altered. With the storm, however, just by passing from one place to another, it has not altered, in such a central, fundamental way; because it is not in the essence of a storm to shift from “here” to “there”; it is in its essence to be a storm (there is no gap between its being and doing, as stated above), and the shift from “here” to “there” is necessary to the operation of a storm, but incidental to being a storm.

[097] We are conscious entities, we know this, and we possess the ability to represent ourselves in and as narratives. In fact, it is only *by* representing ourselves (as narratives) that we exercise our existential surplus of self-consciousness, and with the struggles—psychic and social—to manage this representation, bring about the dialectic, the movement of history, that brings us closer to internal and external states of liberation.

[098] But to represent ourselves as narratives, consciousness itself is not enough, as has been seen. Subject requires object. There must be interaction between the world and consciousness in such a way that there is *action* on the part of (what now becomes) the subject. Without this doing—that is, acting on one's consciousness, on desire—there cannot be the fundamental transformation in the being that allows self-representation as subjects in the narrative, that thus

allows a true narrative, allows history; there cannot be the fundamental transformation in the being from one consciousness to the next, that makes the narrative be about the being, about ourselves. Consciousness only makes us conscious entities; but it is action that makes us subjects, it is action that enables self-representations in history, and through that operation, drives the dialectic. In a word, without active being, the dialectic cannot move.

[099] Back to today, the here and now. We are at a point where our doing and our progressions in consciousness have gotten us as far as we can go in the socio-existential order as it has been thus far. We have, in the last decades, been in a standstill. It is natural. If we are to move any forward, the forces of productivity and subjectivity will move us squarely out of the times that have borne us so far—the holocene—and will land us into the future.

[100] There are thus two options – to stay in the current rut and let that be our end, let that be *the end*; or to find ways of feeling the world to be the object that can instill in us the fire and will for active being, for being subjects, a fire—no aloof furnace, but a fervent wildfire—one that will light our way into the Anthropocene.

ANTHROPOCENE

[101] There is no difference between the human world and the natural world. That is to be the bedrock of all thought and actions in our new epoch.

[102] The term “anthropocene” is currently under official consideration at the Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society of London to designate the geological period for when human activities have had a significant global impact on the Earth's ecosystems. The term was first used in its current sense in the 1980's by the ecologist Eugene F. Storer, and has been gaining prevalence in discourse outside the Earth Sciences—thus far, mainly, it must be admitted, in humanities departments of universities, particularly English departments—through the Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist, Paul Crutzen. His postulation, and those following from it, are simple: Human activity has so significantly affected the Earth's atmosphere in recent centuries, that they could well constitute a new geological epoch for the Earth's lithosphere. Or, more broadly, the postulations extended from his idea, that this phase—whose starting point has not been settled on—constitutes a new epoch for all of Earth, not just the lithosphere: “Since [the agricultural revolution], we have made the world our anthill: the geological layers we are now laying down on the Earth's surface are marked by our chemicals and industrial waste, the pollen of our crops, and the absence of the many species we have driven to extinction. Rising sea levels are now our doing. As a driver of global change, humanity has outstripped geology.”²⁶ Sentimentality, again, is to be shunned. No nostalgia, no rhapsody – this is reality, and nothing is called for but looking at it as it is – *yathā-bhuta*.

26 Jediah Purdy, "Should We Be Suspicious of the Anthropocene?" Aeon Magazine, March 31, 2015, Accessed April 9, 2015.

[103] While the postulation may be simple, its theoretical and practical implications could be boundless. The Anthropocene is a proposition to raise a thousand questions. One debate today is, if at all it is accepted be a valid concept, when did it start? With the agricultural revolution? If this is so, it would more or less have to usurp the existing term and phase, Holocene, altogether. The industrial revolution? Since the time there started being consensus among scientists and the public that we were seeing the effects of climate change? Or, we should propose, from the moment when humanity, in this purported “age of humanity,” truly takes charge of its destiny – when this “its” means both humanity's and the earth's, *and* neither, since the two truly are no longer to be differentiated as they have been?

[104] To talk about the Anthropocene is also talk about endings. Is civilization, to put it plainly, ending? What kind of catastrophes are we looking at – not just in the abstract, but in the real, in specificity: What will be the precise effects of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere? Of ocean acidification? Or biodiversity loss? Or top soil depletion? Or water scarcity? In a way, to talk about the Anthropocene is to stop living in denial: Not the denial of the right wing, but the denial that even we on the left have – denial of the full implications that we are certain to face of the effect our civilization has had on the Earth, denial of the fact that unless radical shifts in terms of energy usage and infrastructure take place *with no further delay*, then we are looking at catastrophe.

[105] The math is simple:

“1) 2C:

There is overwhelming agreement – from governments, corporations, NGOs, banks, scientists, you name it – that a rise in temperatures of more than 2C by the end of the century would lead to disastrous consequences for any kind of recognised global order.

2) 565 gigatons:

'Scientists estimate that humans can pour roughly 565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by mid-century and still have some reasonable hope of staying below 2C,' is how McKibben crisply puts it. Few dispute that this idea of a global 'carbon budget' is broadly right.

3) 2,795 gigaton:

This is the amount of carbon dioxide that if they were burned would be released from the proven reserves of fossil fuel – ie the fuel we are planning to extract and use.”²⁷

[106] The interpretation of the numbers is also simple: We have five times the fossil fuels than we can burn. Social movements, political initiatives and corporate enlightenment do not currently seem to be moving us in the direction of not burning them. Indeed, according to the International Energy Agency, if fundamental shifts do not take place by 2017, fossil fuel civilization will be set to take us past that 2 degrees Celsius mark: “The energy-related infrastructure then in place will generate all the CO₂ emissions allowed”—that is, all that can

²⁷ Rusbridger, Alan. "Climate Change: Why the Guardian Is Putting Threat to Earth Front and Centre." *The Guardian*. March 6, 2015. Accessed April 7, 2015.

emitted before the temperature goes beyond a 2 degree Celsius rise—“leaving no room for additional power plants, factories and other infrastructure unless they are zero-carbon, which would be extremely costly.”²⁸ If the grid is developed to this extent, to more emit more than 565 gigatons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, by 2017—as seems likely: if not by 2017, then surely by 2020—then the only choice for us will be either to stop using this infrastructure after it has been laid in place, a prospect that the existing politico-economic system will only allow if forced to, or we will have to fully dismantle this infrastructure—the fossil fuel infrastructure as well as the politico-economic infrastructure—to avoid burning all that carbon.

[107] The need for social restructuring, thus, will become even more necessary in the coming few decades, as ecological crises exacerbate current trends of inequality:

“[I]t’s common wisdom that rising sea levels will first affect some of the world’s poorest people, notably in Bangladesh and coastal India. But it’s much worse than that grim geographic coincidence. Wealth has always meant some protection from nature’s cruel measures. In fact, that is the first spur to technology and development of all kinds: not to be killed. Tropical diseases with changing range will find some populations well-equipped with vaccination and medicine, others struggling with bad government and derelict health systems. When seas rise fast, even the feckless but rich US will begin adapting fast, and coastal flooding will be

28 International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2011*, (Paris: International Energy Agency, 2011), p. 40

classified in the rich-world mind as a catastrophe of the poor.

So will starvation. A legal regime of unequal Anthropocene vulnerability is well underway. Take the vast, long-term leases that Chinese companies have entered into for some of Africa's richest farmland. When drought, soil exhaustion or crop crisis puts a pinch on global food supply, contracts and commerce will pull trillions of calories to fat-and-happy Beijing."²⁹

However, the instability caused by further inequality could be catastrophic in itself to global security, as the world's operation does depend on all the health and coordination of all its regions. So, this instability must also be prevented at all costs. The world of climate change must be a socially just world; or, it may not be a world at all.

