UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

"The Vivacity of Our Ideas":

Habit in Modern Political Thought

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Political Science

by

Alexander Diones

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"The Vivacity of Our Ideas":

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University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Davide Panagia, Chair

This dissertation offers a history of habit in political thought. Its purpose is to show that political theorists have consistently used the concept of habit to elucidate a theory of social transformation grounded in the experience of routine. By charting a critical history of habit, wherein it gives a shared experience to otherwise-individual sentiments, I show how habit has come to constitute an important basis for emancipatory politics. In a more critical vein, I argue that postwar Anglophone political theory's attention to "action" has meant that it fails to attend to this domain of collectivity, resulting in an avoidance of the problem of political agency in a world of tradition, custom, and repetition. Hence, my question: how can political theory move past the account of heroic action to account for more mundane forms of group attachment and social transformation?

The chapters of this dissertation examine the work of a set of thinkers who understood the contest over the meaning and significance of habit to be a contest over the terms of social transformation. What's missing in our understanding of these thinkers (and their critics) is the regard

they held for repetition as a resource for collective attachment and political change: they not only provide arguments for how to act morally but understand the everyday activities of habit as the central dimension of moral and political life. In reconsidering some key figures in the political theory canon, I demonstrate that routine, in its various guises, matters as much to democratic participation and collective action as more familiar and dramatically heroic forms of political action. By recasting habit as a material basis of democratic participation, this research enables us to understand that moments of activism are far less important to social transformation than the patient work of political organization.

The dissertation of Alexander Diones is approved.

Joshua F Dienstag

Sarah Tindal Kareem

Giulia Sissa

Davide Panagia, Committee Chair

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2022

To Lynn, since the prospectus

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to everyone who's supported this project. I want first of all to acknowledge Davide Panagia, the chair of my dissertation committee, for his indefatigable pursuit of potential in this project, especially when I found it hard to believe in it myself. Joshua Dienstag's always had a knack for pressing but thoughtful critique that grounds me in whatever it is I'm actually complaining about. Sarah Kareem was kind enough to allow me to sit in on a seminar or two on the subject of sentimentality just as I was beginning to formulate some ideas about the politics of habit, and taught me how to read for my own attachments as much as the text's. Her offhand suggestion that I read Hume for inspiration was a turning point for the whole inquiry. Giulia Sissa taught me the value of attending to the philosophical relationship between affect and power. She also taught me about collegiality and the importance of living my arguments. This dissertation was written under their supervision, and documents my humble attempts to follow their models.

Although this dissertation has taken an embarrassingly circuitous itinerary, the questions that set me on this journey were first posed in Andrew Poe's undergraduate classes at Amherst College. In coursework and in conversation, he taught me two existential lessons: an intellectual ethic—*don't dominate the text!*—but more importantly, I think, a way of living with magnanimity. In the years since I've sat in his seminar room, he's remained an exemplar and, I hope to say, a friend. In and around these classes, I made a number of friends whose thoughtfulness, attention, and kindness I've hoped to be deserving of. Several of those Amherst classmates—particularly Jeff Feldman and Nica Siegel—have remained close colleagues, generous critics, and constant interlocutors in the pages that follow. Without Alice Shen and Yilin Andre Wang, who both ventured out to California for a PhD around the same time I did, I can't imagine how I could have found the strength to complete the degree.

The specific topic of this dissertation first took shape in a graduate seminar I took with Kirstie McClure on "Democratic Revolution in the 19th Century." With characteristic historiographical alertness, she offered key lessons in thinking about the past from the present and in the stubborn materiality of intellectual labor. Much of what is good in my argument—particularly in chapter one, which I presented in a research seminar she led—comes from her relentless demand that I actually *read* the texts I discuss.

UCLA's political science department has been an excellent place to study political thought, not only for the department's broad approach to political theory but also for the university's especially fertile culture of slippery disciplinary boundaries. My colleagues in political theory provided good company and better criticism: Ziyaad Bhorat, Josh Campbell, Steve Cucharo, Naomi Ellis, Rachel Forgash, Jared Loggins, Jennifer Joines, Nick Muench, Vanessa Pooudomsak, and Michael Stenovec. My work is better for having their eyes on it. Jenn, in particular, has been endlessly willing to read and comment on my work. There are many other friends, near and far, both within and without the magic circle of the academy, whose offhand remarks and deep engagements have helped to make my work what it is.

Ashley Blum, Vivien Leung, and Christine Slaughter kept my spirits up in our cohort writing group during the interminable isolation of the long 2020. As a student-worker, my experience of university social life was also shaped by my membership in UAW 2865. I thank my comrades in the union not only for fighting alongside me for secure working conditions but also for showing me what a habit of solidarity looks like.

Audiences at the Association for the Study of Law, Culture and the Humanities; the American Political Science Association, the Midwest Political Science Association, the Western Political Science Association, have engaged with the various arguments in the dissertation as they were coming together, and the book is so much the better for it.

No list of acknowledgements can be exhaustive. But the fact that there are too many to name in no way releases the author from their duty to thank. My only hope is that the work that follows, and the ideas that it offers to the reader, might suffice as proof of my heartfelt gratitude.

VITA

Alexander Diones graduated from Amherst College in May 2014 with a B.A., with honors, in Mathematics and Political Science. In fall of 2015, He entered the doctoral program in the Department of Political Science at University of California, Los Angeles. In 2019, he received his M.A. in political science from the same institution. He has served as an Assistant Editor for the journal *Political Theory*, and his scholarship has been featured in the pages of *Theory & Event* and *Polity* (the latter forthcoming). He is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Loyola Marymount University.

Introduction

A Political Theory of Habit

"…and it is in this respect that one constitution differs from another, a good one from a base one."[1]
–Aristotle

"*Habit.*— Every habit makes our hand more witty and our wit less handy."[2]
–Friedrich Nietzsche

"Modern life is such that, confronted with the most mechanical, the most stereotypical repetitions, inside and outside ourselves, we endlessly extract from them little differences, variations, and modifications."[3]
–Gilles Deleuze

I. Framing the Problem of Collectivity

This dissertation is about habit and its importance to democratic politics. More specifically, it's about the tense relationship between behavior and political action. It has two ambitions, one rather limited and another more far-reaching. The first is to examine how the problem of habit figures into the writings of some well-known political philosophers working in the tradition of a "critical theory of society." The second is to think through the limitations of contemporary political theory's understanding of collective action and of the forms of participation that count as political.

Habit, I propose, has shaped our understanding of these categories in ways that, while often alluded to, have not been systematically examined. The erosion of solidarity, the development of y as a model for all kinds of nonmarket sociality, and the relentless emphasis on personal agency are all ways that habit has been understood to define relations of power, reinforce practices of domination, and solidify attachments to broken institutional forms. But the repetitions of habit, and their ever-

[1] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b.

[2] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 215. Translation amended.

[3] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xix.

present potential for instability, also exposes points of weakness in the logic of capitalist political economy. The overlooked potential of habit to destabilize social forms suggests a different story of mass society and democratic decline. This dissertation asserts that by giving a shared experience to otherwise-individual sentiments, habit is the basis for an account of collectivity and transformative action. It addresses not only long-standing threats to democratic politics but also offers a new direction for stagnant debates about agency, judgment, and the relation between individuality and collectivity. In a more critical vein, I argue that postwar Anglophone political theory has failed to attend to this domain of collective action, resulting in an avoidance of the problem of political agency in a world of tradition, custom, and repetition.

The following chapters engage a set of thinkers—David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, and Herbert Marcuse, along with Walter Benjamin in a minor role—who understood the contest over the meaning and significance of habit to be a contest over the terms of social transformation. What's missing in our understanding of these thinkers and their critics alike is the regard they held for habit as a resource for collective attachment and political change: they not only provide arguments for how to act morally but understand the everyday activities of habit as the central dimension of moral and political life. Their arguments seek to reckon with both the problem of abstraction in philosophy and politics and the problem of political agency in a world of tradition, of repetition, of isolation and therefore domination, the normative-imaginative horizon of which is set by the routines of commercial society. What do we do when there is no limit to or exit from the routines that constitute modern society and there is no rational expectation that the work of theorizing will motivate or facilitate meaningful collective action? Though not all of these figures are readers of Hume, more importantly, they adopt his categories of repetition and association as an experiment in the sources and limits of solidarity and transformation. In the pages that follow, I try to identify some of the main features of the concept of habit when it is viewed from within the

tradition of critical theory. By including habit as an active force in political reflection rather than a limitation on it, these figures enable us to recast routine as a material basis of democratic participation.

The "vivacity of our ideas" is Hume's impression-image of repetition and association. It appears in the conclusion to book one of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, in the course of his famous argument about skepticism and philosophical delirium, as a description of the way that habit bestows material reality.[4] In another argument about the origin of government, though, Hume tells us that the ineluctable presentness of habit is a "natural infirmity [that] I may very much regret, and I may endeavour, by all possible means, to free myself from it."[5] These two aspects of infirmity and vivacity encapsulate Hume's argument that it's the repetition of custom and manner that constitutes associations: as such, it affirms an ontology of routine utterly indifferent to the existence of political philosophy as a coherent intellectual ambition. In this spirit, the collapse of a distinction internal to habit between the "vivacity of our ideas" and their "natural infirmity" may be read less as an opportunity for political-philosophical reflection than as an index of the *distance* between philosophy and politics. In the pages that follow, I take it to be a fitting emblem of the dialectic of repetition that animates these authors' accounts of political solidarity.

The first two chapters introduce that dialectic as they appear between Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. Here, habit appears to society in terms of the distinct but deeply interrelated discourses of enthusiasm and jurisprudence. Although Kant's critical project is often understood, in part, as a refutation of Hume's empiricist philosophy, it also preserves Hume's preoccupation with habit, association, and moral heteronomy, as evinced in Kant's constant

[4] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 173.

[5] Hume, 344.

concern over the philosopher's double, the enthusiast, whose bad habits consist in an excessive obedience to a law at once overly abstract and overly embodied, formally indistinguishable from the rigorous deductions of critical philosophy. In outlining the discontinuity that both thinkers posit between enthusiasm and the transcendental (Kant), or philosophical melancholy and the common affairs of life (Hume), I first of all aim to have them mind the gap between personal and political agency, two capacities that are too often taken as commensurate if not identical (agency + solidarity = collective action). More importantly, by wedging habit into this gap, I have them speak to a mode of acting that both actuates and frustrates human sociality.

Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse are my interlocutors in the dissertation's second part. Here, I consider how they take up the midcentury problematic of behavioralism *avant la lettre* as an animating foundation for criticism amid the perpetual displacements of political modernity and mass society. Although we are a very long way from 18th century debates on comportment and civil society, the conditions of global capitalism, colonial domination, and the dreams of retrenched authoritarianism alongside the endless proliferation of knowledge and critique jointly only intensify the question of habit and its mass form, behavior, in political life. If desire and strategy could, on their own, lead us to the land of democratic politics, we would be there: after all, we already know, at the level of policy, how to solve rampant inequality, racial capitalism, and climate change. But that tells us nothing about how to organize for such an outcome, even among those of us who know what we want and how to make it happen. On this point I follow Deborah Nelson, who writes: "The problem is not that we do not know what is happening but that we cannot bear to be changed by that knowledge."[6] Whether that thing which "we cannot bear to be changed" is an attachment to the job that exploits us (Marx), or a culture industry that seem to

[6] Nelson, *Tough Enough*, 14.

synchronize our every idea (Benjamin), or our desire for a comfortable life that relies on unceasing cruelty being meted out to countless others (Marcuse), the figures in the second part all insist that, if only we let it, habit enables us to do this work of bearing the unbearable.

The way that these figures attend to habit and routine enables us to understand that a structural theory of politics is not necessarily an impersonal one. Their claims about institutional domination and the preponderance of historical inertia are also claims about the behaviors and attitudes of those people occupying positions of institutional power and historical interest. In this respect, they offer us models for what critique looks like when it centers *vivacity* as an index of social solidarity. That is, in tasking critique *not* with epistemological opposition but with the elaboration of a form of life, they make it an ethical-economic matter of fashioning associations, clarifying desires, and establishing common priorities. By placing these thinkers beside one another under the common heading of habit, I aim to highlight the fact that their insight consists not in a turning *away* from the social space of the world they criticize, but instead in a thorough suffusion of it; my Humeanizing of their philosophical problems therefore aims to effect a shift in perspective regarding the fundamentals of criticism. My basic contention in this dissertation is that these authors envision a form of criticism capable of addressing structure, not in contrast to but precisely *through* the workings of social personality.

The three epigraphs to this dissertation establish the framework for the following pages' consideration of habit. Aristotle says that moral virtues are habits, and their cultivation requires active exercise. "For the things we cannot do without learning are the very ones we learn by doing—for example, we become builders by building houses and lyre players by playing the lyre. Similarly, then, we become just people by doing just actions, temperate people by performing temperate

actions, and courageous people by doing courageous ones."[7] (This idea that a good person develops virtue through practice is why Cicero will later say that "habit is, as it were, a second nature.")[8] Hence it's not only that "legislators make citizens good by habituating them," but moreover that this constitutes the political science *tout court:* "those legislators that do not do it well *fail in their purpose*, and it is in this respect that one constitution differs from another, a good one from a base one."[9] Following Aristotle, I understand habits to matter to political agency insofar as they occupy a sort of middle realm between action and instinct: while they cannot be adopted or discarded at one's own pleasure, neither are they fixed elements of our embodied selves. Habits, in this respect, superimpose ontology upon historicity. They are essential elements of our social being, constraints upon what we can do and how we can do it, that are themselves amenable to transformation over time.

Today, habit has not received much attention within studies of political thought. Many modern authors take Nietzsche's adage that habit "makes the hand more witty and the wit less handy" as a commonsense description of habit's pathological character.[10] That is, they conceive habit as an unthinking movement of repetition that merely reflects the statistical uniformity of masses set in motion absent an organizing counter-politics.[11] Because the discipline lacks an

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[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a30.

[8] Cicero, *On Ends*, V.74.

[9] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b. Emphasis mine.

[10] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 215.

[11] Jason Frank has recently pointed out that "Kant and his followers" had to ignore "the embarrassing literalism of sovereign assemblies" proposed by Rousseau in order to "extract a coherent and universal moral theory from Rousseau's political theory of popular sovereignty." *Mutatis mutandis*, this dissertation makes a

understanding of habit as anything other than a bodily space of rote repetition, absent of critical reflection and hence antithetical to collectivity, it becomes difficult to think of this vast space of conduct as anything other than *abjection*: the failure of a thing to be seen as a subject or object.[12] Or we think of it as *akrasia*, the experience of the failure of will.[13] Even most generously conceived as the ancient practice of attaining virtuous qualities, habit has no internal dynamism and hence nothing to do with the imperative to perpetually adjust oneself to "things never before seen" and "thoughts never thought before" that describe the condition of political modernity.[14] "When the past is no longer capable of shedding light on the future, the mind can only proceed in darkness."[15] With this statement of Tocqueville's in mind, it's no surprise that we moderns often expect as a matter of course that only speculation and rational reflection, rather than customs or traditional experience, can supervene on the momentum of modern life to make people aware of their social position and their power relations, so they might adjust their behavior accordingly.[16] These modes of philosophical criticism often assume that something exists outside of behavior, and that theoretical reflection can, in fact, step back from the world of routine life. Turning habit into the unthought

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similar assertion: that political theory has had to ignore the embarrassing literalism of habit at all its various scales—reflex, routine, custom, festival, tradition—in order to construct a coherent vision of normative political thought. Frank, *The Democratic Sublime*, 47.

[12] See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1.

[13] William Clare Roberts gives the most recent, and probably best, treatment of *akrasia* as a term of modern political theory in *Marx's Inferno*.

[14] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 249.

[15] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 831.

[16] Cf. North, *The Problem of Distraction*.

enables us to explain practical problems (undemocratic norms and institutions) by referring to an epistemological problem (people act this way because they don't, or are made to not, know any better; they can't contest norms or organize themselves). Accordingly, by suspending our typical modes of comporting ourselves in the world, we find a chance to form good judgments about it and *therefore* obtain agency over it.[17] This makes political theory's task rather straightforward—to point to the shortcomings of our habits—*but also* makes it more difficult to understand how these conclusions can bear upon the pragmatic rhythms of everyday life. What happens when procedures of good judgment and critical reflection are insufficient to the task of coordination and collective action essential to the activity of politics? Can we make sense of "the hand more witty" as an image of political action *without* bemoaning the "wit less handy"?[18]

Although an immense gulf lies between the classical insistence on repetition and "the strange pathos of novelty" characteristic of the modern age, this dissertation demonstrates the existence of a lively conception of habit continues to animate modern political thought.[19] From Gilles Deleuze I take the assertion that habit enables a regime of differentiation and transformation. "Modern life is such that, confronted with the most mechanical, the most stereotypical repetitions, inside and

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[17] See variously Arendt, *The Human Condition*, chaps. 2 and 3; Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation"; Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*; Rancière, *Disagreement*. Depending on who undertakes them, acts of self-reflection can very easily ensure the continuation of the social relations they criticize. As *Promising Young Woman* (2020) vividly demonstrates, men are all too happy to let their awareness of their own failings legitimate their continued indulgence.

[18] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 215.

[19] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 248.

outside ourselves, we endlessly extract from them little differences, variations, and modifications."[20] Political theory, outside of a few forays into the region of the ordinary and the everyday, has yet to reckon with the generative capacities of repetition.[21] This dissertation cannot make (and indeed has no interest in making) any scientific claims about the biological character of habit or its specific place within a wider political psychology: here, rather than investigating what habit *is*, I'm more interested in studying what these political theorists *think it can do*. That is, I'm interested in how these authors theorize habit as a way of talking about political action under the conditions of modern mass society. For these authors, rather than mapping neatly onto either stasis or spontaneity, habit instead traffics between the two as a space of dynamic responsiveness to recurring problems. Without an attentiveness to this dialectic underpinning the political theory of habit, it becomes impossible to fully appreciate the debates central to modernity on the nature of group association, civil society, the significance of institutional design, and the role of custom and manners in forming collective capabilities vis-à-vis the state.[22] In this respect this dissertation aims to offer good reasons to adopt a healthier relationship to the world of repetition.

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[20] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, xix.

[21] For two exceptions that have been informative for my thinking, see Dumm, *A Politics of the Ordinary*; and Aslam, *Ordinary Democracy*. Although it never gained wide acceptance, a notable early argument for the importance of the ordinary to political theory can be found in Wertheimer, "Is Ordinary Language Analysis Conservative?"

[22] Think, for example, of John Stuart Mill's criticism of conformist intellectual culture, which impeded historical progress by the weight of its aversion to ideas (but which nevertheless could be overcome by habits of debate. Or Tocqueville's assertion that democratic society tends to flatten people into a bland mediocrity,

In the course of the dissertation, I contend that one major historical reason for the dismissal of habit in political theory is the discipline's emergence in response to both the behavioral revolution in political science and the exhaustion of social movements in the late 1960s.[23] This is, not coincidentally, a gendered and racialized preoccupation. It's not clear why exactly the behavioral revolution arises at the same moment that massive numbers of people other than cis white men begin to gain entry to civic institutions, but the *effect* of the coincidence is crystal-clear: as Sheldon Wolin writes, behavioralism "discovers that the philosophy of democracy places excessive demands on the 'real world' and hence it is the task of political science to suggest a more realistic version of democratic theory."[24] Naturally, then, any attempt to defend the philosophy of democracy would require both a redoubled commitment to goods like freedom and equality and a repudiation of the structure of habit that frustrates the urgent business of securing those goods. So, for example, the social maladies of the day require "the most precedent-shattering and radical measures," and in pursuit of these genuinely democratic measures, political theory needs to turn away from the preconditioned routines of democratic society.[25]

Given the material conditions of democratic politics at the time, and the state's near-total repression of left social movements, no other response may have been possible. Yet it remains a deeply compromised vision of politics, animated by an internalization of the trauma of democratic

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yet put his faith in voluntary association as a means of cultivating an attachment to egalitarian distinction. For a careful consideration of these views, see Levy, *Rationalism, Pluralism, and Freedom*, 212–32.

[23] See Gunnell, *The Descent of Political Theory*, 221–50.

[24] Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1082.

[25] Wolin, 1082.

retreat. This dissertation offers an alternative and hopefully generative vision of collectivity. *It recuperates behavior as a form of democratic political action.*

As I articulate it in the pages that follow, the political theory of habit consists in the attentiveness to the mood of retreat and normative fragility, as institutions come undone and the only sure mode of association is *conduct*. In this spirit, rather than provide a normative theory of habit, this project concerns habit's relation to normativity: that is, how habit serves as a bridge from convention to conviction, and how it provides the specific conditions under which individuals and publics find themselves inclined to form associations and make judgments. It develops a view of habit neither as animated suspension nor as raw material for critical reflection, but as a vital resource for the kind of solidarity that seeks to organize the energies of everyday life. Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, a founding document of this kind of solidarity, describes in luxuriant detail the juridical implications of the "customs and manners" of common life. Hume's image of humanity as a happy animal aside, habit does not only find expression in the institutional structure of a radically common law.

This dissertation will assert that the work of reknitting a social fabric is inseparable from the work of undoing social harm. But at this point it's worth pausing to qualify the claim that these authors can, in this respect, offer us a *politics* of habit: that is, whether their understanding of social solidarity comes at the cost of a determinate account of what it means to fight domination. Discussions of strategy and resistance are close to my subject here, but habit concerns a different political moment. Strategy seeks to mobilize organizations, whereas habit seeks to organize relations. This is why routine, custom, or tradition could never serve as a straightforward substitute for genuine political solidarity. Like Huey P. Newton says, "culture itself will not liberate us. We're going

to need some stronger stuff."[26] (Incidentally, this is not a dissertation in the politics of aesthetics.) In Hume's writing, the concept of habit belongs to a more general argument about the capacity of common life to intensify, attenuate, or misdirect the "stronger stuff" of state power. Specifically, Hume uses habit to articulate a social ontology of the common law—which dealt with the living concerns of British society—that could help it weather and ultimately appropriate the radical transformations of commercial society. And yet those writing in this genre after the age of democratic revolution, however else they may trace Hume's logic of activity, are not so sanguine about the existence of such institutions.[27] Whereas Hume and Kant could take the commonwealth for granted as an actually-existing form of government capable of realizing the diverse institutions and social agencies of its subjects, it should go without saying that Marx, Benjamin, and Marcuse's modern version of that term, communism, posits this horizon of common good only as a normative ideal.

All of the protagonists of this dissertation's story are white men. All but one spoke German, even if I anglicize their philosophical positions in order to draw out the implications of their reckoning with habit. In this respect the horizon of their thought is entirely circumscribed by a set of intellectual traditions peculiar to Western Europe and the United States. Although all suspicious of universalist claims, they wanted their thinking to have a validity as wide-reaching as the habits of commercial society with which they took issue. At stake in their theorizing of various figurations of habit was the question of what kind of practices might best preserve the "common life" in the face of capitalism's relentless engines of individuation. More prospectively, their questions also had implications for another set of concerns: about the nature of personhood and the moral sentiments,

[26] Newton, "Interview," 4.

[27] Cf. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*.

the degree to which people need institutions to organize their common affairs, and whether political culture could substantiate civic obligations. My purpose in entering the company of these authors is to revisit some of the key moments in the familiar history of a "critical theory of society" in order to demonstrate what John Guillory calls its "heterogeneous constitution," and to think about how the protocols of political criticism might constructively approach forms of life typically taken as antithetical to it.[28] I thereby aim to show that on its own terms, critical theory asks and has always asked that we treat habit, not as a prior to political solidarity, but as its only enduring location.

II. Solidarity and Spontaneity

What is it that makes habit a site of political solidarity? How can it be said to be than an expression of cultural or personal inertia? One way to read this dissertation is as a critique of Sheldon Wolin, whose incisive 1969 essay in the *American Political Science Review* on "Political Theory as Vocation" incited a vast literature in political theory. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that political theory owes its very position in the organization of the modern US political science department to the rejection of habit as a basic principle of democratic society. Wolin's essay makes the case in startlingly simple terms: because the new political science has become enthralled with the notion that "political behavior" consists in "discoverable uniformities" capable of being "expressed

[28] Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 47. Guillory's claim about "heterogeneous constitution" is part of a larger argument regarding the limits of representation in expanding the canon. Guillory's arguments did little to change discourse around these subjects, although his arguments are resurfacing in interesting ways today in terms of a debate between deference and solidarity. As Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò writes: "A constructive approach would focus on the pursuit of specific goals or end results rather than avoiding 'complicity' in injustice or adhering to moral principles." Táíwò, "Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference."

in generalizations of theories with explanatory or predictive value…there are inherent limits to the kinds of questions which the methodist deems appropriate. The kind of world hospitable to method invites a search for those regularities that reflect the main patterns of behavior which society is seeking to promote and maintain."[29] (Arendt makes precisely the same point in *The Human Condition* when she asserts that "society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to 'normalize' its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement." But it's Wolin who develops the critique into a research agenda.)[30] Both Arendt and Wolin present behavior as a law-bound object, capable of study, prediction, and management by state agency according to the requirements of managing a mass society. That is, their interest in behavior is an interest in repetition and regularity and therefore, for them, the status quo. Although these conclusions certainly aren't wrong *per se*, particularly given the repression of anti-capitalist and anti-racist political movements in the postwar United States, this dissertation argues that their displacement of behavior onto domination doesn't accurately describe the stakes for a democratic politics.[31]

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[29] Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1064.

[30] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 40.

[31] Even on its own terms, we have good reason to pause at the claim that behavior forecloses on the performance of action. Arendt is careful to note that the laws in question are the "laws of statistics," which are "valid only where large numbers are involved" i.e. under conditions of mass society, because they involve probabilities over large sets of data. These sets include every relevant activity whether it turns out to conform to the pattern or not. If that's true, then it's not that behavior *excludes* action, as if "the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave and the less likely to tolerate non-behavior"; it's that action itself becomes a species of behavior. This is a very different state of affairs. If the laws in question are probabilistic rather than

Many studies of political thought tend to emphasize habit's structural conservatism. But the reduction of routine to status quo is very different than the instabilities and discontinuities I track in the pages that follow. I take the ascription of conservatism to be related to a major animating disagreement among political philosophers in dealing with non- or anti-liberal ideas among nonexperts and nonelites, people for whom custom and tradition ostensibly matter more than rational reflection. It's my position here that these ideas don't constitute a fixed position: that under the right conditions, people are capable of changing their minds. This is admittedly a basic point, but it often goes underappreciated and for that reason deserves explicit emphasis. People's habits have a politics, even though it often goes ignored or misconstrued. When C.L.R. James says that every cook can govern, he means that despite our desire for qualification, every cook is capable of measuring up to circumstance.[32] Similarly, when Hume describes "education" as built on a "foundation of *custom and repetition*," he means to describe both the reflective and progressive—and therefore eminently democratic—capabilities of habit.[33] Routine is neither necessarily thoughtless nor necessarily rote self-similarity. Even though Hume thinks that, depending on material conditions, habit may still end up stuck in a rut, the consequent sense of disorientation and dissatisfaction can give rise to the most singular energies of political transformation. The problem with habit is not its excessive predictability but rather its *spontaneity*. (In chapter one, for example, the whole question is why Kant's first *Critique* finds it necessary to diagnose fanaticism as a problem of habits.) Although Arendt's and

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deterministic, then the precise opposite of Arendt's so-called "unfortunate truth" follows! Either behavior is bound by statistical laws, and action appears in its data, *or* behavior is not a law-bound activity: in both cases, it follows that behavior maintains a relationship with the radical and the unpredictable. Arendt, 42, 43.

[32] Cf. James, "Every Cook Can Govern."

[33] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 81.

Wolin's concept of behavior isn't *quite* what Hume means by habit, the road through this dissertation from 18th century sentimentalism to the administrative rationalities of the mid-20th century cuts a clean line through the landscape of political thought. From this perspective, it should come as little surprise that when contemporary political theory gets caught up in partitioning procedures of political reflection from the world of political practice, it ends up reproducing a dynamic of perpetual self-frustration that Marcuse calls "the paralysis of criticism."[34]

New materialism, an admittedly ecumenical designation, tends to associate habit with affirmative practices of political association that the critical position finds hard to underwrite. Indeed, when Bruno Latour suggests that critique has "run out of steam," he quickly follows with a request "to associate the word *criticism* with a whole new set of positive metaphors, gestures, attitudes, knee-jerk reactions, habits of thoughts."[35] It's as though negativity itself were the obstacle to solidarity: rather than analytically breaking relations down, we should try a compositional approach instead. Brian Massumi puts the project in simple physiological terms: "Politics, approached affectively, is an art of emitting the interruptive signs, triggering the cues that attune bodies while activating their capacities differentially."[36] William E. Connolly takes the logic to the strategy of mass movements: the "entangled humanism" that results from this kind of thinking enables a "multidimensional pluralism" that could serve as a basis for "multiply anchored, swarming movements" capable of "mobiliz[ing] a cross-country, nonviolent general strike mobilized by the issues posed by the anthropocene."[37] The problem is that while habit clings to material and historical

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[34] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xxxix.

[35] Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?," 247.

[36] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 56.

[37] Connolly, *Facing the Planetary*, 187–88.

conditions, these are attempts to sidestep the central conceptual lacuna of solidarity in the present: if everything has agency, why is it so hard for things to act together? Although these studies have captured a real problem for thought in the present, they remain attached to a partition between critical negation and the affirmation of material capabilities. Is there really no room for reckoning with their conjunction as a productive political possibility?

This question could be put to all the theories of political action that we admire today: it's stunning how much they ignore the everyday actions that constitute the work of politics. Even the literature on radical democracy teaches us to look towards one-off moments of heroism as the primarily locus of the properly agentic form of political action. That is, even if we identify "constituent moments, when the underauthorized—imposters, radical, self-created entities—seize the mantle of authorization, changing the inherited rules of authorization in the process," we still invoke the exemplary and the exceptional as instances of the nature of action.[38] The idea is a persuasive one, especially insofar as formulations like "people out of doors" capture something essential in the ongoing circumstances of democratic rebellion.[39] The problem, though, is that this vision of democracy requires a continuous practice of discontinuity that suggests the moments of democratic heroism cannot possibly bear all the of the weight required of them. If action is only found in the moments, then a commitment to a democratic politics implies an exhausting injunction to endless disruption and constant exceptionalism. "Politics," as Jacques Rancière puts it, "is specifically opposed to the police," and if one wishes to avoid the police then one needs to engage in

[38] Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 8.

[39] Frank, 18, 25, and passim. A particularly perspicacious document of democratic rebellion and constituent power today is Haslett, "Magic Actions."

radical democracy, in all places and at all times.[40] Conversely, valorizing the moment risks displacing our responsibility to concern ourself with duration and disposition as coordinate spaces of political contest and of democratic value. After all, "democracy is predicated on a belief in a non-static conception of human character"—a conception that gives weight to the democratic intuition that no political decision is settled once and for all.[41] Given the centrality of repetition to the renewal of democratic authority, I wonder if the desire to rescue democracy from the abjection of routine by ascribing to it a revolutionary agency ultimately ends up reproducing the very powerlessness that democratic theory tends to lament.

Above all, this dissertation aims to recenter routine—whether material, sentimental, or psychological—as a central problem in the formation of a "critical theory of society," which "has for its object men as producers of their own historical way of life."[42] In situating the object of its attention between repetition and production, or more superficially, between stasis and historical progress, this dissertation resists the view of critique that situates it at a distance from the routines of everyday life or within the transcendent unresponsiveness of the event. It insists upon locating criticism in a *way of life*. I mean that in the most literal sense. If this dissertation refuses Wolin's dismissal of behavior as a mode of life especially available to rational domination, it's not because it is more sanguine about the realities of the exercise of state power. Rather, in the absence of any thorough reckoning with criticality as a habit in its own right, political theory tends to be a self-defeating enterprise. Nothing of the sort can be said of the thinkers this dissertation surveys. Each us helps to reckon with habit as a medium agency and social solidarity by formulating habit not as a

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[40] Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics," thesis 7.

[41] Cohen, *The Political Value of Time*, 160.

[42] Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, 244.

repetition of the same but as the recurrence of *discontinuity* basic to the life of a democratic society. This sentiment can also be found among scholarly examinations of political conduct that trace a more affirmative relationship between habit, progress, and public reason. One such forerunner is the "systematic statement of the role the passions might properly play in moral judgment and public deliberation" in Sharon Krause's *Civil Passions.*[43] Although I am uninterested in pursuing the *properly* that registers Krause's commitment to liberal individualism, this dissertation is deeply indebted to her consideration of that which circulates between persons and things outside of the bounds of linguistic representation. As I argue at length in chapter two, Hume basically refutes the idea that there are any civil ideas that are not already civil *passions:* normative commitments, legal concepts, and even our deepest beliefs about ourselves have no other foundation than the regularity of our perceptions. From this perspective, Krause's anxiousness to confine passion to the sphere of "affectively engaged but impartial judgment" sits strangely askew from its capacity to "dispose us to decision and action."[44] Although the emotional habits she invokes here are not exactly linguistic, neither are they therefore unthinking and inactive, especially if we take habit to involve the solidaristic capacities of sympathy and sentimentality.[45]

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[43] Krause, *Civil Passions*, 2.

[44] Krause, 18, 8.

[45] The relationship between reflective knowledge and sentimentality is a common theme of enlightenment literature. My (somewhat oblique) point of reference here is Sarah Tindal Kareem's argument that in response to the rise of the scientific worldview, 18th century fiction refigures the old philosophical wonder at limit experiences into "the wonder to be found within the everyday." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction and the Reinvention of Wonder*, 2. Indeed, as Jessica Riskin shows, the vitality of repetition in the natural world "transformed the meaning of scientific empiricism, for if knowledge arose from physical sensation, it must now originate

III. A Resource for Democratic Politics

The research I undertake in this dissertation is deeply indebted to the various attempts in contemporary political theory to rethink negative affects as resources for a democratic politics are particularly instructive for this excavation of habit's organizing capacities. Often, these negative affects don't straightforwardly offer "agency" or "resistance" or any other terms of antiestablishment art so much they indicate various strategies of eking out a common life in a present which perpetually disorganizes these ambitions. One such model is Robyn Marasco's scholarship on despair as a dialectical passion that registers both the longing and the inability to come to terms with endless catastrophe. Her account of "that dynamic and restless passion that keeps things moving as earthly projects and purposes fall into disrepair" models a mode of reckoning with its object that finds potentiality precisely in its attentiveness to the question of collectivity: that is, the sociohistorical difference between severally despairing people and a shared social despair.[46] This dissertation remains attached to a vision of redemption that, in exemplary affective fashion, tries to find agency and equality wherever it can. I take this to be the methodological expression of a commitment to democratic politics. As we will see, though, habit often figures the *dissolution* of political commitments insofar as one's profession of a political commitment often has very little to do with their social position and material relations. As the

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equally in emotion." That is to say that "knowledge grew not from sensory experience alone," as Hobbes, Locke, and a whole tradition of political philosophy supposed, "but from a combination of sensation and sentiment." Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility*, 2, 4. Framing the workings of sentiment in terms of science and institutional knowledge has been especially helpful in this dissertation's formulation of the problem of habit.

[46] Marasco, *The Highway of Despair*, 13–14.

following pages repeatedly indicate, commitment as overrated as a category of political theory, if only because what people *profess* to do is far less analytically interesting than what people *actually* do in their daily lives.

Bonnie Honig's vindication of care and complaint offers another, particularly materialist model for reckoning with social conduct. For Honig, the imperative to theorize collective action has very little to do with people's lived relationship to common goods. By considering their relationship to public infrastructure as an example of what D.H. Winnicott calls a *holding environment*, in which "we are cared for and develop capacities for individuation, experimentation, adaptation, concern, and collaboration," she captures the poignant affects of democratic solidarity today.[47] In complaining about our aging subways, streets, and public agencies, there's no shared experience of belonging, only people's own ordinary desires and indignations: these moments are representative of what her subtitle calls *democracy in disrepair*. Is democracy itself ruined? Or does it continue as an activity amidst ruins? The incisiveness of her account lies not in the diagnosis of a problem but a description of the capacity with which people manage to diagnose *themselves*. This dissertation resists Honig's odd concluding cathexis towards "concerted action," which serves as a passable account of collectivity that nevertheless fails to specify the mode of solidarity, the arena of struggle, and what material gains might matter most.[48] Nevertheless, I recognize in that reticence an understanding that the details of political action have little to do with the theorist's task of conceptual clarification. Honig's choice not to overelaborate is in the service of a democratic ethos.

This dissertation similarly turns to habit not to sidestep concerted action or to formulate an alternative to it but rather to provide it a firmer material footing. Although this dissertation's

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[47] Honig, *Public Things*, 40.

[48] Honig, 97.

attention to materiality of routine tracks a specific type of disjuncture in the relationship between political program and the social base to which it refers (that is, between a theory and the people it purports to be about), this analysis should not be read as a rejection of normative prescription as such. Neither do I mean to suggest that a political theory of habit can otherwise settle the questions answered by existing modes of normative or critical inquiry. While "the political theory of habit," as I sketch it in the pages that follow, necessarily faces a tension between the dimensions of spontaneity and routine, particular theorists of habit do not necessarily sit balanced between them. Take, for instance, Hume and Marx: though both theorize habit as a philosophically radical concept, the two could not be more different with respect to their understanding of its political radicality. If habit is as chancy and underdetermining as I take it to be, I don't think it can offer assurances at all.[49] This invites some serious objections. How can an attentiveness to habit in the present sustain a commitment to problem-based inquiry? Can it detach itself from an anodyne orientation towards presentism? I ask the reader to press these questions to the following chapters. After all, they are my questions too.

An even more problematic element of this dissertation might be its straightforward assertion that habit has anything to do with contemporary struggles for the expansion of democracy. I return to this question repeatedly in the pages the follow. I don't dispute that there are numerous ways in which habit may pose an obstacle to democratic government, the thinkers featured in this dissertation are totally unconvinced by the conventional wisdom that says that habit is sluggish or

[49] As Banu Bargu puts it, what's at stake in the reconstruction of "aleatory materialism" is the "possibility of thinking the event and theorizing a radical politics." I think a similar relation between chanciness and radicality is going on here: after all, habit marks a stubborn material limit to instrumental ambitions of radical thought. Bargu, "In the Theater of Politics," 88.

inertial and that only the prod of critical inquiry can goad the common person into action. Though I doubt these considerations will fully satisfy the skeptical reader, I hope to do justice to these thinkers' convictions that habit is not just a political category among others but the singular mode of existence whereby subjectivity meets the common material demands of living in the present. This is probably related to my rejection of the melancholia by which democratic struggles explain their own political failures by asserting the basic backwardness of large swaths of the *demos*. Although it's self-evident that people's habits together constitute the *status quo*, I think they nevertheless need not persist in it. Hume explains: "Any degree of regularity in our perceptions, can never be a foundation for us to infer a greater degree of regularity in some objects, which are not perceiv'd; since this supposes a contradiction, viz., a habit acquir'd by what was never present to mind."[50] As this dissertation will argue, its radical instability suggests that habit bears no default political position at all. To posit routine as a basic element of democratic solidarity is to suppose unsettledness as the basic condition of being together in the world: not only because democracy involves perpetual instability in the relationship of rule, but also because habit involves the perpetual production of difference. "To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something which has no equal or equivalent."[51]

A final note before discussing the chapter structure: although this is primarily a study of political theory, it is not restricted to that subdiscipline. The problem of habit and its affirmative energies encodes a problem all political scientists face: the relationship between realism and critical reckoning, or as Wolin puts it, between *method* and *vision*. How can I study a circumstance in a way that remains true both to its internal complexity and its external validity? This dissertation depicts

[50] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.2.21.

[51] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1.

the history of the problem of habit as entangled with transformations in how people build collective power. It shows how disagreements about habit are disagreements about social milieus, the kinds of political organization they afford, and the practical effects that political criticism may have. Seen this way, this dissertation narrates a history of attempts to formulate a critical social science. For this reason, although it is written as a contribution to political theory, I hope that it is accessible to social scientists interested in behavior, agency, and collective power.

IV. Chapter Outline

The first part of this dissertation reconstructs the concept of habit in terms of an 18th-century dialectic between enthusiasm and jurisprudence. Chapter one begins *in medias res* with Kant's refutation of Hume as part of his wider polemic against the bad habit of political enthusiasm. This chapter traces his thinking on habit within the problem-space of political solidarity. It's not that habit lacks social vitality; more often than not, it risks being *overly social*—particularly when people are habituated to revolutionary sentiments, and risk mistaking the excesses of imagination for critical philosophy. Although I find this question within his political writings, this first chapter spends most of its time turning the *Critique of Pure Reason* inside out in order to demonstrate that the problem of habit is internal to the critical philosophy, too. Readers who are already sympathetic to this view of critique may want to begin with the second chapter, which describes Hume's radicalization of common law as a way of turning to the same problem-space that instead sees the repetitions of habit as a primordial condition for social solidarity. In these two chapters on habit in the enlightenment, I stick to Hume's idea that law is nothing other than the codification of habit, and I insist that Kant, in refuting the claim, doesn't so much discard habit as rework it for the psychology of the critical subject. Kant's constant turning towards and away from the coordinates of habit gives his text a particularly repressed quality, and in the absence of a sustained treatment allows us to go only so far

in theorizing habit. Hume, by contrast, discusses habit in detail as a philosophical problem. What emerges from these two chapters is an account of habit as an experience of freedom beyond the boundaries of, even if ultimately identical to, sober and reasonable legislation. By the end of chapter two, I hope that the reader is left with a comprehensive account of habit and an equally comprehensive sense of aporia: in what sense could this concept habit respond to the forms of domination endemic to political modernity?

The second part of this dissertation contains chapters on Marx and Marcuse, connected by an *intermezzo* on Walter Benjamin, technological reproducibility, and the rise of behavioral technologies. These are chapters on political organization: they talk about habit in terms of the work that goes into solidarity and political transformation. By taking up routine, reaction, labor, and play as elements of political agency in modernity, these chapters study what political theory looks like when it is freed from the demand that it reprograms the customs and manners of ordinary people in pursuit of a radical politics. For Marx, that means thinking about the specific structural conditions that make proletarian solidarity possible. For Benjamin, the work of theory is the work of understanding how new media make possible not only new ways of seeing, but more importantly, new ways of for people to regulate their reactions. Marcuse, finally, understands the habit of desiring, "play," to be a social potentiality foreclosed upon by late-industrial society that needs to be recovered as a condition for any collective political project. Unlike those figures who took play to be the end of a radical politics, Marcuse tries to think of play as its *means* and *medium*, less a specific practice tied to a specific political form than a latent potential for common wants and needs.

The problem of repetition means that each of these figures takes up the question of how to think solidarity in a world where progress is by no means guaranteed and any movement bears the risk of returning right back to where it started. "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly," indeed: frustration may be the central affect of repetition, but *pace* Adorno, it testifies to the persistent desire

to find a way out of routine. The ambition of this dissertation is to consider the role of this frustration in organizing political life. It's not that "wrong life" ends up being right, or that it does away with the need for critical regard, but that the struggle simply to stay alive is an achievement that fractures life's singularity. Life, under habit, no matter how deeply its wrongness remains ingrained, comes to be spoken of a collective subject. This is the promise of an activity whose negativity consists neither in the retreat into introspection nor in the activism of the concept, but in the struggle to make a "second nature."[52]

[52] Cicero, *On Ends*, V.74.

Chapter One

Enthusiasm: Or, the Persistence of Habit in Kant's First Critique

The formal indistinguishability of imagination and inclination is a central problem of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy. Consider the categorical imperative, his central principle of self-legislation which requires that one act "*as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature*."[53] Although it is a purely intellectual rule for the determination of duty, any attempt to put the categorical imperative into practice brings other faculties than reason into play. It anticipates universal agreement even as it must be diffracted through an individual's judgment: an act may be judged permissible only if, in accordance with the dictate of the "as if", one can *imagine* a world in which its maxim could be made a universal law.[54] While Kant guarantees the universality of the categorical imperative by binding it to a regular and consistent conceptual edifice, he can never divorce it from its essential dependence on an act of imagination. It is an imperative which relies on the very faculty that it attempts to constrain, and the invitation to imagine other worlds constantly risks also encouraging the enthusiast's tendency "to take leave of the earth."[55]

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[53] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 89.

