We All Want to Change the World

THE PARADOX OF THE U.S. LEFT
A POLEMIC

Lawrence Grossberg

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ISBN: 9781 910448 496 (e-pub), 9781 910448 502 (pdf)

DEDICATION

In loving memory of Stuart Hall

(because I never got to say thank you)

EPIGRAMS

"I was gratified to be able to answer promptly. I said I don't know."—Mark Twain

"The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits."—Albert Einstein

FIRST THINGS FIRST

I have decided to take advantage of the privilege of my position as a senior professor by putting this book online for free, partly because I wanted it to be as widely available and with as little delay as possible, partly because I wanted to offer it as tentative, unfinished and open to correction, and partly because I wanted to make an admittedly small symbolic gesture against the increasing power of commercial academic publishing. I am also intrigued by the possibility of a book that can be easily updated, taking account of whatever responses it may elicit. While this work is more polemical than scholarly, it is also more about thinking contextually than locating blame. It is informed by my decades as a political intellectual, researcher, professor and teacher.

I want to thank my friends and interlocutors who have read different drafts along the way, for their affection, honesty and intelligent guidance: John Clarke, Paul Gilroy, Sandro Mezzadra, Doreen Massey, Meaghan Morris, Michal Osterweil, John Pickles, Jennifer Daryl Slack, Ted Striphas, and Ellen Wartella. I have tried to respond, as best I could, to their criticisms and suggestions, and it has no doubt made this book better, but they are not to blame for those places where my stubbornness won out over their insight and generosity. As always, I owe a debt of gratitude to my graduate students, who continue to teach me, including Lynn Badia, Bryan Behrenshausen, Andrew Davis and Carey Hardin. And I owe a special debt to Andrew and Carey for proofreading, and to Bryan for book design and realization, lest we forget that even free products still require a great deal of labor.

I am also indebted to Sally Davison and Lawrence & Wishart for their help in making this publication available, and my colleagues and-friends, Chantal Cornut-Gentille D'Arcy and Anindya Raychaudhuri, for the cover image.

I am especially grateful to Hudson Vincent, Sarah Bufkin, Vera Parra and Ben Elkind for re-enchanting undergraduate education for me. In 2010, I promised the students in my freshman seminar on countercultures that they would be named in the book I would eventually write. It has taken me a while, but here you are: Ruth Abebe, Joseph Amodei, Jamie Apone, Kyle Fageol, Tyler Fitch, Patrick Flueckiger, Zachary Frere, Nicolas Garces, Nicholas Gazda, Rita Glynn, Christopher Joy, Sang-June Kim, Tyler Little, Melissa Martinez, Katelin McCarthy, Lindsey Miller,

Kimberly Moore, Sarah Osborne, Walton Reeves, Cameron Rifkin, Elizabeth Rodenbough, Arielle Santiago, Hudson Vincent, and Margaret Zellner.

And finally, whatever desperate optimism there is in these pages, I owe to my wife—the novelist—Barbara Claypole White, and to my son—student, poet and musician—Zachariah Nigel Claypole White, who have always managed to find some blackberries amongst the weeds. I cannot imagine hope without them.

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PREFACE—LOOKING FOR THE BLACKBERRIES

My intellectual and political lives began together, inextricably linked through the articulation of popular culture, political critique and an almost spiritual optimism, which first found expression for me in the 1960s U.S., in social movements including civil rights, anti-war and the counter-culture. Fifty years on, my optimism is all but gone and yet I find that I cannot let go of my hopes for an other, better world. The result is, to put it simply, that, like many others, I feel both angry and depressed about unfulfilled dreams. I am also part of a generation of politically driven intellectuals who occupied the academy because we believed that knowledge and ideas matter, that changing the world depends on having better understandings, better knowledge and better stories than the other sides, and that these would give rise to and animate effective oppositional (and creative) strategies. I have spent most of my academic career as a member of a number of political-intellectual communities trying to understand "what's going on," to understand the profound changes that have characterized the relations of power, and the forms of political struggle, in the United States since the mid-20th century. Those communities (as well as others of which I am not a member) have struggled to find better tools, theories and practices, challenging the ever-growing constraints imposed by the norms and habits of the academy itself as well as, sometimes, by the left. So I do not pretend that the ideas expressed in this book are in any sense original; many of them have been said before and my effort is often to simply bring them together and let them speak to each other. If I am repeating old arguments, the positions and practices that I am arguing against seem to me to have gained strength and become more deeply embedded, partly through "intellectual work," since the late 1970s.

I am, like many people, horrified by what is happening in many parts of the world, but this is a book about what is happening or not happening in the United States. I had a professor a long time ago who told me that you should add a first note to whatever you write that says, "Please read every sentence here as if it started with the statement . . . it is an oversimplification but . . . " This is still a useful suggestion, but in the present effort, I would add, "I am talking about the United States and addressing, in the first instance, a U.S. audience."[1] As will become clear, I

1 Many intellectuals in the U.S., myself included, like the general population, can be incredibly

am committed to a highly contextualized intellectual practice, and I cannot and do not claim to speak about the directions and struggles of change in any other part of the world. I realize that the context of the U.S. is always, in many ways, inseparable from other contexts, and that there are many lines of determination operating across spaces and places, but I think it is necessary to begin by delimiting the space one is trying to describe, so as not to speak, even if unintentionally, in universal terms, as if the events of one context could stand figuratively for all places. In conversations I have had with colleagues and friends from other places, they have often pointed to commonalities, to the fact that some of my descriptions seem relevant to their own contexts, but further discussion always makes clear that the differences are just as important, that different histories almost always mean that the similarities are inflected differently, with different meanings, relations and effects.

This book has been percolating for some time, especially in conversations with close friends and interlocutors—especially John Clarke, Meaghan Morris, John Pickles, Stuart Hall, and Doreen Massey. I have been trying to write it for a long time; what pushed me into taking the risk was my effort to come to terms with the death of Stuart Hall, my teacher and friend, and in many ways, my intellectual and political inspiration. Like many people, it was to Stuart that I turned when I could no longer find that "optimism of the will" that is the precondition for political struggle. But Stuart taught me that such optimism also has to be earned by doing the mental labor that takes us to the depths of "pessimism of the intellect." In his last interview (2012), Stuart admitted that he felt more pessimistic than he ever had in his life, and that his pessimism was the result of both the state of the forces of neoliberalism and the state of the left opposition. In fact, throughout his many important interventions, which attempted to make sense of the historical specificities of the struggles of power, he always addressed and criticized the strategies and technologies of both the forces of domination and oppression, *and* the forces of left opposition. The analysis and criticism of the taken-for-granted assumptions, strategies and habits of the left, or at least, of its leading and often dominant fractions, was an absolutely vital part of what he called cultural studies as conjunctural analysis.[2] I have always liked

parochial. One assumes that everything that happens in the world is somehow reproducing, responding to or following the lead of what happens in the U.S. At the same time, what happens in the U.S. often ignores other histories and geographies as somehow irrelevant to the U.S.

2 I will define "conjuncture" more specifically in chapter 6. For the moment, one can think of it as a moment of a social formation or as a spatial-temporal social context.

his image of his own practice as "wrestling with the angels," and while he most commonly used it to refer to his relations to theory, I think it just as well applied to his relation the left. It is what I am trying to do here. As he put it in a piece defending his own collaborative efforts to use popular television in anti-racist struggles:

> Neither passionate left-wing convictions nor the immutable laws of history can ever replace the difficult questions of political calculation on which the outcome of particular struggles ultimately turns. This essay is written in the firm conviction that we need to be better prepared, both in our analysis of how racist ideologies become 'popular', and in what are the appropriate strategies for combatting them. Both, in their turn, depend on a more open, less closed and 'finalist' debate of positions among people on the left committed to the anti-racist struggle. (1981, p. 29)

I realize that many previous generations have been appalled by the emergence and solidification of forms of power producing an inhumane society in the U.S. as well as in other parts of the world. But I cannot help but feel that something is different about the *victories* of the forces arrayed against the greatest part of humanity, and this difference has become increasingly visible and important since the late 1970s. I call it *the paradox of the left*: actually the paradox is doubled, folding back on itself. It starts with the observation that there are many people and groups actively struggling, in many different ways, around many different issues, at many different scales, but all in some way aimed against the increasingly conservative/capitalist currents of history. Yet many commentators seem blind to this reality and continue to assume that people in the U.S. have simply accepted their lot, that there is no outrage or struggle; they also assume, apparently, that in previous times, the vast majority of the population expressed its dissatisfaction and outrage in forms of activism and protest. That is, the struggles seem strangely invisible. But then, the invisibility doubles back on itself so that, despite the many struggles opposed and seeking alternatives to the existing state of affairs, the left is unwilling or unable to confront the apparent absence of any *effective* force capable of withstanding the tides of power, capable of having a real and sustained impact on these directions. The left seems to undermine the very possibility of a movement that both unites its opposi-

tional fractions and presents a popular—affirmative—alternative future. Hopefully, neither the Democratic Party nor Occupy is the best the left can do. And, if I may be allowed a moment of hyperbole, furthering the paradox, it seems as though the more desperate the times, the less effective the opposition.

There are many intellectuals and academics penning attacks, ranging from technical analyses to moralistic screeds, on the structures, formations and apparatuses of domination, and keeping alive visions of other possibilities. One can acknowledge and even celebrate the energy and commitment of the many people—activists and intellectuals (the two are not mutually exclusive by any means)—engaged in contemporary struggles. There are journals and websites, collectives and organizations galore, dedicated to such work, and I find many of them deeply insightful and moving. And such work does make a difference, often in many ways. But I also believe that such work seems unable to speak to and resonate across the broader spaces and scales of the social formation, in ways that matter to people, that mobilize people, to imagine and empower effective popular political struggles. Whatever visions of other ways of living the left offers people, it appears that many people cannot imagine themselves into such ways of being, nor can they imagine how the nation might get there from here. Changing the world may start with activists, but it comes about only if they seek and are capable of winning popular support for their truths, moral visions and political struggles. If TINA (there is no alternative) appears increasingly commonsensical to large segments of the population, the left must ask how this has come about, and why struggles against it have had, at best, limited success. If history is always made by struggle and contestation, do those who imagine themselves to be fighting the battles not need to step back, once in a while, to ask how the war is going? The question I want to ask is why speaking truth to power—the attacks, the analyses, the demonstrations of the hypocrisies, lies, greed, destructiveness, of existing power relations—as well as the many struggles against them, do not seem capable of significantly altering the directions of social transformation.

Those of us, activists and intellectuals, who identify with progressive struggles, have to consider our own positions and effects within the contemporary context. And we should be at least as critical of ourselves and our allies as we are of those we consider the "enemies;" at the same time, we should nurture solidarities, and avoid too quickly turning political differences into accusations of complicity, casting the efforts of real

and potential allies as operating in the service of the enemy. Such arguments operate within and reinforce an increasingly powerful "organization of pessimism" (see chapter 3) within which political struggles are judged according to ethical and procedural norms that can make failure into a sign of success.

I do not mean to equate the responsibility of the left and the right for the current state of affairs; they differ by orders of magnitude and qualities. The policies and practices of various conservative and capitalist fractions and alliances are, in my mind, immoral and abhorrent (even, to use their own terms, un-Christian and un-American). But I do think that the "state" of the left, its understandings and strategies, have to be included in our efforts to reconstruct the context of political struggles and understand what's going on. The point is not to attack such efforts, but to be self-reflective and self-critical about them, perhaps to reflect on why these efforts are not working in quite the ways some of us might hope. I want to question the forms of intellectual work (knowledge production) and practices of political organization that seem to be shaping the field of progressive opposition, and I want at least to assert the possibility of other kinds of intellectual conversations and political formations, which both more enthusiastically embrace complexity and contradictions, and more humbly and provisionally assert their own truths. But changing the world is never simply about truth but about political possibilities, in which truth has to be part of the calculation. But how do we re-establish the possibility of common truths—not by repeatedly shouting that they lie, nor by repeating our own truths, but by opening ourselves to conversations in which we might have to give up some of our own assumptions. Whatever one's version of the left, those committed to progressive social change have to think about the consequences, for example, of its increasing fragmentation over the past century; this is not to attribute cause or blame, or to make accusations of complicity. Yet, generally, discussions about this fragmentation do seem to imply such accusations by assuming that any effort to constitute unity would necessarily construct hierarchies of power and suffering and homogenizations of difference, or by blaming the fragmentation itself on the introduction of new sites of power and struggle. This seems to me to be a failure of imagination and will, concerning the possibilities of unities.

In the end, my aim is to suggest that the possibility of changing the world for the better may well depend on two parallel efforts to redefine commitment and relationality: to find ways of producing better analyses

and conversations, which may enable us to tell better stories, built upon new forms of authority; and to imagine different forms of effective political organization and opposition, which may enhance our ability to engage in different kinds of political work. My own desperate optimism enables me to accept the fact that I do not have the answers, whether diagnostic, strategic or visionary, only questions. Finding the answers will require that the left find ways of coming together around both commonalities and differences, or better, around unities that do not negate the differences.

Having begun this book by acknowledging my own generational identity raises an unavoidable issue: some current popular constructions of political arguments assign disagreements to established structures of "privilege," which would make my arguments little more than the expression of an old, grumpy, nostalgic, leftist, trying to tell younger generations what they should be doing. I recently heard a respected figure of the old "new left" tell an audience that it was time for "our" generation to step aside and allow the younger generations to take the political stage for themselves. But I respectfully disagree. This work is not offered as a missive handed down from one generation to another (nor I might add as a pronouncement from the academic to the activist, nor from any one side of a binarism to the other), but as an attempt to contribute to the conversations that are happening and that perhaps have to be re-imagined—soon. There have to be other choices besides paternalism and abandonment, the latter unintentionally echoing the broader generational politics of U.S. society. We should at least consider the possibility that those arguments that construct radically discontinuous temporalities of the left ("that is so 'old school', so 60s, so old 'new' left, etc.) can also serve, whatever their intentions, to constrain the possibilities of the left.

As I shall repeatedly stress, binaries are almost always a problem and not a solution, at best the beginning rather than the end of the story. Left intellectuals and activists need conversations across differences of all kinds, including generations; it makes no sense to give up whatever knowledge the past allows to us; it makes no sense to repeat past mistakes, nor to set out to reinvent the wheel. And it makes no sense to give up the experiences of the past—not simply the knowledge that other worlds are possible, but the experience that such worlds have existed and have motivated people in the past. On the other hand, it makes even less sense to assume that nothing has changed; that the lessons of the past are sufficient to answer the questions of the present. In the past fifty

years, a great deal has changed in the material, social and affective contexts of life and power. But not everything has changed; the lessons of past analyses and struggles can neither be discarded nor simply repeated. They must be challenged, debated, criticized, and reconfigured. In researching a book on the rise of the new right some decades ago, I came across an interview with a conservative pundit who said he feared that the left would realize that it had, in its grasp, the most powerful think tank ever—the university—if it could only figure how to converse across disciplines and institutions, but also with other networks. I imagine that he is laughing these days, probably saying his grateful prayers that this has still not happened.

I have no doubt failed to inhabit the voice of the conversation I am proposing, a voice of humility and generosity, which avoids the languages of blame and complicity; for that, I am sorry. Instead, I am alternatively grumpy and hopeful, critical and welcoming, angry and sympathetic, arrogant and generous, confident and humble. I hope the reader will recognize that I have perhaps too many voices here, each of them speaking a real part of who I am. I am a grumpy old man, and I have always been and remain an angry young man. I am an inveterate pessimist, and a romantic and spiritual (countercultural) optimist and sometimes, the two come together to speak me as a desperate optimist. I am a passionate debater and an even more passionate dialogist. More troubling, I speak at times as an academic, a political intellectual, a left activist, a citizen (both of the U.S., and in some fantasy, of the world) and no doubt, from other positions as well; there are many voices embodied here; they are imagined, imitated, engaged with, and argued against. Some of my voices, some parts of me, no doubt, have and continue to participate in the very practices I am trying to question and criticize; some of them are tired of criticizing these things yet again. Sometimes I will put words into other peoples' mouths and they will no doubt feel misused. In this, I fear that I am no different than everyone else: despite the dreams of academics, subjects have never been unified; subjects are always complicated and fractured, full of contradictions even as they seek in various ways to construct some sense of unity for themselves and others.

But this multiplicity is no doubt partly the result of my own failure to finally decide what kind of book I was trying to write, or to whom it is addressed. It is a polemic and a plea, rather than a full-blown piece of scholarship; but it is also an attempt to avoid attributing blame by contextualizing the paradox of the left. It reaches out toward a broader, popular

audience, and yet it is too academic to be a popular (trade) book—although the good news is that one can get the gist of such discussions without sloshing through all the details. I think this has become an inevitable dilemma of the contemporary political intellectual. Some parts are decidedly scholarly if not scholastic, although I see no reason why only academics can or might want to read such demanding sections[3]. They are there sometimes because the discussion dictates the material that has to be covered, and sometimes because I simply can't seem to escape it. Still I have chosen to avoid many of the common practices that signify academic work, including extensive citations, references, textual analyses, and the documentation of every claim, in part because there are simply too many positions and statements, and all too often, too many contemporary intellectual and political arguments are built on "the hubris of small differences." Given my project, I do not want to get pulled into arguments about who says what. Ironically enough, intellectuals who do not believe that language represents either an externally objective reality or a subjective intention, do care a lot about the accuracy of how they are represented or interpreted. Nor will I try to cover every base or possibility, because, as I shall argue, the proliferation of possibilities and differences is a question and a problem, not the grounds of a solution. I am not interested in personal critiques or in rejecting specific positions or practices, except as they are articulated into the politics of the conjuncture, often by dividing the world into two camps and assuming the absolute certainty of their own position. I will offer too few examples—and in some cases, none at all, relying on the knowledge and good will of the reader, because there are always too many examples, and one can prove almost anything these days with selective examples from the material and cultural worlds; instead I practice what I have called a speculative empiricism. I do not claim to have told the entire story or to have taken into account all the contradictions. I have not said everything that should or could be said, answered all the questions, addressed all the objections, etc. I believe this is at best a ridiculous and dangerous academic fantasy. I think of this book as literally incomplete and open-ended, a hybrid (and transversal) attempt to continue and perhaps slightly alter a set of ongoing and possible conversations.

3 Those not philosophically inclined or curious might skip the following sections: in chapter 1, Knowledge, the undiscovered country; and in chapter 4, The ontological turn.

Voices are often thought in relation to individual subjectivity and identity, but they are, perhaps even more importantly, about how one takes up social positions within various collectivities. I am aware that some readers will object to my rhetorical choices concerning the grammars of belonging and identification, of political and discursive collectivities, whether in embodied in nouns ("the left") or pronouns ("we"). I want to explicitly address them here, because I fear that the absolutely vital recognition that such collective signs all too easily cover over and homogenize differences, usually under the master sign of some dominant, pre-constituted, homogeneous collective identity, inscribing a universal principle of inclusion and exclusion, tends to effortlessly slide into the unfounded assumption that any appeal to a collectivity that is not completely specified in advance has to be a strategy or enactment of the power of exclusion. This slide has its problems. After all, such discursive practices do not always succeed; they do not necessarily interpolate anyone or everyone in any or every instance, leaving open the question of if, when and why it may succeed in some contexts and not in others. But more importantly, such claims of affinity and affiliation do not always and only operate in one way, in all contexts; they can be won to different projects and practices. "We" need not always and only function as universalizing, as silencing, as controlling. It is one thing to be aware of the dangers of such claims to collectivity and unity; it is another to assume the worst of one's allies and to reject them in the first instance, to deny the possibility of deploying collective signs in other ways, ways that imagine and attempt to call into being other forms of unity.