[108] These are not matters of a distant future, though, and so, more than anything else, to talk about the Anthropocene is to talk of the present. After all, in a drought-stricken California, these forces of inequality are already mushrooming, as covered by *The New York Times*:

“The fierce drought that is gripping the West — and the imminent prospect of rationing and steep water price increases in California — is sharpening the deep economic divide in this state, illustrating parallel worlds in which wealthy communities guzzle water as poorer neighbors conserve by necessity. The daily water

²⁹ Purdy, "Should We Be Suspicious of the Anthropocene?"

consumption rate was 572.4 gallons per person in Cowan Heights from July through September 2014, the hot and dry summer months California used to calculate community-by-community water rationing orders; it was 63.6 gallons per person in Compton during that same period.”³⁰

After all, 2017 is only two years from now. To talk of the Anthropocene, then, is to talk in and of urgency. It is to talk in and of urgency, or it is to talk of a certain apocalypse.

[109] If this seems like a dire, dismal situation, that is because it is one. However, it is easy to lose sight of all that we have at our disposal on such grim occasions. What we have, as seen, is nothing short of the material and subjective means at our disposal to not only—questions of political organization and action postponed for a minute more—solve the ecological and economic crises we are in, but also to unleash these means in search of a radical re-imagining and reworking of all facets of our being. The Anthropocene could be the epoch not only when we have altered, fundamentally, the Earth; but also, to go along with that alteration, to complete a dialectical movement—*the* dialectical movement—the epoch when we alter our conceptions and our practices of being and reality. The Anthropocene and the ecological realities it will bring to the surface will also constitute such a thunderous return to the Real that time, that metaphysical dimension we have successfully repressed over the last few decades, will be restored, fitfully, uncomfortably, likely even traumatically—but do we not know that the

30 Adam Nagourney and Jack Healy, "Drought Frames Economic Divide of Californians," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2015. Accessed April 26, 2015.

individual subject only comes to be, biologically, by the initial traumatic event of birth? The restoration of time as a part of reality, which we had so blissfully avoided since the Cold War, and much more critically since global warming, will be unavoidable, but that will also have the effect, by opening up a narrative in which to not act is to face collective physical nonexistence, of Subjectifying ourselves again.

[110] Along with envisioning the Earth-Human Machine, the complex of organic and inorganic vitality of tomorrow, the nitty-gritty task of re-imagining politics must also be approached and boldly undertaken. We have already seen and felt how we experience the world and ourselves fundamentally differently from when the Communist project began. How can the visions, the tenors and the methods of that project suit us, when we ourselves are not the same? The kind of earnestness—Holocenic, we could call it—that the twentieth century Left had cannot suit us, because we feel the world differently—both because we are different feel-ers and because it is not the same either—and thus must relate to it differently.

[111] These questions shall be returned to further ahead, for right now, the task that must be dealt with before that, now that the situation as it exists today has been laid forth in all the detail necessary—in its subjective and physical implications—is to figure how we might become subjects at all, how we might be active beings, for if we are not to act on the world, feeling it differently would be pointless.

[112] Everything comes together. Not only is subjecthood necessary to be politically active—though, causally speaking, as seen, it is activeness that makes being subjecthood—but it is also a

dialectical progression which, if made, because of the readiness of material conditions alongside the existential conditions which could make this leap to subjectivity possible, would entail a co-occurring progression in material conditions as well from the existing order. If we are to become subjects, active beings, we will have overcome the socio-existential threshold of the Holocene, culminated in its present mode of capitalism. The situation is one of a break with and a violation of simple, linear causality. Indeed, the dialectic is ripe.

AESTHETIC

[113] We can all agree that as manifestations of postmodernity, whatever we are, we are not much of subjects. Our being consists of having self-images and relishing in them – a state which by definition does not entail interaction with a reality beyond that of unreal representations. We who live with *a priori* knowledge of postmodernity, or now, live with knowledge of “late” postmodernity, experience a thorough “waning of affect.”³¹ Jameson: “As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings—which it may be better and more accurate, following J.-F. Lyotard, to call ‘intensities’—are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria.”³²

31 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 10

32 Jameson pp. 15-16

[114] This is an exciting situation. It is true that we need, today, an activation of the subject. However, because of the discontinuity that has taken place in the last few decades in there even being a subject, whatever subject emerges today will emerge from this radical discontinuity, from this temporal break, and so, will contain the potential to actually *live* a radical departure from the past. If, consistently, the fundamental fact of the Age of Humans is that there no longer exist distinct “humanity” and “nature,” appropriately, then, the new subject will not be a “human” subject as we have known them – known ourselves. In context of the temporal break of postmodernity and our coming advance into the Anthropocene, it makes full sense to talk of the post-human subject, of the transcendence of the self as a category: “The self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.”³³ It cannot be otherwise: the Anthropocene, as following from the historical gap of postmodernity, is a setting to zero of the clock of subjecthood brought about by all subjecthood and lack thereof prior.

[115] As seen earlier, we do desire to be subjects, to be active beings. Thus much of the art we engage in. There are still displays of earnestness—indicative of the potential for real action—that do yet seem permissible for us to express or engage in – we can yet sing about love, and few things could be more reassuring today. The problem with the works that have been examined earlier is that the way they makes us feel about ourselves does not activate us as subjects. This is because they do not have a *ras* to them from which a conscious being can respond and derive desire to act. The *ras* of our art—the only objects existing purely for *ras* and not for other utility—creates the *ras* of our world, and the *ras* of our world is what interacts with us, gives us qualia.

33 Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). 249

The qualia the *ras* of the world gives us have two sides to them: first, the impression of what the world is like – “what is its inner potential to be worked on?”; and second, our own feeling about ourselves, our self-conception – the *ras* of the world, by seeing ourselves in this world, also tells us, “what is *our* inner potential to work, to act?”

[116] The guitar music of the twentieth century can only put us back in a trance of and in the twentieth century; it can only make us feel, temporarily, the way a subject of the twentieth century could be; or it can make us feel like a being that has only a mild, limited amount of earnestness that it can express and act with. What we need is an aesthetic that can activate us as subjects – an aesthetic that can make us feel a world in which we can feel ourselves to be beings with authentic, sincere, lives in which action seems natural, an aesthetic that can make us feel ourselves to be full subjects that can act in a world in which action is possible.

[117] Electronic music is one genre that could fulfill such a purpose. The degree of power, of raw dynamism and ebullience given off by much electronic music being made today would seem ridiculous if done in indie rock. Other genres that contain that level of power are also regarded by those with strong *a priorism* with more than a degree of reservation in terms of being able to sincerely feel their emotion and power – for example, metal, for expressing anger, general dreariness or passion of some other sort, or post-rock, for conveying sublimity. (Sigur Rós, which uses an overt, reverberating Icelandic *ras* to actually complement its ethereality and loftiness and make these aspects believable and harmonious, stands as a prominent exception in the case of post-rock.)