[54] Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, sec. 85. "A rule stands there like a sign-post.—Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I am to go?" Wittgenstein, though, is considerably more optimistic about such an experience of ambiguity. What for Kant is a dangerous experience is for him an everyday one. Contrast with Jacques Lacan's claim that Marquis de Sade "yields the truth" of Kant's, which intends to demonstrate how one might distort the intent of the imperative while remaining rigorously faithful to the logic: the perversion of the law might well be its perfection. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 646.

[55] Fenves, "The Scale of Enthusiasm," 120.

This chapter documents a rather counterintuitive employment of habit. Through a reading of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, it takes the occasion of Kant's encounter with enthusiasm as imagination's bad habit as an occasion to situate the latter in relation to matters of spontaneity and solidarity. In this chapter I read the first *Critique* not as offering a theory of knowledge, but *rather* as offering a theory of *habit* that Kant works very hard to suppress. At issue is the editorial history of a set of passages in the *Critique* on subjectivation and worldbuilding in which Kant explicitly draws the link between the excessive associativity of imagination and the moral excess of enthusiasm. In the first edition of the passages in question, imagination is the double activity of perceiving-understanding that imbibes and organizes sensation of its own accord, giving shape to the sense of reality. Except that in the *Critique's* second edition it doesn't; the imagination merely arranges sensation into a world under the strict supervision of the understanding. Unsupervised, Kant tells us in the second edition, little prevents this engine of relation between self and world from engendering the bad habits of fanaticism. The problem is that automaticity comes first and guarantees autonomy: the conceptual associations formed by our habits of imagination are the architectural foundation of our reflective rational autonomy. On such a picture, it becomes difficult to imagine how the upper stories might modify the lower levels: or put another way, it becomes hard to imagine how to distinguish, at a formal level, between the fanatic and the sober and reasonable person. But making sense of the latter as a stable category is the entire task of Kant's critical project! What, in other words, prevents our critical subject from adopting orientations towards republican politics or religious freedom or economic equality that would render them unfit for the moral life of civil society?

In locating habit in the anatomy of political enthusiasm, this chapter attempts to make the case for a significant mediating factor between moral ideas and political action in Kant's philosophy. It tries to establish the following claims: (1) the passages in question are Kant's account of what it

means to move from intuition to conceptual understanding in a manner that affords reasonable social intercourse. (2) Kant's revisions to these passages are not refinements of argument but rather a thoroughgoing reversal of direction. (3) he offers no reason to suppose that the claims of the second edition were philosophically superior. (4) the reasons that he offers for preferring the second edition have are couched in directly political terms. That is, Kant explicitly states that the soundness of the second edition lies in its careful avoidance of enthusiasm. The following chapter offers an interpretation of this predicament that gives primacy to the political considerations of (4) while remaining generous about the ostensible failing of (3). Although there is no concrete evidence, I suspect that Kant's basic sympathies were such that these revisions, while politically prudent given the low murmur of discontent that would explode into the age of democratic revolution, didn't really reflect his own innermost philosophical convictions.

Scholarship on enthusiasm in Kant's philosophy tends to take the relationship between affect, motivation, and political action to be a relatively linear affair. Yes, enthusiasm is generally understood to refer to something spontaneously felt, as an effect of divine inspiration. But Kant frames it as a disposition, too, and it's in terms of this contradiction—between the internal structure of moral sensation and the spontaneous feeling of moral clarity—that Kant presents the imagination's dispositional power in relation to critical subjectivity. In this chapter's readings of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I want to emphasize that my goal is not to evaluate Kant's philosophical argumentation—to ask, for example, whether the A Edition or the B Edition's account of imagination is the more plausible one. Rather, my purpose is to document the way in which Kant first puts habit to work, and then puts it down, in pursuit of a stable account of civic participation. I want to draw out the particular character of his *use* of habit: as a way for the individual to understand and sustain an affective attachment to something that's not always transparent to rational argument.

On one reading, the problem with enthusiasm is that it links moral ideas to political action in a way that bypasses the practical reasoning of the critical subject. In this chapter I show that the problem may be somewhat more severe: enthusiasm doesn't just bypass but tends to *reprogram* the critical subject. When Kant talks about enthusiasm, he's just talking about habits of association that, by dint of their excessive lawfulness, condition the understanding. *Like the critical subject*, the fanatic is morally autonomous, and has a relationship to convention indistinguishable from that of the self-legislating philosopher-citizen. Autonomy is "the property which will has of being a law to itself," or put politically, "our ability to make and live by the moral law."[56] The capacity to make and to obey the law, to rule and to be ruled, requires a political subject with enough maturity to arrive at their own understanding the law, without the intervention of an outside power. But the problem with autonomy is that it opens the possibility for a procedurally-valid political subjectivity that's totally alienated from the norms of civil society. Kant's anxieties over imagination are anxieties over the fuzzy boundary between these two figures, over what Alberto Toscano calls the "pathology of transcendence."[57] To have it both ways, to secure both moral autonomy and political order, the second edition of the *Critique* has to posit an inner freedom to the imagination, even as he has to tell it exactly how to behave.

The first section introduces the problem posed by the fanatic to 18th century political thought. The subsequent sections deal with the ambiguity as a way to make sense of Kant's two-

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[56] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 114; Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, 513. For a concurring view that locates Kant's politics squarely in the critical philosophy, see Saner, *Kant's Political Thought*. See also Ian Hunter's account of Kant's reduction of politics to the ethics of the transcendental subject; see his *Rival Enlightenments*, esp. chap. 5.

[57] Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 120.

sided attraction to and disgust with habit. The second edition's elevation of rational moral autonomy—"what else then can freedom of the will be?"— requires that freedom be eliminated for the very faculty, the imagination, that secured autonomy's own.[58] The first edition of the *Critique*, by contrast, rather unproblematically locates the automatism of imagination at the origin of rational autonomy. The second edition, by contrast, makes sure to explicitly deny the relationship. Either way, the troubling truth of the maxim that "custom is a second nature" is for Kant the idea that the conventions of imagination might radically shape our sense of world. The fanatic's dreams—like the critical subject's—become the stuff of daily life. The final section turns to Kant's newspaper writings, concerns the consequences of the indistinctness for public political life. It turns out that habit, rather than rational autonomy, makes enlightenment a political possibility.

I. Bad Habits and Civil Tumult

The fanatic, *die Schwärmer*, stands outside of civil society. For Kant, this disqualifies them as a properly political agent. "Such figures are excluded in order to draw the borders of intelligible political agency," Sina Kramer writes, in a description of what she calls *constitutive exclusion*; despite having banished the fanatic to the margins of political society, Enlightenment authors (including Kant) constantly enlist the fanatic's qualities when approaching the heart of what it means to participate in deliberative activity.[59] In the 1787 edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, he warns us that the philosophies of John Locke and David Hume risk exposing us to dangerous forces of cognition. "The first…to *enthusiasm* [*Schwärmerei*], since reason, once it has authority on its side, will not be kept within limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation"; for his own part, Hume "gave way entirely to *skepticism*, since he believed himself to have discovered in what is generally held to be

[58] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, 114.

[59] See Kramer, *Excluded Within*.

reason a deception of our faculty of cognition."[60] On the one hand, we have the appearance of excessive authority. On the other, we have a reason that betrays its own trust. What the two errors share in common is a pathology internal to reason itself, an excessive autonomy of reason that seems to invert into unreason. When reason is entirely master of itself, it ceases to listen to the recommendations of its advisors and even begins to deceive itself. The pathological nature of this autonomy begins to look more like automaticity—a self-moving reason that, far from expressing human dignity, in fact precludes it. While these two names serve as important referents for the intervention made by Kant's own philosophy, the worry isn't over philosophical doctrine. The worry is over the well-ordering of thoughts necessary for good political order. But the critique of order cuts both ways: when it comes to radical restructuring of common sense, critics may seem just as doubtful as the object of their criticism. In Kant's Germany, this problem was embodied in the fanatic as a religious and civil type.

Precisely *how* the exclusion of the fanatic could constitute an ideal of moral autonomy might best be clarified through the mediate experience of enthusiasm that its exclusion makes legible. German distinguishes between two forms of what in English translation are routinely collapsed into the single category of fanaticism: *Schwärmerei* and *Enthusiasmus*.[61] In the discourse of Enlightenment Germany, the former is unanimously considered dangerous to the sober body politic, while the latter

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[60] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B127-129. Emphasis in original. Further citations to this work will appear parenthetically in the body.

[61] For an indispensable collection on the uses of fanaticism and enthusiasm in Enlightenment discourse, see Klein and La Vopa. See also Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable*. I am heavily indebted to Andrew Poe's study of enthusiasm's role as an emotional resource for democratic politics. "The Sources and Limits of Political Enthusiasm" (PhD Dissertation).

is much more ambiguous.[62] *Enthusiasmus* is an antisocial experience of genius which creates something ultimately beneficial to society. It is sometimes pathological but always carries an element of virtue. *Schwärmerei* is nothing of the sort. The swarm, *Schwarm*, from which it traces its origin, could refer both to the buzzing of bees in a hive as well as the buzzing of thoughts in the hive of one's mind. It suggests an undifferentiated mass of animality: an effacement of human individuality in an attempt to leave the bounds of this earthly life. *Schwärmerei* is contagious, and one *Schwärmer* implies many swarmers, all participating in a mass delusion. At the same time, *Schwärmerei* is an extreme form of individuality: a disease of the soul that could infect isolated individuals with self-delusions that substituted fictions for real knowledge of the world. Thus skepticism, too, would be considered a species of *Schwärmerei*.[63] The *Schwärmer*'s combination of individual delusion and collective madness constitutes, or to borrow a phrase from Kristin Ross, a "curious dialectic of solitude and the swarm."[64]

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[62] The distinction between *Schwärmerei* and *Enthusiasmus* speaks to a specific set of concerns regarding the acceptability of various emotional practices. These concerns might be more or less salient according to national differences in the experience of religious strife. Even in English writings on the subject we find the two experiences routinely collapsed, even where two terms are available. David Hume, for instance, declines to distinguish the enthusiast and the fanatic, instead preferring to identify them as one side in what he considers the much more civilly salient distinction between enthusiasm and *superstition*. The reason "that superstition is an enemy to civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it." Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," 78. Suffice it to say that this is not the expression of a secular political problem, however much Hume might relegate enthusiasm to what he calls the "species of false religion." Hume, 73. See further Pocock, "Enthusiasm."

[63] La Vopa, "The Philosopher and the 'Schwärmer,'" 85–87.

[64] Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, 118.

But even if the normative differences were largely agreed upon, it was a much more difficult task to determine whether a given case should be considered *Enthusiasmus* or *Schwärmerei*. It's for this reason that claims of *schwärmisch* thinking, like contemporary accusations of fanaticism or terrorism, came to function not as a description but as a discursive weapon.[65] Kant himself was accused of being a *Schwärmer,* of committing himself to an arcane system of knowledge that encouraged this form of boundless, solipsistic thinking. Hence Heinrich Heine, the Romantic poet, could entitle "Immanuel Kant, the great destroyer in the realm of thought," and assert, admittedly somewhat hyperbolically, that he "far surpassed Maximilian Robespierre in terrorism."[66]

But more than just a Romantic jab at an earlier generation of cultural products, these sorts of worries were internal to the project of speculative philosophy itself. J. G. A. Pocock writes that "the Enlightenments from their outset recognized the possibility of an intellectual fanaticism arising within as well as without the enterprises in which they were engaged."[67] Moreover, as Anthony J. La Vopa explains, "the self-definition of the *Aufklärung* depends on the definition of a particularly unclear word—*Schwärmerei*".[68] The *Schwärmer* was the foil against which idealist philosophy endeavor to "establish itself as the public voice of reason. And yet, before the 1790s, philosophical thought had become vulnerable to the charge that it too was dangerously *schwärmisch*."[69] If the goal of the Enlightenment was the public dissemination of a difficult style of thinking, was it too not open to charges of obscurantism and mysticism even as it attempted to dispel the hold of obscure, mystical

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[65] La Vopa, "The Philosopher and the 'Schwärmer.'"

[66] Heine, *Heine*, 79.

[67] Pocock, "Enthusiasm," 7.

[68] Fenves, "The Scale of Enthusiasm," 122.

[69] La Vopa, "The Philosopher and the 'Schwärmer,'" 86.

ideas on public life? "Abstractions posed their own bind. They promised to remove the blinders imposed by context, and hence to make criticism possible. But they also erased individuality; the reader effaced himself before a relentless cognitive regime."[70] Cold rationality and emotional excess alike were markers of *schwärmisch* thinking. This is why Kant's contemporary, the Anglophile George Christoph Lichtenberg, "does not differentiate between *Schwärmerei* and the analogous threat posed by 'legitimate' science and reason. Rather than distinguishing between the two, he tends to draw parallels."[71] If the diagnosticians were themselves open to the disease, then there seemed to be no easy way to distinguish between enthusiasm and enlightenment. It could apply both to everyone and to no one.

For these reasons, *Schwärmerei* was considered a very different beast from that other form of madness, *Enthusiasmus*. From the Greek *entheos*, possession by a god, it named inspiration in the full sense of the word, the creative madness of the poet that one finds with a departure from both finite reason and human sociability. Whereas enthusiasm "refers without ambiguity, though not without irony, to something more than humankind, *Schwärmerei* points towards something more and less than humankind—less than human because animals, not human beings, aggregate into swarms; and more than human because the only animals whose multitudes turn into swarms are those that, like the gods, are able to take leave of the earth."[72] The uncertainty between *Schwärmerei* and *Enthusiasmus*

[70] La Vopa, 114.

[71] Wetters, *The Opinion System*, 217.

[72] Fenves, "The Scale of Enthusiasm," 120.

marked the ambivalence between a chaotic, inhuman sociability and a solitary, superhuman madness.[73]

This uncertain difference was more than simply a question of poetic license. If *Enthusiasmus* named a necessary element of genius, *Schwärmerei* named a dangerously political mode of unreason. The intense debates surrounding the *Schwärmer* reflected an anxiety common across Enlightenment-era Europe. It implies a certain mode of sociality entirely counter to the burgeoning realm of civil society. The invective designates not only a swarming multitude but also a swarming in the mind. The *Schwärmer* tips into inhumanity not only because their individuality gets lost in the multitude but also because they no longer properly participate in the rational autonomy proper to humankind. The *Schwärmer* develops an overactive imagination that undermines the obeisance demanded by civil society and its model of public reason. But if they fail to properly reason and properly associate, these failings nonetheless manifest themselves as the uncanny doubles of right reason and modern civil society. "By dissociating themselves from civil society, swarmers collect into non-civil (if not un-civil), non-social (if not un-social), non-natural (if not un-natural), and always temporary, multiplicities."[74] La Vopa argues that the critique of *Schwärmerei* descends from Protestant polemics against mass frenzy and individual religious inspiration, the very forces that Luther unwittingly unleashed with his critical assault on the Church's authority.[75] The figure of the *Schwärmer* recalls

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[73] Here it is important to acknowledge that *Enthusiasmus* by no means had an unambiguously positive valence. Examining the term's uses in France, Jan Goldstein argues that enthusiasm "functioned in the eighteenth century as a powerful term of opprobrium. It conjured up everything antithetical to, and rejected by, Enlightenment rationality." Goldstein, "Enthusiasm or Imagination?," 29.

[74] Fenves, "The Scale of Enthusiasm," 121.

[75] La Vopa, "The Philosopher and the 'Schwärmer,'" 88.

Thomas Müntzer's peasant rebellion (to say nothing of other millennialist movements of the Middle Ages), the radical egalitarianism of the English Diggers and Levelers, and common sectarians of all stripes.[76] Each and every time, the fanatic is the subject of a political movement that travels orthogonally to the currents of current civil society. The *Schwärmer* raised the specter of a subjectivity that would sustain a politics completely foreign to the order that right reason is capable of imposing on the chaos of human existence.[77] Most worrisome of all was the *schwärmerisch* tendency to refuse to the governance of other cognitive faculties: rather than accede to the authority of the learned, the *schwärmer* submitted fully to the delusions of their own imagination. Make no mistake of the seriousness of charging one with being *schwärmisch*: as the French Revolution was to confirm a few years later, these excessively-enthusiastic individuals were taken to pose a real threat to civil society.

Many of those denounced as *Schwärmers* claimed to be *more* faithful to the teachings of Christianity (in the case of the revolutions from below) or to the precepts of Enlightenment rationality (in the case of the philosophers wringing their hands over its meaning even as they liberally applied it to others). An accusation of *Schwärmerei* could apply to nearly anyone precisely because it could not be reliably distinguished from the affective conditions of possibility for right reason and proper sociability. The *Schwärmer* is not quite *non*-human, because their bestiality also

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[76] See respectively Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*; Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*. For more on enthusiasm in the English context, see Klein, "Sociability, Solitude, and Enthusiasm"; Mee, "Anxieties of Enthusiasm."

[77] As La Vopa describes it, "The epithet derived much of its force from this cluster of metaphors, evoking all sorts of implications about deviance and conformity, selfhood and collectivity, private fantasy and public authority. It retained that force in the passage from religious polemics to a secular language of medical science." "The Philosopher and the 'Schwärmer,'" 88.

seems to contain something almost divine; not quite *anti*-social, because they partake in some murky other kind of sociability; and not quite irrational, because perhaps all-too-rational if only according to another reason entirely. Despite (or rather, because of) all the effort to clarify who the *Schwärmer* was and how they were to be distinguished, the competing discourses only further muddied the waters. Although *Enthusiasmus* and *Schwärmerei* are two very different modes of bearing oneself in public, with very different political implications, Enlightenment thinkers could articulate no way of distinguishing between them on a formal, phenomenological level.

Kant gets mired in these debates, too. He otherwise-intractable political problem, but to make intelligible a singular *impasse* of Kant's critical philosophy, an almost-intervention which Kant retracts for the set of reasons I've just discussed. In an early work of the pre-critical period—before he wrote the first *Critique*—Kant attempts to distinguish between the two on the basis of the object towards which the emotion was directed:

> This two-sided appearance of fantasy in moral sentiments that are in themselves good is enthusiasm [*Enthusiasmus*], and nothing great in the world has been done without it. Things stand quite differently with the fanatic (visionary, swarmer) [*Fanatiker* (*Visionär, Schwärmer*)]. The latter is properly a deranged person with presumed immediate inspiration and a great familiarity with the powers of the heavens. Human nature knows no more dangerous illusion.[78]

Fantasy may dominate the experience of enthusiasm, but it takes as its object moral sentiments deemed to be "in themselves good."[79] The *Schwärmer*, on the other hand, witnesses a set of visions

[78] Kant, "Essay on the Maladies of the Head," 73 (AA 2:267). Translation modified. Cf. Fenves, "The Scale of Enthusiasm," 123.

[79] How we would come to know such goodness is unclear, especially since Kant insists, famously, on the inaccessibility of things in themselves. This question enters into the paradox of the first *Critique* that the subject of knowledge is at once its object. We cannot, that is, know the form of our freedom.

without the supporting thought that they might be good in themselves. The latter figure thus experiences "immediate inspiration" while the former mediates this intense experience of sentimentality that allows the enthusiast to diagnose his experience as "two-sided". For Kant, there is "no more dangerous illusion" than the visions of the *Schwärmer* because reason cannot moderate them. The enthusiast, on the other hand, can govern his visions by means of higher faculties even as he experiences their full emotional force.

II. Why Critique Suppresses Imagination…

Kant targets precisely these emotional dispositions in the B Edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, from 1787, as part of a philosophical argument for the supremacy of the understanding. In this version of the so-called transcendental deduction, his story about the emergence of understanding from sense-perception, Kant attacks empiricism for conceding far too much freedom to precisely these faculties—imagination chief among them—because they authorize the fanatic's freedom. Kant makes it clear that the dispositions of mind associated with imagination must be subordinated to the understanding: "the imagination is to this extent a faculty…in accordance with the categories" (B152); or again, "that which connects the manifold of sensible intuition is imagination, which depends on the understanding" (B164). That is, the understanding comes first, determines all the possible objects of experience in advance, and determines the "original relation to possible experience" (A94/B127). That is to say, the understanding needs to be able to specify, in advance, what any given experience is life.

When the understanding *fails* to anticipate the contingency of imagination, we meet with two specific derangements of the critical sensibility. Look at the example of Locke, who "from neglect of this consideration [of the original nature of *a priori* understanding]" leads us "to *enthusiasm* [*Schwärmerei*], since reason, once it has authority [of vivid ideation] on its side, will not be kept within

limits by indeterminate recommendations of moderation"; or Hume, who "gave way entirely to *skepticism*, since he believed himself to have discovered in what is generally held to be reason a deception of our faculty of cognition" (B127-129).[80] In either case, the issue is that principles other than reason are in play. For Locke, once reason secures authority from faculty, its own deductive powers run wild. For Hume, it's a little different, because imagination doesn't join with reason, but precisely because it fails to do so, we find ourselves in a situation where reason fails to move cognition in a meaningful way. The subsequent chapter detailing the terms of the deduction is entirely reworked for the second edition in order to reaffirm the primacy of the understanding in and over the synthesis of experience. It's almost as though the one and the other are dealing with precisely the same subject matter, if only in entirely different terms. The original suggestion that the imagination might be an original, autonomous faculty of the soul is totally undone in these pages.

[80] *Schwärmer* is originally an accusation of religious zealotry, yet Locke understands himself as a consummately *secular* thinker tasked with protecting the body politic from the scourge of enthusiasm. For an excellent commentary on Locke's theological architecture, see McClure, *Judging Rights*, esp. the introduction and chap. 1. Kant's deployment of the term here speaks not just to the ways in which Locke, who thought of himself as providing an alternative to religiously-grounded politics, remained caught in theological world of justifications; it more urgently foregrounds the problem of judgment internal to empiricist account of political rule (this is why Hume, too, gets caught in Kant's broadside). It is an appearance of anarchism *avant la lettre*. Skepticism leads directly to *Schwärmerei* in that doubt concerning the *a priori* or just plain prior judgments of authority all-too-easily authorizes one's own judgments instead, especially since those, at least, are based in one's own experience. On the collapse of skepticism into *Schärmerei* see again La Vopa, "The Philosopher and the 'Schwärmer,'" 85–87.

If the B Edition needs to discipline imagination under the government of the understanding, it's because he can't take it for granted that imagination develops that discipline of its own accord. As J. Michael Young argues, this is the specific importance of the notion of a "function" in the critical philosophy.[81] Whereas a faculty is an autonomous element of the mind, a function is an instrument of the understanding, to be used in accordance with the principle of synthesis that he lays out at its beginning: "*all combination*, whether we are conscious of it or not, whether it is a combination of the manifold of intuition or of several concepts, and in the first case either of sensible or non-sensible intuition, *is an action of the understanding*, which we would designate with the general title **synthesis**" (B130, italics mine). That is to say that we don't *imagine* so much as we *use* the imagination. Kant displaces the imagination to a functional role partly in order to differentiate his position from those of other philosophers whose openness to imagination opens them up to the possibility of enthusiasm, hence the explicit references to Locke and Hume in the deduction's introduction and especially that of the B Edition. But these references do not suggest that the section on the transcendental deduction can be simply reduced to a question of competing

[81] J. Michael Young notes that the mysterious concept of synthesis first appears in the immediately preceding section, the metaphysical deduction, wherein Kant asks whether it is possible that "the categories are simply the logical functions of thought in judgment, employed in the determination of the sensible manifold." Kant's argument, he tells us, must answer in the negative. The failure of apriority here prepares the way for the transcendental deduction's account of synthesis as originating in the transcendental empirical intuitions in the form of the imagination—the argument which the B Edition suppresses. Young, "Functions of Thought and the Synthesis of Intuitions," 116.

doctrines.[82] If it were, it would just displace the question, which could then be formulated as follows: what is it that renders empiricism so unacceptable? As I read Kant, it's because opening the door to imagination lets too much contingency into the critical subject. Formally speaking, the understanding already comprehends all possible experience in advance, which means that empirical facts about the world are either a) superfluous or b) unreasonably

How does the critic deal with spontaneity and contingency? For the B Edition, they don't, because formally speaking the understanding already comprehends all possible experiences in advance. Kant is constantly on the prowl, in both editions, for "principles of *a priori* sensibility," by which he means an analysis of unmediated sensation and intuition, "separating off everything that the understanding thinks through its concepts" (A21-22/B35-36). Or he finds himself in the business of developing "the science of the rules of understanding in general" (A52/B76). It's almost as though the goal is to identify a formal structure of understanding that holds regardless of its cognitive content and worldly situation. The goal here is to develop an account of "concepts that may be related to objects *a priori*, not as pure or sensible intuitions but rather merely as acts of pure thinking, that are thus concepts but of neither empirical nor aesthetic origin" (A57/B81). To get at those concepts, then, it would be necessary to bracket off the empirical and the aesthetic concepts as

[82] Paul Guyer suggests that Kant's response to Hume is to argue that experience is subsumed under the structure of the understanding, but in the sections on the deduction and the schematism Kant "leaves unexplained how we come to know particular causal laws, as Kant insists." Guyer here relies on the B Edition of the *Critique*. If we agree that this version of the deduction only rather incompletely argues against Humean empiricism, then we would be compelled to suspect that Kant's revisions were made not to improve a philosophical argument but rather for some other purpose entirely. Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason, and Taste*, 106.

irrelevant to the task at hand. For Kant it is the condition of any science of understanding that the soul be isolated from the world to attend exclusively to its own formal powers.

I take this psychology to be the reason for Kant's restraint in praising the French Revolution. "The spectators do not participate in the Revolution, but they experience a 'wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm', whose only possible cause is a moral predisposition" and not practical reason.[83] The French Revolution provides something that the critical understanding *can't*, namely, a spectacle of moral action at the immediate disposal of the imagination. In this respect, *disposition as such* seems to pose an existential challenge to the sobriety of philosophical autonomy, because disposition makes it possible for an event like the French Revolution to affect my moral sensibility in ways that I don't immediately comprehend. Such an encounter might lead me to conduct myself differently than I thought I would. Is it that the world must necessarily always enter our understanding according to our own categories? The answer to that final question is obviously no, but to maintain appearances Kant finds it necessary to answer *yes*. In other words, to defend his image of freedom as rational autonomy Kant must deny the existence of a world not already comprehended *in potentia* by the categories of the understanding. In particular, he needs to deny that events like the French Revolution provide a morally-compelling spectacle for the imagination. Great destroyer in the realm of thought, indeed.

III. …And Why Critique Needs Imagination

The precise argument of the B Edition is of less interest to me here than the way that it illuminates unexpected aspects of the ontology of imagination that we find in the A Edition. The most striking fact about the B Edition's offensive is that the positions it attributes to Locke and

[83] Burdman, "ENTHUSIASM," 298.

Hume are fundamentally Kant's own positions on the imagination in the A Edition. Here, we have an imagination which stands alongside the understanding as equal and co-original faculties of the human soul. In linking moral feeling to practical action What the B Edition castigates a source of enthusiasm is, for the A Edition, an ideal source of critical autonomy.

Like the Hume and Locke of the B Edition, in the A Edition there's an uncontainable expansiveness to the power of imagination: "the principle of the necessary unity of the pure (productive) synthesis of the imagination prior to all apperception is thus the ground of the possibility of all cognition, especially that of experience" (A118). That is, even if the imagination doesn't take any particular sensation as its object, it's still necessary for thinking to proceed in the first instance. Kant repeats himself elsewhere when he writes of the imagination as simply "the manifold in a cognition," or in Kant's strongest formulation, it is simply "the pure form of all possible cognition" (A118). The imagination serves as the "ground of the possibility of all cognition, and especially that of experience" (A118). Or again: "We therefore have a pure imagination, as a fundamental faculty of the human soul, that grounds all cognition *a priori"* (A124)! It's difficult to imagine a more emphatic affirmation of priority.

The bizarre gesture that Kant makes here is to make the understanding into a function of imagination. If it's really the case that imagination produces the categories of the understanding, then we're dealing with a structure of perception that can't help but fold in on itself. The claim is that the imagination produces the categories of the understanding, but as a matter of perception those categories come into play *after* the contingent, empirical imagination makes sense of whatever sights and sounds present themselves to the critical subject. In this inverted temporality, there exists a productive *a priori* imagination that comes temporally *posterior* to the imagination which deals with the contingent sensations of worldly belonging.

> The schema of a pure concept of the understanding, on the contrary, is something that can never be brought to an image at all, but is rather only the pure synthesis, in accord with a rule of unity according to concepts in general, which the category expresses, and is a transcendental product of the imagination, which concerns the determination of the inner sense in general, in accordance with conditions of its form (time) in regard to all representations, insofar as these are to be connected together *a priori* in one concept in accord with the unity of apperception. (A142/B181)

For our purposes here, the presence of so many dizzying dialectical reliances and reversals in this passage's division of labor among the faculties is less important than the conspicuous absence of any trace of humanity. Kant is so meticulous in describing the mechanisms of transcendental psychology that, at this moment at least, we have entirely lost sight of the fact that this passage is supposed to describe the workings of a human mind. At best, we can hear the faint echo of that humanity in the language of coherence and consistency: things are "connected together" as "pure synthesis" or "in accord with a unity," although they hang together in a way that makes for predictable mechanisms rather than actions of human thinking. Whatever else we may read elsewhere, this passage paints a picture of human thinking with decidedly antihumanist brushstrokes. Although human dignity, in the last analysis, might rest on the exercise of rational agency, which relies on autonomous understanding capable of legislating for itself its own laws of thought, Kant makes clear here that the understanding's laws ultimately come from the habits and inclinations of *imagination*.

On my view, this is point which induces the anxiety of the B Edition. This is the moment at which understanding's pretension to autonomy comes undone, and it has to take the contingent associations of imagination as they are. We saw this figure in Kant's earlier writings: "properly a deranged person with presumed immediate inspiration."[84] This is also where the wider

[84] Kant, "Essay on the Maladies of the Head," 73 (AA 2:267).

Enlightenment discourse located the possibility of enthusiasm, because it's the moment of immediate sense-perception at which the understanding has to trust in the appearance of the thing rather than critique the conditions of its possibility. In this respect it is not insignificant that this passage appears in both editions of the critique and serves as a figure for the differences between them. In the first edition, these reversals install imagination as productive of a cognitive edifice that, whatever heights it may reach, always refers back to the "original source" (A94) of experience. That the original source is some experience of the world isn't a problem for Kant, because it guarantees a in intimate, sensuous connection between the critical subject and the world. In the second edition, though, the "original source" needs to be the understanding itself (from which the transcendental imagination springs), otherwise it becomes a site of impurity, a place where contingent psychology may spill into the transcendental and chain the critical subject *to* the sensuous world. Hence the desire to devise an image-less imagination, a faculty of making images unconditioned by reality nevertheless capable of synthesizing that reality. But in either edition, what we are left with is an account of how the understanding and its various apparatuses of judgment simply repeat the initial configuration of imagination.

The recursions of imagination in the categories of understanding makes the agency of imagination the anatomical correlate of the agency of the reflexive subject. This idea is pretty well substantiated in philosophical responses to To Kant's relation of mutual adjustment between subject and object, Quentin Meillassoux has given the name of *correlationism:* "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being…Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object 'in itself', in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject which would

not always-already be related to an object."[85] Correlation is an illuminating word, because it suggests that the process of arranging sensations into a world of objects is also a process of situating the subject within that world (a subject always-already related to objects), though here we might think of it less as an ontological doctrine than as a question of practical action. The possibility that correlation might fail—that the minds categories might infelicitously map onto the world, and it would cease to make sense to us, such that our projects fail and we find ourselves at a loss—Kant nowhere denies this possibility. Our successes, on the contrary—when the world *does* make sense, and we *do* anticipate the results of our actions, and we *do* have a sense of place and propriety in our relations with others—that success is inseparable from a sense of fit between us and the world. More to the point, this act of correlating subject to object is the condition of possibility for practical reason.

"Thus it becomes clear," in Michel Foucault's reading of the imagination in one of Kant's later writings, "that the world is not simply a source for a sensible 'faculty,' but the basis of a transcendental correlation of passivity-spontaneity."[86] Another name for this work of correlation is *habit*. The presence of habit in imagination makes itself felt not only through repetition and disposition but also because it deals in the work of *habituation*. That is to say, it's involved in the activity of learning and adjustment and transformation of comportment. Though I take habit to be a more appropriate term than "passivity-spontaneity," what Foucault provides for us here is the logic behind that change of terminology. Imagination does more than transcribe the world; it *assembles* the world into a coherent whole by adjusting oneself in relation to it. It involves the constant activity of seeing and smelling and hearing and tasting, that, although in some respect passive, also involves the

[85] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5.

[86] Foucault, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, 86.

spontaneous (i.e. unconditioned) task of resolving those sensations into objects and determining their relations both to one another and oneself. It's as though the activity of imagination actually involves a material dimension of bodily comportment. It involves constantly arranging oneself in relation to one's surroundings in such a way as to better understand how that shape over there resolves into a sun, or a god, or a streetlamp (as the case may be).

This dispositional dimension to imagination makes it possible to offer a thoroughgoing account of why the Enlightenment figure of the fanatic was always understood as to involve failures of both perception and comportment. As we saw above, the enthusiast never appears as a figure of pure epistemological or volitional commitment, as though they could adopt controversial moral ideas in a way that nevertheless conforms to the affective standards of sobriety and reasonability. What makes the enthusiast "properly a deranged person" (i.e. a person who behaves pathologically) "with presumed immediate inspiration" (i.e. a person who imagines improperly) is, wherein the imagination delivers both the wrong arrangement of sensation *and* the wrong arrangement of the body.[87] That is, the diagnosis of enthusiasm is never just a statement about the subject's internal psychology but also a statement about both their demeanor toward and their apprehension of the world around them. Presumably this is why Locke's enthusiasm, as the B Edition puts it, comes from reason's getting "authority on its side," as though it had to find authority in another faculty altogether (B127-128). It's very difficult to gainsay immediate sensory imagination, which only *ever* appears to the subject itself as the assembly of mundane objects.

The basic tension here is between the normative project and the assertion of spontaneity. Kant needs the spontaneity of imagination to make sense of the world not just as a site of sensation but also, and perhaps even more importantly, an object for the exercise agency. But that freedom

[87] Kant, "Essay on the Maladies of the Head," 73 (AA 2:267).

introduces a basic challenge to the critical project because any freedom ascribed to the imagination risks undoing the interpretive authority of the understanding and its transcendental categories. In the B Edition, Kant's solution to the tension is to subsume the imagination in the understanding, such that I can never imagine anything that I haven't already understood in advance. But in the A Edition, the imagination is unproblematically understood to be a faculty of the soul rather than a function of the understanding; uncoincidentally, the figure of the A Edition is concerned neither with the distinction between the automatism of the imagination and the autonomy of the critical subject *nor* with the figure of the fanatic, as though these were just the psychological and sociological statements of one and the same philosophical problem of a mode of existence outside the government of the understanding.

IV. Heteronomy and Habit

These passages from the first *Critique* demonstrate how Kant concatenates habit, disposition, and sensation—all heteronymous modes of existence, since they register the contingent facts of the world—into a single faculty he calls *imagination* in order to anchor critical subjectivity. These faculties, as we saw in the B Edition, threaten Kant's own ambitions to connect critical subjectivity to moral autonomy, literally understood as the capacity to act according to laws that one gives oneself. But as Fred Moten argues, imagination is the kernel of Kant's conception of autonomy, because it functions as a "jurisgenerative principle": imagination makes law by synthesizing categories and positing rules which the understanding and the other faculties are to follow.[88] Insofar as autonomy is Kant's solution to the philosophical problem of human being—wherein lies the source of uniquely human agency?—it is a solution founded a nonhuman ground, namely the a-

[88] Moten, *Stolen Life*, 6, 8; and esp. *The Universal Machine*, 115ff.

rational and nearly animal psychology of sensation which precedes the reflexive capacities of reason and understanding. But critique is also, as Kant conceives it, is a project of reflexivity: it is not just that reason needs to be autonomous, it is that it needs particularly to be grounded in *nothing other than the human soul*. Reason secures autonomy when it reflexively determines its own relation to the world; but the faculty which draws connections to and within the world, imagination, is an automatic and heteronomous faculty. The unsteady proposition which follows from this picture of critique, that autonomy is automaticity is heteronomy, is behind the B Edition's sudden allergy to the productive imagination. But in the A edition the proposition is forwarded in an entirely unproblematic manner. There's certainly a great deal of cognitive armature and a number of subtle distinctions concerning categories and concepts and schemata, but Kant is rather easygoing in asserting that it all rests upon the springs of imagination. The A Edition of the transcendental deduction is, in short, dedicated to these two propositions: 1) that autonomy is heteronomy; 2) that automaticity secures autonomy. Law stands of its own accord only when and only to the extent that it is mediated through imagination. Freedom is found in the law which one gives to oneself, therefore, because it is founded upon the imagination. What could it mean to say that the fanatic is the person trapped in their ideas, whose habits of imagination are too persistent, when habits and ideas are all that we have? We have seen that the B Edition's response to the problem is simply to evade it by positing another term, the agentic faculty of understanding. If this remains an unsatisfactory answer, it is because the story of the autonomous will cannot fully account for the agency of human thinking. One cannot depend on a logic or a decision to imagine or to act. There is something else at play. The mundanity of habit is as necessary to the quotidian affair of living together as it is hostile to the monological autonomy of reason.

This chapter has taken a microscopic view at these few passages because of the weight that they carry not only for the argument of the *Critique of Pure Reason* but for the notion of criticism *tout*

court. "The Transcendental Deduction can be seen as the center of gravity not only of the first *Critique* but also of the whole Critical system."[89] That is, the revisions to these passages encode a set of questions about the purposes of criticism and its relevance both to moral sensibility and political action. I want to emphasize that this chapter's retrieval of a complicated notion of habit at the heart of the transcendental deduction is not an endorsement of one edition over the other. Rather, it shows that the differences between the two editions point to a basic problem of heteronomy in the ontology of the imagination that can't be resolved within the intellectual horizon of the first *Critique*. As Martin Heidegger puts it, the A Edition locates in the imagination the "unknown root" of the critical project from which Kant, in the B Edition, "shrank back" in a moment of philosophical fearfulness.[90] Herbert Marcuse, who was probably familiar with Heidegger's seminars on the topic, also takes the imagination to be the "great conception which animates Kant's critical philosophy" and which "shatters the philosophical framework in which he kept it."[91] Both evaluations suggest that the imagination presents an impasse to critical project's pretensions of moral autonomy: the imagination is only ever the object of the understanding's analysis and the setting of the story that understanding tells itself.

It is not quite clear whether Kant's revisions point to a real change of heart or whether he simply found it more prudent to distance himself from any accusation—however slight—of having authorized fanaticism. Either way it does not very much matter: the first edition is more honest philosophy, and the second is more honest political theory. Just as Pocock points out that

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[89] …If its role is misunderstood or rejected there, then the whole Critical system is distorted or threatened." Bird, *The Revolutionary Kant*, 277. This assessment is rather typical.

[90] Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 112.

[91] Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 30.

enlightenment cannot abide its antiself, the enthusiast, something in Kant's project of moral autonomy cannot abide the existence of habit.[92] And so while the fanatic is, strictly speaking, a essentially contested concept of political exclusion rather than a well-established standard of political excess, Kant's invocation of the figure provides an opportunity to empathize with his anxieties about the structure of his own commitment to moral autonomy.[93] It too is a fiction; and to dismiss it, like the fanatic, as a *political* fiction is to reintroduce the possibility that habit—which Kant might define as the persistent pursuit of moral imagination—might matter to public political life.

V. Public Practices of Enlightenment

A franker accounting of this possibility—franker, at any rate, than the *Critique's* straightforward normativity—can be found in Kant's 1784 "What is Enlightenment?" essay, far removed from the philosophical ambitions of the critical project. Whereas the *Critique* is the solitary and abstruse labor of a decade (and nearly another decade of revision), liable to be read only by those predisposed to philosophical jargon, this essay is published between the two editions as an occasional contribution to a popular journal. These conditions of publication are important because the text places itself and its audience squarely within the terms its own thinking. Kant balances enlightenment on a notion of publicity which he figures as the only space where people can habituate themselves to argumentation and critical thinking: "it is difficult for any individual man to work himself out of the immaturity that has all but become his nature…But that the public should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, if it is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost

[92] See Pocock, "Enthusiasm"; Toscano, *Fanaticism*, 98–148.

[93] Sara Ahmed touches upon some of the difficulties these aspersions raise in *Willful Subjects*, esp. chaps. 1 and 4.

inevitable."[94] The idea that the only requirement for understanding is the freedom of argument, not an innate apprehension, sounds remarkably close to the A Edition, since there too we saw that all one had to do to attain an understanding was to allow the free play of some faculties. Here, though, the *public* constitutes the decisive difference. An inward and individual practice of critique isn't sufficient to lift one out of minority, because our unenlightened nature makes us lazy and timid, and because we are lazy and timid—like Kant between the two revisions—we're unable to enlighten ourselves. It's only in the presence of others that we can work up the courage to think. The subject of enlightenment, accordingly, can only be a public, and its temporality an era. "If it is now asked, 'Do we presently live in an *enlightened* [*aufgeklärt*] age?' the answer is, 'No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment* [*aufklärung*]."'[95] That the age of enlightenment is an age of argument means that maturity is not exclusive title to speak. It remains, though, the exclusive title to rule.

The decisive difference between the *Critique* and the essay is that enlightenment follows from *heteronomy* rather than autonomy. The freedom to argue is expressly distinguished from the freedom to legislate, because on Kant's account it is the public's distance from legislation which opens up the possibility to practice argument and enlightenment. The preclusive relationship between inward autonomy and outward autonomy—between *philosophical* self-government and *political* self-government—is the subject of the quiet chuckle we find in the final paragraph of the text:

> But only a ruler who is himself enlightened [*aufgeklärt*] and has no dread of shadows [*nicht vor Schatten fürchtet*], yet who likewise has a well-disciplined, numerous army to guarantee public peace, can say what no republic [*Freistaat*] may dare, namely: "Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!" Here as elsewhere, when things are considered in broad perspective, a strange, unexpected pattern in human affairs reveals itself, one in which almost everything is paradoxical. A greater degree of civil freedom seems advantageous to a people's *spiritual* freedom; yet the former

[94] Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," 41–42.

[95] Kant, 44. Emphasis in original.

> established impassable boundaries for the latter; conversely, a lesser degree of civil freedom provides enough room for all fully to expand their abilities.[96]

The monarch is qualified to rule the public because he has found a way to rule over himself. He isn't afraid of the dark. Naturally the reference to a ruler is a routine homage to Frederick the Great; given Kant's half-avowed republicanism, however, it's difficult to shake the feeling that his praise isn't guarded and ironical in its own way. We have more than good reason to doubt that Frederick really is enlightened, since we know after all just how difficult it is for "any individual man to work himself out of the immaturity that has all but become his nature."[97] Though perhaps a sovereign's enlightenment is different than an ordinary man's. "A prince," Kant tells us, "who does not find it beneath him to say that he takes it to be his *duty* to prescribe nothing…is himself enlightened."[98] A monarch, to be enlightened, must only obey a single categorical imperative. Or rather, he need only *aver* it, even if he does not obey in his heart. Paradox of enlightenment aside, I'm far more interested in the phrase "no dread of shadows"—what is it that the enlightened ruler is so unafraid of? And if he is unafraid of it, why does he need such a "well-disciplined, numerous army"? A shadow is first of all a shade, a spirit, but is also itself a weighty word in an essay dedicated to the explanation of light. In the scheme of the enlightenment metaphor it designates that which the light does not touch: the yet-unenlightened public. He has no fear of shadows, that is, the public—and yet he deploys an army against it? Or is it *because* the army is deployed against it that he has nothing to fear? In the one case the ruler acts on a fear he cannot admit; in the other he's only ceased to fear by force of arms. Either way, the ruler's autonomy is secured not through the law of reason but the law of

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[96] Kant, 45.

[97] Kant, 41.

[98] Kant, 45.

arms. The paradox is not just the political one, then, wherein civil unfreedom is necessary for intellectual liberty, but a paradox of inner sense, where enlightenment actually seems to breed a paranoid and overactive imagination. "The realm of shadows is the paradise of dreamers," as Kant writes in a very early text, but here the joke is that Frederick is wide awake and really *does* see something in the shadows around him.[99] All the power at his command cannot put his imagination at ease.[100] There is something there—whether a threat to reason, or a threat to his rule, both amount to the same thing for a ruler who arrogates to himself the title of enlightened.