Contemporary theory has taught us that the meaning of such terms is not fixed and referential; instead, its effects are constantly changing, sites of struggle, and hence, strategic and even performative (calling political positions, relations, and forms of unity into existence). Words don't name, they produce. Such experimentation seeks to assert the possibility of finding new forms of solidarity, new ways of belonging together that embrace and respect differences. I use signs of collective belonging as always plural, fluid, temporary, and as invitations into a unity of multiplicity, which anyone can move into and out of, move closer and further apart. I am not attempting to name something that already exists, or to automatically incorporate anyone into specific discursive identities. Such collective signs pose questions addressed to a project in the future tense. The question is whether all forms of connectedness and belonging, of solidarity and unity, need be closed, insular and homogeneous. The in-

vitation is to explore and enter into more differentiated, provisional and open forms of political identification and conversation. I hope that my readers will see this work as an open call to think and act otherwise. I am trying to find ways of incorporating critical arguments and agonistic differences into new forms of being together, so that rejecting a theoretical or political statement, strategy, or position need not negate the possibilities of conviviality and solidarity. It is the invitation I am trying to make hearable—and imaginable: the possibilities of new forms of communication, cooperation, institutions, political struggles and social movements, an invitation to experiment beyond the limits of the risks people appear willing to accept.

Consequently, I choose to continue talking about something called "the left." I realize that the political meaning of the "left" varies widely historically and geographically—in local, national and regional ways—but this is probably true of any political sign. And I realize that, in the context of the contemporary U.S., many people "of the left" refuse the term or refuse to be named by it. I have to admit that I find something disingenuous about saying that one does not know what the left is, or where it is. What does this mean, since almost everyone who says it assumes their own difference and distance from both pro-capitalists (whether republican or centrist democrats) and conservatives, even if they are occasionally in agreement around specific issues. All that means is that it has become somewhat unpredictable where you find allies in particular struggles. There is nothing new there. It means that you have some serious disagreements with some people who think they are (although they might also deny) of the left. Nothing new there. It means there are no fixed definitions of the left. Nothing new there. It means that many of the "traditional" formations thought of as the left no longer seem particularly attractive, or sometimes, even progressive, but then you must already know what "left" means. It means you don't want to be on the same team as some others. Nothing new there.

Some people assume that the term calls up specific organizational strategies, that it entails particular commitments—e.g., to state politics, mass mobilizations, Marxism, unions, etc., or even that it demands unity and homogeneity. Many believe that the commitments of "the left" no longer define the appropriate substance and practice of political opposition. They argue that the forces of opposition and alternatives are too diverse and fragmented today to be captured under a single sign. They are no doubt right on many of these claims. And I agree that "left" and

"right" are problematic categories, inadequate ways of mapping the political field. Both "the left" and "the right" are always little more than temporary efforts to create fragile unities; both are rather gross terms, hiding a myriad of differences and contradictions, of visions, commitments, priorities, strategies and tactics. Still any effort to map such a complicated field is going to be inadequate, but they may still be useful as starting points, strategically valuable for a moment. Perhaps there have been times when "the left" *seemed* to name a stable and even formal set of organizations and positions, or when it tried (unsuccessfully) to impose singular forms of unity and conformity. But there have also been times when the left embraced its own heterogeneity and instability. How politics is understood, and how political positions are distributed and perceived, varies from one context to another, from one tradition to another. It is no doubt true that the distribution of issues and positions is no longer guaranteed in advance (if it ever was) and that it no longer corresponds to a simple dichotomy between left and right. The world is too complicated for that and as a result, its politics too contextually specific. And so, there have always been and will continue to be times when unexpected alliances are constructed around specific issues and struggles (e.g. mobilizing conservative rural populations against extraction economies, or libertarian conservatives around specific social liberties). The Italian communist leader and intellectual, Antonio Gramsci, who spent much of his adult life imprisoned by the fascists, called this a war of positions. But there is nothing new about this either.

Critics of "the left" as a nomenclature are willing to use other terms that are at least as problematic—such as conservatism, capitalism or neoliberalism—as if these named something identifiable once and for all, and I assume they would argue that such ellipses are strategically justifiable. Perhaps there is another term that one prefers—for example, "progressive." For me they are largely interchangeable in the U.S. context, except that the latter is more easily attributed to electoral politics; and I do not mind if one substitutes the latter wherever I use the former. But there is an irony because, although both terms carry some baggage, in some sense, "the designation "left" is rather arbitrary (derived from a particular distribution of parliamentary seats, I believe) while "progressive" actually does suggest some assumption about historical change. Regardless, the real question for me concerns the strategic consequences of either continuing with or abandoning some sign of unity and solidarity, for an oppositional left has always had to be continuously forged, assem-

bled, constructed out of the necessities and possibilities of the moment; it is an ongoing and shifting project. The left has to be articulated—in both senses—relations have to be made and given voice (spoken, named, expressed). This may be particularly difficult in the U.S., where the notion of "a left" has never been as strong or as clear-cut as it has, at least at some moments, in some other parts of the world. So rather than trying to revive some native understanding of the left, or to import one ready made from somewhere else, I want to suggest the strategic project of naming a new kind of political unity of struggles. I do not care if it is called the left, but I will use the term strategically until a better imagination of the possibilities of solidarity and opposition comes along.

As I have said, "the left" does not designate anything already existing. It calls it into being; it invites and invokes. It is the expression or organization of forms of unity out of complexity, multiplicity or difference. There is no litmus test, no inclusionary or exclusionary principles that constitute the left for all times in all places. For the moment, it is enough to say that I mean by "the left" all those (theories, groups, opinions, actions) which fundamentally oppose, at the very least, the obscene growth (if not the very fact) of profound inequalities in the distributions of the resources (wealth, power, knowledge, meanings, emotions, bodies, time, etc.) necessary to live a reasonably secure and dignified life, which oppose the absence of justice and freedom (and these too are productive terms), manifested in different ways, in different populations and places, which stand against the full range of technologies of othering, including subordination, subjugation, exploitation and violence, by which society transforms differences into relations of domination, etc. That means people who, whether in general or in specific issues—and in spite of whatever specific disagreements they may have—are opposed to the trajectories and directions of historical change over the past fifty years (although for many, the time frame can be longer). The left names a collective project to articulate and perform opposition, resistance, discomfort or whatever, with the dominant vectors of contemporary social change. It names a collective desire for better ways of living otherwise. The real question is whether one can use a binary like left and right provisionally, as a project, to understand the political field as complex, fluid and changing realignments among shifting assemblages. Or perhaps I can turn the question around: can we mobilize effective opposition without organizing the field in some way? We need a discursive figure to enable us to imagine new ways of struggling and belonging together in a

common effort to change the world or at least the directions of the future of the U.S. Where is the left? Well, it is everywhere insofar as it is a multiplicity dispersed, and it is nowhere without some unity, an imaginary unity no doubt, but that is how real movements are made. In the current context of struggle, I suggest that abandoning any sense of oppositional unity potentially gives away the victory before the battle has been waged. I know that there is a real danger is speaking of "the left" in this way. Although it will sometimes sound as if I think the left has a single voice, I am fully aware of the very real and even healthy plethora of voices and disagreements within and among the lefts. I do not mean to erase or deny them, but to avoid getting so caught up in multiplicity that one cannot see the directions and tendencies along which the left is moving, or the possibilities and necessities to move together with such differences. So once again, I would urge you to read such statements as strategic simplifications and erasures that are temporarily offered here in the attempt to better understand the frustrations of the present context. It may be that they do not work, that they do not lead us to see some of the constraints and possibilities of the conjuncture, but that is always the risk political intellectuals have to take.

Experience has taught me that it is all too easy to forget, in the passion of disagreement, the moments of self-reflection, criticism and hesitation that an author proposes at the beginning to frame and limit his or her own comments. So I allow me a bit of whimsy to hopefully remind the reader, following on Piet Hein's inventive *Grooks*:

> Put up in a place where it's easy to see
> This cryptic admonishment WTPP
> When you feel the anger welling up in your head
> Please try to remember What This Preface Pled.

This book is driven by my own passions, my own sense of urgency, my own desperate hope that some imagined collective left can still change the future, without waiting first for a catastrophic conclusion to the present. On a recent family trip to England, my college age son began to point out that every conversation we had with family, friends or colleagues ended up with the sorry state of the this or that, in depression and too often, hopelessness. Eventually, picking up on a headline from a tabloid he had seen, he began to interject the possibility of an optimism that can arise from other angles, other trajectories, other starting points:

"It's a good year for strawberries and the blackberries are coming up nicely." The book then is about the paradox of the left in the present conjuncture, and the possibility of looking for some blackberries. But first, I will try to elaborate the paradox.

CHAPTER 1—THE PARADOX OF THE LEFT: PESSIMISM OF THE INTELLECT, OPTIMISM OF THE WILL

Gramsci's famous dictum, "I am a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will," is a good guide for progressive intellectuals, as long as one remembers two things: first, optimism has to be earned by going through the pessimism, in fact, by going as deeply and fully into the depths of pessimism that one's intellectual labors will enable; second, pessimism is not solely the result of the exploration of the dominant forces, and optimism does not emerge solely from a consideration of the possibility of oppositional forces. One needs to work through pessimism into optimism on both sides of the political equation. One needs to seek the pessimism that comes from an intellectual analysis of (left) opposition itself in order to arrive at the earned optimism concerning oppositional and alternative politics as well. That is, the forms and forces of resistance and opposition are as much a part of the context as are the forces of domination and subjugation. I am asking that those who identify with a left opposition try to occupy a position of double consciousness with respect to that identification itself.

I want to start off by laying out some things I think I know. I think I know that the U.S. is becoming an increasingly inhumane society—less democratic, less just, less equal, less equitable, less mobile, less caring, less free (in significant ways), and less tolerant of and open to the demands of differences. It is becoming more inhospitable to many peoples; it continues to move in directions that seem to ensure a less livable world for the majority of people, a world more polarized and even torn asunder by the challenges of the future (even as it seems less concerned about the possibilities of a collective future) and the competing visions of the nation. To state it even more bluntly: the U.S. is going to hell or someplace nearby. In the 1960s, there was a popular story, taken from Brecht's poem "The Buddha's Parable of the Burning House" (1961), based on a parable of the *Lotus Sutra*. To paraphrase, as it was often told at the time, the Buddha is asked to describe the nothingness of Nirvana—is it a calm and peaceful nothingness, like floating on the ocean, or an ugly and destructive nothingness, like that of a rotting corpse? After a suitably long period of silence, he tells the following story. "I was walking in the streets and saw a house on fire. I ran inside to warn the people still there, yelling to them that they must leave. They responded, where will we find

food tomorrow? Where will we find clothes? Where will we find shelter? To them, I had nothing to say, and so I left," the Buddha concludes. The obvious message is that when your house is burning around you, you don't worry about what kind of alternatives will appear tomorrow. This was, obviously, a somewhat overly melodramatic statement about the state of American society,[1] and a refusal on the part of the counterculture to be held answerable for the details of the future, although many thought they were prefiguring that future in their lifestyles.

Many generations have thought they were called upon to face the possible end of the world, and to fight the great beast in some apocalyptic vision of a struggle for the future of humanity and the world. That human beings seem often to be caught up in a seriously deformed present and to face a precarious future does not, however, mitigate the importance of the challenges that we face. The fact that people have, over and over again, faced possible and emergent catastrophes and demoralizing and dehumanizing conditions does not mean they are always the same, or that they are any less real. Instead, they have to be taken in context; in the present, especially for someone of my generation, the directions of current political change stand in stark contrast to a political faith shaped by over a century of growing expectations and possibilities. Unlike Brecht's parable, and no doubt, much of the 60s counterculture's sense of itself, I think it is more difficult today to see oneself standing outside the building, or even having the luxury of leaving. Perhaps it would be more useful to understand the sense of society on the brink of disaster by using Gramsci's concept of an organic crisis. An organic crisis is both objective and experiential. It is itself the result of the intersection of multiple crises across the full range of the social formation (economic, political, cultural and social), and calls into question a society's understanding and imagination of itself. It is likely to endure for decades because it recasts society as a problem space (Scott, 2004) that demands a new vision, a new set of commitments, perhaps even a new organization and new leadership. The political struggle to resolve the organic crisis is as much about the effort to define how it is understood and lived, how the multiple crises are stitched together or fused into a single project, as it is about how to resolve them.

1 It is unfortunate that the only term we seem to have for talking about the U.S. is American, since the term also names all those who live on the American continents. I once heard the term US-onian proposed, but I am afraid it is simply, aesthetically, too displeasing.

The second thing I think I know is that, broadly speaking, the population—admittedly a vague and abstract collectivity—is deeply polarized: conservatives versus liberals, Republicans versus Democrats, engaged versus withdrawn. This is not the first time the U.S. has been so polarized that, on the one hand, elections seem almost undecideable (and so increasingly indeterminate) and, on the other hand, the possibility of finding common grounds for conversation and the negotiation of action and direction seems to have disappeared. This deep divide presents apparently insurmountable obstacles to moving forward as a democratic society. Evidence suggests that the divide has even entered into the ordinary judgments of everyday life, reproducing some forms more commonly associated with social hatreds: we do not want to live near, interact with or even have our children marry the others. This state of affairs presents a serious dilemma to any oppositional movement committed to democracy and opposed to minority vanguards that treat vast numbers of people who disagree with them as either simply misinformed or manipulated dopes. What is left to do? What is the left to do?

This affective context underlies two other things I think I know: third, many people (perhaps even a majority of the population) are pessimistic, cynical, indifferent, disinvested with regards to matters of politics and the possibilities of the future, to say nothing about actively shaping that future. Such attitudes can be articulated at two levels: people can doubt the capacity of existing institutions of power and governance (at various scales and locations), and of supposed opposition (e.g., unions) to face up to and respond to the various challenges facing society and even the world, in viable and effective ways. And in more personal terms, people can conclude (assume?) that their actions can have little or no effect, because in the end, the game is rigged, the outcome already decided. Perhaps there is a touch of nostalgia for being able to grasp how change happens and how one can contribute in small ways that one assumes will aggregate into larger changes.

This is not quite the same as the fourth thing I think I know: that some, perhaps lots of people seem to have accepted, embraced, consented to or just retreated into the status quo. Taken together, these last two conditions result in a situation in which many people are not active participants (whatever their thoughts and feelings may be) in political processes—at most voting, usually not enthusiastically and often in surprisingly low numbers. From the outside, commentators often assume that this signals apathy or acquiescence, which is taken to result from the

fact that people feel better off, comfortable, satisfied or scared. Again, there is nothing particularly new about complaints that the U.S. public is generally apathetic about politics, or that it has embraced the status quo. But precisely because such apparent affective politics may signal very different things in different contexts, I think such descriptions are the beginning and not the end of the story, questions and not answers. An alternative starting assumption might be that most people are most often focused on matters of survival—perhaps hoping for a bit of comfort, pleasure and dignity. The majority of people struggle to live with their lot, to hold onto what they have already won and perhaps, dream most immediately of improving their lives and that of their intimate relations. History teaches us that most people are not, or at least do not think of themselves as activists or revolutionaries. Yes, in desperate times, people may choose to get politically involved; they may take up some struggles; they might speak truth to power and even fight the power; they may enter into experiments, seeking out and even creating alternative institutions and mechanisms for living together. But even then, it may still be—in the first instance at least—about finding ways of surviving and flourishing. They may not think of their actions as generalizable critiques or alternatives.

There are two more things I think I know, which are crucial to the effort to understand what's going on—especially because, taken together, they make visible a paradox that stands as the proverbial elephant in the room: I think I know (fifth) that there is an extraordinary amount of resistance and opposition, activism and struggle, taking place in the U.S.—my concern is, not surprisingly, with left activism—perhaps even more than at any time in the past century, including during the turbulent 60s. Paul Hawken (2007) described the assemblage of contemporary activists as "the largest social movement in history," although I cannot help but feel that he has confused movement and network. These struggles are enormously dispersed and diverse—in terms of their issues, tactics, strategies, goals and styles. There are many books, websites, magazines, blogs, etc., that provide information, perspectives, explanations and suggestions, from a variety of left positions. There are many groups, voices and actions of opposition and progressive change. Some organize people around specific institutional practices, policy decisions, and government decisions. Some seek to create alternative communities, alternative institutions, and alternative solutions to what often seem to be insoluble

problems. One should certainly be glad for all this activism, the varied commitments it embodies, and the public expression of progressive values it makes visible.

But I also think I know (sixth)—and this is no doubt more controversial—that such left oppositional activities are to a large extent ineffective in redirecting and re-orchestrating the social transformations that are defining our collective present and future, even if they significantly and valuably improve the lives of some. I realize that disagreements about what defines "effectiveness" have become as polarizing as many other differences. By an effective left, I certainly do not mean victorious, for there is nothing new about the left losing, especially in the U.S. I mean one that attempts to have, and indeed may have, a significant influence, exerting pressure, and mobilizing varied constituencies, to affect the tides of history, which continue to move against the sorts of values that the left cherishes. And I think that there have been moments during the twentieth century (and even earlier), including the Progressive Movement, the union movement and the struggle for the welfare state, the Popular Front, and the 1960s (which still holds a place in popular memory and imagination), when the U.S. left was effective in this sense, when it turned the course of history, even if it was not able to completely control the engines of the future, even if its victories were limited and even if its victories have been clawed back by emergent oppositional alliances from other, more dominant forces.

It is not that there have been no successes or significant changes over the past decades; in fact there have been many victories, and some groups and struggles have gained significant visibility. But all too often, their struggles, victories and visibilities remain largely local or temporary. Of course, sometime, such efforts become national and even international (such as Occupy) and sometimes they even seem to win important national victories (such as the current struggles for gay rights and marriage, or the legalization of marijuana, or net neutrality). Recent struggles over the disturbing levels of economic inequality have resulted in new organized struggles and in some increases in wages and benefits, although these are often dispersed and not systemic, and they do not seem to signal any significant structural changes in the relations and distributions of wealth and resources. Many of these victories are small scraps thrown against real change, and many of them will be clawed back through strategic oppositional planning. Yet, however small and even temporary they may be, one needs to take the win without leaving the

struggle behind and moving on to the next, but by figuring out how to allow the victory to move the struggle to the next level or scale. Often, the left in the U.S. looks elsewhere, for example, to Latin America or the Arab Spring, because those struggles often promise grander changes at greater scales. What often appear as wonderfully exuberant moments of revolution and transformation here and elsewhere often end up at best in seriously compromised forms, which does not mean the changes cannot be significant. Often, significant fractions of the U.S. left refuse to embrace such compromised victories. But actually, the situation is even worse, since many of these "revolutions" end in failures, because the left (often the initiator of the revolution) was unprepared to fight the ensuing battles; the results are deeply regressive transformations.

Provisionally speaking, it does appear the left is losing more than it is winning. I believe that at least part of the reason is that, in the U.S., the struggles and even the victories remain largely disconnected, isolated, autonomous. While some on the left seem to believe that the very fact of a dispersed and fragmented opposition threatens the forces of domination, I find such formalist assumptions rather doubtful. I cannot help but assume that the various conservative-capitalist alliances are more than relieved by this state of affairs. I cannot help but agree with and want to generalize McRobbie's (2009, pp. 25-6) observation that "Disarticulation is the objective of a new kind of regime of gender power, which functions to foreclose on the possibility or likelihood of various expansive intersections and intergenerational feminist transmissions." Disarticulation may be a political choice of some on the left, but it may also end up negating a politics of solidarity and the possibilities of more effective transformational movements. The awareness of the commonalities among the fractions of the left, or of their possible organization together as a unified movement, often remains largely invisible to many, not only to those outside the assemblages of these struggles but even to those inside. Many of these groups and the larger networks and formations they may be part of, simply do not know that the others exist and when they do, they do not acknowledge the unity of their struggles. Ironically, even while some of these groups do see themselves as part of a "movement of movements," or at least call for such an imagined unity, they seem willing to embrace only the multiplicities, the experiments, the imaginations, the struggles, that they like. Others dismiss such a possibil-

ity, without even thinking about where similar efforts have emerged, when they have succeeded, even if only temporarily, and why they have failed or disappeared.