[118] Electronic, however, doesn't seem fake. Consider, for example, the Dan Deacon song “Wham City,” from his 2007 album *Spiderman of the Rings*. It starts gently, with an electronic hum. It gets louder, as further electronic drones complement it, an unobtrusive, simple jingle repeating itself, and then another layer of buzzing, when, at almost two minutes into the song (out of almost twelve minutes), one of the layers of buzzing bursts into a strong buzz akin to an uncontrolled, yet beautifully manifesting, burst of current. This is also backed by a (non-electronic-seeming) drum played in a simple yet strong way—like a war drum—to back this burst of current. At almost two-and-a-half minutes a synthetically produced (or so it sounds) chorus of vocals appears with childlike, fantastical lyrics: “There is a mountain of snow, up past the big glen / We have a castle enclosed, there is a fountain / Out of the fountain flows gold, into a huge hand / That hand is held by a bear who had a sick band / Of ghosts and cats / And pigs and bats / With brooms and bats / And wigs and rats / And play big dogs like queens and kings / And everyone plays drums and sings / About big sharks / Sharp swords / Beast bees / Bead lords / Sweet cakes / Mace lakes / O ma ma ma ma ma ma ma ma.” These lines do not seem strange. Rather, the strong electronic zone created by the sounds till that point seem to have established a permissible realm of fantasy. We have been taken out of our world—though by technologies very much of our world—and have been allowed to express ourselves in ways that would not seem appropriate to a typical guitar-bass-drums-backed indie song. It is somewhat like the effect that the novel electronic space of a video game created by the Nintendo system, for example, allowed us to play in fantasy worlds where Italian plumbers jumped around on clouds and leapfrogged off mushrooms to gain energy and rescued princesses. After these lines are repeated once again, and a brief return to the sounds going on earlier, though amplified in the force of the drones and beats, at 4 minutes and 17 seconds into the song, a final layer of melody

is added. This one is continuous, unlike the discrete jingle earlier, and feels like a plain smack across the face, so strongly does it rise and take one with it above the realm we were already in. This is the most exhilarating part of the song – one feels as if one is on a joyride on a vitalizing lightning bolt in a rainbow-filled space above the smog-line of a metropolis. This goes on till seven minutes into the song, when it dampens briefly, allows us to breathe, before, slowly it picks up with its drones again. Vocals come on, Dan Deacon's, though through an electronic muffling mechanism, sings: “I hope in my heart that we on a whole / Will die and the earth be left alone / Just beast and bee and fish and tree / This hope I wish will someday be / That bacteria will have ate our remains / That all knowledge of us has decayed / Our burden raised the world set free / The earth returns to land and sea / Our buildings burned and highways gone / I love my friends and everyone / but we've had our chance let's move aside / let time wash us out with the tide” – and then we return to yet another couple rounds of high-powered “There is a mountain of snow ...” Deacon's lyrics, though coming through as muffled and hardly comprehensible, are in themselves such a strong statement that it is difficult to see even Deacon expressing them in an attitude that isn't inauthentic or feigned. But if they were in an indie rock song, unbacked by the related sounds of this song, they would surely have seemed inauthentic and fake. After this point, at about ten-and-a-half minutes, all sounds disappear except for one final round of vocals of “There is a mountain of snow,” and then, at eleven minutes, for a last hurrah, with a full symphony of electronic layers, there is this chorus one last time that fades away as the song ends. Such an exhilarating indie song would be difficult to genuinely produce today. Furthermore, the *ras* of this song is contagious and also makes us, the listeners, feel alive, buzzing, rising above a smog line; and even if into oblivion through that elevation, acting in the world in earnest ways regardless.

[119] A similar effect exists to much electronic music, even if a lot of it does embody the indie meekness described earlier. Take, for example, the 2010 Lazerhawk album *Redline*. The sound of this album is somewhat retro; but its overall sound has the effect of putting one in an automotive trance, so to speak. If there were a soundtrack to be made about going on a fast car ride at night in a street in a large city, or perhaps even in some automobile on an extraterrestrial settlement—of course, many soundtracks for such scenes have been made—this would be it. The music is high-energy, fast-paced, but also with a layer echoing spaciness that creates a realm of not just action, but action in a surreal, transcendent, and quite possible risk-laden space. Song titles such as “Overdrive,” “Dream Machine,” “Pedal Metal” and “Interstellar” intensify such an effect.

[120] The world created by this music is not our world, yet it is not the nostalgic world of so much indie rock. Its *ras* is that of a thrilling, rousing, indeed, electrifying world, and feeling ourselves in this music, we also feel this *ras*; we feel ourselves to be things that are meant to have exhilarating existences. Finally, it appears, an opening into earnest being.

[121] The most significant fact about electronic music that leads to this effect will be set out just ahead, but one characteristic about much electronic music—not present to all individual manifestations of electronic music but certainly to some, and thus, by association, contributing to the overall *ras* of the genre and so all its individual manifestations—is its schizophrenic character. Take, for example, the music of Aphex Twin from the 2014 album *Syro*. The sounds, the notes of the songs taken in isolation, do not relate to each other in conventional musical

chord combinations or sequences. They all stand randomly, but yet in a chaotic association with one another, which by our knowledge of the genre and what it represents and is supposed to be, cohere into a song, into a work of art, for us. The disjointed, garbled, almost freakish syntheses of sounds associated with electronic music allows the genre as such to resound with subjectivities—such as ours, today—in which chains of signifiers are faltering and breaking down left and right, into an existence consisting of “a series of pure and unrelated presents in time.”³⁴

[122] What electronic music tells us, then, is that an aesthetic is yet possible—and extant—with *rases* that feel contemporaneous, consistent with today. By aesthetic we must not just think of objects commonly regarded as “works of art,” but all entities, all reality, that has a significant effect of producing a *ras* to our being, of making us feel ourselves to be a certain way. We desire this “certain way,” of course, to be one that enables and facilitates action. In the spectacle, as it is not art, but all entities that give off a *ras* and are responsible for us deriving a *ras* to ourselves, we must look to not just art in that limited sense, but reality-at-large-as-art, to make the world seem one in which action is yet possible. Aesthetics, thus, for us, is also a matter of architecture, graphic design, industrial design, fashion design, etc. A building, for example, or any spatial setting, can profoundly influence how we feel – being in a library, for example, such as the New York Public Library, in its reading room, can makes us feel like we are in the 1940's, but feeling like that is empty insofar as active being goes, because we are not in that world, and so, the feeling generated is a mere phantasm. Subject requires object – if the world does not present itself to us as being of the present moment, then we cannot feel ourselves to be subjects; the

34 Jameson p. 27

sense that we can *act* in the world is not yet activated.

[123] The aesthetic that can most activate true subjectivity today is mistaken as “futuristic,” but that is only because of our nostalgia for the past – it is, in fact, present-oriented. Take, for example, so-called “futuristic” architecture. The manifestation of a “futuristic” anything contains nothing but the productive capacities we have reached today. There may indeed be a vision or a hope about where today may lead, but the productivity and subjectivity that are tangible and sensible cannot, necessarily, be “of the future.”

[124] This is precisely what activates subjecthood—Subjectivity, we can now call it—out of conscious entities: A world that we can perceive and understand as containing productive energies not of the point up till 1960, but up till 2015. When listening to electronic music, what we are conscious of is not just the sound waves that enter us; we are moreover subliminally conscious of the electronic mode of musical—in general—cultural production; and on top of that, we are aware of the electronic mode of cultural production as having been brought about by the cumulative effects of all prior modes of production – we are aware of the electronic medium as containing within it, as it were, the record, the trace, of all prior human technological and subjective advancement. When listening to electronic music, thus, we are again in the presence of an unbroken linearity of history – the disjunction of postmodernity is negated. In the electronic sound, we have nothing but the sound of the present means of production, of the forces of history till this moment.

[125] So, when listening to this music, it is easy to feel the world as contemporaneous, to feel

ourselves in a world in which means of material and subjective production have indeed kept on advancing right till the moment we started the music, and indeed, are advancing during these moments, in which we are listening to the music, to the effect that can, as it were, jump into the current of history, and feel, *become* Subjects.