"Frederick of Prussia," Foucault says, "is the very figure of *Aufklärung*, the essential agent of *Aufklärung*, the agent who makes the right redistribution in the interplay between obedience and private use."[101] An enlightenment which pivots around such a figure arranges itself very differently from the autonomous enlightenment of the *Critique*. The real absurdity would be the idea of intellectual anarchy: that the understanding could, unaided by any greater power, insulate itself from the habits, whimsies, and dreads of the imagination. As J. H. S. Formey, a member of Frederick's Berlin Academy of Sciences, would remark, "The *esprit d'ordre* cannot be maintained without the

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[99] Kant, "Dreams of a Spirit-Seer Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics," 305. Translation amended.

[100] "The first imperative of paranoia," writes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "is *There must be no bad surprises*, and indeed, the aversion to surprise seems to be what cements the intimacy between paranoia and knowledge per se, including both epistemophilia and skepticism." "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," 130. Given Sedgwick's position on the interdigitation of anticipation and reality it is hard to see how the enlightened ruler could fail to be paranoid.

[101] Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 38.

vigilance of a ruler who knows how to use his power without abusing it."[102] Though Frederick serves that role for others, there is no ruler who can put him at ease in turn, and so it is not the sleep of reason but his own insomniac rationality that imagines monsters.[103] Visions *schwarm* in the shadows before Frederick's eyes. He cannot be sure which threats are real and which imaginary. His attention is fixed on what he insists he does not see in the shadows, even though his princely power is bound to the imperative he dared to avow. Sovereign legislator he might be, his habit of seeing danger in the dark offers no real possibility of freedom.

VI. Conclusion

If there is any freedom in the unconditioned imagination, it will be found in the habit of enlightenment rather than the state of the enlightened. If "a lesser degree of civil freedom provides enough room for all fully to expand their abilities," it's because subjects can experiment with habits of thinking and living without much in the way of consequences.[104] Their experiments in civil society

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[102] Formey, "Eloge de M. de Maupertuis," 511. Cited in Terrall, "The Culture of Science in Frederick the Great's Berlin," 346.

[103] *The sleep of reason produces monsters* is the title of an etching by Francisco Goya which is part of a larger series which moralizes against prejudice and folly. Though the title of the etching reproduces standard Enlightenment rhetoric about the opposition between reason and sentiment, freedom and custom, knowledge and superstition, Alexander Nehamas suggests that the etching itself reveals another relationship, one where "reason is asleep when the imagination deserts it." "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters," 38. It would be nice if Frederick could sleep, to dream rather than to imagine, but to do so would let the monsters loose, and he would abdicate his pivotal role as the enlightened guarantor of public enlightenment.

[104] Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," 45.

have nothing to do with the pragmatics of rule: "Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!"[105] In light of the first *Critique*, this command from the sovereign takes on another, equally significant role. It lifts the burden of action from the shoulders of the understanding and the danger of *Schwärmerei* from the imagination. As a matter of state policy, Mary Terrall argues that "Frederick's policy of religious toleration" meant that "heterodox theology could not be read as a threat to the state"—nor, indeed, could any thinking which took place under his generous patronage.[106] Freedom to think is conditioned on a despotism over action. Whereas the various commands of the form "Do not argue, but obey!" seek to suppress the faculties, Frederick's alone seeks to encourage them.[107] A member of such a public would never feel the need to justify the worth of an argument. Argument ceases to have an object; it becomes an end in and of itself, a playful exercise of one's faculties unencumbered by the anxieties which elsewhere led Kant to shrink away from the productive imagination.[108] Kant's definition of enlightenment as the "courage to use

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[105] Kant, 45.

[106] Terrall, "The Culture of Science in Frederick the Great's Berlin," 352.

[107] Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," 42.

[108] The structure of enlightened despotism, by making it possible to *play* at politics, is what allows the kind of political thinking that Arendt champions in the turn to Kant. When government is not at stake, we can worry over political, religious, and philosophical matters precisely in the same way as over aesthetic matters, which is to say, not at all: worry has nothing to do with the experience of the beautiful. If there really had been a democratic theory of judgment in the time of enlightened monarchs perhaps the history of the democratic revolutions would have turned out differently, but as it is the question of aesthetic judgment is more a category of despotic theory. Perhaps its contemporary relevance suggests the existence of contemporary despotism, not that we were wanting for evidence.

your own understanding!," read again in light of the first *Critique*, becomes an invitation to compose one's own understanding, and thereby to employ the faculty of composition. The argument of enlightenment, not at all similar to an enlightened argument, is an argument of imagination.

Enlightenment's only condition is heteronomy: that the public not be a republic. What Kant gets right here, in a negative register, is the intimate relation between the reality-sense of imagination and the capacity for political action. Hence the need for a barrier between the two. Because the freedom to think and the freedom to rule preclude one another, government and civil society must be kept at arm's length. With such a paranoid ruler and such an ambitious public, the separation could, as indeed it did, only last for so long. And Kant would not long after transfer his enthusiasm for the monarchy of enlightenment to the "revolution of a gifted people," and the idea of a democratic revolution which it made thinkable.[109] As it is, though, Kant's republic remains a counterfactual. And though within that counterfactual republic the imagination engenders habits, they remain habits of the public realm, inextensible to the institutions of political authority. It is in the subject of enlightenment, almost autonomous and almost an enthusiast, committed to self-rule and unable to secure it, that Kant's problematic of imagination becomes a problematic of democratic habits. What remains unthinkable in the ambit of Kant's philosophy—even though it desperately wants to be thought—is the possibility of legislation.

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[109] Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 155. Or, more precisely, he makes note of the *enthusiasm* that the revolution inspires in the disinterested spectator—as though that enthusiasm were in a manner analogous to the practice of enlightenment discussed here. In a footnote Kant explicitly draws the connection to Frederick and the problematic of enlightenment. See also Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 39.

Chapter Two

Images of Right in Hume's Sentimental Jurisprudence

"…apparently he loves reason and virtue;
but reason and virtue don't affect you very much when they are boring."
– Voltaire, of Grotius

What is Kant so afraid of? How is it that imagination could threaten the sovereign sanctity of law? As far as philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment David Hume is concerned, what Kant castigates as inclination and enthusiasm are really just the customs and manners of everyday life. Given their different normative evaluations of the phenomenon, it is somewhat surprising that there is no disagreement about the nature of the object. At issue between the two is the way that law is situated in and emerges from the world of habit. This chapter shows how the very same structure of imagination and inclination that we saw in the last chapter characterizes David Hume's radicalization of common law jurisprudence.

This chapter concerns law, and how Hume yokes this high institution of political affairs to the sentiments of common life: esteem, pleasure, anger, and discomfort are not quite legal categories, but they are productive of legal relations. In what follows I deal primarily with his first work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, though I draw liberally from his subsequent writings to illustrate the persistence of a problematic that I call Hume's sentimental jurisprudence. The *Treatise* treats imagination as "the vivacity of our ideas" (173), a habit which is conducive to the customs and manners of common life. The only difference between Kant's and Hume's imagination is the quality of associativity. Kant thinks of the enthusiast as a lonely person; for Hume the imagination is an essentially sociable faculty. There is no aspect of common life which does not touch the sentiments, and which one could access otherwise than through the mind's habitual associations.

It's been understood for at least a couple of centuries that Hume understands both aesthetic and moral sentiments to fall under the ambit of habit. Here, though, I want to linger on Hume's

thesis that law belongs to habit as well. This is the most unsettling notion of Hume's political theory, because it suggests that political order simply *happens* to us, outside of our conscious capacity to legislate, in the same way that our knowing and our reasoning are at the mercy of our psychological habits. Nevertheless, I take it to be Hume's point that legislation is not the only mode of lawmaking. Though it should come as no surprise that we tend not to think of Hume as a political theorist, he takes this occasion to consider some basic questions of political theory. What is the difference between conviction and convention? Which comes first? Are traditions conservative or progressive in character? Do habits allow for responsibility, or a sense of individual autonomy? To ask these questions of Hume is to implicate him in a set of modern vocabularies and anxieties somewhat at cross-purposes to his thinking. Sharon Krause, for instance, rather politely suggests that "Hume's account needs to be supplemented by a commitment to democratic equality, liberal rights, and contestatory public debate."[110] But if Kant is right to say that Hume's philosophy "gave way entirely to *skepticism*," untethered from the sureties of intellect, then surely Krause's interest in assuring normative supplements poses a very much open question. If "practical states of mind cannot be produced by reasoning," as Elijah Millgram glosses Hume's argument, is it really possible to simply commit oneself to liberal-democratic desiderata?[111] Scholars who find in Hume a theory of habit instrumentally oriented towards the production of norms and ethics might find themselves answering affirmatively.[112] Hume himself, insisting on the specific purchase of habit as a bridge between convention and conviction, would answer less straightforwardly.

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[110] Krause, *Civil Passions*, 77–78.

[111] Millgram, "Was Hume a Humean?," 42.

[112] On norms, see Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 99–100; on Hume's thinking as an ethical discourse, see Taylor, "Humean Ethics and the Politics of Sentiment."

This is, in a sense, already all that the common law is, though scholars of political theory have never recognized it as such, owing to the popularity of civil-law accounts of legislation proffered by theorists like Hobbes and Rousseau. When I say that Hume radicalizes common law jurisprudence, I mean that he takes the codified culmination of centuries of custom and builds within it a political psychology wherein habit is the only principle of authority. It's not only the case that no particular arrangement is natural; it's also that no particular arrangement is necessary. Davide Panagia, one of the few authors to consider Hume a full-fledged political thinker, takes Hume's skepticism on this point to authorize a radical democracy of sentiments: "as there is no rule or law that authorizes the operation of impressions, so is there no rule or law that commands the nature, shape, and content of one's subjectivity as beholder and bearer of impressions."[113] My ambition in this chapter is to suggest the opposite: that the beholding and bearing of impressions is what commands the nature, shape, and content of law. Habit engenders a sense of reality through custom and manner rather than belief or reason. Unlike Kant's enthusiast, Hume's subject of habit is always feeling in an orderly and constitutional manner. On Hume's account, habits are collective habits, customs and manners that one never develops in isolation, and the habit of imagining social reality is always an activity that one engages in with others. Jurisprudence names the result of that collective activity.

What follows is a meandering reading of the *Treatise of Human Nature*. It begins with the rise of commercial society as it occasions Hume's turn to habit, often mistaken as a methodology of skepticism (section 2). It then turns towards the jurisgenerative capacity of repetition in both the natural and the social worlds (sections 3-4). The second half of the chapter (sections 5-7) examines the ways in which habit—the repetition of associations—impresses itself upon various categories of

[113] Panagia, *Impressions of Hume*, 7.

law. It concludes (sections 8-9) by tracing what, amidst the supremacy of habit, has become of the concept of agency.

I. The Problems of a Commercial Society

The "rules, which determine property…are principally fix'd by the imagination" (323). This is precisely the sort of claim cited in defense of Hume's skeptical tendencies, since it introduces an unsettling moral and legal relativisim. It is not insignificant that in the meantime, new forms of commercial society are calling into question what J. G. A. Pocock calls "the unity of the moral personality which can only be found in the practice of civic virtue."[114] The rules of property are no longer fixed by God, or by the state, or even by tradition; they are fixed only by sentiment. Hume indexes the commerce of these rules by the imagination, a language of sentimentality which underwrites the mobility and fluidity of persons and property in the new commercial society of the eighteenth century.[115] The theory of property must involve a theory of "imagination and the passions," a faculty that is somewhat too capricious to offer a philosophically satisfactory theory of norms.[116] In this respect, John Rawls rightly says that Hume's reference of politics to sentiments is something other than a prescription for "the best imaginable" arrangement of conventions. He errs, though, when he treats that something other as still within the ambit of the best, namely, "the best given human beings as they are."[117] Hume is making an entirely different sort of investigation, one attentive to the problem of the possibility of convention (which is a very different issue than

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[114] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 110.

[115] See Pocock, 103–23. See also Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*.

[116] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 133.

[117] Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, 64.

whether or not it is the *best*): tautologically, he might say that we know the *best* imaginable arrangement of property because it is the *only*, or better simply *the* imaginable arrangement of property.[118]

This is partly what is at stake in the *Treatise's* title page announcing "an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects" (1). Jacqueline Taylor suggests that the experiment method is an attempt to turn away from "teleological accounts of the passions that focused on the proper balance of affections, or the proper objects and causes of the passion."[119] Experimentation—or put more strongly, empiricism—makes legible that tautological reduction of the best to the imaginable by turning away from normativity as a guiding category for political thought. It makes it possible to discuss forms of association without feeling the need to justify those forms by reference to markers of authority. "Property—the material foundation of both personality and government—has ceased to be real and has become not merely mobile but imaginary."[120] Under the circumstances of commercial society, on Pocock's account, property ceases to be fixed by any one normative standard. It becomes a mobile ontology, one dependent on habits and customs. Imagination provides Hume with the critical language to turn away from fixed markers of authority.

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[118] The *Treatise* is remarkable for how liberally it employs the language of imagination. At every level of human cognition there is a quality of vivacity. If the imagination explains everything, it explains nothing in particular. The question before us, then, is how the imagination specifically and specially responds to Hume's concerns regarding the question of property. At this point, we find that the imagination ceases to be a principle of explanation. It functions rather as a limit of explanation, the moment where explanation comes to an end; an appeal to experience, after all, is an appeal to brute matters of fact which cannot be explained any farther.

[119] Taylor, *Reflecting Subjects*, 30.

[120] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 112.

It makes it possible to narrate political tradition and transformation in terms of habit and custom, what Pocock calls personality and government. Given such and such a balance of affections and sentiments, the imagination infers certain habits and customs, and those repeated turns of mind give rise to property; These "humours and turn of thinking" are so necessary for collective life that Hume finds in them "the character of a nation" (206). [121]

[121] The terminology of motive, Hume's word for the efficient cause of moral relations, sheds some light on the movement from imagination to property. Writing of justice and injustice, Hume tells us that "no action can be laudable or blameable, without some motives or impelling passions" (311). One account of the motive-action distinction emphasizes both its importance and its problematic character. On the one hand motive mediates our judgment of actions; the merely material facts of an act are insufficient to settled the moral propriety of the act, and so one must look to the elements of motive—*mens rea*, disposition, circumstances—to make a judgment. On the other, motives are inaccessible to observation, even when we appeal to them to make sense of what we see. An earlier version of Hume's point makes the difference more apparent: "when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produc'd them" (307). Regard is a kind of gaze. If motives are not open to transparent observation, then strictly speaking we regard motive only through imputation. "The external performance has no merit. We must look within to find the moral quality" (307). But because "this we cannot do directly," we must find some sort of substitute, namely action, upon which we "fix our attention" (307). Motive mediates our judgment of the action, and action mediates our understanding of the motive. There's a doubleness to Hume's thinking here that is something other than a dialectical movement. It's more of a split attention, one eye on the visible fact of action and the other on the invisible motives. These objects of attention need to be connected and ordered in our moral considerations. One of Hume's first principles is that "the imagination supply the place of that inseperable connection" (14). "Nor is this merely a metaphysical subtility": what this principle offers is an epistemology of motive located in the sentimentality which "enters into all our reasonings in common life" (307). Whatever the precise

Hume is not a theorist of similarity. His talk sympathy does not appeal to any homogeneity of race or climate or even comportment: we feel the feelings of others "however different from, or even contrary to our own" (206) their sentiments might be.[122] The nation matters mainly as evidence of sympathetic communication: without sympathy there is no collectivity. Sympathy and society are identified in rather dramatic counterfactual fashion at the conclusion of the *Treatise's* first book, on the predicament of skepticism. The predicament concerns the solitude of reason, the isolation that trains of careful thought require from the liveliness of everyday life. No matter how frequently they might occur or however much force with which they might strike the thinker, those thoughts evaporate upon the slightest contact with the world. Consider how completely Hume capitulates to the conclusions of philosophical skepticism: "I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable…utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty" (175). And yet this condition produces no conviction, because the confusions dissolve at the least disturbance. Why? Because he is not only a being of reason.

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther. (175)

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valence of that practical epistemology, we can be sure that the "rules of morality"—property is one of those rules, as is therefore justice and politics—"are not conclusions of our reason" (294). See also Wertz, "Hume, History, and Human Nature," 485.

[122] On the climatic and the racial see his essay "Of National Characters." Now Hume's performance in this essay must by no means be celebrated merely on account of our own disapproval of the objects of refutation. Hume doesn't quite hypostatize national character, but he allows it a

The "lively impression of my senses" (175), and not the reflection of reason, is to be thanked for returning me to the common world. Hume understands sense impression to be what Jonathan Kramnick describes as "contact with the world, not ideas or mental impressions of that world."[123] Reason, which traffics in the latter, can comment upon the world, but cannot enter it; reason deprives us of every means of connecting with the world, of the "use of every member and faculty" and even of itself.[124] And yet that deprivation seems to pose no danger to Hume—he may distrust it, but he does not fear it. After spending time in the company of his friends, the "speculations" of his study "appear so cold, and strain'd and ridiculous," that he finds it impossible "to enter them any farther." Though his antagonism towards his former state borders on misology, here we find no valorization of one kind of life over another but rather only a comparison between the sentiments of given moments. In making contact with the world, we do not experience objects *per se*, but object-feelings; conversely, insofar as abstraction turns away from feeling towards the object, it invites the philosophical delirium of which Hume speaks. To such denial of life the ready prescription is to spend time with others. Before we are reasonable beings, we are social beings. It's not just that we can safely abstract because we know that we can always fall back on society. It is utmost mark of health to be able to think in a way that we already feel.[125]

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[123] Kramnick, *Paper Minds*, 11.

[124] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 175.

[125] The importance of feeling to a healthy intellectual life is best seen in the Enlightenment figure of the "man of letters," the ideal type of which masterfully balances thinking and feeling in the art of correspondence. The literary form cultivates a style of intellectual intimacy wherein the weighty philosophical matters are difficult to disentangle from more personal asides. Fontenelle, Adam Smith writes, saw the amiable simplicity of the

II. Habit and Natural Order (Causality)

It's through an allusion to this scene that the opening passage of Book 3, "Of Morals," broaches the *topos* of habit as the condition of juridical categories—justice, property, and virtues both artificial and natural. "When we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life, [reason's] conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning" (293). And so Hume denies a page later that "the rules of morality" are "conclusions of our reason" (294). The common affairs of life fail to be reasonable but they also fail to be *conclusions*, in the logical but also the narrative sense. The denial is immediately qualified: "'tis in vain to pretend, that morality is discover'd only by a deduction of reason" (294). This isn't quite a repetition of the prior claim. Hume now argues that morality is not discovered *only* by the procedures of reason (which is no longer absolutely forbidden from the domain of morality). Hume's addition of the "only" is significant because it admits that reason *can* discover aspects of morality, provided that it work in tandem with some other principle. And this is what we go on to read: "reason…can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion."[126] The two modes in which reason can influence morality, property and causality, are rightly speaking inferences of imagination.

In both property and causality, the imagination infers an *ought* from an *is*. Inference is a primary activity of the imagination, and Hume finds many occasions to put it to use in the

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man of letters as their chief characteristic. *Theory*, III.2.22. On the sentiments of the man of letters cf. Christensen, *Practicing Enlightenment*, 3–7.

[126] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 295.

epistemological passages of book one.[127] The *ought* in question, though it sounds like a term of ethical thinking, should be read in the register of inference and its logical aftertaste; Hume's *oughts* are compelling in the way that convention or necessity compels. On the one hand, we have the notion of the proper object. The propriety in question is a matter of proper fit to the passions, wherein a person may suppose "a pain or pleasure to lie in an object, which has no tendency to produce either of these sensations, or which produces the contrary to what is imagined."[128] We would expect that mistake to be rather quickly rectified by an experience of the object. Hume does not expand any further, but we ought to note its philological proximity to the notion of property. On the other hand, we have the theory of causal relations. Cause, too, is fixed by the imagination.[129] In Hume's pleasantly archaic technical vocabulary, both are *necessary* connexions. A necessary connexion is that association which subtends every relationship, whether of custom or convention, power or property. Hume describes it as "a customary connexion in the thought or imagination between one object and its usual attendant."[130] The form is important. Such a connection is not materially but *morally* necessary.

The moral necessity of connections between objects ultimately depends on the habit of the mind making the connection. It's in this psychological realm that Gilles Deleuze seem a moment of novelty at play: "Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in

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[127] Hume, 54–132 passim.

[128] Hume, 295.

[129] This denial of reality being the doctrine of Hume's so-called skepticism. But Hume nowhere denies the reality of causation; he is just careful to locate that reality in imagination.

[130] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 52.

the mind which contemplates it."[131] Because we experience a relation between objects, we come to expect it every time. In this manner, habit is more than simple convention or tradition: it is not a matter of verifying a pre-existing relation but of developing the expectation that affirms the relationship in the first place. There is "no continuity apart from habit," because it is habit which makes the continuity possible.[132] If this were the case, then it would also be the case that there are no necessary relations outside of the contingencies of habit. Hume's Problem, as Quentin Meillassoux calls it, is the challenge that this notion poses to our ideas of justification: "so long as we continue to believe that there is a reason why things are the way they are rather than some other way, we will construe this world as a mystery, since no such reason will ever be vouchsafed to us."[133] The only certain experiences are not reasons but habits, because we only experience relationships to be necessary when we repeatedly impress them upon our mind. Which is to say, habit turns contingency into necessity. Its movements of repetition make the happenstance into the familiar, and the familiar into the necessary, because it is through the force of habit we find it impossible to imagine things otherwise. For that reason, there is no difference between the necessity of custom and the necessity of nature, no daylight between the laws of physics and the laws of social relations.

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[131] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 70.

[132] Deleuze, 75.

[133] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 83. This is yet again a consideration of a solitary reason. I say solitary not just for the austerity, but because Meillassoux concerns the problem as one of a *reason-why*, which takes it upon itself to justify necessity, or why "things are the way they are rather than some other way." As we saw earlier, the attitude of doubt, which requires vouchsafing, is an attitude best reserved for the solitude of one's study, not for the lively worldly experience that customary connexions require. We might well translate Meillassoux's subtitle into Hume's conceptual vocabulary as the necessity of sentimentality.

Both come about through habituation—its variations representing the various historical modulations of one and the same human nature.[134]

III. Habit and Social Order (Property)

Just as causality is the general principle of our experience of physical relations, *property* is the general principle of our experience of social relations. In its emphasis on the legal authority of habit, Hume's account of legal right could not be more different from social contract theory. In this tradition men enter into society with one another by contracting to respect their persons and their private property, as though humankind were not "innately sociable" but only insofar as it served to protect private interest.[135] For Hume, too, property is impossible without society: not in the sense that society defends property, but that society makes property thinkable. Whereas in the contractarian tradition, society reduces to the legal form of individual persons, for Hume the legal form reduces to society. It is custom, after all, that which makes the property relation a question of common sentiment rather than juridical reason. It is custom which "gives us an affection" and "reconciles us to any thing we have long enjoy'd."[136] Conversely, avarice aside, if "we never have enjoy'd, and are not accustom'd to" the possessions of others, we have no particular motivation to contest their right of continued possession.[137]

In short, Hume's notion of a "common life" encompasses both a perceptual and a practical meaning, and it does so in a manner that has particular juridical significance. Whereas social contract

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[134] Wertz, "Hume, History, and Human Nature."

[135] Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 89.

[136] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 323.

[137] Hume, 323.

theory presupposes many separate *private* mental and sentimental existences which the legal apparatus strains itself to respect, Hume's sentimentalism implies the existence of *common* sentiments which a *common* law takes itself to express.[138] As Donald Livingston argues, *common life* refers both to the popular idea that there is a world which we all perceive in common and to the shared social domain of habit and custom.[139] The reason why the turn away from philosophical skepticism is of a piece with an account of juridical custom is because both concern the "common affairs of life."

Accordingly, Hume offers four or five modes of customary thinking that, in their repetition, confirm the various relations of property: occupation, prescription, accession, and succession (the fifth, delivery, Hume sets somewhat apart because it involves an action, but even that action takes on something of a ritual or customary form).[140] Each mode is a typical turn in attention, a habit which articulates a relation of property. In moving through each of them in turn, I am less interested in rehearsing or vindicating Hume's legal philosophy than I am in outlining the many ways in which he codifies legal relations in the repetitious mechanisms of habit.

a) Occupation

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[138] On the differences between Locke and Hume's philosophies of mind, see Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 61–65.

[139] Livingston, 17, 58–59.

[140] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 324. The typology is not original to Hume. He adapts it from the continental natural law tradition of Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf in order to typologize the habitual associations of imagination. Adam Smith calls this last mode tradition, a word that obviously refers to historically-enduring custom but also, etymologically, refers to the more voluntary act of a "handing over" (from Latin *trādō, trādere*, to hand over). Cf. his *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, i.25.

Occupation is the most basic impression of the property relation. Hume tells his reader that "first possession" engages the attention most, and establishes the framework for "assigning property to any succeeding possession" (324). He calls it a "species of cause and effect": "first possession" causes "stable possession" (324–25). There are no metaphysical subtleties involved in this notion of cause, though. We are not dealing with any ethereal substance of right that adheres to the first possession and persists through its continuation. It's rather a matter of legal psychology: materially holding a thing establishes the property relation because it becomes impossible to imagine anything otherwise. "A wild boar," Hume imagines, "that falls into our snares, is deem'd to be in our possession, if it be impossible for him to escape" (325). This example offers an excellent example of the way that Hume sees legal relations as impressions of material relations: when he says that it is "impossible for [the boar] to escape," he is not making a literal proposition about the way the world is but is rather describing what goes on in the mind of the beholder. We possess the boar because we cannot imagine ourselves in any other relation to it, and we cannot imagine other relations because, having confidence in our snares, we think it "impossible for him to escape."

Rather than a statement of propositional belief, the claim to occupation requires a touch of sentiment. In fact, Hume finds the sentiment of property so remarkable precisely *because* it cannot even be translated into rigorous logical criteria. "Mark the precise limits of the one and the other, and show the standard, by which we may decide all disputes that may arise…upon this subject" (325). This rhetorical question occasions a lengthy footnote which before all else offers an answer. "If we seek a solution of these difficulties in reason and public interest, we never shall find satisfaction; and if we look for it in the imagination, 'tis evident, that the qualities, which operate upon that faculty, run so insensibly and gradually into each other, that 'tis impossible to give them any precise bounds or termination" (325n73). Evidently imagination, unlike "reason and public interest," is capable of satisfaction. It simply doesn't satisfy a certain form of justification. (Logical)

boundaries are typically taken as public goods, since they offer a set of clear criteria for making decisions and resolving disputes. But Hume's position is that this overintellectualized vision of the origin of property isn't consistent with social reality. The footnote goes on to note that many property relations suggest contradictory principles. The absence of any commonality means that "the least effort of thought may present us with instances, which are not susceptible of any reasonable decision" (325n73). The decision, if we can call it that, is all in the habit, which bestows an unimpeachable authority on the property relation which we might imagine. Note how Hume trusts his reader to accept that authority as a matter of course. There's no question that the snare, by making escape impossible, causes the boar to enter our possession. The only question fit to ask, "what do we mean by impossible?" (325), has no bearing on the existence of the relation itself and furthermore presumes a "we" that already agrees on that fact.

b) prescription

Why does it matter that we *habitually* agree to principles of right? Because otherwise we don't know *how* to agree, as a disorienting metaphysical aside in Hume's discussion of **prescription**, or property established by long possession, makes clear: "as 'tis certain, that, however every thing be produc'd in time, there is nothing real, that is produc'd by time; it follows, that property being produc'd by time, is not any thing real in the objects, but is the offspring of the sentiments, on which time alone is found to have any influence" (326). Sentiment is the stuff of time, which is to say that time bears upon associations and not objects. For that reason, long-established customs of sentimentality make it impossible to imagine things otherwise. The footnote to the prescription paragraph, speaking of sentimental association, explains that such a "change in the relation produces a consequent change in property" (326n74). The importance of custom might be best illustrated by returning to the footnote on occupation and its consideration of custom's limits. After concluding

that property admits of no reasonable decision procedure, Hume presents the antique and prodigious case of the Greek colonies:

> Two *Grecian* colonies, leaving their native country, in search of new feats, were inform'd that a city near them was deserted by its inhabitants. To know the truth of this report, they dispatch'd at once two messengers, one from each colony; who finding on their approach, that their information was true, begun a race together with an intention to take possession of the city, each of them for his countrymen. One of these messengers, finding that he was not an equal match for the other, launch'd his spear at the gates of the city, and was so fortunate as to fix it there before the arrival of his companion. This produc'd a dispute betwixt the two colonies, which of them was the proprietor of the empty city and this dispute still subsists among philosophers. For my part I find the dispute impossible to be decided, and that because the whole question hangs upon the fancy, which in this case is not possessed of any precise or determinate standard, upon which it can give sentence. (325n73)

The dispute is remarkable because it is irresolvable, and it is irresolvable because it is remarkable. In a way that recalls his model Joseph Addison's conjunction of the novel and the strange in his "Pleasures of the Imagination," Hume suggests that the spear's impressiveness forecloses on any appeal to custom and *ipso factor* throws the legal reasoning for a loop.[141] Does the spear, having been

[141] "Every thing that is new or uncommon raises a pleasure in the imagination, because it fills the soul with an agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed." Addison, *Spectator*, vol. 6, no. 412. If we believe Hume, this "elegant writer" teaches him to appreciate the willingness of imagination to absorb strange ideas. "As the fancy delights in every thing that is great, or strange, or beautiful…" Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 186–87. The contrast with later accounts of imagination and sympathy (which rely upon likeness) is remarkable. According to Ronald Paulson, Addison speaks of the "Strange" as something which "directs our attention from Novel/New as modern, local, indigenous, to remote times and regions, and from adult literature to superstitions and fantasies. And the distance seems to be in terms of transgression, raising the stakes of the more normative positions first taken by the Novel." Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange*, 66. The example of the Grecian contest, far removed from Hume's own time and place, offers precisely the distance that Addison's categories of imagination require.

fixed first, convey a greater title to the city than a messenger's touch? Or does touch prevail, being a more immediate relation between person and thing? Both parties could produce a surfeit of arguments, which is perhaps precisely why no reason can be admitted—and perhaps why the dispute is still of interest *only* "among philosophers." The faux-naïveté of the limit case gestures away from philosophical disputation, reminding the reader of the necessarily contingent grounds of our sense of property. It's not insignificant that the footnote closes with a tongue-in-cheek admission of ignorance on these matters, deferring the proof to "such as are wiser than myself" (326n73) when

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Addison, going somewhat further than Hume would allow, identifies imagination exclusively as the faculty of the strange and novel. "We are quickly tired with looking upon hills and valleys, where every thing continues fixt and settled in the same place and posture, but find our thoughts a little agitated and relieved at the sight of such objects as ever in motion, and sliding away from beneath the eyes of the beholder." Addison, *Spectator*, vol. 6, no. 412. Cited in Park, *The Self and It*, xxiv. Addison takes the imagination to be somewhat repulsed by habit and its tendency to desensitize through repetition. Addisonian delight in the unnatural and the new lends to the imagination its capacity for judgment: "the imagination can fancy to itself things more great, strange, or beautiful, than the eye ever saw, and is still sensible of some defect in what it has seen." Addison, *Spectator*, vol. 6, vol. 418. The mundane appearances of our world are insufficient to the imagination. Hume does not share this disdain for the world: his imagination is not sensible of defect, even in its capacity as an adjudicator. We should expect as much. A defect is a kind of misrelation, but there are no misrelations in the imagination, only more or less easy—abstract or vivacious—associations of ideas. Nothing imaginable is defective.

The case of the Grecian colonies illuminates part of the logic of property because it is an unfamiliar example, a limit case which allows the imagination to shine. There are no defects, only a problem of relation irresolvable within custom. The imagination shines because it needs to *make* sense of the case when we can no longer rely on judgments of habit, and the precedent of "what it has seen."

Hume very well knows proof to be impossible. (Impossible in *politics*, at any rate, though a solution might certainly be found in the study. Study is not a political category.)

The novelty in question here is the crucial element of the case. Formally speaking, the qualities of the contest are no different from those that decide possession of the boar. There, too, we saw that there was no easy criteria, no "precise bounds or termination" (325). And yet what was obvious in one case is undecidable for the other. The difference is in precedent. Even if we were to dispute the possession of the boar, we can rely on custom to decide the case. Precedent suggests to us that the hunter's claim to property in the boar results from "the effect of industry" (325n73). The work of hunting produces the property—there's nothing new in that idea. It's a relationship so customary that Hume sees no need to defend it. He says nothing new, only articulating the relationship that we already subscribe to. That agreement can't be taken for granted in the case of the contest because it has no precedent: the messengers share no prior understanding of what it would mean to have established the better claim. We might certainly might have shared a sense of what it means to win a race: that races are always won by the runner who finishes first; and that finishing means crossing *oneself*, with one's own body. Such are the normative boundaries we might have posited. Yet that spear-throw, which we cannot help but acknowledge shatters the normalcy of the case: the throw is *impressive*, not just in the usual sense but in strict accordance with Hume's psychological vocabulary. To impress is to produce an *impression*, a mental datum distinct from an idea by dint of its superior vitality. The real question of the case is which arrangement may "satisfy the fancy best" (326n73).

c) accession

The legal import of satisfaction is particularly clear in Hume's third category. In cases of **accession**, it's not time or priority but the sheer habit of comparison that gives rise to property:

> We acquire the property of objects by *accession*, when they are connected in an intimate manner with objects that are already our property, and at the same time are inferior to them. Thus the fruits of our garden, the offspring of our cattle, and the work of our slaves are all of them esteem'd our property, even before possession. Where objects are connected together in the imagination, they are apt to be put on the same footing, and are commonly suppos'd to be endow'd with the same qualities. (327)

Hume can trust that our habits are more or less similar—that "we" connect the fruit with the garden, the offspring with the cattle, and the work with the slave. That last example is somewhat more jarring than the other two, especially considering his emphatic condemnation of the practice elsewhere.[142] The ease with which the slave slides into place is nevertheless not so out of place in Hume's ontology of property. Property is a relation indifferent to the ontological qualities of the thing in question. The whole purchase of the notion of imagination is that it is the principle according to which the thinking of relations is *easy*, no matter the nature of the object. No customary ascription of property—and that includes ascription of slavery—could be problematic in itself

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[142] The condemnation comes as a rebuke of English republicanism's abuses of metaphor. "Some passionate admirers of the ancients, and zealous partizans of civil liberty, (for these sentiments, as they are, both of them, in the man, extremely just, are found to be almost inseparable) cannot forbear regretting the loss of this institution; and while they brand all submission to the government of a single person with the harsh denomination of slavery, they would gladly reduce the greater part of mankind to real slavery and subjection. But to one who considers coolly on the subject….The little humanity, commonly observed in persons, *accustomed*, from their infancy, to exercise so great an authority over their fellow-creatures, and to trample upon human nature, were sufficient alone to disgust us with that unbounded dominion." Hume, "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations," 383–84. Emphasis mine. Note the employment of the first-person plural towards the end of the passage. Whereas the inhumanity of mastery disgusts us, the readership of the essay, nevertheless we readers of the *Treatise* naturally ascribe our slave's work as our own property.

because no object can present itself to the mind as resistant in itself to property associations. We may reflect on the impropriety and injustice of enslaving a fellow human being, but moral associations of this kind, being habitual, are precisely prior to any such reflection. In imagining these connexions we are entirely indifferent to ontological distinctions between the terms (whether those distinctions are between the garden, cattle, and slave, or whether those distinctions are between the properties and the products). The natural generation of plants and animals is of a kind with social relations of production, and so property in the slave and their labor is coeval with property in the "fruits of our garden" and "the offspring of our cattle." His commas, which separate the slave *from* the cattle and the garden only to assert the ontological homogeneity of the whole list, are aesthetic and not reflective. The concept of property, in other words, is not a humanism.

That aesthetic mode of imputing property relations is, as we've seen, a way of imputing necessary connexions indifferent to the humanity or the thingliness of the object in question. Necessity applies equally to nature and society, physical law and cultural convention. Hume speaks of inferiority between the object in question and the object which is already our property: the tree in the garden causes the fruit; the cattle causes the calf; the slave causes the product. These relations of labor between the property and the inferior objects (literal in the cases of the slave and the cattle, figurative for the garden) harken back to Locke's understanding of property, wherein the "*Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his."[143] Locke's theory of property is a metaphysical one: the property-owner mixes his labor with that of the object to create a substantive *right* in the object called property, which removes the object from the common state Nature hath placed it in," excluding "the common right of other Men."[144] Labor itself creates right

[143] Locke, "Second Treatise," 287–88.

[144] Locke, 288.

in the object by mixing something of the laborer's body into it and forming the object anew. That labor furthermore displaces the object from nature (or what is equivalent the common) into the laborer's ownership. I note these features of the Lockean theory to underscore the distance between it and Hume's logic of property. Locke conditions the recognition of property on the recognition of the labor which bestows a substance called "right" onto the object. Hume's logic of property, by contrast, is neither a theory of right nor a theory of labor, because in true empiricist fashion is is concerned not with the actual substance of objects but rather their impressive surfaces. The connection between objects is a connection not of labor or substance but of the imagination, which puts the objects "on the same footing" and "commonly" endows them with the "same qualities" (the similarity making the relation of property). For Hume the question isn't so much in the register of metaphysics as in the register of grammar. Locke speaks in the third-person singular—it is *his* property at issue, whoever this he might be. The trick of grammar makes wives, children, servants, and objects mere extensions of the master's own subjectivity. The first-person plural in which Hume speaks of property is a disavowal of Locke's autarkic logic. It's we who imagine this property, and we can generally trust in that agreement of images. The reason we agree, after all, is that we've had the same experiences, witnessed the same conjunctions, and consequently expect the same relations. Even if it's the case that Hume speaks *for* the "we" when he speaks of our imagining property, it remains significant that he requires plurality to underwrite this convention of justice. Property is a matter not of a static right but of a social phenomenology.

Hume's reliance on the first-person plural for the architecture of association bears a number of similarities to what Peter de Bolla calls the regime of the eye. In his study of 18th-century British looking, *The Education of the Eye*, de Bolla defines this regime "within a grammar of the phenomenology of seeing," a grammar in which the eye takes an active role in perception: "it too

has prior knowledge."[145] This should be distinguished from the exclusionary kind of knowledge, characteristic of what de Bolla calls the "regime of the picture," that is "based on what one knows…and enables one to see or recognize what one has, in effect, already seen."[146] The picture is *about* something which the eye is to properly recognize. It is, for instance, a mistake to imagine a Biblical painting to be about anything other than the scene which it depicts. The painting cannot teach anything that a religious upbringing has not already supplied. The regime of the eye, by contrast, entrusts the eye with its own kind of knowledge. As the title of de Bolla's study might ndicate, the eye's acquisition of that knowledge is the primary problem. Under this regime the content of vision is no longer determined before the glance. Part of this surely has to do with the emergence, in the 18th century, of new subjects for visual representation and the new locations of visual deliberation. By the 1760s, the culture of visuality no longer deals primarily with primarily religious themes, and the patronage of the royal court gives way to a more public culture of open exhibition and massive architectural and environmental aesthetic projects.[147] These two transformations enable what de Bolla calls the "sentimental look," an active practice of seeing that enfolds the looker into the field of vision. "Where the gaze objectifies things seen and the glance skids, off them, the sentimental look presents the viewer to the object and to vision, allows the viewer both to recognize itself in the place of the seen and to identify with the process of seeing."[148] De Bolla explains that it is through the cultural practice of the sentimental gaze that British publics of the 1760s could make appropriate to themselves the massive public artifacts—gardens, estates,

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[145] de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, 9, 10.

[146] de Bolla, 9.

[147] I am following de Bolla's exposition of the transformation of high culture, 5–12.

[148] de Bolla, 11.

cities—around them. The sentimental look looks at more than the qualities, taken independently, of the object under view and of the viewing subject. It arranges a relationship between the viewer, the object, and the act of viewing itself. It is, in a word, it is a genuine act of looking, associative in precisely the sense that Hume attributes to the jurisgenerative logic of imagination.[149] To put it schematically, the Lockean picture of property belongs to the regime of the picture, because it posits an ontology of right which the eye may recognize but may possibly fail to do so; the Humean image of property belongs to the regime of the eye, because herein we have an act of looking *out of which* the property relation emerges. This is not to suggest that Hume in any way anticipates aesthetic developments that occurred a full two decades after the publication of his *Treatise* and postdating his every major philosophical work. Moreover I should point out that Hume is not topically concerned with, nor does his exposition of sentimentality and imagination raise questions of, the massively public practices of seeing and being seen which constitute the situation of the sentimental look. It is rather to suggest how Hume's sentimental logic of property might achieve institutional standing. It is decisive for de Bolla that "the sentimental look is a *fully* cultural form: it exists only in the ether of the process of culture"; in other words, it is a habit.[150] The English Gardens, exhibition halls, and palatial estates of the 1760s are *training grounds* on which the eyes of anyone who might enter them may educate themselves in this habit of seeing.

IV. Habit and Customary Judgment

[149] Cf. the categories of "absorption" and "conviction" in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*. The sentimental look is neither.

[150] de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, 220.

De Bolla calls this habit "connoisseurship"; as a term of refinement and distinction we're dealing with a certain kind of elitism, though one which is acquired *through one's own powers* and in principle open to all. If the connoisseur is central for other 18th-century British theorists of aesthetics, its absence from Hume's thinking on property becomes all the more notable. This is true *a fortiori* if we restrict our attention to Hume's legal thinking: while elsewhere he talks at length about refinement in taste and sentiment, when it comes to our images of property no connoisseurship is possible. But first Addison again, who, writing some thirty-odd years before Hume's *Treatise*, proposes the stakes in a marvelously unselfconscious manner:

> A Man of Polite Imagination is let into a great many Pleasures that the Vulgar are not capable of receiving…He meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession. It gives him, indeed, a kind of Property in everything that he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated Parts of Nature administer to his Pleasures: So that he looks upon the world, as it were, in another Light, and discovers in it a Multitude of Charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of Mankind.[151]

The act of beholding with a "Polite Imagination" gives the one who bears it "a kind of Property in everything that he sees," an exclusive title to something in the object not open to "the Vulgar." Whatever this kind of property is, its distinctiveness from possession suggests that it is not an economic category and in fact boasts a certain superiority over it. The inequality Addison suggests between the "Man of Polite Imagination" and the "Vulgar" is decidedly not any material inequality (though it must certainly imply material exclusions: no gentleman is a common person). Whatever the kind of property in question *is*, the reader can be sure that the connoisseur is the only one capable of owning it (because the only one capable of appreciating it, nay, capable of *perceiving* it). We are dealing rather with a perceptual inequality, or perhaps better a perceptual *distinction*. Refined perception precludes property in the matter at hand. The "Man of Polite Imagination" is not the

[151] Addison, *Spectator*, vol. 6, no. 411.

landowner, and *a fortiori* is refined imagination is most stimulated precisely when he surveys uncultivated land. This is not a theory of disinterestedness, where the formal inutility of the object to the viewing subject is a condition for taking a real aesthetic pleasure in it; Addison's logic rather expresses the inherent utility *in* pleasure, as though passion could stimulate substantive economic interest. The "Man of Polite Imagination" may not be a landowner, that is, part of the country gentry, but he is *certainly* of more gentlemanly breed and may indeed have ambitions of rising to that station. Addison's figure here reads like a townsperson who has gone out for a jaunt to inspect a plot of land. The novel and uncommon sights that stimulate his imagination are almost preliminary to the purchase of an estate.

