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### Publication Date

2021

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,

IRVINE

Bird Freedom: Lumpen Dreams and the Long Picaresque

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Comparative Literature

by

Jon-David Wesley Settell

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Gabriele Schwab, Chair  
Professor Jane O. Newman  
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Associate Professor Annie McClanahan

2021



## **Dedication**

To

César, whose love made the impossible possible

and to unhoused people everywhere.

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## Acknowledgements

“Si he de decir lo que siento,” I would be turning my back on the picaresque silences, omissions, and voids that I have spent too many years attempting to capture in my own way. But at the end of the road, like Lázaro I will say what in truth I feel: an unbounded gratitude toward those who have helped me along this picaresque road. To Gabriele Schwab, I am deeply grateful for the long nights, the endless phone calls from all over the world at late hours, the evenings spent thinking together long after I should have left; and finally, for telling me to bring myself to this project, to not fear unorthodoxy, and to think wildly, like a picaro. To Annie McClanahan, who listened to me cry, rage, whimper, and exult, I am so thankful. She read enough versions of these pages to make her cry alongside me, but she never stopped reading and thinking and propping me up. Annie’s solidarity knows no bounds—her critical thought, her brilliance, and her comradeship kept me in it and out of a *vida picaresca* that would have made of this project a series of blank pages. To Adriana Johnson, I am so grateful—I would never have found *El vampiro* without her; nor a title; nor the structure and choreography of this entire project. I am deeply indebted to her incisive work on Euclides da Cunha’s novel *Os Sertões*, which provided a point of departure and a critical frame for the entire project: thank you for that. And finally, to Jane O. Newman, whose critical rigor, unending intellectual curiosity, and deeply thoughtful and generative notes helped me rewrite entire chapters, thank you. Years ago I balked at thinking of my project as a kind of lumpen love story. At the end, I can admit she was right. I owe her and my committee a huge debt of gratitude, for urging me to acknowledge and finally to cultivate my own lovesickness.

None of this would have been possible without my partner, César Rivera, whose endless patience and support—for putting up with it all, for too damn long—has made me forever grateful. And to my family, who each in their own way cajoled and loved and pushed me forward, I am thankful. To friends like Gwendolen Pare and Henry Ward, thank you for reading more versions of this than any person ever should.

Finally, I am endlessly grateful to the decayed roués of dubious means of subsistence, the *lazzaroni* and the property nationalizers, the hustlers and sex workers, the queens and bull dykes, the righteous drug addicts, and all the unhoused people I have known and loved over the years. This project was always for us.

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## Abstract of the Dissertation

Bird Freedom: Lumpen Dreams and the Long Picaresque

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Irvine

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The picaresque genre attempts to represent a subject outside History—in early modern Europe, the newly dispossessed peasant, “dissolute, crooked, thieving and idle”—who will eventually become the modern wage laborer. The genre uses slapstick humor and parody to make for witty stories that to this day retain their power to make us laugh out loud. But alongside the genre’s humor, the picaresque also figures its protagonists’ refusal to submit to the discipline of wage labor. Attending to the ideological and aesthetic strategies of the picaresque, this project examines the ways in which the genre has acted as an apparatus of capture for those living outside and on the margins of the enclosures of wage labor and the home. At the same time, it takes the picaresque as the genre of the lumpenproletariat and a chronicle of the making of new forms of life. The errant path of the rogue in the long picaresque traced here begins in early modern Spain, in *La Celestina* and *Lazarillo de Tormes*, moves through 18th C. England in *Moll Flanders*, leapfrogs continents and centuries to reappear in 1970s Mexico City in *El vampiro de la colonia Roma*, and ends with a bang in contemporary South Africa in *Thirteen Cents*. In terms of method, this project thinks alongside Herbert Marcuse, who writes that “art is perhaps the most visible ‘return of the repressed.’” It

interrogates the shift in the literary figuration of the poor from holy mendicant to homeless subject, reading the genre slant—like a picaro—and against its function as moral fable of capital, in order to reveal a rich lumpen imaginary overflowing with other ways of being and living. Finally, in imagining a time before and after the long picaresque, I sketch out the contours of a radical psychoanalysis grounded in the urgency of working through the deadening effects of the philosophy of productiveness and the pain of private property.

*Si he de decir lo que siento, la vida picaresca es vida, que las otras no merecen este nombre, si los ricos la gustasen, dejarían por ella sus haciendas, como hacían los antiguos filósofos, que por alcanzarla dejaban lo que poseían, digo por alcanzarla, porque la vida filósofa y picaral es una misma, solo se diferencian en que los filósofos dejaban lo que poseían por su amor, y los pícaros sin dejar nada, la hallan. Aquellos despreciaban sus haciendas para contemplar con menos impedimento en las cosas naturales, divinas y movimientos celestes; éstos, para correr a rienda suelta por el campo de sus apetitos; ellos las echaban en el mar, y éstos en sus estómagos; los unos las menospreciaban, como caducas y perecederas; los otros no las estimaban, por traer consigo cuidado y trabajo, cosa que desdice de su profesión; de manera que la vida picaresca es más descansada que la de los reyes, emperadores y papas. Por ella quise caminar como por camino más libre, menos peligroso y nada triste.*

—H. De Luna, *Segunda parte de Lazarillo de Tormes*

*[If I were to say what in truth I feel, the life of the picaro is the real life, and other ways of life don't even deserve the name; if the rich could savor it, they would abandon all their properties for it, as did the philosophers of old, who gave up everything they possessed in order to achieve it; I say to achieve it, because the philosophical and the picaresque life are one and the same; the only difference between them is that the philosophers left what they had for love of it, and the picaro, who has nothing to leave, discovers it. The philosophers scorned possessions in order to study the natural and divine world and the movements of the celestial bodies with the least impediment to the contemplation; the picaro scorns them in order to roam freely through the world of his appetites; the philosophers tossed their belongings into the sea, and the picaro tossed his into his stomach; the philosophers despised them, because they were valueless and transitory; the picaro did not prize them, because they entailed work and worry, which are in contradiction with the profession. In other words, the picaresque life is more reposeful than that of kings, emperor, and popes. In choosing it, I chose to travel by the freest and least dangerous of roads, and by no means a melancholy one.]*

—H. De Luna, *Part Two of Lazarillo de Torme*

## Introduction

*Each new deprivation raises doubts about when freedom is going to come; if the question pounding inside her head – Can I live? – is one to which she could ever give a certain answer, or only repeat in anticipation of something better than this, bear the pain of it and the hope of it, the beauty and the promise. – Saidiya Hartman*

A well-known Californian politician recently said the quiet part out loud, describing the state’s population of unhoused people as a “zombie apocalypse”<sup>1</sup> of criminals and undesirables. Some of these zombies had been recently evicted during the pandemic as service work dried up, others had long histories of unhousedness, and still others fell somewhere in-between. A preternatural sense of unlife enveloped them the moment they became unhoused; in the eyes of the housed and the ‘productively’ employed, life on the streets seemed to turn people into zombies and parasites.

It’s as if at the moment of becoming “homeless,” they somehow stopped being people: less than home, homeless, less than human. Once a person moves to the streets or the shelters, they seem to cross a threshold into a zone of nonbeing, no longer seen as people but as throw away life, the waste of the city consigned to its literal margins: sidewalks, underpasses and bridges, abandoned lots, navigation centers and ‘homeless’ shelters, and single room occupancy hotels. Sleeping on cardboard boxes or beneath underpasses, in donated tents or on the sidewalk, people are transfigured into the waste of the city, swept up by outreach workers, sanitation corps, and the police. They become disposable, crossing into abjection, so much “refuse and corpses” (Kristeva 3), the “refuse of all classes” (Marx *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* 75) and “social scum, that passively rotting

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.motherjones.com/coronavirus-updates/2020/04/devin-nunes-fox-news-coronavirus-homeless-zombie-apocalypse/>

mass” (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* 20) living on the margins of social life and on the margins of the city.

Disposable life inhabits and haunts marginal spaces, like the strange afterlives of the waste of the home and the workplace in trash cans, dumpsters, and landfills, forgotten and assiduously unseen but still inescapable, lingering sensually and spatially. The relegation of waste and of life rendered disposable to the marginal spaces of the city and its hinterlands is a constitutive act, as Tim Cresswell notes: “the tramp was made up as a marginal figure. In the process, marginality itself was being constituted in relation to deeply held notions of what constitutes normality. In their very definition, the high includes the low, the center includes the margin, and the normal includes the pathological” (11). In other words, the unhoused person’s loss of a kind of ontological status is intentional and constitutive; the unhoused person’s abjection makes possible the mythic joy of the housed and the fully employed. Their social death keeps capitalized life alive.

What sleight of hand, what sorcery transfigures life into refuse and trash? Thomas Richards observes that the “study of commodity culture always turns out to be an exploration of a fantastic realm in which things act, speak, rise, fall, fly, evolve” (11). This study of the making of disposable life, taken as a kind of corollary to commodity culture, explores another kind of fantastic realm, one where living people turn into dancing objects and ludic spectacles, less than ‘us’ and uproariously funny. Like the alchemy of the commodity fetish and its enchantments, there’s no simple recipe for the making of disposable life. Its production seeks both to cleanse and to protect the social body from the abjectly poor, so much *pharmakon* and so many *pharmakos*. The unhoused

person is the nadir of a “dangerous class” conjured into being as a new form of disposable life, what Marx calls the lumpenproletariat and the refuse of all classes: beggars, thieves, panhandlers, sex workers, and “the whole disintegrated mass thrown hither and thither” (Marx *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* 75) produced by the collapse of feudalism and the dispossession of the peasant.

Disposable life is always already abject life, cast out and ejected from the social body like so much effluvia. But the abject “from its place of banishment [. . .] does not stop challenging its master” (Kristeva 2): without a ‘home’ people on the streets become suddenly *unheimlich*, something “hidden and dangerous” (Freud 134) yet uncannily familiar that has come into the open world of the streets. This paradox is written into the diffuse category of those who fall outside the struggle between the proletariat and capital: as a third term the lumpen oscillates between ruin and danger, abjection and potentiality.

Because “factories, farms and other sites of labor and capital are not the only places where society is produced” (Cresswell 14), in what follows I want to think in the *longue durée* about the picaresque novel as another site of production. One of the earliest representations of a “dangerous class,” abject, disposable and yet still able to wield a kind of lumpen magic—tricking, wounding, stealing, cheating, and lying to a kind of prosperity—is the picaro, better known as the rogue. The first picaro, Lazarillo de Tormes, lives in the margins of the city, wandering between masters and hovels. Abjectly poor, dispossessed by his family’s immiseration and their making into criminals, Lazarillo never stops challenging his masters. It should come as no surprise that the first picaresque novel was banned by the Inquisition for nearly three hundred years.

From 1554 until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the picaresque was a ludic dream vision of the poor, so many objects against which readers can situate themselves; it has been best known as a kind of social parody. The picaresque novel gifts its readers with a kind of constitutive negation: as those who can gaze upon—and read—the masses in the streets as so much spectacle, they consolidate a subject position as *not that*. In this sense, the heterogeneity of the lumpenproletariat constitutes the homogeneity of the bourgeois subject, as Peter Stallybrass points out (73). At the same time, Patricia Waugh points out that “parody presupposes both a law and its transgression, or both repetition and difference [...] [it is] both conservative and transformative” (Waugh 101). In this dual sense, then, the making of proper subjects through negation and parody that “presupposes both a law and its transgression” subtends the picaresque as genre.

Like the picaros and their bourgeois readers, the purified proletarian subject of Marxist lore – the honest working class – surfaces in the picaresque as the repentant and reformed rogue turned worker, one who narrates his becoming-worker as a coming-of-age through a series of episodic jaunts. Rag picking, destitute, panhandling, sex working, thieving and dissolute, the rogue is the child to the mature subject of capitalized life, the proletarian who emerges into the clear light of wage labor from the “rotting mass of criminals, etc.”, the lumpenproletariat, ripe for exploitation, made “stupid” by hunger and poverty (Marx *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire* 77).

The origins of the word *proletariat* illustrate the indelible imprint of this rotting mass on the honest working class. Stallybrass notes that the Roman legal term *proletarii* described a property-less person of low social origins without voting rights (Stallybrass

84). In *Capital* Marx draws from German law to describe the newly property-less peasant of early modernity as *vogelfrei*, “free and rightless” like a bird:

The proletariat created by the breaking-up of the bands of feudal retainers and by the forcible expropriation of the people from the soil, this free and rightless [*vogelfrei*<sup>2</sup>] proletariat could not possibly be absorbed by the nascent manufactures as fast as it was thrown upon the world. On the other hand, these men, suddenly dragged from their accustomed mode of life, could not immediately adapt themselves to the discipline of their new condition. They were turned in massive quantities into beggars, robbers and vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases under the force of circumstances. Hence at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth centuries, a bloody legislation against vagabondage was enforced throughout Western Europe. *The fathers of the present working class were chastised for their enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers.* (896, italics added)

The term *proletariat*'s capaciousness would appear then ample enough for both the poor, the unemployed, and the dispossessed; in other words, if vagabonds and paupers are the fathers and mothers of the present working class, then its relation to them should be read not just as genealogical, but constitutive.

Stallybrass describes the *Brumaire* as a crisis in Marx's thought, since the workers' revolution and their gains in 1848 were actively undermined by a third term, the lumpenproletariat, *outside* the dialectic of class struggle and left behind by another kind of transformation, this time not into vagabonds and paupers but wage laborers. I want to attempt to work through this crisis by thinking the lumpenproletariat not as class fraction or social scum, but as the potential negation of labor and class.

In the picaresque novel, the episodic movement between different social classes and the heterogeneity and metabolism of its lumpen antiheroes, all point to traces of

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<sup>2</sup> A translator's note in *Capital* points out that “here, as elsewhere in this context, Marx uses the word ‘vogelfrei’, literally ‘as free as a bird’, i.e. free but outside the human community and therefore entirely unprotected and without legal rights” (896). I follow Marx in my usage of the term.

classlessness under erasure, as it were. In the figure of the rogue, then, a crude form of what will come after the abolition of class and wage-labor comes into focus. This is what makes the picaresque as a genre both instrumental and transgressive, all at once. In offering up a taming of the newly dispossessed peasant, it points to a time before and a place outside the antinomies of capital and labor, of home and placelessness.

Stallybrass goes so far as to argue that the lumpenproletariat is not a disruption of class struggle, but its potential unity in classlessness; he argues that Marx lays out the groundwork for grasping the lumpenproletariat as a condition of possibility for the proletariat. In the *Brumaire*, Marx “shows that class itself is a political articulation, a product of social production” (Stallybrass 90). While in *Capital* he identifies the lumpenproletariat as so much surplus population ripe for exploitation, in the *Brumaire* Marx notes that “the strength of the proletariat lay in the streets” (51). Unlike the other natural ally of the working class, the peasant subject to immiseration and dispossession through cycles of rent and debt (“Hence the peasants find their natural ally and leader in the urban proletariat, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order” [123]), the multiplicity of the lumpenproletariat and its very plasticity make it not only a possible ally of the working-class, but an integral part of it.

Franz Fanon makes a similar point in *The Wretched of the Earth*: “The constitution of a lumpenproletariat is a phenomenon which obeys its own logic, and neither the brimming activity of the missionaries nor the decrees of the central government can check its growth. This lumpenproletariat is like a horde of rats; you may kick them and throw stones at them, but despite your efforts they’ll go on gnawing at the roots of the tree” (129). So, while the picaresque enacts a kind of aesthetic capture,

holding the *vogelfrei* proletariat tight in a net of representation and making them into figures of comedy, they never stop gnawing at the roots of capital.

The picaresque novel first came on the scene in early modern Spain. Written in 1554, *Lazarillo de Tormes* recounts the *aventuras* of a poor unhoused kid. By the end of the novel, Lazarillo the child-turned-rogue by hunger and desperation, becomes Lázaro the adult wage laborer, making it a kind of *bildungsroman* for the newly emerging proletarian subject. Over time, the genre will become a moral fable of capital: play hard while you're young, but then grow up and get a good job and a decent place to live; that's how you become a *person*. Marx points out that

the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-workers, appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and this side alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire. (*Capital*, 875)

The picaresque novel tells the story of this historical movement in “letters of blood and fire”: through violence, depravation, and pain rendered as so much ludic, slapstick comedy.

I think alongside John Beverly, who opened an entirely new line of inquiry when in 1982 he departed from a broad critical consensus that read the genre as a parody of Spanish society, and, as it spread in popularity across cultures and times, of other societies, too. Instead, Beverly situated the picaresque novel as a record of expropriation, “so-called primitive accumulation,” and the making of the proletariat out of the ruins of feudal serfdom. At the same time, I agree with Saidiya Hartman, who rightfully describes literature as “better able [than history, sociology, or political economy] to grapple with

the role of chance in human action and to illuminate the possibility and the promise of the errant path” (93). The picaresque novel, though complicit in the making of a proletarian subject cleansed of its impurities and vagaries by the discipline of wage labor and the home, is also a kind of “dream book for existing otherwise” (xv), punctuated by rebellious silence and motored by a joyful resistance to work and the logic of private property. I want to read the picaresque like a picaro, to “discern the glimmer of possibility, feel the ache of what might be” (30), and trace the errant path of the rogue across time and place.

### **Errant Paths and Bird Freedom**

Clinical practice on the streets of New York and San Francisco led me to seek out the origins of the unhoused person’s social death and making into symbolic refuse and corpses. I learned over time that the vibrancy of street life often escapes the gaze of the reformer, the social worker, the street-based physician, and other figures, including of course those who already view street life with antipathy and suspicion. Instead of seeing the hungry and the destitute in the fullness of their being, instead of the work of seeing the naked vulnerability of their faces and becoming, as Emmanuel Levinas suggests, unable to kill, another kind of labor takes primacy: the *drawing in* to cycles of rent, debt, labor, and ownership, a capturing of fugitivity and flight from capitalized life and the psychic killing of those outside and living otherwise. The picaresque novel is one form of this labor, a kind of discursive strategy that seeks to capture and symbolically kill those outside wage labor and the metaphysics of home and place, living a kind of errant and fragile bird freedom.

At the same time, this lumpen imaginary offers readers the contours of other forms of knowing and experiencing the world, outside of a psychic enclosure of the self, the walls and fences of which are a kind of twinned metaphysics of capitalized life, home and work. For Martin Heidegger, who describes the home and a kind of rootedness as a critical part of *Dasein*, “to be on the earth as a human being [ . . . ] means to dwell” (348). His thinking lays bare a structure of subjectivity hundreds of years in the making, and deeply imbricated with a conceptualization of space grounded in enclosure and a private, inward dwelling self. In this view, to be human is to be rooted; it is to build and to dwell in a home.

Advocates for people living on the streets, many of whom have experience with eviction and dispossession themselves, use the term unhoused to describe street living. It’s common to hear people who have lived in a tent or out of shopping cart talk about carrying their homes with them, in terms of personal property like a tent, sleeping bag or blanket, or a shopping cart. The notion of home itself makes the human, as Heidegger notes; this is part of what makes homelessness so problematic in symbolic terms. To be without a home—to be *homeless*—is to be less than human.

The metaphysics of labor and the perniciousness of joblessness, on the other hand, emerge from a conceptualization of value “as a social form that expresses, and is based on, the expenditure of direct labor time. This form, for Marx, is at the very heart of capitalist society” (Postone 25). The unemployed, like the unhoused, begin to accrete a kind of sheen of lifelessness the longer they remain ‘off the market’ and no longer produce value, at least not as a capitalist social form.

It is telling then that the people on the streets should appear before us —when we see them at all—as feral, errant and dangerous, abject, dirty and miserable. They seem emphatically *not us*. But like the rhythmic surfacing of the repressed, the people living these throw-away lives refuse their disposal, camping out on streets and under bridges, living in zones of abandonment and in what hustler and author John Rechy calls the vast city of night.

Disposable life—those disintegrated masses tossed hither and thither, from the white trash of the trailer park to the racialized scum of urban streets—poses a real risk to value. As the unconscious to the daytime city’s conscious mind, these disposable lives constitute a kind of lumpen imaginary central to value as its negation—the *u* to its *topos*—and the dark underside of a sunny productivist subjectivity. The ‘dangerous class’ defines through transgression the boundaries of two dueling metaphysics, labor and the home, much as those living and working outside constitutively define the inside. The lumpen in this sense is the negation not only of the bourgeois subject, but of the worker as proletariat, excluded from the animating antagonisms of capitalized life while clarifying its boundaries in transgression.

Negation often acts as a binding and repressing of taboo or forbidden content, as Freud notes: “the negative prefix *un-* is the indicator of repression” (*The Uncanny* 151). The nadir of the lumpen, the *unhoused* person living outdoors, is *unheimlich*: unhomely because they are unhoused, stirring dread and terror at the same time as they remind us of something that once was familiar, but has been lost. Matthew Garrett has described the picaresque novel as a readerly dream of freedom (117); the picaro flits ludically about in bird freedom, *vogelfrei*. This takes on new meaning when we start to think past the

abjection of people living on the streets, crossing through the “boundary between life and death”: in the spaces between the work refusal of the vagrant and the refusal to refuse of the sex worker, and in the mutual aid of the encampment and the survival strategies of drug dealers, pimps, and thieves, there’s a glimmer of a form of life *outside* the antinomies of capital and labor. Those living these throw away lives—often in abjection and misery, still living despite it all—are as close as we’ve gotten to a post-work, post-class world. The picaresque novel, then, is the stuff of dreams.

In the next chapter, I lay out an incomplete and always already flawed genealogy of the picaresque novel and its object, since the fugitivity of rogues troubles any authoritative grasping of them. In chapter two, I examine the ways in which multiple registers of violence, material and symbolic, inhere in the genre, and how the *picaro* in early modernity resists proletarianization with the trickery and tactical violence of the rogue. In chapters three and four, I ask how the figure of the rogue maintains a dis/continuity across hundreds of centuries and disparate sites of production, from 1970s Mexico City to turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> C. Cape Town, in what I think of as the long picaresque. The representation of unhoused male hustlers and street-based sex workers<sup>3</sup> in these late modern and contemporary novels will show how the making of disposable life is a metabolic process that continues today, though the long picaresque comes to an explosive end in the figure of the racialized rogue. In the fifth and final chapter, I turn to the objects

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<sup>3</sup> The female rogue, or *picara*, appears most frequently as a sex worker, as this wayward genealogy will show. An enduring gap in this project, however, is the missing study of her representation and its role in the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. A co-written article I recently published in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, “Service Work, Sex Work, and the ‘Prostitute Imaginary’” partially mitigates this absence, though it doesn’t make up for the otherwise masculinist preoccupation with the *picaro*. A uniquely queer attention to male sex work, limited time, and limited resources, partially explain my failing to attend to her capture, as well. But it is important work that still needs to be done, and her absence here bears noting.

of the picaresque novel, the people caught in its nets of romantic spectacle and moral fable: the vast, disintegrated masses of social scum, the lumpenproletariat. Here I lay out the contours of a radical psychoanalysis for the subjects of accumulation—readers and dreamers, workers and owners and home dwellers—informed by the silence, refusal, negation, and tactical violence of their *vogelfrei* shadow selves. My object at last isn't the lumpen or the representational strategies that seek to bind, repress, and tame them with the discipline of wage labor. Instead, I want to turn a readerly gaze toward ourselves, to find like the picaro ways of working through and surviving the traumas of capitalized life.

## Chapter One: The Rogue's Story

The first major dictionary of the Spanish language, *El Diccionario de las Autoridades* [1739], links the word *pícaro* to the verb *picar*, to wound or stab with a sharp instrument. The same entry defines *pícaro* as a rogue and a criminal, while also telling us the word historically served as an adjective meaning low, “*ruin*,” without honor or shame. In this sense, the word contains a double meaning. It describes a danger and lethality that dwells within picaros at the same time as it names them into being as shameless, dishonored, inglorious, and often comic figures of ruin. The figure of the picaro, captured by language and aestheticized in literature, renders this inward-dwelling danger—the picaro’s capacity to wound or kill—abject and comically *ruin*.

Moving between lethal power and shameful ruin, the inside and the outside of the law, and in between the antagonisms of labor and capital, the picaro is an elusive figure. As a spectacle of the survival and transformation of “beggars, robbers, and vagabonds” into wage laborers and sovereign citizens, the picaresque novel seems to neutralize the sharp danger the picaro poses to the congealing body of labor constituted by the changing social relations of rapidly capitalizing life. In the picaresque, vagabondage and unhousedness become adventure-time; the violence of primitive accumulation becomes discipline and education; and wage labor, redemption. The picaresque novel in this sense offers us a kind of parable of capital—to live a life worth living, get a job—at the same time as it reveals the making of what Antonio Gramsci calls a double or contradictory consciousness for the “man-in-the-masses,”

one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It

holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity (333).

The “superficially explicit or verbal” consciousness comes into being at least in part through culture’s regulating and renewing of social life, part of what Gramsci describes as the intellectual’s function in an ideological superstructure that maintains the economic base in a condition of “moral and political passivity.” The picaresque novel vivifies this regulating of social life; its figuration of life on the streets will not be written by a person *from* the streets until Jean Genet’s 1949 *Journal du Voleur*. But the genre encodes work refusal and trickery in its defiant silences, omissions, and deceptions, showing how culture can also renew social life, and making the genre an always already incomplete apparatus of capture. Full of holes and broken locks, uniquely vulnerable to the quick-witted machinations and trickery of the rogue, traces of bird freedom are everywhere in the picaresque novel.

As a genre, the picaresque is as slippery as its rogues. Claudio Guillén gestures toward the problem of defining the genre in “Toward a Definition of the Picaresque.” Shortly before the publication of Guillén’s essay in 1971, the appearance on the picaresque scene of novels by Thomas Mann, Günter Grass, Saul Bellows, and Jerzy Kosiński underscored the resilience of the genre *mutatis mutandis*. Guillén attempts to create a critical consensus by describing eight constitutive elements of the picaresque novel: a “dynamic psycho-sociological situation or series of situations” that begin with the picaro as orphaned or abandoned child; a double narrative structure that conceals as it reveals; paratactic and first-person narrative styles; an outsider perspective that creates

enough narrative distance for trenchant social critique; an emphasis on materiality and subsistence; movement through variegated social classes and types, often though not always as a servant; a horizontal movement through space and vertical movement through classes and social groups; and finally, episodic narration that is “biographic” and appears to tell a life story in moments or narrative chunks (79).

These elements of the picaresque, with its stories about beggars, vagabonds, criminals, and sex workers surviving the depredations of life on the streets, make it “an apt form for describing the experiences of a population defined by exclusion, precarity, and superfluity” (Annie McClanahan *n.pag.*). But the genre’s enduring mutability makes any formal defining of the genre contentious, as Ulrich Wicks notes: “On the one hand, we have a historical approach that sees the picaresque as a ‘closed’ episode in the fiction of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, and, on the other, we have an ahistorical approach that sees it as an ‘open’ fictional tradition, until in contemporary usage the term ‘picaresque’ seems to be applied whenever something ‘episodic’ tied together by an ‘antihero’ needs a name” (240). So, while I follow Annie McClanahan in thinking that the picaresque is “the genre of the lumpenproletariat” and an apt form of representation for their imagined experiences, in the following chapters I approach the literary phenomenon of the picaresque as what Wicks calls a *mode of fiction*. Wicks writes that “the recurrent tendency to use ‘picaresque’ in all sorts of general ways argues for its necessity as one of the basic fictional modes” (241). As one of the basic modes of fiction, the picaresque’s figuration of life is what Matthew Garrett calls “a social relation, the basis for imagining a form of life” (122), embedded in time and human circumstances. Thinking of the picaresque as a mode opens the category to texts that defy many of its

conventions at the same time as they provide a basis for imagining new forms of life: the socially included proletarian subject, and the socially excluded, rendered as so much disposable life.

I take the world of the picaro, “worse than ours,” chaotic, with journeys of predation and exploitation (Wicks 242), as a lumpen imaginary: the *vogelfrei* peasant—“the dissolute, the crooked, the thieving and the idle” (as cited by Federici 127)—captured as it were by language and molded to fit within the structural-symbolic order of capital, emerges by the end of the picaresque novel as either a productive proletarian subject, or as throw away life. Anne Cruz usefully describes this transformation as a split in subjectivity into good subjects—workers—and bad subjects, those who refuse or are unable to work (33).

The picaro’s emergence as a literary figure parallels the proliferation of vagabonds and beggars in the economic crises of mid-sixteenth century Spain. Anne Cruz has argued that the picaresque “depict[s] an alienated being who refuses to conform to society’s norm. His punishment for this is to be ostracized from society; his redemption lies in the exchange of his own values for those of the privileged class” (206). The picaresque mode ideologically re-fashions the beggar and the vagabond, the *pauperum Christi* of early Christianity, into rogues, criminals, and social deviants. Cruz calls the figure of the picaro a *pharmakos*<sup>4</sup> whose oscillations between inclusion (Lázaro as worker) and exclusion (vulnerable Lazarillo), operate as a useful “moral spectacle” (44)

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<sup>4</sup> *Merriam Webster* defines *pharmakos* as “a person often already condemned to death sacrificed in ancient Greece as a means of purification or atonement for a city or community.” The *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes that the *pharmakos* could also be an unusually ugly person who would be fêted and then beaten in a ritual of purification before being exiled from the polis.

that inoculates Spanish society from a dangerous ‘other’ “contained within the social body” (47). Jacques Derrida notes that “the ceremony of the *pharmakos* is thus played out on the boundary line between the inside and the outside, which has as its function to trace and retrace repeatedly. *Intra muros/extra muros*. Origin of difference and division, the *pharmakos* represents both evil introjected and projected” (134). Lazarillo, born *extra muros* and an imputed “hideputa” [son of a whore], travels within and without the Spanish walled cities, enduring degradation and violence before becoming Lázaro, the wage laborer. In the 1499 novel in dialogue, *La Celestina*, a comedic forerunner to the genre, a sex worker turned procuress lives outside the walls of the city. In the figures of Celestina and Lazarillo, we see what Derrida calls evil introjected and projected. Viewed in light of Cruz’s insight into the function of picaro as *pharmakos*, part of the picaresque mode as a form of social discourse, Celestina’s murder appears before us as a sacrifice, and Lazarillo’s transformation as a banishment.