My concern for effectivity is not an expression of my own impatience; on the contrary, the ineffectiveness of the left is also partly the result of the impatience of many fractions of the left, an impatience that increasingly reflects a temporality that saturates contemporary U.S. culture. (See chapter 3.) If political struggle takes time (to define, organize, embody and enact, etc.), much of the left continues to reproduce a demand for immediacy: we want the world and we want it now. But social transformation, especially democratic political change, takes time, time to coax people to your positions, time to recruit them into your struggle, time to win people to accept whatever organizational structures of leadership and compromise are necessary, time to forge the bonds of affiliation and affinity that enable movements, and time to build the institutions that can sustain these movements and the changes they seek to produce.

And yet, I gain some optimism from my sense that many of the young people involved in such activisms are asking lots of questions, doing a lot of reading, seeking more effective and appropriate forms of theoretical, diagnostic and political practice. Unfortunately, those to whom I am closest tell me that they often find much of what is celebrated by left intellectuals and activists to be not very helpful, because it is too simple, too dogmatic, too self-confident and not very self-critical. Such questions recognize that political struggle and strategy must be, from the very beginning, inseparable from the knowledge we have and the stories we tell about what is going on, about the struggles over power and the efforts to establish new balances in the field of forces. They recognize that the left needs stories that are both more complex and more modest, and that speak to people's everyday lives. Again to quote Hall (1981, pp. 48,49):

> Ultimately, then, the debates about strategies turn on the analysis of political conjunctures. And it is this which should be openly debated—rather than caricatured into an eternal conflict between the 'true' and the 'false' left. Not only the 'middle ground' but liberal consciousness itself must be an object of struggle—if what we intend is the winning of positions in a protracted war of position. . . . political calculation begins with

> defining the target of action, the limits of the terrain, an accurate assessment of the balance of forces and a correct estimation of the enemy's strength.

I do not claim that these six things I think I know provide a complete or consistent account of the contemporary conjuncture. On the contrary, they constitute a paradox of and for the left at the very heart of the conjuncture. This paradox defines my point of entrance into a discussion about how the left itself, including left intellectuals, operate as both participants in and expressions of the current context. My effort is not to critique the left but to reach for an account of this paradox, for it is only then that the left might be able to find ways out of it. I am suggesting that the left—in its many and varied expressions and articulations—should make a greater effort to reflect on its own part in what's going on.[2] It must come to terms with what I will describe as the crises of knowledge that left intellectuals have, in part, helped to construct, and with the affective politics of the current context. But perhaps that is not entirely honest, for I also want to criticize some assumptions and habits that have become all too common on the left.

Of course, part of the ineffectiveness of the left is the result of the effectiveness of the right, but that is, whatever one might think of the right's tactics, at least one vision of politics: to defeat if not destroy the enemy. But sometimes, it looks like the left easily and quickly blames everyone—each fraction with its own favorite fall guys (which is not to say that they are not partly to blame)—except themselves. It blames the right and capitalism, in some form—and it assumes (mistakenly) that it is obvious to all. But it also blames the Democratic party, the State, unions, academics, consumer and entertainment cultures, hierarchical organizations, all those people who seem willing to consent to what's going on, or unwilling to do anything about it. Often, it even blames selective segments of the left. And it blames the media. There is so much depressing, frightening and shocking news out there, and so many lies. Apparently, what is needed is that the left speaks truth to power and to the people, to bring them into the light of truth. Even though the mainstream press does tell some of the critical stories it tells, and popular culture even more of them, even though it can be said that many people do seem to

2 Because I want to offer an account of how this paradox is constituted, I am not suggesting, as Rebecca Solnit does in her moving "A letter to my dismal allies on the US left" (2012), that the problem is the personal attitudes of individual leftists.

know what's going on, the left continues to act as if, once people see the light, the truth that we already know, then . . . what? Everything will change? Vast numbers will join some imagined revolution, or join the tide of some epochal transformation? The left is already a master of making the news available—but to an unfortunately large extent, often only to those who turn to its outlets, who already share its basic judgment of what's going on, leaving one to wallow in it, to rage against it, or to imagine a variety of ways to pretend it is otherwise. Too many people who might share many of the left's commitments and priorities do not seem drawn into its sphere or visions or moved to action. And many parts of the left continue to treat people who do not agree with them as if they suffered if not from stupidity then from ignorance, because they assume that there is no other explanation for the fact that they have not joined with the left.

Over the decades, this has been repeatedly expressed in the question: where's the outrage?[3] What this really means is, why aren't people doing what the left thinks they should be doing? The question comes and goes, depending on whether there are visible protests, although even when there are such actions (e.g., anti-war protests, or post-Ferguson protests against police racist violence), there is always the question of why more people are not out in the streets, or doing whatever it is that they are supposed to be doing. It is actually unclear whether the question is a demand for activism or for visibility, because, as I have suggested, there has been an almost continuous series of ongoing activisms and struggles over the past decades, whether in the form of protests or creative alternatives, although they have many different intensities, visibilities and durations. Even those that gain significant visibility fade from view, and whatever broader support and participation had emerged disperses, leaving only the few deeply committed activists in place. In the end, questions like "where's the outrage?" are simply the wrong question, because those posing the question assume that they know what people do feel and what they should feel. (See chapter 3.)

3 This is perhaps a contemporary version of the Marxist question, why do people accept their own subjugation, exploitation and oppression? Marxists tend to think that workers would rise up against the forces oppressing them once they became conscious of their own social position as both the exploited and the universal class. Such demands continue to be made, even in the face of various national and global protests. Among the latest, see Fraser (2015) or consider Quartz and Asp's (2015, p. 4) appeal to neuro-science, "The proliferation of consumer choice helps explain why today's Gilded Age hasn't sparked as much outrage as the last one."

I am asking why the existing forms and practices of opposition are so often disappointing and how various forms of left activism and intellectualism have helped construct these conditions? Why is it so difficult to organize an effective left opposition? Why does the feeling that things are terribly wrong (if not rather insane) not lead to effective opposition? Why can the left not organize itself in these desperate and dark times, mobilizing a centripetal force to bring together those who might already care about what's going on? And why can it not mobilize centrifugal forces that might enable it to expand the possibility of a popular movement? Why can it not empower people, many of whom are unhappy with the state of their society, to find ways of acting collectively? I want to make a small contribution to understanding the state of affairs I have sketched, not by investigating the structures of domination, which most certainly play a crucial role, but rather, by looking at the conditions of possibility working against the construction of effective transformative opposition. In particular, I will look at two aspects of the present conjuncture: crises of knowledge, and the reconfiguration of affective experience as an organization of pessimism.

Perhaps the first questions we should be asking are about the stories being told. Why are the leading stories taking the world in anything but progressive directions? Why does it seem at times as if the only way in which various lefts can speak in public is through populist discourses of rage and antagonism, on the one hand, and utopian discourses of insurrection, escape and alternative spaces, on the other, both of which seem largely unmoving or unavailable to various less politically well-defined constituencies? Or perhaps it is that so many problems remain at best politically ambivalent, echoing, for many people, a political indifference between the left and the right. Why is it so hard in the current context to articulate progressive politics into a popular language? Why don't we have better stories to tell?

There are, no doubt, many reasons for the failure to tell better stories. One is, perhaps, that people assume that they always and already know where the story begins and where it ends, because they assume that the beginning guarantees the end. Before you can tell a story about a problem and its possible solution, you have to reach some agreement that it is a problem, what the problem is, and what a solution might look like. People may disagree about whether some state of affairs is actually a problem, even if they often assume that whether something is a problem is immediately and viscerally obvious. But it actually takes work—both in-

tellectual and political—to make something a problem and to make it visible as a problem (or to deny that it is a problem and render it invisible). Even if people agree that something is a problem, problems rarely exist in isolation. There are many real or experienced problems, many of them complicated in their own right and made even more complicated by their often (equally complicated) relations with other problems. Sometimes, I have to admit, the feeling seems unavoidable that there are simply too many problems, and that it is all too confusing. After all, the world is a complicated place—and the more closely one looks, the more complicated it becomes. Whether or not it is more complicated than previous eras, there are more tools, concepts and information available today, which in turn makes the complexity more available to experience.

People are rarely happy with a laundry list of problems; they respond perhaps by assembling and organizing them into stories that give them a sense of both the wholeness of their lives and the possibilities for how to go on living if not improving their lives. People seek ways to navigate through this increasingly strange and often uncomfortable world; perhaps people hope that along the way they will be able to open up possibilities for others, maybe even future generations. Many of the stories people tell and embrace take the easy way out by simplifying the list, by finding an apparently straightforward narrative built upon a single cause, and by distributing the differences into absolutely divided camps—the good and the bad, the true and the false. It is easy to say that the world is going to hell. Lots of different stories start there, and lots of different stories end up there. People tend to follow the paths laid out by what they think they already know; they grab hold of common sense—intellectually, theoretically, empirically and politically, as their starting point, even if they take it off in slightly different directions. And because such stories reinforce people's sense of who they are, they can embrace them with an intensity that can be visibly and publicly performed. But why would anyone one think that a viable and responsive story would be singular and straightforward, instead of a not very elegant mixture of any number of divergent and sometimes contradictory stories and even bits of stories? How does one make sense of this world—whether to "interpret" it (as an academic), to change it (as an activist) or simply to live in it and navigate its labyrinthine possibilities (as a citizen)? How can one know what's going on? How does this question tell us something about the paradox of the left?

The first part of this book, "Determinations," looks at part of the context that provides some conditions of possibility, or perhaps more accurately, of impossibility, of an effective left opposition. These chapters attempt to describe something about how the paradox of the left has been constructed and sustained by looking at two aspects of "where people are," and where the left itself has to be located. My starting point is to observe that the contemporary political context is constituted and circumscribed by particular epistemological conditions and struggles, and that left (but not only left) intellectuals have played an important role in constructing what can best be described as a sense of crisis, or a series of crises, around matters of knowledge and epistemic authority. I think it is important to ask about the state of knowledge, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of the very possibility of claiming to know something about the world or to know what institutions have the authority to adjudicate competing observations, interpretations and conclusions. Ordinary experience seems to suggest that there is too much information, too many knowledge claims, and too many contradictions among them, to be able to confidently know what to believe. Ignorance sliding into partisan certainty seems to be a more comfortable response. The media have played a major role here, but so has the academy, partly because many of its practices have developed less as a reasoned response to the demands of understanding the world than as an accommodation to the increasing capitalization of knowledge production. And finally, critical thinking itself, especially of the left, seems to have backed itself into a corner: on the one hand, unable to legitimate the validity or value of any particular story on anything other than predefined political grounds, and on the other, unsure about the possibility and value of critical work itself insofar as it is taken as an expression of the political relations of the European enlightenment. I am wary, I must admit, of airing such intellectual and academic dirty laundry in public. By pointing to epistemological failures, including but beyond those of the sciences and economics (as a pseudo-science), I may well be contributing to the problem, but I believe that the only way to get through hell is to keep walking, as Winston Churchill said.

At least part of the failure of the left has to be laid at the feet of the institutions and practices of the intellectual left. This includes, in quantitatively and qualitatively important ways, the academic left, but it is not limited to it. Today, there are many activists and activist collectives, artists and cultural workers, journalists and independent researchers, attempting to more rigorously investigate the conditions of possibility and impossibility of political transformation and struggle in the contemporary world. This requires an exploration of at least three intersecting questions: (1) the analyses or diagnoses of the existing conditions—the state of play as it were—which serve to define the possibilities of moving elsewhere; (2) ethical visions and aesthetic imaginations of other ways of living, other ways of doing things and sometimes, the possibility of their pre-figurative enactments; and (3) strategies for moving from (1) to (2), for moving towards a better world or, more immediately, better alternatives. These elements and their appropriate relations have to be theorized and empirically investigated; they have to be expressed not only in forms of embodied activism and engagement but also in visions built on optimism born of our knowledge of what's going on rather than on what we assume we always and already know, or what we rightly or wrongly value. For the moment, I am most concerned with the first and third questions, because I believe that ideas and knowledge matter, and that bad stories make for bad politics.

The second set of questions I want to raise to address the paradox of the left takes me on a very different path, following the authors of an often forgotten but important book (Landry et al., 1985, p. 3), *What a Way to Run a Railroad*: "Could it be that we cannot solve the political equation we're still puzzling over because we're using the wrong kind of algebra?" I want to talk about the affective context of contemporary life and political culture. What do I mean by affect? I mean all of those dimensions of people's psycho-social lives and their relations to the world that are marked by degrees of intensity: emotions, moods, feelings, desires, attention, will, matterings, etc. I believe these dimensions of experience are simultaneously biological/bodily, and discursive (cultural)/ social. They cannot be understood simply in terms of the forms and processes of meaning and representation that have almost entirely dominated discussions of democratic, civil, ideological and popular politics, but they are rarely completely separated from them. If one of the truly great intellec-

tual accomplishments of the past half-century has been coming to more sophisticated understandings of the workings of language in the production of meaning and representation, consciousness and subjectivity, ideology and hegemony, affect has often been left as tacit knowledge in the practices of therapy, care-giving and parenting, with only a few important exceptions. But if affect defines a crucial dimension of contemporary political struggle, it is vital that the left reflect critically on this domain, that it stop telling people what they should feel and start trying to understand how they do feel, and find ways to transform what I shall describe as a specific organization of pessimism (Sedgwick, 1997).

In *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (1992), I argued that the success of a new conservative alliance was in part the result of a shifting balance in the deployment of ideological and affective appeals. Understanding the rise of "Reaganism" depended on analyzing a set of affective strategies that mobilized and reorganized how different populations could or should feel, what could or should matter to them, etc. The political use of affect was not new—it has been a part of popular politics for centuries, I suggested—but both its importance and its strategic modulation through a specific set of practices were. The growing, self-conscious deployment of an affective politics was actually inaugurated by the postwar "rupture"—culminating in the 60s protests of civil rights, anti-war, and feminist struggles, and the more amorphous counterculture, all of which seemed to both depend on and reimagine, in their use of popular forms of culture and discourse, including religion, the possibilities of changing how people felt. In fact, the successes of the various conservative alliances of the past fifty years owe much to what they learned about affective politics from the popular left of the 1960s. The left needs to understand the place of affect in contemporary politics as both an ongoing struggle and as a crucial condition of the possibility of an effective oppositional left.

I describe the contemporary affective territory as "an organization of pessimism," but I want to emphasize the complexity of this formation, both in terms of its historical specificity (differentiating it from previous, similar affective structures) and in terms of the very different ways of living within its spaces. Understanding the contemporary "organization of pessimism" in more explicit and critical terms may enable the left to better understand both the variety of forms of popular accommodation and consent, and the successes and limits of left opposition. This affective organization is the product of two "structures of feeling." The first is a complicated reconfiguration of the relations of difference (in terms of

whether things matter, how and how much), resulting in the affective normalization of absolute certainty or a certain kind of "fundamentalism," which in turn seems to provoke strategies of negation, including humiliation and intimidation. In the space of affective fundamentalism, one grasps political positions with either a certainty that can only come from absolute faith, or a cynicism that can only come from the total diminution of hope. The second structure of feeling is characterized by an anxiety that might be seen as the result of a struggle over time itself, or more specifically, over the relations of the past and future to the present. It is lived out as a historically specific form of anomie and alienation, not just from the present but also from time itself. We are, as it were, stuck in time, all dressed up with no when to go. It is an affective alienation from the immediacy of one's own existence in time, from the present that can never arrive because change itself has become a problem rather than as assumption.

The left has to learn to speak from within and in response to the experiences produced by such affective formations, as they constitute many of the taken for granted perceptions of and relations to the world. The majority of left analyses and practices have largely ignored the affective, even while various conservative/capitalist formations have carefully and strategically engaged it. But an understanding of contemporary affective politics, even as partial and oversimplified as what I will offer here, may also help us to gain a better grasp of why the stories, rhetorics and strategies of the left seem largely ineffective. For such practices, which often have long histories, may take on a different appearance and effects when placed in the light of these structures of feeling and the resulting organization of pessimism.

The second part of this book ("Expressions") suggests some of the ways in which the left is implicated in these epistemic and affective conditions and often unself-consciously expresses and even reproduces the structures of feeling constituting the current organization of pessimism. I am most concerned with the ways the left enacts states and statements of certainty that, in the contemporary context, easily appear as affective fundamentalisms. Let me be clear here: performances of certainty are neither new to the left nor limited to the left. But context changes everything, and its forms and practices, perceptions and effects, have changed significantly since the post-war challenges to U.S. liberalism. Such actions take on different resonances and affordances as a result of their articulation with and into the organization of pessimism that began to

emerge in the final quarter of the 20th century. Perhaps the most profound expression of such certainty (although I think it also offers important openings) is to be found in the theoretical turn to a new universalism grounded in science and a post-Enlightenment ontology, although many involved in these developments are among those who most vehemently refuse the appellation "left." This ontology, generally speaking, refuses mediation and representations, and presents every event, phenomenon and relation in the same terms—describing all reality according to concepts of capacity and effectivity, materiality and process. It shares elements with both poststructuralism's emphasis on deconstructing or deterritorializing unities and structures in favor of fragmentation, and with postmodernism's tendencies toward a ruptural and epochal understanding of history.

The left further reinscribes such fundamentalism in the absolute certainty with which it presents itself as the guardian of truth, and with which it tells its stories. A new, even more intense sense of certainty seems to inhere in and drive the sorts of stories the left is telling, and the ways it tells them today. These stories seem to follow one of two paths: the path of the old—it's all the same old same old, and the path of the new—everything has changed. On the one hand, some on the left seem to find pleasure in repeating the same narratives that it has been telling for decades and decades, perhaps thinking that the next telling will finally be the one that works. Browse the many progressive online sites or blogs, read the many publications, listen to the many screeds and manifestoes. One finds too many almost liturgical incantations that we are caught in the throes of the same mechanisms and institutions of power (usually capitalism, the failures of liberal democratic states, colonialism, racism, etc.) that have been operating for centuries, and while many generations have thought that these forces had achieved a new level of success in their lifetimes, in terms of both scale and intensity, eradicating both opposition and the imagination of other possibilities, today it is finally true. And one finds, just as endlessly repeated and with just as much certainty, that the old stories have become irrelevant as contemporary society has entered a new epoch (the endless rediscovery of the postmodern) and power has taken on absolutely new forms and mechanisms. The result is often somewhat paranoid stories (which does not mean they are not true) about the hidden emergence and secret deployment of new forms of scientifically and technologically enabled power and control, which are

sometimes understood to be in the service of the older sorts of power, e.g., capitalism. But stories of the new are, by now, banal and . . . rather old.

Whether everything is old or everything is new, such stories stage either a great romance or a great tragedy. They assume that this is the final, apocalyptic battle with an ultimate, monstrous enemy; whether having traversed some historical rupture or not, the left has finally come face to face with its nightmares, peppered with just enough reality, come back to haunt it—economic enslavement, the commodification of life itself, genetic monsters, viral contagion, technological mutiny; each description of the battle gestures to its own partiality but each is apparently fully confident that it is predicting the true fate of humankind. They have forgotten that many previous generations have seen their place in the world in similar terms, or that others may see themselves as also trying to hold on to some moral high ground, however fragile and imperfect it may be, against the expansive effects and growing intensities of power.