[126] With this, the process of becoming one with ourselves *as Subjects* is fulfilled. We can be one with ourselves when we listen to indie rock, flaunting our savviness to the general socio-existential situation by manifesting mildness or irony that marks the art/ifact we associate ourselves with and which then makes up our self-image. But that with which we are one is a mere self-image; it is not a subject; it is a subject only when the being we experience and are one with is a being desiring being as doing, one oozing out, by simply being aware of where it stands and that it stands there, the knowledge of itself not as a perfect, beautiful turnip or hedgerow; but knowledge of itself that (it) is of this world, of this moving world, and capable of action on it, with it.

[127] The crux of our existence, thus, becomes doing. “I am doing,” or just “I do” becomes a more accurate statement of the bare essence of our existence than “I am like this.” This is the aesthetic effect of an active, undull world on a conscious entity; this is the effect of art and artifacts which make the world come alive as happening, as a process, as inviting radiance rather than indifferent dimness, as a storm to be swept into.

[128] We have examined electronic music, but that is not the only kind of music that has this effect. In fact, we can now return to indie culture to showcase not the backward-looking creative

productions in it in (for all their merits), but now to examine the forward-looking, present-disposed, elements. Indie music, by not being slave to market demands to produce chart-topping, radio-friendly and “easy” music, is also the only scene of experimentation with music with *rases* to itself, and thus, ways of feeling ourselves, *rases* for ourselves, that are hitherto unfelt and untried.

[130] It is commonly the fusion of genres in the melting pot of indie that does this. Thus we have the music of Animal Collective. At the height of its popularity, around half a decade ago at this point, Animal Collective represented a consummation of a sound that combined elements of psychedelia (called “neo-psychedelia” in this particular current), electronic and a “world-music”-seeming sound. The net *ras* that emerged from this was an emergent property – not the mere combination of these three (and other) elements, but *by* their combination, a new *ras*, which could be engaged in, and taken for oneself, to feel oneself, with not necessarily an activating Subjectivity as electronic music would lead to, but certainly a strange, new feel about oneself that could fuse with other subjectivities and evolve into something unprecedented.

[131] One of the most interesting novel producers of affect today—one of the few artists and bands perhaps worthy of the term “avant garde” today—is of Montreal, Kevin Barnes' project. of Montreal's sound is hard to describe; Barnes utilizes a potpourri of references and sound and moods, creates a bricolage that generates a unique *ras* about it. His songs are relatively danceable, have synthesizer-generated rhythm, sometimes have jazz, funk, afrobeat and electronic influences; his vocals are high-pitched, strung-up, resorting frequently to a blasé falsetto, which frequently morphs into frenzied shrieking; and his lyrics take us to darkest

recesses of his mind, charged with psychoanalytic and psychoanalyzed angst and memories of inclement past romances, and incorporating references to French literature and classical mythology and legends, but all this, generally, with upbeat melodies and hooks. His bombastic, passionate lyrics, rising at times to the status of jangly, fevered poetry, would not work, would seem insincere, were it not for the pure *weird* space created by his other elements. Thus, for example, we have the opening of “The Past Is A Grotesque Animal,” from the *Hissing Fauna, Are You The Destroyer?* (2007): “The past is a grotesque animal / and in its eyes you see / how completely wrong you can be / ... / I fell in love with the first cute girl that I met / Who could appreciate George Bataille / Standing at the Swedish Festival discussing *Story of the Eye*”; from “Id Engager,” from *Skeletal Lamping* (2008): “Ladies I’m screaming out to you from the depths of this phallogentric tyranny / My self-conceptions awaiting your invasion clumsy penetration punishment”; and from “So Begins Our Alabee” from *The Sunlandic Twins* (2005), a song about the birth of his daughter: “The chrysalis is breaking and the superego’s waking / I’ve been a gloomy Petrarch, with a quill as weepy as Dido. / You’re my mousy aesthete, you’re my buoyant cherub, it’s true. / And I never want to be your little friend, the abject failure.” The lyrics, plump with psycho-romantic gore, not only reveal the depraved and neurotic corners of his mind, but as we experience the music, we realize that these corners are not only present in his mind, but, to some extent, in ours as well. His stage persona—an contemporary indie David Bowie of sorts—also contributes to the creation and projection of a new, queer subjectivity, way of being, way of feeling oneself. Where Angel Olsen and Devendra Banhart allow an earnest message to be put forth by dimming down the net earnestness created by all other elements of their music but their preferred—typically lyrically conveyed—message, Kevin Barnes allows his earnest, lyrically conveyed messages to be conveyed by riding on a crest of waves of sound and effort so bizarre,

that given these waves, what sits on top of them *cannot* seem “too much,” but rather, the message atop them is complemented by the *ras* of the overall song; it infused the message with a new, different vitality.

[132] The immensely interesting question opened up by of Montreal and music like it is as follows: If, say, the qualia of contemplating a theme as common as love, or mental illness, or simply one's own inner demons, under the *ras* of of Montreal, is so different from the qualia of contemplating these same themes under the *ras* of other music that makes use of more conventional, “twentieth century” artistic formulations – then couldn't it be asked whether these latter qualia, from the conventional-seeming music, also seemed as bizarre and fresh when they first appeared? To feel “love” or “being young” or, in general, “being,” from the *ras* of the Beatles—we were already in the spectacular age then, *rases* did exist similarly as a social fact—could well have felt as strange and new as “love,” “being young,” and, indeed, “being” now feel with the *ras* of of Montreal.

[133] The question, then, is—the same kind of authenticity that, say, Bruce Springsteen is associated with today—namely, as conveying the *ras* of an authentic (American) state of being, could that same authenticity, though in a qualitatively different *ras*, be associated with an indie “avant garde” act such as of Montreal? If the myriad pastiche effects of indie, and the *ras* of being with the contemporaneity of electronic music are recognized as art which can make subjects of us—if, indeed, along with other social actions, we transform into Subjects, with them as our background score, our guiding voices, could of Montreal, say, one day, not have the same feel of “Americana” that Tom Waits has today? Coming to consciousness about the strange,

frightening, bright possibilities of the day—including and associated with the *rases* of being today as presented by indie music such as of Montreal—would allow us to derive qualia of experiencing ourselves as truly “authentic,” and, as our goal is, as being active subjects in the world.

[134] Indie culture, thus, does have radical political potential, as does electronic music, the music capturing and conveying the means of production, the material, the “current” reality, of our age. The latter lets us adopt qualia and *rases* of being that have never been had before by humanity, thus allowing guises and forms with which to center the radically new states of being demanded by the Anthropocene. The latter, of course, makes us feel subjects of the moment, Subjects that can act in earnest in and on the world, because the *ras* of electronic technology is, after all, of the moment, the productive means most responsible for making today what it precisely is.

[135] Once we are Subjects, as we are now, the task of actual politics can be tended. However, before approaching that, a reminder about the demographics of indie culture and the state of the world at large is warranted: For many demographics of the population, in this nature and in all others, Subjecthood is not such a challenge. The world is already Sisyphus's mountain, one requiring work and action on it to merely maintain existence. The culture—art and artifacts—emerging from the oppressed peoples of the world is authentic to begin with, because it is the expression of full Subjects, with sincere desires and appraisals. The prime example of such culture in the United States would be hip-hop culture, deriving originally from the experiences of marginalized immigrant communities in the South Bronx in the late 1970's and 80's, and now

still, at its core, in its very essence, an expression of authenticity and defiance, particularly for African American, and secondarily for Latino populations around the country. If one can engage with a culture such as hip-hop without a feeling of inauthenticity or fakeness, the *ras* to be had from hip-hop is completely earnest and subject-activating.