Hume's discussions of property, on the contrary, provide no opportunity for a refined imagination to appear. By this I mean he systematically prioritizes the vulgar sentiments as determinants of property relations. To be clear, even though Hume has no notion of refinement, it is not to say that Hume disavows the influence of Addison's pleasures. It's not insignificant that among Hume's opening statements in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* is a pronouncement that "Addison, perhaps, shall be read with pleasure, when Locke shall be entirely forgotten."[152] Though the prediction falls humorously flat today, as a declaration of intentions we can hear a desire to take Addison's rambling as a model of pleasure which Hume's *Enquiry* will attempt to model. Addison's pleasures are worthy of imitation because they result from the "easy philosophy," Hume's counterintuitive name for the more valuable and more enduring philosophical project which "considers man chiefly as born for action" and makes its audience "*feel* the difference

[152] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 3. However false the prediction may ring to our ears, we should attend to the easy confidence with which Hume announces it.

between vice and virtue."[153] The *easy* philosophy is easy because it is open to all. It requires hard labor, to be sure, but that work is not unintelligible to common people (or the vulgar, as Addison would have it), and it is not to be practiced only by a few. This easy philosophy, the philosophy immediately accessible *to* and always practiced *within* the common affairs of life. Now notwithstanding that ultimate referent, Hume does spend a great deal of time theorizing aesthetic and moral categories open only to a very few, as in his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" which treats at length the question of "the perfection of every sense or faculty."[154] Even there, the faculties yield to habit however much they admit of natural differentiation. "But though there be naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another, nothing tends further to increase and improve this talent, than *practice*."[155] In the *Treatise,* refinement generally only appears as a quality of the isolated intellectual abstractions to which Hume opposes the common and the sentimental.[156]

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[153] Hume, 1–2.

[154] Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," 236.

[155] Hume, 237.

[156] For refinement as a term of intellect see Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 5, 52, 174–75, 192 and passim. Refinement is the opposite of vivacity. Refined thoughts touch us, but only to the most delicate degree: "Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us; and yet we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence, which implies a manifest contradiction." Hume, 174. The contradiction seems to me a little more refined than he supposes it to be. Nevertheless we can consider the opposite position, as do those who contrast it to the frivolous appearances of imagination. "'Tis usual with mathematicians, to pretend, that those ideas, which are their objects, are of so refin'd and spiritual a nature, that they fall not under the conception of the fancy, but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view…" 52. Hume is not concerned to dispute the point in defense of fancy; the distance from the world

It is decisive for Hume's conjoining of commonness with sentimentality that a principle of moral taste is common to all, without qualification. "For if nature did not aid us in this particular, 'twou'd be vain for politicians to talk of *honourable* and *dishonourable*, *praise-worthy* or *blameworthy*. These words wou'd be perfectly unintelligible" (321). No sentiments which remain unintelligible to others, or as Addison might say, "conceal themselves from the great generality of Mankind," can serve as a sentiment of property.[157] On the contrary, the more obvious, trite, and even vulgar observations of the fancy might be the most suited to binding people together in relations of property.

d) succession

The easier those observations come to people, the more persuasively the imagination has legislated. The three rules of determining property that we've examined so far are, after all, are sentimental associations that must in principle be not simply intelligible to but easy and agreeable to all. The fourth rule which Hume discusses, **succession**, is no different. "The right of succession is a very natural one" (329), Hume tells us; and yet he notes that the right, as with every other, "depends, in a great measure on the imagination" (330). This is an ordinary and almost-natural-seeming imagination. When we consider the succession of property, as in cases of inheritance, "'tis evident the person's children naturally present themselves to the mind" (329). It is the natural relation is because it is the *easy* relation, the one that presents itself most immediately to the mind. The easy relation is opposed to the refined relation, just as the vivacious is opposed to the most abstract. And if we feel tempted to ask—in a rather suspicious manner—what this habit of relation conceals, we

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which the mathematicians posit plays out much to the disadvantage of refinement, insofar as "we can give no reason for our most general and refin'd principles, beside our experience of their reality." 5.

[157] Addison, *Spectator*, vol. 6, no. 411.

should notice that Hume does not share our temptation. His strategy of criticism runs in the opposite direction. Rather than criticize the sentiment by comparison with an idea, Hume locates the origin of the idea in sentiment. Kant, as we saw last chapter, anticipates a whole set of modern anxieties when he considers the imagination as a possibilizing force. In Hume, by contrast, the imagination functions as a necessitizing force. It makes relations seem necessary, whether because we fancy a certain naturalness to them or because we simply cannot imagine things being otherwise. That necessity emerges from habits and customs of imagination that themselves could have been otherwise. Custom and habit are not traditions. Custom is, until it is not, and while custom is easy, remaining entirely and constantly with it is hard. The radical displacement of jurisprudence from the analysis of right onto the history of custom is what Hume calls "the progress of the sentiments" (321).[158]

V. A Language for Moral Relations

The appeal to natural sentiments, insofar as it is an appeal against our own autonomy, requires that we rethink our notions of responsibility. Habit is a kind of agency that we exercise; it seems to happen *to us*. The appeal to sentiment is a trust in the automatic, unselfconscious associations that we habitually make. There is a sense in which such automaticity is all there is to being human, which is why Hume makes these so-called artificial virtues (of property and justice) the center of his moral and political analysis. In locating artifice in an "anatomy of human nature" (171), we find that the liveliness of the imagination is not *our* liveliness. "'Tis merely the force and liveliness of the perception, which constitutes the first act of judgment."[159] Judgments of the

[158] Cf. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*.

[159] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 61.

imagination, which are presubjective in nature, consist only in the forceful and lively association of impressions that specifically excludes what Hume calls *ideas*, i.e., "the faint images of these [impressions] in thinking and reasoning."[160] Habitual and automatic associations of the mind, rather than reasoned deliberation, are at play in operation of judgment. This agrees with what Hume's conclusions concerning mental anatomy more generally: "The memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, *or the vivacity of our ideas*."[161]

In other words, Hume's is a deeply antihumanist account of human nature. As Livingston comments, for Hume "we have no direct access to the world through either sense or memory that is not mediated by an interpretation of the imagination": that is, our only access to the world lies outside of our control.[162] It's unclear whether the grammatical possessive Livingston employs is subjective or objective: does the imagination perform the interpretation or is the imagination the object of interpretation? Put differently, how can we be certain of ideas which have no hand in formulating? Experience and habit, "conspiring to operate upon the imagination, *make me form* certain ideas…" (172, emphasis mine). Ideas associate among themselves, and the faculties—memory, senses, understanding—only touch the surface of those associations. Hume's psychology is relentless in submitting the problem for his reader's consideration. "No wonder a principle so inconstant and fallacious should lead us into errors," Hume laments, speaking of this imagination, "when implicitly follow'd (as it must be) in all its variations."[163] It's as though human agency were subordinate to the agency of vivacious ideas. So, for example, when Hume seeks to justify

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[160] Hume, 7.

[161] Hume, 173. Emphasis mine.

[162] Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, 240.

[163] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 173.

patriarchy, he does so by passing from the tendency to the normative: "as we have a stronger *propensity* to pass from the idea of the children to that of the father, than from the same idea to that of the mother, we *ought* to regard the former relation as the closer and more considerable" (201, emphasis mine).

Hume's friend Henry Home offers a similar observation as the very first of his *Elements of Criticism*. "A man while awake is conscious of a continued train of perceptions and ideas passing in his mind. It requires *no activity on his part* to carry on the train: *nor can he at will* add any idea to the train."[164] Hume does not go so far as to disclaim any activity on the part of the person, but mainly because it's not clear that there *is* a person aside from the association of ideas. "They are successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind" (165). The nature of the self is an assemblage of perceptions that associate with one another, sometimes more easily, sometimes less. That language of ease runs throughout his discourse on the various rules which determine property. In first possession, or occupation, we find "an easy reason" (324), one that will "be easily imagined" (323). Prescription, for its part, names the rule of temporal ease: "a man's title, that is clear and certain at present, will seem obscure and doubtful fifty years hence, even tho' the facts, on which it is founded, shou'd be prov'd with the greatest evidence and certainty" (326). Accession, too, "arises from the easy transition of ideas" (327). Succession, the last rule, concerns "the influence of *relation*, or the association of ideas, by which we are naturally directed to consider the son after the parent's decease" (329)—Hume here punning on two modes of relation, the filial and the ideational, where the ease of ideation bears some connection to the presumed naturalness of filiation.[165] The

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[164] Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 1:21. Emphasis mine.

[165] But that word, presumption, gives us reason to think that on Hume's account nature is always a product of artifice.

presumption of naturalness is key to the tenor of the relation. When "we are naturally directed," we are directed *through* nature, though not *by* it. Nothing normative originates there. The nature in question is the nature of an artifice, the nature of something that goes without saying; and it goes without so saying because it is such an *easy* or association of ideas. It is not the filial relation that conditions the ideational, but the ideational that conditions the filial.[166] Consider more broadly: "In all these cases, and particularly that of accession, there is first a natural union betwixt the idea of the person and that of the object, and afterwards a new and *moral* union produc'd by that right or property" (327). The transition is what we would call habituation: it concerns the transformation of a "natural union" into a "moral union," or a union of *mores*, i.e. custom and habit. The movement from naturity to morality takes the form of a discontinuity rather than a devolution of legitimacy: the standard of legitimacy for a moral relation is to be located not in a distant past when there was at first a natural union but within the moral union itself. Whatever the shape of the natural union, it

[166] Regarding these two modes of association cf. Edward Said's articulation of the distinction in literary modernity. "The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of "life," whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society." Filiation, belonging to an asocial world, is only a philosophical fiction. The purpose of that fiction is to illustrate a kind of lost completeness: an authority, legitimacy, harmony that we have always lacked and yet have never doubted. Affiliation is the patchwork solution to the psychoanalytic abyss between wanting and knowing. "What I am describing is the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship…" *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 19–20. Said's modernism provides a solution to an anxiety that Hume would not be able to conceive. Habit compensates for nothing; it does not respond to lack. It emerges rather from a vivacious *presence*, the overflowing associativity of imagination.

bears no consequences for that of the moral union. Whatever philosophical narrative concerning the origin of habit Hume might concoct is not explanatory but conjectural: philosophers "may, if they please, extend their reasoning to the suppos'd *state of nature*; provided they allow it to be a mere philosophical fiction, which never had, and never cou'd have, any reality" (316-17). The fiction in question is not just the fiction of his history but the fiction that habit would need such a historiographical justification whatsoever. The fiction purports to explain why our habits are *this* way rather than another. Whatever their history, though, as matters stand, our habits of association did actually turn out *this* way, and so "we are naturally directed" (329) to persist in that way of thinking.

The imagination is a comprehensive faculty: it "enters into all our reasonings" (95). Under its government, we are no longer the ones who associate ideas, but the ideas themselves associate among one another. Like Kant, Hume takes the imagination to be a condition even of memory, or the simple reproduction of sense. Even this faculty depends on the artifice of associations. Just pages into the *Treatise*, after explaining the nature of perception and distinguishing perception into impressions and ideas, Hume describes two elementary operations of mind. Memory reproduces perceptions in their proper order; imagination freely rearranges them. But this way of putting the distinction is untenable because, as A. J. Ayer glosses it, "we cannot return to our past impressions to discover where this difference obtains."[167] Happily, there is another way to distinguish memory from imagination: the memory, as is "evident at first sight," produces ideas "much more lively and strong than those of the imagination."[168] The distinction serves to delimit the scope of imagination. Aside from difference in vitality, the faculties are also distinct in their capacity to order their material. On the one hand, "the chief exercise of the memory is not to preserve the simple ideas, but

[167] Ayer, *Hume*, 29.

[168] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 11.

their order and position"; on the other hand, the characteristic liberty of the imagination is its capacity "*to transpose and change its ideas.*"[169] Though this distinction appears so early in the text, it seems not to be the structure of Hume's philosophical argument and appears to have entirely dropped out of the philosophical conclusions of the *Treatise*'s first book. If the conclusion forgets any distinction between the memory and imagination, it's because the imagination has entirely usurped memory. Of the two qualities that distinguished the dignity of memory, its preservation of order and its superior vivacity, the latter is given entirely to imagination. The problem with the imagination's becoming memory is that there's no longer a way to tell between the impressions of memory and those of mere fancy. (Perhaps this is why Ayer insists that Hume's thinking on the point "is clearly unacceptable.")[170] At the outset of the treatise, we seem rather sure (perhaps because Hume assures us) that it is an easy distinction between the memory and imagination, because the former, in dealing with ideas more forceful and lively than the latter's, naturally carries a superior sense of reality. By the end of the *Treatise*'s first book, though, the imagination has entirely captured that vivacity (alternatively "firmness, or solidity, or force, or vivacity"; Hume assures us that whatever the term, it is "related to the same quality," ultimately the quality of imagination).[171] The dissolution of the distinction between memory and imagination has something very much to do with the distinction between nature and artifice. Memory is because it repeats impressions without

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[169] Hume, 12. Emphasis in the original.

[170] The trouble begins as soon as imagination and memory traffic in the same mental matter. This thinking is mistaken; "it is perfectly possible to remember a past experience…without the aid of any images at all." Ayer, *Hume*, 30. There is no philosophical problem here at all! Unfortunately Ayer can save his intuitions only by rejecting the first premises of Hume's philosophy, those concerning the nature of perceptions.

[171] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 74.

changing their order. Imagination transposes as it pleases without concern for the resemblance of its representations. If memory is always natural, imagination is always artificial.

But the properly philosophical perspective—i.e. the perspective of common life—cannot draw a distinction between the natural and artificial. Consider the paradigmatic case of education: "as education is an artificial and not a natural cause, and as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason" (81), we might disdainfully call it stultification instead, "a fallacious ground of assent to any opinion" (81). Yet this distinction itself is just as fallacious: "in reality it be built almost on the same foundation of *custom and repetition* as our experience or reasonings from causes and effect" (81, emphasis mine). Hume denies any distinction in categories of experience. Experience of education is exactly identical to experience of the world. In every case, custom and repetition serve as the grounds for assent, and serve as the grounds in identical ways. In a footnote to this passage, Hume gives a reason for that identity: "our assent to all probable reasonings is founded on the vivacity of ideas." [172] Assent is the index of belief, vivacity is the index of imagination, and there is a direct relation between the two. As such, "it [belief] resembles many of those fancies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination."[173] This footnote goes on to describe two senses of in which we can use the term imagination. When opposed to memory, it refers to the faculty "by which we form our fainter ideas." When opposed to reason, it means "the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings." In either sense, whether we exclude the rigor of reasoning or not, Hume wants to suggest that the imagination is a faculty of fainter ideas. This settlement of the confusion is all the more remarkable if we note that the confusion arises in the context of imagination's liveliness. Hume doesn't so much

[172] Hume, 81n22.

[173] Hume, 81n22.

settle the question as evade it. It is one thing to claim that the imagination works faintly, and another entirely to make the claim after conceding its vivacity. There is a third possibility to which Hume leaves the gates wide open, the one with which he closes the first book of the treatise: an imagination opposed to nothing at all. No matter how often Hume might try to specify its identity as a distinct faculty, imagination constantly dissolves into the whole mind. It becomes a quality of every other faculty. Again *belief*, because it "is founded on the vivacity of ideas, it resembles many of those fancies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination."[174] This is a somewhat delicate way of putting a philosophical problem, especially given the categorical judgment with which it concludes. If we suppose that opprobrium to issue from the viewpoint of philosophy, the logic of the statement seems clear enough. We want certainty in belief; the "fancies and prejudices" of imagination mean that such certainty *must of necessity* be sentimental and grounded in the common affairs of life.

The imaginal account of property leaves us less with a prescription than a problematic. It may well be that habits are open to change in principle, but are they open to change *for us*? The radical anthropology of habit and convention seems to foreclose on any notion of responsibility. Thus readers of Hume, concerned with divining his philosophical position on political affairs, take his confidence in custom either as an intellectual tell for conservatism or as a whiggish expression of optimism in the progressive amelioration of society; both hypotheses make the same mistake of assuming the habit is a behaviorism which determines political outcomes.[175] American pragmatist William James calls habit "the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent"; Hume might agree with the analogy, but in practice the angular moment of the flywheel points

[174] Hume, 81n22.

[175] For an example of the latter, see Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 87.

society in no determinate direction.[176] It need neither carry us forward nor keep us in place. That habit is the subject of the sentence is precisely the problem. Insofar as habit simply happens to us—as it automates our relations with one another—it seems to make of politics merely an epiphenomenal affair: there is neither revolution nor reform nor anything more than mere modification at the margins of our manners.

VI. Customs and Customary Law

To this objection Hume offers no response, partly because the question is too dialectical to respect his sense of the answer. Habituation is a middle range of agency, conjunctive rather than negative, and so unlike the negative models of will or commitment or self-interest. In other words, rather than the representative model of agency peculiar to political philosophy after 1789, Hume finds in habit a *juridical* model of agency. Property, habit, custom, convention—this is a language exceedingly familiar to an English audience of the 18th century, being central categories of their common law. "The common law," Pocock writes, "was by definition immemorial custom."[177]

In his lectures on Hume's political philosophy, John Rawls explains that "Hume calls justice an 'artificial virtue' because it is a disposition to adhere to a general system of rules recognized to be for the public good."[178] This is a misreading as far as the *Treatise* is concerned. Justice is an object of sentiment, not reflection, and it is an artificial virtue because its generality is on the order of a *custom*, something which varies across era and nation. Now certainly Rawls intends in part to appreciate

[176] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1:121.

[177] Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, 37.

[178] Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 180.

how the harmony between the passions and the intellect forges "peace in human society."[179] But that harmony, as we've seen, does not take the form of recognition, though Rawls interprets Hume "to be saying that *we would not approve* of these institutions unless *we recognized* that…these institutions have beneficial social consequences and serve the public good."[180] The medium of justice is habit, and its rules are imagined rather than recognized.[181] When it comes to speaking of justice, Hume's first order of business is to correct Rawls's view. "*First,* public interest is not naturally attach'd to the observation of the rules of justice….experience sufficiently proves, that men, in the ordinary conduct of life, look not so far as the public interest" (309). That said, Rawls does identify a real problem for Hume, even if his intellectualized reading merely highlights what it tries to resolve. What happens to agency under custom and habit? Recognition allows Rawls to avoid the question of agency because it tethers habit to rational will; our collective recognition of a principle is a sufficient condition for its realization. Recognition is not a part of Hume's moral vocabulary for the same reason that the will is a problem for morality rather than a solution. "'Tis one thing to know virtue, another to conform the will to it" (299). In one respect sentiment is available to reason, but in another respect entirely opaque to it. We can readily perceive our feelings, but they are not so ready

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[179] Rawls, 180; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 321.

[180] Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, 180. Emphasis mine. Rawls seems rather to be glossing the later *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, wherein Hume asserts that "every man, in embracing that virtue [of justice], must have an eye to the whole plan or system…" Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 95. To have an eye to something is quite distinct from recognizing it; and even if we were to defend that identification, it is not, as we have seen, the logic of justice explicated in the *Treatise*. The Hume of that first text is not the Hume of the later, more refined *Enquiries*.

[181] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 309.

to hand as they are to the understanding; we can change them only obliquely, through an action of common understanding, that is, law.

What the law concerns itself with is custom, not right. It may be that the two views of law are similar in a great many respects. "This theory concerning the origin of property, and consequently of justice, is, in the main, the same with that hinted at and adopted by Grotius."[182] Hume's invocation of such a premier early modern moral philosopher and theorist of right is an acknowledgement of law's centrality to his picture of the sentiments. Grotius is a jurist, and like Hume, thinks of law as codified convention. At the same time, their agreement at a formal level only puts into relief the decisive differences in the confidences and concerns. Having studied Hugo Grotius under William Scot, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, Hume finds in him an example of the refined reasoning from which one must constantly turn away.[183] Perhaps that aversion had something to do with his performance in Scot's classroom. If, as Hume remarks in retrospect, he "too much neglected" his studies in Greek, he presumably took just as little interest in the rest of Scot's intellectual horizons.[184] Biographical speculation aside, Grotius's conception of human sociality, "as so many of its critics from their day to this have pointed out, required a highly reductionist view of the human personality as one motivated only by egotism."[185] Society is possible here only when organized by as few moral axioms as possible. Hume, by contrast, considers interest to be at best an epiphenomenal fact of social life, a post hoc method of rationalizing the plurality of human experience. Reducing human experience to egotism may account for the formal structure of

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[182] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 95n63.

[183] Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 41–42.

[184] Hume, "My Own Life," 612.

[185] Pagden, *The Enlightenment*, 67. See also Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 62–67.

property relations but cannot explain their substance, insofar as it is the substantive variety of sentiment that give rise to those relations. To locate the origins of society in terms of a logic of right (in this respect Grotius anticipates Rawls) is to overdetermine the nature of human association. At best, its nature is boundlessly more plural than any logic of right can encompass. At worst, the juridical desire to render sentiment transparent to interest actively suppresses what Tobias Menely has called the "creaturely voice" of human nature.[186] Hume's citing Grotius at this point is unexpected mainly because Grotius is a thinker of subjective natural right. Right that is not habit can have no part to play in our common affairs. Anthony Pagden argues that the Enlightenment response to the egotist reduction was to recover an older scholastic vision of human sociability as a wide-ranging and pluralistic "universal moral and political code," which envisions "a unified and essentially benign humanity."[187] The key term is universal: the law is invariant across time and place, because all of humanity participates in it. Hume's confidence in law comes instead from his confidence in a very different source, the particular sentiments that undergird the law.

An authority structured around the particular conventions of the sentiments is very different than one structured around rights. This is where habit and custom, being terms of common-law jurisprudence, provide a readymade vehicle for thinking the political import of imagination, which becomes a political activity insofar as it becomes a legal activity. The *exemplum* of this jurisprudence is Cicero, who belongs to neither to the universal abstractions of natural law nor to the metaphysics of scholasticism. "I suppose, if Cicero were now alive, it would be found difficult to fetter his moral sentiments by narrow systems."[188] Narrow systems can only really hope to *fetter* the sentiments, and

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[186] Menely, *The Animal Claim*, 57–67.

[187] Pagden, *The Enlightenment*, 65–66.

[188] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 103n72.

even then only with difficulty—much less hope to emulate them. Inly with great difficulty can they encourage the sentiments that they describe. There is in the logic of right knows nothing of Cicero's persuasive power over the sentiments.[189] This is, at any rate, where Hume's move to sentiment over right agrees with standard Enlightenment dismissals of systematic thinking: it is not so much that such thinking is wrong as that it feels lifeless. Consider what Voltaire, consummate *philosophe des Lumières*, has to say on the subject through B, a character in one of his philosophical dialogues: "I was often bored by Grotius; but he is very learned; apparently he loves reason and virtue; but reason and virtue don't affect you very much when they are boring."[190] Dismissive, certainly, but dismissive for reasons not irrelevant to our considerations here. Grotius is boring because his philosophy of natural right cannot touch the ebbs and flows of human feeling. His commitment's noncontagiousness, which prevents our being affected by his reason and virtue no matter how much you and I might esteem ourselves to love those qualities, serves only and even to redound upon his head. Only apparently does Grotius love reason and virtue, and the air of fraudulence only heightens the more, and the more tediously, he extols them. He is, B continues, "an utter pedant" (and for his part, Thomas Hobbes is nothing more than "a sad philosopher"; their sentiments are proof of their mistakes).[191] If Grotius is a pedant, Voltaire is a polemicist, so we ought not assent to his judgments of character too quickly. But within the remark is a sentiment perfectly agreeable in itself, because it concerns the dignity of sentimentality. There is something repulsive about the gesture to reduce all sociality to the expression of law. Despite all of their agreement on formal questions of order, *this* is

[189] Not to say that Cicero did not exercise a great influence over Grotius himself; see Straumann, *Roman Law in the State of Nature*, 51–82.

[190] Voltaire, "The A B C," 87.

[191] Voltaire, 87.

the difference between Grotius and Hume. The difference between them is the risk that theorizing the abstractions of right distances us from the sentiments that animate human nature.

Sentiment is prior to right for the same reason that the relevant political category is property over persons. It's not that Hume is a defender of property; it's that he declines to defend a proper humanity. That is to say, common life is not so much about the ontology of individuality, but rather about the relations by which individuals come to exist in society. This is oratory as political science; it consists of an "appeal to common sense, and the natural sentiments of the mind."[192] Hume notes with approval that the "fame of Cicero flourishes at present; but that of Aristotle is utterly decayed."[193] Just as we saw that Addison is superior to Locke, Cicero is superior to Aristotle—and the tradition of classical moralism superior to that of scholastic philosophy. ""Tis one thing to know virtue, another to conform the will to it" (299). That other thing is the customary force of law.

VII. Law as an Act of Habituation

e) delivery

Though the skeptical dictum's radical distinction between knowledge, will, and conformation would seem to make any concept of agency, legal or otherwise, difficult to countenance, Hume declines to do away with the terms. How is it possible to remain an agent? Hume answers, through the action of our sentiment. Consider the account of practical sentimentality he offers while discussing **delivery**, the final mode of habituating imagination to property:

> In order to aid the imagination in conceiving the transference of property, we take the sensible object, and actually transfer its possession to the person, on whom we wou'd bestow the property. The suppos'd resemblance of the actions, and the presence of this sensible delivery, deceive the mind, and make it fancy, that it

[192] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.

[193] Hume, 2–3.

> conceives the mysterious transition of the property. And that this explication of the matter is just, it appears hence, that men have invented a *symbolical* delivery, to satisfy the fancy, where the real one is impracticable. Thus the giving the keys of a granary is understood to be the delivery of the corn contained in it: The giving of stone and earth represents the delivery of a mannor. (331)

To recognize a change in legal status, the law requires the actual transfer of an actual object. Physical delivery fulfills one purpose only: to produce a relation in the imagination. This is in strict opposition to the legal standard of *voluntas*, by which the expression of will is the criterion for the transfer of title.[194] Hume is conscious that there is strictly speaking something improper about such an affair: the physical transfer of an object will only "deceive the mind," but deception is the very thing we need for conviction in the new relation.[195]

The illusion that stimulates the imagination is so necessary that even in cases where an actual handoff of the object itself would prove impossible, it is necessary to "have invented a *symbolical* delivery, to satisfy the fancy," as though we would be otherwise unable to imagine, i.e. to perceive, the transfer of right that the law imposes. The material transfer of the object is expressly *not* intended to fulfill the legal obligation implied in the transfer of right. That is, delivery of the key does not transfer property in the key (or even the granary which it unlocks), and delivery of the dirt does not *merely* (or at all) signify property in the dirt. Both are instances of a mode by which our fancy "conceives the mysterious transition of the property." It is not a matter of the concerned

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[194] Again, Grotius is the relevant authority from whom this position departs. See Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ii.4; Straumann, *Roman Law in the State of Nature*, 194.

[195] Hume's discussion here crucially relies on the distinction between property and possession. Possession refers to the material facts of handling and enjoying an object; property refers specifically to a legal relationship which need not have anything whatsoever to do with possession. This same thought animates the critiques of private property that we find emergent in the 19th century.

parties' recognizing the law, which is an easy enough task for the understanding, but of their *habituation to* its pronouncement. It produces that habit by stimulating the fancy. Material fulfillment of the law is one thing; metaphorical fulfillment another. Hume's insistence that delivery has nothing to do with the legal matters at hand is a claim that pure legal title, abstracted from all experience, has no force in and of itself. "The property of an object, when taken for something real, without any reference to morality, or the sentiments of the mind, is a quality perfectly insensible, and even inconceivable" (330–331).[196] To take a determination of law as something real in and of itself is inconceivable. It cannot intervene in the world of fact, cannot of itself produce new relations.

How, then, does the law harmonize the world with its pronouncements? The contractarian tradition usually explains this though consent, and the mechanisms of coercion which the law undertakes to express it.[197] Hume is not a contractarian, and does not make the mistake of reducing

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[196] Hume continues: "This is a kind of superstitious practice in civil laws, and in the laws of nature, resembling the *Roman Catholic* superstitions in religion" (331). Hume, safe to say, does not intend the comparison to be a flattering one. But the uncomplimentary comparison between the laws (civil and natural) and the church is, I take it, meant to draw attention to the shifting sands upon which the edifice of legal doctrine is built. The problem is why law's strict reasoning should be accompanied by so much ritual. The answer is that law must be considered mysterious in the strictest sense, namely the same sense in which the holy mysteries are mysterious. "As the *Roman Catholics* represent the inconceivable mysteries of the *Christian* religion, and render them more present to mind, by a taper, or habit, or grimace, which is suppos'd to resemble them; so lawyers and moralists have run into like inventions for the same reason" (331, emphasis in the original). The central problem confronting both the church and the courtroom is the comprehension of incomprehensible doctrine.

[197] "A legal system is a coercive order of public rules addressed to rational persons for the purpose of regulating their conduct and for providing the framework for social cooperation." Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*,

law to a singular (or even preponderant) impulse to punishment.[198] Consent to the law is one thing, but it first requires that the law *make sense*, both as an object of reason and an object of the fancy. Hume's distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact would suggest as much.[199] A bare legal pronouncement has no efficacy for the same reason that philosophy produces phantoms: the relation between ideas which it determines cannot change the facts of possession. Relations in the common affairs of life can be distinguished from law because ideas of relation involve sensation and

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sec. 38. See also Goerner and Thompson, "Politics and Coercion." An account of the material form such coercion takes can be found in Cover, "Violence and the Word." Hume's law involves ritual, not violence. It does not seek to exact consent from "rational persons." It is addressed to the agreements of sentimental persons.

[198] A mistake made all too quickly and often by establishment liberalism of the 21st century. A representative example: in a recent op-ed for the New York Times, Nicholas Kristof accounts an argument with his daughter concerning the recent removal of Harvard law professor Ronald Sullivan from his deanship on account of his legal representation of Harvey Weinstein. Kristof's predictable position is that "*Of course* no professor should be penalized for accepting an unpopular client." This is not at all opposed to his daughter's position that "*of course* a house dean should not defend a notorious alleged rapist." "Stop the Knee-Jerk Liberalism That Hurts Its Own Cause." His conceit is that both parties are talking past one another, and yet it seems that the misunderstanding is very much one-directional. Her claim—like Harvard students' claim—is a claim about character and conduct, *not* about penality. How could Kristof displace the one to the other so easily? And who finds in punishment the natural response to judgment? Certainly not the daughter, nor the students. Even the aggrieved professor of demonstrably questionable judgment knows that it is in the "reaction of university administrators" that we find such a habit of associating judgment and punishment. Sullivan, Jr, "Why Harvard Was Wrong to Make Me Step Down."

[199] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 15.

imagination, and the ideas of law involve only the most refined abstractions. Law is conceptual but not sensible; cause is sensible but not conceptual. Cause is a sentimental relation, one that concerns imagination rather than abstraction, and the determinations of law have nothing to do with sentiments. But for that reason it also has nothing to do with the world. Unless the law were to prescribe a sentimental activity…

The law of property is simply a law of social experience: relations of property track the mental associations we make, no matter how much we might argue about what we *should* think. Even when law subvenes in relations of property it can do so only by submitting itself to fancy; law adjudicates nothing without imagination. Imagination, for its part, and insofar as it functions as a principle of political action, adjudicates nothing except within law. The apparatus of law that guides the sentiments, the sentiments that actualizes the principles of law. Law and sentiment need one another. As Hume is sure to admit at the outset, it is only for "trivial reasons" (330) that the civil laws—and the "laws of nature" (330), too!—require delivery of objects. Trivial reasons are reasons external to law, superfluous to the legal determination itself (*de minimis non curat lex:* the law does not concern itself with trifles). In a sense, *trivial* reasons are not reasons at all, yet leave an impression nevertheless. Impression, a basic term of Hume's philosophical vocabulary, refers to the more vivacious kinds of perceptions (ideas being the fainter, more abstract variety). In the strictest sense, the term has only a metaphorical relationship to mind, but as Brad Pasanek notes, the metaphor is so forceful that authors of Hume's period readily literalize it: "in the sixth edition of Phillips's [1658] *New World of Words*, the term 'To Impress' is defined, without comment on its figurative or literal status, as 'to print, stamp, or make an Impression upon the Mind, or upon the Natural Faculties of the Body'; and an almost identical definition is found in Bailey's [1730] *Dictionarium Britannicum*."[200]

[200] Pasanek, *Metaphors of Mind*, 138.

Its literal meaning has a specific sense concerning a material mark. A printing press impresses words onto a sheet of paper. A wax seal impresses its image upon the wax that seals a letter. The material impressions inform the metaphorical usage: impression involves the thing which impresses, the object which is impressed, and the form that impressing transfers. Law needs sentiment to impress itself upon the mind, which is a way of impressing itself upon the world. As it is, the "imperfection of our ideas" makes the ideas of law unimpressive in the most material sense: they cannot impress their shape in the minds of law's subjects. No one is immediately interpellated by law because the quality of legality is "a quality perfectly insensible": law must first be mediated through sense. "Now as nothing more enlivens any idea than a present impression, and a relation betwixt that impression and the idea," an instrument must be found to *impress* the form of the law upon the mind. That instrument is "the sensible object" (331). Its delivery impresses the law upon the mind. It enlivens the law by satisfying the fancy. Common usage—and Hume is very common in this regard—speaks of impressions rather loosely, "identifying cause and effect" and collapsing the whole nexus of relations into the activity of impression.[201] Law needs sentiment because it needs to be impressive. For that, law needs to be *imagined*. The epigraph to the third book of the *Treatise* asks the "lover of austere virtue" to "ask now what virtue is and demand to see Goodness in her visible shape."[202] The *Treatise* concludes with the same gesture. Even if there is "something hideous" to the anatomy

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[201] Pasanek, 146.

[202] Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 291. Oxford editors David J. Norton and Mary Norton provide this translation in their notes. They adopt it from Lucan, *The Civil War*, 547. The Latin which reads as follows: *Durae semper virtutis amator, Quaere quid est virtus, et posce exemplar honesti.* The rather free translation of "*exemplar honesti*" as "goodness in her visible shape" is a suggestive gloss on Hume's thinking. *Honestum*, as it happens, is the central principle of Cicero's moral philosophy. See Cicero, *On Ends*, passim.

Hume has forwarded, "[a]n anatomist, however, is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter; and 'tis even impracticable to excel in the latter art without the assistance of the former" (395). Here, virtue and goodness make their appearance as images, which is to say, realities inaccessible except through sensation, even though the anatomist may offer advice. Action is impracticable without a good account of its sensorial capacities. For Hume, a good account does not offer the ideal rule, but describes the actually-existing habits of use and enjoyment to be found in the world, however hideous those associations may be. We could put it even more strongly: for Hume imagination and property are just the internal and external aspects of the same social relation.

This is why, despite his interest in commercial society, Hume is not a capitalist. Eighteenth-century political arguments for capitalism, according to Albert O. Hirschman, depend on the regulative principle of interest—the recuperated disposition once called avarice—to both counteract and channel the passions.[203] Here the reverse obtains. The passions are prior to and more plural than any notion of interest. Corresponding to that plurality are just as many modes of determining property. There is always another convention of property to be enumerated. Being a conventional law, not a positive law, property cannot be reduced to a coherent and exhaustive set of legal postulates governed by principles of interest. Interest is but one component of the sentimentalism which Hume posits to be the medium of law.

In some respect the preponderance of sentiment is at odds with our understanding of what the law is and does: lawgiving is a form of intentionality, and when it comes to the legal recognition of property, Hume concedes only the barest importance to fancy. Law, after all, is about comprehension, not sentimentality, and accordingly *de minimis non curat lex*—the law does not concern itself with trifles. And yet it is for "trivial reasons" (330) that the law to requires itself to

[203] Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 14–42.

satisfy the fancy with symbolical delivery. What is a law, then, that must assent to trivialities? It must leave its judgments to a mode of association, the significance of which it cannot recognize and the vicissitudes of which it cannot control—as though it were a law without sovereignty. To concede the triviality of those reasons is not a concession at all. The sentiments are, through the apparatus of law, the very mechanism of coordinating judgment; even in the midst of law's activity we find sentiments hard at work. Even though Hume's habits are anatomically inhuman, in constituting the juridical conditions of collective life they nevertheless remain essentially *humane* because, being open to the law, they make possible human agency, namely the possibility making manners and customs. Heretofore I have located the potential for the other arrangements under the name of contingency, but it is to Hume's great credit that he never explicitly theorizes contingency, in part because fragility is not his concern. His real concern with habit-law's to and fro is the way it makes solidarity possible.

VIII. A Moral Law of Sentiments

What Kant calls the moral law is for Hume a manneristic law. It deals with what is habitual and customary, that is, with an inheritance rather than an imperative. Habits of tradition, habits of authority, habits of privilege…these, as with any other habit, hold in themselves no especially enduring place. "We have already observed, that no objects are, in themselves, desirable or odious, valuable or despicable; but that objects acquire these qualities from the particular character and constitution of the mind, which surveys them."[204] What, then, are the conditions for the judgment of these qualities? Hume speaks of a singular mind here, but if the mind is receptive to sentimental communication then we're dealing not of an isolated and contemplative mind but one essentially

[204] Hume, "The Sceptic," 171.

entangled with others. The specific valence of Hume's thinking can be put in terms of the relation between sentiment and personality. For Smith, personality takes precedence; I can use my powers of sympathy to imagine how things must be like for you because I can recognize you for who you are. For Hume, the fact of sympathy calls personality into question. "Now we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy," Hume writes, "and consequently 'tis that principle, which takes us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in characters which are useful or pernicious to society, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss" (370). In the historical development of capitalist political economy, this metric of "our own advantage or loss," or self-interest, is crucial because it organizes the passions according to a well-recognizable set of norms for conducting oneself in the transactions of our common affairs. Social convention rather than political prescription becomes the name of the game. Though it is possible to recognize a protocapitalist logic here, this passage—and it is definitive one—does not settle on the terms of commercial self-interest as a guiding norm. It settles on nothing more or less than sympathy, and it is when we sympathize, or express those judgments of sentiment called pleasure or uneasiness, that we are taken "out of ourselves." When we sympathize, we neither judge from our own standpoint nor project ourselves into the situation of another (as Smith would have it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*) but we occupy a passional position of society itself.[205] That is, sympathy becomes an occasion for expressing not one's own peculiar sentiments of "pleasure and uneasiness" but those which, located "outside of ourselves," properly belong only to a group.

In expressing these group sentiments, law becomes *impressive* rather than discursive in form. Property is an easy, vivacious relation not just for the legislator or the judge or the transcendental subject but for *everyone*. It's never the case that you or I could imagine separately, and that our

[205] Smith, *Theory*, I.i.1.6.

isolated inferences could give rise to commercial, social, or political association. Rather, as Andrew Sabl points out in his scholarship on Hume's *History of England*, there is something essentially coordinative and constitutional in the operation of imagination. Coordination problems concern joint decision-making without individual decisions or deliberate agreement: "When no common interest in joint decision making exists, no coordination problem exists."[206] If the problem is the formulation of a common interest in the first instance, it is not insignificant that Hume choses to argue almost exclusively from the standpoint of the first-person plural. Aside from the conclusion to the first book concerning the problem of solitude, Hume's argument concerns how *we* imagine our relations and how *we* habituate ourselves to one another. He never remarks upon his remarkably consistent employment of the we—as though he could describe a train of thought confident that readers would already recognize their own thoughts in it. Hume undertakes, in other words, a collective phenomenology. One of his essays takes a stab at understanding the import of his own enterprise. "Here then is the chief triumph of art and philosophy: It insensibly refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavor to attain, by a constant *bent* of mind, and by repeated *habit*. Beyond this I cannot acknowledge it to have great influence."[207] Common experience is prior to the determinations of law. Whatever the ontology of the sentiments, they make possible a collective activity governed by the immediate and unimpeachable associations. Imagination is agential, insofar as it is a mode of making associations that congeal into the durable habits that structure the common affairs of life. Andrew Sabl is right to suggest that though Hume "is often compared with Burke, and may in fact have much in common with the Burke who prized liberty and restraints on arbitrary power," nevertheless his more important affinities are "with a

[206] Sabl, *Hume's Politics*, 24.

[207] Hume, "The Sceptic," 171. Emphasis in the original.

more populist constitutional tradition that enjoys exploding rather than cultivating myths of origin and of ancient virtue."[208] In this sense, the keyword for Hume's style of unmasking to be *constitution* rather than suspicion or opposition.

If there is a limit to Hume's view, we might find it here, in the way that the constitution of custom makes no room for difference. His world seems strangely either too ambitious or too ideal.

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[208] Sabl, *Hume's Politics*, 2. We could go farther and note that Hume's logic of habit resembles even more closely, in terms of its political-philosophical claims, the anarchy of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, who in the second letter of his *Philosophy of Progress* speaks of the priority of *certainty*, a category of experience, over the dogma of the *criterion*. The purpose of the distinction is to remind his readers of the contingency essential to history, a contingency that he calls *movement* or *progress*. "All truth is in history, as all existence, is in movement and the series; consequently every formula, philosophical or legislative, has and can have only a transitional value." Proudhon, *Philosophie Du Progrès*, 98. The only extant English translation of this work is Shawn P. Wilbur's, available online at http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/proudhon/philprog.pdf. The purpose of reducing philosophical or legislative formulae to points in a temporal sequence is to lessen their grip on the diversity of lived experience. "all actuality is imperfect and unreal" from the perspective of "the law," because it is "always representing only a movement of the evolution, a term in the series." Proudhon, 90. Criterial thinking, which relies on a "means of discernment and guarantee," cannot grasp the idea of certainty in such a reality. And so it supposes that "the accident is reality itself." Proudhon, 98. In other words, the thesis is that every *arche*, every formula or proposition or normative claim, is historical in character and acquires its authority from the experience of certainty that articulates it. Moments, whatever their significance, are subordinate to their history. Whereas anarchism would name one political arrangement among others; anarchy names something that preexists arrangement and is, in a sense, its condition of possibility: namely history. Like Hume, Proudhon takes history to disprove the absolutist pretensions of every creed. Proudhon's formula is Hume's habit; they might ossify, and nevertheless both are media of freedom.

There exist no challenges to collective action; indeed there is no concept of action apart from the dynamic repetitions of "our common affairs of life." The whole motivating problem of political theory, though, is that we cannot take common life as it is as a straightforward mechanism of political solidarity. To put it in Hobbesian terms which would have been available to Hume, there is a distinction between the multitude in the state of nature the "people" who have become united in the personality of the commonwealth.[209] The former is the subject of commercial sociability, and the latter the subject of political rule. For Hume, Hobbes's version of the political question—how we make a multitude into a subject of power—is the wrong one to ask, because it belies an inordinate desire for stability through rule.[210] The sovereign principle settles the question of stability with an account of absolute and incontestable power in a single location, whether in a person, and institution, or a process. The point of the principle is its clarity as an answer; what Hobbes calls "visible Power" to keep subjects "in awe" is simple, transparent, and obvious to all.[211] By yoking law to the contingent movements of habit, Hume structurally precludes sovereignty from politics. His world of customs and manners is too baroque to be governed by transparent principles of power and readymade pathways of legitimation. There is nothing awe-inspiring or uncontestable about any custom or manner of political life, and so the authority of convention takes the form of tendency rather than compulsion, and the associations of customs and manners are contested every day by every act of imagination that does not accord with the tendency.

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[209] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 118–21.

[210] For an account of the tenuous relation between constitutional government and the popular authority supposed to legitimate it, see Grewal and Purdy, "The Original Theory of Constitutionalism," esp. the description of multitudinous constitutionalism on 688–691.

[211] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 117.

Hume's reply to this objection might therefore be to insist on the flatness of our common life as a pressing—if problematic—matter of fact. Even if we oppose various features of our social world, or find ourselves alienated from its ideals, the fact remains that we remain habituated to its ways of thinking and of seeing. And so this field of common habit is where the work of politics happens: habit is the means by which a plurality of persons accustom themselves to the action of the law, *but also* the means by which they accustom law to their own way of doing things. (As Sabl points out, Hume's histories take the so-called "original contracts" to achieve their meaning and their binding force only through repeated confirmation.)[212] Although this emphasis on the collective is not to say that Hume's thinking lends itself to democratic aspirations—he nowhere pretends to defend egalitarian norms, and as we ourselves well understand, democracies can show a mean sovereign streak—it *is* to say that Hume systematically refuses to subordinate imagination to the sublime lawmaking sovereign. It is a non-sovereign agency, which, as Krause has argued, refers to an agency which "regularly comes apart from intentional choice and consistently eludes control."[213] Kant sees this failure of sovereignty to be a product of the failure of will: if I cannot will the universality of one's actions, how can I be an autonomous moral personality? For Hume, by contrast, a politics of will is a contradiction in terms, because will—the feeling of unilateral agency or mastery—does not belong among the political dispositions: "it be not comprehended among the passions" (257). Insofar as it codifies passion, rather than willpower, the central idea of Hume's jurisprudence is heteronomy: it is here that Hume begins, with the receptive media of habit, custom,

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[212] See the discussion of the Magna Carta in Sabl, *Hume's Politics*, chap. 4. Legitimacy is conferred in habituation. This accords with much of what British histories have to say about customary law. See the discussion of confirmation in Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, 44–45 and passim.