Cruz traces the function of the picaro as *pharmakos* to medieval lepers, who both embodied evil at the same time as they made visible the parables of salvation and damnation: “by accepting charity to attenuate the physical disease, the same lepers provided the potential cure for sin as well” (14). Charity offered a salve for the leper, while almsgiving served a spiritual purpose, inoculating the giver from the spiritual illness that lepers manifested in their bodies. In the sixteenth century, the Spanish state’s secularization of the care of the sick and poor – from religious institutions to the state-administered *casas de misericordia* [houses of mercy] – signaled a move away from the holy beggar to “sanctions against those who refused marginalization and containment” (15). In *Lazarillo de Tormes*, “the abandonment of the Christian ideal of charity is

precisely what is at stake in the novel” (30). Instead of charity, what the picaro “vividly learns [from his various masters] are the ruthless economic lessons of exchange value” (34); as a beggar and vagabond, his exchange value is practically non-existent. The collapse in value, from the abject but sacred leper and beggar, to the dangerous social deviant, relied on the recasting of the poor “from their initial sacralized role as scapegoat into the increasingly demonic figure of the social outcast” (74). Scapegoated like the lepers before them, the poor were increasingly “called upon to atone for societal ills” (15).

Linked to sexual debauchery (16), the female leper would become in literature the *picara*. Often depicted as sex workers, the licentiousness of the *picara* served as another kind of moral spectacle intended to reinforce male domination and control over women’s bodies and sexualities. The death of the titular character in *La Celestina* underscores the emergence of this morally spectacular element. I take Celestina’s murder as a social discourse around salvageable and non-salvageable subjects; in this early form of the picaresque novel, the making of disposable life begins to come into focus. The text describes Celestina as “una puta vieja” (108) [“auldhoor” (23)], and in this sense unsalvageable, at the same time as it praises her medical knowledge and wisdom, making her potentially salvageable. But in the historical context of capitalism coming into being, the part of Celestina that is salvageable represents a threat that must be neutralized.

Celestina’s death acts as a ritualized cleansing and sacrifice, like a purification of the body politic at the same time as it shows its readers the “dangers of the wicked intermingling with the virtuous” (145). As part of the historical consciousness of the working class, her death augurs the end of a kind of women’s power, and points to the

bargain between the male wage worker and capital (he gives up his ownership of the means of production but gains ownership of women's bodies). Celestina figures real people at a real moment in time, and her death foretells a real shift in gender relations under capitalism. The kind of woman represented by Celestina had to die so that women's bodies could be made into labor-power and managed by men. This early form of the picaresque mode as social discourse makes clear that no part of Celestina and women like her—folk healers, abortionists, and other 'witches'—fit within the congealing body of capital. Like a toxin, she must be expelled from the body of capital for it to live. At the same time, the promise of difference and the spirit of refusal—"A tuerto o a derecho, nuestra casa hasta el techo" (123) ["By foul means or fair, we take our share!" (34)]—lingers like a repressed memory of freedom.

In *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the contours of the picaresque come into sharper focus. Like Celestina, Lazarillo dies too, though this time only figuratively. Lazarillo the picaro becomes Lázaro the wage laborer, reflecting the emergence of a new form of disposable life. This development in the picaresque mode emerges from the changed economic and social context of mid-16<sup>th</sup> century Spain, with widespread economic malaise and runaway price inflation, and crowds of beggars, vagrants, and thieves roaming the land (Cruz 40). The violence of primitive accumulation and capital's hunger for wage labor transformed the poor from figures of piety to potential workers, as Spanish humanists like Juan Luis Vives issued impassioned pleas for the poor to be "pressed into labor" (Federici 127). Capital accumulation, social disruption, and economic malaise provide the context for the moral fable of picaresque life: wage labor will set you free.

The picaresque mode uses the figure of the picaro to show that poor people don't need charity, they need to get a job, making wage labor both the measure of the good *and* the moral. Wage labor and the money relation are interwoven throughout *Lazarillo*, a literary 'innovation' central to the picaresque mode of fiction, as W. E. Wilson has noted (174, 178). The episodic movement of the novel, in turn, eerily resembles the working day, written in seven narrative 'chunks' of different experiences of selling labor-power. Violence like the peasants' "bloody expropriation" (Marx *Capital* 896) features prominently in the novel, from scenes of one master – the Blind Man – knocking out Lazarillo's teeth, to the infamously short fourth *tractado* where Lazarillo's silence ("otras cosas que no digo" (157) ["one or two other things that I'd rather not mention" (66)] hints at sexual assault. Hunger appears in nearly every chapter, reminding readers of Lazarillo's desperate state. Begging, vagrancy, theft, and deception, tools of the dispossessed peasant in the face of primitive accumulation, are also the tools of Lazarillo's trade.

In the final *tractado*, the local archpriest approaches newly waged Lázaro with an offer of marriage to a maid in his employ. Lázaro accepts, and with a job and a wife, completes his transformation into the ideal proletarian subject. But like the novel itself, Lázaro's transformation is deceptive. With a double narrative structure that combines the epistolary form—directed to an unnamed church authority—with the *vidas*, stories of saints popular at the time, the novel interweaves truth with deception: the story of "el pobre Lázaro," forced by hunger to beg, steal, and lie, resembles the tribulations of saints who endured hunger, torture, and so on, making Lazarillo almost saint-like. As a letter to *Vuestra Merced* using the form of the *vidas*, Lázaro tells the "truth" of his life to cover up

the deception for which he is most likely being investigated: his wife's long-standing adulterous relationship with the archpriest. Lázaro writes that he has finally decided to "arrimarse a los buenos," a comic irony given that his wife and the respectable archpriest's adultery is clear to readers: "yo determiné de arrimarme a los buenos. Verdad es que algunos de mis amigos me han dicho algo deso, y aun, por más de tres veces me han certificado que, antes que conmigo casase, había parido tres veces, hablando con reverencia de V.M., porque esta ella delante" (175) ["I made up my mind a long time ago to keep in with respectable people. It's quite true that my friends have said something to me about my wife. In fact they've pointed out to me that she had three children before she married me, speaking with reverence because she's there" (78)]. With regular meals, deliveries of wheat every year, a rented home next door to the archpriest, and occasional gifts of old stockings, "así quedamos todos tres bien conformes" (176) ["We were all happy about the arrangement" (79)]. In this sense, we see that Lázaro's newfound prosperity as a wage laborer rests on a foundation of deceit. Thinking alongside Cruz, Lazarillo functions as *pharmakos*, subject to abuse and degradation and ultimately, expulsion *extra muros*. But while Lázaro the wage laborer sheds the skin of Lazarillo the picaro, his machinations and deceptions show us that the residues of Lazarillo remain, like an indelible stamp on the new proletarian subject.

What many consider the first Western novel, then, turns out to be in part a story about wage labor and getting a regular job. Deception and even a kind of tactical violence lie at the heart of this record of the taming of the working person<sup>5</sup>. Reading the picaro as

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term working person and not proletariat here to capture what Marx calls our species-being, always already productive in shaping the natural world and unalienated from the products of our labor.

a figuration in social discourse of working people on the margins of capital brings the outsiders and outlaws of labor and home—the lumpenproletariat—into historical consciousness in new ways. Cruz is right to think of the picaro as *pharmakos*; the picaresque mode often works as a kind of bourgeois ideological device to inoculate readers from the poison of low-class deviance. But this is only one part of the picture: traces of other forms of subjectivity linger in the form of the picaro. Lazarillo’s silences, his tactical and self-defensive violence, and his efforts to pull one over on each of his masters, are reminders that dispossessed peasants did not become wage laborers without waging a fight.

Despite the traces of the peasants’ fight against subsumption into the wage labor form and the obvious satire of ecclesiastic and aristocratic authority, the ideological labor of cultural discourses like *Lazarillo* accelerates the capture of *vogelfrei* peasants into wage labor. This is especially true in the Spanish picaresque novels of the seventeenth century, where, as José Antonio Maravall notes, “la crisis social y (con algunos intervalos de signo favorable) la crisis económica, esto es, un período, en conjunto, de alteraciones sociales que comprenden desde antes de 1590 a después de 1660, aproximadamente, contribuyeron a crear el clima psicológico del que surgió el Barroco (103) [“social crisis and (with some intervals of favorable signs) economic crisis, that is, a period of drastic social change that began before 1590 and continued until after approximately 1660, contributed to the creation of a psychological climate during which the Baroque blossomed”]. As a “respuesta [ . . . ] dada por los grupos activos en una sociedad en dura y difícil crisis” (47) “[answer . . . given by active elements of a society in hard and difficult crisis” (my trans.)], the Baroque emphasized governmental and ecclesiastic

authority in order to maintain a firm grip on the changing forms of Spanish society and economy. Critically, the picaresque in this time period emphasizes a downward movement toward social abjection for those who make use of the picaro's trickery.

With comic scenes of a young low-born orphan, Pablos, being covered in spit and shit by the high-born students at a local *colegio*, Francisco Quevedo's *El Buscón* highlights this aspect of the Baroque picaresque mode<sup>6</sup>, suggesting that those who seek to rise above their station, so to speak, deserve contempt. The last lines of the novel drive this point home: "Y fueme peor, como verá V. Md. en la segunda parte, pues nunca mejora su estado quien muda solamente de lugar, y no de vida y costumbres" (65) ["But they went worse, as they always will for anybody who thinks he only has to move his dwelling without changing his life or ways" (214)]. The Baroque picaresque mode makes especially clear the role of the picaro as *pharmakos* to be degraded and expelled from the body of the Spanish polis. Pablos, by the end of the novel, flees Spain for the Americas. His banishment and degradation, however, contain a figural meaning indelibly tied to our other picaros: as the outside of a wage labor form slowly encroaching on the world, Pablos represents a real risk to the emerging economic structure of the capitalist world. In *El Buscón* any subject who leaves his or her station becomes toxic, like a wound in the body politic that needs lancing. These shifts in the form of the picaro—from unsalvageable *pharmakos* (murdered Celestina) to purified proletarian (Lázaro *sans* Lazarillo) and back again (expelled Pablos)—point to the mutability of the form and its dialectical exchange with history.

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<sup>6</sup> Demonstrative of the impact of local social and economic conditions, or material life, on the picaresque as mode of fiction, the Spanish Baroque novel differs substantially from the German picaresque novel, *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, published less than forty years after the publication of *El buscón*.

The persistence of the picaresque as mode tells us that its function as social discourse is perhaps its most enduring feature. In Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* [1722], the form of the picaro undergoes another change. Moll like Celestina trades sex for money; unlike Celestina, she lives. She also steals, lies, and cheats, bringing her character in line with the male picaro. The novel is framed with an author's preface that makes its function as a kind of inoculation clear from the very outset: "All the exploits of this lady of fame, in her depredations upon mankind, stand as so many warnings to honest people<sup>7</sup> to beware of them" (6). The novel ends with a resolution to spend the remainder of her life in penitence for her life of 'sin' (308), reiterating its purpose as a bourgeois moral fable and the picaro's function as *pharmakos*.

At the same time, the changing form of the picaro from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century suggests that their representational content exceeds the bounds of *pharmakos*. Writing about what he calls the antinomies of realism, Frederic Jameson argues that "women, not yet fully absorbed into capitalism and the vehicles of unpaid labor, are more likely narrative occasions for revolt and resistance than men" (147). His insight applies as much to Celestina as it does to Daniel Defoe's female picaro, Moll Flanders. In terms of value, Moll's inability to live as a wage laborer in the built-in gender inequalities of capitalism is clear from the start: "'Why, what can you earn?' says she; 'what can you get at your work?' 'Threepence,' said I, 'when I spin, and fourpence when I work plain work.' 'Alas! poor gentlewoman,' said she again, laughing, 'what will that do for thee?'" (15). Defoe's novel offers a trenchant critique of the gendered structures of capitalism by noting the

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<sup>7</sup> Defoe's "honest people" brings to mind Luxemburg's "honest working class," with sex workers "rightly disposed of" (332).

impossibility of living on wage labor alone. Lois Chaber argues that, while in many ways the typical bourgeois novel, “*Moll Flanders* suggests that women must co-opt even the male tactics the novel criticizes, to achieve power—or to survive at all” (221). As a “narrative occasion for revolt,” and as a vehicle for critiquing the savage dislocations of capital accumulation, Moll reminds us that the proletariat in the most capacious sense is the negation of capitalism.

When at the end of the novel Moll becomes penitent and submits to marriage and unwaged house work, it is as if she has shed forever her lumpenproletariat skin. But Moll the picaro, connected across time to Celestina, Lazarillo, and Pablos, is a figure of working people outside wage labor, determined to survive “a tuerto o a derecho.”

Deception and trickery belie her submission<sup>8</sup> to proletarianization up until the very end of the novel, as her lies about a stolen gold watch show us: “I did not, indeed, tell him that I stole it from a gentlewoman’s side, at a meeting house in London. That’s by the way” (303). The theft of a watch points to a kind of picaresque theft of time, like a refusal to submit to the discipline of wage labor. Even married and settled into unwaged house work, Moll tells us that there is much in the proletariat that is “by the way.”

Two hundred years later Jean Genet in *The Thief’s Journal* takes up this “by the way” of the proletariat in a semi-biographical account. Genet describes his life during the

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Moll’s fate, festooned as the narrative is with trappings of moral judgement and penitence, with the fate of Nana, a sex worker in Émile Zola’s naturalist realist novel of the same name: “Venus was decomposing; the germs which she had picked up from the carrion people allowed to moulder in the gutter, the ferment which had infected a whole society, seemed to come to the surface of her face and rot it” (425). Cruz’s notion of the pharmakos applies much more readily to Nana, whose death bourgeois society requires as a cleansing of toxins in the body politic. Separated by a hundred and fifty years, Zola’s realism contrasts vividly with Defoe’s picaresque mode.

deep economic crises of the 1930s, amid roving crowds of dispossessed and immiserated people that echo the “forcible expropriation” of primitive accumulation and its transformation of working people in “massive quantities into beggars, robbers, and vagabonds.” Recall that Marx calls the vagabonds and paupers of early capitalism the “fathers of the present working class” (896). In the dawn of advanced capitalism, Genet’s picaresque mode makes it clear these “fathers” still live among us, though the form and content of their representation has changed.

Narrated episodically by an orphaned “vagabond and pauper,” *The Thief’s Journal* modernizes the picaresque mode with a picaro who refuses to shed his lumpenproletariat skin. Instead, Genet revels in what he calls the vascular exchange between his “taste for betrayal and theft and my loves” (153). On the heterogeneity of the dispossessed and attempts to capture them figuratively in language, Genet writes, “I would be overjoyed if I could call him [his lover] scoundrel, hoodlum, crook, charming names whose function is to evoke what you, derisively, call a pretty world. But these words sing. They hum. They also evoke to you the sweetest and spiciest pleasures” (146). These sweet and spicy pleasures – the outsides of wage labor and capitalism – lie at the heart of this vascular exchange, and at the heart of the picaro as an uncanny representation of our own desire, once familiar and now forgotten.

The picaro in Genet’s hands becomes a figure of refusal, part of what punk musician Patti Smith calls holy disobedience.<sup>9</sup> Instead of sacrifice and expulsion, like Celestina and Pablos, or Lázaro and Moll’s deceptive submission to waged and unwaged

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/08/13/holy-disobedience-on-jean-genets-the-thiefs-journal/>

labor, Genet's picaro takes his disposability and glories in it. When Genet tells us that robbing his johns—bourgeois men, soldiers, and cops—increases his own pleasure, since “each burglary allowed us to breathe for a moment at the surface” (21), Genet invites us as readers to imagine surfacing from the depths of capitalism, to breathe the air of bird freedom. Genet's picaro moves beyond survival and cunning and toward expropriation and resistance as a tactic for overthrowing capital: “there must be expropriation. The well-being of all—the end, expropriation—the means” (Kropotkin 23).

In disobedience, Genet's picaro drops the pretense of becoming-proletarian and embraces the ‘holy’ work of revolution and communization: theft becomes expropriation; and perversity *qua* homosexuality, freedom from capitalist reproduction and the economic contracts of marriage. His picaro takes up the notion of the unsalvageable as poison and seeks to inject it into the capitalized body politic, asking us to rethink the impossibility<sup>10</sup> of living *otherwise* than as wage laborers. In *The Thief's Journal*, the fullness of the picaresque as a dreamscape of labor emerges, with the picaro as a dream vision of working people without masters, refusing to submit to the discipline of the wage. The picaro connects the proletariat across time, from the stirrings of capital and its bloody expropriations to the riots and insurrections against capital that would come in Genet's era. It registers in the historical consciousness of the proletariat its own negation of capitalism, and the unboundedness of *living otherwise* than wage laborers.

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<sup>10</sup> “Do not forget that it is wagedom, the impossibility of living otherwise than by selling your labor, which has created the present capitalist system” (Kropotkin 144).

The transformations of the picaresque continue today. In our era of global capitalism and its recent turns toward barbarism<sup>11</sup> the picaresque continues to live otherwise. I want to end this whirlwind tour of the picaresque by turning briefly to K. Duiker Sello's *Thirteen Cents*, a novel that in later chapters I read in relation to the romance of the hustler in Luis Zapata's queer picaresque, *Adonis García*. Like a *Lazarillo* story, Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* narrates the experiences of a young, orphaned child named for the blue eyes that stand out in the dark skin of his face and body. Azure makes money by begging, stealing, and sex working—at 12 years old—with primarily white South African men. A series of episodic adventures with gangsters, pimps, drug dealers, and other figures of the criminal poor make the novel a fine example of contemporary fiction in the picaresque mode. Reflecting a historico-material shift from Genet's world, with dispossessed masses, colonized people, and industrialized workers seeming to offer unlimited revolutionary possibilities, Duiker's novel takes place long after the seeming triumph of capitalism. Unlike his picaresque antecedents, who turn to trickery and deception to become proletarian "by the way," and unlike Genet whose refusal is premised on the revolutionary potential of the outsides of capital, Azure's story ends with visions of destruction and fire, like an unworlding. This picaresque of late capitalism seems to suggest that the black subjection central to capital inheres so deeply within the structures of the world that there is no "outside" to aim for: there is only the destruction of the world as currently constituted and the making of a new one in its ruins.

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<sup>11</sup> Echoing Luxemburg in her *Junius Pamphlet*, I think here of the contemporary rise of the far right and its practices of extreme cruelty towards social others of all kinds.

But the novel's ending is opaque. Readers are unsure whether Cape Town burns to the ground in reality or only in Azure's feverish dreams. In the end, the picaro's uncanny liminality—his contingency and particularity, containing both the promise of history and the possibility of living otherwise—is like a shadow we can't outrun: "I tell him to fuck off with my eyes. In everyone I pass I can see a little of myself. I carry a little of everyone I know in me" (119). The long picaresque may end with a bang, but the picaro endures.

## Chapter Two: The Poiesis of the Picaresque

*Lazare, veni foras.* – John 11:44

A few decades before the publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Spanish Humanist Juan Luis Vives in *De Subventione Pauperum* [1526] railed against the crowds of displaced people moving from town to town, arguing that “the dissolute, the crooked, the thieving and the idle should be given the hardest work, and the most badly paid, in order that their example might serve as a deterrent to others” (as qtd. in Federici 127). In other words, Vives suggests a role for the Spanish state in pressing—or capturing—the poor into labor. In what follows, I wish to suggest that the poiesis of what will come to be known as the genre of the picaresque is itself an apparatus of capture, one that attempts to make legible the opacity of a subject outside History. Three registers of violence lend this apparatus its structure and point to the intractability of what Gyan Prakash calls an “otherness that resists containment” (288): first, the violence of primitive accumulation and its mimesis in the novel; second, the violence of representation and the murder of the word; and third, the tactical violence of an unbecoming subject.

### **Time and Being in the Violence of Primitive Accumulation**

The cause of the sharp rise in poverty and hunger in Spain at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century remains under contestation. As Anne Cruz notes, however, consensus has emerged that a clash between Spain’s mercantile interests and its exporters of raw materials was worsened by several factors: the consolidation of agricultural lands into *latifundias*; Charles V’s manipulation of wheat prices and the

subsequent decrease in peasant farming; and the Emperor's support for a nascent international capitalism—centered on his vast European and colonial possessions—over local industry and national capitalism. These factors combined to create a massive surge in poverty and homelessness (40), creating a national crisis. By the 1550s, “the need to squeeze more work from the aboriginal populations [in the Americas] largely derived from the situation at home where the Spanish Crown was literally floating on the American bullion, which bought food and goods no longer produced in Spain” (Federici 225). Economic crisis, excessive exports to the New World, and vast itinerant crowds of hungry, dispossessed peasants produced the context for *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

Marx calls this the time of primitive accumulation, a time that depends on brute force<sup>12</sup>. In Volume I of *Capital*, Marx writes of the peasants who were “suddenly dragged from their accustomed mode of life” by what he calls the bloody expropriation of the peasant from the soil, and made in “massive quantities into beggars, robbers, and vagabonds.” Silvia Federici describes this as the state's criminalization of newly dispossessed peasants:

The attack on workers that began with the enclosures [ . . . ] led to the formation of a vast proletariat either incarcerated in the newly constructed work-houses and correction-houses, or *seeking its survival outside the law and living in open antagonism to the state*—always one step away from the whip and the noose. (85, italics added)

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<sup>12</sup> “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. [ . . . ] The different moments of primitive accumulation distribute themselves now, more or less in chronological order, particularly over Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, and England” (Marx *Capital* 915).

As records or captured images of liminality, the picaresque figures the beggar outside of the law but *inside* the state and subject to its “bloody legislation” (Marx 896); it captures the rogue outside of labor *and* the transformation into a worker, inside labor.

A translator’s note tells us that Marx uses the term *vogelfrei* to describe these criminalized peasants before the accumulation of capital, free but “outside the human community and therefore entirely unprotected and without legal rights” (896). Drawing on Gramsci’s use of the term subaltern to signify non-hegemonic groups or classes, I propose we think alongside Marx’s notion of the *vogelfrei* peasant to define the figure of the *pícaro* as radically liminal, *a priori* to the complete exteriority of Gramsci’s subaltern<sup>13</sup>, “subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up” (55), and in between the violent antagonisms of labor and capital.

The violence that punctuates *Lazarillo de Tormes* has its origins in the accumulation of capital. For capital, violence is an ontological necessity; Rosa Luxemburg will call it the “only solution open to capital; the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon” (371). In the face of this violence, Lazarillo’s family exhibits a desperate determination, a form of thought made possible by this very violence: stealing, begging, and flaunting codes of moral and sexual behavior, and finally giving the boy away to a blind beggar. As Lazarillo moves between beloved child to object of abuse, he learns through brute force how to beg for

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<sup>13</sup> Writing about the *Risorgimento* in “Notes on Italian History” in *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci examines the failure of the Northern Italian proletariat to form a cohesive political bloc with the Southern Italian peasants and agricultural workers. I believe he uses the term subaltern—“non-hegemonic groups or classes”—to describe the condition of exteriority for the southern Italian peasant in relation to the political blocs of industrialized northern Italian workers (unions, syndicates, and so on). I use the term in this sense.

alms and live in abjection. Crystal Chemris notes that “when the blind man breaks [a wine jug] on Lazarillo’s face, a parallel performance of trauma occurs in the text in which language and speech are broken; as the boy becomes unconscious, “the subject ‘I’ becomes split or traumatized and becomes ‘el pobre Lázaro’.” This explosion comes after a sexually suggestive scene, where Lazarillo steals wine by “huddl[ing] between the blind man’s legs, eyes half-closed, to receive the fountain of liquid in his mouth” (130). Once caught, the blind man smashes the jug on his mouth as punishment for stealing, breaking most of his teeth, “sin los cuales hasta hoy día me quedé” (101) [“and that’s why I haven’t got any in my head today” (31)]. This scene of violence *from within* a space of subalternity, where Lazarillo and the Blindman both comprise part of a “non-hegemonic social group,” points to the destructive force of primitive accumulation.

Primitive accumulation relies in part on what Jordy Rosenberg has called a “dialectical relationship between the [violent] drive to annihilate space by time, and the production of very real and immiserating spatial conditions that accompany this drive” (*n. pag*). In other words, wage labor rises at the cost of the commons, and time itself takes on a new form, sliced into pieces and commodified as part of the working day<sup>14</sup>. In *Lazarillo de Tormes*, time is episodic and broken into seven *tratados*, with the first eight years of his life—before leaving home to find work—condensed into the first part of the first *tratado*; the structure of the novel, broken into sections of different forms of labor with different masters, contains traces of what will become the time of wage-labor, like a

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<sup>14</sup> See Marx’s chapter on the working day in *Capital* for a more extensive treatment of the destruction of space by time.

workday. John Beverly, who positions the text as a record of primitive accumulation, calls this episodic progression “a primitive process of proletarianization” (37).

Lazarillo’s proletarianization takes place in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the chronotope<sup>15</sup> of adventure-time of the novel of everyday life (125). In this adventure-time, “the role of the adventurer and the parvenu is the role of one who has not yet found a definite or fixed place in life, but who seeks personal success—building a career, accumulating wealth [ . . . ] this role impels him to study personal life, uncover its hidden workings” (126). As time congealed into wage labor, the realm of the private in everyday life grew in direct relation to the destruction of the commons, creating in literature what Bakhtin calls private genres opposed to public life and only accessed through spying, eavesdropping, and snooping. Metamorphosis, one of the key functions of the adventure-time of the everyday, relies on this study of personal life, as in the case of *Lazarillo de Tormes*: the lessons learned from his snooping and spying propel Lazarillo’s metamorphosis into a wage-laborer in the final *tratado*, complete with “the specific form of alienation that accompanies subjection of human energies and capacities to commodity status” (Beverly 37).

The chronotope of the picaresque, with its episodic progression, its snooping in the realm of the private, and its final metamorphosis into the alienated worker, imitates a new form of being in time within the changed spatialities of capital. When we recall that

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<sup>15</sup> “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (Bakhtin 84).

Lázaro's<sup>16</sup> main job, in the end, is to pimp—he marries the bishop's mistress, and lives in a house attached to his—Lázaro's alienation becomes clear, even as he proclaims, “Esta manera no me dicen nada, y yo tengo paz en mi casa” (177) [“As a result nobody says anything and there is peace at home” (79)]. This final moment of alienation<sup>17</sup> illustrates the first register of violence in the picaresque as an apparatus of capture, a register shaped by the time of primitive accumulation and enfolded in the chronotope of the picaresque.

### **The Murder of the Word**

As a liminal figure of dispossession who moves between the inside and outside of capital, the *pícaro* as subject seems to take on the transient quality of freedom implied by Marx's term *vogelfrei*, even in the face of the violence of primitive accumulation. But the *pícaro*'s imputed freedom of movement—flitting like a bird from scene to scene—is an inscription made by the violence of representation. Stallybrass in “Marx and Heterogeneity” calls this the “spectacle of heterogeneity” that shaped the bourgeoisie's own “specular, homogenizing gaze” (70). Like Stallybrass, I turn to Marx's work on the lumpenproletariat in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Paris* to situate this homogenizing gaze.

People on the edges of labor in its figuration as the international working-class figure prominently in Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Paris* as a class fraction and secret society—*la bohème*—of “disorder, prostitution, and theft” (77). Marx's distaste appears to stem largely from the role of *la bohème* in Bonaparte's ultimately successful

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<sup>16</sup> Lazarillo is the diminutive form of Lázaro in Spanish. I use the former to speak of young Lázaro, following the novel's convention.

<sup>17</sup> “If the product of labor is alien to me, confronts me as an alien power, to whom then does it belong? If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an alien and forced activity, to whom then does it belong? To a being other than myself” (Marx *EPM* 291).

efforts to overthrow the Second Republic. He describes these figures as an unthinking, violent mob of rag pickers easily mobilized by capital—with free-flowing champagne and abundant sausages<sup>18</sup> (78)—into what he calls an industrial reserve army. In other words, *la bohème* for Marx is a group liminal to labor in its antagonism with capital and easily bought off; their purported ease of purchase makes ‘them’ a natural ally of capital. As Stallybrass notes, however, language for Marx seems inadequate to the task of instantiating these liminal figures:

Alongside decayed roués of dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ grinders, rag pickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars. (*The Eighteenth Brumaire* 75)

He turns to French, Italian, and German to “capture” a figure that appears both outside capital—*vogelfrei*—and at the same time essential to it: the figure of the worker is defined on one end by the capitalist; on the other, however, the rogue as the outside of labor completes the ontological instantiation of the worker. In this sense, the rogue becomes a kind of inverse mirror of subjectivity, a picture of *le monde à l’envers* for what Luxemburg calls the honest working class.

Moving along similar lines of figuration, Adriana Johnson argues that the popular and literary representation of the Canudos rebellion<sup>19</sup> shows how it became a “surface of

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<sup>18</sup> Marx’s description of these marginal figures as *les saucissons* becomes especially ironic when read against the first *tratado* of *Lazarillo*, where Lazarillo steals and eats a sausage.