[136] The most powerful of such hip-hop combines the attributes of belonging to an independent label, and thus giving off the *ras* of resistance, non-commodifiability and freedom; dealing in noticeably electronic production (with respect to this association with African-American culture, Afro-futurism as a broader movement showcases the radical potential of such bricolage); and containing overtly political messages – an attribute possible most naturally only in inherently earnest forms of expression such as hip-hop. An exemplar case of such music is the artist P.O.S., of the Minneapolis-based Doomtree Collective. Unlike those of other political rappers like Dead Prez or Rebel Diaz, who rap about society directly, his songs are frequently primarily about radical subjectivities. As an example, consider the lyrics of his song “Weird Friends,” from his 2012 album *We Don't Even Live Here*:

“Bolt cutter, box cutter, brick / Take that shit, take no shit / Bolt
cutter, box cutter, brick / Take that shit, shake that shit / I ain’t like
yall / I’m into weird shit / I’m in the back getting weird with my
weird friends / hugging a bass line / hoping you feel this / and these
rhymes ain’t tight they are terrorish / and that girl’s not white she’s
an anarchist / and we float like kites through your turbulence / born
with our throats slit / self stitched / raised to aim over it / soldier

with no king / war with the war on me / I am more than this world
lets me be / so I be like a beast / let me bleed / let me see through
the fear / man, I don't even live here / self-taught / wrong / barrel
on no kings y'all come along / we never tryna be the best at some
bullshit / naw let the rest crawl Imma get out right now / this
world's got a whole lot of locked doors / we decided not to live
here anymore / found a way to trade tragic for savage / we insist on
a life less average / this world's got a whole lot of locked doors /
we decided not to live here anymore / picked though the norm
didn't fit didn't stick to the script didn't care / we don't even live
here / we ain't like them / we into weird shit / me and my peers
disappear when the lights hit / roach wag / same kinda path / stash
no crap tryna gag in your coach bag / for laughs / something bout
your money / trust no rich folks empty out the tummy on your math
/ that's how I feel about that / back to that good old fashion class
warfare / aint enough and the cash got the young punks / stab any
rapper and laugh when he piss blood / so human / all flawed / found
my world tryna test those odds / best flows chose for the wreck not
the rep / when the sets done no ones up next / and no ones upset /
and no one holds breath anymore right? / bolt cutter, box cutter,
brick / explore.”

Aside from expressing a remarkable “urban” or hip-hop version of a Deleuzian nomadic

sentiment, music like this directly enlivens us as politically inclined Subjects.

[137] The reason for focusing on indie culture and its representative demographics, then, is not out of disregard for the true Subjectivity of the oppressed. It is out of a bitter recognition that the way capitalism works is by imparting the fruits of its productivities first to those better off within it. Thus, the subjectivities produced by capitalism—in particular, the existential situation generated by spectacular being, of being at maximal-remove-from-oneself and thus maximal potential to “stay with” oneself; and the bleakness of postmodern being—reach the less-oppressed first. It finds its highest expression in the subcultural and existential form of the hipster. All of us, to varying degrees, if we experience existence as the experience of ourselves and find old forms of artistic and political earnestness somewhat incredulous, embody the kind of existential development and readiness for a new kind of subjecthood as the hipster; all of us, indeed, are to some extent hipsters – that is simply the way it is.

[138] The task is to facilitate an aesthetic metamorphosis—an aesthetic that will be material and social—of the world that activates we who stand on the brink of hitherto unseen, vital states of being – into Subjects; and with us as Subjects, fight with all other Subjects of the world for an emancipated socio-existential order.

HACKER

[139] The dialectic of representation can be saved from itself (by, of course, itself), as seen. The reason we have focused so much on culture and aesthetics as opposed to politics qua politics is because of the neglect, through theory thus far, of our existential dialectic. Western intellectuals have only focused on the material dialectic; and indeed, it is important – until it could begin, the existential dialectic had to wait at the start line of history, and the latter was set off only when material conditions complemented the subjectivity humanity had been born with and had borne for millennia. But history then on has consisted as much of the unchaining of material productivity, as it has consisted of the growth of subjective productivity – a productivity towards more and more efficacious means of representing ourselves to ourselves, so as to be with ourselves as we exist, and thereby satisfy this fundamental human existential impasse. Just as we forced the movement of history by struggling over just ways to allocate our collective material surpluses and potentials, so we have also forced the movement of history by progressing in the ways we have represented ourselves existing in the world, thus influencing how we do exist in the world, the material dialectic, which then allows for new ways of self-representation.... and so on and so forth, till the present moment. This moment has been one in which we represent and experience ourselves and experience ourselves through images, through *rases*, as it is the spectacular moment. The kind of representation needed has been one that activates us as subjects. It is imperative to be activated as subjects, as this is the only way we would take political action, and push the dialectic the distance it still has to go. All this is a question of culture and art, as these are what confer *ras* on our world and our being. That is why we had to deal with these considerations in such depth – they are not more important in

themselves; they had just been ignored, in favor of efforts to figure out how to drive the material, politico-economic dialectic where we wanted it to go, not knowing the one can go nowhere without the other. But now we know—in theory—the kind of cultural and aesthetic changes that would allow us to be subjects, and thus actors of the dialectic. So the question of politics—politics qua politics—can finally be broached.

[140] It is not just a question of becoming such new Subjects, with *rases* about ourselves that are a break from how we have existed till now, of course. Yet the task of maximizing the possibilities for Subject-being, for forms of being of radically new *rases* is necessary, and for us, that is where politics can begin.

[141] The existential possibilities unleashed by all hitherto material and subjective developments in itself are at this point boundless. Still, today, we have such limited forms of being actually at our disposal, among the culture available to us. Capitalism, for all its boons and its present invisible omnipresence, is still the problematic, old foe.

[142] It is the logic, ideology and self-preserving instinct of capitalism, obviously, that still permits and oversees all production today. The world that exists today, the world whose *ras* is so bleak that it stripped us of all sincere feeling about life and made ironic, half-hearted non-subjects of us, the world that has *rases* that can fill us with no overt sense of wonder and hope for today, let alone for tomorrow. It is capitalism, our old foe, that has commodified culture and restricts and channels its production today to follow only the law of profit. Capitalism must still be confronted.

[143] In a world that has reached a level of productivity such that any facet or object of the world can generate a distinct *ras*, a distinct way of feeling one's existence, why is it that we still have such limited *rases* that we do end up experiencing? Why is it that so many of the *rases* we do experience have the effect of subduing our sincerity and the fire of our being, and force us to find sincerity in anachronistic *rases* that do not nourish us to be Subjects? It is because homogeneity in ways of being, and in ideas of what is considered good or desirable, leads to the maximal and most efficacious generation of profits. Similarity in how it is believed how things should look, similarity in how people's qualia of being are, allows for the concentration of capital and labor in a useful way that their existing in a multiplicity of differences would not allow.

[144] Information, culture, *rases*—whatever we call it—wants to be free. It is only when it is free that it can let loose all its heterogenous potential, blossom, through complexes of materiality and subjectivity, into materialities upon materialities, subjectivities upon subjectivities. We also want it to be free, for if it were free and unhindered in its flourishing—our flourishing *of it*—then we would have manifested for us a multifarious and powerful aesthetics for the world, and with that, such a myriad of *rases* to our own possible existences. The more states of being we can adopt, not only is there greater richness to our lives, but as we are to seriously move into the ontological and existential terrains of the Anthropocene, we have to take with us as many states and ways of being that we can – intense, jubilant, melancholic... all of them. Only then will we be able to fully live up to, with our actions, the blurring of natural and human boundaries that geology demands of us; only then will we be in a confident position to cope with all the travails that Earth/Us will be bringing upon ourselves.