The left also reinscribes the contemporary organization of pessimism in some of its leading political strategies and the grounds on which they are defended. These strategies often assume the ontological priority and value of fragmentation, singularity, deconstruction and process. The rise of a passionate and morally certain politics of "horizontalism," which defines the state and any hierarchical organization as the enemy, has once again divided the left in absolutist terms. Organizing the possibilities of political struggle on a two-dimensional Cartesian grid in terms of a binary choice of axes is an act of closure that denies the reality of hybrid and transversal practices, and the necessary imagination of how local collectives, social movements and institutional forms can be brought together. At the same time, the expansive and increasingly intensive resurgence of what is unfortunately called "political correctness" involves a set of struggles over the effort to "govern" the psychic space of the left. While this is most visibly and commonly linked to a politics of identity built upon the demand for the recognition of an expansive universe of singularities, it can be more broadly understood as efforts to manage the practice of a variety of forms of political differences through appeals to experience as the ultimate—and certain—arbiter of effects. Yet, both of these debates do raise crucial questions about the nature of political organization and alliances, the relationship between oppositional (negative)

and alternative or prefigurative (affirmative) politics, and the nature of political agency, all of which pose real challenges to the possibility of any effective left opposition.

The third and final part of my argument ("Articulations") tries to open up moments of optimism—that other ways of knowing and other ways of struggling politically to make a better world are possible. I do not have the answers, but I do want to raise the questions. Without arguing for a return to some simple notion of a singular Truth, intellectuals can find more modest and contextual ways of mapping the truth of a context, by recognizing the realities, complexities and contingencies of the relations that constitute it. I want only to enter into and perhaps help to reanimate a different practice of critical intellectual work, one that is more modest and provisional, more collaborative and conversational. It would hopefully be a more self-reflective conversation that examines its own responsibilities for what is happening. I want to think about the conversational and organizational work that might enable the left to move forward, to better understand the conditions within and against which it is struggling, to forge transformative social movements capable of effecting change at every scale, and to offer oppositional visions that can turn the tides of history toward a better world, recognizing that this may be a slow, imperfect and even compromised process. While I believe that other worlds are possible, I do not want to tell anyone what sort of a world they should desire. Still I do think it is important that the left find effective ways of producing the multiple sorts of changes it wants; and that will require it to move people to see that these changes are not only what they need but that they are also possible. I do think that the left has to imagine and build new forms of unity that embrace rather than negate differences, and new forms of difference that seek out affinities of belonging together rather than negating them in advance. Rather than criticizing others for what has been left out, I think we should assume the need for analyses, stories and strategies that do not affect "the solace of closure" (Hall, 1996, p. 138). Rather than choosing between difference and multiplicity, or unity, in terms that exclude the other in absolute terms, the left might seek forms of unity precisely because they can organize differences and multiplicities. Rather than choosing between relativism and certainty (whether intellectual, political or moral), the left might seek a more provisional and popular politics, one that begins and remains in the complex and compromised realities of people's lives. But above all, the left cannot afford to give up its optimism, however desper-

ate it may be, or to claim it too quickly, so that it ends up, despite itself, in the thralls of an overwhelming organization of pessimism. This it seems to me is at least one reasonable response to the paradox of the left.

DETERMINATIONS

CHAPTER 2—THE FATE OF KNOWLEDGE

What does it say that despite all the "truth-saying" that analyzes and criticizes the contemporary state of affairs—from liberals to radicals, from the public and scholarly pronouncements to the excoriations of corporations and politics in popular culture—the country still seems to be moving in fundamentally troubling directions. Without underestimating the coordinated efforts of the right, or the significant wealth behind their struggles, or the odiousness of many of their strategies, I still think the left needs to question the adequacy of its tools for and diagnoses of what's going on, and the effectiveness of the strategies of opposition and transformation that they suggest. First among these, why does a fundamental assumption of the left—that one should speak truth to power, and by extension, to the public—seem to matter so little, and have so little effect. That is, why does knowledge itself seem so ineffective?

Today, many progressives start with a different question: why is it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism? This assumption, a new common sense of the left, is wonderfully desperate—and, I fear, both misguided and wrong. Not because it is not true, but because people have long imagined the end of the world, and it is not surprising that people would find it difficult to imagine the end of their taken for granted social reality. One might start with a much simpler, and more frustrating question: Why do people seem to think corporations are better than governments at shaping their lives for the better, even though they are clearly at least as incompetent, corrupt, untrustworthy, etc.?

I believe that most people think that they make the choices they do for good reasons, even if their reasons are defined by matters of faith. After all, even the most scientific or logical sense of reason depends, ultimately, on some grounds of faith. Of course sometimes, someone may think that they have no choice, but presumably, he or she must have reasons for believing that they have no choice. At the same time, choices are never simply a matter of what one thinks one knows, but also of what matters (values distributed on what I will later call mattering maps) and of the logics of comparison and calculation by which one adjudicates competing claims and demands. Reasons are not necessarily rational according to any single definition; they may be entirely emotional, as in "I did it because I love him" or "God told me to do it." Still, even such "irrational" reasons involve claims of knowledge: I know I love him and that this is good for him; I know god's voice when I hear it.

Today, there is a serious problem, or actually, many intersecting problems, which seem to have fused around matters of knowledge, ranging from claims of too much information (information overload of various sorts) to crises of credibility and undecideablity. My discussion will proceed in three parts: first, I want to try to describe something of what it feels like, as an intelligent citizen, to confront the public world of knowledge, a confrontation that often results in confusion and skepticism. I want to describe the experience of this state of affairs and then consider two common accounts that have been offered for this state of affairs: anti-intellectualism, and the explosion of information. Second, I want to consider the contribution of the media to these crises, including its interconnections with the academy. Then I will focus on the academy itself, first, by considering the organizational and everyday practices of the academy, and then by attending to a theoretical conundrum at the heart of much of contemporary critical intellectual work, which ends up undermining its own authority if not possibility.

Reality is bad enough, why should I believe (in) the truth?

These epistemic problems are commonly displayed anecdotally and sometimes statistically. Habitually, the first examples that come to mind are often linked to the political right as the "irrational" refusal of evidence, "ignorance" of basic principles of science, and the determining power of political and religious prejudices. The most common examples, trotted out again and again, include evolution, climate change, Obama's citizenship, welfare entitlements, vaccinations, gay genes, and certain economic policies. Left intellectuals commonly blame the epistemic crises on the right's lying or ignorance—but since the left tells the truth, it is simply a matter of education or persuasion. Such explanations make life easier, and they relieve the left of the burdensome work that needs to be done. The problems of knowledge are not limited to the right, and all those who subscribe to conservative positions cannot be dismissed as ignorant or uneducated. More educated fractions of the right, and even some liberal and left populations, are not exempt from occasionally choosing to ignore evidence that, at least on first glance, argues against their taken for granted "knowledge." It is not unheard of that elements of liberal-left political culture are selective in their relation to science—attacking it at one moment, defending it at another—apparently (at least it often appears to others) as it fits their agenda. Educated liberals and left-

ists seem quite happy to buy into conspiracy theories aimed against science, when it is convenient: the panic around vaccinations is only the latest example. Or consider debates around GMOs. Despite my political instincts, the scientific evidence, thus far, is at best ambivalent (although I could be wrong about that); at the very least, it seems to belie the unearned certainty of its opponents. I am not equating arguments around climate change and GMOs. Admittedly, one could argue that there are other dimensions in the latter instance on which to make decisions, that perhaps science and expertise should not be the only determinant of public policy here—contesting as it were an assumption that partly explained the value placed on bureaucracy and expertise in much of the 20th century, but that would seem to work for at least some of the arguments of the right as well. In the end, some on the left are not above constructing nightmarish scenarios that simply ignore or selectively appropriate the scientific evidence. And one might take note of the fact that there have been other moments when scientists were convinced of some truth that later turned out to be not quite so true.

At one level, then, the crises might be defined as an inability or refusal to question one's own assumptions about what is true, or what one knows, or even how one goes about knowing. One result is that increasingly polarized political positions are capable of justifying themselves on the basis of radically selective readings of and disparate selections among the available knowledge claims. Why does one assume that any particular commentator, whether Paul Krugman, Katha Pollitt, Naomi Klein, Mark Greif, Dean Baker, Stewart Brand, Liza Featherstone, Noam Chomsky or Michael Hardt, or even Stuart Hall for that matter, knows what he or she is talking about, or that he or she is right? The most likely answer is that one "trusts" them, but what this usually means is that they are saying what one already knows, what one wants to hear, what one can imagine oneself saying. This appears to be true across a wide range of sources and institutions of knowledge. This has sometimes been called "the Amazon effect," whereby people only expose themselves to information, knowledge and sources they agree with. The difficult thing to admit is that this is often as true of intelligent and educated leftists as anyone else. Those on the left are likely to assert, for example, that the media lie, unless of course the media are saying something they want to here, something they either know or want to be true.

But these observations, focusing largely on political differences, only begin to address the more general crises of knowledge, felt by many people across a broader range of life activities. One can understand the feeling. After all, the world feels like it has become increasingly complicated and its rate of change itself appears to be increasing. The "truth" seems to be too changeable and contradictory for anyone to grasp hold of with any confidence. People are confronted with a plethora of contradictory facts and competing stories. At the same time, despite the "fact" that the facts keep changing, and the contradictions keep multiplying, it feels like the stories remain implacably the same despite all the chaos surrounding them. However intelligent people may be, they can be forgiven for feeling confused and full of doubt, and perhaps even incapable of making sense of it all. There are lots of quick and generally bad accounts offered of this state of affairs, lots of targets to blame: the ignorance of the masses; the proliferation of media which, either for economic profit or political ideology, present whatever they think audiences "want" to hear; anti-intellectualism; the failure of public education; the increasing power of fundamentalist faith; tenured radicals; the growing political and economic interference with cultural institutions, including the media, schools and universities.

For some, it seems that the only reasonable position is to embrace one's ignorance, even that one cannot know the extent of one's ignorance, or how one might go about ameliorating the situation. Marx and Engels (1976) thought that people do not know what they do but they do it anyway: they do not realize that their labor is the necessary condition of their exploitation by the wealthy, but they continue to labor. This was a crucial part of their concept of ideology. Perhaps the world today is more appropriately characterized as one in which people know what they are doing, but they continue to do it anyway. But they can no longer know the results of what they do. Dewey (1927/1954) thought that people were no longer able to predict the consequences of their action. Today this is known as the law of unintended consequences, which might suggest that the only solution is to do nothing at all. Most people do not succumb to complete paralysis. If they do not know whom to trust, what sources about what sorts of information to believe, what stories to tell, even where to turn for help, they may take the easy way out: go with what they already think they know, grab hold of common sense—intellectually, theoretically, empirically and politically—for all it is worth, with a fervor that again may not be new (it most certainly has happened before) but with an

intensity that has to become visible, that has to be performed. There seem to be only two options: the cynicism of relativism or the passion of certainty. How does one account for these increasingly lived epistemic crises? I want to recount some of the most common stories told, not to dismiss them but to embrace them all, to suggest that they are all partly right.

Anti-intellectualism: Character or conspiracy

One way to "naturalize" the crises simply makes it the latest expression of some imagined condition of anti-intellectualism inherent in or endemic to "the American character," a contemporary articulation of a long-standing and often repeated fracture in the political/culture of the United States. Sometimes this is interpreted as a political strategy (often reaching extreme heights during the Great Awakenings; think of the Scopes Monkey Trial as an icon), rather than as some kind of natural national cultural sensibility. Any effort to give a single definition of these struggles, which have stretched across the entire history of the U.S., is likely to miss the specificity of what is going on. Any effort that simply accepts the relatively simple binary terms within which the struggle is often presented—such as a battle between faith and reason, or a struggle between the competing authorities of experience and knowledge or expertise—is likely to miss the complexity of the issues and the strategies behind them. After all, most claims to knowledge rely, to some extent, on forms of experience; and most appeals to experience claim to represent some kind of valid knowledge or understanding. Rather than thinking of this in binary terms, one should recognize the multiplicity of appeals at stake here—including forms of immediate, experiential knowledge, whether based in one's own perceptions or in faith, naturalized ideologies and common sense (as the taken for granted understandings of the world comprised of inherited fragments or bits of knowledge, the origins and authority of which have been lost), traditional and folk wisdom, practical expertise, tacit knowledge, the intellection of formal education, and the self-reflective and self-critical forms of knowledge production. Even if one imagines this as a continuum, one should be careful not to dismiss or at least define in advance the value and weight that each of these contributes to human lives. And yet, I do want to defend the necessity, in the contemporary context, of the more intellectual and academic forms of knowledge, without dismissing the importance of other forms.

The current version of this struggle might be traced back to Richard Nixon's presidential campaigns of the 1960s (Perlstein, 2008). Nixon is often "credited" with the "southern strategy" by which southern white working class people were "won" over to the Republican Party through largely racist appeals. But Nixon inaugurated another strategy, for which Spiro Agnew was often the front person, which defined an equally fundamental division within the U.S. population. It was in many ways a brilliant strategy, for it had only to define one term of an opposition: a cosmopolitan, liberal, educated and secular elite. The other side was left amorphous and ill defined: "the silent majority," who were presented simply as the good, honest, ordinary, hard-working folk of the country, who trusted their own faith and experience. The characterization of the "elite" could change, or at least be given different emphases at different times and places, thus constituting different understandings of the rest of the nation. For Nixon and subsequent generations, the "enemy" was the cosmopolitan elite, who arrogantly thought that their education and their faith in science and expertise not only guaranteed that they had a better understanding of the world, but that it also gave them the right to define what other people should do, and how they should live, embodied in their defense of science and big government.

This division was neatly captured in a conversation I had recently with a conservative neighbor in rural North Carolina. Knowing his grandson would soon be graduating high school, I asked about his college plans. My neighbor responded, rather caustically, that his family did not see any reason for him to go to college (although, in North Carolina, it would likely be affordable). Why, he shot back at me, would I assume that he would or should go to college? Putting aside my own criticisms of and doubts about the higher education system in the U.S., I responded, rather naively, that people often saw college as an opportunity for young people to expand their horizons, to open their minds and their lives to other possibilities and other futures. For many people, a college education embodied the hope that their children would be able to live better lives than they had. His angry response was, "Why do I want him to be better than me, to have a different life than I do? What's wrong with me and my life?" I was taken aback and silenced. He saw education as a personal insult. More publicly, recent political rhetoric has rejected as elitism and snobbery the idea that more kids should go to college.

The politics of this culturally constructed opposition between experience and knowledge-based expertise is not as simple as it may appear. Although it is often assumed that this division corresponds to the political difference of right-conservative and left-progressive, the antagonism is reproduced within each political formation. There are many elements of the left that are suspicious of Enlightenment reason, elitist intellectual expertise, and the authority of the academy; they are likely to propose the experience of some fraction or configuration of "the people" as the superior basis for political knowledge and judgment. In fact, many forces on the left have joined in the chorus of championing experience over the cold, methodologically based knowledge that most people have come to identify with the academy, science and expertise. Often, against the right's appeal to "the silent majority" as the innocent (who have not yet been corrupted by the system and therefore, the authority of their experience is determined, paradoxically, by their lack of experience), the left, particularly since the 1950s, valorizes the position of the outsider or marginalized (whose experience has been constituted by their oppression and suffering). The claim that the unique experience of "marginality" does and should give some people a unique and privileged authority means that the apparent lack of what might traditionally be thought of as "knowledge" makes their perspective more valid and valuable, precisely because it is rooted outside of the dominant frameworks of interpretation and ideologies. (See chapter 6.)

Recently, the historian of economics Philip Mirowski (2013) has taken this "anti-intellectualism" story into a conspiracy theory that blames the crises of knowledge on the political project/formation of "neoliberalism," which he describes as an elaborate social machinery and organization that has sought to transform the role of knowledge in society. He argues that the contemporary experience of ignorance and doubt is being consciously produced by a fraction of the "neoliberal right." This fraction is rooted in the Mont Pelerin Society, an international "thought collective" founded in 1947 committed to economic liberalism and utilitarianism, and political libertarianism, which was strongly shaped by the ideas of the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, who opposed the influential economic theories of John Maynard Keynes. Its most prominent U.S. member was the Chicago economist Milton Friedman. One of the often ignored arguments between Hayek and Keynes involved the problem of knowledge: in simple terms, Keynes believed that knowledge of the past provides the basis for knowledge of the future, while Hayek denied

that one could predict the future consequences of action based on knowledge of the consequences of past action. Thus, for Hayek, the future is intrinsically unknowable: "There is not much reason to believe that, if at any one time the best knowledge which some possess were made available to all, the result would be a much better society. . . . Knowledge and ignorance are relative concepts" (cited in Mirowski, p. 81). This would seem to deny the Enlightenment fantasy of the power of reason and knowledge to solve society's problems! All in the name of the Enlightenment values of freedom, liberty and autonomy!

Mirowski describes three tactics through with which the right deploys ignorance as something "to be produced rather than a state to be mitigated"(p. 81): fostering an impression of implacable controversy; constantly adding 'noise' into any discussion; and disparaging expertise. Of course, as Mirowski himself notes, there is a real irony, even a contradiction, at work here: Hayek and his followers offer a knowledge-based explanation for why the market has to be left to its own devices, why the market is the only reliable information processor: "It is because we normally do not know who knows best that we leave the decision to a process we do not control" (cited in Mirowski, p. 78). Moreover, these "neo-liberals" believe that they have further, secret, esoteric knowledge that cannot be shared with anyone else (including not just the masses, but politicians, organizers, other movement leaders, etc.): namely, that despite their constant attacks on the capacities of the state, the spontaneous order and "rationality" of the market has itself to be engineered by the state.

Mirowski's reading of Mount Pelerin as a political force is compelling but flawed. He assumes that the effort to represent oneself as anti-statist while actually wanting to use and operate through particular state policies and apparatuses, and to do so by muddying the field of knowledge, is a new phenomenon, and thus erases similar previous projects and their contextual specificities, successes and failures. His assumption that the Mount Pelerin society's efforts are, in and of themselves, responsible for the broad crises of knowledge ignores the complexities that contribute in significant ways to the experience of ignorance and doubt. He has decontextualized the strategy and reduced a reality that is the effect in part of complex struggles of ideology, to the effect of a single determining position. And in the end, his account suffers from a common flaw of conspiracy theories: it assumes that intent guar-

antees success, that every project is realized. And even if he is partly right, he still does not explain why it has worked to whatever extent it has.[1]

The information/knowledge explosion

The most common account of the crises of knowledge offers a naively empiricist account (which does not mean that it is not true): there is simply too much of all the ingredients that shape people's ability to understand or know the world,[2] and this multiplicity is full of contradictions and inconsistencies. These ingredients include: information[3] or what are commonly if somewhat naively called facts or data; concepts or theories that allow people to select, connect and organize the information; and the resulting stories that people eventually tell, the interpretations that constitute what people normally mean by knowledge. Such stories select, assemble and organize "facts" into some sort of whole. Facts are generally thought of as what is given, what appears self-evident; they provide the evidence on which disputes can be resolved; under normal circumstances, they cannot be false unless one has either lied, or made a mistake in either observation or representation. Yet, "information" or facts are only bits of a puzzle; without the larger picture that can tell one what they mean, one doesn't know what one has or what one knows. Knowledge demands more than the collection of information; it demands frameworks, concepts and logics—theories if you will—and the interpretive skills to bring the two together, to be able to know which "facts" matter, how they matter, how they can be fit together, to produce knowledge. Facts then are not the neutral and final arbiters of theoretical arguments (that is, deciding which of two stories is better), nor do theories get to define away all the evidence that doesn't fit in its narrative.

1 There are other, equally plausible accounts of neoliberalism as "a new relationship between government and knowledge," as one in which, according to Aihwa Ong (2006, p. 3), "governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions." Such a vision, according to John Clarke (2008) locates neoliberalism within a long history of modes of depoliticization, which re-present political contests as problems of knowledge and technical expertise. Perhaps the answer lies in recognizing neoliberalism as a multiplicity and an assemblage, a process of articulation, so that both accounts, however contradictory, can be true. (See chapter 5.)