<sup>19</sup> “Under the leadership of the lay prophet Antonio Conselheiro, Belo Monte/Canudos fought a war against the still-fledgling republican government in Brazil in the backlands of the state of Bahia in 1896 – 1897. After three failed government expeditions, the conflict finally ended with the destruction of the community and the deaths of most of its inhabitants” (Johnson 2). The rebellion was largely a peasant insurgency.

inscriptions for a series of antagonisms” (76). The inscribed surface of its representations, and the obscuring force of the antagonisms written upon it, speaks to the opacity of the subaltern: “we do not have access to the subaltern as an autonomous agent external to a discourse of power [inscriptions, antagonisms]; we have access only to the way subaltern rebellions were committed to paper, rendered unintelligible, turned into the equivalence of nonsense or noise” (47). I think of this rendering as a form of violence produced in part by these antagonisms; it is the second register of violence at work in the apparatus of capture.

The lumpenproletariat—the rag picking workers—provides an ontological grounding for these animating antagonisms. Disposable like the rags they pick, dangerous (“the industrial reserve army of capital”), and only tenuously salvageable, the lumpen is particularly useful in defining through negation the terms of engagement. In this sense, the negation of these antagonisms illustrates the violence of representation. Hegel in *The First Philosophy of Spirit* attributes an originary violence to the movement of self-consciousness, one that entails a negation of the object for itself: “The first act, by which Adam established his lordship over the animals, is this, that he gave them a name, i.e., he nullified them as beings on their own account” (221). In other words, perception requires us to grasp the object as concept for us, not as a thing for itself, encoding violence in the act of perceiving and, subsequently, conceptualizing and naming.

In Marx’s call for the disposal of the hangers-on of capital, a similar kind of murder occurs, marked by a phenomenological and ontological violence that seeks to bury the lumpenproletariat beneath the ground of the Worker/Capitalist dialectic. Luxemburg, writing with no apparent irony *against* Marx’s notion of accumulation as

occurring in a society consisting solely of workers and capitalists, enthusiastically endorses the disposal of these liminal figures: “the hangers-on of the capitalist class (king, parson, professor, prostitute, mercenary), of whom [Marx] quite rightly disposes as [ . . . ] the parasitic joint consumers of the surplus value or of the wage of labor” (332). Like Marx, Luxemburg attributes an essential disposability to the sex worker, part of Marx’s lumpenproletariat. One could say that as much as the dead bodies of workers haunt capital, dead rogues and hookers haunt the body of labor, like so much chaff and refuse: their disposal instantiates the worker as subject, defining them by a negation that is fundamentally violent.

Written half a century before the publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, amidst the stirrings of capital in 1499, Fernando de Rojas’s novel *La Celestina* offers a particularly instructive example of the violence of negation. It points to an internal antagonism within the narrative of disposability articulated by Marx and Luxemburg and captured by the picaresque: salvageable and non-salvageable, the figure of Lázaro-as-worker posed against the dead body of Celestina-as-sex worker. *La Celestina* articulates an early version of what would become the rogue’s story. Viewed strictly within a Christian frame, Celestina is an “auldhoor” (23) justly punished for her sexual libertinism. At the same time, even Pármeno, the young man who ultimately kills her, praises her medical knowledge and her skillfulness in protecting orphans and unmarried sexually active women. Until her death, Celestina uses wit, sex, and trickery to bring virtually the entire town under her influence. A doula and “physickist,” a kind of early feminist and radical sexual healer, Celestina unequivocally states, “A tuerto o a derecho, nuestra casa hasta el

techo” (123) [“By foul means or fair, we take our share!” (34)]. Her defiance will cost her life.

Celestina’s death by murder seems to point to a set of fixed consequences for the evils of licentiousness; the circumstances of her death, however, complicate this reading. Celestina dies at the hands of the boy she had raised and his friend, after they quarreled over a valuable gold necklace. Money-hunger, reflecting the stirrings of the accumulation of capital happening all around her, led to Celestina’s downfall, not her refusal to conform to the order of reality. It is telling that, by 1554, the accumulation of capital in Spain was taking place through the ravishment of the Americas and the importation of American gold and silver. Celestina’s pre-capitalist practices—healing and midwifery, sex work and copulation outside of the structures of the family, abortion and birth control, folk “magick” as practiced by women—defied the stirrings of a capitalist reality of dispossession and dissolution for women like her (“auldhoors and procuresses”). Pármeno intuits as much when he describes a nascent picaresque ethos that violently resists the movement of primitive accumulation to which Celestina has succumbed: “Destruya, rompa, quiebre, dañe; dé a alcahuetas lo suyo, que mi parte me cabrá. Pues dizen, a río buelto ganancia de pescadores. ¡Nunca más perro al molino!” (137) [“Destroy, tear down, break, damage, give everything he has to procuresses, I will get my part. As they say, ‘River running wild, fisherman’s gain.’ Never lick someone’s boots again” (46)]. Driven wild by what he perceives to be Celestina’s greed, he plots her death as part of an antagonism that points to what Federici calls the “struggle for the breeches” (31).

“Destroy, tear, break, damage”: this multifaceted destruction reflects in language

the primitive dis-accumulation of power for women like Celestina, folk healers, procuresses, sex positive single women, or—in a word—witches. Federici argues compellingly that the capitalist accumulation of labor resulted in “witch hunts” that degraded women’s local power vis-à-vis folk wisdom [*sabiduría*]. Criminalization and punishment would come to be seen as just deserts for women like Celestina and more broadly for workers who defied the demands of capital. Federici describes this as the degradation of the female body as site of reproduction: “Like the land, the body had to be cultivated and first of all broken up, so that it could relinquish its hidden treasures. For while the body is the condition of the existence of labor-power, it is also its limit, as the main element of resistance to its expenditure [ . . . ] the body had to die so that labor-power could live” (140). We can see this at work in the novel, like the violence of an inscription made on Celestina’s body. Her death, told as a part of a morality play, highlights the consequences of sexual and reproductive freedom for women at a time when the control of reproduction was being consolidated within the confines of the family structure.

As a pre-capitalist figure of the social connectedness *qua* use value relation soon to be replaced (‘killed’) by the exchange value relation<sup>20</sup>, Celestina is killed twice: once by Pármeno, and again by the act of representation. Her death *and* her creation in the literary imagination is an erasure, part of what Gayatri Spivak calls the historical

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<sup>20</sup> “Certain it is that gold must take its place as *the earliest metal known*, and in the first record of man’s progress it is indicated as a standard of man’s position’ (because in the form of excess, the first form in which wealth appears. The first form of value is *use value*, the everyday quality that expresses the relation of the individual to nature; the second, exchange value ALONGSIDE use value, its command over other people’s use values, its social connectedness: exchange value is itself originally a value for use on Sundays only, going beyond immediate physical necessity.)” (Marx *Grundrisse* 177).

silencing of the subaltern, an “effacement in disclosure” that renders any tracing of the remains of her voice a tragic—and doomed—project of “moral love” (*History* 310). In this sense, the word and even her name is a murder (Celestina, celestial, otherworldly, outside of reason, inside History only in death). The “homogenizing gaze” of a nascent bourgeoisie (Fernando de Rojas was a *converso* lawyer who would become mayor of Talavera de la Reina) requires her death. It is tragic but necessary, part of capital’s assertion of control over women’s reproduction in the wake of the labor crises of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Federici 40).

A similar violence is at work in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, though it differs in two key ways: first, through the literary function of Lazarillo as a roguish servant, allowing him to snoop and spy on the private lives of the various sectors of Spanish society (the dissolving peasant family, the wandering blind beggar, the starving hidalgo, gluttonous and licentious priests and archbishops); and second, through his metamorphosis into a figure of the proletariat. In the first instance, Lazarillo’s bird’s eye view gives his anonymous author a position from which to critique the social realities of his time, making the first picaresque novel as much a satire of Spanish society as it is an inscription on the body of the rogue. In this sense, Lazarillo’s importance derives from what Heidegger describes as a kind of tool being: “The less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment” (98). The utility imputed to the picaresque—the servant as spy—makes him useful as an immanent critique of Spanish society; in this first instance of violence, the very question of his being becomes one of utility and authorial labor, erasing the residues

of subaltern heterogeneity with the homogenizing gaze of its bourgeois author. In the second instance, the figure of the peasant as *vogelfrei* becomes, through literary intervention, a member of the laboring proletariat (albeit an ambiguous kind of labor, sex and service) effectively entombing his pre-capitalist subjectivity in the sepulcher of language.

One scene in particular elucidates the violence of representation in the novel. In the extraordinarily short fourth *tratado*, Lazarillo tells of his time with *un fraile de la Merced* [Friar of the Order of Mercy]. I quote the scene in its entirety here:

Hube de buscar el cuarto, y éste fue un fraile de la Merced, que las mujercillas que digo me encaminaron, al cual ellas le llamaban pariente. Gran enemigo del coro y de comer en el convento, perdido por andar fuera, amicísimo de negocios seculares y visitar: tanto, que pienes que rompía él más zapatos que todo el convento. Éste me dio los primeros zapatos que rompí en mi vida; mas no me duraron ocho días, ni yo pude con su trote durar más. Y por esto y otras cosillas que no digo, salí dél. (156)

[I had to find a fourth employer, and this one turned out to be a friar of the Order of Mercy. The women I mentioned recommended me to him as they said he was a relative of theirs. He wasn't interested in singing in the choir and he wouldn't eat in the monastery. He loved going out and worldly affairs and visiting people. I think he wore out more shoes than the rest of his community put together. He gave me the first pair of shoes I ever went through in my life. They didn't even last me a week and I couldn't take the running around much more. I left him because of that and also because of one or two things that I'd rather not mention.(66)]

What are these “otras cosillas” that Lazarillo does not tell us? As Francisco Rico notes in the Cátedra edition of the novel, “En años recientes, casi toda la crítica ha querido ver aquí la alusión eufemística a unas relaciones nefandas entre el mozo y el fraile” (112) [In recent years, almost all of the criticism has tended to see here a euphemistic allusion to abominable relations between the boy and the friar (*my trans.*)]. Rico goes on to cast doubt on these readings of the scene; their accuracy, however, does not concern us here.

Lazarillo's silence, regardless of what it alludes to, illustrates what I have called the second register of violence, that of representation: the re-making or fashioning of the peasant outside capital into the worker *inside* capital. In this sense, his silence speaks volumes. Thinking alongside Spivak and the unintelligibility of subaltern speech, I suggest that Lazarillo does not tell us because there are no structures of reception for what he has to say. His silence reflects his position outside reason, impossible to access. Lazarillo's silence is the image of death, a literary idealization and preservation that refuses signification. In it there is both a murder and a birth, an end for the subaltern of capital and a beginning for the picaro as capital's slippery, ungraspable figure of liminality. Even as a speaking subject, the "I" of the text, Lazarillo speaks in a borrowed language, using the form of the *carta mensajera* [confessionary letter] to narrate a self into being.

I want to agree with Chemris, who calls Lazarillo's silence a "glimpse into subaltern experience" (111). At the same time, these glimpses appear to me to be a series of inscriptions on his violated body, part of what Spivak calls the tragic emotions and moral love of the political activist. We "read" his silence as subjection, impossibility, prudence, or as something else entirely, and in this way fill up the void created by what he refuses to tell us. Our critical and political desire to *name* Lazarillo's silence exemplifies the second register of violence I have so far described as the murder of the word.

### **The Third Register: Picaresque Violence and the Grotesque Body**

At the same time, Lazarillo's silence points to what Prakash calls "an intimation, a trace of that which eludes the dominant discourse" (288). This elusive trace leads me to

the third register of violence in the picaresque genre as apparatus of capture, part of what Federici calls the criminalized working class's "open antagonism to the state." This antagonism is central to Michel de Certeau's *The Practices of Everyday Living*. De Certeau dedicates his book to "the ordinary man [ . . . ] a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets" at the center of his formulation of the routines of everyday life. He conceives of these routines of everyday life as a series of small acts of resistance (playing *la perruque*: making do or 'pulling one over'), calling them an art of the weak (38). As tactics, making do resembles guerrilla warfare and acts as a counterpoise to strategy and its spatial mastery through vision and "panoptic spaces" (36). He writes, "lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness [ . . . ] resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power" (38). As a liminal figure moving between the inside and outside of capital, the picaro—without *une espace propre*—turns to a violent trickery that is tactical and spontaneous, mischievous and disingenuous and born of the desperation of close combat between ill-matched foes. In what follows, I want to suggest that when making do *à la perruque* fails the rogue and the beggar, another kind of tactics becomes available, a making do on picaresque terms. I propose we think of this as picaresque violence, the third register within the apparatus of capture, similar to what Prakash calls the eruption of subalternity within the system of dominance.

Writing about Jean Genet's twinning of vagrancy and militancy, William Haver describes violence as an ontological priority for those inhabiting juridically liminal spaces: thieves, queers, sex workers, racial minorities, beggars and poor people; in short,

those on the margins of the antagonisms animating the movement of capital. In making this claim, Haver cites Genet's dismissal of non-violence as a political strategy: "the non-violent stance of the Whites belongs to a moral dilettantism. Nothing else" (3). For Genet, violence is *a priori* and constitutive. Haver articulates a set of conclusions that he draws from interviews and analysis of Genet's opposition to non-violence as a political strategy, which I highlight here: first, that violence is a constitutive relation; and second, that violence causes thinking, and indeed is the "very possibility for thinking" (48). Haver's concept resonates with the registers of violence in terms of its phenomenological and constitutive content, viz. primitive accumulation and the picaresque novel as an apparatus of capture, and in terms of its ontological content and the "possibility for thinking."

I have made reference several times to the body as a site for this violence. In the example of the Blindman and the jar of wine in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, the body of the *pícaro* serves as the site of much of this violence, from the dispossession of accumulation to the erasures of representation. At the same time, the body is also the site of a tactical picaresque violence, like a corporeal making do; we see this in Lazarillo's own body, in the silence of his body in the fifth *tratado*, and, by the end of the first *tratado*, on the body of the Blindman.

After breaking Lazarillo's teeth, the Blindman will force him to vomit up a sausage<sup>21</sup> he secured through trickery and theft. Bakhtin, writing about the representation of the body in the self-mocking humor of folk culture (282), argues that "in the act of

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<sup>21</sup> Recall Marx's *saucissons*.

eating, as we have said, the confines between the body and the world are overstepped by the body; it triumphs over the world, over its enemy, celebrates its victory, grows at the world's expense." As Maria de Malkiel points out, the first *tratado* has its origins in Spanish folklore about blind men and guide boys (355). Comic images of eating and drinking symbolized working people and a folk culture, Bakhtin argues, as "human labor's encounter with the world and the struggle against it ended in food" (281). In this sense, the rending and tearing of the mouth belies an exuberant transgression of the boundaries between the self and the world, like an unbecoming subject; eating, laughing, and mocking, the "the body of the people" opposes the closed, unitary system ("the individual, the impenetrable façade") of the form of the subject (the worker, the bourgeois) that was taking shape at the time.

In de Certeau's terms, Lazarillo's theft of a sausage resembles the making do of the workplace; instead of paperclips and stamps, he steals his employer's sausage. Confronted by the Blindman, he vomits the sausage back up under duress suggestive of sexual violence: "abríame la boca más de su derecho y desatentadamente metía la nariz. La cual él tenía lengua y afilada, y a aquella sazón con el enojo se había aumentado un palmo" (108) ["[he] forced my mouth wide open, and thrust his nose down my throat. His nose was long and sharp and his rage had made it a lot longer" (34)]. Gagging and unable to breathe, Lazarillo covers the blind man's face in vomit: "le dio con el hurto en ella, 'de suerte que su nariz y la negra mal mascada longaniza 'a un tiempo salió de mi boca" ["I brought it all up, and his nose and the half-digested sausage came out at the same time"]. He thus repels the intrusion of the blind man's "lengua y afilada nariz" ["long and sharp

nose”] with the force of his stomach; vomit frees the boy from the sexually charged intrusion.

Bakhtin has noted the connotations of vomit and other bodily eliminations with life and death. In his struggle with the Blindman, Lazarillo’s vomit degrades and brings the material world down to earth and its fecundity: “to degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place” (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 21). In this sense, Lazarillo’s vomit can be seen as a tactic born of necessity, a life or death struggle. Vomiting in the face of the man who would rape or beat you illustrates the third register of violence in the picaresque, a self-defensive response that lends multivocality to the registers of violence. Scent, tactility, and taste (the smell of the longaniza, the feel of the Blindman’s long nose in young Lázaro’s throat, the stench of vomit and the repulsive heat of its materiality) all form part of what Bakhtin describes as the bodily material principle of degradation, with its downward movement toward the fecundity of earth and its regenerative cycles of conception, life, and death. The material body with its open orifices is in perpetual flux, incomplete and in continual exchange with the world. It moves liminally between the antagonisms of labor and capital at the same time as it resists their containment, a process of unbecoming enacted through the lower bodily stratum.

Lazarillo’s final escape from the Blindman showcases the centrality of the body to picaresque violence. He leads the blind man to a stream and tells him to leap across it. The blind man does not sense the stone pillar blocking his path, and jumps with all his might, bashing his head against the pillar and falling unconscious. As Lazarillo escapes,

he mocks not the man's inability to see, but his inability to smell: "¿Cómo, y olistes la longaniza y no el poste? ¡Olé, olé!" (112) ["What, you smelled the sausage but you couldn't smell the post? Olé, olé!" (37)]. Considerable word play here alludes to bull fighting, and the call is the same (¡Olé!), but the word itself is the affirmative informal imperative of the verb "oler" [to smell]. Smell functions here in two ways: first, as part of a material bodily principle imbricated with hunger and the stomach, indicative of a corporeal openness to the world; and second, as an invocation to resist, especially in Lazarillo's position directly behind the pillar like a bullfighter dodging a bull. Dominique Laporte in the *History of Shit* writes, "Civilization despises odor and will oust it with increased ferocity as power strives to close the gap between itself and divine purity" (83). He goes on, "smell is the antimony of order and hygiene, is equally incompatible with beauty [ . . . ] the beautiful is constituted by a primordial *non olet*. What will in several hundred years become codified as an aesthetic principle Laporte links to Kant ("there are no beautiful smells"), is already vigorously mocked and degraded by the *pícaro*: not *non olet*, but ¡Olé, olé!"

Referring to the scene from *The Golden Ass* by the second century Roman writer Apuleius, where a man transformed into a donkey is saved from a beating by explosive, foul-smelling diarrhea, Maier argues "[the] passage derives its comic force through an ambush on the senses and a similar assault on rational expectation" (682). In *Lazarillo*, this comic force conducts a similar assault, on the senses, the body, and perception. Lazarillo's picaresque violence comprises a set of tactics, from stealing to begging, from eating and vomiting to violence and subterfuge, that continually trick and subvert authority, as subsequent *tratados* will demonstrate. The entire novel is a kind of trick, a

manipulation of the confessional narrative to sway *Vuestra Merced*'s opinion about *el caso* (his 'pimping' to live in peace). The trickery of the rogue and the use of the lower bodily stratum to degrade and mock are core elements in the tactics of picaresque violence, a making do fundamentally shaped by the materiality of the body.

I want to conclude by returning to Lazarillo's scene of revenge on the Blindman. Stanley Novak describes the boy's use of violent trickery in the chapter as part of the *pícaro*'s rebirth, redolent of the fecundity of the lower bodily stratum; in this sense, we see the centrality of violence for Lazarillo's emergent sense of self. According to Novak, violence precipitates this re-birth:

Lazarillo not only prognosticates a future event in his imagined violence, a function traditionally associated with his Teiresian master, he will also reverse roles in another way. If throughout the *tratado*, Lazarillo has been the victim and the Blindman the vehicle of anger, in the last episode, the Blindman becomes the victim of Lazarillo's anger. (903)

Lazarillo's picaresque violence is a tactic of self-defense, a response to brutalization as a condition for thought. He experiences and then uses violence as a weapon, as will many of the *pícaros* to follow him, learning from the Blindman—who later he will refer to as "el bueno" for his lessons in survival—how to endure the violence of capital: through trickery, deceit, and violence. His deception of the Blindman, part of the first chapter of the first picaresque novel, establishes a precedent for the use of violence as a tactic:

Yo le puse bien derecho enfrente del pilar, y doy un salto y pongome detrás del poste como quien espera tope de toro, y díjele: "¡Sus! Salta todo lo que podáis, porque deis deste cabo del agua." Aun apenas lo había acabado de decir cuando se abalanza el pobre ciego como cabrón, y de toda su fuerza arremete, tomando un paso atrás de la corrida para hacer mayor salto, y da con la cabeza en el poste, que sonó tan recio como si diera con una gran calabaza, y cayó luego para atrás, medio muerto y hendida la cabeza. (112)

I put him straight facing the pillar, took a leap and darted behind it like a bullfighter avoiding a charge, and cried, 'Now, jump as far as you can and you'll

get over.’ I scarcely had time to say thing before he reared up like a billy-goat and hurled himself as hard as he could, having taken one step back to give himself more impetus. He crashed head first into the post, which rang as if a pumpkin had hit it, and then fell back half dead with his head split open. (36)

Responding to hunger (the Blindman, emblematic of the accumulation of capital, is starving him) and the Blindman’s lessons in survival, Lazarillo’s violence becomes a tactic that recalls Fanon’s formulation in *The Wretched of the Earth* of violent resistance as “the rehabilitation of man” in his totality (62), a final triumph for humanity that “mobilizes the people, i.e. it pitches them in a single direction, from which there is no turning back” (50). In this scene, Lazarillo shows that he has mastered a kind of grammar of violence that inheres within the language of primitive accumulation and, for Fanon, of emancipation: “To have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up (too quickly, say some) the famous echelons of an organized society, can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence” (3).

### **Lazarus Springs Forth**

By way of *Lazarillo*, I have attempted to demonstrate the ontological priority of violence as constitutive of subjectivity, as a condition for thinking, and, perhaps most critically, as a tactic of self-defense and material form of unbecoming. In the end, the making of the picaresque is a bloody business. As an apparatus of capture, the genre attempts to make legible their opacity: they become the other of capital *and* labor, a parable of capital *and* the moral love story of the political activist. The picaresque is indispensable, both as the record of how to become a good worker, and as the ontological ground beneath the feet of the honest working class. The first two registers of violence in this apparatus render the figure of the rogue always-already inscrutable, at the same time as these registers seek to make them legible as the negative of the working class. But they resist

the violence of accumulation and the containment of language with a trickery born of desperation. Written in a borrowed language and inscribed by violence, traces of the rogue's story—"otras cosillas que no digo"—linger, like a degraded body that continuously springs forth renewed.

### Chapter Three: Picaresque Silence and the (Im)possibilities of Representation

*“If I take leave of this book, I take leave of what can be related. The rest is unsayable. I say no more and walk barefoot.” – Jean Genet, *The Miracle of the Rose**

Marx observes that the economic power of capitalism arose in direct proportion to the accumulation of capital and “the forcible expropriation of the people from the soil, and their making into beggars, robbers, and vagabonds” (*Capital* 896). In the preceding chapter, I described the picaresque as an accomplice of capital and its accumulatory processes; I have sought to show how the genre is one part of a semiotic power structure that scaffolds and sustains the dominant power of capitalism, the economic. As the genre-form of “beggars, robbers, and vagabonds,” the picaresque narrates the process of becoming-proletarian as an entrance *into* labor from the cold outsides of criminality and vagabondage. But while multiple registers of violence and domination make the picaro through negation and “the Hegelian theme of the murder of the word” (Zizek *n. pag.*), something remains, under erasure and hidden in the voids and gaps of the genre and in language itself. An imaginary of what Marx calls the fathers of the present working-class, the picaresque represses and binds a history outside History, before and after wage labor, subtending our waking lives with the countervailing force of a persistent dream. As is so often the case, what we repress is what we most desire.

This chapter lingers in what Aaron Betsky calls the “queerest space of all,” the void<sup>22</sup>, and takes up the silences, gaps, and omissions of the genre in its modern and contemporary forms. As a kind of sign and signifier of the rebel, picaresque silence spills over and overflows the genre-form, emerging in language and its absences, in dreams, and in the im/possibility of representation. Like Lazarillo, whose omissions and lies are tactical and strategic, picaresque silence surfaces as rebellion and defiance throughout the genre, so many “*otras cosillas que no digo*.” Silence and the unsaid or unsayable, in the final instance, subtend his seeming submission to wage labor, a warm home and a happy—if cuckolding—wife, as “*Destá manera no me dicen nada, y yo tengo paz en mi casa*” (177) [“As a result nobody says anything and there is peace at home” (79)]. In Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, deception and trickery belie Moll’s submission to proletarianization up until the very end of the novel, as her lies about a stolen gold watch show us: “I did not, indeed, tell him that I stole it from a gentlewoman’s side, at a meeting house in London. That’s by the way” (303). The theft of a watch points to a kind of picaresque theft of time, like a refusal to submit to the discipline of wage labor. Even married and settled into unwaged house work, Moll tells us through omission—one form of picaresque silence—that there is much in the proletariat that is “by the way.”

In the following chapters, I focus on two historically discontinuous iterations of the queer picaresque, understood here as the first-person and paratactic narration of the *aventuras*, *desventuras*, and *sueños* [adventures, misfortunes, and dreams] of queer lumpen subjects. These texts, a self-proclaimed picaresque novel from Mexico from 1977

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<sup>22</sup> “The queerest space of all is the void, and AIDS has made us live in that emptiness, that absence, that loss” (182).

and a South African novel with a picaresque affective register from 2000, offer a unique vantage point for critical inquiry into picaresque silence and the (im)possibilities of representation.

### The Queer Picaresque

In *The Avowal of Difference*, Ben Sifuentes Jáuregui provocatively asks, “How do we write a history in a place that does not know or acknowledge a queer language?” (83). Many of us have struggled with this question. A little less than ten years after Luis Zapata’s attempt to see and voice a kind of queer subaltern in *El vampiro de la colonia Roma: las aventuras, desventuras, y sueños de Adonis García* [*Adonis García: a Picaresque Novel*], the queer communist Pedro Lemebel sought to bring Zapata’s antihero—*pobre y maricón*—into history:

Pero no me hable del proletariado  
Porque ser pobre y maricón es peor  
Hay que ser ácido para soportarlo  
Es darle un rodeo a los machitos de la esquina  
Es un padre que te odia  
Porque al hijo se le dobla la patita  
Es tener una madre de manos tajeadas por el cloro  
Envejecidas de limpieza  
Acunándote de enfermo  
Por malas costumbres  
Por mala suerte  
Como la dictadura  
Peor que la dictadura  
Porque la dictadura pasa  
Y viene la democracia  
Y detrasito el socialismo  
¿Y entonces?  
¿Qué harán con nosotros compañero? (89)

[But don’t speak to me of the proletariat  
Because to be poor and queer is worse  
One must be tough to withstand it  
It is to avoid the machitos on the street corner  
It is a father that hates you

Because his son is a queen  
It is to have a mother whose hands are slashed by bleach  
Aged from cleaning  
Cradling you as if you were ill  
Because of bad habits  
Because of bad luck  
Like the dictatorship  
Worse than the dictatorship  
Because the dictatorship ends  
And democracy comes  
And right behind it socialism  
And then what?  
What will you do to us, *compañero*? (*n.pag.*)]

Lemebel's speaking out *en diferencia* breaks from Adonis's silences and the many gaps and absences that punctuate the text. But Lemebel's critique of anti-queerness in leftwing politics would leave Chilean leftists unmoved<sup>23</sup>. So while his manifesto suggests that the subaltern can in fact speak, it also tells us that the structures of reception for their speech do not exist.

Marx observes that political economy “does not recognize the unoccupied worker, the working man in so far as he is outside this work relationship. The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are figures which do not exist for it, but only for other eyes—for the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers, beadles, etc.” (335). It is no surprise that the picaresque—the genre that *figures* the lumpen—is riddled with omissions, gaps, and narrative silences. The picaro—

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<sup>23</sup> “‘The PDI [Partido Democrático de la Izquierda, home to many repatriated former Communist Party members] simply could not deal with it,’ said Ricardo Ochoa, a member of the MOVILH. ‘At their meeting, a majority of the leadership voted to kick us [LGBTQ activists affiliated with Lemebel and his *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*] out. The reason they gave was that neither the PDI nor Chilean society as a whole was prepared to deal with a *sui generis* relationship between a political party and a homosexual movement’” (<https://nacla.org/article/history-making-homosexual-liberation-movement-chile>).

“the swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man,” all rolled into one—exists for other eyes: the reader’s.

Another figure which does not exist for the eyes of political economy and its philosophy of productivity also eludes Marx’s gaze: the *maricón pobre* or queer lumpen, cruising for sex and hustling for money, often unhoused and pushed to the margins, willfully outside of the reproduction of labor and economic contracts of marriage. In the *18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire*, the *maricón pobre* appears before our eyes as a figure of degeneration and corruption, as the “decayed roués of dubious means of subsistence and dubious origins” (75). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a roué is a “debauched man”; synonyms include libertine, rake, and degenerate. Capacious as it is, the term can be taken as a subtle signifier for the “low class” homosexual who seeks out clandestine sexual encounters in parks and restrooms, and may charge or pay for sex. It is no mere coincidence that much of Marxist discourse historically includes men who have sex with men epistemologically within the lumpenproletariat, as signs of bourgeois decadence and part of the “refuse of all classes.”