[145] It can be seen as a matter of anthropological resilience. We are currently going through a period of not just historic biodiversity loss, but also the loss of cultural diversity. As we lose the different existential states and *rases* stored and availed of in diverse cultures, we not only squander the beauty of species, we also lose treasure-stocks of ways of experiencing things and pure knowledge that could be vital for survival across a variety of contexts. The only way this resilience can be regained is by freeing the means of cultural production and allowing for the (re)flowering and (re)flourishing of independent cultures – not “indie” culture, in its singularity and bounds, but independent, autonomous, and, very certainly, eccentric, idiosyncratic and extraordinary cultures from all pockets of society. “In order for music to free itself, it will have to pass over to the other side — there where territories tremble, where the structures collapse, where the ethos get mixed up, where a powerful song of the earth is unleashed, the great ritornelles that transmutes all the airs it carries away and makes return.”³⁵

[146] The most compelling account of the politics—organizational and subjective—of freeing the means of cultural production has been provided by MacKenzie Wark in *A Hacker Manifesto*. In this book, Wark frames the prime class conflict of our day as that between the hacker class and the vectoralist class. The hacker class refers not (just) to politically conscious computer scientists and software engineers, but more broadly to all creators of abstractions, which can be reductively formulated as “information.” In recent times, abstractions have been put under the leash of private property, which they not been, earlier. This happens, moreover, because abstractions or intellectual property, for the first time in history, has reached remarkable levels of

35 Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 104.

productivity in and of itself. So, controlling and harnesses abstractions, or more specifically, the vectors along which they flow and are transmitted in society, allows for the generation of great levels of profit. The class that emerges, controlling the vectors of the flow of information and dispossessing the hacker class of its labor, is the vectoralist class, which frequently has interests in opposition to the capitalist class.

[147] The newest class conflict is thus for the freedom of abstractions, to be able to imagine, write, code, sing, and engineer any and all words that *we* want to, and which, indeed, we need to. It may also, in terms of plain economics, be the most vital/important class struggle today. Indeed, as Wark writes in a separate essay:

“Take a look at the top Fortune 500 companies, and it is clear that in one way or another they are now mostly in the information business, with the actual mechanics of making things being increasingly subcontracted, or based on short-term leasing and contractual obligations. The oil companies are in the information-prospecting business. The car companies make most of their money in finance. The big box stores are logistics companies. The drug companies are patent farms. The big retailers all sell the same cheaply made crap but carefully manage their intangible brands. Big finance is in the information asymmetry business. All this is before you even get to the tech sector.”³⁶

36 MacKenzie Wark. "#Marx21c." ARCADE. January 19, 2015. Accessed April 3, 2015.

Or as the Critical Art Ensemble puts it, in essence:

“The privileged realm of electronic space controls the physical logistics of manufacture, since the release of raw materials and manufactured goods requires electronic consent and direction.”³⁷

[148] However, this is surely not the only class struggle that must be waged; the old class struggles still, of course, have not faded away. After all, the project of producing new *rases* to the world, of generating a new aesthetic to the world, to spur more ways of feeling the experience of the world and the self, thus leading to better representations and *rases* of being, cannot simply happen by enabling all possible means of imagining. The material basis of the world still remains, and it is also necessary to free the means of production in their most familiar sense, to physically enable the creation of the worlds we desire ... and to prevent the creation of the worlds that absolutely must be stopped. And, of course, facilitating the creation of new aesthetics and *rases*, as necessary as it is for the production of an array of possible states of being and Subjects to cross a long-awaited existential threshold, isn't the only necessary task for today and tomorrow. Indeed, life in the Anthropocene—out of ecological unavoids—will be a return to the Real. Control of material operations of society are to be unequivocally important for mere survival. Hence, Wark:

“The time is past due when hackers must come together with

37 Critical Art Ensemble, *The Electronic Disturbance* (New York: Autonomedia, 1994), pp. 16-17.

workers and farmers—with all of the producers of the world—to liberate productive and inventive resources from the myth of scarcity. The time is past due for new forms of association to be created that can steer the world away from its destruction through commodified exploitation. The greatest hacks of our time may turn out to be forms of organizing free collective expression, so that from this time on, abstraction serves the people, rather than the people serving the ruling class.”³⁸

[149] It is furthermore vitally important to seize the means of production and vectors of information, because the production and usage of information technologies is the authentic form of production of this moment. It is, in terms of labor, what is *our own*, for this time *we* belong to. As it expresses, contained within it, all productive energies—material and subjective—harnessed till this moment, the qualia of engaging with the *ras* of electronic and digital culture, as we have seen in the consideration of electronic music, activates Subjects of us like few things can. But this only happens when we feel the production of electronic or digital technologies or art to be real culture – expressions of what it is like to exist, or displays of ingenuity using the material and subjective means at our disposal, not for a directly economic function. Thus Wark was on the right track when wrote that:

“The terms hacking and hacker emerge ... in electrical engineering and computing. As these are leading areas of creative production in a

38 MacKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), paragraph 23.

vectoral world [which can also be read as, 'leading areas of production in our contemporary world'], it is fitting that these names come to represent a broader activity. The hacking of new vectors of information has indeed been the turning point in the emergence of a broader awareness of the creative production of abstraction.”³⁹

The *ras* given by authentic means of electronic-cum-digital technological and artistic production is a pivotal source of Subjectivity, and, of course, of technological and artistic production in itself, and thus, of the dialectic itself. This is why information—as both the producer and product of electro-digital culture—must be free.

[150] Those who yet doubt the political relevance of this class, consider its privileging to be a fanciful and wildly incorrect appraisal of the situation, a misconsideration of those who suffer hurt and those contribute to creating the world and making it go round, may look to past thought regarding the history of society: In the 19th century, the agrarian working class—peasants—still constituted the vast majority of working peoples. However, Marx was perspicacious enough to see the economic changes taking place and realize how they would transform society, and how the possessors of the productive energies being developed then would have to constitute the vanguard—not a party, but the productive energies embodied in the industrial working class itself—of a revolution. We are at a similar situation today. Surely, the traditional working class exists, but to think that the work it does is the work that has to be taken control of to build a society we want and need, to think that would be akin to thinking that taking control of land,

39 Wark 71

rather than also capital, was all that had to be done to build the free societies envisioned then.

[151] We who are at the fore of sensing the world for what it is and forming *rases* of it and for ourselves are hackers in essence. To sense the potential for and to form *rases* is to produce abstractions. So far our *rases* themselves have not been privatized. Whether or not we are producers of abstractions in any other way—artists, scientists, writers, engineers; even, certainly, producers of sheer affect—we are producers, and thus stewards of *rases*. It is our class responsibility to safeguard the *rases* we possess, keep them out of the thralls of commodification. For if they are commodified, existence itself, at its most fundamental, since ours is an existence of the experience of *rases*, may end to be free. Those of us who produce abstractions, technology and art have a special obligation to keep it in the commons, to let these productions have *rases* that others among us can feel and derive Subjectivity from. Our interests lie in the greatest possible means of generation of *rases* and the greatest possible Subjectivity. “Information, when it is truly free, is free not for the purpose of representing the world perfectly, but for expressing its difference from what is, and for expressing the cooperative force that transforms what is into what may be. The sign of a free world is not the liberty to consume information, or to produce it, nor even to implement its potential in private worlds of one's choosing. The sign of a free world is the liberty for the collective transformation of the world through abstractions free chosen and freely actualized.”⁴⁰ If this can be done, we have the greatest avenues for transcending the existential limitations that have defined our being since we have been existent; and thereby, for becoming new beings, suitable to, demanded by, and exalting in a new epoch.