2 See Andrejevic (2013). It is worth pointing out that this proliferation of choices is not limited to epistemological matters but is visible throughout the cultural sphere, where this situation poses interesting but I think very different empirical questions about how people evaluate and choose among the alternatives. I am not so sanguine about the domain of consumer goods, where "free trade" seems to have limited our choices as much as it has expanded them.

3 While this is the common use of information, "information theory" views it very differently: as a matter of form and selection, of constructing an organization out of chaos. My thanks to Bryan Behrenshausen.

While this division is a useful simplification, what constitutes a fact, what is allowed to be a fact, and what facts matter, often depends upon the theories one holds and the specific stories one is inclined to tell. Thus, the general crises of knowledge are not simply the result of an "information overload," the simple result of too much information, but of too many theories and too many stories as well, many of which are inconsistent. Each of these elements poses unique challenges, and all of them seem to be proliferating. This is most obvious in the fields of health (e.g., what is good for you, what treatments are beneficial, etc.) and economics.

Most commonly, this explosion is laid at the doorsteps of the media, especially the so-called new media and the explosion of media conduits made available by new technologies. The "fact" is that there are too many places to look and too many places trying to claim one's attention. Even within one's own orbit of taken-for-granted knowledge, one is likely to be overwhelmed. Consider the plethora of sources on the left, broadly defined—too many magazines, websites, and blogs. How can anyone keep up with it—and who can risk missing that one crucial piece, the one example, the latest development, the newest metaphor or analysis? What is a poor boy to do . . . ? While the expansion of the media technologies has no doubt played a role, this story is rather too easy and too predictable. I do not believe the contemporary epistemic crises can be explained simply by making quantitative arguments—that people are overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information, concepts and knowledge claims or stories—for a simple reason: this is neither a new phenomenon nor a new experience. The assumption that this state of affairs is new is another example of every age thinking it is somehow facing problems that have never been confronted before.[4] It is, at the very least, an integral part of the experience of modernity at specific moments of significant change. It may be that there comes a point at which quantitative change becomes so great that it produces qualitatively distinct effects, and I do think the intensity and complexity of the crises of knowledge are at least unique if not unprecedented. But I do not believe one can make such claims independently of its relations to other aspects of the context.

4 It was commonly experienced and observed, for example, at the end of the 19th century. To offer just one example—and I thank Lynn Badia for the reference—consider Henry Adams, writing over a century ago (1906, pp. 412-3): "If science were to go on doubling or quadrupling its complexities every ten years, even mathematics could soon succumb. An average mind had succumbed already in 1850; it could no longer understand the problem in 1900." See also Blair (2011) for an even longer historical perspective.

The media versus the academy: The visibility of the crises of knowledge

The media are assailed not merely for making too much information and knowledge available, but also for having destroyed the audience's ability to make critical judgments, often couched in an argument suggesting that the emergence and proliferation of digital media are responsible for the demise of critical reading and communication skills, and even of attention and concentration. Whether such claims are right (the data are at best contradictory), they are often presented as if, previously, people read great works in intelligent and self-conscious ways, so that they actually learned about the world and human possibilities. I do not know if people read less, or in less critical ways, but I doubt that popular culture was ever about such ways of reading and thinking, and even less about literate culture; if modern institutions of education defined the privilege and priority of certain definitions and forms of literacy, the opposite claim —that the new media are enabling new capacities, making people capable of extraordinary feats of multi-tasking and new forms of attention— appears just as reasonable.

The current response to new media technologies is sadly repetitive. From the invention of writing to the emergence of digital media, stopping along the way at printing, railroads, telegraphy, recorded music, telephones, radio, television, every new technology (and whatever new cultural or communicative forms, relations, habits, etc. are associated with it) has been the occasion for a predictably banal debate. On the one hand, there are those who see the new medium as a great threat to the existing social order, debasing the established systems of values and standards, and destroying not only the most precious social institutions (the family, democracy, etc.) but diminishing both individual and collective intelligence. On the other hand, there are those who see the newest media as society's salvation, the potential cure for all its problems, bringing democracy and education, as well as new forms of intelligence and social community, into the world. The reality is almost always somewhere else, less melodramatic in the short term, and less predictable in the long term (Carey, 1989; Davidson, 2011).

Yet the media have played a major role in the crises of knowledge, whether intentionally or not, whether for economic or other reasons, even though they often shift the burden of responsibility onto the academy. The media often accuse academics of failing to share their

knowledge, failing as public intellectuals (as if teaching were not a form of public intellectual work). Academics are castigated for not respecting real-world experience, although most universities are increasingly hiring some faculty and granting class credit on the basis of "experience." Supposedly, academics do not care about the real-world implications (policy?) of their work. Pundits claim that academics cut themselves off from the public, through obtuse technical languages and overspecialization. Ironically, sometimes economics is held up as a better model, although even the slightest actual research into economics as a discipline would demonstrate the most egregious incomprehensibility (and often, when honest, a refusal to actually engage with real-world economies despite a willingness to define policy largely based on political agendas); and, given the consequences of economists' forays into policy over the past decades, often funded in questionable ways, perhaps the media would be better off encouraging an even greater distance between academicians and policymakers.

Is it true that academics invest too little effort (outside the classroom of course) in speaking to broader audiences? Critics commonly assert that the bench sciences (rigorously formalizing, quantitative and/or experimental) do a better job, writing more books explaining themselves to various audiences, and explaining themselves in the media more fluently. I have never seen any actual evidence for these claims, and it seems to me that there are always a plethora of books (and other media forms—often available on cable networks or online) being published by humanities and social science professors aimed at various audiences outside the university. There are websites and magazines galore, aimed at non-academic publics (although these days often defined politically) that publish a wide range of essays and reports, some of them intellectually rigorous and even theoretically sophisticated (on the left, e.g., *Jacobin*, *N +1*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Open Democracy*, *Truth-out*, *Z-Magazine*, *Mother Earth*, *The Nation*, *Counterpunch*); there are many writers, across the full range of political and intellectual positions, who write about specific events, long-term trends, and possible solutions.[5] Actually, this is quite an accomplishment not only because the university does not generally reward such activities (although I have never heard of a hard scientist

5 Among my favorite I would acknowledge the valuable efforts of Henry Giroux (e.g., 2008) in both print and online (especially on www.truth-out.org).

being disparaged for such activities) but also because, to be honest, the risks for those in the more qualitative disciplines are significantly greater (and the rewards significantly lower).

Some critics of the academy have suggested that academics are not making sufficient use of new digital media—twitter, blogs, etc. They often point to TED as a rare exception that has popularized intellectual work. Such tools need to be differentiated and their values assessed. I know many academics that blog, and it works partly because of the very nature of this communicative form: it is a mini-essay, which, like any essay, is necessarily a moment in a conversation on the way to something better. But perhaps a better analogy is the conference paper, the workshop presentation, and the early draft of an essay that one circulates prior to its publication. These are the testing grounds of ideas, the fluid and ephemeral statements that one offers for criticism and comment. On the other hand, I am more reluctant to defend forms like Twitter and even TED as media for the communication of serious critical work and ideas, although I do not deny that there are many things—even moments of knowledge—that can be communicated with them. But in general, knowledge does not lend itself to sound bites. (This is why it is hard to deal with pre-digital media as well.) There are many wonderful TED lectures, but they tend to be talks on the latest and sexiest themes, where it is simply the fact of their existence that is fascinating. There are significantly fewer TED talks that successfully communicate the complexity, contradictions and contingency of knowledge. TED talks may be very good for announcing ideas—as if they were pop songs—but it is rarely good at contextualizing them, explaining them with the depth and richness that is likely to prevent people from seriously misusing them, and for the most part, it successes are not in the more academic realms of knowledge. And since there is no opportunity to seriously challenge claims or interpretations offered on TED talks, it is, in the final analysis, a form that stands against the kind of practices of knowledge production that define the academy. TED is the very commodification of ideas and knowledge that the academy must stand against, even if it may occasionally have some educational value. After all, commodification is not a total evil; like everything else, it allows one to do some good things even as it constrains what one can do, and pushes people in directions that may contradict their ultimate goals.

There is another side to what is implicitly a question about the temporalities of the academy and the media. The crises of knowledge are, in important ways, a question of time and the forms of temporality in which people live. It has become banal to say that life and the world have sped up, but that is only partially true—in some places, at some times, for some people (Sharma, 2014). I believe that one of the commandments of knowledge production is that it takes work, and work takes time. Occasionally, I get a call from a media outlet asking me for a comment on some event that is happening now. It is bad enough that what they want is not a serious analysis but a sound byte, but they want it now. My usual response is that if they want a comment from me as a professor, they have to give me some time to research the question because I don't assume that I always and already understand everything, just because I have researched some (even similar) things in the past. If they want a comment from me as just another person, without using my status as a marker of expertise and truth, I am happy to give it to them. They never do. Might I say something interesting, even useful, on the spot, as an expert—I would hope so, but that doesn't mean I should offer every hypothesis, every tentative conclusion, as a claim to truth. However multiple the temporalities in which people live, the demands of public policy, politics, media and commerce operate at radically different temporalities than that of academic knowledge production. If academics continue to give that up, and there is a growing pressure for academic work to succumb to the demands of these other temporalities, they renounce and undermine the very basis of their own authority,[6]

So why does it appear that the academy absents itself from the media, from public responsibility and scrutiny? At least part of that absence, especially that surrounding the more interpretive and critical disciplines studying human social and historical life, the "human sciences" as they are sometimes called, has to be laid at the feet of the media themselves. The media (and perhaps even the general population) easily overlook the technicality of the languages and methods of the sciences; in fact, they seem to expect and tolerate scientists, engineers and even auto mechanics who have vocabularies that the majority cannot possibly understand. Yet they complain about the technical languages of the disciplines studying human realities, assuming they are used to obscure . . . something, I

6 Again, this is not a new observation. One might think here of George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891). But that does not tell us how such concerns have been re-articulated in the present context.

am not sure what. But these technical languages are not used for their obscurantist value, but because they function as a kind of communicative shorthand among those working on shared questions or within shared paradigms. As importantly, the theoretical language is necessary because such research, not unlike the quantitative expressions of the hard sciences, attempts to get beyond people's common sense assumptions about the world, and about specific phenomena within it. Ordinary languages encode and reproduce many common sense assumptions. For that very reason (again, not unlike the use of quantification), it is sometimes vital to find other ways of talking, other ways of describing and explaining human reality, other forms of rigor, all of which may strike some as obscure and turgid precisely because they deny the authority of common sense. But because of the difficulties, the media rarely give significant space to more qualitative, critical work and when they do, it is often to ridicule it, presumably because the reporter (and one assumes, the audience) does not understand what is being said or why it might be important, because he or she has not done the work to figure out the translations. The media have journalists trained as translators for the bench sciences, so they are more comfortable with research findings made available through quantitative and experimental arguments. There are no translators for the human sciences.

As importantly, the media tend to represent "knowledge" as if it were simply a collection of "discoveries." They treat knowledge as an accumulation of studies, so perhaps it is not surprising that they report knowledge production as and give space to the latest "discoveries," which better fits the appearance (if not the actual practice) of the hard (or bench) sciences. But knowledge, even science, is not an accumulative process of separate studies and discoveries. Scientific findings, like all knowledge, are part of ongoing conversations that provide the context within which any finding is judged and its importance understood. The latest paper on any topic, whatever the discipline, is not in and of itself a finalized and accepted truth claim. Presenting the results of a single study as "truth" is not unlike taking a conversational snippet out of context: you can't possibly know what it means or what its value is. Maybe part of what distinguishes the hard (bench) sciences from the rest of the academy is that the communities in conversation generally agree, punctuated by occasional rifts, on the questions and the parameters within which answers might be offered and the conversation continued. The life sciences do not quite live up to the model, although the media often act

as if they do, helping to produce a sense of confusion in the public, as results often seem to contradict each other. Some social sciences—economics, psychology and increasingly political science—pretend that they operate like physics, but they do not, and often, presenting their findings in such terms contributes in important ways to the epistemic crises. The remaining social sciences as well as the humanities are even . . . "messier," more qualitative, interpretive and critical. They encompass more and more radical disagreements; the knowledge of human reality moves forward more slowly, hesitatingly and modestly. But that is the nature of knowledge in every important realm; knowledge production is an ongoing conversation, always crawling toward better truths, better understandings, but rarely arriving at a final shared conclusion.

The media have largely abandoned their own role in the cultures of knowledge. As producers of knowledge, they have succumbed to the temptation to offer blatantly partisan claims as if they were the results of empirical investigations and critical self-reflection. As adjudicators of knowledge, they have retreated into self-destructive efforts to present balanced coverage, as if there were always and only two sides to any story and as if both sides deserve to be treated equally. Too many stories, including many of those on the university, exhibit a shameful lack of actual research and investigation. The media do not educate their readers about the processes of knowledge production, and they often refuse—in a blatant act of moral cowardice—to pronounce judgments on competing claims, to even suggest that such judgments are both possible and necessary. The result is that the media's coverage of academic knowledge has an almost haphazard feel about it; they publish research as if the mere fact of its publication—even the mere fact that someone noticed its publication or released a press release on the matter—means it is newsworthy and presumably true, with no vetting and no larger picture. Because they rarely bother to provide the larger context of conversation and debate, they often seem untroubled to report on research, for example, around issues of medicine and economics, which present contradictory findings. Why is anyone surprised that people are confused and that many do not trust science, or the academy, when they are confronted with such a picture of knowledge as obscure, piecemeal, contradictory and chaotic?

The academy and the crises of knowledge

Academics have rarely considered their own role in producing the crises of knowledge. I do not think that this silence is intentional, as if academics were trying to protect their own claim to authority even when it is not earned, although from the outside, it is likely to look that way. In fact, unintentionally perhaps, the academy may provide some of the best evidence for the failures of knowledge and expertise. Let me be clear: I do not mean to condemn all or even most of the work being done in universities; nor do I mean to criticize all of the choices that academics seem increasingly called upon to make. But I do think that some of the directions, institutionally and intellectually, that define the contemporary research university have left the broader academic community in trouble.[7]

The explosion of academic knowledge

One has to look at the university itself, and at changing academic practices, to understand its place in the current epistemic crises. After all, how are journalists, or ordinary citizens for that matter, to make sense of economic realities, for example, when economists so radically disagree—often in public—without any explanation that might at least make sense of the differences, and provide people with some way to adjudicate the matter? How can academics claim an authority based on knowledge—even scientific knowledge—or at least better knowledge than ordinary common sense, when it is quite obvious to anyone who looks, even cursorily, that there is as much disagreement among academics as anyone else? Now I am not saying this is bad, but academics have failed to explain how this works, why disagreements are necessary to the conversation of knowledge, and why such intellectual disagreements are—at least theoretically—different from those that characterize everyday arguments. The truth, such as it is, is that it does feel hard to grab hold of the truth. At the very least, in the face of all this uncertainty, it seems quite reasonable for people to doubt the authority of academic knowledge. It is

7 These trends are strengthened by a bloated administration so intimidated by both sides of the political spectrum that they happily forget any sense of their academic mission and become managers who give the right what it wants in the name of protecting the university from the right, and occasionally making gestures toward the demands of more radicalized students on the left. At the same time, although faculty and graduate students are not generally particularly radicalized, they do seem to me to be increasingly timid and risk-averse (not without some good reasons I might add), but they too often act as if previous generations of intellectuals did not have to take real risks. In the end, the university becomes a microcosm of a significant fraction of the population—morally liberal but politically disengaged.

but a small step to accepting that, if something "feels" like the truth —"truthiness"—then it is true. It may not seem unreasonable to expect the academy to do some of the vetting which I assailed the media for failing to do, but (as I shall suggest) in an age of out of control publication and individual self-promotion, it is no longer perceived as something for which one is rewarded.

I want to start by considering the ways the academy has contributed to the so-called explosion of knowledge: to put it simply, universities are producing too much work in the name of knowledge that is simply not worth it. As universities have appropriated business-managerial models, and had to adapt to changing public pressures and perceptions, their self-representation has given way to commodified measures of reputations and rankings. The result is a rapidly expanding demand for publication and the expectation that one's reputation—including the possibilities of promotion and the increasingly rare and small pool of funds for merit raises—depends upon publications. Even more, the pressure to publish takes particular form—a demand for research with measurably high "impact" and visibility—whether because it is newsworthy, or creates marketable discoveries (including patents and cures), or is influential in some other way. Scholars are pressured (through complicated reward systems) to move onto more economically and pragmatically driven research, to produce work that can be made visible, and to make ever greater claims for their work. I remember when I was a graduate student and asked my mentor James Carey whether I should be publishing. He responded that I should not presume that I had something really worth adding to the conversation after only a few years of reading and research. Take the time that intellectual work demands. Such advice, however, seems impossible if not naive today. (Could one really propose that pre-tenured faculty should not be required to publish, or that graduate students should not be encouraged to publish?) This all depends upon an increasing emphasis, not surprising in the contemporary university, on the individual career over any sense of loyalty to an institutional or an intellectual community. One result is, in my opinion, an unwillingness to take risks—both intellectual and political—forgetting as it were the risks that previous generations of political intellectuals had to face.

The situation has been propelled by the business of knowledge dissemination. The academy as the site of knowledge production has literally been hijacked. As commercial publishers increasingly own and operate the means of internal dissemination of academic knowledge on a

for-profit basis, the need to fill their journals and book lists with free material that they can sell back to academics and libraries becomes paramount. Actually, if one thinks about it, academic publishing is a nearly perfect capitalist machine. Publishers get the raw material (primarily academic essays of various sorts) for free; they package it into journals, and the journals into larger bundles so that if a library wants particular journals, they have to buy bundles that include journals they may not actually want. Libraries of course have little choice but to buy these bundles, because they are the ongoing record of current research and knowledge. As a journal becomes successful, publishers can increase the page count or the number of issues per year, increasing their demands for free work, and enabling them to charge even more for the journal and the bundles. More recently, publishers have created a whole new, rapidly expanding and relatively useless market for handbooks and encyclopedias. In the bench sciences, the situation is even more perfect from the perspective of the capitalist publisher, for the author(s) often have to pay to have their papers published, to pay for the right to have their work sold back to their own and their colleagues' institutions. Ideas, academic practices and even intellectuals are made into commodities defined by certain kinds of industrial logics that seem to drive the intellectual research work.[8]

I will, in the following description, focus on the situation in the human sciences (rather than the hard sciences), where the explosion of publication creates an ever-expanding circle in which there is always too much to read—too many positions, too many arguments, too much contradictory evidence—so that scholars have to rely on either the author's stature or theoretical and/or political agreement. It has become almost impossible to read everything one must read, everything necessary to legitimate, at least in traditional terms, the claim of academic expertise or scholarship. In fact, given this situation (and its consequences as I will describe below), the most surprising thing is how much good work continues to be produced.

This situation has serious consequences: First, one's expertise becomes defined in increasingly narrow terms, resulting in the proliferation of sub-fields.[9] And while each of them is valuable for their interdiscipli-

8 There is an interesting counter-development here, as universities demand that all the work of their faculty be freely available online.