While the *maricón pobre* does not exist for political economy nor for Marx as anything other than a figure of decay and corruption, he very much exists for the eyes of the reader of the picaresque novel, as we see in the late modern text by Zapata and in the contemporary picaresque novel, *Thirteen Cents*, by K. Sello Duiker. Both texts are linked across time by their picaresque figuration of a queer, sex working lumpen antihero: the hustler. Both texts are riddled with narrative silences, gaps, and omissions. I think of these novels as a kind of queer picaresque. In *El vampiro*, the hustler figures as a kind of revolutionary *flâneur* and lyrical paean to gay liberation; in *Thirteen Cents*, the hustler

appears as a figure of negativity and creative destruction, calling to mind the notion of unworlding—as riotous collapse and rebirth—through gasoline and matches.

The changing figuration of the hustler, like that of the picaro, emphasizes the importance of reading the economic under erasure in the aesthetic strategies of capture and negation the genre employs. The voids and silences of the queer picaresque, themselves so many erasures and negations, only begin to make sense when situated within the economic, since the genre re-imagines the depredations of capital—dispossession, immiseration, alienation—as so much ludic spectacle, a *jouissance* achieved through abjection. But in the dark spaces after and between spectacles, the hustler disappears from the scene, evanescent and impossible for us to grasp unless we follow him into the wild darkness of the voids.

These voids are the space of the hustler. Moving through what the trailblazing queer writer John Rechy calls “the world of Lonely-Outcast America, [ . . . ] the Cities of Terrible Night” (116), the hustler stands in penumbral anonymity, face obscured but fingers lightly caressing a crotch in invitation. His voids are the “Terrible” negative spaces of the city, uncanny and pregnant with barely repressed desire. Unlit street corners, dark parks, murky public restrooms and the pulsating red lights of sex stores and x-rated adult video arcades: like a vast undercommons, these negative spaces constitute “a wild place that is not simply the left-over space that limns real and regulated zones of polite society; rather, it is a wild place that continuously produces its own unregulated wildness” (Halberstam 7). The hustler’s void produces its own silences, part of the unregulated wildness of the negative city spaces he occupies.

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century the male sex worker was a marginal, almost hidden figure in Western literature, before coming out of the shadows in Europe in Jean Genet's *The Thief's Journal* [1949], in the US in John Rechy's *City of Night* [1963], and in Mexico with *El Vampiro* [1979]. By the time of Duiker's novel in 2000, the affective register of the hustler will be almost unrecognizable. But Genet, Rechy, Zapata, and Duiker's hustlers are all unhoused outsiders, making the picaresque an enduring figural home for them. T.E. May notes as much when he observes that "the picaresque becomes [ . . . ] essentially, not simply a rogue in the narrow sense, but the man who does not belong" (33). In the queer picaresque, hustlers dwell outside and on the margins: of work, as wage laborers openly selling their bodies and its pleasures in increments of time, embodiments of the commodity fetish; of home and place, sleeping on streets, parks, and in old hotels and flophouses; and of sexuality and gender, as often virile masculine figures who fuck and get fucked by other men.

While the conventions of the picaresque—abasement, ridicule, moralizing and spectacularizing—point to a repressing and binding of what Julia Kristeva describes as a violent and painful passion like *jouissance*, in the queer picaresque this painful passion seems to overflow the genre form, like a return of the repressed. Genet in *The Thief's Journal* revels in this violent passion, calling it a vascular exchange between his "taste for betrayal and theft and my loves" (153). Genet writes, "I would be overjoyed if I could call him [his lover] scoundrel, hoodlum, crook, charming names whose function is to evoke what you, derisively, call a pretty world. But these words sing. They hum. They also evoke to you the sweetest and spiciest pleasures" (146). These sweetest and spiciest pleasures—outside property and the philosophies of productivity, unbound by contracts

of marriage and reproduction—evoke the kind of freedom Marx calls *vogelfrei*. This bird freedom lies at the heart of this vascular exchange, and at the heart of the picaresque as a homeless subject, part of what Matthew Garrett calls “the reader’s dream of freedom” (117). Genet’s semi-autobiographical picaresque inhabits homeless subjectivity and its abject body violently, painfully, joyfully. He revels in its volatile fluids – from shit and piss to semen and blood – and the anarchy of vagabondage, taking up abjection and covering himself in its fluids like a kind of pyrrhic defeat. Genet asks us to gaze upon death through the lens of desire, with reading as seeing and wanting, and writing as being made to be seen and wanting to be seen. In this way readers can imagine the dissolution of the boundary between self and other as a kind of unbounded circuit of desire. In queer love, on the streets, Genet sees the possibility of living otherwise. In *The Thief’s Journal*, the picaresque emerges as an uncanny dreamscape of labor, outside the property relation and a scene of fugitivity and flight from capital: the picaresque becomes in Genet’s hands a resurrected vagabond hero, masterless and refusing to submit to the discipline of wages and rent, procreation and marriage.

Zapata’s queer picaresque novel appears to continue this embrace, though unlike Genet, Zapata himself makes no claims of subalternity. This is perhaps why his novel so overtly engages the genre of the picaresque, historically a kind of mediated bourgeois gaze, as I have argued in previous chapters. Zapata’s novel engages another kind of bourgeois gaze, this time that of the homosexual working person who ‘becomes straight,’

part of what Lisa Duggan calls the homonormative turn<sup>24</sup>, leaving the *mariconerías* behind for hustlers and those outside licit wage labor relationships. The novel is very much one of gay liberation, a point I return to later. But despite this essential difference, both novels reveal a sense of confidence and profound cathexis in the lumpen<sup>25</sup>, especially the hustler and the cruiser, as a ‘new’ kind of revolutionary subject.

After the collapse of communism and the seeming triumph of capital, a different affective register emerges in the queer picaresque, one that makes the heroization of the unhoused hustler appear facile. With the rise of neoliberalism and its rhetoric of human rights and equality, and in light of the now uncontested primacy of the individual and their identity within the structures of a consumer-oriented civil society, embracing abjection no longer appears revolutionary like the “perversions” Marcuse celebrated. Up against the homonormative turn, the queer picaresque novel shifts toward a dreamworld of death and destruction, closer to Lee Edelman’s vision of the queer as negative and outside futurity in *No Future*. The later iteration of the queer picaresque will be its uncanniest yet: no more of Genet’s reveling in abjection, Rechy’s pulsating red lights spelling out “F\*A\*S\*C\*I\*N\*A\*T\*I\*O\*N” (41) in the nocturnal sex world of 1960s Times Square; no more of Zapata’s hustler-jouissance. Instead, fear and terror underpin a young boy’s movements in the vast cities of night, ‘Terrible’ and terribly alluring as the

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<sup>24</sup> Duggan defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (190).

<sup>25</sup> Genet wrote shortly after the end of World War II, when European economies were shattered and the streets full of the “disintegrated mass tossed hither and thither” of the lumpenproletariat. At the same time, colonized people around the world were beginning to liberate themselves from colonization. For writers like Genet, thinkers like Frantz Fanon, and revolutionaries like the Black Panthers, the lumpen of the world were natural allies and a kind of anti-capitalist vanguard.

repressed recurs and takes shape as the violent negation of a world that would make a twelve-year old boy like Azure into a hustler. Like Lazarillo—also twelve years old, hungry and unhoused and brutally abused by older men—Azure uses tactical violence to survive; unlike Lazarillo, the text ends in a refusal to become Lázaro the good proletarian subject, and instead seeks to burn capitalized life to the ground. In this way, *Thirteen Cents* radically departs from the picaresque mode of fiction as the *bildungsroman* of the proletarian, giving the novel a picaresque affective register with violence—physical and sexual, symbolic, and finally tactical—as its defining feature.

Amidst the shifting forms of the queer picaresque and its diverse figurations of the hustler, the omissions and gaps so central to the genre throughout its long life endure. In *El vampiro*, these absences are textual and graphic, in terms of grammar and punctuation, and content-based, in terms of what the picaro refuses to say or tell. In *Thirteen Cents*, picaresque silence takes the shape of a refusal to tell, like a kind of enigmatic silence. Writing about the “the self-conscious manner in which [the picaresque] underscores its own narrative silences, or lacunae,” John Parrack remarks that these silences have long been noted in critical studies<sup>26</sup> of the genre. The omissions and gaps of the genre are an “intrinsic part of the text that emanates from it and reveals itself in the ironic silences” within the language, structure, discourse, and space of the picaresque novel (292). Parrack positions picaresque silence as a stylistic tool, part of a roguish toolbox that ranges from laughter to silence. In the picaresque, silence is the flip side of laughter, described by José Antonio Maravall as an instrument of social

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<sup>26</sup> Parrack gives us a critical genealogy of these textual lacunae: “gap” (Dunn 6), “chasm” (Maiorino 87), “void” (Carey 42), “discursive space” (Friedman 120), “fragment” (Wicks 246), and “fisura” (Rey 62).

disintegration in the genre (Maorino 14). Unlike laughter, however, the textual lacunae of the picaresque belie the “contradiction between word and action” at the same time as they destabilize the reliability of the narrator. What the *picaro* leaves unsaid – “that’s by the way,” as Moll Flanders puts it – robs the word of its flesh, as the narrator’s unreliability becomes the word’s unreliability.

I think alongside Parrack in turning to Luis Zapata’s exuberantly queer picaresque novel to make sense of the ways in which queer writers have attempted to answer Sifuentes-Jáuregui’s question: “how do we write a history in a place that does not know or acknowledge a queer language?” (83). Zapata’s novel with its picaresque genealogy writes this history as the wayward romance of a male hustler whose word is unreliable and riddled with silences and omissions. In his hands, the rogue as hustler becomes a priapic figure, the stuff of some men’s dreams.

### **Romancing the Hustler**

When Adonis García, the young man otherwise known as the Vampire of Colonia Roma, rolls into Mexico City, he has a hundred pesos in his pocket, no job, and no place to stay. Wandering the streets like a modern-day Lazarillo, he looks up his brother and crashes with him and his *loca* [queen] lover. Seduced in short order by another *loca*, Adonis gleefully enters into a homosexual underworld marked by prostitution, drugs and alcohol, hunger, police violence, and homelessness. It is a picaresque world, chaotic and full of depredation, but Adonis laughs and fucks his way through it. Zapata’s novel, published in 1979 shortly after the end of the Mexican “miracle” of sustained economic

development, proclaims its mimetic relation to *Lazarillo de Tormes*<sup>27</sup> in its very title: *El vampiro*<sup>28</sup> *de la Colonia Roma, Las aventuras, desventuras, y sueños de Adonis García*.

Unlike Lazarillo's proletarianization, however, the novel narrates another kind of becoming.

Adonis trains like Lazarillo with a series of masters; only this time, instead of becoming a wage laborer and master of the art of servitude, the young homeless protagonist becomes a hustler—another form of wage labor—and master of sexual service. But becoming straight, or at least straight acting and appearing, is part of becoming worker, as we see when Adonis seeks psychiatric treatment and is told to straighten up his act: “A mí me vas a venir a ver con el pelo corto bien corto y esos zapatos que tienes de llanta<sup>29</sup> de jipi horribles detestables éstos no los vas a traer nunca y nada de esas pulseritas y esos colgajos y demás mariconerías” (150) [“y’re gonna come to see me with short hair good and short and those horrible revolting hippie sandals y’re wearing made of used tires y’re never gonna wear them here and none of those wristbands and charms and the rest of that effeminate garbage” (172)]. In order to be healed, Adonis must first heal himself of his *mariconerías*, a word more efficiently translated as faggotry. So while Adonis in this penultimate chapter appears to

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<sup>27</sup> The complete title is *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades* [*The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities*].

<sup>28</sup> As Ariel Wind notes in her work on the novel, *vampiro* was a slang term for a male sex worker – or hustler – in 1970s Mexico.

<sup>29</sup> In the famously short fourth chapter of *Lazarillo*, where picaresque silence makes its first and most spectacular appearance as “otras cosillas que no digo” [“some other little things I will not mention”], the wearing out of shoes has a sexual undertone drawn from Spanish folklore, where the idiom’s signifying power ranges from intercourse to the loss of virginity. So when Lazarillo tells us that the friar’s *trote* [running around] wore him out, he appears to make what several critics have called an allusion to sexual abuse. But as Russell Thompson and Walsh note, this “assumes the answer is there in the text and not left in the silence” (445).

submit, cutting his hair short and never again wearing his hippie sandals and effeminate bracelets, his becoming straight is, like Lazarillo's becoming worker, part farce and part secondary gain, full of "otras cosillas que no digo." It's a trade secret, after all, that the hustler's best customers are straight-acting and closeted Johns.

The psychiatrist's clumsy attempt at a kind of conversion therapy instantiates what Adonis had already intuitively experienced as a kind of social death-by-homosexuality, as his communist and otherwise politically woke stepbrothers make clear when they pejoratively call him a *puto* [fag] for wearing his pants too tight (17). Instead of arguing with his brothers, Adonis stays silent. Lemebel's question—"¿Qué harán con nosotros compañero?"—resonates for a young man who, increasingly aware of his same-sex desire, finds himself well outside a hyper-masculinist and anti-queer communist morality of the late 1960s and early 1970s, one emblemized by Che Guevara and *los barbudos* [the bearded ones] in Cuba's revolutionary struggle. And once he becomes a hustler, he will find himself always already outside bourgeois morality. Adonis's life in liminal spaces between and outside the moral, the political, the social, and the economic will be written into the text itself, as so many blank spaces, gaps, and omissions.

In a text like *El Vampiro*, so full of flesh, explicit sex, and orgasmic pleasure that it appears to suggest the jouissance in abjection that Genet celebrates, these textual lacunae seem almost out of place, jarring and incongruent. Sifuentes-Jáuregui cogently suggests "reading those white spaces in *El vampiro*, not simply as grammar as the author tells us, but otherwise as editions, failed reflections, spilled semen, racial whiteness, and as moments of sexual practice. [ . . . ] thus, textuality in *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma* functions as a proscenium that opens and closes, revealing and hiding." He goes on to

argue that “we can find in those white/blank spaces a new and different place to hear the voices of those who have yet to share in the privilege of speaking openly” (83). I want to suggest that in the queer picaresque, silence, gaps, and omissions create a negative space and textual absence that in the hands of the hustler becomes a kind of language: the stealthy glance of longing exchanged between two men cruising, the dangerous hush of a rushed embrace in a public restroom, moans of pleasure whispered and pantomimed so no one else can hear, so much that happens in the spaces between and outside the authorization of the word, the text, the author.

As a discursive tactic marshalled by the author of Mexico’s first ‘gay liberation’ novel to render legible the hidden and unacknowledged language of the “mundo gay,” as noted on the back cover of the novel’s Mexican edition, the text belies what Gayatri Spivak calls the moral love of the activist (65). José Joaquín Blanco notes as much in the introduction: “to such an extent is he [Adonis] complete that he becomes an idealized, exemplary figure—more the yearning, lyrical vision of the ideal hustler” (8). Aware, perhaps, of the irony of a *licenciado* in French literature from the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico giving voice to a street-based queer sex worker, Zapata’s novel is in constant dialogue with the picaresque, most notably with *Lazarillo*. Like *Lazarillo*, seven chapters narrate in the first person to an anonymous but socially ‘superior’ other. The text swaps out *Vuestra Merced* [Your Honor]—to whom Lázaro’s letters direct an accounting for the waywardness of his life and present circumstances as a willing cuckold and pimp—for an equally unnamed interlocutor. Both texts speak in the final instance to their readers. Each novel recounts the *aventuras* of a young man who leaves his home with no money or skills and trains with a series of masters; both operate

as a kind of social discourse, with implicit social criticism conveyed in a comic, often burlesque manner.

In a modern twist, a presumably adult Adonis recounts the story of his life through tape recordings with his anonymous interlocutor; these recordings stand in for the epistolary form of *Lazarillo*. *El vampiro* presents readers with another kind of vulgar *vida*, the hagiographic genre form popular in the late middle ages in Spain, with Adonis figured as a kind of queer saint of beauty and desire. But unlike *Lazarillo*, who uses a series of enigmatic silences and omissions to obscure sex and objectification, Adonis tells us everything—or so it seems.

The tape recorder, superficially a kind of MacGuffin to drive the plot, performs a textual encoding of silence punctuated by the recurring use of caesuras. Absences and omissions in punctuation and language mark the novel, leaving a series of voids, like deep breaths or sighs, written into the text itself graphetically. Instead of the finality and sense of closure afforded by formal grammar, the novel appears to its readers as unfinished, dialectic and paratactic, punctuated by caesuras, question marks, and parentheses. Without periods, the sentences seem to flow together, interrupted only by the pauses in Adonis's speech. In her work on the novel as the story of a queer *flâneur* and agent of disruption, Ariel Wind interprets these omissions as part of an authorial mimesis of orality. It also signifies class status—working class, ill-educated—and a position outside mainstream social discourse, through the use of slang, vulgarity, and 'bad' grammar: "the stylistic choice to omit punctuation marks in the text serves to remind the reader that Adonis is orally relating his story [and] as a reminder about socio-

economic class and profession” (581). But like a cassette recording, it imitates and mimics orality, like a shadow or dream.

Herbert Marcuse observes that “art is perhaps the most visible ‘return of the repressed,’ not only on the individual but also on the generic-historical level. The artistic imagination shapes the ‘unconscious memory’ of the liberation that failed, of the promise that was betrayed” (130). Picaresque silence suggests the presence of an always-already “by the way,” an unconscious memory impossible for us to access in our waking-life. Reading these textual lacunae confronts us with this impossibility as a kind of void that could be read as what Rajeswari Sunder Rajan calls the “willed enigmatic silence” of the subaltern (121). But doing so requires a suturing together of these gaps and omissions that in turn renders the unintelligible, intelligible, like the cassette recordings that appear to tell us the story of Adonis’s life. Out of a kind of moral love, we might read these textual lacunae as evidence of a kind of resistance and surfacing of the subaltern in History, a presence paradoxically signified by absence. In this view, the subaltern speaks even when they don’t.

I laud the moral love of the activist and share a determination to make visible the slow violence of capital. But reading picaresque silence as evidence of an encoded subaltern resistance is ultimately a doomed project. The making of the picaro has always been ideological, deeply imbricated with what Marcuse calls the philosophy of productivity; this does not suddenly change in the queer picaresque, even when its authors are themselves hustlers or picaros. For the picaro of early modernity, when not to work becomes criminal, working becomes the only path to salvation. For the hustler, however, his sex work is an abjected outside of labor. The only path toward a ‘decent

job’—and salvation—is to stop hustling and leave the queer underworld behind. He needs to become, in other words, an ideal gay<sup>30</sup> subject, with short hair and loose-fitting pants, and an appropriate sense of social shame around his sexual *aventuras*.

The inspiration for Zapata’s novel, an infamous Mexico City hustler named Osiris Pérez Castañeda, recorded a series of interviews with Zapata that would become the novel itself. The word transfigures his hustler days into a ludic and erotic passion play that he eventually leaves behind, while withholding what his new life holds. He ‘tells’ us all of this in the middle of a series of silences, both graphic (note the gaps, like voids, between sentences and clauses that mimic orality) and informational: “cuando me cambié a la colonia cuauhtémoc se inició otra etapa de mi vida pero ps ésa ya la dejamos para otra ocasión ¿no? para otro libro” (173) [“when I moved here another chapter of my life began but let’s leave that for another time ok? for another book” (197)]. Coming shortly before the end of the novel, Adonis’s gentle refusal to speak seems comic, a picaresque attempt to make a few more pesos telling our anonymous interlocuter about the next stage of his life. It also seems to acknowledge cheekily his commodity status. But his refusal is more than a rogue’s wink. In the silence of his refusal to speak, another kind of void opens before us. Like the queer negative spaces of the city, his picaresque silence represents both an affirmation and a possibility: of a return of the repressed, and of the “unconscious memory of the liberation that failed.”

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<sup>30</sup> The gay subject, as opposed to the queer subject, seeks assimilation and a place within the structures of capitalism; they marry, raise children, and embrace the philosophy of productivity. The queer subject, on the other hand, embraces the outsides of capital and refuses its strategies of social reproduction; their position is always already opposed to the assimilationism and accommodationist strategies of the gay subject. The queer subject is always already lumpen, while the gay subject is a worker or a capitalist.

In the previous chapter I described representation as one of three registers of violence in the genre of the picaresque, and I want to return briefly to this conception of what Žižek calls the murder of the thing. Hegel rightly attributes violence to the word, part of a processual movement of consciousness that entails a negation of the object. In other words, something becomes nothing before being born again in language: perception requires us to grasp the object as concept for us, not as a thing for itself, encoding violence in the act of perceiving and, subsequently, conceptualizing and naming. In that sense, the voids and gaps of the text are neither the enigmatic silence of the subaltern, nor a form of anti-capitalist resistance encoded consciously or otherwise by the author about whose intentions we remain in the dark. Picaresque silence, instead, is the affirmation and possibility of the unsaid and the unknown, a world still becoming and unnegated by the word.

Freud observes that negation is the “first measure of freedom” from repression (“Negation” 4143). The imagination through language of an object for us offers this “first measure” of freedom through negation: the hustler captured on the page is the reader’s *Not I*, making available a freedom to make of him what they will, outside the structures of repression. He can be their sex object and fantasy, their moral failure and exemplum of the dangers of life outside heterosexuality, or something else entirely. The next measure of freedom, however, lies with picaresque silence and its queer voids and gaps, the omissions and lies, and finally the refusal to tell, name, or be captured by language (at least not for free).

Because we do not know what the next stage of his life might hold, we are left to imagine it. And because Adonis is the “yearning, lyrical vision of the ideal hustler,” we

know that the picaresque world he departs is not ours, nor Osiris's, but a dream vision of desire. But though the word's negation kills the thing, the unconscious memory lingers like a trace under erasure, emerging in dreams, and, in our waking life, as the fiction we produce and consume. The lacunae of the text, nestled in white spaces on the page, in gaps and in memories, and finally, in the refusal to tell us, affirm an unbounded potentiality and unknowing that pulsates underneath picaresque silence, repressed but always present, unspoken and unacknowledged. It is another kind of unwritten queer language, what Genet might call the unsayable.

This comes into clearer focus as we read the pages that follow Adonis's refusal. He tells his interlocutor about a strange moment when he notices a greenish-yellow light in the sky, moving back and forth and finally seeming to hover above him. It happens several times, and then again about two months later. This time, he says, the object was a "platillo volador" (175) ["flying saucer" (200)]. In the picaresque spirit of the outsider who never belongs and has no home, Adonis jokingly surmises that there must be "marcianos gayos" ["gay Martians"] who have heard of his hustler fame and come to sample his wares. He would willingly go with them, he says, and it would be "increíble coger con algún ser verde o amarillo y de piel gelatinosa en la que se hundiera la verga" (176) ["incredible feeling to fuck some green or yellow creature with a skin like jelly that your cock would sink into" (201)]. Finally, in the last full paragraph of the novel, he says he would leave with the aliens, and, on seeing a shooting star, "cerraría los ojos y pediría un deseo que no volviera nunca pero nunca por ningún motivo a este pinche mundo" (176) ["i'd close my eyes and make a wish that i'd never never ever for any reason come back to the fuckin world" (202)]. The world of the picaro as we know it in the

picaresque genre, and even within the sexy spectacle of its queer iteration, is unbearable, *pinche* and mean, making Adonis's wish for flight and freedom legible to us, like waking from a dream of freedom. In fleeing sex work and the queer voids of its underworld, Adonis like Lazarillo can become grown-up, a wage laborer of the socially sanctioned kind, leaving "este pinche mundo" behind. He becomes, we surmise, a gay subject, finding begrudging acceptance through emerging neoliberal discourses of civil rights and equality, and—who knows?—possibly even getting gay married and having a kid or two.

What would Osiris, who worked as a hustler until the end of his life, have said about Adonis' dream of freedom from sex work and, presumably, his entrance into "decent work"? Readers will never know because Osiris can (no longer) tell them. So while the novel encloses and encapsulates his life in the form of the hustler as picaro, what can never be known emerges in queer voids and textual white spaces, like an absence or lack that propels us as desiring reading subjects. One may or may not 'know' that hustling is indecent, part of a "pinche mundo". But picaresque silence forecloses certainty and cracks open possibility, intriguing and ultimately drawing readers toward in to that same "pinche mundo". That is its enigmatic power.

The novel's ending suggests that Adonis' new life is as a gay proletarian subject, adult like Lázaro. But his desire to leave with "marcianos gayos" suggests that all is not well in his new, 'decent' world. It would seem a fitting an end to the text as the reader's dream of freedom, like a wake-up call to the reality of everyday life under capitalism: the only real escape is to leave the planet, since capitalism is a global totality. But the novel's final words trouble this enfolding into capital as just another (licit) wage laborer: "y ora sí ya apágale ¿no?" (177) ["now turn it off right?"]. Turning off the cassette recorder

signals a closure to the narrative, ending in a negation of the word's negation, and in that sense, as affirmation. As the text's MacGuffin, the reader knows that life continues after the recording stops. What remains to be said? What hasn't he told us? We can imagine, and we can dream: this is the affirmation and possibility of picaresque silence.

Picaresque silence is at once this space of affirmation and possibility, a negation of the word's negation at the same time as it opens onto multiple horizons of being. A subject willfully slippery, difficult if not impossible to grasp, the queer subaltern omits, lies, hides, and deceives; they move in language like the picaro, using and adapting it as tactics to survive. The content overflows the genre form: sex and the reified body overflow it like semen and bodily fluids. The hustler resists representation like early modern rogues, becoming through representation whatever his reader wants him to be: a spectacular erotic fable of commodification; a pornographic cautionary tale about sexual libertinism and moral degeneracy; or a dream of freedom from the linking of Eros to reproduction and monogamy. He can become all of these things or none of them.

Ultimately, the making of Osiris into Adonis names into being—much like the picaro—a kind of identity, the hustler. It is another kind of reification, this time not the dispossessed and hungry child turned into the playful and conniving rogue, but of queerness and sexual difference made into a thing, an identity and a form with a master (heterosexuality, majoritarianism). But as always something escapes capture, as the novel's ending suggests: “apágale ¿no?” [“turn it off right?”].

And yet, Zapata's queer picaresque mobilizes textual lacunae as absence and lack at the same time as it utilizes the dream form to imagine their contents. Interestingly, the dream has a prominent place in picaresques written *from above* and features much less

prominently in texts written by hustlers like Jean Genet or John Rechy. I suspect this is because the dream form allows for a surging forth of repressed contents, part of what Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* call an insurrection of the unconscious (277). In Genet and Rechy, there's no need to dream about hustling and having multiple sex partners every night, nor any need to repress and bind that desire. They simply live it. In Zapata, on the other hand, the dreams that open each section are fantasies of queer freedom. In Duiker, an ambivalent dream form takes up the end of the novel and imagines an unworlding—creative destruction and rebirth, like a kind of return to natality—and a queer wilding. In these dreams we see how queerness itself escapes representation, like the absence that motors desire.

To make sense of picaresque silence and the dream vision of destruction in *Thirteen Cents*—a text separated by over three decades from Zapata's—we need first to interpret the dreams of the Vampire of Colonia Roma.

### **Vampire Dreams**

Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism* observes that “capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie maker; but the living flesh it converts into dead labor is ours, and the zombies it makes are us” (19). Similarly, Carl Cederstrom and Peter Fleming in *Dead Man Working* describe the worker today as a dead man, like a kind of zombie. The metaphor—not uncommon in contemporary Marxist discourse—sorts the human into two camps: the vampiric, or the capitalist class, and the zombic, or working class. In this sense, the capitalist feasts on the blood of the living and slowly kills, or zombifies, the working person in the process. The zombie trope crosses ideological lines, too. In early April of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was killing thousands of people

by the day, a far-right politician, Devin Nunes, appeared on Fox News<sup>31</sup> to denounce the crowds of “zombies” on the streets of California’s cities. But zombies for Nunes were not, as Fisher posits, the alienated and exploited mass of working people living in increasingly precarious conditions. For Nunes, the zombies were unhoused people, “the homeless,” who by sheltering on the streets threatened a zombie apocalypse. While his language sought to conjure into being a dangerous multitude of Others who could be scapegoated for increasing rates of infection and virus transmission, there is a curious unintended effect of his hyperbolic speech act. In attempting to ‘kill’ the dispossessed and resurrect them as the living dead, Nunes inadvertently points to what Marx describes as the slow killing of the laboring body by capital “which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks” (*Capital* 342). But Nunes’s slavish devotion to capital blinds him: he is unable to see the unhoused person sheltering on the streets as the end result of capital’s hunger for living labor. They are the terminal point of zombification: the worker with no more labor power for capital to suck. Finally dispossessed and immiserated in direct proportion to the accumulation of wealth, they appear to us as the zombie we all fear becoming.