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ORGANIZATION

[152] It is not enough to say that we must come to see ourselves as a class and then work to free the electro-digital means of production, and say that if we do so, a multiplicity of states of being would be within our grasps, particularly the directly subjective state directly resultant from the *raises* of true electro-digital culture. It is not enough to say that we must work with other labor movements, for the success of those struggles and our success—our success in being the threshold group towards trans-species states of being and doing—cannot, by necessity, happen independently. That is vague politics, and politics cannot consist of vagueness – nothing can!

[153] The charge against Left theory is that is aprogrammatic. It may have the most discerning diagnoses of our situations, but it cannot say what actually, in the realm of our free time and in our workplaces, is to be done. Without a tenable political *plan*, the sum of theory becomes useless. This charge is serious and, for sure, legitimate; thus, an attempt must be made to offer a program.

[154] The labor movement in the United States has the potency, let us face it, of a wounded, timid penguin. For one, there is not the class consciousness there used to be among the working class. Two, the segments that do have class consciousness have been turned into petty liberals; they advocate, for example, for inviolable “peaceful protest.” Three, much of the labor movement today is based on an almost completely dispensable workforce: replaceable not just by humans, but by machines – indeed, in Europe, McDonald's has already drafted thousands of

touch-screen kiosks to handle cashiering work.⁴¹ While obviously we must support those those that fight capitalism “proper” in our countries, we must pay more attention to movements in the not-yet-overdeveloped nations—indigenous groups fighting mega-dams and mines, unrest and strikes among factory-workers in China and India—because these actions are more militant, and the roles of these workers are not likely to be taken over by robots as quickly as those of their counterparts in the overdeveloped world.

[155] Alliances must further be built with the precariat of the overdeveloped world – those who work intermittent temporary jobs, the labor-drifters of Europe and North America. This class of frequently college-educated bums performs labor for an information economy simply by existing, by taking part in the creation and giving of information, even while it is unemployed. Neoliberalism creates these subjects to feed on their souls, to hold them under debt, and this class, if noncompliant to neoliberal demands that they remain a deferential reserve army of labor and not have class solidarity with the actually-employed, if they start building worlds outside the world of capital—to the small extent that can be done—and show that if they come together, they don't need the economic order – this would be menacing to the existing order.

[156] As for other intersecting forms of domination and their respective movements—such as anti-racist, feminist and LGBT/LGBTQ/LGBTQIA—we must, of course, support them. However, these forms of *domination* are not the same as economic *exploitation*; it is the latter that colors all of these: a hypothetical world with perfect gender equality—or gender abolition—could still conceivably accommodate racism; conceptually, eradicating the one does not imply or

41 Amanda Koozer, "McDonald's Hires 7,000 Touch-screen Cashiers," *CNET*, May 11, 2011, Accessed April 6, 2015.

demand the eradication of the other, even if effectively it is so. However, even at a conceptual level, one could not imagine any prevalence of racism or sexism in a society in which colored peoples and non-cis-men had maximum control over the wealth and resources of our society. Our overall task, then, is to build a politico-economic order replacing the current flawed one, *not* based upon any socially constructed hierarchies—with special consideration to race, gender, sexuality, cultural class, etc.—forms of domination not at the operative core of reality as such, but yet at the center of peoples' lived experience of reality. For this, these movements must be supported – not because they are useful to the emancipation of labor, but because they have the intrinsic value by constituting the core of the lived experiences of people. Among these movements today in the United States, the anti-racist movements have both most militant potential—the police have interpellated that subjectivity finely—and with most consciousness about capitalism; while feminism, for all its prevalence in indie cultures, and reflective of it, is by and large much more bourgeois. Of course, at a theoretical level, feminism knows the iniquities of capitalism. Yet as a living social movement, the black communities and their allies in Ferguson, Baltimore and elsewhere seem to know—with *knowledge* as embodied in their very being—like no other demographic in this country, that it is the same total oppressive system that regards some bodies as disposable in the same way it regards labor as disposable and culpable to exploitation for profit.

[157] But all these groups—labor and otherwise—must be represented by their own organizations. And we by our own. We must together form a contemporary “united front,” forward-directed, as a whole and as a whole only fully intelligent, and within the whole, fully intelligible, we as a whole our own vanguard.

[158] Organization is yet the only way sweeping political goals can be accomplished, and organization will take the form of organizations. Deleuzian fantasies about the radical potential of concatenated revolutionary machines, multitudes forming multitudinous lines of attack – these must be set aside. There is a job to be done.

[159] Our organization will be to two final goals: 1) Organizing those who are existentially at the thresholds of being able to experience—and be with—ourselves as we experience, and representing their interests of having a commons of *rases*, and thus a commons of culture and contemporaneous material productions. 2) Organizing, in general, producers of abstractions, i.e. those who create the designs, tools and *rases* of which reality at large and its *ras* is made.

[160] To be able to experience oneself as one experiences is one thing – that will in itself be a state of being-as-doing that will be liberatory and joyful. But to *be with* oneself fully is a psychological and existential task that we will reach only with much practice – *spiritual* practice even, perhaps, as it is called. But as processes of the production of materiality and subjectivity keep on developing, after we have crossed the threshold to the next state of being, society will keep on changing and allowing other groups to enhance the tension in their image-existences to go further and further in this dialectic as well.

[161] Whatever means of abstract production we do manage to extract from the realm of commodities and commodity production, this will have a degree of an impact on the overall material and subjective conditions of society, to the effect of weakening capital's holds on other

means of production and its defense against various arms and legs of labor. Naturally, also, the advances made by these arms and legs will also make conditions better for us.

[162] Of course, though, it is unlikely that we—or any other “labor struggle”—will succeed in collectivizing all means of production in our respective realms. Thus we will also be forced to spend energy on the defensive, as was noted at the beginning, or at least on two fronts.

[163] First, to keep a stable, relatively sane political order. This does not mean that we are to put our fates in a Party that claims to lead us to revolution. If somehow there rise to political power parties that do collective private property—which is to say, without transferring its ownership to a totalitarian state apparatus—then, excellent! But we cannot count on this to happen. All we need to guarantee is that society does not retrogress further in certain basic provisions like social securities and rights of economic organization. So we must keep a foot of sway in the door of politics as well. It would, of course, be ideal if we weren't to depend on any political party wanting a piece of the pie of establishment power, but we are, as noted, getting back up on our feet after suffering the injuries of the past few decades.

[164] Second, we must actively—which is to say, by participating in—support a full diversity of tactics on the environmental front, from the most paltry liberal measures to anarchist direct actions. We simply do not have the luxury to not try *everything* on this front. The environmental movement in this country at least—and even more so, arguably, in Europe (in terms of an non-governmental radical green politics) and in un-overdeveloped industrial giants like China and India—is not accomplishing all that is needed. Geoengineering, once further advanced within a

few decades, cannot be relied on to solve all our problems, though it can infallibly be relied on to *not* solve our problems if put into practice in a neoliberal politico-economic regime, indeed, in any regime in which those abstracting these new ways and new worlds do not have power over how these abstractions are used.