9 For example, one might point to security studies, surveillance studies, transition studies, game studies, code studies, hip-hop studies, horror studies, etc.

nary efforts around a new empirical field, they all too often act as if the questions (and the realities they interrogate) are new; unfortunately, they rarely say anything new or surprising, anything that has not been said elsewhere. They frequently simply re-discover in their own empirical "pocket" universe what others have said previously in other fields. For example, all sorts of technologically defined sub-fields rediscover the rather old assumption that media audiences are active. This is partly because, within each subfield, one gets the impression of witnessing endless redistributions of a highly circumscribed set of citations and authors, under a series of ever-changing terms to describe their fields or positions. So, academics create ever shrinking circles in which authors cite a few theoretically and politically compatible works, and then follow the footnotes, all of which ultimately lead back to the original authors, creating an endlessly self-referential closed system of citations, a numbingly predictable, circular tissue of references. Second, one is less likely to read work that appears tangential but may nevertheless be absolutely decisive to producing truly interesting and insightful research. Asking significant questions should demand that one makes reference to all sorts of concepts and questions which would lead one to follow other unexpected traditions and lines of research, since any investigation (e.g., around questions of participation, publics, or leadership, to use only a few examples that have irked me recently) is likely to open up to an entire history of problematization, of conversations and debates, but who can afford the time and energy anymore. Third, one tends to read only the most recent work since so much is being published—in various media—so rapidly that there is little time to go back and read. Fourth, one tends to select one's sources according to criteria that have more to do with theoretical and political sympathies than with an understanding of research as a conversation with difference. One reads selectively, finding those ideas that are already in line with what one assumes one already knows, and one establishes a body of near-sacred texts; fifth, one selects topics that are *au courant*, partly because there is less scaffolding that one has to build upon and partly because one's work is more likely to gain visibility and impact. Sixth, complexity goes out the door as one increasingly "sees the world in a grain of sand." One can no longer be satisfied claiming to have discovered merely a new piece of a complex puzzle or even an interesting redeployment of an older practice or structure, because such claims do not bring fame and glory—either to oneself or the university. Instead, one has to have discovered the leading edge, the new key or essence. One

good but relatively small idea is expanded into a metonym for the entire economy, culture or society. Instead of seeking new discursive forms to embody complexity, uncertainty and humility, one goes with elegance, hyperbole and the ever receding new.

Finally, everything is driven by highly exaggerated claims of originality (new discoveries, new theories, new solutions derived from new sources—and increasingly, new disciplines) that justify the extraordinary explosion of essays, journals and books. As much as it saddens me to say this, an ever-expanding body of work is full of exaggerated and self-aggrandizing claims of originality and import. The result is that a great deal of what is published is, to put it plainly, crap—certainly not worth reading—not because it is theoretical, or political, or contemporary, but because it appears to be written in a vacuum or at best, a rather boring conversation among a small group of people who share the same assumptions and habits of thought.[10] Most of what is being said simply repeats what has been already said in different terms, often ignoring a history of discussions and debates (over certain positions, assumptions, practices, logics, etc.), so that one increasingly feels like intellectual history is repeating itself over and over.

Academics may know lots of things, but in the end, they don't seem to matter, because they remain fragments without a story, utterances without a conversation. Because they have not done the reading and research, and because theory is increasingly the over-valued currency of these disciplines, one believes someone is saying something new because, well, he or she is speaking the latest theoretical vocabularies. It has become increasingly common to believe that dressing something up in new (theoretical) clothes, even though much of what one is saying has been said before, across a range of disciplines and theories, is a viable definition of original critical work (e.g., "crowdsourcing" or "surveillance"). Let me be clear, however, that I do not mean to attack theory per se or the use of esoteric/technical language. I am not suggesting all academic writing should be clear or accessible to all. Much of my writing is densely theoretical and I have long defended the importance of theory. But I cannot avoid the feeling that theory is increasingly used to drive the work itself—as if the conceptual vocabulary were sufficiently empirical in its own right. It is one thing to very carefully take concepts from an author, from one context into another; it is another to fail to un-

10 They would, however, make interesting objects of investigation, if sufficiently contextualized.

derstand the difference between concepts, what has been demonstrated through the use of such concepts, and what is simply claimed to be true as a result of the concepts, as if there were no distance between the conceptual and the empirical. Even the claims of selected secondary and even tertiary commentators on particular theories are increasingly treated as if they too were surrounded by the sacred aura of the original theorist. I am surprised by how often colleagues who are very fluent in contemporary theory—and in many cases, eminent theorists in their own right—complain about the growing abuse of theory, where it covers over bad arguments, old observations and even incoherent ideas ("onto-babble"). So one finds oneself reading excruciatingly technical exercises using what can only be described as theoretical micro-languages (telling oneself that it will be worth it in the end), but when one gets to the real meat of the argument, to its attempt to cut into the lived realities of power, when it has to become "empirical" as it were, the theory either disappears or re-appears only in the most contorted ways. And the conclusion ends up saying the obvious, or what so many others have said with other theories. Or it offers some esoteric abstraction that bears no relation to any imaginable concrete popular political practice. And you wonder, why did I have to go through that work? How has the intellectual project to understand what's going on been advanced?

Crises of authority

But as I have already said, the crises of knowledge are not simply the result of too many choices, or of the practices and forms of the distribution of visibility of all the claims and options. They are also the result of the apparent absence of any (knowledge-based) basis for choice. The growth and proliferation of claims of information and knowledge, and the increasing democratization of access to the new technologies of communication, create an expanding demand for critical evaluation, but increasingly, without any sense of what makes one competent to judge. There is, increasingly, a failure of authority—not just of the traditional, unquestioned positions of authority to say this is true or this is not, but of more modest forms of authority based on some agreed upon logics of calculation and comparison, enabling people to adjudicate the conflicts between and to recognize the limits of different facts, theories and stories. Such authority is not individual but institutional, invested as it were in the demonstrated effectiveness and worth of the values, practices, relations and discourses of the specific institutions that claim authority in

specific domains of knowledge. The traditional logics of expertise, the practices of the production, organization and adjudication of evidence and theories, the multiple institutions of epistemic authority (e.g., education, journalism, politics and faith), all seem to have lost their credibility, and their failures have been visibly played out in public. Such "crises of commensuration" point to the lack of an authoritative and stable standard against which to measure the comparative value of competing claims across a wide range of cultural phenomenon, including knowledge claims, but also aesthetic merit, political priority and even economic value. In the case of knowledge, this erosion is the result of numerous forces, including changes in the media, but it is also the result of political attacks on these institutions, from both the right and the left, originating in news media, popular culture, public opinion, churches, social movements, think tanks, and even universities. It is sometimes also the result of self-inflicted damage, especially within the academy. Without the possibility of assessing multiple knowledge claims, or at least of explaining the contradictions, one is confronted with a chaos of possibilities, and no way to navigate the relations between such statements and the worlds in which they function.

One might question why it is that people seem to continue to believe (in) certain institutions—the logic of the market and the operation of corporations, the sanctity of the church, the values of education and science—despite often legitimate attacks and their "bad behavior." For the moment, let me simply say that the answer varies with each institution. For example, if one asks about the continuing power of economics in the face of radical failures and corruption, I think one would have to talk about the changing and complicated forms of investment in the economies, and the contradictions between economic knowledge and economic realities. In a somewhat paradoxical way, the force of the latter is sustained precisely because in actuality, the latter never claimed the authority or credibility of the former. That is, if everyone knows you lie and are motivated only by greed, then you may appear less absolutist and evil, and your authority comes simply by continuing to deny any other forms and institutions of authority. In that sense, corporations can never let people down. If all institutions of authority, all logics of adjudication, and all media are biased, then information and stories that one disagrees with can be simply ignored and one can even feel somehow culturally sophisticated in being so reflexively critical.

The crises of knowledge often find their deepest, most difficult and most passionate expressions in the complex struggles concerning questions about the nature and values of education and academic knowledge. I want to turn my attention to some aspects of these matters. The current attacks on education from public K-12 through universities are often fought out in terms of funding (costs and state support), access and inequalities, content (e.g., curricular biases, core content, skills), assessment (e.g., the measurement of outcomes or value-added), tenure and the supposed politics of the faculty (which are assumed to necessarily inflect their classroom practice). The debates are often framed by the increasing corporatization (centralization, bureaucratization, standardization) of education, with new forms of managerialism and new demands for efficiency and accountability trumping more traditional values that are not amenable to quantification.

The university has become the object of the most vicious and vitriolic attacks, which is not surprising given its status as the institution traditionally charged with the production, distribution and, most importantly, the evaluation of knowledge. In the contemporary context, the academy is certainly not the only institution of knowledge production; contemporary knowledge production is marked by its own proliferation of institutions and sites working with and sometimes against or in spite of the university, although the university does retain—at least in my mind—some sense of privilege because it does or at least it is supposed to operate with a unique epistemological stance—always open to the possibility of being wrong, committed to some (contested and evolving) senses of rigor and self-reflection. From both the right and some fractions of the left, the university faces a radical rejection of its very authority and often a denial of the continuing importance of certain values that are, in theory at least, still deeply embodied in the current incarnation of the institution. The left is often critical of the hierarchical and anti-democratic nature of the model of education and intellection, of the continuing expression of the dominant politics of difference (e.g., racism, classism, sexism), and of the increasing effort to capitalize education and put the burden of the costs on students. The right seeks to limit the power and independence of the university, in both economic (free market) and cultural terms (against both relativism and supposed left wing indoctrination). For example, in my own state of North Carolina, the conservative state government has launched what I believe to be a long-term attack on the public university, generally thought to be one of the best

(and most affordable) in the country. Of course, they want to stop what they see as government subsidies of public institutions, and they want to re-institute a two-tiered educational system built on class and wealth. And of course they want to end what they assume to be the leftwing indoctrination that defines all of the teaching in the social sciences and humanities (even as they fear the opposite, that the university is teaching students to be relativists and nihilists). It is important to see the complexity and contradictions within the Right's vision, and it is important to recognize that at least some on the right recognize the importance of struggling over ideas and knowledge. As a key conservative advisor in these attacks (C. Bradley Thompson, director of the Institute for the Study of Capitalism, at Clemson University, reported in Purdy 2015) put it:

> I meet too many very smart businessmen and women who are giving millions of dollars every year to political candidates, and I have to ask the question 'How has that worked out for you?' And the answer has to be, 'It hasn't worked out very well at all' . . . If they really want to change the culture long-term in this country, it's not going to happen through politics. If you think the political system is corrupt, what you're really saying is the American people are corrupt. And if you're saying the American people are corrupt, then what you have to do of course is change American culture. And the way you change culture is through ideas.... If we're giving tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars to political campaigns and we're giving one-tenth of one per cent to trying to change the intellectual culture of this nation, you are by definition going to lose.

One of the most common ways in which this attack is launched, even by those who claim to support the academy, is to conflate the two functions of the university which, however interconnected (in both institutional theory and individual practice), have to be somewhat distinguished: (1) producing knowledge and (2) disseminating knowledge. Their relation is complicated. I will not try to answer the question of whether the best teachers are also researchers or not (although the model of the research university tends to assume this, suggesting, somewhat disingenuously, that those who do no research have a surfeit of time to invest in their teaching). Let me briefly try to say something about edu-

cation, largely in the form of questions that I leave open for discussion. Again, it is important to note that a sense of uncertainty about both the function and even the possibilities of education is not new. Many observers in previous eras, going back as far as the ancient Greeks, have questioned the value of education or more accurately, whether the existing forms and content of education—because the very meanings and measures of education are always changing—have become obsolete, whether they sufficiently prepare students for the challenges that they will face, or even if society yet understands or is capable of predicting those challenges well enough to craft some vision and practice of education.

Before one can say whether the university educates its students, one has to ask what it means to be educated today and acknowledge that different forms of education may serve different purposes, for different audiences, in different contexts. Is education meant to be training for jobs, imparting skills that are defined in large part by the current market (or at best, the imagination of the future market)? Many contemporary attacks on the university focus particularly on the question of the value of liberal arts education, and the necessity for students to take classes in the humanities, social sciences and the arts. In many ways, this argument has a longer history, but it is now rearticulated into a broader set of concerns and struggles.[11] Actually, those who advocate such a training-for-jobs view of education are often, whether consciously or not, calling for a return to a two tier (often classed and raced) system of education, with some students getting a liberal arts education, while for others, education becomes a form of apprenticeship. Such arguments ignore the very reasons that *public* higher education was established: as a way of producing "better" citizens (capable of understanding the world and arguments about the state of the world), for after all, it is a basic premise of U.S. democracy that it requires educated publics—required if the "marketplace of ideas" is to work; it is also true, although more difficult to specify, that universities shape such publics according to particular ideologies and values, but they also are supposed to make space for dissent and debate precisely about the content of such educations. Public universities give a broad range of students an appreciation of the full range of human creations, imaginations and possibilities, as well as to the various ways humans have lived together in the world. Even more importantly,

11 Not surprisingly, such attacks have produced many defenses of the liberal arts, of varying quality and persuasiveness; one recent example is Zakaria (2015).

such exposure to the practices of learning, wisdom or *phronesis*, serves as an important condition of the possibility of creativity and innovation in any field. Why should innovation be so thinly understood as a response to the demands of stakeholders for specific immediate impact, that is, as a response to needs already felt, or as the production of new needs that are consistent with current social norms? This is how innovation is reduced to entrepreneurialism, even though it is disingenuously stretched to encompass both social change and the creative arts. Little mention is made of the fact that the theory of entrepreneurialism (Schumpeter, 1962) limits the role to a select few, and that most "entrepreneurs" or "start-ups" in contemporary society fail. Those who advocate innovation and entrepreneurialism ignore that, in a richer sense, the university has always been devoted to innovation, long before contemporary reformers (riding on the privileges of capitalism) took hold of the term and the agenda. Finally, the knowledge and capacities universities develop are assumed to be forms of cultural capital, an important determinant of social and economic mobility.

But academics have undermined their own authority because they have not done a very good job of policing their own practices. Ironically, whenever the media speak about academic scandals in the humanities, they inevitably trot out the Sokal affair. They rarely mention the scandalous failures and behaviors of the various bench sciences or even of the "more scientific" social and psychological sciences. In 1996, a run of the mill physicist submitted an essay he wrote as a parody of contemporary critical analysis to a journal, which published the essay. The author subsequently claimed, in print, that the essay made no sense and expressed a totally misguided interpretation of science; its publication presumably demonstrated the lack of rigor in what he called "cultural studies." To be clear, Sokal's paper presented a position in the philosophy of science that argues, against "realism," that scientific concepts (such as those naming sub-atomic particles) are constructs of science with no necessary, direct correspondence to real existents. Whatever mistakes the editorial collective may have made, there are a few elements of the story that are rarely stated: First, the very act of knowingly submitting a false essay is an ethical violation in the academy, although Sokal was never called to answer for this. Second, Sokal intentionally sent his essay to a non peer-reviewed journal, so that it was not subject to the traditional demands of blind peer-review. And third, most importantly, Sokal's claim that the article offered a nonsensical understanding of science is simply not true; it tries

to ridicule one side in a long-running debate, and a significant number of scientists have accepted the position it offers (constructionism), starting with Niels Bohr, although they probably would not use the vocabulary Sokal appropriated for his essay. I happened to be at a conference with the chair of a leading science studies department when this "scandal" broke. When I asked him about it, he affirmed that many scientists accept some version of constructionism. When I asked him why scientists (or science studies scholars) did not stand up to defend the journal against Sokal, he said that scientists would not want their authority undermined by admitting that they did not think science offered empirical descriptions of an objective reality.

While the hard or bench sciences often act in public as if they are protected from such scandals by virtue of their rigorous experimental practices, quantification and evaluation (demanding replicability), the truth is rather different. They act as if "data" were the neutral and objective arbiters of theories (precisely what constructionism denies), but recent disclosures have made visible their hypocrisy, especially in the medical and life sciences, but also in those social sciences that claim to emulate the hard science. Recent reports have documented the widespread corruption of a significant part of medical, psychiatric and pharmaceutical research because of the close—financial—ties to industry, both in terms of research funding and personal rewards. Similarly Mirowski (2013) has demonstrated the compromised, if not corrupt, subsidization of academic economists and large parts of the economic profession by government and corporate interests. But that is nothing compared to the recent assertions that much of the published research, including many of the most influential landmark studies in the life sciences cannot be replicated (the linchpin of scientific claims to authority).[12] This has been accompanied by further claims that much of what has been published is false: data has been falsified or, at the very least, subject to what has been called the "confirmability bias,"[13] where one reports only what proves one's hypothesis, and doesn't report the counter-evidence. In some cases, researchers apparently manipulated data, or exaggerated their statistical significances. In fact, some have suggested that a notable proportion of published work may even be in-

12 See "Trouble at the lab" (2013); also http://bulletin.imstat.org/2013/11/resolving-irreproducibility-in-empirical-and-computational-research/

13 Ironically, this has long been the criticism lodged against the human sciences by bench scientists.

comprehensible gibberish. Where then is the rigor the sciences claim? Should the increasing number of scandals of falsified data, irreproducible results, etc., not be taken as a reflection on the sciences and the claims to knowledge? The excuses echo those of capitalist enterprises: you can't blame the system for a few bad apples. And it should be noted that the Right has very successfully used the increasingly visible uncertainties of science to further undermine its credibility.

Things look somewhat different as one moves away from the romantic image of science as Truth, which scientists continue to propagate as their public image. Scientists may recognize that truth is malleable, changing, and limited; they might know that it is not an objective descriptive of an objective world, but for the most part, they don't really want to say it too loudly because it would undermine whatever authority they still have and with it, their funding. In the human sciences, evidence is in such abundance that it is often difficult to make evidentiary arguments conclusively. Moreover, having accepted that "data" cannot be treated separately from the concepts used to organize and describe them (much as the bench sciences use mathematics and formalization), it is difficult to see how evidence could be taken to be the final arbiter of theories. The relation is more complicated and messier. In recent decades, theories themselves have become the arbiters of facts as it were, the adjudicator of competing knowledge claims.

But this is largely a problem internal to the academy, and not the worst problem from the point of view of the public authority of the academy. If the hard sciences protect their public credibility by hiding in claims of objectivity, couched in quantification and sophisticated technological apparatuses of experimentation and discovery, and by touting the benefits of their work, the human sciences are caught in the inability to actually pull off the illusion of looking like a real science, too easily wallowing in the shadow of the relativism that seems to be the implication of their attacks on scientific objectivism, and rarely being able to demonstrate the immediate importance or utility of their research. But I think the problem goes deeper. One might say that, in general, the practices of the human sciences have no protocol for defining a collective sense of advancement or accomplishment. Does the intellectual community (and by extension, the public community) now have a better understanding of whatever phenomenon is being considered, or is such work simply reproducing the enjoyment of (critics might say wallowing in) a space of constant and never resolvable disagreements, whether over theories,

methods or analyses. At the end of a conference on some particular problem (from finance to the popularity of zombies), does one leave with a sense of having moved forward, of having some new ground of common knowledge that enables the intellectual community to take the next step? I do not mean to condemn this kind of intellectual practice; I merely want to suggest that in the larger context, one can understand how this might be seen as . . . a problem.[14] Recent events have made it clear that one of the ways conservatives are trying to undermine higher education, especially public universities, is to challenge the need for research or at the very least, to question why tax payers should be supporting such research. I think that scholars in the human sciences have to take this challenge seriously. "Knowledge for knowledge sake" is unlikely to carry the day. And it is not unreasonable to ask—how would one justify one's work as a public good, worthy of public support?