[213] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, 21.

emotion, and convention—that is, with the multitudinous affairs of common life. Sentiments do not need legal judgments; law needs sentimental judgments. This is why alienation has no place here. Relations of power, duty, authority, interest, and allegiance are, like his exemplar of property, conventions of habit: that is, they are neither norms nor principles nor commitments. Hume is not a figure who mistakes the lawmaking power of habits for the coercive structure of institutions. The difference is that the law founded in custom, unlike the law founded in awe, defines a world of democratic habits, and one in which humankind is a happy animal, even in its political affairs.

IX. Conclusion

In his relentless desire to find in personal habits the common law, we should recognize without a doubt a structurally masculinist sentimentalism at work. In locating property in precisely these four or five habits of association, it would seem that Hume makes the habits of the English gentry the north star of his philosophical sky. Yet there's a curious way in which sentimental description of social relations works both with and against this desire for law, such that *every* one of his sentences exhibits both a conservative and a subversive character. To say that we treat people in property in such and such a way for no other reason than we have always done so is simultaneously to offer a justification for law and to undercut its pretensions to authority. The discontinuities and reconstitutions of imagination which destroy the great chain of being mean that there is no relation which is not a conventional relation, no association that cannot be traced back to an association of habit. This is a conclusion as comforting as it is disturbing. We can rely on our traditions only because we *must* do so, since our knowledge and our reasoning are things that merely happen to us: we are wholly at the mercy of our habits of association. "The significance of Hume's argument was not merely that it greatly extended the reign of custom at the expense of reason, but that it undercut

the whole idea of an underlying rational harmony in nature."[214] What interests us about this demolition is that it makes repetition out to be something other than repetition of the same, because every iteration brings forward something new. The future will repeat the past, but it will not be like the past. This is because habit, being a variety of imagination, is legislative. It is the capacity to give law which Kant found so repulsive about habit: its involuntary and unindividuated workings evince an agency outside of our reflexive control. The principle of habit means that we are of the world, that a whole set of political, legal, and social habits establish our turns of thought. The messiness of that agglomeration isn't evidence of a failure to properly order things; it is part of the plenitude of common life. Hume's subjects neither conform the will to a moral law nor affirm a positive theory of justice; they find themselves receiving conventions to which they must reconcile themselves. Habit makes judgment appropriate to its history—we, too, find ourselves habituated to law, habituated to property, and therefore habituated to the matter of our established principles. What is established might either please or revolt us. Either way, we are impressed by our standing, prepared to undertake our common affairs.

[214] Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism," 1002.

Chapter Three

Romance and Routine: Marx on the Agency of Machinic Repetition

"And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?"
–William Blake

"The expression 'the state *withers away*' is very well chosen, for it indicates both the gradual and the spontaneous nature of the process. Only habit can, and undoubtedly will, have such an effect."
–V. I. Lenin

In *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy,* Kathy Ferguson relates the story of a worker whose power in the workplace comes from his familiarity with the way things work:

> Thus Cliff Shields, the foundry worker cited above, is prohibited by the company he works for from fixing the machine he works on, even though he knows how to fix it and the repair crew does not. His machine is frequently "down" for hours or even days at a time; when he does his own repairs, management chastises him for it and sends in the repair crew to undo his work and reset the machine improperly again. He is acutely aware that this is not simple stupidity on the part of management, but is instead a deliberate effort to avoid acknowledging his skills and to remove from his task the aspects of it that are enjoyable and fulfilling.[215]

This chapter is about Shield's relationship to his machine, and the conflict with management that thereby ensues. In modernity, antagonism over the nature of repetition takes place under the political economy of industrialization. Repetition enters modernity under the political economy of industrialization. After the sentimental and enthusiastic repetitions of Hume and Kant, we might have been poised to take this world of machinery as something of a relief. After all, the enthusiast and the sentimentalist speak in too many voices and express too many emotions to make their practice of politics a transparent, straightforward, and progressive affair. With machines, by contrast, we have the enlightenment ideal of scientific representation: matter in motion, governed by mathematics. We know where things stand and what they can do. Whether we listen to the apostles

[215] Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*, 114.

of progress or to the masters of modern suspicion, we hear that the engine is the exemplar of rational repetition, instrumentalizing the unending and unchanging processes of the natural world for the endless transformations of modernity. Chugging away at the same task *ad infinitum*, it dedicates its every movement to the working life in a way that the enthusiast or the sentimentalist never could. To fix repetition, to instrumentalize repetition, and to make it work toward rational ends: as an object-metaphor for social relations, the engine poses a disturbing new economy of action. If society is an engine, who sets it in motion? Or does it require the direction of an outside party?

In this chapter I argue that for Karl Marx, revolution and routine are problems of moral sentimentalism. The persistence of inner life even on the factory floor means that we're dealing with a matter of spontaneity rather than determinism. Like the sentimentalism of the previous two chapters, Marx's consists in the belief that there are no natural relations, only those conditioned by repetition: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."[216] For Hume and for Kant, the weight of repetition, its settledness in the past, makes it a solid foundation for political movement. For Marx, by contrast, the weight of custom and tradition has more to do with unsettled spirits and unfinished business than it does with stable points of reference. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[217] And as with the time of generational reproduction, so with the time of daily toil: "How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?…though private property

[216] Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire," 437.

[217] Marx, 437.

appears to be the source, the cause of alienated labour, it is really its consequence."[218] Routine is alienation is domination: it unsettles the worker's spirit and fixes their body to the rote of the means of production. What does Marx need to understand about repetition and routine labor in order to make this equation intelligible?

Though Marx's analysis of domination is sometimes thought to involve a normative prescription against routine, understood simply as alienation, such a characterization risks occluding how routine operates within the horizon of his thought. This chapter turns away from his accounts of alienation, domination, dispossession, dehumanization, and capitalism's "illegitimate monopolies" of surplus value and colonial extraction (terms of "uneven" usefulness "for social criticism and radical politics").[219] In turning to Marx as a thinker of repetition this chapter instead investigates how he deploys routine as a material reclamation of the idea of politics. Though a massive gulf of technological and political revolution looms between Marx and the enlightenment debates of chapters one and two, his notion of the routine does not put us so far from the problem of habit thus far outlined in this dissertation. Hume's problem, "how does repetition lead to conviction?," and Kant's problem, "how does repetition anticipate reflection?," become in Marx a slightly different problem: how is repetition a motive principle of action? More pointedly, in what respect does the laborer's capacity for setting the rhythms of the world in motion stand against routine's internal stasis?

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[218] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 59, 65.

[219] On Adam Smith and David Ricardo's political economy of the "illegitimate monopoly" see Cole, *History of Socialist Thought*, 106ff. On the usefulness, see Nichols, "Theft Is Property! The Recursive Logic of Dispossession," 4.

Routine matters because it elaborates what Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* calls "a new language" for speaking of the exercise of agency.[220] This new language of social physics allows him to pose questions of political organization—self-determination, workers' councils, cooperative relations and extra-parliamentary action—in terms of their sentimental-economic conditions. If communism is to emerge from capitalism, which has its own grammar of routine, then the question at issue is how the one affords the other. In this respect it is not insignificant that Marx's manifesto paints an admiring picture of capitalism's organization of life: *Capital* starts not from dispossession, expropriation, alienation, or even a cursory explanation of the facts of domination, but rather from a problem of coordination and exchange, and even that only in order to jump right towards the basic routines behind it. In asking what is distinctive about this activity and why Marx feels compelled to begin with it, I am less interested in treating Marx's critique as a theory of exploitation and domination within modern society than as a theory of the nature of transformation in modernity prerequisite to his understanding of domination, a theory which struggles to think the freedoms of both the worker and the capitalist as both afforded by and subsumed under the routines which structure their lives.

This chapter, accordingly, attempts to demonstrate that *Capital* becomes a political text, concerning what people can do and how they can do it, precisely insofar as it takes agency to be a problem of machinic repetition. The first part takes William Clare Roberts's argument that "Marx thought the moralism of moral economy to be completely out of place in the confrontation with the capitalist mode of production" as an opportunity to rethink how the practical facts of factory life inform his account of political solidarity.[221] When people cannot coordinate except through the mechanisms of capital, and capital cannot valorize itself except through routinization, political life

[220] Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire," 437.

[221] Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 21.

becomes paralyzed with worry even as worry becomes the central motor of social coordination and historical progress *tout court*.[222] The second part of the chapter turns toward the virtuoso, a figure that both concentrates the problem of routine under industrial capitalism and provides the very field of the concept's intelligibility. While routine labor may wear away at the body, and it may deaden the mind, it enlivens something else in the process, namely the machine, which by virtue of mechanical law exhibits a strange and repetitious agency. Something in the chugging of "these dark Satanic Mills" suggests rather the spontaneity characteristic of a living being, and suggests a peculiar form of industrial agency. The third part of the chapter discusses how repetition enables its subjects—the proletariat—to organize by themselves and for themselves, on the basis of their own capacities and on behalf of their own interests. The diagnosis of modernity this chapter locates in Marx implies that if he can be read politically, he ought to be read as a theorist of repetition.

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[222] Cf. "collective unfreedom" in Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom*, 263–64. In an early rehearsal of *Capital's* argument, Marx defends his choice of critical object by asserting that "men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will," and that the resulting "totality…constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 20. This has typically been read as an assertion of a dogma of economic determinism, but it is also possible to read it as the disjunction between base and superstructure as a statement of a *problematic*, and the disjunction between base and superstructure as the problem of habit's priority to will. This disjunction, strangely enough, is reflected in the various readings to which Marx is subject. Those who read Marx as an economic writer find the standstill of domination everywhere they look. Those who read him as a political author find in the very same totality an exhortation to "total and radical revolution." Marcuse, *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, 10. It's as though Marx is asserting something both necessary and impossible: there is nothing outside the routines of capital, and it is to that outside we must escape. Cf. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 510–37.

I. Repetition and Domination

For reasons that modern critics have never ceased to remind us, the political economy of routine puts a great deal of pressure on the possibility of human freedom. The humanistic aversion to routine work relies on the premise that spontaneity and routine are essentially exclusive properties of an action. When the conditions for the will's reality fail, that is, when work becomes rigid and routine—not just tedious but scientifically anatomized and rationalized in order to make the means conform best to the ends—anyone can do it, and when anyone can do it, there is no longer an active or personal relationship between the worker and their work. Put this way, the central complaint is that the character of work frustrates the free formation of one's character.[223] Because rote labor ostensibly takes place in the absence of real social relations, it is a routine unsuited to political consciousness. It is an alienated kind of labor, one which "in degrading spontaneous activity, free activity, to a means," manifests in the political realm as a pathological relationship to the stuff of the modern world.[224] "Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character and, consequently, all charm for the workman."[225]

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[223] Much of this antithesis might be attributed to the highly structured character of "rationalized" work and its distance from the unstructured chaos that modern critics ascribe to democracy. The "resolved mystery of all constitutions" (in Marx's phrase) rather than a constitutional form *per se*, democracy represents an ideal of indeterminism and instability—attributes opposite to that of industrial labor. Labor is bound to routine, but democracy is achieved precisely in being unbound by anything except the ideal of unboundedness itself. See Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* 29–30.

[224] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 63.

[225] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 341.

Previous work on Marx and domination draws heavily on his language of repetition. Moishe Postone, for instance, appeals to routine in order to articulate a distinction between concrete labor and abstract labor, though repetition drops out of the picture when he makes the equation between domination and abstraction. William Clare Roberts makes a similar theoretical displacement when he casts an "infernal machine" to play the role of capital, but the machine disappears after it authorizes the move from moral to institutional criticism.[226] Georg Lukács appeals to the same set of rote mechanisms in order to define domination as reification. According to him, labor becomes an entirely unthinking affair when its routines become "progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialised operations so that the worker loses contact with the finished product and his work is reduced to the mechanical repetition of a specialised set of actions."[227] Reification, on this account, is only a problem because it is actually a process of repetition. The endless routine by which the thing is made dehumanizes the laborer engaged in the rote labor. This manner of repetition inverts the turns and returns of sentiment and *Schwärmerei*. In the factory, repetition is the movement that turns spontaneity into stasis, remaining in place and remaining the same.[228] The static routine doesn't allow one to do anything, or to engage in any activity, other than the prescribed operation. The rigid regularity of input and output might well model the affordances of a steel mechanism, but is rather less conducive to the living of an animal life.[229] The more routine my labor, the more embedded I am in a mechanical process, and the less I am able to freely act. "In consequence of the

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[226] Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 2. Roberts refers the phrase to Frederic Jameson.

[227] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 88.

[228] Hence alienation "is, incidentally, also the psychology of the fanatic." Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 44n2. The fanatic and the laborer are antinomies, but both are trapped in the cyclicality of their activities.

[229] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense," 32.

rationalisation of the work-process the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear increasingly as *mere sources of error*."[230] Novelty and individuality are problems rather than ideals: the factory worker may indulge in their own handiwork, but then the work ceases to be standard, and the overall operation must deal the problem. If the worker is a good one, they will avoid novelty and individuality in favor of the prescribed operation. A "mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system…he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not."[231] Whether he likes it or not, that is, whether he approves of his actions or is even conscious of their consequences, it is entirely immaterial to the production of commodity. In this respect it is no surprise that Lukács is not only the theorist of reification, he is the theorist of reification as the index of the proletariat's political consciousness. "The internal organization of a factory could not possibly have such an effect—even within the factory itself—were it not for the fact that it contained in concentrated form the whole structure of capitalist society…the principle of rational mechanisation and calculability *must embrace every aspect of life*."[232] Such a life can have nothing to do with the "elevation of sentiment, and liberality of mind" long thought among humanists to be necessary conditions of free citizenship.[233]

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[230] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89. Emphasis in original.

[231] Lukács, 89.

[232] Lukács, 90–91. Emphasis in original.

[233] Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 334. Marx makes reference to this passage, though not to these words, in *Capital*, 1:474. Joseph Schumpeter (*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* [Routledge, 2010], esp. chaps. 15, 16) suggests through a rather sympathetic analysis of the concept of planning that this is a quality of industrial society *tout court*, that is, endemic both to capitalism *and* its successors to the extent that planning remains a central political-economic activity.

Here I want to linger upon the language of repetition that makes this account legible as a theory of domination. If the routines of capital and labor do not simply *veil* the real relations of industrial society but constitute the actual social relations themselves, then we are dealing with something like Dickens's ekphrasis of Coketown, the industrial setting of his novel *Hard Times*.

> It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.[234]

This description of alienation is as rich as any that might be found in the socialist tradition. What makes it so is the repetition. Every person, and every day, every day, and even every year, is the equal of every other. Especially when read aloud to the natural meter of the prose, the passage describes to us Lukács's world of mechanical parts totally integrated into a mechanical system, endlessly clanking out the same sounds and the same movements. Yet while Dickens describes the factory as "full of windows," he declines to peer through a single one. Though labor is present, it is wholly off-stage: the sooty factories, the smoke that trails off into a smoggy sky, the engines which repeat their motions as endlessly as the people misfortunate enough to live here, and the year which reduplicates itself in calendrical progress only—these are all elements of an ekphrasis in which the various movements and activities are arranged and coordinated in rhythmic relation to one another even in the absence of direct causal connection. In sum, the abstracted drudgery is precisely the

[234] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 23.

source of the passage's literary qualities. The rhythm of the text itself lends to it a formal motive force lacking in the bare propositional content of the passage. Read aloud, it becomes easy to hear the machinery in the narrator's sympathetic mimicry of the very world it attempts to describe. The harsh angles of the factory architecture (red-brick, brick-red, smoke and ashes, red-black); the cadences which curl out of the chimneys, ("interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never…"); the recurrences which organize the town in both time and space ("several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another…one another…same…same…same…same…yesterday and tomorrow, the last and the next"): something in the aspect of the town's exhausting regularity nevertheless renders an aesthetic experience.[235]

II. Homogeneity and Routine

Like *Hard Times*, *Capital* makes quite a bit out of the self-similarity of routine. With apologies to the reader, the following section rehashes Marx's basic account of political economy with an eye to the way that it mediates the various dialectical inversions. If all we had to go on for our understanding of human activity were *Capital's* first use of the term labor, we might be forgiven for failing to make the connection to any particular, concrete action. "If then we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains, that of being products of labour."[236] No matter how they come to be alienated, reified, or abstracted, the various forms of labor all emerge in political economy with the same value and function: namely, ceaseless production. This failure to be sensible to the variety of labors—here legible in Marx's jargon only in the plurality of commodities—is

[235] Dickens, 23.

[236] Marx, *Capital*, 1:128.

precisely the purchase of abstract labor. Although there are as many different labors as there are products for use, it's only in the abstraction from the particulars that any sort of relation of equivalence can be posited between them. And equivalence, on Marx's account, is necessary for a functioning political economy and hence for a viable commercial society. In order to have commerce, it's necessary to be able to agree with one another that "20 yards of linen = 1 coat," with "=" being understood here as an active copula which posits not just the similarity of the objects to either side but a formal equality between the labors that produce them, regardless of the real differences between weaving and coat-making.[237] The equivalence between the two is a recognition that the same quantity of labor, i.e. "labour-time," goes into each article.[238] However one chooses to spend their time, weaving or making coats, is immaterial to the remuneration one receives at the end of the day. In this manner the daily routine evacuates anything distinctive, personal, and intentional from labor.

Routine is the material register of a social experience of capital: it is a kind of mechanical time-keeping, measured independently of any biological body, and therefore becomes capable of regulating it. Aristotle tells us that such a measurement is impossible, since "time is neither identical with movement nor capable of being separated from it."[239] For him, time depends on the singular movement, which is always the movement of bodies. There are the natural periods of day and month and year, of course, traced out by celestial bodies; but these, too, are natural principles, regardless of how high they may hang above the surface of human affairs, and their movements only mark time. Augustine regards the matter similarly: "I have heard a very learned person say that the

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[237] Marx, 1:139.

[238] Marx, 1:145.

[239] Aristotle, *Aristotle*, 1957, 219a.

movements of the sun, moon, and stars themselves constitute time. But I could not agree."[240] These things constitute time only insofar as they constitute an expectation in the temporal subject—the one who experiences life passing by. "So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time….The *impression* which passing events make upon you abides when they are go. That present consciousness is what I am measuring…"[241] For Augustine, the Hume of late antiquity, temporality has nothing to do with movement itself and everything to do with the form of internal experience. What does an hour feel like? What does a minute? The questions are patently absurd. As Ursula Coope argues, Aristotle thinks of time not as a kind of measurement but as a kind of order, namely an ordering in the thinking soul.[242]

Things are very different with the rise of capital and commodity exchange. As Lewis Mumford put it, what "dissociated time from human events" was the "belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences," or put differently, a belief in the consistency of repetition.[243] Foucault has shown that on the cusp of modernity there arises a number of institutions which arrange bodies in space by parceling out their activities in time in just this way, according to a rigorous schema of interchangeable, successive units.[244] For Marx, this abstract time makes possible a way of measuring the processes of exchange and accumulation in a manner regulates the idiosyncratic pace of laborers. What matters is not the complex organization of human practices but the way in which the labor experiences this organization as an absolute monotony. For the purposes

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[240] Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.xxiii.

[241] Augustine, XI.xxvii. Emphasis mine.

[242] Coope, *Time for Aristotle*, chap. 6.

[243] Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, 15.

[244] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, esp. 6–16.

of exchange everything needs to be made measurable, above all the things that labor produces, so labor cannot be anything other than the abstract quantity. Moishe Postone tries to mediate between the concrete time of preindustrial organization with the abstract regularity of industrial discipline: "concrete time" flows from the "natural cycles and periodicities of human life as well as particular tasks or protocols, for example, the time required to cook rice or to say one *paternoster*."[245] Needless to say, different people accomplish these tasks in different ways and at different paces, and so are incommensurable with one another. "The modes of reckoning" derived from this plurality "do not depend on a continuous succession of constant temporal units," because recurring human activities do not map onto each other so neatly.[246] Clearly, this poses a problem for a social order that hinges radical commensurability, which might explain why the shift in temporal structure is also a shift from the inconsistencies of habit to the iterated identities of routine.

It's important to appreciate that this is not a process of dehumanization. We are dealing with something too material and visceral to have anything to do with lofty ideals of human dignity or spiritual value. To think of it in terms of a humanism to which moral categories could apply is to misunderstand the nature of the capital's discovery. The evil of capitalism isn't only class domination, but moreover the domination by all of valuation, a physical and energetic abstraction. As historian Anson Rabinbach puts it, the world of value is a world in which human and machine work are made fungible with one another:

> this [Locke's] increasingly anachronistic vision of labor became superseded by the energeticist model of mechanical work. The work performed by any mechanism, from the fingers of the hand, to the gears of an engine, or the motion of the planets, was essentially the same. With this semantic shift in the meaning of "work," all labor

[245] Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 201.

[246] Postone, 201.

> was reduced to its physical properties, devoid of context and inherent purpose. Work was universalized.[247]

If work is universal, its humanity is only incidental. A mechanism can work as well as a hand, and there is no longer a then there is no longer a necessary relationship between the worker and the work. As a matter of political economy, there are no Lockean laborers, alienated as they are from the object into which they have mixed their labor. Work no longer socializes natural objects into property, as Locke supposes, because there is no longer a distinction between natural things and social things between which human labor could mediate.[248] On the contrary, here work itself, as well as commodities, take on immanently "socio-natural" properties.[249] These are the particular properties—routine, sameness, fungibility—that give to routine its rote and life-denying qualities. It's not that capital somehow scams the laborer, since "labour-power is bought and sold at its value."[250] The capitalist may certainly bargain unfairly, but this is not what makes them a capitalist. The essential thing is that after the purchase of the laborer's time, the capitalist sets to work making *labor-power* by rationalizing the workers' labor, in order to bring it in line with the protocols for the creation of value. This is to say that the domination of capital over labor does not take the form of an inequality. Rather, it is the form of a right over conduct.

III. Duration as a Category of Domination

[247] Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 47.

[248] Locke, "Second Treatise," sec. 27.

[249] Marx, *Capital*, 1:165.

[250] Marx, 1:340.

To put it less euphemistically, the right over conduct right to overwork: that is, the capitalist hopes to get as much out of a day's work as possible, both by extending the day and intensifying the work in any given unit of time. "Let us assume that a line A – – – – – – B represents the length of the necessary labour-time [to break even on the worker's wages], say six hours."[251] In Marx's typography of the working-day, repetition of dashes registers the repetition of hours that constitute the day's extent. That the length of the necessary workday is six hours, Marx registers with six dashes, as though this simple form could encompass the working day in general no matter what the labor in question may be. In the extension of the working day, we find just an extrapolation of the same routine:

> If the labour is prolonged beyond AB by 1, 3, or 6 hours, we get three other lines:
> *Working day I*: A – – – – – – B – C
> *Working day II*: A – – – – – – B – – – C
> *Working day III*: A – – – – – – B – – – – – – C
> which represent three different working days of 7, 9, and 12 hours.[252]

What's so remarkable about this account of the working-day is that the diagrammatic form captures the essential elements. The fact *that* capital harnesses the human body is represented in Marx's employment of the dash. By its logic, the extension of the working day—i.e. the intensification of exploitation—is just a matter of abstract composition. Each dash is the same as every other, and all mark the day's passage in a constant and uniform way. What the dash's repetition can articulate far better than the numeral, or even a descriptive phenomenology of labor, is that the profit from a working-day *obtains from the whole rather than any particular part*. Any given moment of the day is the same as any other moment, and indeed is no different from a given moment of any other working-day. And so the amount of surplus value extractible from the day is a direction function of its

[251] Marx, 1:340.

[252] Marx, 1:340.

extension in time, which obviously varies according to the political conditions of different firms and industries. Hence J. Cunningham's curious line, to which Marx refers without commentary: "A day's labour is vague, it may be long or short."[253] The long and the short of it is the entire terrain of capitalist exploitation.

Capital, in terms of Marx's diagram, shortens and thickens each dash while maximizing the number in a given line. It overworks labor neither by underpaying it for a given action (waged work is not piecemeal work); nor by forcing it to perform one or several actions which generate a significant amount of value far beyond its rate of compensation (waged workers do not complete *projects*); rather, it overworks labor by intensifying and extending *the routine* as long as possible. Hence the battle over the length of the workday which Marx recommends as a bid to force capital into an economic corner: if accumulation is frustrated in the short run by a shorter work-day, the best way to recoup the losses is to revolutionize the technological forms of production, so as to extract the same magnitude of value in a shorter period of time. To concentrate the work-day into ever-more intensive units of time requires intricate enterprises of cooperative labour, ever more mediated by "the extensive use of machinery."[254] The machinery involved in this intensification bears an ambivalent relationship to labor. On the one hand, it frees up a great deal of labor time and releases the laborer from a great deal of exertion, but on the other it just frees up the worker's concentration for new responsibilities necessary to manage the interlocking moments of the production process. "The problem for capital is that it needs the *agency* of labor."[255]

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[253] Marx, 1:341.

[254] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 341. In Capital, Marx calls this "relative surplus-value."

[255] Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, 52.

IV. Regularity and Agency

Capital apparently wants it both ways. It needs the materiality of the activity to be displaced onto the mathematical regularity of mechanical process in order to make legible the exchange-value fetched by that the activity's product. It also needs the activity to remain an irreducibly vital process, undertaken for eminently human needs through immanently human means. For all the machinery that it can introduce into the process, it still needs the labor-time of human life in order to produce value. Put another way, capital needs the agency of labor because it needs the agency of its constant exercise: this insight is the substance of Marx's critique of earlier socialist authors. Neither a more just distribution of the collective social product nor a more rational organization of productive capacities really gets at the form of domination unique to industrial society. The problem is rather to be found in the specific discipline to which labor must be subjected. In his early days, Marx's word for the reduction of "spontaneous activity, free activity, to a means," was degradation.[256] In *Capital*, the tone ceases to be so moralistic. Much of this has to do with the book's project of immanent critique, an attempt to think through, on its own terms, the categories and concerns of capitalist political economy. It is an economy which falsifies any attempt to locate the experience of time and agency in the potentiality of sensibilities and routines undertaken within the rhythms of human subjectivity. "The total labour-power of society, which is manifested in the value of the world of commodities, counts here as one homogeneous mass of human labour-power, although composed of innumerable individual units of labour-power."[257] The units in question are constant, interchangeable, and self-identical magnitudes. In both of these moments we can perceive *in nuce* the transformation of work into routine that makes Lukács so worried: beyond the point of preserving

[256] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 63.

[257] Marx, *Capital*, 1:129.

the linen's exchange-value, "the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear increasingly as *mere sources of error*."[258] They are errors because in what Rosa Luxemburg calls "the continual recurrence of the process of production," the rhythm of the engine is the productive ideal.[259] Any deviation from that rhythm and the precise movement of its parts, which elsewhere we might have called creativity, is regarded here only as inefficiency.

Unsurprisingly, regularity is a prized quality in labor which needs to time itself according to the engine's rhythm. We find ourselves in a bizarre situation where Marx constantly compares human labor to the action of a machine, even though he routinely insists that from an economic perspective, it is the exclusively human origin of the labor that generates its value. The processes of valorization and degradation are one and the same. In *Hard Times*, Dickens explains plainly how that matters to capital. "It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the national debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent…at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants."[260] Perhaps if these capacities cannot be measured, it is because they do not exist, or more plausibly because they bear no relevance to the creation of value. Marx, too, notes that although human labor is required for the creation of value, it's not for want of any particularly human qualities. Rather, it is for want of the particular quality of being human. It is the fact that the worker chooses to perform *this* activity, which results in *this* particular product, rather than any other activity that gives the labor its value.

> On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is *in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour* that it

[258] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89. Emphasis in original.

[259] Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 31.

[260] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 61.

> forms the values of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values.[261]

In the dialectic of use and exchange, labor creates use-values insofar as it is the specific production of a concrete object with a definite use—one among many—but the object itself is valued alongside others only insofar as it embodies "labour-power," which is in turn "measured by its duration…labour-time."[262] This isn't a matter of professional specialization, where "people need many things" and so "gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers" in various different livelihoods.[263] What Adam Smith calls the "division of labour" is a division not of professions but of *routines*, such that the single activity of making a pin is "divided into about eighteen distinct operations."[264] Whatever they may be, those operations require that the "human labour" which undertakes them develop the "quality of being equal, or abstract," that is, the quality of being without any particular quality. The laborer who forms the head of a pin is acting in *this* way and not any other—whether that be in love or hatred, in goodness or evil, or even in another factory. The undertaking is a singular one. And yet this "concrete labour…counts exclusively as the expression of undifferentiated human labour…identical with other kinds of labour."[265] The very road at which we arrived at labor in the abstract is the road which bypasses every particular laborer's shop. In this respect, "abstract labor" presents us with a puzzling redundancy—abstract as opposed to what? Marx calls it "the concrete forms of labor," in the plural, but these "can no longer be

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[261] Marx, *Capital*, 1:137. Emphasis mine.

[262] Marx, 1:129.

[263] Plato, *Republic*, 369b–c.

[264] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, I.i.3.

[265] Marx, *Capital*, 1:150.

distinguished"; they are "all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract."[266] The transformation of activity into labor prepares them for subsumption under capital. But he continues that the collapse with diversity only matters insofar as it makes the various labor-powers commensurable under a single measure of magnitude. So the various labors, *qua* labor, go from plural to singular. It no longer bears any bumpy, uneven, or accidental qualities. It must conform to rhythm and rule. "If the thing is useless, so is the labour in it; *the labour does not count as labour*, and therefore creates no value."[267]

The shunting of a human life from its inner multiplicity into the regular form of productive labor is what gives human labor its generative quality. This is not a matter of alienation. It is a matter of subsuming spontaneity under regularity. A human being is capable of making all sorts of forms and having all sorts of aims, and it is the act of restricting all of this potentiality to the actuality of a single process wherein lies the value: that the laborer spends time on *this* activity rather than any other. This restriction needn't require an alien will. Single-mindedness would suffice. On this point Marx and Arendt are in full agreement. The laboring body "concentrates upon nothing but its own being alive, and remains imprisoned in its metabolism with nature without ever transcending or freeing itself from the recurring cycle of its own functioning."[268] The difference is that Arendt takes such imprisonment to hold universally, whereas for Marx labor is confining only when it is rote—that is, only under the phenomenological conditions of stasis.

This is the great discovery of capitalism. Regularity, routine, recovery, reproduction, and their various industrial adjuvants (chief among them the homogeneous and interchangeable cycles of

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[266] Marx, 1:128.

[267] Marx, 1:131. Emphasis mine.

[268] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 115.

both the engine and of abstract time), and the way in which they may all interlock as so many forms of repetition—these are the discoveries in which Marx situates the beginning of capitalism. That repetition is energetic, progressive, composable, and social: these discoveries of political economy mark an innovation upon the enlightenment sentimentalism that we saw in the previous two chapters. There, repetition was revolutionary, yes, and could revolutionize the matters of property, propriety, and impropriety; but these were figured as excesses of or exceptions to practical reason, which was always fated to arrive too late. In Kant that excess was the ante-rational routines of an imagination left to legislate for itself. In Hume the excess was a sentimentality that could come into contact with reason through the written codification of the law or through solitude, but never in the actual activity of life itself. Here, Marx understands industrial capitalism to bring repetition and reason into unmediated contact.

V. Virtuosity at Work

To say that the machine is an agent of domination is to presuppose that mechanism is an agency. Because the action of the machine is the only activity that *works*, as it were, it offers Marx an occasion to think through humanity's "creaturely dependency" on an artificial world.[269] What about mechanism is so supportive of human life? Why do humans rely on machines so extensively? "Rather, it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it."[270] The machine becomes

[269] Butler, "The Inorganic Body," 13. Butler continues: "What we end up with here is not a straightforward vision of humans dominating nature, but human creatures, dependent on nature, as well as on [their] activity by which nature becomes support and sustenance…"

[270] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 693.

endowed with an individuality of its own. The genius that Marx detects within it is not a quality of mind, and it has nothing to do with the body, either, that is, whether its substrate is metallic or biological. It is disclosed in the periodic motion of its various parts, from the lawlike regularity of its movement indistinguishable from and identifiable as nothing other than its soul. In mediating between routine and action, between fungibility and individuality, the soul of the virtuoso-machine radicalizes the moral economy which Adam Smith recommends as the secret to wealth in a commercial society.

Industry, as Smith employs it, is more of a gerund than a noun, since it describes an activity rooted in personal disposition more than an object or economic system. We have, for instance, the "industrious and frugal creditor" to which is counterposed the "idle and profuse debtor."[271] It involves the moral habits of labor and foresight, such that even a "porter" exemplifies the "sorts of industry" which can be carried on with nothing other than a mind directed to one's own betterment.[272] The industry of the 19th century retains the moral agency without the involvement of a moral person. According to the sciences of work and waste, it is the engine which engages in moral action, cycling between disequilibrium and equilibrium, between hot and cold, between movement and rest, and by this "impelling power" or "thermal agency" turns repetition into progress.[273] The rhythm of the machine is neither a static repetition of the same, nor is it the emergence of innovation. It is the motive principle of action which the machine carries within itself. "The two laws of thermodynamics reveal the paradox at the heart of the concept of energy," as Cara New

[271] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, V.iii.60.

[272] Smith, I.iii.1.

[273] Carnot, *Reflections*, 49; Thomson, "Carnot's Theory," 129, 130, and passim.

Daggett puts it, "between balance and change, or stability and progress."[274] Unlike the "passivity, limitation, and constraint" of preindustrial mechanism, here industry requires the machine to adopt precisely the opposite capacities.[275] As Marx puts it, the mechanical laws *act*, as though the mechanism itself were the agent only insofar as the laws are acting as well, creating new appearances and new relations, disappointing every desire we might have to attribute to law a fixed and settled nature, and conversely to nature a fixed mechanical law. The machine does not merely go through the motions, it allows the laws "acting through it" to disclose themselves in action.

This way of posing the problem of action is just another way of posing the problem of the relation between the economic and the political. It makes of politics an energetic labor. When we turn to the virtuoso's motive principle of action, we find it only in constant practice, as its three appearances in *Capital* attest. The first two appearances are sarcastic references to capitalist functionaries, who, despite being compelled to continuously accumulate if only to preserve what they already have, nevertheless display some ingenuity and ability in the role assigned to them.[276] They are agents in a world of necessity. The third mention, though, appears in frank admiration. It concludes a luxurious description of the genesis of "social production and the free individuality of the worker himself," which emerges out of that state of affairs "where the worker is the free proprietor of the conditions of his labour, and sets them in motion himself; where the peasant owns the land he cultivates, or the artisan owns the instruments which he plays like a virtuoso [*als Virtuose spielt*]."[277] The virtuoso's freedom comes by virtue of his labor; free because, though he may be

[274] Daggett, *The Birth of Energy*, 50.

[275] Riskin, *The Restless Clock*, 67.

[276] Marx, *Capital*, 1:868, 917.

[277] Marx, 1:927. Translation amended.

compelled to work, and compelled to perform *this* work, he is not compelled to perform in any particular way. Hence this virtuoso's labor still possesses all of the "individual character" and "charm for the workman" that "the work of the proletarians" has since lost.[278]

To avoid putting too fine a point on it: the virtuoso is not just a worker but a musician, and not just a musician but an especially distinguished one, with specific skills and accomplishments and a personal relationship to their instruments. The worker and the musician alike work insofar as they play (*spielt*), that is, insofar as they play *with instruments*. The virtuoso is an accomplished musician, and it is the particular skill of the accomplished musician to play with the instruments that are available to them; to play, that is, within the constraints of rhythm and meter and the particular affordances of the instrument in question. It is as though the element of play determined the nature of their relationship to their work. The activity is what makes the actor; in this particular case the actor merits virtuosity only through the of playing. We are no longer dealing with a mechanical labor which evacuates personality in favor of "sheer auto-performance."[279] We are dealing with a vital mechanism which involves both the labor of the body and the work of the soul. The language of virtuosity suggests a kind of happy work, and fulfilling action, where the virtuoso achieves virtue only as a human acting among other humans, such that "social production" and "free individuality" come to be one and the same thing.[280]

VI. Habit, Disposition, and Discovering Cooperation

[278] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 341.

[279] Hamacher, "Working Through Working," 40.

[280] Marx, *Capital*, 1:927. Translation amended.

This fantastical coincidence of activity and agency ultimately only throws into relief the immense gulf between factory life and the genuine kind of political participation with which we might be familiar. If this had been the only virtuosity on display in the ambit of Marx's thinking, the communist project would have been a failure on the first count. At best, the yearning for a form of labor long past would have been useless to the project of building a new world; at worst, the simplistic declaration that factories in and of themselves lead to worker self-emancipation would have been positively misleading.

Nevertheless, it is far more than a slip of the tongue that lets Marx invoke the figure of the virtuoso twice, in very different historical moments, once as the artisan and once as the machine. The transmigration of the artisan's soul into the body of the machine underlines the essential continuities between both practices of labor. The movement from the artist into the machine involves the fall of independent self-proprietorship and the rise of *interdependent* industrial cooperation. In the figure of the virtuoso, the impossibility of individual agency, economic *and* political, heralds *both* the economic arrangements of industrial capitalism *and* Marx's own positive vision of interdependence and political community.

Virtuosity recovers a notion of free action which his thinking elsewhere forecloses upon. Seen from this perspective, it should be no surprise that virtuosity plays no part in Marx's analysis of domination: in fact, the aggressive pursuit of the desire for a total picture of power might lead us to reduce virtuosity's valorization of routine to yet another form of domination. But in the *Grundrisse's* fragment on machines, there is not a single word about "false consciousness," no taking up of "the Cartesian doubt" by which Marx could claim to reveal the essence behind the appearance.[281] The machine *really is* a virtuoso, as though the constant practice of routine could somehow express not

[281] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

only virtue but skill and expertise. With such a display of virtuosity, this machine, and its soul, could almost be taken for a human. It's certainly not a matter of being *mis*-taken: the virtuosic machine is nakedly mechanical, and neither its metal composition nor its artificial organization could be mistaken for biological organism. The point where they coincide, these two virtuosos, machine and human, is their equal capacity to incarnate mechanical law. Though domination degrades humans to the status of machines, this really doesn't matter much if the machine in turn is elevated to humanity. From person, through machine, to person again—it's almost as though the quest for dignity under capitalist domination would *have* to pass through this dialectical inversion of human agency.

In short, the virtuoso evidences the existence of an internal irregularity to the movement of the body that capital's protocols of routine have yet to entirely efface. As a way of refiguring sociality for an industrial society mediated by "the extensive use of machinery," it offers a way for Marx to recognize the indivisibility of cooperation, self-respect, and democratic self-ownership.[282] Hence the absence of any moral philosophy which could offer an alternative to the dependency of routine, even though Marx's critical analysis constantly speaks of routine's many degradations. There is no philosophy of action which could distinguish between freedom and subsumption, or, for that matter, between subsumption and sociality. The activity of the virtuoso is the real and necessarily-singular repetition of an action that never quite amounts to a repetition of something singular and selfsame. The stasis of fixed mechanical action thereby gives way to the singularity of an activity undertaken by *this* particular body, in *this* particular spirit of the mechanical laws. Not quite spontaneous, but certainly not static, the dignity of the virtuoso is to act in attachment to routine without being dominated by it.

[282] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 341.

VII. Routine, Convention, and Collective Action

However suggestive the *Grundrisse's* fragment on machinic virtuosity might be for an account of agency as organized routine, this very reason makes its absence from *Capital* all the more remarkable. Much of this might be attributed to the different orientations of the texts. As Kathi Weeks writes, "although they both offer systematic mappings of capitalist logics and social formations, Marx's *Grundrisse* approaches the analysis more from the point of view of crisis and conflict, whereas *Capital* tells the story from the perspective of capital's appropriative and recuperative capacities."[283] If the virtuoso is absent from *Capital*, perhaps it is because from the perspective of capital—the perspective that Marx strains all of his faculties to adopt, in the fashion of immanent critique—agency in repetition is structurally unthinkable and anyway unnecessary to the task of valorization.

Despite its absence from *Capital* as an explicit thematic, the logic of virtuosity nevertheless continues to structure the text. To see it we would have to turn to another unthinkable, the logic of collective action. When the workers do not possess their own ingenuity, freedom, and creativity, it is possible for the machine to usurp those qualities and itself become the virtuoso. In this respect Marcuse anticipates Ernst Mach's insight that, in industrial society, "the common divisions between physiological and physical elements" are only of a "conventional nature."[284] But the collapse of a conventional distinction between humanity and metal mechanism makes room for workers' agency, too:

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[283] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 27–28.

[284] Canales, *A Tenth of a Second*, 17.

> Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates, and controls the metabolism between himself and nature…he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power.[285]

This begins to answer the question of why communism is only possible in and through capitalist modernity. The conventional collapse between "man and nature" occurs when "He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature"—that is to say, he makes a machine. The exchange of energy between worker and machine here is where the *Grundrisse* locates the conflict of capitalist society: the collapse of a conventional distinction between the (physiological) person and the (physical) machine might make all the difference for political convention, too. It's almost as though Marx *requires* the machine to take the position of the virtuoso—not as a usurpation of human power but as an *expression* of human knowledge and social expertise. When the worker has to carry out the metabolism between the *capitalist* and nature, the machine plays the role of usurper, supervening upon the worker's own agency. But when workers work together, and work with machines, to express their collective capacity for creativity, the machine ceases to play the role of usurper. When the time come, Marx thinks we *need* the machine, not just as a symbol of cooperation but as common interest's material agent: only under conditions of industrial production do workers in a cooperative venture become free agents of their own minds and bodies, because only then can the machine free them from the most taxing of tasks.

In the political-economic horizon of *Capital*, the machine affords both free time and the consequently the space for political liberty. Insofar as we are dealing here with the interplay between autonomy and automaticity, the non-sovereignty of giving oneself to the rhythm of a cooperative

[285] Marx, *Capital*, 1:283.

venture, the model of virtuosity prefigures the model of emancipated labor. The engine is an agent not because it manages to flout nature but because it manages to carry it out. The laborer, too, is a jurist of mechanical law, and moreover discovers his capacity for it through the machine's exemplary jurisprudence. Marx himself confirms the point in plain, public speech, a year or two before drafting the *Grundrisse*. "We know that to work well the newfangled forces of society, they only want to be mastered by newfangled men—and such are the working men. They are as much the invention of modern time as machinery itself."[286] It is not the old virtuosity of the independent artisan that the newfangled men rediscover, but that of their partner in modernity, the machine. They come to realize their own place in history, and their capacity for measuring up to that place, in partnership with the machine rather than independence from it.

The Combahee River Collective's extension of Marx's work is based on the criticism that his thinking is restricted to the class situation of "raceless, sexless workers"—that is, Marx implicitly works with an unmarked, universal subject that invariably turns out to be a white man.[287] Given his systematic interest in the routines of factory life, it's hard to imagine him expanding that analysis much further beyond the factory (or the plantation), on his own terms, i.e. without entirely rewriting

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[286] Marx, "Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper," 428. Cited in Rosenberg, "The Pathos of the Proletariat," 603. In this respect, the virtuosic machine's absence from *Capital* bears a more than passing resemblance to the absence from any of his writings of any prescription for what Communist institutions or norms ought to look like. Marx himself, in an afterword to *Capital*, dismissed such a desire as a petty request for "recipes…for the cook-shops of the future." Marx, "Afterword to the Second German Edition," 17. If the virtuoso needs no recipes, it may be because virtuosity cannot be prepared for, only practiced in the course of a day's labor.