It would be better to be a vampire, it seems. Adonis arrives at a similar conclusion, turning toward the extraction of wealth from willing johns. Despite intermittent homelessness, police violence, and poverty so biting that days go by without eating, Adonis, the vampire<sup>32</sup> of Colonia Roma, seems to approach sex work with a kind

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<sup>31</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/devin-nunes-homeless-coronavirus\\_n\\_5e8a97bfc5b6cbaf282b7be3](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/devin-nunes-homeless-coronavirus_n_5e8a97bfc5b6cbaf282b7be3)

<sup>32</sup> The word *vampiro*, as Wind notes, has a long history in the Ciudad de México as a slang term for male sex workers.

of élan, joyfully sucking and fucking all the livelong day. Adonis first appears to his readers in a dream, surfacing like Dracula in Jonathan Harker's "queer dreams" on his first night in Transylvania. Unlike Jonathan's dreams, however, to which we are denied access, Adonis seems to invite us into his dream world. He tells us that he is at a party where glamorous men and women surround him and move their mouths mysteriously, in between blowing kisses and reciting incantations. But Adonis slowly realizes that no one is really blowing kisses. They are asking him, over and over again, "y tú ¿qué vas a hacer cuando dios se muera?" ["hey you whatcha gonna do when god dies?"]. Adonis and his *cuate* [buddy] laugh hysterically at the question, until the crowd of *bugas*<sup>33</sup> transforms before his eyes, from men and women to "pura gente de ambiente" (14) ["all gay people" (14)], as if no longer human. The transformation makes him uncomfortable, and the recounting of the dream ends with a closed parenthesis and no period, like an ending without an end.

Set in Colonia Roma, a once-grand neighborhood in Mexico City, the novel takes place nearly a decade after the end of a period of sustained economic development and growth. By 1977, Colonia Roma had experienced a dramatic transformation, as the mansions and leafy boulevards were subdivided, torn down, or converted for commercial use. When Adonis appears on the scene, it had become known as a neighborhood where low-income workers, students, and artists could rent cheaply. Colonia Roma, transformed from a bastion of wealth and privilege into a decaying neighborhood of crumbling mansions and garret houses, would become an almost perfect setting for street-based sex

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<sup>33</sup> Mexican queer slang for heterosexuals, loosely equivalent to the pejorative term *breeders* used in a queer US context.

workers, part of the “disintegrated mass thrown hither and thither” of the lumpenproletariat.

The change in Colonia Roma’s fortune, like the downward movement of Marx’s disintegrated masses and decayed roués, has been framed within a narrative of decline, like a kind of withering or dying. The demi-gods of Adonis’s dream, wealthy *bugas* dressed in furs and tuxedos, dancing under crystal chandeliers on mirrored floors, are on the cusp of a dreamy transformation into the social death of queerness: “ya no eran hombres y mujeres” (14) [“they weren’t men and women anymore” (14)], but “pura gente de ambiente” [“gay”]. The dreamscape suggests a dying world, like Colonia Roma, about to be resurrected as a vital alternative to “deadening, alienating labor, and in short, of that murky and tragic spectre” of late capitalism. In “the nervous flame of the lamps in the night streets of Colonia Roma, where Paradise would seem sometimes to open its gates [ . . . ] eyes searching, lips ready to curve in the smile of the pick-up” (Blanco 8), lies the answer to Adonis’s dream question, “y tú, ¿qué vas a hacer cuando dios<sup>34</sup> se muera?”

The epigraph that precedes the recounting of his dream, taken from the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Mexican picaresque novel *El periquillo sarniento* [The Mangy Parrot], observes that “Dios no se muere; parientes tiene (Perico) y padrinos que lo socorran; ricos hay en México harto piadosos que lo protejan” (12) [“God doesn’t die; he (*Perico*) has relatives and patrons to come to his aid; and there are plenty of very devout rich people in Mexico who will protect him” (11)]. But among the crumbling mansions and vanishing fortunes of the devout rich, there is no one left to protect him. God dies, like Colonia Roma and

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<sup>34</sup> “If the product of labour is alien to me and confronts me as an alien power, to whom then does it belong? To a being other than me. Who is this being? The *gods*? (Marx *Economic* 330).

the glittery straight denizens in Adonis's dream, and Paradise—like the curved lips of the smiling hustler—beckons.

Colonia Roma abuts the Zócalo, a large central plaza built on top of the ruins of Aztec palaces and places of worship. The presence of old, dead gods still lingers in the Zócalo. Ongoing excavations steadily reveal more and more traces of the old Aztec capital, like a slow resurrection. In Aztec cosmology, the gods died to give life to the world. The most well-known example of this is Quetzalcóatl, the plumed serpent god of Aztec mythology, who purportedly died by descending into the Land of the Dead to bring back the bones of humanity and begin life anew. Adonis's dream of death portends a kind of signifying void; like Quetzalcóatl, dying may be how he retrieves the bones of humanity and seeds its resurrection.

But perhaps a better figure is Adonis's namesake, who dies and is resurrected. The dream that opens the novel begins to make sense to us when we think of him as a dying or dead god, like Adonis. Socially dead and occupying the negative spaces and voids of the city, Adonis reappears as a *vampiro*, undead but not exactly living, extracting life in the form of money and bodily fluids<sup>35</sup>. Critically, the hustler whose life the novel fictionalizes, Osiris, takes his name from the Egyptian god of the dead whose body was cut up into pieces and dispersed around the land. After the pieces of his body<sup>36</sup> were reassembled, he was resurrected as the god of the underworld. What a fitting name for a man whose life would be dismembered and torn apart by the violence of the word,

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<sup>35</sup> The connection between money and abjection, elaborated by Freud and popularized in the notion that money equals shit, becomes clear when we view sex work as a kind of extraction of life under capitalism, in the form of money and the “disgusting” abject bodily fluids extracted through sexual labor.

<sup>36</sup> In some accounts the one part of the body not recovered is Osiris's penis, which is reconstructed by Isis; so many voids and so much lack written on this hustler's body.

turning up in Zapata's novel as a new god of the damned and socially dead. This dream portends Osiris's death-in-writing as much as it does Adonis's eternal renewal; it seems almost to acknowledge the impossibility of representing the fullness of Osiris' life in language.

In the sequence of seven dreams that opens every *cinta* [tape recording], the second dream mirrors the first. This time, however, the dead person isn't god, but his father. The dream invokes the death of what Lacan calls the Name-of-the-Father, the laws that regulate desire and language itself. Freed from these laws—and their holding—by his father's oneiric death, Adonis falls endlessly through a hole in the floor of the bathroom in the shared room he lived in with his first male lover and, in true picaresque fashion, his first 'master' in the art of hustling: “me oprimía el pecho y no podía respirar no había nada de aire pero yo seguía bajando ya no sabía a dónde iba ni nada nomás me daba cuenta de que bajaba y bajaba y bajaba y bajaba y bajaba y   )” (38) [“my chest felt tight and i couldn't breathe there wasn't any air or nothing i just knew i was going down and down and down and down and down and   )” (42)]. Freud links dreams of falling to anxiety and a symbolic “surrender to an erotic temptation” (*Int.* 405); repressed contents, like homoerotic desire and unregulated sexual gratification, “proliferate in the dark, and take on extreme forms of expression” (*Int.* 149). Adonis's *bildungsroman*-style transformation from long-haired, effeminate *maricón pobre* to short-haired, straight-acting gay man, is one of these extreme forms of repression, binding and repressing queer multiplicity *within* a homonormative gay subject. In his dreams, on the other hand, repressed contents “proliferate in the dark,” thriving like vampires.

Freud observes that the *ars poetica* of the writer “lies in the technique by which he overcomes our repulsion” (“Creative Writer” 33), arguing that what in waking life is repressed emerges in dreams and, for the writer, in writing as a kind of daydream. Repression’s production of repulsion as a mechanism to regulate desire at least partially explains the abjection of the queer, whose association with the male vampire—undead, cruel, disgusting, and inexplicably hot—begins with Jonathan Harker’s sublimely erotic nighttime encounters in *Dracula*. Freud notes that repressed contents exercise a strong pull that emerges in fantasy life and in dreams, “balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure” (“Repression” 2982), like disgust, fear, terror, and repulsion. In this case, Osiris’s nighttime hustling in public parks, dark alleys, glory holes and restrooms, repulses us; he is the decayed roué of dubious origins, a figure of death and disgust, vampiric. And still, some of us can’t stop reading. The genre reflects what Garrett calls the reader’s dream of freedom at the same time as it reveals the writer’s—and, as I have been suggesting here, many of our own—fantasies and dreams. In this sense, Adonis’s dream of falling points to his surrender to erotic temptation. But it also tells us about Zapata’s own dreams of insurrection and surrender, at the same time as it situates his romantic vision of the hustler as a dream of sexual freedom.

It is telling that Adonis’s dream of endlessly falling is recounted in a series of gaps and voids; it even ends in a textual abyss. Jack London in *The People of the Abyss* describes unhoused life as an abyss through which “the inefficient are weeded out and flung downward” (*n.pag.*). In the chapter that follows this dream, Adonis and his friend find themselves broke, “inefficient” in the eyes of political economy and flung downward into the abyss of homelessness. While the picaresque is one way of gazing into the abyss

of homelessness, in Zapata's novel, the dream of falling brings the reader into the abyss itself. The rhythm of the language, with its repetition and its long, breathy pauses, carry its readers down and leave them, finally, in a graphetically empty space: the abyss of homelessness. As a void and a silence bracketed by the word "y" ["and"] and a parenthesis that comes after an empty textual space, the abyss leaves us to imagine what might come after. We know, because of the silence written into the text, that *something* happens; what that is we can only imagine.

Freud observes that "the writer tones the character of the egoistic daydream by modifying and disguising it, and bribes us with the purely formal—that is aesthetic—bonus of pleasure" ("Creative Writer" 33). In this sense, the ludic quality of the picaresque makes it an ideal vehicle for modifying and disguising repulsion, as it makes the abject spectacular, comic and pleasurable, in turn offering us a kind of relief from the rigorous censorship of waking life. Zapata overcomes repulsion and the censoring<sup>37</sup> power of the superego by appealing to both a subterranean desire and to traces of what Marx calls species-being<sup>38</sup>, a point to which I shortly return. If one accepts, as I do, the largely anodyne notion of "the unconscious [as] that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter" (Lacan *Écrits* 50), then Adonis's dreams—part of the daydream of the writer—must be read as themselves a kind

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<sup>37</sup> "But we can state provisionally a second condition which must be satisfied by those elements of the dream-thoughts which make their way into the dream: *they must escape the censorship imposed by resistance*" (Freud *Int.* 326).

<sup>38</sup> "In tearing away the object of his production from man, estranged labor therefore tears away from him his *species-life*, his true species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him" (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* 329).

of insurrection. Situated as they are within a picaresque text that is already a dream of freedom, its dream silences, omissions, and voids reveal glimmers of repressed contents that escape censorship. These blanks and falsehoods are the censored chapters, the illicit dream of the licit daydream.

So, while the picaresque acts as an apparatus of capture and a taming of the queer *qua* lumpen, the blank spaces, lies, and voids that punctuate the text make it possible for the repressed contents of the unconscious to surge forth. The picaresque ending, with the rogue grown up into the adulthood of licit wage labor, is like an awakening and a return to waking life. We find in *El vampiro* the same processual movement of the genre, this time with the undead queer *qua* vampire transfigured into the “honest working class.” Adonis’s picaresque silence in his waking life tells us that all is not as it seems. His dreams contain their own silences that trouble this transfiguration, leaving us to imagine—and to dream—of other worlds, outside the antagonisms of labor and capital.

These dream visions proliferate in the dark, in the queer voids and negative spaces of the city, and in the textual voids and abysses of the novel. In this sense, we can think of the picaresque as the dreamscape of labor, a working through of resistance and repression with the proletarian *and* the bourgeois subject figured as a kind of consciousness or waking life; the lumpen is its wild unconscious. The queer iteration of the picaresque presents us with another kind of waking life: in this case, the gay worker or capitalist, with the hustler as the repressed content that surges forth in the dark night space of the dream.

Gramsci in *The Prison Notebooks* astutely lays out the role of the intellectual in creating and maintaining the hegemony of capital; I would add that literature and art act

as the binding and repressing agents of the conscious mind that in turn create the psychic conditions for capital's domination. At the end of the second chapter of his essay on the uncanny, Freud notes that the prefix *un-* is an indicator of repression, akin to the negating force of the word I described earlier. The unfamiliar or the unhomely, repressed in our waking lives, becomes through literary mediation an expression of repressed desire. Reading the picaresque is one method of recollecting and remembering the repressed contents of our Selves as subjects; it is a kind of fantasy recuperation of species-being. The lumpen, as the repressed contents of capitalism, are inscribed in the genre like a perverse Winnicottian<sup>39</sup> holding environment and an apparatus of capture. Swap out capital for mother in Winnicott's description of the holding environment, and the picaresque emerges as a technique for "adding up to the child's first idea of [capital]" and of the child himself, with the parts that Capital rejects (the non-productive, non-procreative) entombed in the unconscious and relegated to the supposedly anti-social (property theft, queerness, and labor refusal, among other horrors).

But if, as Freud observes, "the motive and purpose of repression has nothing else but the avoidance of unpleasure" ("Repression" 2983), it makes sense that the repression of our species-being avoids or at least mitigates a reckoning with the unpleasure of alienation: it hides, binds, and furrows it away in the body of the picaro and the hustler. In *El vampiro*, the hustler does a double labor: he offers to pleasure the reader, indulging

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<sup>39</sup> Winnicott in *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* describes the holding environment—"mother's technique of holding, of bathing, of feeding, everything she did for the baby, [that] added up to the child's first idea of the mother" (86)—as constitutive of the self. In short, the holding environment makes us who we are.

repressed dreams of sexual freedom, at the same time as he reassures that reader that 9 – 5 jobs, short hair and sensible shoes are part and parcel of ‘gay liberation.’ But like Lázaro, whose becoming worker enfolds a picaresque trickery and deceit, the gaps and silences of Adonis’s story and the voids and abysses of his dreams act as a negation of the word’s negation. They produce an affirmation of human potentiality that points toward the infinite horizons of being that linger in queer voids and in the possibilities of silence.

In the final dream of the novel, Adonis describes a kind of becoming Priapus: “cuando me subí a la moto ya iba desnudo ¿verdad? [ . . . ] entons ahí tienes que iba yo por los aires en mi moto desnudo y traía el pito bien parado pero con una erección que en mi vida había tenido ¿no? de tan tremenda haz de cuenta que me estuviera viniendo constantemente y sintiéndome chingón en todos sentidos como persona ¿no? (155) [“when i got on the bike i was naked y’understand? [ . . . ] so there i am riding through the air on my bike bare naked and i had a big hard on like i never had in all my life y’know what i mean? it was so huge like i was coming all the time and feeling on top of the world in every sense of the word like a real star y’know?” (178). His vision of phallic divinity precedes a chapter where he speaks of “una gran hermandad gaya” [“a gay religious brotherhood”] and queer mutual aid, in the form of a call to drill gloryholes in the walls of public restrooms. The last of the novel’s dream sequence circles back to the first dream of a dying god, like an answer to the dream’s question, what will you do after god dies? The final dream suggests that the answer is to become a god, in this case, Priapus, with one’s own religious cult: the *hermandad gaya*.

Re-casting the hustler as Priapus is a fitting end to a novel that lyricizes him. It inscribes on the body of the queer lumpen the sexual dreams of freedom of the gay subject and makes the hustler almost deific. The translator chose to translate “como persona” as “like a real star,” but a closer translation renders this as “like a person.” In this sense, the dream makes this becoming Priapus a kind of resurrection from the social death of queerness, and seems to celebrate, like Marcuse, the “perversities” as anti-capitalist praxis, and the hustler as revolutionary subject. But by hewing so closely to the picaresque, Zapata’s text ultimately suggests that the vampiric extraction of wealth is a reasonable *temporary* response to the immiseration of capitalism. Adonis is telling us the story of his life as a young man and hustler, before he cleaned up and like Lazarillo became proletarian. Only his final silence (“apágale ¿no?”), his omissions, and the graphic gaps that structure the novel leave queer voids; otherwise, the spaces of the novel fill in for the fantasies of the gay subject, making the text a seminal one for ‘gay liberation’. In this fantasy, the hustler like the rogue can become a full-fledged participant in political economy and can finally be *seen* by it: he can become a human again, not the *maricón pobre*, by giving up hustling and its overt vampirism, working a ‘regular’ job, and avoiding (or at least staying silent about) the queer spaces he visits after dark. But what Adonis—like Osiris—does not say makes picaresque silence a wild space of freedom, where the revolutionary subject of lore may or may not reside. Readers may leave Adonis’s “pinche mundo” when they finish the novel, if they finish it at all; it binds and represses his queerness and his vampiric extraction of wealth, making it *pinche* and repulsive.

The gaps and absences of the text, however, defy language and beckon to us like the hustler's silent smile, a queer language that invites us to dream of other worlds.

### **Labor, Representation, and Flight**

Adonis's silence—an authorial attempt to render a kind of street-based queer language textually, through broken grammar, empty spaces, and “*otras cosillas que no digo*”—appears before the reader as enigmatic, an illustration of what Gayatri Spivak calls the “silent, silenced center” of a circuit of desire and power impelled by epistemic violence against those on the margins. Observed in this light, the silence resembles that of the “illiterate peasantry, Aborigines, and the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat,” or in other words, the subaltern subject. But Lemebel in “*Hablo por mi diferencia*” gives the lie to Spivak's original conclusion—since revised and called ill-advised—that the subaltern cannot speak. Lemebel, exemplum of the queer as subaltern, speaks loudly and clearly; at the same time, his late-life international fame as a poet and novelist—in essence, his speaking—troubles his status as subaltern. If representation is “proxy and portrait” (Spivak 108), speaking *for* and re-presenting the decayed roués, hustlers, and pimps who inhabit the lumpen world of the queer picaresque, then who does picaresque silence *not* speak for? Whose refusal to speak, and whose “enigmatic silence,” appears before the reader; who speaks the queer language of the text's lacunae?

Gazing at the images of hustlers on the front covers of the novel in its Spanish and English versions can help move us toward an answer. The first image is from a recent edition of the novel for a Mexican mass market paperback:



In this edition produced for the Mexican mass market, the young hustler appears in the pose of a Greek god, Adonis-like, with alabaster skin and flowing, curly fine haired locks. His features are distinctly European, emblematic of a racialized, colonialist standard of beauty that prizes the European body over the indigenous one. Though the vast majority of Mexicans bear little in common with this vision of male beauty, it continues to be the standard of male beauty. The young man on the cover poses like a statue of Adonis, and bears a strong resemblance to statues like *Dying Adonis* by the Italian sculptor Vincenzo di Raffaello de' Rossi.

The book cover for the Mexican market illustrates what Spivak calls representation as proxy. Osiris, the Mexico City hustler who inspired Zapata's novel, bears a passing resemblance to the young man on the cover, as seen in this image taken from the *Obituario Mexicano LGBTTTI*:

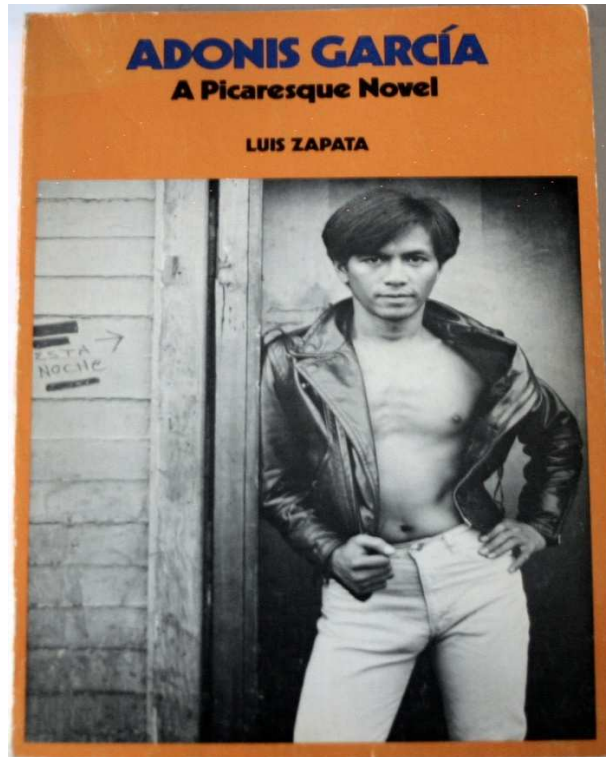


The cover image presents an eroticized vision of male beauty, but the hustler captured by the aesthetic mediation of the novel is not Osiris. That hustler is an idyllic, lyrical vision of white male beauty, the kind of body the colonized subject has internalized as perfect and complete. Osiris himself escapes representation; Adonis's story isn't his.

Frantz Fanon notes that "if the white man elaborates an imago of his fellow man, the same should be the case for the Antillean, since it is based on a visual perception. But we would be forgetting that in the Antilles perception always occurs at the level of the imagination. One's fellow man is perceived in white terms" (141). For the colonized and especially for the Black, Fanon argues, whiteness is beauty, part of the legacies of slavery and colonization, both of which left enduring imprints on Mexico. Viewed in this light, the white male Adonis we see on the cover acts as an imago at the center of a constellated

alterity that spins outward, growing darker as it moves further away. Like the novel, the image on the cover is a dream vision of desire, both licit—the desire to become White—and illicit.

The Kleinian concepts of projection and projective identification help make sense of these visions of desire, especially in the context of race-related transference. Kris Yi observes that “Western culture has constructed Black and White racial categories to create a focus for projection and introjection. The ‘opposite’ race creates a category of people who are ‘not me’ into which one can project unwanted psychic content, such as aggression, which is then introjected by the other racial category of people” (248). In the image on the front of the US version, the hustler presents the reader with another vision, this time of the ‘opposite’ race, with dark skin and gleaming black hair. Graffiti on the wall says, “Esta noche” [Tonight], with an arrow pointing toward the young man and seeming to suggest his flesh is available *esta noche*. His jacket opens to reveal supple brown skin and dark nipples, and his genitalia appear large and engorged, almost monstrously so:



Fanon notes that Carl Jung “regularly assimilates the outsider with darkness and baser instincts” (167). He is “quite right” to do so, Fanon observes, as a mechanism of projection: “Whenever I discover something out of the ordinary, something reprehensible in me, I have no other alternative but to get rid of it and attribute its paternity to someone else.” The hustler, figured here for the gaze of the US reader, is a dark outsider with “baser instincts,” an ideal vehicle for the illicit desires of the white reader: “Projecting his desires onto the black man, the white man behaves as if the black man already had them. [ . . . ] The black man is fixated at the genital level, or rather he has been fixated there” (143). (This dynamic will become particularly clear in *Thirteen Cents*.) From the very start, the novel makes this projective mechanism clear, in the white body as imago of the colonized that we see on the cover of the Mexican edition, and in the dark body as the base outsider to whom the pure white subject can transfer and project illicit and “reprehensible” desires.

Even before the reader even opens the book, then, there is a kind a paradoxical semiotic operation that renders the queer lumpen visible at the same time as it annihilates and negates. I think alongside John Fiske here, who in *Understanding Popular Culture* observes that while “the basic power of the dominant in capitalism may be economic, [ . . . ] it is underpinned and exceeded by the semiotic” (3). In the queer picaresque, the violence of the word subtends the making of the queer lumpen into a spectacle, one that aestheticizes the “chaos” of the streets and in this way attempts to capture and master it in discourse. The images chosen for the novel’s cover do a similar kind of labor, attempting to capture and fix in place fleeting objects of desire that point to different racialized processes of introjection and projection.

In the queer picaresque, a glimmer of the ‘good gay’ appears before us, proletarian or bourgeois but definitively not a hustler. The genre’s semiotic power shapes our understanding of the pure proletarian shed of a lumpen skin: to be good, pure, and to have value, is to work. The hustler-picaro, like the images chosen by the editors and marketers for both editions of the novel, is the shadow of another self, defined through negation. He is what the pure proletarian subject is not: an abject body the bourgeois subject both recoils from *and* desires, as the forbidden, base Other.

These editorial choices—a dark-skinned indigenous man for the cover of the US edition, and a light-skinned European man on the Mexican edition—reveal the force of negation, as Fanon’s conceptualization of projection and projective identification in racial transference suggests. Freud notes that negation “is a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed, it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed.” Negation “belongs to the instinct of destruction”

(“Negation” 4143) and not, like affirmation, to Eros and the pleasure principle. Thinking alongside Fanon, the choice of a dark-skinned outsider for the cover points to the function of negation for the White subject (I am *not* that), and the subsequent projection of a ‘base desire’ (*his* reprehensible desire, not my ‘good’ desire) onto the body of a dark outsider, the Not I. This in turn engenders what Fanon calls a fixation at the genital level, made abundantly clear in the young man’s tumescence on the cover.

The image suggests that the repressed is, in fact, a reprehensible desire for sodomy, projected onto the body of the Not I. At the same time, crucially, “the creation of the symbol of negation has endowed thinking with a first measure of freedom from the consequences of repression.” In other words, the destructive force of negation—I do *not* desire this—makes space for a measure of freedom from repression, as “thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression” (“Negation” 4141). The eroticized bodies on the cover of the novels afford the target reader—in the North American version published by Gay Sunshine Press, an affluent white gay male<sup>40</sup>—the opportunity for libidinal release as a kind of freedom, and an affirmation through negation (I am not like that, but purer).

The negating force of judgment, which “is a continuation, along lines of expediency, of the original process by which the ego took things into itself or expelled them from itself, according to the pleasure principle,” tells us that the world of the hustler and the picaro is not our world. We know this from the moment we see his captive body on the cover. It is a titillating underworld the contours of which we can more easily

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<sup>40</sup> <https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/media-issues/diversity-media/queer-representation/pink-dollar-marketing-queer-representation-advertising>

dream and read about than actually experience. What is otherwise unspeakable and unseeable—the steady immiseration of the laboring body; the congealing of time into wage labor; the rupture of the social in the enclosure of the commons; sex between men in shadowy alleys and toilets, in the cities of night—becomes, in the chronotope of the picaresque, a ludic, comic parable and capitalist morality play, like so much poverty porn.

But while the word (and the image) make the picaro, in the lacunae of picaresque life, the picaro unmakes them. Osiris, you will recall, escapes representation: *El vampiro* was never his story, just a dream vision of sexual freedom mapped onto his hard-working body. By the time of *El vampiro*, the verb *picar*—to wound with a sharp instrument—will stand in as a Mexican queer slang term for casual, sometimes paid, anal sex. The word makes the picaro: he is, according to the *Diccionario de las autoridades*, ruin, shameful and dishonored, a picaro; but in *El vampiro*, the picaro's *picote* [literally, a prick or stab; in the novel, the anal penetration of a john] is the hottest commodity in town. We all want a piece of him<sup>41</sup>.

Picaresque silence, pulsating as it were with the reader's desire to possess Osiris's story and receive his *picote*, is both absence and the negation of negation; it is the space between the word's transformation of something—the thing in itself—into nothing but a breath of air and a symbol. In these voids lie the spaces of fugitivity as one form of escape from representation, and an unbound and unlimited potentiality. Osiris's

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<sup>41</sup> Left out of an earlier discussion is the fact that Adonis bears the name of the Greek god whose slain and fragmented body was restored and reborn through love.

unknowability inheres in his willful silences, after narrating to the author<sup>42</sup> the parts of his *testimonio* he chooses to share, making him ungraspable, slippery and just out of reach, a *petit objet a*: the less we can grasp him and negate him, the more we want him. In the body of the picaro, captured as it were in the discourse of the novel, the reader may think they get to possess a fragment of his divine body and read/resurrect him into being. But his queer language escapes possession, and he remains—for better or for worse—outside History.

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<sup>42</sup> While Zapata has described a series of tape-recorded conversations with Osiris as the source and inspiration of the novel, he doubted whether Osiris would see himself in Adonis.

## Chapter Four: The End of the Picaresque

Outside History but the stuff of dreams, the hustler lingers in the unconscious and spills over onto the pages of the queer picaresque like so many wish-fulfillments. The dream—an insurrection of the unconscious and the unbinding or freeing of repressed desire—makes way for what Freud calls the measures of freedom that begin with negation. Dreaming begins where negation ends. José Muñoz writes that “We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queering is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, indeed that something is missing” (1). In K. Sello Duiker’s novel, *Thirteen Cents*, a dream of destruction wrought with cleansing fire and floods “is the thing” that shows us the world in which the male hustler lives is not enough.

Andrea Spain calls the apocalyptic dream that ends the novel “a radical negation of the present as imagined in the apocalyptic undoing of all sociality in the conclusion of *Thirteen Cents*” (821). As a radical negation, its ending refuses the proletarianization that characterizes the picaresque mode of fiction; the novel also sheds any sense of comedy or parody. Suffused with violence, the novel has what I think of as a picaresque affective register that portends the genre’s end. Duiker’s novel narrates the violent abjection of a hungry, poor kid episodically, paratactically and in the first person, all elements of the picaresque, at the same time as it refuses the redemption—tactical and “by the way”— of wage labor. And unlike the short fifth chapter of *Lazarillo*, which uses silence to intimate that the young man was sexually abused by the priest with whom he works, *Thirteen*

*Cents* explodes that silence, describing in explicit detail Azure's sexual victimization as an almost unending sequence of violence. Azure never becomes worker; he never reveals to whom he speaks, or why. Instead, he speaks as if to himself, like the interiorization of a history he knows is always already outside History. The racialized rogue of the novel, always already captive and made into "flesh/body" (Spillers 68), brings the picaresque to an explosive end: he will refuse the structures of the world and the discursive apparatus of capture that helped build them.

*Thirteen Cents* opens with a Lazarillo-like tale of social isolation, when we learn that Azure, the twelve-year-old boy at the center of the story, left home after the murder of his parents three years ago, and now "the streets of Sea Point are my home" (1). He has learned to survive on the streets by "scratching for food in dustbins" and selling his body to *moffies*, older, mostly white gay men. Azure spends his days walking endlessly and aimlessly throughout the city. His friends are an older sex worker, Liesel, who lives under a bridge with a motley crew of lumpen characters; a much younger boy, Bafana, who uses drugs heavily; and an older woman he calls "Auntie"—like a kind of chosen family—who persuades him to give her his extra cash to hold for him.