Meanwhile, people in the human sciences have adopted a number of strategies aimed at improving their public image. The first strategy is to link critical theory and analyses to the authority of current scientific methodologies and theories. It is important here to distinguish between anti-scientism (i.e., opposing the claim that only scientific knowledge is legitimate), anti-science (against any science as a reduction of the complexity of human life) and a healthy skepticism about the appropriation of any particular scientific field or paradigm as offering a new and vital foundation for understanding human life. Such appropriations have resulted in surprisingly authoritative appeals to neuropsychology, information sciences, cognitive sciences, complexity and chaos theories, quantum mechanics and string theory, evolutionary biology and synthetic biology. What is the basis of such legitimation efforts? How are such appeals justified? Do they need to be? Are those who build on particular claims in the sciences aware of the complexities and conversations, the debates and contradictions, within which any work has to be interpreted and evaluated? This turn to science has a certain irony, since much of the contemporary work in the human sciences arose in part as a result of arguments against the 'objectivity" of the hard sciences and against the claim that they provided the only proper model of all knowledge production built upon a secure objective foundation. It is an inglorious slippage,

14 One factor contributing to the different ways social constructionism is understood and deployed may be the need, in many other systems of higher education, to support one's research through external funding, although I am sure this creates other problems.

from explicit anti-scientistic and anti-foundationalist arguments to rather banal appropriations of scientific confidence and homages to scientific prestige.

The second strategy for establishing some status is even more damnable, as it becomes more common for academics to slide from academic "expert" to educated citizen, without acknowledging the shift. Obviously, part of what is uncertain today is what counts as expertise; for the moment, I mean that one has devoted significant time and energy to studying the phenomenon, to familiarizing oneself with the various positions, accounts, issues and arguments surrounding it, and to finding some grounds for choosing to defend some position(s) or answer(s) above others. I think of this as the definition of academic responsibility—the willingness to consider that one may be wrong. So with little or no basis for academic authority, too many academics may speak of politically charged issues, or matters of governance and policy, or emergent cultural developments, as if their opinion was supposed to count for more than that of any other intelligent citizen. To use only one example, too many political intellectuals write about matters of economics with little or no real basis, to say nothing of academic training, other than the closed circle of references and colleagues that provide the illusion of a solid grounding. They describe and critique neo-classical economics, or neoliberalism, or even government policies, based not on their own expertise but on the basis of a few, highly selective, secondary sources chosen often on the basis of shared political or theoretical positions. But they often fail to understand, for example, that neoclassical economics is a complex and often heterogeneous set of commitments and positions and that there are a variety of insights within and debates around each problem. Moreover, their reconstruction of economic knowledge is usually rather thin—as if it were a choice between some evil homogeneous neoclassical theory and some preferred left-wing alternative (usually some version of neo-Keynesianism, found in the pages of the New York Times, or some popularized and often oversimplified version of Marxism). But on what grounds do we, as professors of whatever—base our claims about economic matters? On the basis of what expertise are our judgments and interpretations any better than those of any other citizen—if one has not done the rigorous research demanded by the practice of intellectual and scholarly work (although again, as I have suggested, this is done less and less well)?

Despite the constant demand that academics should have a higher public profile, I believe they need to approach this very seductive trap with great caution. Is it, in the contemporary context of the crises of knowledge, always a good thing when scholars become media pundits if, as often happens, the result is a further blurring of the line between partisan politics and knowledge claims? Nowhere is the deterioration of authority and expertise more evident than in the rise of academic superstars. Sometimes this has delivered a kind of instant celebrity based on what, in another time and place, might have been considered a rather thin contribution or narrow expertise. Such stars are often empowered—not only by the media but by academics as well—to speak of anything they want, whenever and wherever they want, as if their opinions were somehow authoritative. Statements by such stars, whose work is more often than not theoretical, are often evidently true by virtue of their status as stars, in yet another academic circular machine. I have sat through too many occasions when such stars are asked to talk about matters outside their spheres of expertise; their comments, often repeating what others have said before, are then automatically received as if they were insightful and even revelatory. And in the meantime, there are others in the audience who have thought about and researched the topic in more concrete and contested terms.

Thus, both academics in general and left academics in particular act increasingly in ways that undermine the very authority of knowledge. I do not mean to suggest that the sorts of practices and failures I have described are universal, or even dominant in the academy, but they do seem to me (and others) to have become increasingly visible and prevalent as the ever-emerging response to the changing conditions and demands of the university and of the crises of knowledge. It is even more disturbing to think that many of these practices are actually not all that different than the very sorts of things for which left intellectuals often criticize the right. For example, increasingly, both sides practice selective readings and the selective choice of examples—whether of the bible, the constitution, science or history. Of course, in one sense, every reading is selective and every argument chooses examples, but the authority of knowledge seems to demand a certain level of self-consciousness and a public acknowledgement of possible counter-arguments. Both on the left and the right, one finds a kind of hyperinflation in which a small number of the most extreme examples are made to stand in for the complexity of the whole e.g., cases of academic repression on the left, or welfare cheats

and voter fraud on the right. And while both sides often appeal to history and memory, such appeals are often even more selective. The right conveniently forgets previous examples of corporate failures, greed, and corruption, as well as economic predictions; the left forgets the history of its own failed predictions and strategies. I am not equating these behaviors, for they differ both quantitatively and in terms of intention. Both sides have rigorous and responsible intellectuals, and both sides speak out of turn. Certainly, outlets like Fox News think they can credentialize their own "experts," who frequently exaggerate and even outright lie. I am simply trying to understand a context in which such behavior, even when exposed, is not scandalous, is not terminated, in which people seem to embrace outrageous claims (perhaps even knowing that the claim to truth is, at best, suspect). I am trying to understand a context in which the very ideas of knowledge and truth are contested, and how left intellectuals have, no doubt unknowingly and unwillingly, contributed to the existence of this context. I should also admit that I am, unhappily, as implicated in many of these practices I am criticizing, and also, that I have no obvious solution.

The state of the university

Much of the crises of knowledge are no doubt the result of changes in the institutional organization and the political economy of the academy, some of which began in the 1960s, but most of which have been instituted since the 1980s. They have reshaped the academy, often behind the backs and when visible, against the will of many faculty (and some students). A great deal has been written about the changing institutional forms of the research university, although these structural changes have played out somewhat differently in public and private schools,[15] and there have been some attempts at public and intra-academy policy debates.[16] Under a variety of pressures, universities have come under many of the same managerial and corporatist strategies that have redefined both governmental social service apparatuses and private enterprises. These impose new and increasing constraints on the labor conditions and practices that are solicited, rewarded and even allowed in universities; they

15 Part of why I do not need to elaborate on such matters in here is because there is so much work done around these issues, and much of it is quite good. See. e.g., Martinson and Considine (2000); Newfield (2011), Giroux and Myrsiades (2001), Morris (2005), Morris and Hjort (2012), Bok (2015).

16 See, for example Harvard University, *Mapping the Future* (2013), Boyer Commission, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education* (2003), Association of American University, *Reinvigorating the Humanities* (2004).

have redefined the relations of the practical and pure sciences, and between the sciences and the liberal arts; they have redefined the relations of research and education; and they have meant that the sources of income and support have had to adjust to the changing political debates, policies and pressures of the various "stake-holders" of the academy. As state funding for education (which conservatives increasingly deny as a public good) and basic research has diminished, universities have had to depend on investments and grants from commercial enterprises and private funds, as well as ever increasing tuition rates. They have had to sell themselves to diverse constituencies with their own interests, who have now become potential sources of funding, including alumni, parents of potential and current students, politicians, fans of college athletics, corporations, governmental and non-governmental sources of research funding, etc. Universities are being driven by others' demands, including those of students (who are intimidated into thinking of education as a down payment on a career).[17] Universities used to resist such demands.[18]

Although such structural changes and constraints are not the focus of my comments here, anyone who has worked in universities for more than twenty-five years has directly experienced them, including: the increasing centralization of decision-making; the increasing demands of legal and financial accountability and time management; the subsequent growth of administrative bureaucracies; the transfer of teaching responsibility from the professoriate to precarious labor; the increasing micromanagement of the organizational structures of colleges and departments, as well as curricular matters; changing demands for fund-raising and self-funding; etc. How these changes are implemented in different universities and different kinds of universities may vary widely, both rhetorically and organizationally, but the directions are pretty much the same. Anyone working in universities has felt their impact on his or her own professional life as a scholar and teacher, although again, how they are lived at the various positions of labor within the university vary significantly. They have resulted at the very least in a sense of disempowerment, increased pressure and exhaustion, an individualization and professionalization of academic careers (with a correlative diminishing of institutional loyalty and the willingness to take on unrewarded service activities), an increasing division between undergraduate

17 It is important to distinguish the demand for "relevance" in the 1960s from the current demand for a guaranteed return on one's investment.

18 Even conservatives acknowledge the legitimacy of some of them.

and graduate teaching (and a seemingly necessary coincidence between one's research and graduate teaching), and a hesitancy to take risks (both academic and political).

The temporality of academic work, of research and thinking, has had to adapt to the tempos and rhythms of business. So perhaps it is not surprising that academics get caught up in the same problems as businesses—from dishonesty, misrepresentation, and exaggeration to the endless proliferation of needless products (articles, reports and books)—all defined by the demand for profit—both commercial and academic—in increasingly unregulated competitive environments. And as universities become centralized—interestingly emulating the inefficient corporations of fifty years ago, while being governed by contemporary managerial practices, they encourage—in deed if not in words—academics to shift their loyalty from the institution (the last vestiges of such concern may rest with the department, but even that is challenged by the increasing fragmentation of disciplines) to an almost total investment in one's own career, making the constant demand for increased productivity a reasonable expression of self-interest. There is a wonderfully circular symmetry that aligns apparently mutual interests.

It is important to realize that not all of these are inherently bad developments and, more importantly, they are often reasonable responses to the new material conditions of people's labor and life. Having lived through these changes, I realize that my analysis of the changing intellectual practices of knowledge production depends in part on my sense that other ways of working as intellectuals and academics are possible. But I want to separate myself from the all too common responses. While faculty often bemoan and try to defend universities against the worst of the charges and changes, it is surprising how often the terms within which the university is defended are simply nostalgic and patronizing. They harken back half a century to defend an institutional model (and set of practices) that apparently does not need to respond to historical changes. Rather than foregrounding the history of the modern research university, which, in the U.S., was itself invented in the late nineteenth century and redesigned somewhat in the 1950s and 60s— in response to what were perceived as the needs of emergent social institutions, changes and populations—academics find themselves defending something they had previously criticized, something which was invented to meet the needs of

a very different society.[19] I do not assume that the older institutionalizations of the academy were somehow more desirable, simply that they had different problems and failures. I am not nostalgic for the university of the 1960s and 70s, but I do want to suggest that other organizations of higher education and knowledge production are possible. Such nostalgia reveals a deep lack of imagination: in this case, an unwillingness or inability to imagine the university otherwise—not by simply rejecting it (as elitist, or the servant of capitalism or corporate or military or . . . interests), but by asking about what sorts of knowledge and education are necessary for the contemporary world, beyond current conceptions of education as job training or liberal incantations of skills and capacities, and how they might be actualized institutionally. What the left does not have is a vision of what the university could and should be, what it might become and how it might realize these possibilities.

There are many criticisms that have been and can be made of the contemporary university, including some from both the left and from inside the university. But one has to be cautious here not to assume that one already knows the problems and the solutions, or how specific intellectual and political failures relate to specific features of the extant academy. The university has to be approached with a sense of complexity, a sense that there are no easy answers, for every solution has to be seen in terms of what Hall (1981) called the double movement of resistance and containment. For example, there are some who think the university should be a democracy, arguing against the increasing sham that the institution is governed by the faculty's scholarly and pedagogical commitments. I agree that the university must open its conversations to more democratic possibilities, and that decisions should be made in a transparent environment in which all opinions can be heard. But it is also the case that democracy is not the universal panacea, and that the university is not supposed to be defined totally by democracy, for it is and in part has to be a meritocracy of sorts, in which questions of value and experience matter. This need not describe a rigid hierarchy, closed to change and challenge. Even more narrowly, concerning the production of knowledge, intellectuals face a contradiction: on the one hand, it is absolutely vital that they democratize and multiply the voices that are part of the conversations of knowledge. Previous (and in some cases, still domi-

19 This is not uncommon on the left. The left ends up defending the very institutions that it has previously attacked; it does not even bother to explain the conditions that such institutions were meant to mitigate, or the blood and sweat struggles that were needed to create them.

nant) systems of judgment and commensuration were all too often defined by ex-nominated standards and socio-political positions. But the resulting chaos of overproduction and crisis of authority do not provide a solution, nor does the assumption embodied in intellectual versions of crowdsourcing and group-think. These are serious problems that pose the difficult challenge of re-imagining the possibilities of knowledge production and education.

I think that there are answers, often multiple and complex answers, to address the different demands of and for knowledge, but I think academics need to start by not assuming that they know the questions that need to be asked or the answers that can be offered. Might they need to step back from their own reproduction of the demands of the "new" university, even if they think that they can meet those demands in critical and politically sophisticated ways? Might they need to ask themselves difficult questions? How do they answer a public that asks why they should pay for the sorts of research (and possibly teaching as well) that increasingly seems to define left intellectualism? How do academics explain what appears to many to be the increasingly arrogant assumption of political and moral superiority, which allows them to assume that the sorts of knowledge they produce constitute a necessary and valuable social good that society is morally obligated to support? Might left intellectuals want to ask what practices of knowledge production are for? Should they not give more credence to public and popular questions about the academy? Might they need to examine the relation of their own actions to the crises of knowledge in the contemporary world? Do they need to reflect on their own obligations and responsibilities, on the one hand, to the specific authority of academic—intellectual—work and, on the other hand, to the society that supports their privilege?

The left can reimagine the university—both as research and education—in relation to the emerging needs of contemporary forces and populations, rather than simply assuming the worth of its endeavors without any reference to its context. This will require the left to do more than resist efforts to remake the university in the image of a business, or in the service of solely economic needs. And while I do not want to fall back into a naive voluntarism, as if one could ignore the structural conditions of possibility and the various pressures and constituencies that are invested in its shape, I do insist that change is possible and that left academics have a vital role to play in these struggles. But they need to find and to create the sorts of conversations that would allow them, col-

lectively, across disciplines, institutions and social spaces, to move forward, however slowly and humbly. Such struggles have to be approached carefully and handled with care.

Knowledge, the undiscovered country

The right's common contradictory description and equation of relativism and indoctrination as the practice of left intellection may not be as off the mark as one might think, since both are in a sense derived from a common root/route. In a significant sense, the crises of knowledge are the Frankenstein's monster that no one, at least in the academy, intended to bring to life. Yet this monster was built in large part in the academy, in the second half of the 20thcentury; its institutional infrastructure depended on the organizational and economic changes of the academy, while its intellectual foundations were laid in the "invention" of a transdisciplinary notion of theory. This is not to say that theory did not exist before its invention. After all, "theory" has always been a part of intellectual work, whether in the form of scientific hypotheses, or more importantly here, in the less well defined political, social and literary theories at the end of the 19th and the early 20th century (the founding work of Dewey, Durkheim, Weber, Lukacs, Richards, Leavis, etc.). Here theory was, to a large extent, differentiated from philosophy by its more restricted domain of reference and less abstract generalities. It was often marked by a difficult relation to science, which had, since the 18th century, been closely linked with the very notions of knowledge, reason and progress. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the hard sciences—as formalizable/mathematically representable knowledge—gained both popular prestige and the ability to impose their practice as the only valid form of knowledge (scientism).[20] As a result, academic philosophy in the English-speaking world was increasingly seen as the "handmaiden" of science; its task was to describe the nature of scientific theories and knowledge in logical rather than ordinary languages, where science is understood as producing knowledge of an "objective" world made available to the senses through technical and experimental means, although many of these terms were the subjects of prolonged debate.[21]

20 This philosophical position, which began with the defense of science in the European Enlightenment, was eventually named positivism by Auguste Comte. But its effects and power change as the understanding and practice of science changes.

21 In philosophy, this project was known as logical positivism or logical empiricism and eventually, after a series of criticisms, as analytic philosophy.

In the 1950s and 60s, two significant developments came together to challenge the power of positivism/scientism. First, the assumption, essential to positivism, that science is apolitical and objective was challenged by its increasingly visible relation to military and governmental missions (e.g. the atom bomb, Vietnam, the space race) and to a number of social horrors (e.g., the Holocaust, racism, colonialism). Such arguments did not necessarily claim that science was inherently political, but rather that it could not simply absolve itself of its political responsibilities. In the 1960s, long-standing questions about the relationships between academic science, power and state politics became the topic of heated public debates, especially on campuses. Later, the rise of various new conservative formations and alliances re-inflected the questions in terms of "tenured radicals" and the institutionalization (in a variety of forms, including new departments, journals, etc.) of explicitly politically defined work in the human sciences.

Second, and perhaps even more importantly, logical positivism came under attack, thus weakening the scaffolding that legitimated scientism. Positivism assumed an absolute distinction between statements of facts (the universally available "objects" and building blocks of knowledge) and theories or hypotheses. The two kinds of statements were connected, in scientific theories, by forms of logical operations often referred to as "translation statements." The claim that facts were independent of theoretical statements was absolutely necessary for a vision of science as objective, self-correcting and progressive (i.e., that it was not only improving its understanding of reality but also that it accumulated true knowledge even as its theories changed). This distinction, along with the demand for some notion of verification, raised problems positivists could not solve. But it was further undermined by historians and sociologists of science. Most famously in the U.S., historian of science Thomas Kuhn (1962) argued that facts and theories could not be separated, that theories made certain facts visible and important, and others invisible and unimportant, and that theories themselves depended on a broader set of assumptions (a "paradigm") about the practice of science and the nature of the world. Although Kuhn later contested the common interpretation, his reading of the history of science suggested that the history of science is discontinuous—marked by long periods of "normal science" during which scientists operated within a shared paradigm, but interrupted by "revolutions" in which a new paradigm emerged and gained dominance, making what had been invisible or irrelevant "facts" into the new defining

problems (e.g., the shift from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics). As a result, not only is scientific knowledge not progressive and cumulative but more importantly, communication across paradigms is impossible: the same theoretical terms in different paradigms have different meanings and are describing different realities. That is, for many outside the hard sciences, Kuhn seemed to be arguing that science is just another cultural form, another—often changing—way of knowing the world. Kuhn's critique, as well as that of others, undermined the certainty, essential to the authority of science, of objectivity and foundationalism, that there is a single, secure and universal basis for all true knowledge.

This "deconstruction" of the claim of the necessary truth and authority of scientific knowledge was the cornerstone of a significant, albeit not universally accepted shift in the practice of the human sciences, as the critical and qualitative study of human social and cultural life. There was a new emphasis on questions of philosophical anthropology (of the specificity and uniqueness of human life) and a return to the tradition and idea of the *Geisteswissenshaften* (literally, the science of mind or spirit), which had argued that the human sciences required different sorts of theory and methods, predicated, metaphorically at least, on the difference between movement, which raises questions of causality, and action, which raises questions of intention and understanding. If quantification provided the *lingua franca* of positivist based sciences, now a radically trans-disciplinary set of theories emerged as an alternative *lingua franca* for the human sciences. This new practice and configuration of "theory" no longer distinguished itself from philosophy per se; instead it returned to a wide range of "continental" philosophical traditions that had been largely excluded by the analytic (logical) commitments of most philosophy departments. This trans-disciplinary formation of theory does not see itself as domain-specific, presenting itself in highly abstract and often technical vocabularies.

The starting point in this newly re-assembled discourse of theory was, not surprisingly, the Enlightenment. What is surprising is that the route such theory follows leads, almost inexorably, to what I might call the "paradox of enlightenment," in which the very search for certainty and universality ends up in relativism (if not nihilism). The Enlightenment was, to a large extent, all about the possibilities of knowledge of the world, beginning as a debate between empiricism (all knowledge is grounded in the sensations that constitute our immediate awareness of the world) and rationalism (all knowledge is grounded in the innate struc-

tures and capacities of the human mind), both of which, for the most part, assumed a metaphysical dualism (between mind and body, thought and substance). Kant's Enlightenment credentials were impeccable, given his faith in the autonomy of reason and its ability to understand both the world and reason itself, and his continuing expression of what the French historian of ideas Michel Foucault (1997) described as the essence of the Enlightenment: the will to know. Yet Kant, attempting to both defend the validity of the new sciences (i.e., Galileo and Newton) and to legitimate the possibility of a variety of ways of experiencing and knowing the world (including religious and metaphysical claims, ethical norms and aesthetic experience, as well as the new science), saw the limits of both empiricism and rationalism. He argued instead that all knowledge begins with experience but does not simply arise out of experience. The "real" world, which is ultimately unknowable apart from our experience of it, contributes what might be thought of as the raw data, what the U.S. pragmatist William James would later call "a blooming buzzing confusion." And the mind contributes the relationships that organize the data into a meaningfully ordered world of experience and knowledge. This relationship constitutes the necessary conditions of possibility of the forms of existence, experience, knowledge and subjectivity that constitute human existence. In Kant's terms, they are transcendental.