[287] Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," 274.

the critical armature of *Capital*. Although repetition, as a medium of what Marx calls "subsumption" under capital, bears no small traces of domination and no small anticipatory resemblance to the totality of 20th century totalitarian politics, it is no coincidence that its mastery of factory machinery makes the European working class the essential core of the world-historical subject. The proletariat discovers its agentic interdependency, and thereby comes into its own, by mastering a set of machines and the technical relations between them.[288] As far as Marx is concerned, this is the bread

[288] What's at stake in this moment is the transformation of a gendered worker into a social and political subject. In this respect Marx's phenomenology of repetition seems less like Lukács's than the interplay of exhaustion, boredom, and inspiration that we find in the workers' biographies of Edouard Foucaud. There is no evidence that Marx ever read Foucaud. But both were writing in Paris towards the end of the July Monarchy, both concerned themselves with alienation in the workplace, and both trace out one and the same logic of manual intelligence, routine, and social solidarity. By Foucaud's lights, it is not work which produces exhaustion, but exhaustion which produces work, by dint of the pleasure to be found in routine:

> Unless he is as rich as a citizen-king, or has a narrow brain…quiet enjoyment is almost exhausting [*écrasant*, crushing] for a working man. The house in which he lives may be surrounded by greenery under a cloudless sky, it may be fragrant with flowers and enlivened by the chirping of birds; but if a worker is idle he will remain inaccessible to the charms of solitude. However, if a loud noise or a whistle from a distant factory happens to hit his ear, if he so much as hears the monotonous clattering of the machines in a factory, his face immediately brightens… (Foucaud, *Paris Inventeur*, 222).

What's at stake here is the constitution of a gendered worker as a social and political subject. The conceptual nexus of paralysis and isolation here is almost identical to the structure of abstraction that we saw

Hume offer in the scene of skepticism: in times of leisure, Foucaud's working man finds himself "depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty." (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 175). As Carol Pateman remarks, a "'worker' is a husband," and a husband has a "housewife," an "economic dependent" whose province is "domestic service." Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 136–37, 138. The industrial coarticulation of the family and the factory means that, thanks to the wife's labor, Foucaud's worker has nothing to do around the home. The worker is so bored, exhausted of the capacity for feeling, that his surroundings remain inaccessible no matter how penetrating their beauty may be. It's not that the working man is a philistine; rather, idleness exhausts him to the point that his senses cannot delight in the scene or appreciate it for its own sake or even experience "the charms of solitude" in anything but the most superficial way. There's no doubt that something ideological is at play here: workers enjoy work, so let's give it to them. But beyond the obvious point is something genuinely problematical in Foucaud's description of the scene. Why would the worker's senses come alive only in routine?

It's almost as though the experience of boredom confirms the important of activity and the relentless progress not only in the course of a single life but in the course of industrial modernity as a whole. The fact that the worker is almost physiologically unsuited for unending vacation is proof of boredom's latent creativity. It is not so much that delight is found productivity—the desire is by no means a desire to make and accumulate—but delight can be found rather in the *creativity*.. "He remembers the happy days of his work [*d'un travail manuel*] that was guided by the inspiration of the mind [*l'inspiration de cerveau*]." *Paris Inventeur*, 222. It's possible to read this as transposing the sensation of joy into the relation of rule: the worker is *happy* to labor under a boss. But Foucaud's distinction between the hands and the brain, between "*travail manuel*" and "*l'inspiration de cerveau*," doesn't naturally resolve into a distinction between persons, as we might have expected under business's distinction between labor and management. It suggests rather the opposite, that the days are happy because the worker can use his head *alongside* his hands. Rabinbach calls this a "moral proscription against idleness," though a homily seems somewhat beside the point when the worker naturally gravitates toward industry. Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 32. When Foucaud assigns the worker back to the

and butter of a free society. "Nobody—not even a practitioner of the music of the future [i.e. a virtuoso]—can live on the products of the future…just as on the first day of his appearance on the world's stage, man must still consume every day."[289] This attachment to the present need not imply obedience to it. It only suggests that the laborer must still depend on other people, and conversely that dependence on others requires labor.

VIII. Repetition and Class Formation

E.P. Thompson asks us to "remember that class is a relationship, and not a thing."[290] In this respect, Marx's account of repetition and virtuosity *is an account of class-formation*. That is, it is an account of solidarity that emerges in the habits and material capabilities that make up people's working lives and inform the relationships that they form, both to their machines and to one

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factory, he does not thereby order them to remain in their place and return to their function. The worker takes up the place of the hand, but the head too, and takes up his work both as ruler and ruled.

The *Grundrisse's* fragment on machines structures cooperation and repetition in similar terms: "The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ [*bewußtes Organ*], scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself…" Marx, *Grundrisse*, 693. Productive human individuality disappears in this moment and is never replaced by a commensurate form. Rather, the productivity takes the form of a partnership between the individual living workers, "merely as a conscious organ" when organized by management, but perhaps not so mere when *organ*-ized by the workers themselves for their own "support and sustenance." Butler, "The Inorganic Body," 13. Thus the workers' ingenuity may just be the organized avoidance of exhaustion.

[289] Marx, *Capital.*

[290] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 11.

another. The "ever-present temptation to suppose that class is a thing," Thompson continues, mistakes class to be "based on the differences in legitimate power associated with certain positions…He belongs to a class because he occupies a position in a social organisation."[291] The problem with this image of class is that it relies too heavily on the causal power of domination; it may offer a perfectly good explanation of how class came to be, but the static quality of the image cannot capture the sense of solidarity essential to the notion. "If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences."[292] Nevertheless, "if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change," that is to say, if we look with Thompson at the industrial transformation of a society, we see how class coalesces around the workers themselves—in "their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions." It does not coalesce around their domination. In this respect it seems possible to think of virtuosity as the sentiment that composes solidarity: it invokes the capabilities of machinic co-operation that lead to political cooperation.

The most persistent difficulty in Marx's thinking is that he speaks of the origins of political solidarity in terms of the personal virtue which it was supposed to condition. This dependence is the virtuoso's essential problem. It's not just that the experience of individuality remains locked in the individual, it's also that the individual alone can never experience it without the feeling of interdependence. Hence the deep ambivalence of the proletariat, their stasis and their spontaneity. The daily need to sell their labor and purchase their reprieve, which circumscribes their life in routine, puts the proletariat in a position to act, and is why Marx gives the proletariat their name. As is well known, the word is not an invention of Marx's. The proletariat (*proletarii*, from *proletarius*,

[291] Thompson, 10–11.

[292] Thompson, 11.

producing offspring) is the name given to the lowest stratum of antique Roman society: those Roman citizens who, owning very little property, could offer the state only their offspring. This is a class which is good only for reproduction. What makes someone *proletarii* is not their poverty, or the fact that they must sell their labor to subsist; it is that their children are listed on the census forms in the absence of any other property. Hal Draper notes that though this technical meaning holds for the republic and most of the early empire, it "was obsolete by the second century A.D."[293] After that, it comes to refer to those on the margins of society. "It embraced all kinds of workers simply because they were poor, but it did not necessarily imply a working status of any kind, let alone the wage-working status."[294]

The proletarian is someone who owns absolutely nothing at all, except their body, their skill, and their labor. Marx sometimes calls it labor-power, and sometimes also calls it virtuosity. The former is spoken from the position of the political economist. Consider what the calculation of labor-power involves. This proletarian is someone who ekes out the barest living on the margin of society; the precise form that life takes, and the "means of subsistence" which suffice "to maintain him in his normal state," vary by time and place, and involve "a historical and moral element."[295] But in the course of a few lines the maintenance in question is no longer of a sociocultural order. It merely refers to the maintenance of the worker's body as a working body. Hence "in a given country at a given period, the average amount of the means of subsistence necessary for the worker is a known *datum*."[296] The proletariat is no longer on the margin of society, away from the prying eyes of

[293] Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 131.

[294] Draper, 131.

[295] Marx, *Capital*, 1:275.

[296] Marx, 1:275.

power. The numbers are there, and they are *known*, even if they have nothing to do with morals or history. "It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the national debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent…at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants."[297] Strictly speaking, the laborer is good for only one thing—labor—except when considered as a member of the proletariat, in which case they are honored with the additional duty of reproduction. The point of the moniker is that the proletariat must constantly replenish the labor-power available to capital. "The capital given in return for labour-power is converted into means of subsistence which have to be consumed to reproduce the muscles, nerves, bones, and brains of existing workers, and to bring new workers into existence."[298] At the daily level, the proletariat needs to recover from the exhaustion of the working day on a daily basis. They also recover their own labor-power on the timescale of generations, in the form of their children, the next generation of workers. Though reproduction here appears in two forms, for the purposes of accumulation the distinction between persons hardly matters at all. To capital "in full swing, and on its actual social scale," what matters is that there be a anatomically fungible reserve of labor-power for purchase.[299]

Virtuosity takes that very same anatomical fungibility and makes of it a personality. As Arendt points out, labor needed to become public in order to become productive, and that aspect of publicity lends to routine its cooperative energy.[300] Here we ought to pause to appreciate Marx's choice of term for the collective subject of capitalist domination and communist revolution. He does

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[297] Dickens, *Hard Times*, 61.

[298] Marx, *Capital*, 1:717.

[299] Marx, 1:717.

[300] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 87–88.

many things with the term, whether it is to describe their plight as those "who live only so long as they find work," or in a turn of history ascribe to it "the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority," or call it the class that, like Cincinnatus, "will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class."[301] The particular uses to which he puts it are less remarkable than the fact that he uses it at all, this old, obsolete, and by any measure inaccurate term of Roman law, to designate this absolutely modern class and this absolutely new condition of having nothing to sell but agency.[302] It is further remarkable in light of the mockery that he makes of the 19th century bourgeoisie's attempts to claim the very same ancestry: "unheroic as bourgeois society is," it yet found the emotional resources for political agency in a motley amalgam of "Roman costume" and "Roman phrases."[303] And yet the continuation of that tradition "knew nothing better than to parody, in turn, 1789 and the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795."[304] It's not simply that the repetition is a farce, it's that repetition is structurally farcical. Hence Louis Bonaparte's need to accelerate historical time, "executing a *coup d'état en miniature* every day…makes some tolerant of revolution, others desirous of revolution, and produces actual anarchy in the name of order."[305] The proletariat's

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[301] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," 341, 344, 353.

[302] Draper suspects that perhaps the usage first arose among Parisian workers' circles in the 1830s, given that it was a hotbed of working-class thought, as the term for the general category. Engels then uses it in his *Condition of the Working-Class in England*, the book that caught Marx's eye and suggested their collaboration. Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory*, 132. The question remains as to why Marx himself was so drawn to the word, especially in light of his mockery for so many other instances of classical nostalgia.

[303] Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire," 437.

[304] Marx, 437.

[305] Marx, 524–25.

repetitions are not subject to the same biting satire. Indeed, Marx sees the proletariat, not just as workers or individuals but collectively, *as proletarii*, as capable of assuming a genuine world-historical role. Perhaps the difference lies in the emplotment of the action. The spontaneity of the proletariat, and the exhaustion of the bourgeoisie, seems to reside in the fact that the one acts in order to repeat, and the other repeats in order to act. The bourgeoisie recalls the past—its Caesars and its Ciceros—in order to project their will into the future. The class repeats *so that* it can act. In the case of the proletariat, there is no pretense to heroic action, molded an older model. Insofar as they are a newfangled class, one without precedent in the history of class society, then there is no historical precedent for the proletariat to draw upon for their own emplotment. If their present action warrants a comparison to the past, it's only a comparison made in review, rather than on the stage itself. It's as though for all that the bourgeoisie thought of themselves as the latter-day Romans, it is really their counterpart, the newly-gathered social class, who revive, without pretense or parody, the pageantry of the old republic. The action is an unselfconscious repetition.

What Marx says is novel about the rise of capital is that it needs a class without society, without power, without world, and without future, in order to power the mechanisms of its own future progress. The daily need to sell their labor and buy their recovery makes the proletariat fit only to reproduce, to provide ever more bodies and ever more labor power to the processes of accumulation. And yet, speaking literally, it is nonsense to say that the proletariat is an "utterly new invention…alien to the ancestral spirit."[306] They are *proletariat*, that is, an utterly new condition nevertheless given this ancient name; their novelty becomes intelligible only in terms of that ancestral spirit. The dialectic of repetition internal to the proletariat is that the recognition of a historical repetition passes into the total confinement of biological repetition, and conversely, the

[306] Rosenberg, "The Pathos of the Proletariat," 603.

privation of biological repetition passes into the recognition of one's collective place in the historical process. In this respect we ought to take seriously the suggestion that, counterintuitively enough, "Marx rejected the kind of pro-worker sympathy which limits its horizon to the narrow, class-bound, corporative interests" of a working-class.[307] What Marx could not understand, owing to his conviction in the historical process, was that his two accounts of the proletariat's daily role and historical simply correspond to two manners of repetition, and that the movement from the one to the other is not a matter of abandoning repetition but arranging it in a different manner. Though the proletarians may be workers, their essential characteristic is not that they work but that they repeat, and as repeaters they figure both destitution and interdependence.

Rosa Luxemburg is perhaps the first to pick up on this ambiguity and to transpose it into a question of political organization. "The fate of democracy is bound up…with the fate of the Labour movement."[308] Not democracy for the laborers, but democracy *tout court*, as though there were a potentiality embedded in labor's routine which could extend to "embrace[s] every aspect of life."[309] The phrase is Lukács's, who meant it to describe a vision of a tragic world wherein every action would fatefully redound to the benefit of capital, and where the proletariat would be submerged so

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[307] Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Volume 2: The Politics of Social Class*, 72.

[308] Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings*, 56.

[309] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 90–91. Even though many later Marxist authors found Lukács's speculations untenable, they agreed on the basic scope of the problem. The Frankfurt School, for instance, accepted as a truism the existence of a "culture industry," as though the two were now one and the same. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94–136. Bernard Stiegler arrives at the logical conclusion of this expansion of the concept when he describes "'elites' themselves proletarianized," not due to a fall in rank but insofar as their elite functions themselves take on a proletarian character. Stiegler, *States of Shock*, 198.

fully in the regimes of capitalist routine that they could never "come into their own," "become a historical subject," etc. Althusser would be tempted to agree, on the grounds that "it is extremely hard, not to say almost impossible, to raise oneself [let alone a class] to the *point of view of reproduction.*"[310] But the organizer interpreters of Marx found it very easy, perhaps because they understood the question of reproduction in an eminently practical sense. "We can (and must) build socialism, not with abstract human material, or with human material specially prepared by us, but with the human material bequeathed to us by capitalism."[311] Socialism, on this critique of radicalism, is simply the immanent reproduction of capitalism. It neither transcends capitalism, nor negates capitalism, but emerges from the belabored repetition of its forms.

And who ought to be the agent of that reproduction? The proletariat, of course, but the simplicity of the story ends there. On the one hand, the proletariat can refer to a specific class of individuals, namely those who must sell their labor to live, a group so exclusive of so many forms of dominated labor that it ceases to be a politically useful concept in Marx's own time, to say nothing of our own postindustrial era. On the other hand, as the exemplar of a systemic experience, the proletariat is capable of embracing almost everyone under the regime of value. Apparently the sharing of a single structure of routine, with various modalities of domination, is enough to open a doorway to solidarity, what Luxemburg calls "conquest" and Lenin calls "compromise."[312] Whatever its name, it is the art of navigating the routines of capitalism. When Marx theorizes the historical agency of the proletariat, he does so in terms of their energetic agency, their intellectual creativity

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[310] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 2.

[311] Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism—An Infantile Disorder," 50.

[312] Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings*, 56–65; Lenin, "'Left-Wing' Communism—An Infantile Disorder," 66–77 and passim.

under physiological constraint. The proletariat are revolutionary, but the revolutions in question are neither those movements which turn society upside down, nor the recurrent rise and fall of governments, nor even the movements of the heavenly spheres. They are the cycles of routine, mechanical work. Unlike the conscious recollection of the bourgeois revolution, which Marx thinks of as betraying a collective dearth of imagination, the proletariat's gestures of repetition are singular: they refer to no models of action at all, even though they might be conditioned upon them. Even when the proletariat repeat, they imitate nothing, least of all the past, and certainly not with the presumptuousness of the bourgeois actors.

The grandeur gives way to the everyday partnership of their own routine. "Only the hammer blow of revolution," Luxemburg writes, "can break down this wall" between capitalist and socialist society, but she cannot say whether the hammer is a weapon or a tool, found on the field or the factory floor.[313] What is certain, though, is "spontaneity," since "revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them."[314] The proletariat remain human instruments, but never the tools of an enlightened vanguard; they act rather more like the instrument of Aristotle's speculations, which, without the need for another's coordination, "could accomplish its own work when ordered, anticipating the will of others," and thereby "enter self-moved the company divine."[315]

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[313] Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution and Other Writings*, 31.

[314] Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike," 198.

[315] Aristotle, *Aristotle*, 1932, 1253b35. Translation amended. Aristotle's remark supplies the counterfactual substitutes for both slaves and the lower craftsmen. If we had such instruments, he says, all labor would be taken care of, leaving everyone free for the higher activities. No such instruments exist, and so some must be compelled to labor.

IX. Conclusion

Kathi Weeks writes that "Marxism is so often understood in terms of its commitment to work's acclamation, to the liberation of work from exploitation and the restoration of its dignity in unalienated form."[316] Without contesting her basic diagnosis, this chapter has tried to read Marx differently, as someone interested less in work itself than in *routine*, and as a theorist of the rhythms of interpersonal life. Marx's commitment to work comes from a more basic commitment to the idea that there are modes of creative social cooperation necessary for a good life. When routine is taken as the circumstances of an individual working life, it makes for alienation and destitution. When taken as the effect of an individual action—as in the effort to escape the working class and to reclaim one's personal freedom, which no person can undertake without trampling on the heads of others and reproducing the capital form—it signals futility. In his more republican moments, though, he turns back to the logic of habit and argues for a classical notion of political freedom to be found in "the practice of virtue" within local forms of cooperation.[317] As far as the horizon of his own thinking is concerned, the exemplar of virtue is not the orator or the general or even the party secretary, but rather the virtuoso, the machine, and like the machine, the virtuous subject who secures virtue only by giving themselves to the abstractions of routine. Just as repetition and progress are one and the same movement under the political economy of capital, here interdependence and initiative are found in one and the same mastery of routine.

The Marx that emerges from this portrait is not a eulogist of productivity; he is the organizer's Marx, the Marx of direct action and worker's cooperatives, the Marx who appreciates work because he appreciates the political felicity of falling into the right rhythm, and the right place,

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[316] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 81.

[317] Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 247.

at the right time. Though spontaneity is an important word in the reception of Marx's thought, as a way to interpret his understanding of the agency of the working class, Marx himself never relies on the idea. Organization never comes from nowhere. Seen through the lens of repetition, Marx's thought ends not so much a revolutionary imperative as in an infinite task of sentimental association. As a revolution in sentimentalities, communism's chief active verb is not to redistribute, or to equalize, or even to seize and to rationalize. It is to habituate. What matters is constant practice at social cooperation: this is the logic behind Marx's communism from "a *state of affairs* which is to be established" to "the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things," which in turn just reflects Marc's basic position on biological repetition: "Life itself appears only as *a means for life*."[318]

At stake in the contest for democracy in the workplace isn't just a more equitable distribution of the goods produced in a capitalist society; it's also about a more humane kind of workday. By specifying the problem of labor—of how people relate to one another as they go about their everyday social activity—as a question of repetition, Marx suggests an alternative to private enterprise and the value-form of accumulation which motivates it. When the worker collapses into the machine, we have the conditions for dispossession and displaced vitality. But when the machine collapses into the figure of the worker, their work becomes neither a means nor an end but an immanent vitality *emplaced* in the practice of sociality. "Labor cannot become play, as Fourier would like, although it remains his great contribution to have expressed the suspension not of distribution but of the mode of production itself, in a higher form, as the ultimate object."[319] Perhaps Marx is right, and labor cannot become play; nevertheless, it *can* be expertly performed; and so in like manner to Fourier it is Marx's own contribution to have theorized the inversion of play into labor:

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[318] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 56–57; Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 62.

[319] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 712.

not as an act of capture by capital, but as an ongoing activity of absorption in one's work. This chapter has tried to capture that scene of absorption as a question of how workers come to cooperate in a way they can be proud of. The machine, absorbed in its own routine, cannot help but display "a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it."[320] What so unsettles the theorists of virtue is their suspicion that the agency of the virtuosic machine comes from neither a will nor a being, but rather from its actualization of those mechanical laws. Things are not so easy for the human body: it cannot will itself into virtuosity, though it can perhaps habituate itself into it. This process of habituation—Marx calls it critique—is precisely what the routines of capital both resist and rely upon. Even though no scientist or capitalist has discovered virtuosity in an engine or a human body, they have routinely had to presuppose it. It is this elusive quality that Marx finds so promising in machinic repetition. The politics built upon it is no longer a willful fantasy of radical transformation; it is tedious and repetitive, like "slow drilling at hard boards"— a labor of determined action.[321]

[320] Marx, 693.

[321] Weber, "Politics as Vocation," 93. Translation amended.

Intermezzo

Walter Benjamin on the Emancipatory Potential of Behavioral Technologies

"On the one hand, film furthers insight into the necessities governing our lives by its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through ingenious guidance of the camera; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of a vast and unsuspected field of action [*Spielraum*]."[322] In the second version of the essay which was later to be published as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin places the problem of agency squarely in the middle of *Spielraum*, or room-for-play. It is a placement that describes the very same field of habit and repetition that we have seen thus far in this dissertation. Just as Hume asserts in his *Treatise of Human Nature* that the establishment of legal authority requires the repetitive activity of habit; and as Marx asserts that the factory trains the proletariat in the habits of machinic operation necessary for political co-operation; so too does Benjamin argue that film's capacity to shock its audience, to train their reactions, and to habituate them to their own environment, has nothing to do with its representational power. Benjamin's claim is that film is a sentimental rather than a mimetic medium. In other words, rather than encouraging a "degraded form of concentration" it corresponds to a dynamic and historically appropriate form of attention.[323] If there is a case to be made for the politicality of film, it hinges on these capacities of popular perception.

Political theorists are for the most part familiar only with the *Illuminations* version of the essay, which describes a very different kind of film than that just outlined. The idea that the masses are capable of solidarity at all, let alone a progressive, is far from obvious to a sensibility steeped in

[322] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 37.

[323] Jagoda, *Experimental Games*, 13.

the truisms of critical theory, especially to a sensibility which understands "the masses" as a mimetic monolith. The *Illuminations* version, which Benjamin revised at Theodore Adorno's insistence, provides a convenient way of displacing questions of aesthetic and technical media into this question of the masses, and onto the question of whether films can either dupe the masses or make them properly aware. (Consider how Benjamin concludes by summoning the specter of a "politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic," to which "Communism responds by politicizing art.")[324] Although the draft I'm interested in concludes on the same dubious distinction, Miriam Hansen documents how it pays far more careful attention to the tensions internal to the medium of film itself. Unlike the more familiar version, this one retains what she calls "the dynamic of Benjamin's distinctive—and distinctly productive—mode of thinking in which concepts are hardly every stable or self-identical."[325]

I prefer to turn to the second version not only to make the case for *Spielraum* as a form of political sentimentalism, but also to get at what was so disturbing about the possibility of play to a nascent notion of critical theory. These notions of differentiation mark a significant departure from the ontology of audience in other exempla of Frankfurt political thought. Perhaps most notably, Adorno could not think of popular culture as a site of anything other than mimesis, that is, as anything other than the repetition of the same. "One need only have heard the laughter of the

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[324] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 242.

[325] Although Benjamin's essay raises many of the questions that Marcuse will open two decades later, the latter never refers to his writings on this point. I attribute this silence to the institutional politics of the Frankfurt School: Adorno forcefully opposed the second version of the essay, the one that lays emphasis most forcefully on play (to the extent that Benjamin even praises the character of Mickey Mouse!), and persuaded Benjamin to remove the references to such undialectical concepts. Hansen, "Room-for-Play," 5.

audience at the film to know what is happening," he writes, as though there were only one form of laughter and obviously only one thing "that is happening."[326] Adorno's worry, to spell it out, is that when audiences watch a slapstick comedy their response can only reflect the absurdities on screen. The laughter is a taking of pleasure in the scene that cannot reflect on the indecent and authoritarian dimensions of the plot. In other words, those who laugh at Chaplin films are fascist subjects at the larval stage, because they enjoy the barbarity of the physical antics. Adorno writes that "it is as though you feared a consequent inrush of barbarism (who could share your fear more than I?) and protected yourself by raising what you fear to a kind of inverse taboo."[327] There's a way here in which Adorno's own exasperation with Benjamin's thinking comes from his inability to escape the image of social life as the culture industry, whereby all reception is reproduction and hence the viewing of barbarism reproduced on screen reproduces that barbarism in the soul of the viewer.[328]

Miriam Hansen suggests that we read the artwork essay as a "partisan manifesto."[329] As a partisan of what? Surely not communism, too-simply understood as the ideological opposite of fascism. Certainly we can say that Benjamin is a partisan of film; but he is even moreso a partisan of the audience. As I read it, what distinguishes the second version is not just its attentiveness to play but *through play* its attentiveness to the attentional conditions of political agency. The case to be made

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[326] Adorno, "Adorno to Benjamin, 18 March 1936," 124.

[327] Adorno, 123.

[328] In a work that could fruitfully be read as a desperate rebuttal to Benjamin's essay, Adorno and his coauthor Horkheimer write that "all [the culture industry's] agents…are on the alert to ensure that the simple reproduction of mind does not lead to expansion of mind." Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 100.

[329] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 77.

for the politicality of film is less a matter of aesthetic form than attentional mode: film matters because it trains its audience in the habits of attending and appraising necessary for navigating the modern world. The problem with the culture industry thesis is that it misunderstands both what film is and what the audience does. Given the anxieties present from the start, it's no surprise that Adorno could find in film only a medium of domination. In what follows, I describe both the concept of *Spielraum,* room-for-play, and the preparatory work that Benjamin does in order to make the concept legible as a mode of popular agency. The essay concerns the political character of film, which is to say, the political character of popular culture. Its interest in the technical details of the medium is an interest in the way that the medium is uniquely capable of eliciting a kind of reaction—Benjamin calls it "progressive"—from its audience.[330] When an audience collectively views a film, they not only react to it all simultaneously but react to the film amongst one another—and so we have not just a transmission of information to the audience but a situation of interplay. Because their responses can respond to one another, this is not a scene of mimetic unity but one of democratic differentiation. Benjamin's claim isn't merely that play is a form of competent collective subjectivity, but more strongly that play is the necessary sentimental condition to any political competency capable of measuring up to the ruptures of modern life.

I. Play-form, Game-form, Organization

"The great archetypal activities of human society," writes the cultural historian Joseph Huizinga in his 1938 *Homo Ludens*, "are all permeated with play from the start."[331] Roger Caillois

[330] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 36. Emphasis in original.

[331] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 4.

admires the breadth of this vision, but objects that it is "at the same time too broad and too narrow."[332] We ought to distinguish "the play principle," understood as something purely creative and "denuded of all material interest," from "games of chance" and "competitive games," which are strategic, rule-oriented, and "occupy an important part in the economy and daily life of various cultures."[333] Thus does Caillois explain the way in which Huizinga's historical discovery becomes the governing principle of a new program of research and governance. It is an ambition to turn the old maxim that "habit is a second nature" into a literal and empirically testable proposition. The central intuition of what will come to be known as game theory is that it becomes possible to command and control a political or economic situation simply by reducing it to the analogical game.

Needless to say, Benjamin's account of *Spielraum* is not an example of game theory, and I do not intend to treat it as such. Benjamin speaks of play in the unpurposive way in which a child plays, or the way in which one encounters a work of art, or the way in which one of Sigmund Freud's patients might describe whatever comes to mind. Nevertheless, I think it relevant for our purposes here to note that Benjamin approaches the behavioralist problematic of the game theorists in a way that political theorists have not yet acknowledged: namely, the sense in which play is a problem of organization. Both give us an account of organization without justification, or, put differently, a moral sentimentalism. For social scientific purposes, the analytical conceit of the game requires an exclusive attention to the external form of the action. At issue is how the player's behavior conforms to the appearance of a game, without any reference whatsoever to their internally-expressed norms, values, or beliefs. In other words, game theory attempts to capture the formal elements of intentionality and organization without any reference to incidental psychological matter. That a game

[332] Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 4.

[333] Caillois, 4–5.

can be enjoyed is largely incidental to their analysis; the fact never arises in their consideration of the subject, even in relation to "the everyday concept of games."[334] Norbert Wiener, the cyberneticist, makes use of this point to object that "von Neumann's picture of the player as a completely intelligent, completely ruthless person is an abstraction and a perversion of the facts."[335] Nevertheless, the absence of any idea of fun makes their attachment to the notion of *game* all the more remarkable. Though Wiener's criticism should sound rather familiar in light of decades of invective against the theory of rational choice, here it hits a little off the mark: von Neumann and Morgenstern take care to specify that "the zero-sum [i.e. competitive] restriction weakens the connection between games and economic problems quite considerably."[336] Accordingly, "extending the theory to all non-zero-sum games must be expected to bring us into closer contact with questions of the familiar economic type."[337] To put it more plainly, games become models of social and economic arrangements the moment they model *cooperation* as well as competition—or to put it slightly differently, the moment that they cease to model coordination in terms of a competitive individualism, since the picture of intelligence that corresponds to cooperation is less about individual cunning than common sense—that is, a sort of social sensibility.

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[334] von Neumann and Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*, 32. I am tempted to observe that this silence surely has something to do with their concern that the concept of a game must be "precise and exhaustive in order to make a mathematical treatment possible." von Neumann and Morgenstern, 32. This is an observation that the Marx of the last chapter might just as well have made.

[335] Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, 159.

[336] von Neumann and Morgenstern, *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*, 504.

[337] von Neumann and Morgenstern, 504.

Political theorists often point to this lack of explicit communication as evidence of the presence of ideology, namely, the ideology of market fundamentalism behind the rise of neoliberalism in the late 20th century and the consequent "undoing" of democratic politics.[338] Rather than contribute to such a far-reaching thesis, my point here is just to say that the rise of behaviorism facilitates the substitution of mathematics for political philosophy. In this respect the game is the explicit alternative to what Hannah Arendt called the example, that element of political education which provides direction to the agent sufficiently schooled in history to know which actions lead to success and which, on the contrary, lead one to ruin.[339] The kind of argument for or against the existence of the senate that one might hear in a modern university lecture in political science instead typically turns to a subjunctive account of the norms and the behaviors the institution would encourage.

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[338] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. In this respect, Marcuse's proximity to the play-notions of systems theory might be usefully compared to Michel Foucault's interest in neoliberalism as a new social order more amenable to horizontal relations of power and experiments in living—an interest for which he has been rather heavily castigated. See Zamora and Behrent, *Foucault and Neoliberalism*.

[339] This propadeutic tradition of the example is described by Dienstag, "The Example of History and the History of Examples in Political Theory," 485.

Arendt wastes no time in contrasting historical experience to statistical law when she bluntly asserts that "the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave"—that is, the more likely they are to blindly repeat some determined behaviors. Presumably behavior is evacuated of political potential, because its blind repetition could not be further from the plurality and personhood that characterize the properly political realm. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 43, 175ff.

Thus the ontology of justification for the game is a matter of mathematics rather than moral philosophy. The action informed by the example banks on the idea that history can repeat itself, indeed itself incarnates history's self-repetition. The action informed by the model, by contrast, repeats not in time but in the intentionality of play and counterplay that the model's formal logic registers. Unlike the example, which offers "a set of cases for instruction," cases which are situated firmly in the pasty and consumed through the reading of history, the formal model of a game involves only the hypothetical formalism of mathematical symbols. In this respect game theory is the 20th century version of utilitarian philosophy, in that it enables coordination without communication and, indeed, coordination without reference to internal mental states at all.[340] It doesn't *matter* whether an action conforms to tradition or religious belief I may hold, because all that matters are the external questions of utility or behavior. What is the utility in performing this action? Or what game does it conform to? Political questions cannot be moral ones precisely because they naturally involve a calculus of coordination that has nothing to do with the autonomous intentionality behind individual actions—because, as we saw before with Hume, any thinking that has to do with norms or values is literally senseless. When cooperation involves taking information from all sorts of environmental impressions—not only what people say but what they do, when they do it, and how—we begin to locate collective action in a sensorial apparatus that is no longer concerns only, or even mainly, the representation and the interpretation of signs. This act of imputing agency to another so necessary for cooperation is, in other words, primarily about sympathy rather than reflection.

This problem puts moral criticism in an extremely precarious position. It's also precisely what Adorno found so disturbing about Benjamin's fondness for play. While it is obviously possible

[340] On this question of coordination cf. Sabl, *Hume's Politics* discussed in chapter two.

to praise or to blame the way in which the figure of *homo economicus* plays an economic game in a way that contravenes their consciously-held values or norms, this reflex neither addresses the real explanatory ambitions of this proto-"neoliberal" mode of political thinking, nor does it confront the ontology of belief, action, and organization that underlies it. I may criticize some features of the social order which surrounds me, but what happens if I nevertheless feel compelled to participate in those very same features? To take the ontology elaborated here seriously is to admit that no such withdrawal is possible. What we have in this account of systems or games—these terms being almost synonymous in their reference to one and the same mode of activity—is not of market fundamentalism but a sense that the organization necessary for real political association is found in an economic sensibility rather than moral reflection. What happens when I feel compelled to participate in the very same features of social life that I wish to criticize? What if, like Adorno, I harbor deep reservations about the products of the culture industry, but like Adorno I find myself ineluctably drawn to the cinema? In other words there is a way in which this mode of criticism is incapable of substantiating political change precisely to the extent that it fails to carry out moral persuasion. Two researchers for the RAND corporation summarize the problem well, if rather approvingly. "To sit down and play through a game is to be convinced as by no argument, however persuasively presented."[341] Because all the relevant features of game-playing are externally and immediately observable, there is no need to inquire into the psychology of the players. To play a game requires a social impressionability that is far more lively, to return to Hume's word for it, than the products of critical reflection. What was true of Hume holds here as well, namely, that we have a moral theory unrecognizable apart from its social theory, because the moral relations depend on the pattern which emerges *through*, rather than before, the moment of play.

[341] Mood and Specht, "Gaming as a Technique of Analysis," 13. Cited by Jagoda, *Experimental Games*, 80.

In other words, what we have is an account of novelty. I do not think it is a coincidence that Benjamin turns to the same potentialities that will be unearthed by this project of complexity and cooperation. Whereas the game theorists' attention to the pure formality of the interactions means that games come to substitute for a vivacious and varied social existence, Benjamin locates that vitality within the moment of play itself. But in both cases the moment of play is a moment of novelty, because it is a moment of organization. In this respect the question of novelty helps us consider the practical implications of his lack of confidence in film's ability to straightforwardly represent value to its audience. Representation cannot account for the activity of organization: to say that film represents something to which the audience responds underestimates the extent to which the audience can organize their own perceptions of and responses to what is happening on the screen. In other words, the question may not be whether film can serve "fascist" or "communist" ends—the sort of question for which Benjamin, despite the ending, would generally have little patience—but whether it can, in the first instance, elicit the competencies of political agency.

II. Benjamin on Play and Popular Culture

It's more or less well established that the artwork essay hazards a cautious optimism towards both the technological potentials of film and the social potentials of popular culture. It's also well established that Adorno strenuously objected to both of these points on the grounds that Benjamin failed to think sufficiently dialectically, that is, negatively and critically. Less well appreciated, I think, is the way that he gives us a vision of agency or even autonomy founded instead upon a kind of sentimentality. In a series of sections which are far more detailed in the second version, Benjamin elaborates on three interrelated elements of the "progressive reaction" to the popular cinema: *Spielraum*, shock, and habit. In a footnote that failed to make the final cut, Benjamin attributes this new and different kind of participation to a new and different kind of technology—one in which

"mastery of elementary social forces is a precondition for *playing* with nature."[342] In another such footnote unique to the draft, he announces the end of the era of aesthetic perception founded in "beautiful semblance," and in its place announces the arrival of play: "Semblance is the most abstract—but therefore the most ubiquitous—schema of all the magic procedures of the first technology [the technology of domination], whereas play is the inexhaustible reservoir of all the experimenting procedures of the second."[343] Benjamin pairs this with a "practical insight": "what is lost in the whithering of semblance and decay of the aura in works of art is matched by a huge gain in the *Spielraum*. This space for play [*Spielraum*] is widest in film."[344]

This offers a different normative ideal of medial (and political) engagement. To play with a film requires that one *does not treat it as an object of critique*. Unsurprisingly, of all the moments of naivety in the text this is the notion that Adorno would really unacceptable: "but I do not see why play should be properly dialectical, and appearance…should not."[345] Given the centrality of dialectics to the project of a critical theory, is this perhaps the worst thing Adorno could have said. How could play matter in a way that representation could not? As Adorno could understand it, play could appear in the cinema only as laughter, and the "laughter of the audience at a cinema…is anything but good and revolutionary; instead, it is full of the worst bourgeois sadism."[346]

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[342] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 45n11.

[343] Benjamin, 48n23.

[344] Benjamin, 48-49n23.

[345] "Adorno to Benjamin, 18 March 1936," 122.

[346] Adorno, 123. I am convinced that this approach is the wrong way to understand the operations of cultural power. The laughter, as an expression of "bourgeois sadism," may be an outward reflection of attitude but is not itself the essential object of Adorno's anxiety. "Each single manifestation of the culture industry," he and

"Accordingly, what I would postulate is *more* dialectics"—i.e. more on appearance and less on play, which after all, cannot engage in the work of negation necessary to secure the autonomy of the critical subject.[347]

Whatever the merits of Adorno's attempt to displace the physiology of play into the epistemology of critical reflection, the fact remains that on a superficial level, Benjamin himself found play—and its instantiation in laughter—to be one of the most *civilized* ("progressive") responses to film, and slapstick comedy to be one of the highest forms of the medium. "*The extremely backward attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into a highly progressive reaction to a Chaplin film.*"[348] Though these two exemplars of their respective media elicit somewhat comparable responses, the meaning entirely differs from each. It's not that these are two different responses, but the same response to two different objects. "A painting has always exerted a claim to be viewed primarily by a

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Horkheimer will elsewhere explain, "inescapably reproduces human beings as what the whole has made them." This process of reproduction "debars the spectator from thinking…while still repressing the powers of imagination." The process by which "the power of industrial society is imprinted on people once and for all" is a triple determination of knowledge, imagination, and behavior. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 100. But this underestimates the extent to which social behavior can depart from social knowledge, and argument that Olúfémi O. Táíwò makes rather persuasively in "The Empire Has No Clothes." That is, what's so worrisome about the laughter of bourgeois sadism is the possibility that it's *freely indulged in*, with full knowledge of its implications. This is precisely what Adorno's variety of critical theory cannot conceive.

[347] Adorno, "Adorno to Benjamin, 18 March 1936," 124.

[348] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 36. Emphasis in original.

single person or by a few."[349] The social impact of painting those becomes a matter of sequential viewings: individuals stand in front of the painting to behold it and to impress it on their memory, and then depart to make room for the next viewers. The experience of parallel reception characteristic of cinema makes it a far more social medium. "The decisive reason for this is that nowhere more than in cinema are the reactions of individuals, which together make up the massive reaction of the audience, determined by the immanent concentration of reactions into a mass. *No sooner are these reactions manifest than they regulate one another*."[350] In other words, film is an experience both of simultaneity and solidarity. What makes film's political logic unique is that a large number of people can view the film all at once. Whereas painting, according to Benjamin, would always be viewed in "a manifoldly graduated and hierarchically mediated way," "the simultaneous collective reception" of film underwrites the progressive (we might also say *egalitarian*) attitude of its audience.[351] In the chapter on Hume, we saw how the "regime of the eye" differed from the "regime of the picture," in that the former emplaces the viewer in the social landscape they are viewing and the latter isolates the viewer from the image. Whereas the regime of the eye "allows the viewer both to recognize itself in the place of the seen and to identify with the process of seeing," the latter "enables one to see or recognize what one has, in effect, already seen" in a textbook description of how ideology works.[352] For Benjamin, the reason that film, like the earlier arts of landscaping of architecture, escapes the "regime of the picture" is that it places its viewer in the scene being viewed. In viewing a film, the audience simply doesn't behave in the monolithic manner that Adorno

[349] Benjamin, 36.

[350] Benjamin, 36. Emphasis mine.

[351] Benjamin, 36.

[352] de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, 11, 9.

constantly worries that they will. They do not represent to themselves, and reenact upon themselves, the barbarity of the action on screen; they sit in a theater in solidarity, viewing the screen and *also* viewing themselves view the screen and one another, gasping and laughing and shushing in turn. It is precisely insofar as "the masses" are capable of "organizing and regulating their response" that they become capable of reacting "progressively."[353]

Though it's not quite clear what Benjamin means by *progressive*, it's at this precise moment that his argument about progressive consciousness leans on an entirely Humean account of sentimentality among the audience. "The [audience's] progressive attitude is characterized by an immediate, intimate fusion of pleasure—pleasure in seeing and experiencing—with an attitude of expert appraisal."[354] These are impressions that are also ideas. It's as though the knee-jerk reaction could become a site of political power. Given the importance of the term, we should not how Benjamin never situates it as a matter of ideology. This, and the way in which he associates the audience with expertise, are, from the perspective of critical theory, Benjamin's most counterintuitive gestures. Adorno, for instance, objects that "the idea that a reactionary is turned into a member of the avant-garde by expert knowledge of Chaplin's films strikes me as out-and-out-romanticization."[355] He takes Benjamin's notion of expert appraisal to mean something like a thoroughgoing connoisseurship of Chaplin's filmography. But it seems more plausible to suppose that the expertise in question is a matter of habit rather than "expert knowledge." After all, Benjamin figures the audience not as a collection of individual experts but as a crowd which develops its own common expertise. "It is inherent in the technology of film, as of sports, that

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[353] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 36.

[354] Benjamin, 36. Consider the resemblance to recent accounts of feminist political practice.

[355] Adorno, "Adorno to Benjamin, 18 March 1936," 123.

everyone who witnesses these performances does so as a quasi-expert."[356] Unlike painting, film and sport are both viewed by crowds. The experience of viewership is, consequently, an experience of reaction—one's own and others'—and an experience of division. Thus does Benjamin continue: "Anyone who has listened to a group of newspaper boys leaning on their bicycles and discussing the outcome of a bicycle race will have an inkling of this."[357] At work here is a kind of disagreement: each of these children discusses their own reaction with others. It's not just that no formal training is necessary for this kind of knowledge; the training itself would impinge on the phenomenology of their own bodies that these children draw upon. It is the circumstances of their togetherness that informs their capacity to think and to speak.

Though debates in contemporary political theory would find this language to presage a theory of judgment, Benjamin sees something else at work here. Whereas judgment belongs more to the bourgeois spectator whose atomized act of independent judgment belongs more to the old, hierarchical world of the museum and the gallery, the proper attitude of the audience is *affection*. When the audience looks at the screen, it is literally untrue that they view the representations of distinct objects, upon which they can then render various judgments of taste. What they see on screen is a world, and it's with respect to that world that film's challenge to its audience is twofold. On the one hand, what happens on screen is a total impossibility. It could not happen "like that" in real life, that is, as a continuous sequence of movement and action without the capacity to shoot, reshoot, and edit the various shots together. On the other hand, even though we view the film knowing full well the total artifice behind it, we cannot see the screen as anything other than a window into that impossible scene. We do not peer into the screen for evidence of its artifice. We

[356] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 33.

[357] Benjamin, 33.

do not see the studio lights, or the production crew sitting inches out of the camera's field of view. Under these circumstances we do not respond except immediately, with the

When the audience "reacts progressively," it *reacts*, in a manner that suggests a concrete physiological activity.[358] And when "organizing and regulating their response" in a manner that guarantees their progressive character, they audience certainly *may* do so by talking during the film, but far more often it's through their subtle bodily tics: the slight jump out of one's seat, the collectively bated breath, or the involuntary cheer at some particularly exceptional moment. Which is to say that the spectators together *inhabit* a space afforded by the moving image on the screen that we might call a space-for-play The translators of the Harvard volume call it a "field of action," suggesting a measure of agentic weight. The reason why this text is hardly "aesthetic" at all, even though it deals with recognized topics in the study of aesthetics, is that it doesn't adhere to the traditional distinction between craftsperson (the aesthetics of making) and spectator (the aesthetics of beholding). "In the case of film, the fact that the actor represents someone else before the audience matters much les than the fact that he represents himself before the apparatus."[359] What Benjamin calls a "fact" refers to the way in which the relationship between the actor and the audience is not mediated, as it traditionally is, by the work of art. The actor is not recognizable as having made an object which the audience beholds. The actor *is* the object, or part of it, anyway, and only a minor part of the whole "apparatus" taken as a material whole (the lights, the set, the production crew, the editing room, and everything else that makes a studio). And yet the actor is also

[358] Benjamin, 36.