Each in their own way will fail Azure, making a mockery of the romance of mutual aid and community care. Bafana wastes away from heavy drug use, becoming thinner and fading from life and the novel; and Liesel, "she's also full of shit. I knew what a hard bitch she was but I just ignored it. [ . . . ] When Kim was sick and couldn't work the streets Liesel didn't help her. She didn't give her any food. She let her starve" (167). Azure's pimp, Allen, tells him how he can spend the money that he earns, and takes freely from him. The little he manages to hide and save with his "Auntie", Joyce,

will be taken from him, too: she steals his savings, having lied about keeping them safe in a bank account.

Violence in the novel takes many forms, from the relational to the financial, the sexual to the physical. When he seeks refuge under the bridge where Liesel lives and spends time with Sealy, a *kaffir* or native African, he will be badly beaten by a gang leader, Gerald, who prides himself on passing as white, after Azure mistakenly calls him by Sealy's name. Covered in blood, and too ashamed to ask Joyce for his money, Azure will return to Sea Point to make money hustling. When he finds out Gerald is looking for him and decides to confront him, he will be beaten and hospitalized; upon being discharged, Azure is taken to a brothel and locked inside for days, sexually abused repeatedly. When he returns to the encampment under bridge, Gerald finds him and tells him he killed his parents, and to never return to Sea Point. He flees to Tabletop Mountain, where he dreams wildly and madly for days before returning to find the encampment burned to the ground and Gerald dead. Alone after Sealy gets arrested, Azure returns to the mountain and builds a fire. He dances around it to "the sound of dreams burning" (184) before emerging into a world of violence, death, and destruction where "the heads of white bodies float like kelp" (189).

The life of violence in the picaresque is long. It spans early modernity, with the murder of Celestina and the brutal taming of the *vogelfrei* peasant in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, to the violent making of the queer hustler subject of *Adonis García*; in each case, violence shapes and molds a subject outside History into what Georg Lukacs calls the subject-object of History, "the first subject in history that is (objectively) capable of an adequate social consciousness" (199). But in *Thirteen Cents* the same violence—still

multiply registered and episodic, still a kind of rogue's tactic for survival—produces an object, so much “body/flesh” (Spillers 68). In the end, there's only the sound of dreams burning; there seems to be no exit from a racialized capitalism that consumes everything it touches, flame-like.

Spain argues that “turning our focus to aspects of the novel that highlight strategies of how those living precarious lives come to ‘know their way around life,’” (423) allows us to see another way out, one aligned with picaresque silence and the tactical violence of the rogue: the temporality of the encounter and the ways in which these “prompt unexpected actions, improvisational alignments and becomings marking, as Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes, ‘the fundamental mobility of life’” (423). Such a fundamental mobility is at least part of what the picaresque seeks to capture and fix in place, making the unhousedness of its antiheros a key component. The unmooring of life in *Thirteen Cents* does a queerer kind of labor, as a dreaming out of joint with the structures of the world. It is a “longing that propels us forward” without any prescriptive futurity or even the utopic imaginings that Muñoz links to the practice of cruising. In *Thirteen Cents*, the apocalyptic dream that sees the burning and flooding of the world is something *other than* redemption or futurity: it refuses the world, negating it as Spain argues. I want to suggest it exceeds that negation not only through the encounter, but through a kind of wayward refusal that marks an end of the genre as an apparatus of capture.

Coming ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its flawed but hopeful promise that another world is possible, the novel seems on the surface to be a more than adequate representation—a portrait, if you will—of the global domination of capital and

the structures of neoliberalism that subtend it. Page after page of violence, hunger, and deprivation written on Azure's body tell the tale of the accumulation of wealth in racialized capitalism. It juxtaposes white wealth and luxury and black immiseration and deprivation, driving home the imbrication of race and capital at every turn. Like the introjective and projective mechanisms we see at work in the choice of sexual objects on the covers of the two different editions of *Adonis García*, Azure stands in for what Fanon describes as the white's projection of forbidden desires onto the black, already "fixed at the genital level." There is no escape for Azure, no chance at becoming the good gay subject; instead, there are only ruptures and breaks in time, the kinds we see—as Spain notes—in fleeting encounters with others, with the natural world, with himself, and finally, with the figure of natality that surges forth in the novel's final dream sequence. These ruptures and breaks are one way to survive precarity and the continuous ravaging of his body.

Azure learns through violence how to survive on the streets in post-apartheid Cape Town. He doesn't smile alluringly like Adonis. Instead, Azure stares, angry and desperate but ready to do what you ask of him for a price. At night, the place where he sleeps on the beach and bathes in the sea most days, Sea Point Promenade, becomes a venue for cruising, one of the city's many queer voids and negative spaces. Azure sells his body there to mostly white men. His young age and his blue eyes, striking against the dark black of his skin, make him a prized commodity.

Unlike Adonis, whose hustling appears to us as a ludic jaunt that produces an unending jouissance, Azure despises the men who buy the use of his body and takes little pleasure in the sex. Adonis's dream of becoming Priapus, joyously "viniendo

constamment” [“coming all the time”], starkly contrasts with Azure’s taut and unlyrical description of a sexual encounter as a kind of losing battle with a savage animal:

The married ones are always the horniest and by far the roughest. He takes me in his family minibus to a dark beach near the V&A Waterfront. We are the only ones parked there. He takes me to the back seat and oils me with cooking oil before he takes me like a beast. I bite the seat in front of me while he grunts and moans. He goes at it for at least an hour before he comes into a condom. (33)

Seen in this light, Adonis’s *jouissance* is a far cry from Azure’s pain. Only once does he describe feeling pleasure in his sexual encounters, and it is short-lived, since “after a while, the pleasure turns into sadness” (100).

Walking the streets in worn-out shoes with holes in the soles, wearing a ripped t-shirt covered in dirt, dried semen, and blood, soothing his sore feet and violated body in the cool waters of the sea every morning, Azure represents an entirely different kind of hustler. Hustling for him is anything but revolutionary, his abjection a far cry from the “sweetest and spiciest pleasures” Genet describes in *The Thief’s Journal*. In mid-twentieth century novels as diverse as Genet’s and Rechy’s *City of Night*, hustler-picaros extract value from those who make use of their bodies, giving hustling the appearance of a tactic and extractive mechanism to drain value *qua* life under capitalism, and operating in public spaces as the remainders of the commons. Extracting value in this way makes the *vampiro* into an undead version of what Michel de Certeau calls the Human, the anonymous worker extracting value in whatever way they can.

For some hustlers—and especially for Adonis—the body is a site of production that produces both pleasure and value. This is especially true for the hustlers of the mid-twentieth century, when it still seemed possible to fuck your way to freedom. In *Thirteen Cents*, however, the aesthetic capture of a racialized subject troubles this sex positive

conceptualization of human emancipation. Reading one part of its historical context—the Soviet Union, the despair of a heightened left-wing melancholia and the seeming triumph of neoliberalism—the novel’s abjection of its hustler-picaro, Azure, makes a kind of sense. Reading another part, however, upends this logic: as the Soviet Union fell, so did apartheid. So while Azure lives a kind of non-life, disposable and commodified, he responds to his abjection and the violent ravaging of his body with what can best be described as a kind of wayward refusal, part of what Saidiya Hartman calls “waywardness [ . . . ] the avid longing for a world not ruled by master, man, or the police,” and a “queer resource of black survival” (227). Waywardness in *Thirteen Cents* is both the refusal to die and the refusal to be killed; Azure survives by any means necessary, and dreams queer dreams of longing for other worlds. Situated on the margins and in the shadows of Cape Town, in homeless encampments and in public parks, Azure is the “shadow” of the famously beautiful city, its negation and—as the terminal point of the long picaresque—its promise.

### **The Racialized Rogue**

Frank Wilderson in *Red, White, and Black* uses “*White, Human, Master, Settler*, and sometimes *non-Black* [ . . . ] interchangeably to connote a paradigmatic entity that exists ontologically as a position of life in relation to the Black or Slave position, one of death” (23) and negation. I want to take up his terms at the same time as I ask how a novel like *Thirteen Cents* might be read as a text that seeks to make visible a figure—the Black and South African lumpen, sex working, hustling, thieving, panhandling, “dissolute and idle”—rendered invisible by political economy and the structures of capitalized and racialized life, socially dead.

For Wilderson, the Black is the figure that makes legible all other subject positions, including marginal figures like the queer and the *maricón pobre*. Thought in the psychological<sup>43</sup> sense, social death is a capacious phenomenon to accommodate the lumpen and their transformation into waste and social scum. The queer—like *el vampiro* of Mexico City and the *maricón pobre*—and the unhoused experience forms of social death, as Lemebel poignantly reminds us. At the same time, the non-Black queer or unhoused person can, as Adonis does, become worker and play what de Certeau calls *la perruque* [pulling one over, or making do] simply by leaving behind or hiding his *mariconerías*. His enfoldment into political economy is like a resurrection, an option always already available to him. But in Azure queerness and Blackness collide like an ontological suicide, and the repeated scenes of violence annihilate and negate him. A figure like Azure would appear to have no access to a world ontologically structured around Black subjection except as its negation. Surviving these multiple exclusions—ontological, political, sexual—would be beyond the capacity of most people, especially when one’s labor, like that of the Slave, has built the foundations of the world.

Duiker died by suicide in 2005. In his obituary, Liz McGregor argues that “sex in Sello’s novels is a way to return to the essential self hidden behind race and gender”; in this sense, it would appear to resemble the working through of psychoanalysis. Shaun

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<sup>43</sup> The dictionary of the American Psychological Association defines social death as “a pattern of group behavior that ignores the presence or existence of a person within the group. Social death occurs in situations in which verbal and nonverbal communication would be expected to include all participants but in which one or more individuals are excluded. See shunning; ostracism. 2. the social effect of individuals’ reactions to a living person as if he or she is dead” (<https://dictionary.apa.org/social-death>).

Viljoen argues that “Duiker epitomizes a new generation of South African writers who succeed more easily in creatively transgressing the old black/white divide” (xxii); he calls his writing “a provocative unsettling of the black and the white” (vi). But this unsettling is a formidable task in the face of whiteness and its reliance on Black subjection. Can sex really help us return to that “essential self,” a body before slavery and the racialized settler colonialism of South Africa, to a time before the Black and the White? Hortense Spillers suggests that, in fact, the answer is a hard no:

But this body, at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses: 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming being for the captor; 3) in this absence from a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of “otherness”; 4) as a category of “otherness,” the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general “powerlessness,” resonating through various centers of human and social meaning. (67)

Azure’s body maps out the “externally imposed meanings and uses” Spillers describes: as a hustler, his body provokes and provides “an irresistible, destructive sensuality”; his sex work makes his body a commodity, a thing for White captors; and his “otherness” as a Black boy whose blue eyes betray a kind of impurity, an almost Whiteness, deepens his sense of alienation from the White *and* the Black. Throughout the novel his “powerlessness” will resonate in seemingly endless scenes of violence and sexual subjection.

If there is an answer to this question—how to return to an essential self outside or before the “old white/black divide”—I suspect it might be found in what escapes the page

and the word, and not in Duiker's hyperrealist representation of a twelve-year-old hustler. In the text's silences and queer voids, and in its final dream scene, the possibilities of other worlds start to emerge.

### **The Dream's Insurrection**

In my second chapter I describe picaresque violence as an art and a "polemology" of the weak (38), part of what Michel de Certeau calls "the space of the other." In *The Practices of Everyday Life*, he uses the example of *la perruque* to envision tactics as a kind of guerrilla warfare. *La perruque*—getting one over on 'the man', or making do—acts as a counterpoise to strategy and its "triumph of space over time" (permanence), its spatial mastery through vision and "panoptic spaces" (36). He writes, "lacking its own place, lacking a view of the whole, limited by the blindness [. . .] resulting from combat at close quarters, limited by the possibilities of the moment, a tactic is determined by the absence of power just as a strategy is organized by the postulation of power" (38). The resilience that he attributes to the practices of everyday life relies on the trope of the anonymous worker. But the true subject of de Certeau's resilient, resisting-by-trickery worker-trope, though never specified, is the human. His human aptly describes Adonis, whose vampiric extraction of value seems to subvert the alienating force of commodification by taking ownership of the means of production, his body. It's a less apt description for Azure.

Wilderson cogently argues that "modernity marks the emergence of a new ontology because it is an era in which an entire race appears, people who, *a priori*, that is prior to the contingency of the 'transgressive act' (such as losing a war or being convicted of a crime), stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world" (18). He

points out that the whole edifice of modern humanism, what he calls its ontics, relies on a notion of freedom essentially and irremediably imbricated with slavery. In other words, the opposite of freedom is slavery, and the Slave's position of unfreedom constitutes the Master's position of freedom. Enslavement, Wilderson notes, reconfigures the African body into Black flesh, making slavery a "banishment" from ontology and locating Blackness outside of meaning. Violence constitutes this banishment from ontology; it is what Saidiya Hartman calls a "deadening objectification to chattel status" (*Scenes of Subjection* 101).

Unlike Azure, Adonis has access to structures of power and domination built on the subjection of the Slave, even as a fungible commodity selling his labor power for factory work or for sex work. In true picaresque fashion, Adonis can make do within and without these structures. Azure's captivity, on the other hand, reflects the fungibility of the Slave as commodity, which "makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires and values" (Hartman 21). As captive body, he is the perfect "abstract and empty vessel" for readerly fascination. Azure contains multitudes within his flesh, not a body but as the meat of chattel, and never the subject-object of History that Adonis becomes:

A boy? I'm not a boy. I've seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age get into his car. I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going [ . . . ] A boy? Fuck off. They must leave me alone. I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea. I have been fucked by enough bastards and they've come on me with enough come to fill the swimming pool in Sea Point. (166)

While Adonis can be "like a person" by cutting his hair short and wearing loose-fitting jeans, Azure is always already socially dead. His literary figuration—his capture by

language and genre—renders his flesh ready to consume, giving readers what Hartman calls a “delicious taste of the other” (*Wayward Lives* 323).

Wilderson points out that “as an ontological position, that is, as a grammar of suffering, the Slave is not a laborer [or de Certeau’s anonymous worker] but an anti-Human, a position against which Humanity establishes, maintains, and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity” (11). Wilderson notes that, for the Black, “‘home’ is no different than prison [ . . . ] the ‘Black home’ is an oxymoron because this notion has no structural analogy with a notion of White or non-Black domestic space” (127). This is obvious in Azure’s homelessness. His home, the site of his practices of everyday living, is a sequence of scenes of subjection and captivity.

Azure’s discursive captivity—part of the text’s picaresque register—renders him a liminal figure, always already never *enough*. And while liminality regularly appears as a feature of the picaresque and the rogue’s in-between subjectivity, in Duiker’s text there are no ludic machinations, no sly tricks and games. Instead, the racialized rogue contends with the impossibility of escape. Spillers suggests that “even though the captive flesh/body has been ‘liberated,’” as one might argue in post-apartheid South Africa, that flesh/body continues to exist as what Spillers calls “the human subject [who] is ‘murdered’ over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise” (68). For Azure these scenes of violent physical and sexual subjection—his unending ‘murder’—constellate not only around his Blackness as an ontological position of death, but also in terms of not being Black enough and masculine enough, part of “the intense policing of gender identity in urban South Africa’s affirmation of hyper-masculinity” (Spain 427). Hustling in this sense does a kind of

double labor of subjection, feminizing him and then barring him from any kind of affirmative identity: “the feminization of Azure is central to the disciplinary violence inflicted upon him [and] Azure is barred from an affirmation of an identity outside the iteration of normative masculinity.” Unlike the disciplinary violence Lazarillo experiences as part of a becoming-proletarian, this violence seems to want to unmake him at every step, like an unbecoming-human.

Azure’s light blue eyes and their signal of racial impurity link him suggestively to the “impurity” of homosexuality as a White or European sickness. In a hyper-masculinist post-apartheid South Africa where, according to Winnie Mandela, “Homosex [sic] is not in Black Culture” (as qtd. in *Spain* 427), the force of Azure’s exclusion comes from all sides. He isn’t masculine enough, as a young boy having sex with older men, and his blue eyes make him not black enough. We see this in the scene where his friend Vincent tells him how to survive on the streets:

I mean you have to be the blackest person.

But I am dark. Look at my skin. I’m not far from *makwerekwere*.

No, I mean you have to be more black ... like more black than all of us. You must watch what you wear. Like those shoes. Things like that give you away. Like if people see you and they don’t know you right, the first thing they look at is how you look right?

Right.

So now they look at your blue eyes and your shoes and they think blue eyes, *veldskoene*, he’s trying to be white. That’s how they think. See what I mean?

Shit. I think I do.

That’s why people have beat you up all your life. They think you’re not black enough. (35)

Black but not black enough, queer but only by necessity, and by way of both of these exclusions, not masculine enough, Azure's social death appears processual and almost infinite, like a becoming-dead seemingly without end.

The making of Azure's body into a fungible commodity spectacularizes the ontological break between the White (freedom and life) and the Black (slavery and death). This dynamic surfaces not only in his sex work with White johns but also with Gerald, the light-skinned gangster from whom he seeks protection: "So now I own you. Understand?" (67). Sex and physical violence make manifest his captivity, corporeality, and domination: he knows "how to please a man"; he knows "these bastards" (98). Fanon describes this as a kind of unconscious knowledge: "A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white. [ . . . ] I am guilty. I do not know of what, but I know that I am no good" (*Black Skin* 106). Trapped between nonexistence—never becoming *como una persona*—and the status of a sex object unto whom the dark desires of the White are projected and introjected, Azure knows he is "no good."

In the context of racialization, when it makes sense to approach Blackness as "a production of bodily (not biological) difference at the nexus of violence and sexuality" (Sexton 9), Azure is caught between the structures of hypermasculinity and the feminizing impurity of his blue-eyed gaze. His queerness appears at worst as a kind of abyssal zone, and at best as the force of what Lee Edelman suggests is a negativity that both inheres within and motors queerness. As negation, he seems to affirm

what the Law and the Pope and the whole of the Symbolic order for which they stand hear anyway in each and every expression or manifestation of queer sexuality: fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; Fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid

on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop. (Edelman 29)

Azure tells us as much about the random passerby who stares at him as he walks by without shoes: “I tell him to fuck off with my eyes” (119). No future indeed: the hopelessness of life always already fucked, as it were, collapses inward in the figure of the racialized hustler-rogue.

And yet in this figure of a boy damned to violence and pain, the double death of Blackness and queerness cracks open new horizons of possibility, what Hartman calls the possibility of refusing and exceeding a world marked by negation (*Wayward Lives* 62). James Bliss, writing about the dialectic of pessimism and optimism in Black studies, suggests “that what is characterized as hopeless, pessimistic, nihilistic, or cynical offers instead a hope against hope, the possibility of politics not simply as hope for a different or better world, but as the ardent refusal of this world” (93). I want to think alongside him to suggest in turn that Azure’s discursive fixing into place contains a kind of “hope against hope.”

Azure tells of dreaming deeply, “fragile” dreams (76) of wonder and sun and water, the kind of maroon freedom he alludes to when he fantasizes about swimming in the Seaport pool or bathing naked in the ocean. The unknowability of his dream-life—readers only see what he chooses to reveal, with the rest “by the way”—together with his willful silences and omissions, reveal the power of that which escapes representation in the picaresque and lingers in its lacunae: “Sshhh, I tell myself. You’re getting stronger. I must repeat this to myself” (58). This is the power of quiet rage: “Now the black girls are different. There’s always something quiet and angry in their eyes. Black girls talk with their eyes [ . . . ] I know their strength and fear it” (112). Hartman notes that “by either

refusing to answer reformers' questions or determining what questions they would answer, sex workers unexpectedly gained the upper hand" (130). This is the tactical silence of the picaro—Lazarillo's "otras cosillas" and Moll Flanders' "by the way"—as much as it is the tactical silence of the racialized rogue. Azure's racialized being negates life as a figure of social death, and his silence negates the word. In the double death of queerness and Blackness, Azure's silences become what Emmanuel Levinas calls the murmur of silence, "like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence. There is nothing, but there is being, like a field of forces" (35). Negated by the word and the world, Azure's voids murmur with the presence of being that exceeds negation, silently asking, "Can I live?" (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 10).

His dream-life resembles another field of forces, one that explosively exceeds negation to reveal what Bliss terms "hope against hope." The novel ends in a final dream sequence of fire and destruction, a space of death where "freedom and negation operate" (Mbembe 39) like a dream vision of the ecstasy of the suicide bomber. Achilles Mbembe writes that "the human being truly *becomes a subject* [ . . . ] in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death (understood as the violence of negativity). It is through this confrontation with death that he or she is cast into the incessant movement of history. Becoming subject therefore supposes upholding the work of death" (14). He goes on to note that "what connects terror, death, and freedom is an *ecstatic* notion of temporality and politics [ . . . ] For death is precisely that from and over which I have power. But it is also that space where freedom and negation operate" (39). The analogy with Mbembe's suicide bomber may seem facile, especially when one asks how a dream

vision of death and destruction can be compared to the negating force of a suicide bomb. But the text's ambiguity about this final scene subtends the analogy.

The final scene moves between a dream state of fire and destruction, and the creeping burn of a wildfire—which Azure may or may not have started—approaching the cave where he shelters after the shantytown is bulldozed. Between open-eyes scenes of flames growing larger and “the sound of dreams burning,” and closed-eyes ones of “animals running at a furious speed,” Azure dances around the fire “till I’m so exhausted that I collapse on the ground” (184). The reader is left to discern what is real and what is dream; Azure may or may not be the suicide bomber; the text’s refusal to tell is another kind of negation. Dancing, Azure’s becomes a body in motion, a somatic singing “crooned in infinite variety, every story altered and unchanging: *How can I live? I want to be free. Hold on*” (Hartman *Wayward Lives* 349).

The novel in this sense never forecloses—and never refuses—violence as a tactic of the weak, leaving open the possibility that Azure has brought about a kind of total destruction—like an unworlding—where “the heads of dead white bodies float like kelp” (189). Writing of Jean Genet’s refusal to foreclose violence as a tactic—what I describe in Chapter two as picaresque violence—William Haver describes this refusal as an “openness to futurity”:

Transition, movement, metamorphosis, with neither a goal nor an origin: this is the very openness of violence to futurity as such; without the affirmation of that violence, the future is only an ahistorical—anti-historical—continuation of the present, or (but it is the same thing) the telos of a revolutionary project. It is perhaps for this reason that Genet repeatedly insisted that he was a vagabond, not a revolutionary. (43)

The possibilities and affirmations of picaresque silence mirror this openness to futurity and the absolute contingency of violence. In *Thirteen Cents*, this silence, like a refusal or

omission, something “by the way,” emerges in this final scene as another kind of absolute contingency, a dream within the daydream over which we have little control. It asks the reader to imagine unworlding, as dream or as revolutionary violence, or as something else entirely. Like the work of dream interpretation, it’s left to the listener, or in this case, the reader.

In *Thirteen Cents*, the everyday scenes of futility and gratuitous violence seem to embody Black abjection as defined by Fanon. And its final dream scene of death and destruction seems to embrace violent resistance as what Fanon describes as “the rehabilitation of man” in his totality (62), a final triumph for humanity that “mobilizes the people, i.e. it pitches them in a single direction, from which there is no turning back” (50). But the Black body is always already the site of another kind of violence, in this case, White violence (“deadening objectification”). In light of this, Hartman’s invocation of the ravished body as “hold[ing] out the possibility of restitution,” has particular resonance for Azure, especially as a kind of “recognition of the amputated body as human flesh, in the cognition of its needs, and in anticipation of its liberty” (74). In scene after scene of street life and sex work, everydayness highlights his corporeality and his pain.

It would be a mistake, however, to see the representation of his captive, ravished body as a cry for White empathy. Writing on the dangers of empathy, Harman argues that “the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body to make this suffering visible [ . . . ] in making the other’s suffering one’s own this suffering is occluded by the other’s obliteration” (19). In other words, if the representation of the ravished body acts only to

stir White empathy, it runs the real risk of “obliterating” and further ravishing the Black body while making the White feel good about their moral generosity.

I believe Duiker is well aware of the dangers of empathy. Using sex to “unsettle” the break between Black and White in this text ends up with yet another abjected and violated Black body. At the same time, it serves to break the Althusserian mirror by which a subject is hailed into being, and serves as one way to “become aware of [ideology’s] operations” (Silverman 217). Viewed in this light, the reflection of Azure’s corporeality, part of Hartman’s possibility of restitution, emerges in the novel’s relentless focus on everyday street life: eating, drinking, surviving, dancing as the world burns, and even finding moments of pleasure with the older White men who use his body. Azure’s humanity stares the reader in the face, unsettling what Wilderson describes as a position of social death that is largely irremediable, or at least irremediable without the kind of unworlding Azure experiences in the final scene of the novel.

The rough textures of everyday life—from scenes of walking painfully after being beaten and having his ankle broken, to ‘domestic’ scenes of washing semen and blood from his ripped t-shirt at the public fountain—highlight the futility of what de Certeau calls ‘making do’. Hartman argues these everyday practices “occur in the default of the political, in the absence of the rights of man or the assurances of the self-possessed individual, and *perhaps even without a ‘person,’* in the usual meaning of the term” (65, emphasis added). Azure’s captivity is reflected in every one of his practices of daily life, appearing before the reader through the lens of violence.

‘Making do’ at work, for Azure, means finding ways to survive sexual and physical violence, often in the small moments of pleasure that turn quickly to sadness.

The tactics of the everyday that de Certeau celebrates for the anonymous worker simply don't apply to Azure. But while playing *la perruque* might not be an option for Azure, "to paraphrase Fanon, violence cleanses" (Wilderson 126). Violence in *Thirteen Cents* both ruptures and sutures.

Azure's final moments of fire and destruction, part dream, part reality, point to the renewing and cleansing work of a political violence that closely tracks what elsewhere I call the third register of violence in the picaresque: the tactical violence of an unbecoming subject who refuses to submit. This goes some way toward explaining the impossibility, the *unspeakability*, of Lenin's question—What is to be done?—for the Black subject. Wilderson points to this conundrum in the final lines of *Red, White, and Black*: "How does one deconstruct life? Who would benefit from such an undertaking? The coffin approaches with its answers in tow" (431). The answer is unspeakable, at least for some.

Despite this unspeakability, Wilderson writes eloquently of what he calls Fanon's "two gestures" concerning violence as an answer to Lenin's question: first, that violence is a "precondition for thought," because the "reigning episteme" cannot be called into question without revolutionary violence. This resonates with Genet's position on violence; like Fanon he situates violence as an ontological priority. Wilderson points out that Fanon's second gesture, however, situates the political violence necessitated by violence's ontological priority as not "gratuitous or absolute." This is because the restoration of land for the postcolonial subject offers a "therapeutic grounding wire" that, in essence, creates an ethical framework for violence that guides its use in instrumental and para-instrumental ways. Whether this ethical framework applies in South Africa—

where land restoration is a possibility in ways it is not for those who are natively alienated<sup>44</sup> in the U.S.—is contested within and without Afropessimist thought.

I don't pretend to have an answer. But thinking alongside Fanon, Genet, and Wilderson, if violence effects a rupture, and if the ravished body, like Azure's, provides the conditions of possibility for restitution, maybe we can take up what is unsayable about violence: for Azure, the violence *is* gratuitous and absolute. It is also the suture, where "heads of dead white bodies float like kelp," operating outside ethics, an insurrection of the unconscious at the same time as it narrates total death and destruction, a burning down of the world and a way to survive in its ruins.

In the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre writes, "Read Fanon: you will see that in a time of helplessness, murderous rampage is the collective unconscious of the colonized" (iii). He goes on, speaking directly to the White reader: "Perhaps, then, with your back to the wall, you will finally unleash this new violence aroused in you by old, rehashed crimes. But, as they say, that is another story. The history of man. The time is coming, I am convinced, when we shall join the ranks of those who are making it" (lxii). Even Sartre does not dare to name this violence, unspeakable because it requires the undoing of the White subject and the end of the world as we know it.

For de Certeau, the practices of everyday living involve trickery, a kind of tactics that knows "what it wins it cannot keep." But if everyday life for a boy like Azure is "gratuitously, absolutely" violent, the tactics of the everyday must be defined differently.

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<sup>44</sup> Orlando Patterson describes natal alienation as "what is critical in the slave's forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations" (7).

Not *la perruque* and small acts of defiance at work, but tactical violence, even a kind of ultraviolence of a kind that leaves Whites “with your back against the wall.” The ontological priority of violence makes such a tactic—both gratuitous and absolute—necessary. Any making do that uses what Wilderson calls a Black grammar of suffering may well need to grapple with this ontological priority.

In the end, Azure’s silences negate the word, the world, and death itself. His dreams and visions of violence and destruction exceed it all with an ecstatic hope against hope. Viljoen observes that the dream figure who appears to Azure before fire and violence consume Cape Town, “a woman who looks like she lived a very long time ago” (139), invokes the figure of Saartjie Baartman, “the ancestral Southern African Xhonian woman [ . . . ] maternal and protective of him” (xvi). Baartman is the same woman infamously known as the Hottentott Venus, who was captured, enslaved, and displayed in traveling freak shows in Europe until her death in Paris, where she lived in abject poverty for the rest of her life. Natively alienated and ravaged by rape and disease, Baartman appears before Azure as a vision of natality, of the family that died long ago. Finally, amidst fire, death, and destruction, in the unworlding of this world, natality appears before him, like a return of what was once familiar but has become unknown. With gasoline and matches, silence and dreams, Azure dances within the enclosure of racialized being with the ecstasy of the suicide bomber. He refuses the world and exceeds its negation of his captive body/flesh. This is how the long picaresque ends: its object finally refuses capture, and “the rest is unsayable. I say no more and go barefoot.”