[165] Apart from these two tasks, we can devote our attention to our own proper organizing and requisitioning tasks. So how actually are we supposed to go about organizing a ragtag, disparate mass of hipsters and other immaterial laborers to collectivize means of production? Of course, it would be utterly naïve to believe that these groups are politicized to nearly the extent that is required to immediately believe in such a communistic idea. Most people in this demographic are, for sure, liberal or progressive, and thus liable to radicalization, which is why this attempt can dreamt of in the first place. The formula then, as always, is time and the representation of interests.

[166] Time will be needed. That is why we must make efforts to keep the economic front—yes, capitalism—stable, and have governments taking as much action as can be forced from them for the environment. But discourse and “education” do work. Especially when the class comes to recognize its own interests in a political program. In fact, the very fact of having an available political program, the potential that something can happen politically, will have the effect of awakening some degree of real subjectivity among us, of making us see a tomorrow bravely and see ourselves as being in time, of facilitating the process by which we would naturally want to act to make a tomorrow happen.

[167] The interests cannot, initially at least, be phrased in terms of “means of socio-existential production.” We must appeal directly to, again, lived experience. So, what is one thing that most workers—blue collar or white—do not like today? The answer – work itself. So, one political aim that must be taken up by our organizations is the reduction of the work-week. We simply do not need to work as much as we do today. We could easily have 24-hour work-weeks with the level of technological production we have reached, to maintain qualities of life that would probably be better than those we have right now. The reduction of productivity would be ecologically beneficial as well. So, that would be our demand number one.

[168] Second, we must demand massive jubilees in debt, particularly student debt—representing a bubble of \$1.2 trillion as of August 2013—because most of those being organized would agree that prices of education, at least, are criminally absurd, and that they or their peers should not have graduated with insufferable amounts of debt. In general, neoliberalism is an economy of debt: “In neoliberalism, what we reductively call 'finance' is indicative of the increasing force of the creditor-debtor relationship. Neoliberalism has pushed for the integration of monetary, banking and financial systems by using techniques revelatory of its aim of making the credit-debtor relation a centerpiece of politics.”⁴² Breaking this relation thus comes out to be akin to breaking neoliberalism itself.

[169] The third interest that must be represented is not, admittedly, one deriving from immediate experience, and so, it is toughest experience to be represented. But the demand must be made, out of desperation and sheer necessity – a demand for immediate upheavals in energy

⁴² Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of Indebted Man: An Essay on the Neoliberal Condition*, (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 23.

usage. By the time we will be in a powerful enough position to even make these demands, probably, alternative technologies to enable this, without any excuses, will also have been developed. Along with a *complete* phasing out from fossil fuels—if the idea sounds excessive or impractical, one must remember that if we don't, we will, probably, all die—we should also appeal for a reduction in the total energy consumed by society, even if it is through renewable sources. After all, present forms of oppression only derive their actual, physical execution-power from the surplus of energy being used by society over and above that needed to maintain a decent quality of life for its members – the most obvious example is the energy going into the military-industrial complex. Indeed, “[a]s UK climate change campaigner and author George Marshall has pointed out, we could cut flights (and probably all transport emissions) and slash energy used for home heating by 80 percent overnight by going back to the way people used to live as short a time ago as 1972, provided we used home insulation and efficient boiler technology developed since then. Instead, 40 years of efficiency gains have been wiped out by ever-greater consumption. Yet UK "personal satisfaction" surveys show that people's sense of satisfaction or happiness peaked in 1970. Once people's basic needs for energy are met, rising energy use remains vital for corporate profits and economic growth, but not for people's quality of life.”⁴³ This scenario is true not just for the UK, but could be extrapolated for at least all of the overdeveloped world. Though this demand demands rationality and not self-interest, it cannot be shelved any further, or be compromised with in the slightest; as it is, from a standpoint of pure, physical existence, perhaps the most important one to be made.

[170] The obvious question remains is that of how these demands should be made. For all the

43 Ernsting, Almuth. "Abundant Clean Renewables? Think Again!" Truthout. November 16, 2014. Accessed April 7, 2015.

simplicity and attractiveness of bottom-up community-building politics—sharing *rares*, art, technology, etc.—“garage culture” it could be called—there is no way any of this would put us in a position to make these demands.

[171] Out of all possible forms of political action, it appears that the most potent one remains that of the general strike, at least for producers of abstractions, whose labor isn't as easily replaceable as that of service industry workers. A general strike of a magnitude that would shut society's operations down to enough of an extent that these demands would be ceded by Power may seem anachronistic and risible, a complete disregard of the kinds of subjectivities described thus far. Three points can be made against such skepticism. First, if it is accepted that drastic changes are needed, then whatever is needed is going to seem excessive or unrealistic, but by the very appraisal of the situation, we have to try – the Situationist slogan stands: “Be realistic, demand the impossible.” Second, regarding what could constitute genuine resistance in the information age, in high data “semi-capitalism,” Deleuze comes to mind: “The problem is no longer getting people to express themselves, but providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people from expressing themselves, but rather, force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, or ever rarer, the thing that might be worth saying.”⁴⁴ A strike is silence from meaningless action. And third, in terms of method, a strike, conveniently, actually seems most in line with the ethos of our class – it involves, necessarily, no earnest gesture, no fist-waving or banner-raising. Instead, we must do *nothing*. We must sit down, relax, enjoy our existence and the existence of

44 Gilles Deleuze, “Mediators,” in *Negotiations: 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 288-89

each other, until we are allowed to create all the existences, in all their plenty, sociability and subjectivity, that we desire.

[172] The war must, certainly, be waged on all fronts. A united front of all struggles would of course be more powerful than disjointed struggles – better a fist than five fingers. But we must organize. The dialectic—or destiny—however one would choose to see it, calls upon us. With the quietude of a strike we may gain strength, come closer to our real goals, our final vision, of seizing control of the means of material and subjective productivity.

[173] But let us be certain about a few things. The fight was never over only a material dialectic. If it was our being human that made material surplus a conflict, it is but the same reality that made our existential surplus of self-consciousness—both these surpluses fateful workings of unaccountable chaos—a conflict for ourselves. It is *both* these conflicts, set off in their vibrancy only when material conditions were ripe, that interacted with each other, moved history, brought us to the present.

[174] We now stand at a cusp, a portal: For the first time in history, we have within our reach the possibility of settling the dialectic, whose internal contradictions have brought us to this level of material and subjective productivity, and in settling the dialectic, of taking an awesome, resplendent leap – a leap into not only material plenty, the society the Communists sought, but also a leap to new states of being, with myriad, untold *rases*, but most importantly, marked by the existential state—hitherto unaccomplished but always lying in potential—of oneness and self-possession. We may not even be able to consider ourselves “human” after such a leap – in

the integration with the self as we may one day possess, far after, likely, taking such a leap, we may discover, in this state of union and harmony, that we have transcended the self so as to find there is no self – *anātman*.

[175] If we take the leap, then while we may no longer be *anthropos*, the new reality, by virtue of what made it such, will well be called the Anthropocene.

[176] So why not? Let us try, at least, to meet the world, meet history, where they are, and see how it feels, see what happens, see ourselves as not merely beautiful glimmers or shades, but unassailable forces of desire, by our very potential, by the dialectic, by the world itself having waited for millennia to realize what what it can, to realize us as full Subjects.

[177] Let us not be *communists*, if that is not what we want to be; but let us certainly be Subjects. Let us return to an Eden, but a new Eden, existing as pure action and will, having transcended ourselves in so doing. We can call this Eden the Anthropocene, and see what it, when we are there, calls us in return.