[359] Benjamin, 31.

an opportunity for sympathy. The drama of film, the whole vitality of the genre, consists neither in an actor having "represent[ed] someone else before the audience" nor in the movie itself having realistically emplotted some story but more basically consists in *the film convincing the audience that the image on the screen is an entire human being*. "For the majority of city dwellers, throughout the workday in offices and factories, have to relinquish their humanity in the face of an apparatus. In the evening those same masses fill the cinemas, *to witness* the film actor taking revenge *on their behalf* not only by asserting *his* humanity (or what appears to them as such) against the apparatus, but by placing that apparatus in the service of his triumph."[360] This is not just a side effect of film. The audience goes to the cinema *in order to witness*, that is, *in order* to stand in a sympathetic relation with the actor, no matter what their opinion of the movie itself. And so when it comes to the reception of film, the question is not whether the members of the audience individually develop the right consciousness, or whether their personal judgments have the right form, but rather whether they find solidarity in their sentiments. If a movie moves me, is it because of something in the movie itself? Or am I in the right mood, and with the right people, on the occasion that I happen to view it?

III. Viewing Culture and Popular Agency

Benjamin's case for the politicality of film thus turns on an account of popular culture as popular agency. On the one hand this is a more or less standard argument about media literacy as necessary for democratic competence. Much in the same way that to be a good liberal subject needs to understand a newspaper—not only what the words *mean* but what the object on which they are printed *is*—and the good contemporary subject needs to understand social media—not just the mechanics of typing out a post but what the genre entails and how posts should be read—the good modern subject needs to be able to understand film. It's not that the good cinemagoer is necessarily

[360] Benjamin, 31. Emphasis mine.

a good citizen; it's that there are no good citizens that do not go to the cinema. Whereas Adorno's critical theory delivers a set of injunctions (Don't go to movies! Don't go to jazz clubs!) that become increasingly senseless as the collection of verboten media slowly expands to the whole of modern life, for Benjamin the ever-increasing scope of media is precisely what licenses its educational function.[361] Film matters to politics, then, insofar as it trains the audience to play with their perception, to *see* the way that a camera sees, and thus to adopt a "progressive attitude." (The progressive, audience, remember, is the one that views film together, and views it playfully and generatively; the reactionary audience is the one that views it severally and small-mindedly.) Agency is not a matter of turning away from viewership, but of having joined the cinematic audience and having adopted their affections. This is because the moving image instantly and irrevocably rearranges the modern architecture of alienation:

> Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split second, *so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris.*[362]

Now as a metaphorical matter, film explodes not modernity itself but the "prison-world" which its architecture comprises. Or simply put: film teaches its audience how to use a train station. It teaches the audience how to use a factory. But not in the prescribed or even in the best manner. Its education is a sentimental one.

If film can educate the audience in sociality, if it can train people in the habits and affections necessary to navigate modern life, it is because film—the edited transcription of modern life—is

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[361] Cf. Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenology and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*.

[362] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 37. Emphasis mine.

unimpeachably a medium of feeling. Think of the variety of scenes that have been filmed on these sets: the most memorable scenes are precisely those that depart the greatest from common experience. Of all the scenes shot in "our railroad stations," for instance, we remember best those extraordinary moments which the camera records of a tragic love or a final showdown between enemies. We never, by contrast, recall the humdrum punching of a ticket or the operation of machinery; perhaps we fail to attend to these scenes but perhaps these are not the scenes that cinema is interested in—except as these prelude some more explosive moment. In other words, the editorial structure of film rearranges the audience's sense of what social bonds the modern world makes possible. It subordinates the technological material of social life to its sentimental matter: this is the explosion to which Benjamin refers. So whereas Horkheimer and Adorno dismissively assert that "the moviegoer…perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left," Benjamin would go on to say that the street to which the moviegoer returns is nevertheless *not* the same as the one that they left when they entered the theater.[363] Even though the film is a reproduction of that world, it nevertheless does more than simply re-present it *does* something in the intervening period. When the audience leaves the theater, they possess the capacities necessary to navigate the world as though "on journeys of adventure."

Now, it is by no means obvious that Benjamin thinks a progressive attitude leads to a progressive politics.[364] He never, for example, denies either in the second version or the published version that laughter in the theater can express "the worst bourgeois sadism."[365] But it can also

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[363] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 99.

[364] The only mention of any connection comes at the essay's close, when Benjamin counterposes fascist and communist aesthetics in a manner that echoes the contrast between the reactionary and the progressive.

[365] Adorno, "Adorno to Benjamin, 18 March 1936," 123.

express the lightness of being necessary for the playful attitude that is in its own turn the prerequisite for both social solidarity and political agency. Modernity, with its "offices" and "factories," is not just a political arena but "an apparatus."[366] Film is "the apparatus," too—not just part of it but identical to the whole.[367] Film is the occasion for this theory of modern agency not because it is somehow exemplary of modernity, or the medium most capable of representing modernity; rather, it's that the technical apparatuses of film themselves compose the modern world. Whether shooting a main feature or newsreel footage, cameras are everywhere. The production crew is everywhere. The edit is everywhere, and so too is the actor. And so the film's field of view is as wide as modernity itself. "Any person can lay claim to being filmed," that is, they can lay claim not just to viewership but to cinematic agency as an actual matter of fact.[368]

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[366] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 31.

[367] Benjamin, 31.

[368] Benjamin, 33. Traditionally, Benjamin's account of agency has been understood to depend on *innervation*, "a neurophysiological process that mediates between internal and external, psychic and motoric, human and machinic registers." Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 133. To innervate a region of the body is to connect nerves to it and to organize it under the nervous system. To elaborate on the metaphor, if film is capable of innervating the masses, that is to say, if it can serve as "the masses' means for adapting to machines" and to the late mode of industrial capitalism organized around those machines, *it is only because film already constitutes a nervous system*. That is to say, it is already thoroughly embedded in modern society. In this respect it is important to recognize how Benjamin understands the activity of innervation itself. "Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity, in its efforts at innervation, sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach…the individual suddenly sees his *Spielraum* immeasurably expanded." In other words, organization actually *requires* play,

This claim is less a metaphysical one than a banal statement about the circumstances of the modern world that make film a medium of political agency. Though class consciousness, criticism, clear thinking, and robust debate might make life under capitalism more bearable, they do not carry us one step beyond it. When the time comes not only to resist power but to organize it, and to develop interpersonal relations capable of improving on the political economy of capital, neither books nor newspapers nor any revolutionary theory will matter very much. Understanding is important, but not as important as the affections we might attach to Chaplin's agentic everyman. In this respect, what the progressive consciousness will require, what the *asserting of humanity* will require, is the organized sentimentality of the cinemagoer.

It's by virtue of his notion of play that Benjamin's account of technological reproducibility is recognizable as democratic theory. If we understand democracy to refer not only to a set of legal norms and institutions of representation but more basically to a set of vicarious social relations, then the proposition that film is a sentimental medium is equivalent to the proposition that film is a democratic medium. Rather than the monolithic model of mimesis we get in the notion of "the culture industry," wherein the crowd poses a political danger insofar as it is singularly susceptible to the workings of power, Benjamin insists that members of the audience are capable of a kind of sentimental power *in their own right*. The crowd can inhabit the standpoint of play. "No sooner are these reactions manifest than they regulate one another."[369] It's almost as though the experience of solidarity that occurs in this moment conditions the agency of its members. Like the Marx of chapter three, for whom the sentimental mode offers a space for reappropriating the rhythms of

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action, experimentation. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 35n11. Cf. Ahn, "Cinematic Innervation," 2.

[369] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 36.

industrial labor towards a mode of political cooperation, Benjamin takes the audience's reaction to film to embody a kind of virtuosity. The audience, despite the agentic capacity of its individual members, demonstrates a capacity for collective affections.

With this in mind, and as a way to turn to this dissertation's final chapter, we might hazard a rereading of the slogan on which Benjamin's essay concludes: "Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art."[370] Miriam Bratu Hansen argues that this closing slogan ultimately "rings hollow," because the move "from an argument about sensory-perceptual alienation to communist cultural politics encapsulates this disjunctive relationship between the main body of the essay's text and the epilogue."[371] If the mediatic circumstances of film are more important than its narrative content—its "cultural politics"—then the choice between an aestheticized politics or a politicized aesthetics is very much beside the point. Or to put it slightly differently, perhaps film becomes politicized art not when it has expressed a conviction in class struggle, but when it "has freed the physical shock effect" from the "wrapping" of "the moral shock effect," that it, which it has shocked the audience into a condition of attention.

In this respect, Marcuse and Benjamin deal with the exactly same question. As we've seen, Benjamin's essay pins revolutionary political potential of film on its status as a product of collective labor as it does with its status as a media artifact. This is especially visible in his remarks on the edit.[372] Marcuse's cultural politics, "the transformation of labor into play," is exactly identical to the agency by which film—or more accurately, that people, through film, work to create—a space-for-play. Both are the action of editing the material of the world in a manner that trains the audience and

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[370] Benjamin, 42.

[371] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 91.

[372] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 30.

the actors (where does the difference between then begin?) in their own capacities.[373] In this manner the *Spielraum* carved out in the reproduction of experience leads to the forms of "concerted struggle" central to both Benjamin's and Marcuse's understanding of progress. Whereas Benjamin's account of popular culture trains its attention on the medium of film, and Marcuse's cultural politics on the medium of labor, even this distinction remains a matter of contestation.[374] Hence, as we will see in the final chapter, the strange way that Marcuse's chapter on "the aesthetic dimension" can turn so quickly from matters of art to matters of work. It's as though the feelings of freedom dimly represented in both the bourgeois artwork and the bourgeois beholder were, like a Chaplin film, the absurd and unfinished sketches of those feelings which emerge in the labor of collective organization.

[373] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 193.

[374] They are, in fact, one in the same.

Chapter Four

Ludic Repetition:

Play, Work, and Marcuse's Critique of Opposition

"—the principal horror of such a system is that it
robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and
life appeal and fulfilment."[375]

The previous chapters have shown that in various circumstances habit enables a kind of anti-heroic politics. That is, we have seen that it is not action but repeated action that grounds solidarity and social transformation. We've discerned in this repetition some kind of relationship between habit and an egalitarian politics. But any connection of democracy aside, there's the lingering question of whether habits are fundamentally conservative in character. The basic puzzle is that for each of the authors we've examined, social transformation hinges on the behavioral mechanisms of habit and yet the repetitions of habit seem more closely associated with custom and tradition than with any kind of progressive politics. What's more, these authors agree with contemporary scholars on decision-making and cognitive psychology that habit is *intuitive* action. It is spontaneous, done without search, computation, or cognitive effort. But the entire premise of a progressive politics that we can, through conscious reflection, reconsider and reform the structure of our social life.

In light of this lingering puzzle, Herbert Marcuse's writings are a fitting topic for this final chapter, because it's Marcuse that radicalizes this problem and gives it its sharpest expression. This chapter traces the effects of his encounter with play and the notion of agency that he adumbrates thereupon. By framing habit in terms of play, that is, a kind of unstructured capacity for political agency, I show that Marcuse's texts offer a reconsideration of the political potential of critical theory. For Marcuse, *both* the repressive character of capitalist culture and the moral asceticism of

[375] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 24.

criticism makes it difficult to see what he calls the "paralysis of criticism" and a "society without opposition" as anything but two symptoms of the same pathological commitment to negativity over novelty. By examining Marcuse's concept of play through his critique of opposition, this shows how he reconstructs an alternative vision of a creative cultural politics on the concept of habit. Rather than refer to a revolutionary overturning of reality, or the wholesale "transformation of labor," Marcuse doubles down on play's character as work and consequently enables us to understand that solidarity is neither totally orderable nor totally spontaneous, and never quite conforms to the logic of opposition. It only ever emerges out of the common habits of play. In short, when Marcuse wonders if there doesn't exist such a thing as play, he is wondering if there doesn't exist such a thing as democracy.

I. Seriousness and Solidarity

"*An Essay on Liberation*," wrote the political theorist George Kateb in 1970, reviewing Herbert Marcuse's attempt to make sense the atmospheric anticapitalism of the previous decade, "is a love-letter to the young, and to the blacks too."[376] The *Essay's* unabashed sentimentalism disqualifies it as a serious political text: "there was a time when Marcuse was above that sort of thing…He had a strict conception of what counted as serious. And the young and the blacks, if they were mentioned at all, were not treated as though they were serious or could matter very much."[377] Kateb cannot imagine that the German émigré's newfound respect for his adopted audience, expressed only after years of one-sided adoration, could be anything other than phony and pandering. Surely Marcuse must be playing around, disdainful as he was of the very people whose

[376] Kateb, "The Political Thought of Herbert Marcuse."

[377] Kateb.

praise he now seeks to return. Naturally, the only way to take him seriously now is to take what he said then seriously, too: "We must close our ears to all this noise and try to hear what Marcuse is saying." This irony is Kateb's most damning evidence against him: to read Marcuse attentively requires that one pay no attention to his readers, whose speech—the buzz of the democratic crowd—cannot participate in reasoned discussion. They have much to utter but nothing to say, or at least nothing that can be taken to be an informed demonstration of political preference, because their individual utterances are all identical to one another, mere repetitions of one another, unable to stand out from the noisy background that they themselves compose. Is the problem really that Marcuse took so long to turn to them? Is it that he deigned to do so at all? Or is it that he was fundamentally mistaken about their capacity for political desire?

So much has been written about Marcuse as a theorist of subjugation that I have very little to add on that score, especially as it regards an account of political agency. Rather, I read him as a theorist of play, mainly in order to mine that concept for a whole different set of social relations than those provided by domination. (There is no reason that political criticism should restrict its attention to the study of the latter.) So, rather than focus on his many discussions of repression, I will focus on those moment in his writings which concern pleasure, play, and habituation in order to show how he articulates a relationship between organizational routines of desire and the organs of collective power. For the occasion of Marcuse's writing is that agency—like sympathy—is not natural. It does not precede the work of organizing political power. It cannot be generated through simple belief or spectatorship. As Martin Jay would later remark, "Critical Theory was being increasingly forced into a position of 'transcendence' by the withering away of the revolutionary working class."[378] Kateb's own perplexity, strangely enough, provides a good example of Marcuse's

[378] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xliv; Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 43.

concern: surely his appeal to such unserious actors could not have been seriously meant as a political program.

The broader historical problem is precisely that it's no longer obvious that serious politics exists, at least as critical theory and the wider Marxist tradition has typically tried to formulate it. "In and against the deadly efficient organization of the affluent society, not only radical protest, but even the attempt to formulate, to articulate, to give word to protest assume a childlike, ridiculous immaturity."[379] Thus Marcuse, as early as his 1955 *Eros and Civilization*, anticipates Kateb's cringe of unsympathy. The problem of describing a collective political subject and, more basically, to a politically meaningful category of *desire* is precisely why Marcuse matters to political theory today. What kind of world do we want, and how do we come to want it when the expression of desire itself has been captured by the culture industry? Marcuse's Marxism is less about the means of production than about the means of exchange: the exchange of commodities, to be sure, but also the exchange of sentiments, and hence the possibility for desire to organize something other than the logic of market and state administration.

This chapter outlines Marcuse's account of play and power around a reading of *Eros and Civilization's* unusually tangential chapter on "The Aesthetic Dimension." There, Marcuse theorizes play as a space of collective unseriousness, a space for the shared suspension and supposition of reality, that is: as the essential element of a liberatory cultural movement.[380] Whereas the rest of the

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[379] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxi.

[380] In a work of academic prose so concerned with the question of reality, and so skeptical about prevailing appeals to "reality" as a justification for various modes of political domination, one might expect Marcuse to offer a carefully-thought out counterdefinition. He might, for example, give another standard another standpoint for the evaluation of what counts as "realistic," or offer some historical explanation of why his

book deals with the analysis of desire, repression, and domination, this chapter deals with a very different atmosphere of power. Rather than respond to the paradox of freedom and unreality with a defense of the aesthetic, or a reconstruction of the aesthetic principle, as though it could signify a mode of freedom with political significance, Marcuse cautions us to think about what such a paradox implies about the structure of agency and reality and how that structure came into being. "However, we shall try to show that this notion of aesthetics results from a 'cultural repression' of contents and truths inimical to the performance principle"—i.e. the principle of "the competitive economic performances" of society's members.[381] And yet whatever these contents and truths might be, they are equally inimical to "the aesthetic dimension," that is, equally opaque to the operations of judgment. Perhaps it's the case, as I suggest below, that the crises of agency in "the affluent society" of post-industrial liberal democracy has something to do with the collapse of play as a mode of solidarity. In the chapter in question, Marcuse tells the story of that collapse in the form of a history of a concept: the aesthetic. Because "the realm of aesthetics is essentially 'unrealistic'," there is no such thing as a politics of aesthetics, precisely because the condition under which this form of freedom is given shape is nothing less than utter divorce from material matters.[382] What does it mean that freedom can be wielded only by one who has, in their freedom, become disconnected

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audience ought not to be so attached to some rather myopic present notion of what can or cannot come to pass. No such definition can be found. The notion of a "non-repressive reality principle" (i.e. play) is the closest he gets, but even that is marvelously underspecified. Doubling down on play as a nonspecific reality principle might in fact be the most critical response to the imposition of reality, precisely because it doesn't try to be one.

[381] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 172, 44.

[382] Marcuse, 172.

from reality? Is it enough, in democratic society, to defend an ideal of judgment modelled on the experience of the viewer of art, as though the formation of a political judgment were the same as expressing one's opinion of an artwork? Or is it the case that such judgments remain "essentially 'unrealistic'," that is, unserious, because unconnected to any attempt at political organization? More than just an alternative to the agency of the critic championed by his Frankfurt colleagues, a certain modality of play in fact marks out that epistemological agency's constitutive limits. In other words, there is an undeniably pleasurable, intoxicating, and often grotesque dimension to the exercise of collective power which isn't beholden to the work of reflection, not because it offers an orthogonal strategy of organization but because sober and careful thinking is an *obstacle* to genuine action.

Although his musings on desire and utopia lead a number of commentators to describe Marcuse as a speculative philosopher, I present his project as a straightforwardly descriptive one. That is, I read Marcuse as literally as possible when he speaks of the corporeality of collective action. At the end of this chapter, I turn to some concrete examples of play: unions, anti-war actions, civil rights, and Black Power. But the first few parts of the chapter are devoted to describing Marcuse's itinerary through various conceptions of social life and the limits that his dissatisfactions with each as a rubric for rendering the problem of collectivity intelligible. To socialism, play signifies the utopian transmogrification of labor. To psychoanalysis, play refers to the expression of pleasure outside of the structure of psychological repression. In aesthetic theory, play refers to the unconstrained operation of imagination. But it's also just a form of behavior.

II. The Limits of Critical Practice

Although it may sound like a contradiction in terms to call Marcuse's a critical theory of play, it may be due to the way that we tend to think of critical theory almost exclusively as a practice of reflexivity specifically intended to repress the operations of behavior. It would come as no surprise,

then, that we think of Marcuse as a minor figure in this tradition. It's not only that, as Marcuse "gladly" admits, the Frankfurt School's ideas become "'cruder and simpler' in my work."[383] It's also that he refuses to rely on the mechanisms of repression at work in bourgeoise ideology and critical theory alike.[384] As Adam Sitze has argued in a recent symposium on Marcuse's work, one of the infelicities of the English-language reception of the Frankfurt School—and the main reason that Marcuse is seen as insufficiently critical—is that critique coincided with the linguistic turn, making it necessary at every turn to put the critical theorists' concerns in terms of language, thought, and understanding—"a consistent foreclosure of the concept of life."[385] Reading Marcuse after the linguistic turn is to interpret him through a philosophical tradition that prioritizes epistemology over collective action and a practice of political thinking which associates autonomy with isolation: above all, the intellectual's isolation from the confused crowds whose habits just reflect the extent of their ideological conditioning. What Martin Jay writes of the prospects of Marxism could just as easily describe those of critical theory: "There could be no easy 'ABCs of Marxism'…because

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[383] See Marcuse's correspondence to Adorno, July 21, 1969. This was the substance of Adorno's complaints regarding Marcuse's support for the student movements of the 1960s ("left fascism," according to "Jürgen"). Evidently the mere desire to hear the students out was amounted to a betrayal of "the interests of the Institute—our old Institute, Herbert" as the only beacon of free and critical thought. But as anyone with even the barest familiarity knows, expertise in the humanistic disciplines need not make anyone a good political agent. See Adorno to Marcuse, May 5, 1969, reprinted in Leslie, "Reading Between the Lines."

[384] In other words, I read *Eros and Civilization* not only as a critique of a prevailing social order but also and insofar as it is a departure from the commonplaces of what is now known as critical theory. The latter is just as committed to repression as the former.

[385] Sitze, "The Paralysis in Criticism," 828.

popularization risked the dilution, if not the perversion, of meaning."[386] This mistrust indicates just how thoroughly Marcuse's arguments about the significance of vivacity to political power were rejected, and with these methodological and normative commitments in mind, "it is hardly surprising," as Sitze writes, that "questions of communicative rationality would rise to prominence" as a model for collective action and critical agency, and "that the work of Herbert Marcuse…would fall into such neglect."[387]

Very little attention has been devoted to the problem of agency in Marcuse's thinking, largely because this play-dimension has never been explored to any great depth. Visitors to Marcuse's writings have only recently begun to contradict Adorno and Kateb's assessments of his utopian and hence unserious humanism.[388] But as Robyn Marasco points out, Marcuse employs Freud's

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[386] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 11.

[387] Sitze, "The Paralysis in Criticism," 828.

[388] For a long time, the only other available reading either assimilated Marcuse to the mainstream of critical theory without any attentiveness to what made him distinct, or took him to be an easily-digestible diversion from the serious work of structural analysis. And as a result, they tend to criticize Marcuse by simply repeating what he himself has to say on the matter. Donna Haraway, for instance, places his "*One-Dimensional Man*" among those "analytical resources" which "have insisted on the necessary domination of technics" as a precondition of political freedom, at the price of other configurations of "power and pleasure." Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 154. Whether this is true of *One-Dimensional Man*, it is certainly true of neither *Eros* nor the *Essay*, both of which take a playful, i.e. non-instrumental and non-dominating, relation to technics as a precondition of political non-domination. Diana Coole describes this "new sensibility" of Marcuse's as nothing more than an "ethical project." Coole, "Agentic Capacities and Capacious Historical Materialism," 462. Marcuse himself insists that the structure of desire that he adopts from Freud "contain[s] no ethics or only his personal ethics," whereas the neo-Freudian revisionists return to "all the time-honored values of

psychoanalytical concepts to "shed a certain light on the structure of society and assist in the analysis of political formations and events. Put another way, psychoanalytic categories have become indispensable to social science."[389] In Marcuse's own words, "the totality of which the psyche is a part becomes to an increasing extent less 'society' than 'politics.' That is, society has fallen prey to and become identified with domination."[390] Under these conditions, psychoanalysis can offer a theory of instinct and drive that turns from this unrelenting obsession with the analysis of domination even as it takes this field of instinctual straitjacketing as its starting point. Unlike the critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno, or even that of Walter Benjamin (whose most well-known text makes programmatic claims about the paramount importance of "historical materialism" over other modes of time-consciousness), Marcuse's attempt at critical theory turns away from the epistemophilia which they locate as a condition of any possible collective agency. Quite the contrary, the repressive tendencies of their own thinking make it somewhat less than helpful when it comes to the task of building power.

We should recognize something viscerally familiar in Marcuse's descriptions of political play. Modern political theory is deeply indebted not only to the apparatus of criticism but *also*, and more primordially, to the representational apparatus implied in the notion of the aesthetic. And so, when I turn to Marcuse's critique of aesthetics, and how he moves from the aesthetic dimension to the play

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idealistic ethics as though nobody had ever demonstrated their conformist and repressive features." Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 249, 258. In other words, he takes himself to be doing something other than ethics, and insofar as repression is the motivating problematic of the book he rather takes himself to be concerned with the *limits* of the ethical sensibility.

[389] Marasco, *The Highway of Despair*, 181.

[390] Marcuse, "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts," 1.

dimension, my concern is not with philosophical aesthetics as such but the extent to which debates, contemporary to both Marcuse and us, about agency and popular culture are shaped by an account of representation that makes desire a matter of repetition. Marcuse is concerned with the way in which traditional critical concerns relating to representation have perhaps come to serve less as a condition *of* than as a limit *to* the exercise of political power.

III. Paralysis and Opposition in Liberal Democracy

When contemporary critical theorists and literary critics speak of "the limits of critique"—that is, when they worry that the style of criticism characterized by suspicion is somewhat ascetic, or when they worry that the critical obsession with epistemological autonomy leads to a fantasy of freedom whereby the only free person is the one who, by means of critical reflection, has managed to detach oneself from social obligation and involvement—they begin to catch up to a worry that Marcuse articulated over fifty years ago. The title of *One-Dimensional Man's* 1964 introduction puts the so-called "paralysis of criticism" hand-in-hand with what Marcuse calls a "society without opposition," which is to say, under conditions of postindustrial liberal democracy criticism becomes impossible as political strategy.[391] The latter involves not the factual absence of real political contestation ("the general acceptance of the National Purpose, bipartisan policy, the decline of pluralism," all of which, like more recent pleas for *unity* in the face of white race riots, are effectively appeals not to oppose the party with which you are supposed to stand) so much as it is the utter

[391] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xxxix. *Pace* Latour, who seems to think that the exhaustion of critique is a novel phenomenon, it seems that one of perennial conditions of criticism's operation is that it is always nearly exhausted, even as early as seventy years ago.

impossibility of any opposition *arising*.[392] Even though "reactionary radicals" and staunch capitalists may both utter moral protest against injustice, their common material dependence on those injustices "guarantees that predation, fraud, and violence will continue."[393] It's not merely that opposition doesn't exist; it's that opposition *can't* exist, as though the total character of society subsumed everything within its ambit. "The containment of social change is perhaps the most singular achievement of advanced industrial society."[394]

This problem of a "society without opposition" might tempt the really committed critic to adopt, as so much of the American academic humanities ultimately did, successively more radical ethics of criticism. Sitze observes that the phrase "paralysis of criticism" suggests that the very act of critique induces an immobility in the very relations that the critic would attempt to set in motion.[395] That is, the critical mechanism by which opposition justifies its existence turns out to immobilize its very workings. Marcuse writes that, "Confronted with the total character of the achievements of advanced industrial society, critical theory is left without the rationale for transcending this society," a position that anticipates Martin Jay's later remark: "Critical Theory was being increasingly forced into a position of 'transcendence' by the withering away of the revolutionary working class."[396] With

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[392] Marcuse, xlii.

[393] Roberts, "What Was Primitive Accumulation?," 548.

[394] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xlii.

[395] Adam Sitze, "The Paralysis in Criticism," *Theory & Event* 20, no. 3 (July 17, 2017): 831.

[396] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xliv; Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 43.

no rationale for its political standpoint, it became difficult to imagine to what actually-existing struggle, and to which actual actors, critical theory could specifically contribute.[397]

The intellectual culture of the linguistic turn was such that, in emphasizing both the efficacity of language and the agentic capacity of hermeneutic reading, it allowed would-be philosophers and social critics to sincerely believe in the activism of the concept. In taking the relationship between signifier and signified as an immediate site of political conflict, it provided theoretical justification to the idea that the writing of a thing is directly tantamount to the accomplishment of a thing, in a way that "will eventually trickle down to the workers who clean up after our conferences, to slums of the Global South's megacities, to its countryside."[398] Despite the utter reliance of this mode of knowledge production on a specific set of power relations and material inequalities, it was as though the performance of critical understanding which plays out in academic writing on resistance against racial capitalism, the decolonizing of dialectical materialism, or the creolizing of the western canon could actually stand in for, or bring about, the material transformation of those relations. Obviously nothing of the sort could be the case.

Although this may seem like a criticism of the linguistic turn itself, we might more helpfully ask the question of whether *any other mode of theoretical work was possible*. If Marcuse was right about ours being a "society without opposition," we might only answer in the negative. What political theorists may thus find most demanding about Marcuse's work is that he dismisses the project of normative signification. For much the same reason that criticism induces a society without opposition, the theoretical "ought" and its signifying relationship to action properly resides only in repressing any alternative arrangement of desire. Recognizing that "ought" as an artifact, *rather than*

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[397] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xliv; Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 43.

[398] Táíwò, "Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference."

solution, to repression helps us to pose difficult questions about the relationship between opposition and political organizing. It's one thing to know that something is wrong and even what to do about it, but quite another to translate that knowledge into action. Moreover, it turns out that only by *doing* something can people do anything. When Marcuse says that there exists a "society without opposition," he does *not* deny that nobody disagrees with the prevailing order; what he denies is rather that they have any capacity to organize themselves, on the basis of that disagreement, into a serious political agent.[399] To put it slightly differently: it's not so much about reversing the paralysis of criticism and of action, since the fantasy of action's autonomy redounds to cause its own paralysis: rather, he's interested in another basis of what it means to work together.

This is the way in which Marcuse's thinking in *Eros and Civilization* passes from the question of opposition to the question of organization. It matters that people have a space for play, not as a feature of the ideal society but as the precondition for collective activity. I see this as a total reorientation of the question which animates Frankfurt-style social inquiry. If Adorno and Horkheimer ask, "Why hasn't Marx's revolution happened yet?," Marcuse's addendum might be phrased: "And why are these Marxists still so committed to repression?" Or more broadly: is

[399] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xlv. Cf. Jennie C. Ikuta's claim that "[t]o the extent we are committed to democracy—that is, to relations of equality for the sake of sharing power—conformity to certain values is necessary." *Contesting Conformity*, 153. This is an important claim to make because it roots the exercise of democratic power *not* in the individualist experience of being different but in the practices of conformation. While I understand Marcuse to theorize a similar phenomenon under the rubric of play, his central concern is with the reversal of Ikuta's causal arrow. It's not that we conform because we're committed, but rather that we commit because we conform.

political organization—that is, organization committed to holding and wielding institutional power—even possible anymore?

IV. Disposition and Organization

In 1966, just a couple of years after the publication of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse added a "Political Preface" to the second edition of *Eros and Civilization*. Here, he describes play as a category of life, and takes the "defense of life" to be the primary project of contemporary left politics. He writes, "the phrase has explosive meaning in affluent society. It means not only the protest against neo-colonial war and slaughter, the burning of draft cards and the risk of prison, the fight for civil rights, but also the refusal to speak the dead language of affluence, to wear the clean clothes, to enjoy the gadgets of affluence, to go through the education of affluence."[400] Defense is all well and good, but in the society without opposition, that one-dimensional period before the movements of '68 and the subsequent counterrevolutions, the problem is not how to deal with defeat, but how to respond to conditions of stalemate. More than just an alternative to the agency of the critic championed by his Frankfurt colleagues, a certain sense of *life* marks out that epistemological agency's constitutive limits.

Marcuse breaks from much of the Marxist tradition the moment that he locates agency in disposition rather than in the causal efficacy of critical reflection. Given this tradition's predisposition to explaining the operation of domination precisely in terms of dispositional *akrasia*, to which it counterposes the active intentionality of proletariat solidarity, it's difficult to imagine a more provocative challenge to Marxist commonplaces about the nature of collective power, whether we understand collective power along Lukácsian lines of class consciousness or Sorel's mythical

[400] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Beacon Press, 1966), xxi.

model of revolutionary spontaneity.[401] That said, I want to emphasize the manner in which Marcuse's own idiosyncratic Marxism is not so much a refutation of other Marxist philosophies of organization as it is an account of the conditions that render those positions obsolete. So rather than think of Marcuse as writing *against* other Marxists (which he will very rarely do in public writings), I suggest that it is more helpful to think of Marcuse as *reinscribing* those organizational problems in the new context of late industrial capitalism. Much of that has to do with the withering away of the Marxist political subject. Whereas these other Marxisms would affirm the position of what Seyla Benhabib will eventually call "the philosophy of the subject," Marcuse takes the new context of late industrial capitalism, particularly "the withering away of the revolutionary working class," to pose an existential challenge to the image of "a collective singular subject…externalizing itself in history and reappropriating this 'second nature' facing it."[402] In post-industrial conditions, the unified political subject that followed from the former experience of the factory floor has given way to a diverse collection of actors from different professions and different identities who do not necessarily see their own interests reflected in the others.[403]

In order to understand how disposition works as a form of repetition, we need to understand how post-industrial capitalism is concerned with the management of desire by managing the rhythm of time—not just that of the workday but of people's free time, too. Following a

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401 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*; Sorel, *Reflections on Violence.*

402 Benhabib, *Dignity in Adversity*, 185; Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 43.

403 Extant, that is, in the context of US political theorizing. This question of identity and revolutionary solidarity takes center stage in many third-worldist theories of political struggle; for a discussion of how these theories made their way into discussions in the United States see Colleen Lye's important account of the Combahee River Collective in "Identity Politics, Criticism, and Self-Criticism."

discussion of technological progress and the revolutionary reduction of labor-time that it would seem to imply, Marcuse observes that "The affluent society is in its own way preparing for this eventuality by organizing 'the desire for beauty and the hunger for community,' the renewal of the 'contact with nature,' the enrichment of the mind, and honors for 'creation for its own sake.'"[404] In channeling desire towards these noble pursuits of personal growth, these "administered cultural activities, sponsored by the government and big corporations" take the superfluous pleasures of free time and instrumentalize them towards social order.[405] Benhabib sees in this contradiction the central thesis of *Eros and Civilization*: "the very objective conditions that would make the overcoming of industrial-technological civilization possible also prevent the subjective conditions necessary for this transformation from emerging."[406] In the logic of Marcuse's argument, all the abundance that accompanies the progress of industrial technology does eventually become a social good, but only because it is mediated by these cultural institutions controlled by the state and big business. In a manner that recalls Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the "culture industry," as long as people can take pleasure in these various administered activities, it loses all democratic significance: time spent on hobbies, the latest gadgetry, or whatever activities are deemed appropriate by "board chairmen" is time not spent in discontent and subversion.[407] Up to a point, anyway: this repression—and here is Marcuse's optimism speaking—becomes, over time, increasingly more difficult to maintain. "Although these activities can be sustained and even multiplied under total administration, there seems to exist an upper limit to their augmentation. The limit would be

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[404] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxiii.

[405] Marcuse, xxiii.

[406] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 176.

[407] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 96.

reached when the surplus value created by productive labor no longer suffices to pay for non-production work."[408] The moment that the state can no longer manage the variety of nonproductive activity is the moment that there is so much of it, in comparison to productive labor, that the value produced by the latter cannot pay for the repression of the former. Hence, in this work on eros, the central questions become: How well can it manage to repress these desires? and What are the prospects for their unrepressed expression? Marcuse's cause for optimism lies in the intuition that these levels of repression can only be maintained for so long, especially since the whole superstructure becomes increasingly more precarious, relying on ever-decreasing proportions of alienated labor to control the whole menagerie of unproductive activities. The problem facing the affluent society is that it produces a world of habits and dispositions it is totally unprepared to administer: that is to say, a world of play.

V. Organization, Disposition, and the Problem of Play

In the previous chapter, I argued that the notion of repetition transforms Marx's understanding of collective agency; now, I'm arguing that it affords a similar transformation in the meaning of desire. The ceaseless concern with cultural management suggests that in some crucial respect, quality of desire, far more than quantity, is the premier threat to capitalist society. "Technical progress, itself a necessity for the maintenance of established society, fosters needs and faculties which are antagonistic to the social organization of labor on which the system is built."[409] Benjamin's account of film, as we saw in the intermezzo, gives us the paradigmatic case. Here, in addition to film, Marcuse takes the technical abundance and cultural production of advanced

[408] Marcuse, xxii–xxiii.

[409] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxii.

industrial society to open up a whole multitude of faculties and sensibilities. Consider the modes of opposition mentioned above: "not only…the protest against neo-colonial war and slaughter, the burning of draft cards and the risk of prison, the fight for civil rights, but also the refusal to speak the dead language of affluence, to wear the clean clothes, to enjoy the gadgets of affluence, to go through the education of affluence."[410] Mass media and communications technology not only facilitate the public discussion of such desires but condition their emergence in the first place. It only becomes possible to protest against war or racial violence, on his account, at least in the visceral manner that protestors of the 1960s did, once there emerges equally visceral documentation of what was going on. Marcuse will have a lot to say about the limits of these sensibilities, not least of which that they often assume "a childlike, ridiculous immaturity."[411] Immaturity is not an insufficiency or lawlessness, but rather a limitation of the repressive apparatus—because it cannot understand such behaviors as "real."

As such, this immaturity is less something to be overcome than a hesitant attitude central to the problem of forging new and different habits. Like the fantasy of academic efficacy embedded in what will become known as the linguistic turn, such cultural politics can often rely on a causal relation between the simple avowal of a believe ("make love, not war") and its political accomplishment and thus conforms to the logic of opposition. But it can also turn upon the difficult work of habituating oneself to a different way of life and a different set of social relations. The fact is that hippie standpoint, however limited it may be, was articulated within a set of institutions that also brought about far more material political dispositions, Those institutions would not have attained the importance to '60s politics that they did without the background conditions of social

[410] Marcuse, xxi.

[411] Marcuse, xxi.

abundance that make it possible for, e.g., massive numbers of young people to attend college and become educated in the superfluous, nonvalorizable ways that were formerly open only to the upper crust and the very lucky few. It is not, for instance, insignificant that two prominent organizations for the advancement of civil and economic rights in the 60s, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party, two organizations derided as ridiculous and immature, were founded by students. When Marcuse says that the problem of political agency is not about opposition, but about organization, it functions perfectly well as a description of this kind of freedom. Marcuse's story about the intersection of instinct and intellect, i.e. play, as the condition of democratic agency is, in this sense, simply a philosophical elaboration upon the opening of the US higher education system as one symptom of the growing availability of freedom to pursue useless knowledge for one's own sake, and the importance that this development held for democratic institutions. When we consider that Marcuse took up a position as a professor of philosophy at the University of California, San Diego, in 1965, a year before the "Political Preface" was published, and that within just a few months he began to attract public notice as the most prominent Marxist teaching in Southern California, it becomes difficult to imagine how these institutional conditions for reformulating the relation between labor and leisure could not form the backdrop of his own formulation of the problem of collective action.

We saw how the preponderance of leisure demonstrates that not all superfluous labor is political labor. And it's precisely when activity ceases to be social—that is, when we severally cultivate our *own* activities, jealously guard them from the interfering gaze of others, when we indulge in activities as a respite *from* the world as it is, that the labor in question achieves irrelevance. This is exactly what happens to the hippies and their cultural politics. On Marcuse's account this set of ideas already constitutes a dead end both in theory and in practice, it is because their *counter*-culture remain stuck in a double logic of hyper-committed opposition and hyper-visible

individualism. The properly *political* struggle in question, by way of contrast, involves "above all, the organized refusal to continue work on the material and *intellectual* instruments which are now being used against man—for the defense of the liberty and prosperity of those who dominate the rest."[412] The moment that labor begins to organize people and create a sense of purpose among them (as, for instance, in the form of the strike), it becomes a "political factor." Although it is a form of refusal, the thrust of the activity in question is essentially creative and cooperative rather than oppositional: this activity is not just the absence of (productive) work, accompanied by sloganeering opposing the powers that be; it is the presence of *unproductive* work. Those involved in the strike are still working, just not for the profit of their employers. They work for their own subsistence, they work with other sympathetic organizations, and they cooperate at the level of national labor strategy. Along this progression from the necessities of the gut to the necessities of the heart, these strikers continue to work because they cannot rely on the old institutional mechanisms for the articulation of their own desires. "To the degree to which organized labor operates in defense of the status quo, and to the degree to which the share of labor in the material process of production declines, *intellectual* skills and capabilities becomes social and political factors."[413] Unlike Hume, for whom *association* was the

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[412] Marcuse, xxiv–xxv.

[413] Marcuse, xxv. Gabriel Winant writes that from 1950 onward, organizing labor "increasingly formed only insulated pools of economic security—no longer an advancing tide…In exchange for this privatized security, labor abandoned its older ambitions for less work and more workplace democracy." Winant, *The Next Shift*, 10–11. This exchange is precisely what Marcuse will identify as the repressive dimension of affluent society. The shift in attention from social freedom to economic security is, on Winant's account, why organized labor finds itself literally invested in the status quo and, perhaps more to the point for our purposes here, why organized labour found it difficult to function as an institution of *political* solidarity.

keyword for the capabilities of living a common life, Marcuse prefers the *organization* as the ontology, however problematic, of political relations. As the last chapter observed, this undoubtedly reflects the general emergence of the *organ* as a physiological metaphor for the structure of social and political life. But if organization can serve as a metaphor for such political concerns, it is only because Marcuse takes the problem of political relation to involve, above all, concerted labor. Organizations matter, but only insofar as they become the object of organization, that is to say, of "intellectual skills and capabilities."[414] This manner of posing the problem suggests that habit, which is not to say subjectivity, is the site of organized political agency. Organizations need to be worked on as much as they enable work. And so on Marcuse's account, the impulse to play depends on a specific rhythm of pleasure, cooperation, effort, and satisfaction at the heart of political organization. The work of building collective power involves, above all, work that people *want* to do. And so while the title of *Eros and Civilization* may imply a reconstruction of Freud's account of desire, it's also a reconstruction of the concept of labor: the hands-on work of wielding collective power.

VI. Play Theory as a Critique of Political Aesthetics

a) The individualism of critical regard

Marcuse's chapter on "The Aesthetic Dimension" thematizes this problem. The chapter explores the relationship of desire to material conduct. Opening with an invocation of reality and closing with a gesture towards organized labor, the bulk of the chapter thematizes play alternately as a matter of imaginative desire and social practice. "Obviously, the aesthetic dimension cannot

[414] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxv.

validate a reality principle."[415] The common sense of the chapter's beginning posits a distance between the aesthetic world and reality that renders each nonfunctional when it comes to the other. Marcuse's chapter on "The Aesthetic Dimension" is a strange excursus into aesthetic theory in a book otherwise preoccupied with debates internal to psychoanalytic theory. Its existence is all the stranger when we consider that Marcuse, out of all the members of the Frankfurt school, expresses a complete, and perhaps uncritical, conviction in Freud's metapsychological principles. Eros and Thanatos, the impulsion towards pleasure and the compulsion towards repetition—these are fundamental to Marcuse's political psychology, constituent elements not only of human life but also of the good life. Given this conviction, it's remarkable that Marcuse turns to a completely different discourse to render a problem that, by all rights, should be the central question for any psychoanalytic theory of progressive politics: are unrepressed social relations possible?

Marcuse takes the standpoint of the spectator tries to refigure the standpoint of the political agent in terms of sensation and desire. On the one hand, it seems like aesthetics may constitute a domain of human experience, parallel to conceptual thinking but basically disjoint from it: "The basic experience in this dimension is sensuous rather than conceptual; the aesthetic perception is

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[415] Marcuse, 172. Marcuse takes this term from Freud, for whom the reality principle is social order. On Marcuse's gloss, the reality principle governs the change from "immediate satisfaction" to "delayed satisfaction," from "pleasure" to "restraint," from "joy (play)" to "toil (work)," and so on. Marcuse, 12. In this manner, the reality principle functions like a social contract, wherein the collective repression of primitive asocial (or even antisocial) individuality is what makes society itself possible. But unlike the social contract which operates solely in the realm of law, here we are dealing with questions of conduct which play out at the level of desire, withholding, and satisfaction before they ever appear as matters of concern to legal institutions.

essentially intuition, not notion…aesthetic perception is accompanied by pleasure…representation is the work (or rather the play) of *imagination*."[416] And yet at other times it may not be so separate after all, since "the aesthetic dimension is where the senses and the intellect meet."[417] In this respect, the aesthetic dimension names that space where the habits of modern sensation simply *are* the habits of modern critical subjectivity, or near enough, anyway, that is polemic against the repressive character of spectatorship and personal judgment is *also* polemicizes against the dispositions of reading, writing, and deliberation foundational to socialist organizing that that occupies this book's political horizon. What the enterprises of ideology critique, the literary turn, and Marxist mobilization all offered was a promise that the right way of seeing could lead to the right attitude toward political life.