## Chapter Five: After the Picaresque

*So the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals throw themselves into the struggle like stout working men [...] The prostitutes too, and the maids who are paid two pounds a month, all who turn in circles between suicide and madness, will recover their balance, once more go forward, and march proudly in the great procession of the awakened nation. – Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth**

*I am large, I contain multitudes. – Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”*

I want to turn now to the people tangled up by the spectacularity and romance of the picaresque. Some readers might be asking whether this study reflects a kind of morbid fascination, a gaze that reproduces the same capturing net of language as the picaresque. You could even say that, like Zapata’s romantic rendering of the hustler, I’ve made the lumpen subject of the streets into a picaro and an object for my own consumption, the revolutionary subject of radical lore appearing on the red horizon “like a real star” and not “como una persona.”

I admit that my years as a social worker have given me a boundless faith in people who live outside. But the romance of the vagabond is a tricky one. On the one hand, vagabondage presents those on the left with a vision of work refusal and resistance; to those on the right, long-term unemployment and the informal labor of the street—sex work, drug dealing, panhandling, the barter and trade of stolen goods—signal moral turpitude, laziness or weakness, and mental depravity. And so it goes—we can’t speak of ‘them’ without also speaking of ourselves and our own values and desires. If the picaro’s tale of adventure and redemption through wage labor is a parable of capital, then the making of the homeless subject—a figure distinct from the person living on the street – is its hyperrealist counterpart. Unlike the picaro’s revelation of what Matthew Garrett calls

the readerly dream of freedom (117), the homeless subject's abjection more often reveals our cruelty, pain, and terror.

Today many of us are caught up in a different kind of net than the one cast by the picaresque: twinned cycles of rent and debt, wage labor and alienation. It's a less figural net than the one cast by language, for sure, since it entangles most of us. But like the picaro before becoming proletarian, people who seem to escape are condemned to a kind of disposability, outside the protections of the law and human community, *vogelfrei*: free as a bird and just as subject to depredation. They become throw away life, abject.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to be abject is to be "cast off, rejected; cast out, expelled; it describes a person "of low repute; despicable, wretched; self-abasing, servile, obsequious." Who lives these throw away, abject lives? People on the streets are teenagers aging out of foster care; queer kids cast out by their families; people living with untreated mental illness; Black, indigenous, and people of color with lives shattered by police and carceral state violence; veterans and those wounded by war; drug addicts and alcoholics; grandmothers evicted and with nowhere to go but the streets. Some become street-based sex workers and pimps, others panhandlers and petty thieves, drug dealers or procurers. Some give up and some become murderously angry. But in short, these are the contours of the "indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither" of the lumpenproletariat, the "refuse of all classes."

In the picaresque, the magic of capital and its fetishes transfigure the 'scum' who seem to have fallen outside the category of the human into one more tradeable commodity, surplus labor. As *figures* of surplus and transformation—unemployed but employable—they evoke a strange mixture of emotions, from envy and hostility to

disgust and desire. In real life the ‘scum’ provoke altogether sadder passions. In a curious piece in *Actuel Marx*, Jean-Claude Bourdin notes with a species of sadness:

the lumpenproletariat, who lack the necessary energy for revolution, will not sweep away the decay of the old system, because they are this decay. From this, Marx comes to the conclusion (a painful one for the noble) that the lumpenproletariat must be left to its fate, that it is pointless trying to reform it, and that the most important thing is to avoid becoming contaminated. (25)

In this view, the ethos of the lumpen is venal and criminal, with a base disregard for life.

It is born of desperation and hunger and infectious like a disease.

Bourdin’s articulation of this lumpen ethos points to the term’s function for Marxist thought: as a negative relief for a communist subjectivity scrubbed clean of its rabble and dirt. In this sense, the lumpen’s *lazzaroni*<sup>45</sup> character negatively defines the revolutionary communist subject. Only a proletarian purified of its dangerous contaminants can sweep away the trash, from the princes of the lumpen, like the payday lenders who prey on desperate low wage workers, to the panhandlers, pickpockets, and pimps whose predations on the ‘honest working class’ happen on the streets.

So much decay, so much sadness, so many swept like trash onto the streets, left to their fate, as it were, of being disposable. The noble pain Bourdin describes feels awfully ignoble when you happen to live one of his disposable lives. Seven years after the publication of his article—amid the ongoing decline of unionized labor in the US and its replacement with piece rate labor costumed in the high-tech finery of the gig economy—Bourdin’s lumpen pessimism is less relevant than ever (if it ever was).

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<sup>45</sup> Marx includes this group—the poorest of the poor in early modern Naples, generally beggars and street people—among his kaleidoscopic description of the lumpenproletariat. Engels like Marx attributes the failures of revolution to a kind of *lazzaroni* character that is irremediably corrupted. But the word itself bears the imprint of Lazarus, who rose from the dead, much like the lumpenproletariat who, consigned to social death, insist on rising from the dead.

Today's working class more closely resembles the hustlers of the damned lumpenproletariat, selling our labor-power and our bodies by the hour for whatever kind of gig work we can find. Waiters and baristas, Amazon warehouse stockers, sex workers and massage therapists, Uber and Lyft drivers, adjunct lecturers, maids and janitors: to make it today—for most of us, just to survive—requires some serious hustle. That's the picaro's hustle, too. By hook or by crook, in the face of hunger and homelessness, violence and all kinds of abuse, the picaro hustles. The same logic of disposability inheres in the genre: unless picaros become wage laborers, they are damned to abject poverty and 'miserable' street life, disposable. Duiker's preteen hustler drives this home.

But if we only become a person through labor, debt, and rent, what are we when we refuse those things? What are we when those things are refused to us? What mode of thought within us makes people into objects against which we define ourselves? And if, as Khadijah Queen points out, "We already live the truth of what and who gets tossed aside" (*n.pag.*), what structures of knowing and experiencing the world give us the truth of the disposable human?

### **Moralizing and the Fascist State of Mind**

Working on the streets amid the 'scum' of which Bourdin and Marx so derisively speak has given me a useful perspective on these questions. Calls to dispose of all the righteous dope fiends, sex workers, and property seizure I know and love appear to me as a kind of pernicious moralizing impelled by a metaphysics of labor: not to labor becomes a species of sin, a stealing of value from the always already righteous proletariat. C. Wright Mills noted the metaphysical nature of labor in Marxist thought in 1960, when he asked in a letter to the *New Left Review* why we "cling so mightily to 'the working class'

of the advanced capitalist societies as *the* historic agency, or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation. Such a labor metaphysic, I think, is a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic. It is an historically specific idea that has been turned into an a-historical and unspecific hope” (22). A-historical and unspecific, this hope long ago became a blind faith in the unmitigated potential of a proletariat *somehow* purified of its contaminants.

Rosa Luxemburg in 1913 reveals this metaphysic subtending the narrative of disposability when she argues that Marx “quite rightly disposes” of the non-productive classes, “i.e. the hangers-on of the capitalist class (king, parson, professor, prostitute, mercenary) [ . . . ] the parasitic joint consumers of the surplus value or of the wage of labor” (332). Luxemburg follows Marx in describing sex workers as part of the lumpenproletariat, with no revolutionary potential and, as he would later call them in *Capital*, an industrial reserve army for capitalism. In this view, the lumpen—the sex worker, the panhandler, the thief—is a parasitic force that feeds on the surplus labor value created by what Luxemburg elsewhere describes in the religious language of reverence as the righteous working class. Like Marx, she attributes an essential disposability to sex workers. And critically, the sex worker here stands in as a particularly abject figuration of the lumpen, tying sex and morality to their perceived depravity, and vivifying Mills’ critique of the legacy of Victorian prudery in Marxist thought. For the communist moralizer—and I coin this term in the spirit of immanent critique, like Mills—the women and men and other-gendered people of the lumpen feed parasitically

on the pristine bodies of the international working class. And like any parasite, their disposal is naturally righteous.

Thinking of labor as a new metaphysic, with the sacral quality that inheres within any metaphysic—in this case, holy workers and unholy capitalists and their hangers-on—clarifies the instrumentality of the disposal of the lumpen: for the international working class to live, some people must die. This is how we *somehow* purify the proletariat: through killing, whether that be social death, death by psychiatric over-medication and institutionalization, death by cop, or otherwise. But the lumpen like the picaro is *pharmakon*: poison, scapegoat, and remedy, all at once. They are a “means of producing something,”<sup>46</sup> that something being the end of history and the reclamation of a human essence cleansed of alienation and despair, at the same time as they paradoxically embody that which must be cleansed.

Alexander Kojève’s otherwise remarkable *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* inadvertently reveals this paradox when he reads Hegel’s mature consciousness—Absolute Spirit—as Being [*Wesen*], and thinks of the movement of consciousness as the movement of humanity toward a universal society. For him, the slave’s productive work and mastery of nature contrast with the master’s indolence, making the slave central to this movement. But the slave is figured by Marx as a lumpen subject: escaped galley slaves are listed in his infamous description of people in the “passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society.” Paradoxically, then, while the slave *qua* worker moves humanity toward some glorious end of history, the lumpen—to repeat, also

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<sup>46</sup> φάρμακον in the online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek–English Lexicon is defined as having this secondary meaning.

the slave, also the worker—negatively defines the proletariat (*I am not that*). The slave bears their dirt, their sins, and their dreams of freedom, and as a reward for this service, is cast out onto the street, beaten by ‘masters’, and killed. This hasn’t changed, though today we call yesterday’s slaves by different names.

The contemporary murder of Black and Brown people by the police<sup>47</sup> continues a long tradition in racial capitalism<sup>48</sup> of beating and killing slaves and other people in the ‘passively rotting mass’ of the lumpen. A recent graduate seminar on Marx’s early philosophy highlighted this painful and contradictory logic. One smart young Marxist objected when I suggested that it might be time to revisit Fanon’s objection to thinking of the lumpen as disposable. The young man—active in his country’s Communist Party and highly respected for his labor organizing with students and university workers—raised his voice as he spoke of the role of beggars and petty thieves in communal violence in India. They should be killed, he said. No revolution is bloodless, he continued, and laughed as he said that the lumpen are the enemies of the working class, as if they were so much dirt to be washed away from the social body.

As a kind of revolutionary *telos*, the disposability of the lumpen appears painful but logical, especially when we think of them as a poison or contaminant in the social body. But as a form of moralizing, this dialectic of disposability bears an uncanny

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<sup>47</sup> Say their names. See here for a memorial and incomplete list of Black and Brown people killed by the police in the US in recent years.

<sup>48</sup> I follow Cedric Robinson here: “Racism, I maintain, was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the ‘internal’ relations [Slavs, Irish, and so on]. As part of the inventory of Western civilization it would reverberate within and without, transferring its toll from the past to the present. [ . . . ] As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I use the term ‘racial capitalism’ to refer to this development and to the subsequent structure as a historical agency” (2).

resemblance to Fascist moralizing that calls for the disposal and ultimately the killing of impure subjects. Separating the pure from the impure and removing poison from the *Volkskörper* of the German state were central elements of this dialectic. In “The Political Economy of National Socialism,” historian Robin Blick calls Fascist ideology—“with all its anti-capitalist pretensions and invective against bourgeois society and values” (*n.pag.*)—a form of bourgeois consciousness. Whether we think of this as bourgeois or simply false consciousness, it points to a larger problem: a dialectic of disposability across ideologies that renders some humans socially dead. For German Fascism, the socially dead were racial, sexual, and political others, as well as physical others, those with disabilities. For much of Marxist thought, this figure of social death is the lumpen, and the homeless subject its nadir.

### **The Unbearable Pain of Blinding Ruin**

It isn't particularly controversial to point out that discourses of morality like these emerge from the twinning of duty and authority, part of what Nietzsche describes as a “priestly mode of valuation” that is weak and driven by hate (643). Weakness and hate are integral to what Spinoza in *The Ethics* calls the sad passions; the sad passions motor the logic of disposability in these forms of anti-poor people moralizing. A. Kiarina Kordela, in articulating an ethics of psychoanalysis as the logical continuation of a Spinozian-Marxian-Lacanian line of thought, concludes with a provocative set of questions:

[ . . . ] if somebody who is starving or his life conditions correspond to what in our Western societies barely makes it to the level of survival conditions, and in his attempt to survive happens to drown me, then his act, far from entering the realm of [Kantian] moral impunity, is immediately raised to the level of radical, if not diabolical, evil, as, in fact, ‘terrorism’ does in the mass media and, likely, in the consciousness of many people. This is to say that, unlike in the above example

[wherein a drowning person stands in moral impunity if he or she drowns the person saving them], here the other's motivation is unambivalently and without any oscillation interpreted as a psychotic compulsion to kill 'us,' whereby the thought never crosses 'our' minds that, perhaps, drowning some of 'us' may be the only chance they have left ('we' have left them) to save themselves from drowning. [ . . . ] *Who* are we when we see these strugglers as psychotic murderers? *What* and *whose gaze* is this, which desires so badly to be killed by the other? (139)

*Who* are we when we see people living on the street as abject, as so much dirt and vermin? *Who* are we when we see them as romantic heroes of anti-capitalist resistance, work refusers and righteous violators of private property? *What* and *whose gaze* is this, that sees the person living on the street not "como una persona" but as a kind of object: the suffering untouchable in need of rescue, the irredeemable ne'er-do-well, the revolutionary subject of lore?

Over the years a number of people who live on the streets have told me that they feel as though they have already been swept away, unseen by the productive workers striding past them as they sleep on warm sidewalk grates and take shelter in tarps and under cardboard. One such person I've known has lived on and off the streets for a decade. She told me once that the worst part of being outside isn't the cold, the danger, or the police violence, but the sense of having been erased. Sometimes when I find her panhandling I pause and watch as passersby look away or glance quickly down at their phones. They give her a wide berth, sometimes pausing to toss some change in the empty cup she shakes at them. But they rarely look directly at her; it's as if they were disgusted or frightened by her. In our street sessions, she tells me that she just wants to be seen.

People on the streets have described homelessness to me as a kind of erasure, like falling into an abyss whose bottom is the street. In the preceding chapters, I sought to show how the unhoused person seems to exist for other eyes: in the picaresque, these are

the reader's eyes. I've argued that these forms of seeing the unhoused person are in fact a kind of mediated gaze, another way of *not seeing* the unhoused person in the fullness of their being. The picaresque has long been a dreamscape of freedom, with our own hopes and desires pulsating beneath the genre's multi-faceted apparatuses of capture. It has never truly been about unhoused people and their plight. It has always been a bourgeois and even a kind of proletarian gaze that seeks to make the abjectly poor into parabolic and negativized mirror images of ourselves.

When Marx writes of how those living on the streets do not exist for the eyes of political economy, he notes that they exist for "the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers, beadles, etc." (335). People on the streets don't exist for the eyes of the workers and owners striding past, but only for the eyes of the grave-digger and the apparatus of the state. They are figures of death, to be buried and forgotten in what João Biehl calls zones of social abandonment, outside and against the philosophy of productivity. When they speak of not being seen, no one is claiming some kind of magical cloak of invisibility. People on the streets will tell you that it is about being seen *as a person*, and not as an object of disgust, contempt, or hate.

So what do 'we' see in these cast off humans that produces such sad passions? I think, like Kordela, that we see ourselves: "The everyday encounter with our neighbor, or the encounter with the random 'neighbor,' and the ubiquitous encounter with the unknown 'neighbor'—all are encounters with oneself. [ . . . ] In my encounter with the other, I (i.e., it, the unconscious) provide(s) the gaze that interprets the other's signs as to his or her desire" (138). So, again, *who* are we when look away—or gaze directly at—people living on the streets?

The working through of psychoanalysis can move us toward an answer. Herbert Marcuse argues that “the true spirit of psychoanalytic theory lives in the uncompromising efforts to reveal the anti-humanistic forces behind the philosophy of productiveness” (202). The “true spirit” of psychoanalysis reveals the deadening effects of regimes of private property and the philosophy of productiveness on ourselves and on our Others-as-objects. Ownership and the property relation—the glue that binds the worker to the capitalist—foster a conceptualization of the self essentially linked to ownership, part of a “long tradition of relating personhood to self-ownership” (Schwab 207) that leaves the cast offs of the lumpen in a kind of in-between subjectivity: neither owner nor worker, and often—when hearing voices, getting high, or being arrested or beaten—not the ‘owner’ of their selves.

Self-ownership is particularly useful to capital. Being in control of yourself—‘owning’ your Self—gives you ownership of your own unique means of production: your hands, body, affects, and mind. As a producer you can—so the mythos of capital goes—become either a worker *or* an owner, depending on how hard you work your personal means of production. The reward of your self-ownership isn’t just wages or accumulated capital, but the ability to become a consumer, too. Capitalized life reads the refusal to take ownership of these means of production—and the rejection that follows of the logics of consumerism—as a sign of illness, insanity, or moral depravity. The *potentia*<sup>49</sup> of people on the streets in this sense lies in their value as surplus labor, potential producers,

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<sup>49</sup> I cautiously follow Toni Negri here, who in *Spinoza for our Time* builds a political ontology of immanence as part of a project of absolute democracy. Negri argues that Spinoza differentiates between *potentia* as a power of acting within the body and *potestas* as ruling power. I use the terms much as Negri does, but Spinoza uses the terms interchangeably at times, somewhat undermining the fundamentals of Negri’s political ontology.

owners, and consumers; when self-ownership falters, value falters. People become like waste, subject to collection by cops and homeless outreach teams, tucked away out of sight in rotting SROs and low-income housing. Street people aren't seen as *people* until after entering 'recovery' and capitalized life (debt and rent, wage labor and alienation). Until then, they inhabit a kind of homeless subjectivity, abject and socially dead.

And so most of us avert our gaze. To look directly at the street person *qua* homeless subject is to be confronted by "the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (Kristeva 4). I think here of one woman I've known over the years who consistently refuses shelter of any form, moving from encampment to encampment, and sometimes simply sleeping on warm grates and cardboard in downtown San Francisco. Her hands are usually crusted with dirt, her hair matted and often lice-infected. Her legs are red and swollen, oozing pus from untreated cellulitis; her feet often bare. She dresses in rags and blankets like the rag picker of Marxist lumpen lore. As a homeless subject, she inhabits a kind of social death. Julia Kristeva argues that "refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being" (3). The abject body of the homeless subject confronts us with death and the possibility of the dissolution of the boundary between self and other, and between the subject and the object, like a surfacing of the Real. To gaze upon her wounded body is to gaze upon death and ruin.

The homeless subject's transgression of the limits of the symbolic order—the law, the home, property, wage labor—appears before us in the same form as Antigone's love of impossibility (Ismene to Antigone: "You're in love with impossibility" [Sophocles

64]). Theo Evison-Reeves notes that Antigone “radiates an image that reveals to us the underside of the law. This has the effect of loosening our grip on the signifier, of coming to terms with the radical contingency of the Symbolic. The transgressive space beyond the law is left open, allowing us to maintain ourselves as desiring subjects, and Antigone serves to render this space visible to us” (*n.pag*). We look away from the ruin to maintain our grip on the signifier and to deny the unbearable contingency of the Symbolic, meaning itself. Judith Butler points out that *ate*, which Lacan defines as blinding ruin in *Seminar VII*, is “the limit of human existence that can be crossed only briefly within life” (47). The homeless subject crosses this limit, like Antigone, dwelling symbolically in the realm of *oikos* at the same time as they dwell, paradoxically, outside the home and *in between* the structures of the state, living Antigone’s symbolic death.

The transgression of the homeless subject contains a power so dangerous that it often entails a double murder, one psychic and social, and another physical and real. This danger at least partially explains the sad passions stirred in the housed person at the sight of the person living on the street: hatred of their dirt and outsideness, because it threatens zealously protected insiderness and property. At the same time, they operate as figures of a kind of freedom from capitalized life: “freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose,” as Janis Joplin used to sing. Films like *Nomadland* [2021]—whose achingly beautiful portrait of off the grid “van life” glides past much of the violence and pain of dispossession—drive this home. As *ate*, the homeless subject blinds us to our own misery, while paradoxically their in-between subjectivity reminds us of our own captivity and psychic enclosure.

Biehl in *Vita* writes of a different unhoused woman, Catarina, living with schizophrenia in a landfill on the outskirts of a large Brazilian city ravaged by accumulation and dispossession. He describes the landfill as a zone of social abandonment. Surrounded by refuse and waste, Catarina inhabits an abject body in a space of total abjection: she lives a throw away life. Like the people I've known who speak of erasure and invisibility, Catarina "died socially." The psychiatrist treating her calls her social death a murder: "She was killed. The ex-human" (186).

I follow Christopher Bollas in thinking of this killing—both symbolic and real—as a kind of transference for the dead core self of what he calls the Fascist state of mind. His use of the term is capacious enough to include the kind of communist moralizing that would seem, on the surface, to be in tension with it:

I term it the Fascist state of mind, knowing that in some respects this is historiographically incorrect, as Fascism was a particular movement in world history with highly unique features to it, but I justify this license by playing on the double meaning of the word 'state.' There was a Fascist state. The coming into being of that state and its political theory can tell us quite a lot about another state: the state of mind that authorized a Fascist theory. Furthermore, like it or not, 'Fascist' is now a metaphor in our world for a particular kind of person, and I wish to reserve this ironic scapegoating of the Fascist from the convenient movement of its personification of evil, as, like Wilhelm Reich and Hannah Arendt, I shall argue that there is a Fascist in each of us and that there is indeed a highly identifiable psychic profile for this personal state. (80)

The Fascist state of mind perseverates on cleansing and purging the self from the filth and waste of otherness, doing this by degrading and then annihilating the other. As Bollas notes, the cleansing of filth "suggests the possible birth of a new, forever empty self to be born with no contact with others, with no past (which is severed), and with a future entirely of its own creation" (85). I think of the purified, cleansed self envisioned by the fantasies of the Fascist state of mind as the terminal point of a psychically enclosed self: inward dwelling, private, and violently ruptured from the social. This psychic enclosure

is intimately linked to the transformations of space and time begun by the land enclosures of early modernity and the stirrings of capital.

In the move from the open spaces of the commons to the enclosed spaces of fences and hedges, human sociality experienced a kind of violent rupture. The abjection of the homeless person and the ambiguous gaze of the housed person is one consequence of this. I think of their social death as a murder, with our inner Fascist complicit in their killing. That is who we are when we look away from the blinding ruin of the woman covered in wounds and dressed in rags, hand out-stretched in a gesture of supplication. That is also who we are when we cling to her immiseration as a symbol of resistance and refusal. We require Antigone's double death to ease the unbearable pain of our own untreated wounds and maintain ourselves as desiring subjects.

### **Love Before Hate**

The logic of disposability first emerges in Marxist thought in the *18th Brumaire*, as I have tried to show in earlier chapters. Marx grasps both the gravity of the social rupture embodied in the dispossessed and the cruelty of their immiseration, and yet will later suggest that these masses of dispossessed people “sprawling across the countryside” (Halpern 74) were lost forever, socially dead and damned to precarity and misery. These people became, of course, the lumpenproletariat.

But this painful logic brushes up against a utopian impulse best described as a kind of love. In 1842 Marx published a remarkable article in the *Rheinische Zeitung* that points to an abiding love of the abjectly poor. Responding to a parliamentary debate about making the collecting of fallen wood—a “traditional right of the poor” like gleanings—punishable by imprisonment, whose “severity would lead people who

otherwise followed an honest path on to the path of crime,” Marx notes that “the right of [poor] human beings gives way to that of young trees” (*n.pag.*) and to private interest. The poor person who in earlier times could rely on the collecting of wood for heat and cooking, and on gleaning for nourishment, becomes under these laws a criminal if they choose to survive without selling their bodies and their labor to capital.

Marx traces how the forms of survival available to the poor outside of wage labor became criminal acts. Survival turned into theft, much as vagabondage became a dereliction of one’s duty to rent, take on debt, and participate in the legal fictions of private property. Marx describes the making of this legal fiction in a passage I cite at length here:

In the case of fallen wood, on the contrary, nothing has been separated from property. It is only what has already been separated from property that is being separated from it. The wood thief pronounces on his own authority a sentence on property. The gatherer of fallen wood only carries out a sentence already pronounced by the very nature of the property, for the owner possesses only the tree, but the tree no longer possesses the branches that have fallen from it. The gathering of fallen wood and the theft of wood are therefore essentially different things. [ . . . ] Hence the legal nature of things cannot be regulated according to the law; on the contrary, the law must be regulated according to the legal nature of things. But if the law applies the term theft to an action that is scarcely even a violation of forest regulations, then the law lies, and the poor are sacrificed to a legal lie. (*n.pag.*)

What cruel sacrifices, what devastating fictions: the life of someone cold and hungry for the private interest of another who happens to ‘own’ a tree. The law lies and people go to jail; the law lies and people die.

Marx points out that “cruelty is a characteristic feature of laws dictated by cowardice, for cowardice can be energetic only by being cruel. Private interest, however, is always cowardly, for its heart, its soul, is an external object which can always be wrenched away and injured, and who has not trembled at the danger of losing heart and

soul?” (*n.pag.*). He is right, of course, to link cruelty to fear of injury and cowardice. Private property establishes a right of ownership, and such a right defends against the possibility that something owned could be taken away. The enclosure of the Self begins with self-ownership; it expands into ownership of property, first personal (combs, clothing, and so on) and then private (homes, land, the means of production). Each successive movement of “private interest” entrenches our enclosure; each step toward private property fences off and erodes what once was shared. We begin to tremble more and more at the danger of losing our heart and soul—private property—and our cruelty grows apace.

Private ownership necessarily “excludes every other person from this ownership” (Marx “Debates” *n.pag.*), making it necessary to defend what is ours from those who would ‘steal’ it. Their theft of our heart and soul would be too painful to bear. Spinoza’s theory of the emotions clarifies the connection between private interest and cruelty. He traces the body of human affect to three emotions: pleasure, pain, and desire. Pain causes us to hate: “to hate a man is to conceive him as a cause of pain” (Prop. XXXIX, Part III). Hatred makes us angry, and this anger makes us cruel: “if hatred be the prevailing emotion, he will endeavor to injure him who loves him; this emotion is called cruelty, especially if the victim be believed to have given no ordinary cause for hatred” (Prop. XLI). Cowardice—“nothing else but the fear of some evil” (Def. XLI)—produces cruelty, particularly when private property becomes our heart and soul and we learn to fear that someone might evilly take what ‘rightly’ belongs to us.

Bollas notes that cruelty and cowardice are essential features of the Fascist state of mind (82), a state of mind centuries in the making. The passage of laws like this one

on the theft of wood, not unlike the Enclosure Acts in England in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, broke with hundreds of years of tradition, and sought to redefine what Marx calls the “the *indeterminate* aspect of property. [ . . . ] Fallen wood provides an example of this. Such wood has as little organic connection with the growing tree as the cast-off skin has with the snake” (*n.pag.*). What falls from the tree becomes part of the property of the tree, and thus of the owner of the tree, turning “a customary right of the poor [ . . . ] into a *monopoly* of the rich. That is exhaustive proof that common property can be monopolised, from which it naturally follows that it must be monopolised. The nature of the object calls for monopoly because private property interests here have invented this monopoly.” The invention of the monopoly—over land, fallen wood, or the “bilberries and cranberries” customarily gathered by the children of the poor<sup>50</sup>—protects private property: by extending legal property rights to fallen wood and berries, for example, the formerly indeterminate aspect of property becomes fixed. What was common becomes private, and the impulse to share transforms into an impulse to hoard and to save, part of what Marx calls accumulation. I think of it as the genesis of a Fascist state of mind roomy enough for the communist moralizer to feel at home.

The exclusive nature of private property requires both an inside—what is owned, what is mine—and an outside, what is not owned and not mine. The communist

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<sup>50</sup> “An urban deputy opposed the provision by which the gathering of bilberries and cranberries is also treated as theft. He spoke primarily on behalf of the children of the poor, who pick these fruits to earn a trifling sum for their parents; an activity which has been permitted by the owners *since time immemorial* and has given rise to a *customary right* of the children. This fact was countered by another deputy, who remarked that ‘in his area these *berries have already become articles of commerce* and are dispatched to Holland by the barrel” (*n.pag.*, emphasis added).

moralizer's throw away life, the lumpen and their nadir, the homeless subject, in this sense offers just such a kind of exclusionary constitution: the 'refuse' of all classes is the negative of the pure proletarian subject. Without the lumpen the contours of the good worker begin to blur. Marx's love gives way to sadder passions.

### **Ruptures and Raptures of Capitalized Life**

The violent ruptures in the social body produced by the passage of "legal lies" *qua* property laws in turn produced another kind of rupture, this time a deterritorialization of peasant life that resulted in masses of vagrant poor people, a "volatile fluid coursing irregularly through the social body and visible everywhere in it, representing the possibility of a total and anarchic breakdown of the existing social mechanisms of order and control" (Halpern 74). Controlling the flow of this volatile fluid, either through enclosure or criminalization, reterritorialized peasants as wage laborers, severed from the land, the means, and the objects of their production. This reterritorialization gave rise to the psychic enclosure of the self and the exclosure of the unhoused, producing a movement of erasure and disappearance, the psychic killing of those who either refused to become wage laborers or were cast out.