The worry about aesthetics here is not just that it constitutes a wrong turn on the royal road to a socialist politics, but moreover that it *actively impedes* the circulation of sentiments necessary to political solidarity. For Marcuse, though, to the extent that this attitude refers to anything—and it's not quite clear that it does, except as an artifact of theoretical idealism—it refers to a *repressive* rather than agentic disposition: neither because it is a liberal-democratic subjectivity (though it is); nor because it turns erstwhile-citizens into a roundtable of critics (though it does); but because it trains people in habits of individual feeling and knowing that foreclose on the articulation of common pleasures. Kant and Schiller's philosophy, in which "the meaning of the term aesthetic was fixed," "results from a 'cultural repression' of contents and truths that are inimical to the performance principle."[418] By calling aesthetics an operation of "repression," I understand Marcuse to be asserting

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[416] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 176.

[417] Marcuse, 179.

[418] Marcuse, 173, 172.

that by the sublimation of the imagination into an asocial form (by making it an *artistic* rather than a *social* faculty) disarms it as an affective resource for consolidating political power. After all, the "contents and truths that are inimical to the performance principle" are precisely those desires for culture and association that get in the way of the efficient functioning of capitalist society and the "competitive economic performances of its members."[419] What differentiates this from the culture industry thesis we get in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that Marcuse's claim is about the social arrangement of conduct rather than the top-down management of social ideals.[420] It's not that beauty is a tool for social management, but rather that beauty motivates an economy of desire committed to *individual* capacity for seeing, imagining, and ultimately performing. With that, we may have a set of exceedingly capable individuals, but without any common desire for association.

In this way, the work of art figures the problem of association. "Aesthetic values may function in life for cultural adornment and elevation or as private hobbies, but to *live* with these values is the privilege of geniuses or the mark of decadent bohemians."[421] The ineffectiveness of aesthetic values comes first and guarantees the freedom. It apparently goes without saying that these are marginal subject positions: if these aspects of aesthetic activity ever achieve widespread distribution, it is because they exist either as curiosities ("cultural adornments" and "private hobbies") or as eccentrics ("geniuses" or "bohemians"), worthy of attention and even recognition but certainly not of intense public and political interest. In the case that they manage to motivate someone to live their life differently, that person is *ipso facto* a genius or a bohemian, solitary in their feeling and certainly off of the ordinary path. "Like imagination, which is its constitutive mental

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[419] Marcuse, 44.

[420] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, esp. 94-136.

[421] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 172.

faculty, the realm of aesthetics is essentially 'unrealistic': it has retained its freedom from the reality principle at the price of being ineffective in reality."[422] Here, the social marginality of the aesthete finds its reflection in the phenomenological marginality of imagination, which secures its formal freedom of play at the price of any social content. Or *a fortiori,* in an explicitly juridical register: "Before the court of theoretical and practical reason, which have shaped the world of the performance principle, the aesthetic existence stands condemned."[423] When it comes to the structure of social relations, aesthetics has no standing to speak, but even if it did, it has nothing to say.

b) The Limits of "Free Play"

This question of the relationship between play, beauty, and worldly involvement turns his critique of aesthetics towards the relationship between sensation and social solidarity. If aesthetic freedom is just the freedom to create and to regard beauty, it makes freedom nothing more than a matter of individual craftsmanship and eyesight. Which is to say, it forecloses on the very collectivity that might make the freedom a political virtue. Marcuse presses the point when he encapsulates Schiller's hatred of the world: "man is only *serious* with the agreeable, the good, the perfect; but with beauty he plays."[424] To this sentiment Marcuse responds: "Such formulations would be irresponsible 'aestheticism,' if the realm of play were one of ornament, luxury, holiday, in an otherwise repressive world."[425] The *if* here is doing a lot of work: in fact, it seems to totally disqualify Schiller's formulation. When Schiller association beauty with play, he *dissociates it* from material conditions of political life: we can no longer play with ideals, or norms, or even what seems merely agreeable to us.

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[422] Marcuse, 172.

[423] Marcuse, 172.

[424] Marcuse, 188.

[425] Marcuse, 188.

We only play with the beautiful. I take Marcuse's worry here to be that in a world only sparsely populated with beauty, the pursuit of it turns Schiller away from the world as a whole, and particularly those parts of it that call out for attention the most. In other words, what makes play an irresponsible sentiment is Schiller's constant turning away from the ugly realities of the world.[426]

Just as the introduction to *One-Dimensional Man* proposes that the act of criticism is *not* a moment around which we might model a politics but rather one which calls the possibility of politics into question, so too does *Eros and Civilization* assert that the moment of aesthetic imagination does *not* exemplify a moment of political freedom—rather, it illustrates a limitation internal to the concept of freedom: "since this other, 'free' reality is attributed to art, and its experience to the aesthetic attitude, it is non-committing and does not engage the human existence in the ordinary way of life; it is 'unreal.'"[427] That is, the desire for beauty risks having nothing to do with a desire for a more beautiful world. Even in the most everyday case, no matter how moving I may find a work of art to be—moving enough to perhaps induce me to change my life in some profoundly personal and fundamental way—it remains an isolated circumstance. I may drop a bad habit, end a stale friendship, I may even convert to another religion. Even then, I am not *committed* to anything, either in my private experience or in my public dealings. The "free play" of the imagination is worldless because it is so individual an experience that it cannot be communicated to others. For Marcuse, trying to communicate the experience of "free play" may be rendered legible in cultural terms, but it obscures actually-existing social relations or the forms of power exercised in their name.

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[426] But on "turning away" as a critical practice, cf. Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenology and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno*.

[427] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 145.

My point in elaborating on Marcuse's misgivings is that "reality" here means not only the way that the free play of the imagination constantly recedes from attempts to instrumentalize it for normative (moral, ethical, political) argumentation, *but also* the way that the mechanisms of repression step in to fill that motivational vacuum. Perhaps the problem here is our attachment to the notion of aesthetics to the first place. Does a truth have to be beautiful before we accept it, or before we incorporate it into our understanding of desire? Or are there rather ugly truths, ugly desires, because they deal in the realities of the ugly world? Perhaps this has to do with our unwillingness to deny that that the beautiful work of art has anything to teach us about "the ordinary way of life."[428] If the monuments to such lofty subjects as freedom, justice, tradition, and equality are anything to go by, art—a sublimated substitute for the more primordial satisfaction of working together—certainly has a lot to tell us about the ideals we might like to live up to, but it has nothing to do with *organizing* that life. For that, we would need to consider the work that goes into living together.

VII. Play and the Labor of Locating Desire

For Freud, repression isn't simply the crude proscription of a particular desire or a way of acting out; it's a way of effacing the ontological negativity that constitutes a subjective experience of the world. That is, repression doesn't just say no to a desire, but moreover *pretends that desire doesn't exist*. With this in mind, we can think of Marcuse's turn to play, not as an agentic resource for collective political projects but more basically as a way of experimenting with agency and social desire in the first place. What makes play "erotic" is not its entanglement with the titular *eros* with the narrower sense of the term (relating to sexual organs and intercourse) but rather that it is basically a mode of experimenting with one's constitutive *incompleteness* as an individual partial needs, desires,

[428] Marcuse, 145.

and capacities to satisfy them, and of experimenting with the sort of relations that one builds in response to this condition.[429] (To put it in terms of the "Political Preface": the hippie imagines an outside to war, to capital, to imperialist domination, and thinks that the radical imagination of an alternative exhausts the political work to be done, only to find themselves disempowered by the repressive transcendence of their own experience of freedom. The trade unionist, by contrast, or the student activist, make the relational structure of their movement *itself*—the work not only of staging a strike and gaining concessions, but planning a march, or disrupting an institution, or staking a claim—into a matter of paramount political importance.)

To see how this works in the text, notice how Marcuse trues to make sense of the relationship between civilizational principles and the question of human (and nonhuman) freedom: "play is *unproductive* and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labor and leisure; it 'just plays' with reality."[430] That is to say, I engage in play when I'm in the midst of working out my relationship to my surroundings: people, nonhuman nature, my own body. This work *can't* be productive, because productivity implies an already consolidated sense of reality that makes it possible to speak of products as distinct objects with distinct purposes; similarly, the work can't be useful, because it doesn't have a relationship to the instrumental categories of means and ends. But play is not just an individual orientation: more importantly, for Marcuse, it's an essentially *social* activity: "Play and display, as principles of civilization, imply not the transformation of labor but its complete subordination to the freely evolving potentialities of man and nature."[431] Labor under play is no longer alienated, but that doesn't mean it can't be tedious and time-consuming,

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[429] Zupančič, *What IS Sex?*, 10–11.

[430] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 195.

[431] Marcuse, 195.

boring and emotionally exhausting to organize the conditions under which they may live with dignity, security, and *a say over their lives*. In this respect, the effect of the idea of play is to articulate what it might mean to have a *democratic desire*. As opposed to, say, a blandly progressive desire, or a statist desire that a certain material outcome obtains, regardless of who acts to bring it about, democratic desire emerges when people work to formulate the standards for common desires themselves.[432] Mediating desire through material practice in this way makes play the occasion, not for the expression of a subjectivity (as in Kant and Schiller's science of beauty, and in more recent theories of judgment), but for the formulation of *common ways to approach common problems*.

If Marcuse's work, in *Eros* and after, has anything at all to teach us, it consists in this proposition and nothing more: only when we *want* to work have we found an activity proper to politics. It's as though Marcuse, in hypothesizing the existence of play, were hypothesizing the existence of democratic agency. It's decisive that the chapter closes by describing how play, as an

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[432] Consider another statement written in the language of midcentury Marxist psychoanalysis: "Historically, the black man, steeped in the inessentiality of servitude, was set free by the master…*Slavery shall no longer exist on French soil*. The upheaval reached the black man from the outside. The black man was acted upon. Values that were not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, whirled around him in a colorful dance. The upheaval did not differentiate the black man. *He went from one way of life to another, but not from one life to another*." Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 194–95. Emphasis mine. I take this metonymic association of life and political agency to be not simply a literary flourish but a literal description of the material conditions necessary to the exercise of political power. The difference between a way of life and a life evidently has to do both with its source and its form. A way of life, imposed from above, cannot differentiate between individuals who have nothing to add to the sociological category. But a *life*, composed by the people who are living it, is both a product of their own agencies *and* a testament to the differentiation of their own individualities—that is, their own hopes, fears, desires, and values—from one another.

activity reducible to neither labor nor leisure, "also cancels their sublime traits—the 'higher values.'"[433] Play functions as principle of "civilization" when, and only when, it undoes the distinction between labor (the sphere of unfree sociality) and leisure (the sphere of free antisociality). "If the higher values [i.e. those that we take pleasure in when we view a work of art] lose their remoteness, their isolation from and against the lower faculties, the latter may become freely susceptible to culture."[434] That is, *play offers us a cultural politics that is at the same time essentially materialist.* Play brings the higher values back into contact with the lower faculties because, speaking psychoanalytically, it's the act of undoing the repression that confines the sensations of pleasure to the realm of art. To speak more colloquially, whereas the classic technique of capitalist subsumption involves taking a set of political propositions and sublimating them into qualities of discourse—respect, dignity recognition—that no longer bear any relation to material circumstances, play involves precisely the opposite. As Marcuse describes it, there are not varieties of play that are not intensely absorbed in the material conditions of desire and deprivation. This is the same work involved in democracy. Voting and protesting alike are both relatively costless activities but are far from sufficient to maintain the conditions of equality necessary to maintain a democratic society. Attending a meeting is an act of play. Convincing co-workers to go to a rally is an act of play. To convince a city council member that their interest is bound up in the welfare of their community—this too is an act of play. Far from luxury goods, constrained by the compulsion to produce and perform, these are activities that strain against conditions of domination.

If play can do the work that past theories of social democracy had attributed to the solidarity of class identity, it's because culture itself is a site of solidarity, a space for people to articulate

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[433] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 195–96.

[434] Marcuse, 196.

common desire in a situation where identity and ideology are no longer up to the task. Consider what happens when politics becomes purely an intellectual or a bureaucratic matter, to the detriment of the sensations of popular organizing:

> To the degree to which organized labor operates in defense of the status quo, and to the degree to which the share of labor in the material process of production declines, *intellectual* skills and capabilities becomes social and political factors. Today, the organized refusal to cooperate of the scientists, mathematicians, technicians, industrial psychologists and public opinion pollsters may well accomplish what a strike, even a large-scale strike, can no longer accomplish but once accomplished, namely, the beginning of the reversal, the preparation of the ground for political action.[435]

The idea is "utterly unrealistic."[436] Whereas Marx could rest assured that the collective labor being undertaken in the factory could prepare the proletariat for the collective action necessary to seize state power, for Marcuse such a common experience no longer exists. And so even though Marcuse is not pinning his hopes on a mass conversion to Marxist creed but on something as minimalist as "organized refusal," the scattershot nature of the refusal in question makes it difficult to understand how such any such organization would arise in the first place. What prevents this scattershot refusal among career types is the fact that it remains bound to "intellectual skills and capabilities."[437] What matters for solidarity is not intellect, but something more sentimental, like the "instinctual refusal among the youth in protest. It is their lives which are at stake, and if not their lives, their mental health and their capacity to function as unmutilated humans. Their protest will continue…because it is a biological necessity."[438] What guarantees the expression, if not necessarily the success, of this

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[435] Marcuse, xxv.

[436] Marcuse, xxv.

[437] Marcuse, xxv.

[438] Marcuse, xxv.

solidarity is a sensation inseparable from the sensation of bare life itself. This is partly a claim about how embodiment matters to our understanding of politics, but I think more importantly it's a claim about the importance of sociality to our understanding of the body. Unlike some who take "bare life" to signify the individual's total powerlessness in the face of the modern state machine , Marcuse's position is that social practice comes before bodily objecthood. It's as though the cooperative enterprises of enunciating human need were as biological as the sheer mechanisms of those needs themselves.[439]

VIII. Play, Care, Eros

Thinking of play as the labor of satisfying needs and desires helps us see how, more than just an expression of the "free play" of the aesthetic imagination, this modality of labor in fact marks out such an imagination's constitutive limit. In arguing that for Marcuse, play is the limit-case of imagination, I've made two interrelated points. First, that imagination and its sheer experience of freedom is insufficient to inform a politics concerned with the problem of power (i.e. politics *tout court*). Second, despite that insufficiency, the very fact that aesthetics names a set of repressed perceptual possibilities teaches us something about what those sensations might look like when they are freed of the burden of signifying immaterial values.

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[439] In this respect, that Marcuse's chapter in the *Essay* on "A Biological Foundation for Socialism?" concerns itself with a series of *cultural* phenomena (or better, with a set of phenomena that, in their movement from the physiological to the cultural seems to obviate the seems to obviate such a distinction in the first place) seems worthy of remark. Pornography, consumerism, and entertainment become as important to the question of a biological foundation as science, technology, and subsistence economics. See Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 7–22.

American political economy makes Marcuse's choice of terms an admittedly odd one. "Play" betrays a continued attachment both to the conceptual nexus of aesthetics and to the sociology of play as a universal cultural constant. Either way, it comes at the expense of a concrete accounting with the capacities in question and they way that they have been historically allocated. *Care work* has served as an important concept for making sense of this same economy of need and desire. The work of taking care of the sick, purchasing goods, maintaining the home, preparing meals, cleaning clothes, and raising children: "These are some of the most fundamental tasks of a society, and the daily labor of these activities can involve both monotonous drudgery and untold rewards for those performing them."[440] It requires the use of a sympathetic imagination—picturing what another needs and desires—but of course, it requires *work*, too, since those needs and desires don't ever fulfill themselves. *Play* is not quite the same thing as *care*, but it's not too far off, either. Both are unproductive but necessary for production, unvalorizable but necessary to the creation of value, and both require the personal work of materially interacting with another. The difference is that Marcuse asserts a historically-progressive character to play. Care work often adheres explicitly to what Marxists call the sphere of "social reproduction," the labor involved with maintaining a social universe, not only for the next generation but day after day after toilsome day. For Marcuse, though, the gamble with play is that it reconfigures the tedium involved with labor: they "imply not the transformation of labor but its complete subordination to the freely evolving potentialities of man and nature."[441] Although it's not quite clear what view Marcuse lands on here, what *does* seem clear is that he sees the need to choose his words carefully. It's not about *exiting* the world of tedium—"not the transformation of labor"—but rather affirming a relationship of labor to "freely evolving

[440] Duffy, *Making Care Count*, 1.

[441] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 195.

potentialities," whatever those may be and however we may come to determine them and desire them.

I would almost call Marcuse's attachment to "civilizational principles" evidence of an ambition to make desire a *masculine* affair. Whereas care connotes attentiveness and social involvement, play seems to give us autonomy and almost irresponsibility: Marcuse presents the latter as a category of political organizing both *equally open to everyone* and *equally unactualized*. Marcuse, strangely, invites this impression by insisting himself that play "will be discussed not as an abstract and utopian speculation" (as a reader of Freud, Marcuse knows very well the significance of the spontaneous denial).[442] Implicit in the statement is the worry that ordinary cares and desires might not be legible in the analytic of play. In other words, the text strangely suggests that we are all equidistant from the socially-sympathetic labor when as a matter of fact, millions of people already engage in this work every day. Care is hard work, stuck in the daily routine of maintaining life, and the uneven distribution of the burden of care-work is "key to the distinct exploitation of women of color."[443] Who, by contrast, wouldn't want to participate in "freely evolving potentialities"?[444]

I say *almost,* though, because what gives me pause are the specific implications of care in 20th century German philosophy. The problem with care, for someone with Marcuse's itinerary, is that it's too overloaded with Heideggerian intent. Marcuse, like many other German-Jewish *émigrés*, studied under Martin Heidegger in the 20s and early 30s, even writing a number of essays on the synthesis of his philosophy with Marxist ideas.[445] In a 1978 interview, Marcuse reports that in his

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[442] Marcuse, 5.

[443] Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work," 3.

[444] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 195.

[445] Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*.

Heideggerian days, "One spoke of *Dasein*, *Existenz*, the "they" (*das Man*), death (*Tod*), and care (*Sorge*). That seemed to speak to us."[446] Given this charged set of associations, and particularly in light of Heidegger's politics, I wonder if Marcuse found it impossible to separate care from its involvement in his philosophical fascism. And even if he could disentangle these lines of thought him, I wonder if he would want to risk entangling them for his readers.

From this perspective, I read Marcuse's catachresis of play as the stubborn affirmation of a politics of life, and care-for-life, and plurality as "principles of civilization."[447]In this respect, I take "play" to have a place in Marcuse's horizon of thought more or less identical to that we might attribute to "care." To see how, it might be helpful to turn to Audre Lorde, who folds both orientations into *eros*, understood here as a matter of work:

> The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional components of that need—the principal horror of such a system is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfilment.[448]

For Lorde, the central failing of late industrial society is the manner in which it confines women's experience of the erotic entirely to their sexual life. It is a system premised on denying women the freedom to use the erotic in the way that they choose, to engage in "our work" in a manner that best reflects the world women desire. This is not the erotic not as a masculine Freudian principle of desirous self-assertion, but "as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; that of creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming."[449] By reclaiming the *erotic*

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[446] Marcuse et al., "Theory and Politics," 125.

[447] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 195.

[448] Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 24.

[449] Lorde, 25, 30.

value, and the *erotic power* of "our work," Lorde means to suggest a new measure of labor (how well it satisfies human need) that is at one and the same time a new measure of political power (how well it organizes people's desires). This is an account of social reproduction and the labor of social transformation: when women can dispose of their labor as they desire, social change becomes possible.

I wonder if something similar is going on with Marcuse. It seems analogous to the central idea that Marcuse was getting at in the closing pages of "The Aesthetic Dimension," even though his continued attachment to the language of civilization made it impossible to formulate it. The crucial question is what it means to make play a principle of civilization. In turning away from the aesthetic ideal, which located freedom in the "free play of the imagination" stimulated by the beautiful piece of art, Marcuse implicitly suggested that the material practice of free play required something ugly and difficult, too. After all, the work of social solidarity involves a lot of drudgery. It's often boring, and when it's not, clashes between different visions and different desires are basically inevitable in a riven with class antagonism. And yet it's this basic work of building a worthwhile life together that takes play out of the realm of spectatorship and into the realm of mutual involvement. By returning *eros* to the realm of public practice—by making emotional need a factor in social relations—Lorde and Marcuse both take the basic work of desiring and building a life together to be *the essential question of politics.*

Whither Prescription?

At this point I think it important to observe that although this chapter's reconstruction of the notion of play gives it a systematic form, this is never present in Marcuse's writing. It's important to recognize this hesitancy as integral to the political stakes of the project. Play always appears as an impulse or a collective of dispositions to solidarity, but he never explains what such dispositions

look like, nor does he systematically disentangle it from the unplayful dispositions (those more caught up in the workings of institutional repression). This is the entire point—after all, solidarity never takes place in a vacuum, and desire is never fully inextricable from the institutions in which one feels it. But it's also that, given both the weight of Marcuse's thesis about the decline of revolutionary subjectivity and the weight of the sheer fact that agency requires agents, a philosophical text is simply not in a position to announce the existence of a new kind of political agency. This unfinished project would fall to those who, in taking up his dispositions, would work both with and against what he had to say. Although, as Neil Roberts puts it, "Marcuse was a humble star of the New Left whose studies of Hegel, Marx, Freud, and the meanings of liberation, eros, the aesthetic dimension, and revolution were well known among academics and an increasingly visible lay audience that sought guidance as to how critical theory could be made relevant to the everyday," the fact remains that Marcuse's only practical suggestion consisted in the non-suggestion that his readers insist upon their own desires as a principle of their political agency.[450]

What Marcuse lacked as a theorist of strategy or institutions, he made up for as a theorist of conduct. You can't *tell* someone to play or to desire, just like you cannot *tell* someone to enjoy a work of art or to sympathize with another. Playing and desiring may be susceptible to the conditioning of habit (I may *come* to desire some product if I see enough billboards for it, or some political good if enough of my friends do too) but it's not susceptible to the logic of rule. For that reason, a politics of play maps only imperfectly onto the politics of prescription. For example, Roberts points out that Marcuse's student Angela Y. Davis did not share attachment in her projects of building political power.

> Developing a strategy of change and systematic approach toward resistance to racism, subordination of women, undemocratic orders, and orders of unfreedom—

[450] Roberts, "Angela Y. Davis," 666.

> Great Refusals against the Establishment, in Marcuse's political language—were aspirations Davis began to chart in terms Marcuse and others had never outlined.[451]

On the one hand, this is a straightforward description of intellectual history: Davis's inspiration for these various projects and their coarticulation into a political program owes far more to the radical black tradition and feminist thought than it does to Marcuse's critical theory. But it also presents us with a conceptual impasse: *did* Marcuse have an outline of a politics that Davis could have faithfully followed? Both yes and no: no in the sense that Marcuse did not, indeed *could* not suggest these particular struggles, but yes in the sense that he gives us the emotional resources for understanding coalition between these struggles. The relation between theory and practice at work here is less about strategic opportunities than it is about the circuits of desire that make Davis's various projects legible as *one common capacity for play*.[452] How do we habituate ourselves towards seeing "racism, the

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[451] Roberts, 667. To be clear, my point in drawing upon Roberts's observation is to say that Davis, in both drawing on and departing from her teacher, exemplifies a disposition of critical theory which Marcuse could hesitatingly describe but never was able himself to put into practice at any appreciable scale.

[452] In a letter of support to Davis after her arrest "on charges of complicity to murder," Marcuse writes: "The world in which you grew up, your world (which is not mine) was one of cruelty, misery, and persecution…I do not know whether you were involved at all in these tragic events." The rhetorical show of distance, though, only serves to foreground the proximity of desires: "but I do know that you were deeply involved in the fight for the black people, for the oppressed everywhere…you also ought for us too, who need freedom and want freedom for all who are still unfree. In this sense, your cause is my cause." Ritivoi, *Intimate Strangers*, 124–25. Obviously there are limits to this unabashed sentimentalism—Marcuse is not, for instance, picking up a gun in response to this radical affection—but there's a lot to be said for public statements of solidarity for someone on the federal government's most wanted list.

subordination of women, undemocratic orders, and orders of unfreedom" as one and the same political question?[453] And how do we link together our desires for their overcoming?

Seen from this perspective, Marcuse's refusal to endow play with a determinate critical or normative content might instead be understood as registering a radical separation from the logic of vanguardism that's otherwise so difficult to distance from the desire for an emancipatory politics. For some, this reconfiguration solidarity comes across as a weakness of political vision. Benhabib asserts that what makes the work of Marcuse, aside from Adorno and Horkheimer's, "the best demonstration of how feeble the philosophy of the subject has become" is the manner in which "even when the historical process seems to destroy all hope in the *revolutionary* subject, the search for *a subject* whose needs and interests might represent those of humanity as such continues."[454] What Marcuse misses in his attachment to the afterimage of a collective and self-conscious subjectivity is "the standpoint of intersubjectivity and plurality; instead, the work model of activity is replaced by that of mimesis."[455] As a question of historical impasses, Benhabib's criticism basically accords with Jay's remark about the transcendence of critical theory from any actually-existing social basis. And I think she's right to point to intersubjectivity, plurality, and the "work model" as material bases for political solidarity today. But on the reading of Marcuse I've given above, it becomes difficult to deny that he's a theorist of these desiderata. Play comes to matter to politics, not just as an object *of* but as a resource *for* solidarity, in describing the work of navigating the plurality of social desires as they manifest what makes life worth living. When it comes to the building of collective power, perhaps what matters is neither class consciousness nor a vanguard cadre, nor even a particular

[453] Roberts, "Angela Y. Davis," 667.

[454] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 143.

[455] Benhabib, 143.

deliberative procedure, as though solidarity required the agreement of belief or reason: but rather a way of life that makes the organizing of many different desires a precondition for, rather than an obstacle to, the constitution of political coalition. Solidarity doesn't require a sophisticated ideological structure where people suddenly become so much more aware of others' pains and perhaps their own role in perpetuating that pain; it just requires that people take their own desires as something worth fighting with and fighting for. And so rather than think of Marcuse either as a spokesperson of the New Left, or as the obscure philosophical distillation of their failed political strategy, it would be more accurate to call him a perennial critic of the New Left's politics of desire.

Given his critique of hippie political theory, it may be somewhat difficult to see what could distinguish Marcuse's own radical notion of play from the countercultural injunction to turn on, tune in, and drop out. Is it that the hippies engage in a bad (disorganized) kind of play, as opposed to the properly organized play that Marcuse will describe for us instead? Rather, it's that they don't really engage in the work of play at all.[456] The assertion of "consciousness as a source of social change" both takes for granted and forecloses the "political struggle" implied in the work of organizing and negotiating desire.[457] Nancy Fraser understands this emphasis on expression over organization to lead to a specific failure of anticapitalist radicalism:

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[456] I thank Michael Stenovec for pressing me to address this question.

[457] Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 38. The distinction that scholarship on social movements draws between "organizing" and "mobilizing" is useful here. As Hahrie Han puts it, mobilizing is the attempt to "maximize participation by minimizing costs," whereas organizing is about "developing people's capacity to act on behalf of their interests." Mobilization's ur-example is the request to sign a petition, whereas the organizer would rather ask that person to attend meetings, to speak to their acquaintances, and more generally to develop a set of skills that entangle them in the networks of political movements. Han, *How*

> On the contrary, political projects that appeal to what they imagine to be capitalism's 'outside' usually end up recycling capitalist stereotypes, as the counterpose female nurturance to male aggression, spontaneous cooperation to economic calculation, nature's holistic organicism to anthropocentric individualism.[458]

The particular anxiety on display here is the relationship between imagination and material effect. There exists a kind of radical imagination which represses the wrong relations, organizes the wrong desires, even though it professes otherwise. While both mass movements and the radical rejection of the hippies seek to deal with capitalist society, the difference between the two is that the attitude of rejection conforms to the logic of opposition that we saw above: it serves only to ossify rather than grapple with the realities of state and economic power. In a very real sense, it's a form of individual speech rather than material cooperation; and so insofar as Fraser describes the problem of opposition, she also describes a problem of agency. While both organized movements and radical opposition seek to deal with capitalist society, the latter's attitude of rejection fixes rather than grapples with the realities of state and economic power. Fraser and Marcuse both observe that when

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Organizations Develop Activists, 91; see also McKean, *Disorienting Neoliberalism*, 224, which usefully documents this distinction's relevance for conceptions of freedom. When Marcuse speaks of play, he speaks of an activity that, in Han's sense of "organizing," builds social capability, and he expressly contrasts it to the costless stylistic concerns of the theoretically committed but practically unengaged individual. The difference between Marcuse and the former authors lies in their theories of power. Because Han's account is interested in the instrumental attitude an organization adopts to nonmembers, I worry that it begins to sound like an elite-driven conception of agency wherein we have 1) "a professional, highly educated staff," and 2) "the masses as audiences of, rather than active participants, in their own liberation," and so her account makes it difficult to imagine what genuine popular initiative looks like. McAlevey, *No Shortcuts*, 6. For Marcuse, this is the entire question: how, in the first place, people might organize their own desires into collective power.

[458] Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode," 70.

someone turns away from the space of capitalist social life, they also turn away from all the other people with whom they might have stood in solidarity. Desire, on the other hand, when it becomes an interpersonal affair, can be read as oppositional, but more substantively and more immediately as an enterprise of solidarity. The emotional rollercoaster of the picket line—that it *can't* just be for yourself, it has to be for everyone in your shop—is the same emotional rollercoaster felt by the conscientious engineer and the student activist.

Advanced industrial society is wholly organized around individual persons as separate units of political and economic interest. People want different things, and in such a psychosocial space they are conditioned to want them in a manner that's antagonistic to vulnerability or communication. It's very difficult to overstate just how hard this makes the project of building solidarity. Whereas the wheels of racial capitalism naturally follow the ruts of economic interest, organizing to other ends must weld all sorts of different desires into a common sentimental solidarity. Given the basic situation of sentimental separation, even with perfect foresight and strategy, the task of communicating and negotiating desire is fundamentally an uphill battle. Whereas Marx premised his entire political project on the idea that the location of production (typically the factory) was also the location of habituation and therefore of political struggle, on Marcuse's account, the labor of politics can happen anywhere that people are capable of actuating their desire in relation to one another. To take play as an organizing principle of social solidarity is to enter this space of real desires and actually-existing social relations in order to center the kind of difficult solidarity foundational to the practice of democracy.

Conclusion

When taken to suggest a positive norm of political activity, "play" becomes at once both deeply enticing and deeply problematic. The simple ontological distinction between desire and

repression, or the pleasure principle and the reality principle, doesn't imply any particular normative content besides the formal opposition between individual freedom and social unfreedom. The theory's normative indeterminacy—the way that it *refuses to distinguish between true needs and false needs*—makes it difficult to evaluate differences between "it's a free country," "my body, my choice," and "hands up, don't shoot," since these are all, at a glance, clear appeals to individual pleasure against outside interference.[459] The fact that such an indeterminate theory kicks the question to our standing moral sensibilities evacuates it of all interest as a philosophical analysis of desire.

Nevertheless, this chapter has tried to argue that, although the *normative* project of pleasure may be theoretically trivial, the *critical* account of play—the account, that is, that emerges in what I've called Marcuse's critical theory of habit—plays a substantial role in organizing political energy. I've shown that Marcuse's use of the term play organizes desire and its satisfaction through a negative ideal of the relationships that become possible when we devote our time to labor that we seek to undertake ourselves.[460] In the vocabulary of critical theory, "negative" has always meant something like "against totality," overcoming and therefore in some respect oppositional; Marcuse's critique of opposition, though, helps us to understand how negativity might function in a more *compositional* sense. In this respect Marcuse describes a kind of political behavior that deserves to be saved from both the anticapitalist prefigurationists of the left and the theorists of social order on the right. Despite the wish for a hyper-awareness that would link individual agency to spontaneous collective

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[459] If many Americans are to be believed, and wearing a mask really is a rather unpleasant experience, then the "reality principle" that a respiratory virus must be dealt with by a coordinated public health response becomes all the more normatively suspect.

[460] On Marcuse's account, this is the line in the sand between the revisionist Freudians and his own understanding of the metapsychology.

possibility on the one hand, and the desire to reduce social behavior to the object of institutional knowledge and management on the right, behavior is neither totally orderable nor totally spontaneous, and never quite conforms to these various projects of coordination.

This chapter has tried to demonstrate how thinking of play as a *way of life*—as part of the autonomous play of social relations—substantializes this vision of social solidarity. It puts political agency into the hands of ordinary people who are perfectly aware of the ways in which their myriad frustrations have something essential to do with each other. Marcuse's ambition is that a disposition towards solidarity might mean, not simple mobilization towards sign-making and consciousness raising, but rather a habit of talking to neighbors about difficulties and desires that they share in as well. If habit expresses the force of organization, it's only because it helps us think of agency as an enduring practice rather than a state of being. The reason why Marcuse could call these habits *play*, even in treating them as a kind of labor, is their involvement in the effort of creating a space for democracy.

Conclusion

The Limits of Habit and Democratic Politics

No single thinker has done more to demote the study of habit in political theory than Sheldon Wolin. Unlike Marcuse, who doubled down on the prospects of emancipation from within civil society, Wolin takes the conditions of cultural administration and social management in the United States to authorize a new task for the political theorist. The actual space of social life is no longer a matter of theoretical concern; rather, the theorist was to become a student of *vision*: "the ideal of an order subject to human control and one that could be transfigured through a combination of thought and action."[461] Wolin's essay on the "Vocation of the Political Theorist" is partly, as I argued in the introduction, about how philosophy might respond to the state's hollowing out of social space for the sake of a more rationally management political antagonism. Wolin has convinced generations of political theorists that democracy lacks the moral and emotional energy necessary to sustain bonds of solidarity. But it is also an argument about the kind of sensibility best suited to democratic politics. If Wolin's argument could be so convincing, it was because we had already come to appreciate the experience of being isolated in our critical autonomy, for only the ruthless criticism of every existing social relation, no matter how damaging it might be to actual attempts to *organize* social relations, could gratify our longing for freedom.

At the beginning of this dissertation I introduced the conceit of a disagreement with Wolin. I conclude by revisiting the terms of that disagreement in order to summarize the stakes of a concept of habit and to think through the limits of a politics founded on its basis. Part of the problem with the idea of a *politics* of habit is that it assumes the existence of a relationship between people's routines and their capacity to participate in the making of group decisions. Though "predictable

[461] Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 20.

behavior is what societies live by," the reason Wolin takes habit (or rather, in his language, *behavior*) to pose an obstacle to democratic politics is that in an era of total administration, "certain regularities in behavior and attitude" make people's routines uniquely available for rational management.[462] That is, his critique of behavioralism concerns the way in which this epistemological toolkit that doesn't just enable but *presupposes* the attenuation, if not the wholesale disappearance, of the political relation, such that the person manipulating behavior and the person engaging in behavior belong to two entirely different social worlds.[463] Rather than a criticism of *behavior* as such, the "Vocation" essay's problem is with a particular variety of manipulating behavior in a desperate bid to maintain the *status quo*.

Wolin's warning is well taken. Habit can't lead to social solidarity when state or corporate powers constantly intervene to manage people's expressions of feeling and attachment. This was a difficulty that we encountered in chapters three and four: for both Marx and Marcuse, the whole question is how the relationship between material routine to social solidarity deals with the presence of countervailing forces that seem to exhaust people's capacity to act independently and act in concert. Just as the behavioral method exhausts the political scientist's capacity for philosophical imagination, behavioral *policy* seems to exhaust the state's capacity to comprehend the active political imaginations of those under its rule. The development of the behavioral model is a political catastrophe of the first order, not because it subsumes habit under its rule but because it has to *ignore* so much in pursuit of regularity. Despite all the powers of state behind it, the behavioral method

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[462] Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1064.

[463] This, after all, was Foucault's intellectual project: to show that certain modes of producing knowledge could not take shape until institutional practices enabled the precise and regular collection of data and experimentation. What's less often appreciated is that this isn't necessarily a bad state of affairs.

could not entirely reduce behavior to an object of management: it might have turned out to be a failure, but as things stand, it didn't even try: "American political scientists continue to devote great energy to explaining how various agencies ingeniously work at the political socialization of our citizens and future citizens while mobs [*sic*] burn parts of our cities, students defy campus rules and authorities, and a new generation questions the whole range of civic obligations."[464] Phrasing aside, the standing of behavioral science as Wolin articulates it in relation to the affairs of the day here marks a tragic turn in the misrelation between state power and civil society. Wolin's reader knows which events he's referring to here: the anti-war movement, civil rights, the rebellions sparked by Martin Luther King's assassination, Black Power. These affairs and their methodical interpretation have become two entirely separate realities. Wolin's image here is one of a science so comfortable in its conference centers and seminar rooms, so enamored with its own models of regularity, that it can blindly assert the triumph of an orderly and just society even as the scenes of solidarity playing out on the quads and the boulevards just outside the window illustrate the ongoing struggle for precisely that. The willful blindness to what have become the "customs and manners of common life"—to the moments of political assertion playing out day after day, week after week—is for Wolin an emblem of the inability to take habit seriously as the engrained and organized expression of freedom.

Habit might be a strange word to use here, given our temptation to describe these affairs as events or rebellions or in any case something rather singular. But Wolin and his reader both know that these have become regular features of life in these United States: these actions of "mobs," "students," and "a new generation" are neither aberrations nor events, but ongoing efforts to put a stop to the nightmare of American society, and in this sense they are more than singular exceptions

[464] Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," 1082.

to the behavioralist's statistical portrait. They are routine and statistically significant refutations of the doctrine's canvas of civic life. These behaviors they evince a riotousness and a rebelliousness to people's common political capacities: they tear behavioralism's civic canvas to shreds, defying the scientist-manager's ambition to rational order. The conscious inability to understand these efforts as anything more than disorder and chaos shouldn't be surprising, for the behavioral revolution begins and ends with a mode of analysis that has to disavow the discontinuities and irregularities of habit as the vehicle of political possibility.

What sort of critical reckoning follows from recognizing the persistence of this basic fact of common life? How can political philosophy contribute to the struggle for a more just and more humane world? Wolin makes it clear that, with peace to Hume, things are different today. Custom and tradition can no long be understood as an autonomous sphere of "common life" separate from the affairs of state. Where it's not withering away altogether, it's coming under the control of the state's disciplinary apparatus. So for Wolin, the question of political theory becomes, "not what new powers we can bring into the world, but what hard-won practices we can prevent from disappearing."[465] If these are the stakes, then a political theory of habit is an essentially conservative enterprise, in the sense of conserving something in spite of all the forces arrayed against it. Nevertheless, this work of conserving, or even perhaps renovating, a space of common life and placid routine—or "hard-won practices," as the case may be—implies a seriously radical position for political theory. Historically, it means taking seriously actual experiments in political organization. Conceptually, it challenges our imagination to stay low to the ground, go deep to the root of the matter, to think through the singularity of habit and routine. The radical task of thought today is not to actualize principles but to inhabit the world as it insists on existing today. Whether Wolin's "hard-

[465] Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, 292.

won practices" are worth preserving or abolishing, the fact remains that they exist; that they are entangled with the desires of state administration; and that they constitute the only extant conditions under which it is possible to build political power. Under these conditions, just as it was for Hume, the radical discontinuities of habit mean that it cannot be taken for granted as a stable foundation of moral and political argument. It cannot constitute a normative political ideal like freedom, or equality, or voluntary association. It is rather a *condition* of political argument.

For democrats, the conditions of class war, of racism, of patriarchy, colonialism, and global capitalism often appear interminable. But an understanding of repetition can provide a vocabulary of enduring magnanimity, too. Until the late sixties, Americans regularly spoke a language of emancipation and organization that drew precisely on this disposition. It was a language that includes not only Herbert Marcuse's particular dialect but also the various tendencies of the New Left, civil rights, Black Power, and the anti-war movement. It was not a language of social democracy, *per se*, but certainly involved a notion of *democratic society* premised on the imaginative power of solidarity with third-world revolutionary realities.[466] What made a society *democratic* were, in part, the ideals of freedom and equality that made time available for voluntary association, interest groups, and the labor of cooperation outside the world of economic necessity. More importantly, what made society democratic were the habits that made political programs possible: people *wanted* to make their time available. In speaking of civil disobedience and direct action, for instance, people spoke of countless nights spent organizing ordinary people's confidence in their own abilities and their capacity for concerted action. The sort of political arguments that favored a democratic society

[466] Cf. Lye, "Identity Politics, Criticism, and Self-Criticism," esp. 711n1. For some recent studies of the political theory of internationalism and third-worldism in the mid-20th century, see Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*; Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist*.

were arguments for confrontation and contestation, *but also* arguments for mutual aid, public arts, community projects, and continuing education. These two dimensions of social solidarity were really just two aspects of the same indifference towards philosophers and policymakers who would attempt to annex and instrumentalize their conduct for very different principles of political order.[467] Above all, democratic society involved a shared sentiment that *common life* was interpellated common interest. Today, this language is coming back:

> look: the problematic of coalition is that coalition isn't something that emerges so that you can come help me, a maneuver that always gets traced back to your own interests. The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us...I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?[468]

Fred Moten's appeal to "your recognition that it's fucked up for you"—an attempt to translate Fred Hampton's Black Power politics into present-day predicaments—articulates a vision of solidarity in the space of desublimated, material desire that this dissertation has located in the idea of habit. Solidarity, desublimated, isn't about ideals or altruism—either of which exists only as "a maneuver that always gets traced back to your own interests." It's about the straightforwardly unrealistic and *selfish* desire to have a good life I can call my own. It's not that wrong life cannot be lived rightly, but that life already militates against the wrongness imposed upon it. Of course, our actual desires often contradict one another, but as we've seen, the active overdetermination of contradictions is one way that people habituate themselves into different manners of thinking. It may even turn out that the possibility of organizing ourselves along these fragile conduits of sympathy and interest is equivalent to the possibility of organizing a democratic politics.

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[467] On cooptation and disavowal of the political theory of civil disobedience, see Pineda, *Seeing Like an Activist*, esp. 159-91.

[468] Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 140–41.

The point of this exercise in political theory is neither to deny the importance of critical distance nor to assert that habit can be utilized for specific ends. It's rather to affirm what many political theorists have implicitly recognized: that habit has an inborn, if fragile, potential for radical discontinuity; that this potential can be worked upon; and that habit is the only enduring answer to the question of collectivity. The conservative counterrevolution that closed the book on domestic organizing and international solidarity, even as it ushered in a new era of racial domination and capitalist expansion, should have led political theorists to defend the motley space of common life against all the encroachments of public and private actors: strangely, it led many to doubt its political potential altogether. This crisis of faith, I think, reflects less on its innate social weaknesses or a change in democratic values than on people's struggles to believe in its viability. Political philosophers are just beginning to return to the style of argument expounded by the authors I survey here. They do not rest content with a few principles, procedures, or exceptional events, but with democracy as a necessary and important part of one's daily routine. The rights to assemble, to organize, to act collectively whether at home or at work or out in the street—if these rights are under attack, it's because the ruling classes know the potential of habit to militate against inequality and unfreedom. Freud teaches that repetition is the working-through of trauma in a strained effort to learn to live again.[469] Political theory could take the lesson to heart: to understand contemporary attempts at social solidarity, it's necessary to take this domain of habit seriously as something other than a site of critical intervention.

Ultimately, the point of examining the concept of habit is to ground a structural politics in an orientation towards life. Although Frank Wilderson writes that "the narrative spine of most political theory" consists in the movement "from equilibrium to disequilibrium to equilibrium

[469] Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through."

(restored, renewed, or reorganized)," this dissertation has tried to think of habit as a perpetual inhabitant of that middle zone.[470] If we stop mistaking the quiet work of habit for political quiescence, if we refuse to cede it both to the managers of mass society and the proponents of a staid traditionalism, then perhaps we can more clearly see the obvious truth that political theory's anti-behavioralism has long obscured from view: that the customs and manners that people adopt in response to their own experiences of domination and disorganization are already efforts to contest the terms of those arrangements. What Marcuse called "the fight for life"—task of forging a less predatory form of politics—has no other social base. From this position, the only really radical orientation involves a conservative politics, but understood in an oblique manner: not as the conservation of a status quo, but rather the conservation of those routines that makes spontaneous action possible. How political theory makes sense of this situation determines its capacity to understand power and collective action today. After all, the promise of the utterly new is only ever uttered by someone repeating and thereby working through the old.

[470] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 26.

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