As a reterritorialization of social life, the abjection of the poor gained particular traction with the criminalization of poverty and its lived experiences. In early modernity, this emerged in the criminalization of vagabondage, gleaning, and the gathering of fallen wood; in contemporary terms, in the criminalization of street sleeping, the increasing use of hostile architecture, and the dehumanization of the poor as suspect, lazy, morally questionable, and mentally ill. This reterritorialization is so much rapturous invention: the

deterritorialized peasant becomes the holy worker; those who remain become throw away life.

The history of homelessness operates along similar lines of ruptures. Before the unhoused were part of the ‘homeless’, some were workers, others owners; dispossession renders people into an in-between state of homeless subjectivity. This re-fashioning belies a rupture not only in the social body, but in the structures of knowing (how do we know the human) and being (what it means to be human) themselves. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, “the poor were recast from their initial sacralized role as scapegoat<sup>51</sup> into the increasingly demonic figure of the social outcast” (Cruz 74). While ancient Greek and medieval European traditions instrumentalized the figure of the poor person as a kind of holy scapegoat, at once cared for and shunned, their transfiguration into the “demonic social outcast” rendered them socially dead, infectious and dirty.

With the homeless subject rendered *vogelfrei*, outside the protection of the law, life itself becomes a struggle between antinomies: labor and capital, production and ownership. What remains outside is cast away *at the same time* as it provides the ground on which this struggle takes place. Like waste or dirt, capitalized life negatively defines these structures of subjectivity, and purifies itself through the killing, whether social or psychic, of street life. We cannot see the person on the street in the fullness of their being, because we cannot—or will not—see ourselves. They aren’t us, we think, though we may dream of them from time to time. As a symbolic outside, the dirt, grit, and abjection of

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<sup>51</sup> Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness. - Leviticus 16:21-22, New Revised Standard Version

street life constitutes the pure insides of capitalized life; it is the wild unconscious counterpart to the purified and cleansed consciousness of the Fascist state of mind.

In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas notes that dirt is only so much matter out of place. But dirt—like the abject figures of street people—is life, too, and “as life is in the body it cannot be rejected outright. And as life must be affirmed, the most complete philosophies [ . . . ] must find some ultimate way of affirming that which has been rejected” (202). I think here of the silent terror that fills Walt Whitman as he stares out at the earth and finds himself unable to affirm its “diseas’d corpses,” rot, and dirt:

Something startles me where I thought I was safest,  
I withdraw from the still woods I loved,  
I will not go now on the pastures to walk,  
I will not strip my clothes from my body to meet my lover the sea,  
I will not touch my flesh to the earth as to other flesh to renew me. (“This Compost” 390)

Since “the ideal, so far from coextensive with the actual, is a mere extract from the actual, marked by its deliverance from all contact with this diseased, inferior, excrementious stuff” (Douglas 202), seeing the person on the streets as “the actual” might allow us to step outside the terror these antimonies produce in us. We could produce what Whitman describes as so much chemistry, an affirmation of life: “What chemistry! / That the winds are really not infectious, / That this is no cheat, this transparent green-wash of the sea / Which is so amorous after me” [391]).

But there’s a catch. Cleanliness and a shedding of dirt—“That all is clean forever and forever”—belie the romance of Whitman’s radical immanence, with God *qua* Nature in us all. His affirmation of life turns paradoxically on abjection, seeking to cast off the dirt and poison of lowness at the same time as he wants nothing more than to roll in the dirt in ecstasy like St. Francis of Assisi (Douglas 179).

Contemporary prose descriptions of Manhattan in the 1850s, when Whitman lived there, used disgust and terror to “situate the unruly lower orders irredeemably beyond the margins of civilized life,” as David Wall notes (524). Manhattan was “a ‘fetid’ world ‘knee-deep in filth,’ filled with ‘human swine,’ ‘bleary-eyed, idiotic, beastly wretches,’ and ‘abandoned women of the lowest grade’ (524). Abject and forlorn, Manhattan’s low Others would seem so terrifying that no one would trespass its streets; but they are “so amorous after me,” that chemistry renders them *somehow* clean. Whitman allows them to lick his naked body, like the johns who hire sex workers in “fetid” urban centers around the world. This chemistry is part of the ambiguity of homeless subjectivity and the gaze turned on street life: one part love, one part hate, disgusting and desirable, *somehow* becoming clean enough for amorousness and producing “such sweet things out of such corruption” (Whitman 391).

Alphonso Lingis notes that “the sacred is not only what sovereignly places itself outside the world of work in sumptuous splendor; it is also what the world of work and reason relentlessly drives out, torments, and crushes. The delinquent, the derelict, the senile, the lumpenproletariat—this living human waste, more difficult to dispose of than the industrial waste of high-tech America excites the most vehement repugnance” (156). Disgust and fear, like a wound that causes us pain, make us cruel. Driving out, tormenting, crushing: this is how we *somehow* cleanse and purge—“What chemistry!”—the impure from the social body. In becoming abject—or put another way, in being made abject—the homeless subject takes on our dirt and waste. We might look away, disgusted, or turn the gaze of *caritas* toward them, but in each instance, the chemistry of disposal, waste, and decomposition reveal the death drive’s aching compulsion to return

to the organic elasticity of the earth. Our (non)gaze at street life belies a dark and terrifying desire.

### **The Bare Life of Homelessness**

Street life and those who live it are transfixed as it were into the ambiguous position of the homeless subject: always already outside, exciting disgust and desire, and in this sense, constitutive of the ‘inside’ of capitalized life. Caught in between, still sacred and yet abject, people on the streets seem to us as so much matter out of place. This ambiguity, linked as it is to pain, cruelty, and cowardice, contains traces of violence. I think of this violence as sacred, much like the scapegoat in Leviticus. As figures of disposable life, people on the streets become what Giorgio Agamben calls *bare life*: “the fundamental categorial pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, *zoē/bios*, exclusion/inclusion. There is politics because the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in an inclusive exclusion” (9). Simple natural life—*zoē*—belongs to the home, *oikos*, and expresses “the simple fact of living common to all living beings.” *Bios*, in contrast, describes a way of living “proper to an individual or a group” (1).

Political theorist Leonard Feldman notes that “not only does the state (through laws and institutions of governance) carve out a second-class political status for homeless persons, but citizenship as full membership is constituted as the exclusion of bare life, and homeless persons figure in legal and political discourse as the embodiments of that bare life. In other words, the political exclusion of homeless persons is a constitutive exclusion” (18). The homeless subject lives in a state of exception that both disrupts and

founds “the modern political order,” a troubling contradiction that Feldman persuasively calls the “predicament of homelessness as bare life.” Whether we demonize or sacralize people on the streets, the isolation of bare life makes the person into an ambiguous figure against which we negatively define ourselves—the bum against our hard-working selves, the addict against our own moderate recreational drug use, the free and gay drop-out to our miserable ‘success’. The authorized exit for bare life—the way to become human again—is to enter into what we euphemistically call recovery: medication compliance, ‘productivity’, housing and the contemporary cycle of debt and rent that affords a kind of citizen-sovereignty.

Submission and obedience, duty and authority: each twinning constitutes an element of citizen-sovereignty. And sovereignty—as central to political life as the world of work and wage labor is to capitalized life—is just another enclosure, this time in the form of the nation state and the homeland. Frédéric Lordon usefully traces the eager willingness to submit to wage labor to *obsequium*, what Spinoza calls the respect for the authority of the state and the boss (61). Caught between disgust and desire, the unconscious seeks to dominate and control the body’s too many desires. Freud canonizes this movement to dominate by breaking—enclosing, as it were—the self and the unconscious into mostly discrete parts, the id, ego, and the superego.

The accumulation of capital changed the shape of our desire and colonized our internal life, as “streams of desire were encoded as streams of money, and circulation replaced free trajectories. The end result: a strictly limited number of infinitely capacious counting rooms under private ownership; and for the rest, the shackles of wages and the lure of (state-controlled) gambling operations” (Theweleit 271). From a conceptualization

of internal life as a series of reactions to pleasure, pain, and desire produced by intimate connections to one another and the world, we slowly moved to a form of psychic enclosure, with the ego conjured into being as the owner of a self separate from the external world, fenced off as it were, with a cop at hand, the superego, to police the wildness within us, rendered as the id. In this way subjectivity shifted from radical immanence and an always already sociality that makes us and the world, to the enclosed self, separate from the world and one another. As if possessed by the alchemical magic of the commodity fetish and the accumulation of capital, we learned to think of ourselves as somehow separate from the world that makes us and each other.

Whitman's terror expresses the condition of being itself in capitalized life: alone, owning ourselves and policing our desires, excluding each other and the world from our psychic enclosures, desperate for the amorousness of others and the natural world but terrified to allow them to lick our naked bodies in love and ecstasy. We tremble at the thought of losing our heart and soul; the pain makes us fearful, angry, and cruel. The Fascist state of mind is born from this deterritorializing and reterritorializing of desire, from our psychic enclosure and internal/external differentiations, and from the affective core of private property, pain.

The compulsion to differentiate and separate—to build fences, more simply put—drives the cleansing and purifying central to the Fascist state of mind. It is, at its heart, a structure of knowing and experiencing the world subtended by moral laws that emerged from the legal fictions of private property; it violently separates the good from the bad and the holy from the unholy with a workerist and productivist metaphysics. Bolla

describes the mechanics of this purging and killing as a multifaceted process of intellectual genocide.

### **Love's Labor Lost**

Cleansing and purging the social body of the lumpen—and our unconscious of the desire to be other than wage slave—relies on the symbolic killing of street life. The abject poor become figures of social death, homeless subjects inhabiting abjection. Inverting the logic of disposability and turning it instead on our inner Fascist is the work of what I think of as radical psychoanalysis. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud calls the dream the insurrection of the unconscious (277); the dream itself is a rupture, making psychoanalysis a natural home for working through rupture as so much destruction and regeneration. I think of the rupture as the natural starting point for radical psychoanalysis, as a breaking with structures of knowing and being that clears the way for what Gayatri Spivak calls the non-coercive rearrangement of desire; instead of cruelty and pain, it cultivates love and joy. Up against the notion of self-ownership, discipline, and productivity as exclusionary metrics of human/subhuman domains—products of the terrain of consciousness cultivated by the inner Fascist—radical psychoanalysis seeks to build community care based on mutuality and the working through of our fetishized attachments to property and things.

Bollas suggests that memory is key to the transformation of the inner Fascist: “the act of remembering is the antecedent to forgiveness (of self and others) and instrumental to the reparative rehumanization of the group”; memory is “the core of potential recovery to a humane future” (93), followed by speech and then by “true grief.” He writes of memory in a double sense: that of the survivor of intellectual or physical genocide, who

must first “remember” their humanity after the numbing dehumanization and psychic killing; and that of the vicious person in a Fascist state of mind, who must remember not only their own humanity, but that of the person in front of them.

What would it mean to remember one’s humanity? If private property is “the sensuous expression of *estranged* human life” and its appropriation (Marx *Economic* 349), and if, as I have suggested, the affective core of private property is pain, then it makes sense to think of a return to humanity as the supersession of private property and the “complete emancipation of all human sense and attributes” (*EP* 352); in other words, communism<sup>52</sup> and the joy that follows letting go of private property and the pain it causes us. But only a communism severed from the metaphysics of labor and productivism—and from the moralizing that follows—can truly emancipate all of us, from those who work to those who own and those who refuse or, in the example of the sex worker, refuse to refuse. I think of this as a transvalued communism that traverses the categories of the pure (the Worker) and the impure (the lumpen). Only then could we speak properly of thrown away lives; only then could we begin the work of “true grief.”

Right now the communist horizon has sunk so low as to be invisible; a transvalued communism shorn of its “priestly mode of valuation”—to follow Moishe Postone, the productivism<sup>53</sup> of traditional Marxism—appears even farther out of reach. So the question remains. How can we transform our inner Fascist and the moralizing

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<sup>52</sup> “[ . . . ] communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism [ . . . ] it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, individual and species” (Marx *Economic* 348).

<sup>53</sup> Postone in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* notes that Marx’s immanent critique of capitalism included a critique of value as “the expenditure of direct labor time” (25), which as he points out significantly weakens any project of human emancipation linked to what a metaphysics of labor.

discourses that animate it? Somewhere alongside the non-coercive rearrangement of desire, I think there's another way. I've been at pains to point out that the killing of street life belies a cruelty and pain that crosses ideological lines. Moralistic discourses of the good worker and the lazy bum on the right and the left emerge from a workerist impulse of domination, authority, and self-ownership. This logic of disposability—central to the metaphysics of labor and the fulsome religiosity of its discourses of morality—is a movement of aggression, one of the two movements of consciousness Fanon describes in *Black Skin White Masks*. Its counterpoint is a movement of love, “a gift of self, the ultimate state of what by common accord is called ethical orientation” (*WS* 28). We see this ethical orientation, one strikingly similar to Marx's love of the wood and berry-gathering pauper, in Fanon's paean to the resilience of the lumpen in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and in what bell hooks and Darnell Moore call Black radical love (325).

The relation between street life and housed life presents us with the possibility of just this kind of a movement of love. As movement it is a form of conscious labor that isn't productivist in the sense of making a commodity for exchange, or in the Hegelian sense of naming and violently grasping an object in mastery of it, like the naming and taming of the rogue. Instead, this is the negative labor of street life *and* of what I think of as radical love: a love of impossibility like Antigone's that is always already u/topic, homeless and outside, a negative ideal that “bears witness to what is not” (Marasco 657).

Radical love treats street life's own labor of the negative—refusal and withdrawal, a Bartleby politics (“I would prefer not to” [*Zizek Parallax* 342])—as so much unbounded *potentia* and as a means of producing nothing, at the same time as it draws deeply on the gifting of the self that subtends the practice of mutual aid in

racialized and marginalized communities. This is the love of maroon communities of runaway slaves; the love of the drag family who takes in the sex working teenager; the love of the Black mother on the frontlines of Black Lives Matter protests after her son's murder by cop; the love of the unhoused drug addict for the community of the encampment, the shelter, or the SRO. Radical love approaches what Jared Sexton calls the affirmation of nothing that inheres within Blackness; drawing from the rich tradition of Black radical love, this is a love that knows that under racialized capitalism "what it wins it cannot keep" (De Certeau 37). Like the pharmakon, radical love is poison, scapegoat, and a means of production, with the nothing it seeks to produce creating a kind of hole for consciousness, like an aperture in the wall of psychic enclosure. The figure of the homeless subject draws us into this aperture, the threshold of abjection that is death infecting life.

Between the person living on the street and in the encampment, outside the structures of capitalized life, and those living and working *within*; between the antimonies of labor and capital, submission and domination, the figure of the homeless subject hovers as a kind of third term. As bare life, their symbolic exclusion from political life constitutes political life; their outsideness is the ground on which the antimonies of capital operate. The homeless subject subtends and sustains these antimonies as a constitutive third term. Radical love—as a movement of mutuality within, without and through these antimonies—points to one way we might begin the work of tearing down the walls of our psychic enclosures.

While Agamben's theorization of bare life suggests a lack of agency and a kind of surrender often attributed to those on the streets, the people living in the abyss of

nonbeing and nonvalue are more than just hapless victims of capital's predations. At once outside the antimonies of capitalized life and absolutely constitutive of them, the homeless subject is *ate* and transgression, a figure of masterlessness *and* abjection, living beyond the threshold of life. Zygmunt Bauman notes that "the vagabond was masterless [ . . . ] what made the vagabond so terrifying was his apparent freedom to move and so to escape the net of the previously locally based control" (94). Modernity could not countenance the anarchy of vagabondage and its constant slipping of the noose of state control; the dispossessed person and the vagabond had to become the homeless bum, mentally ill, morally unsound, and generally loathsome.

The abjection of the person on the streets, then, is part and parcel of the making of the lumpen, the 'refuse' of all classes. Against the *telos* of productivism and its righteous disposal of those who produce nothing and none of the authorized commodities for exchange, radical love sees the homeless subject as a symbol of struggle capable of cultivating what Ernesto Laclau describes as the subjective transformations required in developing the will and the capacity to resist (8).

But like Fanon, "I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions" (28). People living homelessness rarely if ever describe street life as the joy of living freely. More often they speak of erasure, cruelty and pain, hunger and suffering. Hardt and Negri's mobilization of the multitude's love, for example, risks becoming what Marx and Engels call so much "amorous slobbering" ("Circular" *n.pag.*). In a persuasive critique of this vision of love, Eleanor Wilkinson points to its potential for exclusion and domination:

Hardt's understanding of the political function of love presumes a willingness from the other to enter into this relationship. We will love you, we welcome

you—even if you do not want to be a part, even when you want to be apart. What happens when this unconditional love across difference is met with revulsion, irritability, anger, or jaded cynicism? Clearly, these are not the “right” responses, they become ‘outlaw emotions’. Thus, despite all the benevolence and good intentions, Hardt’s ‘properly political’ concept of love still masks issues of power and domination. (67)

Lost in the joyful affirmation of love as a political tool is this masking of the other side of love, what Lacan calls *hainamour*, or “hate-love” (as qtd. in Sexton *n.pag*). This two-sidedness of love surfaces most famously in the words of Che Guevara, who risked ridiculousness to say that “the true revolutionary is guided by love.” Later in a 1967 speech for the Tricontinental Congress he described hatred as “an element of the struggle”: “A relentless hatred of the enemy, impelling us over and beyond the natural limitations that man is heir to and transforming him into an effective, violent, selective and cold killing machine. Our soldiers must be thus; a people without hatred cannot vanquish a brutal enemy” (*n.pag.*). This revolutionary love—a kind of *hainamour*—helps us make sense of communist moralizing and its righteous disposal of the lumpen.

From Bourdin’s noble pain to Guevara’s relentless hatred *qua* feelings of love, these affective movements of *hainamour* are the aggressive movements of a Fascist state of mind that purges, cleanses, and kills those it deems impure. So while Hardt and Negri pose the multitude’s love as a revolutionary force, love alone can’t heal the wounds of capitalized life. Our estrangement<sup>54</sup> from one another, our slavish devotion to enclosure, and the cruelty that flows from our attachments to private property, all lovingly sustain

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<sup>54</sup> “Estrangement appears not only in the fact that the means of *my* life belong to *another* and that *my* desire is the inaccessible possession of another, but also in the fact that that all things are *other* than themselves, that my activity is *other* than itself, and that finally - and this goes for the capitalists too - an *inhuman* power rules over everything” (Marx *Economic* 366).

our inner Fascist. The untreated wounds of capitalized life won't heal while an "inhuman power rules over everything." Laclau writes persuasively that

the ability and the will to resist are not a gift from heaven but require a set of subjective transformations that are only the product of the struggles themselves and that can fail to take place. What is missing in *Empire* is any coherent theory of political subjectivity- psychoanalysis, for instance, is entirely absent. Largely for that reason, the whole notion of being-against does not resist the slightest examination. (8)

In this sense, conceptualizing the figure of the homeless subject and their outsideness as a kind of revolutionary *being against*—and here I'm thinking of the romance of the vagabond, free as a bird—"does not resist the slightest examination."

In the current moment to truly live outside capitalism is impossible. In this sense to truly see the blinding ruin of the homeless subject—their abjection and transgression—is unbearable. We can't see because the outside of capital is impossible and unthinkable; the ruin of the homeless subject blinds us to their pain and our own. This is why simply extending radical love to the person on the streets is not enough; nor is it sufficient to use them as a figure of resistance and *being against*. Love alone is not enough. We need to become sick with love before radical psychoanalysis can begin the work of subjective transformation.

Marx and Engels critique the discourse of love as a political strategy, calling it a "communist lovesickness" at once enervating and hysterical ("Circular Against Kriege"). *Contra* Marx and Engels, I want to embrace communist lovesickness as the ethical orientation of a psychoanalysis of the streets. Love on the streets bears the "untreated wounds of despair" (Marasco 657): we see these wounds in drug addiction, intimate partner violence, in anger and fear, in rage and suicidal despair, in mental illness and death. It is in this sense already lovesick. But the untreated wounds of capitalized life

afflict those of us who live inside, too. Lovelessness kills our spirits and our bodies; the pain of private property and our inner Fascist's relentless movement of aggression wounds us just as it wounds the person on the streets. And even when we do love, like Guevara, it is a kind of *hainamour*.

Guevara's relentless purges of queers and trans-identified people, of those living with mental illness, and of the so-called criminal element – in other words, the Cuban lumpen – in the 1970s and early 1980s exemplifies *hainamour*'s painful logic of disposability. Instead of moralizing, radical love acknowledges the impossibility of what bell hooks calls real love<sup>55</sup> in capitalized life, not as surrender but as communist lovesickness and longing. It knows that the affective pain that shapes our internal and external worlds can only be healed by abolishing private property and the wage labor form; it knows no such abolition is on the horizon. Being sick in love as communists is to bear witness to what is not; like Black radical love, it's a practice, what Darnell Moore calls a daily ritual, “emptying ourselves of the death-dealing practices of misogyny; trans and queer antagonism; ableism; elitism; ageism; and any other act of lovelessness that aids in the killing of Black people's spirits/bodies” (*n.pag.*). Moore places Black radical love at the heart of the Black struggle for liberation; I follow Moore in thinking radical love and its communist lovesickness as central to human emancipation, and a first step toward quieting the demands of our inner Fascist. As its own space of refusal and imagination, the negative of the home—*unheimlich*—exposes to view these most intimate parts of ourselves and one another. In communist lovesickness we bear witness to what is

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<sup>55</sup> “There can be no real love without justice” (*n.pag.*).

not, transforming through voluntary acts of conscious opposition the pain of private property and the dehumanizing cruelty that flows from it, into the heartache of longing for an impossible freedom from private property.

### **The Promise of Radical Psychoanalysis**

If to become homeless is, as I have been suggesting all along, to lose your humanity<sup>56</sup>, to dwell in homelessness is to cross the threshold between life and death, between the human and the subhuman. It forces us to ask what it means to be human and invites us to interrogate a structure of knowing and experiencing the world deeply imbricated with a conceptualization of space grounded in enclosure: to be human is to be rooted, to build and to dwell in the private space of the home. The notion of home itself makes the human; this is part of what makes homelessness so problematic in symbolic terms. To be without a home—to be homeless—is to be less than human: “According to our human experience and history, as least as far as I see it, know that everything essential and everything great originated from the fact that man had a home and was rooted in a tradition” (Heidegger 37). In this view, the human dwells on the earth; we are not of the earth, but an accretion, making this form of subjectivity an apt one for the time of capital accumulation. It sets up a cascading series of oppositions (Earth/human, human/animal, home/outside, and so on) productively unsettled by what I have called a third term, the abject figure of the homeless subject.

As a kind of defilement and making impure, the homeless subject’s abjection “is never an isolated event. It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas [

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<sup>56</sup> Heidegger perhaps inadvertently reveals this when he writes that “to be on the earth as mortal [ . . . ] means to dwell” (348).

. . . ] For the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose keystone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation” (Douglas 51). The abjection or casting out of homeless subjects renders them as feral figures, out of control, wild anti-humans and dangerous contaminants in the social body. This ontologically grounds an edifice of thought “held in relation” by separation, to wit, the enclosure of the world and the subject that makes accumulation possible.

In outlining the contours of an ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan in *Seminar VII* suggests the introduction of third person into the analytic situation, another analyst who can observe and manage the treating analyst’s desire within the space of analysis: the desire to heal, to rescue, to dominate, to love, and so on. I want to suggest that this is where the *figure* of the homeless subject can be particularly effective. Their transgression of the laws of capitalized life—the realm of the Symbolic—maintains us as desiring subjects by showing us that desire is more than so many streams of money, and that there is a time before labor and capital, before submission and domination. As figures of social death, homeless subjects symbolically return to what Freud calls the organic elasticity of organic matter, to be born again in a realm of the social—street life—severed from the ontology of the home and the enclosure. The figure of the homeless subject invites us to return to an ontology of immanence, from disposable bodies to bodies that inhere within me and me within them.

In capitalized life the exclusion of social others is not contingent but ontologically necessary; their exclusion structures our world of homes and homelands, of locked doors and militarized borders. These exclusions hobble the love Emmanuel Levinas describes

as ordained in a face-to-face relation that makes it impossible to kill. The psychic killing of those on the streets and their resurrection as homeless subjects makes this clear. The Levinasian ethics of hospitality and what he calls the rupture in the self produced by the suffering of the other—the call of the naked face—relies on an enclosure that always already excludes the outsider. Such an ethos requires a stranger outside *in order* to show love. And yet, Levinas points out that “in order that I be able to free myself from the very possession that the welcome of the Home establishes, in order that I be able to see things in themselves, that is, represent them to myself, refuse both enjoyment and possession, I must know how to give what I possess” (185). Knowing how to give, as a kind of tactic like the gifting of the self, more closely approaches the kind of love I am seeking to describe than his ethos of hospitality and its constitutive exclusions. It is not the affective, involuntary swooning of bourgeois love that is a consummately private affair, nor is it the love of the stranger temporarily given respite. It is instead a series of conscious acts, as Theodor Adorno argues in *Minima Moralia*: “if love in society is to represent a better one, it cannot do so as a peaceful enclave, but only by conscious opposition” (183).

The ethical orientation of the psychoanalytic model I am sketching out here—its radical love, its communist lovesickness—pushes us to acknowledge possession’s possession of us and the untreated wounds of capitalized life. Up against the holding tight of memory and the ownership of the self, it welcomes the figure of the homeless subject as a third term in an otherwise dialectical struggle between labor and capital, as a kind of symbolic exit from memory and ownership. It opposes the affective core of private property—pain—by dwelling not in an ontology of the home and the homeland, but in communist lovesickness and its love of the impossible.

A radical psychoanalysis informed by the streets is both theory and praxis; a way of understanding pain at the same time as it gives clinicians new ways to undermine the structures of authority and domination central to capitalized life and its affective core. It exploits the fissures in psychic enclosures opened by the figure of the homeless subject and other lumpen figures, and directs our libidinal economies away from aggression, pain, and cruelty, toward the love and joy cultivated by communist lovesickness. Alice Wexler notes that the promise of a psychoanalysis “directed toward radical ends” lies in “uncovering the powerful unconscious sources of dependence on authority, demystifying the symbolic attractions of the state, unraveling the bonds of erotic domination” (*n.pag.*). She points out that Emma Goldman’s “vision of inner liberation had much in common with the Freudian project of freeing the individual from the domination of unconscious compulsions and obsessions” (*n.pag.*). In fact, she argues, psychoanalysis “promises nothing less than an opportunity for human beings to recover their wholeness – to exorcise their most profound terrors, to accept their bodies, to regain access to the full range of their emotions.” Goldman asks, “How many emancipated women are brave enough to acknowledge that the voice of love is calling, wildly beating against their breasts, demanding to be heard, to be satisfied?” (15). I want to be brave enough to acknowledge the voice of love, and the tactics of a lovesick psychoanalysis tell me where to start. As a form of care and mutual aid, these tactics are neither power nor control, neither diagnostic nor world-making episteme, but something far closer to a Spinozist joy and a form of speculative affirmation<sup>57</sup> that “lives by thinking in the vicinity of the

unthinkable” (*uncertain commons* 72). Psychoanalysis in this radical sense is uniquely well-suited for the working person, for the activist, and for the person living on the streets: it shows us how to exorcise our inner fascist.

Radical psychoanalysis interrogates the aspects of our subjectivity—obedience to authority, personhood as ownership, the enclosure of the subject—that make us cruel and cowardly. In pain, trembling at the thought of the loss of our heart and soul—our things, our property—we cower and become hateful. The inner fascist in all of us will blindly follow the authority of the physician and the analyst; our inner fascist knows desire is so many streams of money.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud describes love as “the only state” in which the boundaries between self and other begin to fade: “At the height of being in love the boundary between ego and object begins to melt away” (26). In love we can pass through the boundaries and fences separating the self and the other, and work through the pain and fear that make us tremble. We can step outside the enclosures of the self, becoming lovesick and internally incoherent as we connect again with the earth and one another. An ethically oriented psychoanalysis brings love in all of its capaciousness to ourselves and the world. As a praxis, it calls us to become sick in love. This lovesickness interrogates and opposes the structures of homeless subjectivity and their genesis in the accumulation of capital, and offers one way to work through the accumulated subjectivities of the worker and the owner.

Just the other day an 80-year-old man who has been on the streets for over 40 years was referred to our clinic for outreach and care. Right away I saw in his care two possible lines of inquiry. We could proceed with treating his mental illness by connecting

him to housing and medical care and focusing on his ‘recovery’; in other words, following the well-trod path of a discipline (psychiatry and social work) and its molding of productive sovereign-citizens. This form of care would be good for him, though he has told us many times that he does not want any of those things.

But there are other ways. Known as one of the little saints of San Francisco, he carries baby pigeons and rats in his pockets and nourishes them with love and care; they bring him more joy than any human. I believe the *potentia* of a man who has accumulated so much love and joy amidst the abjection of homeless subjectivity can show us how to care for him *and* for ourselves, for the human and the animal, the mineral and the vegetable. Instead of establishing our authority and dominion over him—diagnosing, treating, world-making—the tactics of radical love accept him as he is, with a home in his backpack and a home in his heart. We bring the deep work of psychoanalysis to him on the streets and accept care from him as mutual aid. We can accept his refusal of capitalized life as a beautiful experiment and learn from his love of the weak and the wounded. Radical psychoanalysis shows us where to start. Between the negative labor of the lumpen and the communist lovesickness induced by the impossibility of “real” love in capitalized life, we can finally begin to exorcise our inner fascist.

Without it we are large; we contain multitudes.

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