Kant both embraced his Enlightenment inheritance and transformed it into a theory of relationality. This was Kant's "Copernican Revolution," in which reason can know only what it produces "after a plan of its own." It was this revolution that sent modern theory on its perilous course. Kant offered a theory of relationality. Human experience and knowledge could only be understood relationally (rather than it terms of singular facts), constituted in the mediation between the data and conceptual relations. Human beings live in a third—"phenomenal"—space, between two unknowable but necessary ("noumenal") realities: a world of real objective existence (e.g., of "things-in-themselves") as the source of data, and a universal subjectivity or mind as the source of the conceptual relations. These two postulates are not only outside of any specific human reality; they are necessarily outside human comprehension and experience. They are the transcendent and transcendental conditions of human existence and of knowledge, whether experiential, scientific, metaphysical, religious or ethical. Humans can only experience and have knowledge within

the mediated third space, and that third space is itself relational, for it is itself structured in terms of the relations between subjects and the objects of their experience.

A relational philosophy changes everything. If the human world is constituted by relations, then the reality that humans inhabit is a constructed reality, not given independently of their own existence in the world. Humans are in some part responsible for constructing the very reality they reside within. Kant's constructionism seems to make human beings into the creators or engineers of their own reality (albeit dependent on a noumenal realities they do not construct). It is not difficult to see the problem this poses, for if the phenomenal world—the only reality humans can be aware of—is constructed, then could there not be different realities? Could reality not vary in time and space? Could it not change? Kant, a figure of the European Enlightenment, would have none of that. The relations defining the phenomenal world are necessary and universal, since they are the product of the transcendent and transcendental subject. This guaranteed that there is and can only be one human reality and it must, by definition, be the reality of the European Enlightenment; it thus provided a philosophical justification for Europe to see itself as the true definers and arbiters of the human, enabling all sorts of ethical and political judgments and legitimating the range of structures and forms of power, difference and inequality that characterized the hegemony of Europe. In a sense, one might say that Kant invented the space of culture, but closed it off by making it singular and universal.

But neither Kant nor the normative imperatives of the Enlightenment could hold back the tide of " social constructionism." Most European philosophy of the 19th century and well into the 20th century was, for all practical purposes, neo-Kantian, meaning that Kant defined the parameters and challenges of philosophy. Whether one questioned or even rejected the hubris of Enlightenment universalism, philosophers faced the challenge of accounting for what seemed to be the great variety of social realities and forms of intelligibility that characterize the multiplicity of human societies/cultures across time (hence, the historical and teleological dialectic of Hegel and Marx) and space (hence, the various theories of symbolic anthropology). Understanding the multiplicity of worlds that human beings inhabit, and the diversity of experiences that they live and value, demands that one inquire into what human beings bring to the relations: how are the processes of the construction of reality themselves defined and constructed? The history of 19th century philoso-

phy can be seen, to a large extent, as various efforts to embrace and elaborate the implications of social constructionism. The various theoretical discourses that entered into the conversation of theory—e.g., dialectical, pragmatist, phenomenological, hermeneutic, structuralist and post-structuralist—all operate within the Kantian space of mediation.[22]

But many of these post-Kantian traditions, which either begin or conclude by rejecting Kant's appeal to transcendence (i.e., his assumed universalism), seem to lead inexorably to forms of relativism, although most of them refused to give up the assumption that there is a reality outside of human experience, however ultimately unknowable. In the past decade, as social constructionist arguments have become more publicly available, even becoming part of common sense, they have provided apparently sophisticated arguments for the refusal of evidence, the rejection of any claim to represent reality, and the deconstruction of any and all truths. As Enlightenment notions of reason are themselves subjected to a withering critical analysis of their limits, determinations and contingencies, one seems to end up with a democratization of all competing claims. If social constructionism is not—at least not necessarily—relativist, it would seem incumbent on those who argue for some version of it to explain how they avoid it, to provide a consistent explanation of why all realities, all knowledges, all judgments, are not themselves equally valid. Whether social constructionism necessarily arrives at relativism (Hacking, 2000), and whether it is necessarily true or not, it is generally true that post-Kantian intellectuals have not done a very good job of offering a way out of the dilemma. I am sympathetic to the view that embracing the multiplicity of knowledges, cultures and even experienced realities is good, but I also think that intellectuals have a responsibility to consider the consequences of such arguments in relation to the current context of political struggles.[23]

The situation may be even worse, as particular versions of social constructionism have argued that forms of experience and knowledge are always implicated in relations of power and politics. The differences between competing experiences of and knowledge claims about the world

22 One can now see that the project of positivism was to deny social constructionism (think of Sokal). And yet, contra Sokal, there is a related if not parallel history in science—figured around the erosion of the Newtonian vision of a stable universe and hence, of scientific certainty. This history would point to the first and second laws of thermodynamics—the former redefined the nature of matter and its relation to energy, the latter presented an entropic universe—as well as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and Einstein's theory of relativity.

23 Friends from outside the U.S. tell me that U.S. intellectuals are obsessed with the problem of relativism in ways not necessarily typical of other contexts.

can be understood and possibly adjudicated by appealing to the different political interests they express, justify and enact. Nietzsche, Marx and most recently Foucault have all been recruited into such arguments. The argument is most commonly presented in terms of Marx, where it appears to be a rather straightforward (although not the very interesting) reading of his theory of ideology and its subsequent development by other Marxist theorists. In its most famous and simplest expression, Marx and Engels (1976) suggested that the dominant ideas of a society are always the expression of the interests of the ruling classes. Although Marx himself—and some of his followers—tried to exempt Marxism itself as science, most Marxists today are more likely to suggest that Marxism itself is an expression of the political interests of the working classes or, more generally, subordinated populations. As a result, all knowledge is deeply and inherently imbued with power, even contaminated by politics. So arguments about the relative merits of various ways of experiencing the world, and of various forms and statements of knowledge, are really political struggles. And the choice comes down not to some judgment about the relative merits of epistemological claims but to a statement of political commitments. Such ideological arguments assume that the concrete social relations of power always contaminate the content of knowledge.

The result is that the politics of any knowledge claim are always guaranteed in advance, as if there was a straight line connecting any "description" to its intrinsic political position. The result is a relativism that can only be adjudicated politically. This sort of political paranoia is not very different from that of the right, which assumes that all knowledge is politically defined and even more, that one can know the politics of the knowledge by the politics of the source. As a result, for both some on the left and the right, the measure of whether democracy is realized is whether their (politically correct) knowledge wins. It is but a short leap from the assumption that the politics of the source (whether the creator or the disseminator) determines the politics of any knowledge claim to the critique of the university as an institution, which can be offered from both the left and the right. Sometimes, this is a formalist argument in which the institutional form of the academy is taken as analogous to the dominant hierarchical organization of social power, which is then assumed to contaminate the content and practice of intellectual work in the academy. Sometimes it is more that the critical work of academics is being overdetermined and undermined by the institutional appropriation of

social systems of measurement and evaluation that are not only inimical to intellectual and creative work, but are also part of the very social logics of power that our analyses might seek to understand and contest.

Recent theories go even further, rejecting—as a remnant of positivism—any claim to representation, that is, any assumption that language operates by "representing" an independently existing reality. Thus, in a revision of social constructionism, language is seen as performative and/or productive: language "fabricates" the real. Consequently, any claim to knowledge, insofar as it seems to presuppose that it is saying something about the way the world is, is suspect. Instead, language—broadly speaking—literally creates the world. Ironically, the most famous statement of such an argument was offered by journalist Ron Suskind (2004) reporting a conversation with a senior advisor to G.W. Bush: "The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from judicious study of discernable reality' . . . 'that's not the way the world really works anymore . . . We're an empire now, and when we act, we create reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously as you will—we'll act again creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'"

Such arguments are sometimes laid at Foucault's feet, but I think this is a serious misreading of his arguments on the relations of knowledge and power. Foucault (1980) argues that in the modern world, the claim to knowledge, especially when enacted by science, is not merely a claim of truth but also a statement that excludes all other knowledges from being "in the true." Science operates by driving all other forms of knowledge out of the realm in which knowledge claims can be judged to be true or false. Scientific knowledge ("in the true") need not be true; non-scientific knowledge can be neither true nor false. For example, although Newtonian physics is, technically, no longer "true," it continues to be in the true. On the other hand, while non-traditional medical practices have long been dismissed as ignorance, they have in recent decades been admitted into the true, allowing them to be seriously researched and even used. Foucault is suggesting that the power of science, an epistemological or discursive power, is an expression of its implicit positivism or more generally, of its claim to be able to represent reality with certainty. Thus, while Foucault continues the Marxist project of a materialist investigation of power as embodied and produced in the complex relationships of lan-

guage (the discursive) and the material world of social practices (the non-discursive), he vociferously refuses a theory of ideology, which, he argues, must always assume in advance the truth of science, even if that science is Marxism. Notice that his position furthers the irony of the contemporary turn to science by some theories or in certain political struggles, since science continues to operate in the exclusionary way Foucault describes.[24]

Social constructionists, including those who view language as the performance and production of the real, often fail to address what Bush's aide's comments make clear: that not every effort to "fabricate" the real, not every performance, actually succeeds; since there are always multiple performances, such acts depend crucially on the conditions of possibility for realizing such effects, and therefore, upon matters, including relations of power, existing outside of language itself. What are the conditions of possibility of effective performances/productions? This sense that knowledge depends on more than just language as normally understood leads Foucault (1980, 1997) to talk about discursive formations, which combine technologies of truth-production, and technologies of power. Without this more complex sense of power as an articulation of the discursive and the non-discursive, the critique of representation (this is the way the world is) as a particular articulation of power and performance leads straight into relativism. So one has to question whether the rejection of representation is built upon the pretense that one can avoid any claims to knowledge. If all claims to representation and knowledge are simply statements of power itself, then is the very refusal of all such claims inherently subversive? Does it assume the possibility of a world without power? Or truth?

It is important that left intellectuals re-establish the possibility that some stories are better than others, and that judgment is partly defined by empirical work, and only partly by politics—not a guaranteed political outcome but the opening up of political concerns and possibilities. This still allows that politics may be the force driving intellectuals to ask particular questions. The point is that politics does not and cannot give the answers, or the means of adjudication. Knowledge production should not be defined by the search for the right politics, but as the site of an absolutely vital responsibility, as a site of privilege both in terms of time and

24 Science may have recently discovered complexity but others have been writing about it for centuries if not millennia; yet one rarely sees this history acknowledged, and even less frequently hears of scientists sharing their grant money with non-scientists. In a sense, Foucault is not concerned with the problem of relativism, turning instead (1977) to the problem of critique.

the license to seek ways to constantly challenge one's own theoretical and political assumptions, and one's empirical findings—so as to allow the world as a witness to say no to our accounts (or yes) and to open up new possibilities of political transformation.

The critique of critique

But instead, recently, a more seductive alternative has attempted to deliver a final coup de grace to the very possibility of any search for truth, any critical knowledge. It is a battle over what it means to be a political intellectual. The debate opens up a complicated field of positions and arguments, and how specific authors are read may depend in part on the context in which they wrote.[25] But I am particularly troubled by arguments that, at least in the context of the U.S. academy, reject the possibility and utility of critical analysis in favor of forms of ethical and political activism. Such attacks depend on a series of tactical moves: first, they present critique, whether in Kant's transcendental or Marxist political terms, as the dominant commitment and practice of the ("modern") intellectual left; second, they divide the intellectual terrain into two camps, condensing many different practices under the single sign of critique; third, they present the worst possible examples of the practices of critique; and finally, they offer something other than knowledge in its stead.

The French social theorist of science, Bruno Latour (2004, p. 225), for example, asks, "Would it not be rather terrible if we were still training young kids—yes, young recruits, young cadets—for wars that are no longer possible, fighting enemies long gone, conquering territories that no longer exist, leaving them ill-equipped in the face of threats we had not anticipated, for which we are so thoroughly unprepared?" This statement suggests that critique has misdiagnosed the current context, that the critical spirit needs reinvigoration and new tools, that it needs to update its analyses to take into account the possibilities of new enemies, new territories, etc. Only in this way might the left prepare itself for the battles that need to be fought. It suggests that one must always question one's own understanding of what's going on, of the battles that need to be fought, and of the best tools and strategies for such struggles. But the critics of critique (yes, it is ironic), including Latour, seem to have something else in mind: it is not just that left intellectuals are asking the

25 Some writers, for example, most especially in Australia [e.g., Tony Bennett (1998), Cunningham (1992)], have juxtaposed a commitment to affecting policy, emphasizing the utility of knowledge, to abstract ideals of truth.

wrong questions but that the world has changed so much that any effort to seek "truth" is already doomed to failure; these critics are not out to strengthen or reshape critique but to abandon it in favor of another kind of project. They assume that any claim to offer a better understanding of what is going on reproduces the relations of power inherent in the very claim to represent—know—the world. The rejection of critical knowledge then becomes in itself an act of political resistance, creating an almost absolute schism between knowledge and politics.

What then is critique? According to Latour, critique is the deconstruction of facts, the anti-fetishization or denaturalization of taken for granted assumptions; it attempts to reveal another, deeper, material truth, somehow hidden behind or distorted within people's experience of the given empirical realities. Apparently, critique is the claim that things are not always what they seem, that there are ways of describing the world that might reveal things not already known and that might even contradict things people think they know. This does not sound particularly disturbing, but there is more being claimed, as the French philosopher Jacques Ranciere (2009, p. 27) makes clear when he says that critique involves "showing the spectator what she does not know to see and making her feel ashamed of what she does not want to see." All critique can be reduced to the simple choice between "the endless task of unmasking fetishes or the endless demonstration of the omnipotence of the beast" (p. 49). It enacts a logic "that conceives the total social machine as a process of self-concealment," and critique merely reproducing that concealment in the very act of its revelation. And to offer one final example, the U.S. political theorist Michael Hardt (2011, p. 19) first declares that "Critique has become the primary mode of practicing theory, at least theory conceived as a political intervention," and then goes on to claim that he "sense[s] today a growing dissatisfaction with the political capacities of critique." Unlike Latour and Ranciere, Hardt both acknowledges the diversity of "modes of critique"—it includes fault-finding, questioning the truth of authority, revealing figures of power, and Kantian investigations into the limits of human faculties—and yet he refuses to define it. He claims that its aim is to disclose to others the need for their own autonomy, but argues that this necessarily undermines the very possibility of their autonomy. All critique is therefore vanguardist and elitist, thereby denying its own possibilities as an emancipatory—or autonomy-producing—project. This is what one might call the paradox of autonomy. Given the very Kantian assumption—Hardt does not justify this claim—

that the aim of political struggle is individual autonomy, "the authority established by critique . . . is an obstacle to the increased autonomy of those it aimed to help." Apparently, the fact that one leads someone to water means that they cannot choose to drink and more importantly, they cannot discover the value of drinking for themselves.

The necessary failure of critique becomes even more obvious if one asks where one can find such practices of critique. Latour's examples seem to depend on paranoia and incompetence, including the most extreme and conspiratorial positions, such as claims that the attacks of 9/11 never happened (supposedly proffered by the French postmodernist Jean Baudrillard), or that it was actually the result of Israeli and/or U.S. conspiracies. Then he adds (p. 228), "What's the real difference between conspiracists and a popularized, that is a teachable version of social critique inspired by a too quick reading of, let's say, a sociologist as eminent as Pierre Bourdieu." It is difficult to know what to make of this: Critique is in trouble because too many people are either conspiracy nuts or very bad sociologists who cannot read serious theorists well. What then does one do with Bourdieu himself, who certainly practices a form of critique? Just to make life more complicated, Ranciere does not read Baudrillard's argument as critique, but precisely as an argument that critique is exhausted, "proclaim[ing] the obsolescence" of critique because "there is allegedly no longer any solid reality to counter-pose to the reign of appearances, nor any dark reverse side to be opposed to the triumph of consumer society" (p. 25). But then Ranciere turns around and suggests that Baudrilliard is a good example of critique, since his arguments only "reproduce its [critique's] mechanism," reinscribing the fact that people are victims of "the mechanism of inversion that transforms reality into illusion or illusion into reality" (p. 31).

These authors, and many who embrace these arguments, assume that critique, as they describe it, is not only the dominant mode of intellectual discourse but also the only option available, other than what Hardt calls "uncritical theory, that is, some method of affirmation of, collaboration with, or accommodation to the existing forms of power"(pp. 19-20). Critique stands condemned as "insufficient as political method insofar as [it lacks] the capacity both to transform the existing structures of power and to create alternative social arrangements"(p. 19). But in the final analysis, it is even worse: critique is complicitous with the enemy, whether because it entails the endless recycling of the "impotence of enlightened reason" (Ranciere) or because it is aligned with the emerging

modalities of control (Latour) or because it reinscribes the dominant relations of power and forms of authority (Hardt). In Hardt's terms (pp. 21, 25), what is required to achieve autonomy, understood as an escape from all power, is the "courage . . . together to make an exodus from authority . . . [I]n order for us to exit from minority . . . to generate the courage to think and act for ourselves, to leave behind the practices of passivity and obedience with respect to authority, we must . . . destroy the social structures of hierarchy and authority that perpetuates obedience." It appears that critique, the very attempt to diagnose the problem, to understand what is going on, has encouraged intellectuals to allow themselves "to be considered as friends by the wrong sort of allies." Critique has become a "critical barbarity!" (As I have said, I find such rhetorics of complicity—that one's potential allies are actually working with or for the enemies—extremely unproductive and even dangerous in the present context.)

So what is the alternative to critique? Certainly not to recognize the full range of critical work, or to set about rethinking and rescuing critique. There are three answers proposed: epistemological, ethical and political. Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) speaks to the first. It offers a radically empiricist practice embodying a "stubbornly realist attitude," in which everything can be described as a network. The larger the network, the more relations are assembled, the more real is the network. The work of the ANT intellectual is to re-assemble the facts [or relations] into networks, or rather, to describe how a variety of agents (or "actants") —which importantly cannot be limited to humans—assemble networks around their own projects.[26]

Both Latour and Ranciere also champion an ethico-political project. For Latour, the intellectual's responsibility is defined by a politics of care, in which "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is . . . the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution" (p. 246). This seems to imply that practicing ANT is itself an ethical act. Ranciere, in a somewhat similar vein, proposes emancipation as the con-

26 There are significant problems with ANT. Latour does not tell us what distinguishes qualitatively different sorts of networks. There does not seem to be any need for an appeal to matters of politics or concepts, and it cannot seem to explain why only some "actants" are able to recruit other elements into their project/network and why some are more successful than others. Moreover, I am not sure why ANT is not, in its own right, a form of critique, discovering what is not always and already obvious about the organization of reality, without assuming a deep hidden truth.

struction of new capacities, reconfiguring "the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought" and thus "to alter the field of the possible and a distribution of capacities and incapacities"(p. 49). And while I am all for care and caution in relation to efforts to construct new organizations in and of reality, and to enable an emancipatory set of capacities, I do not see how this can be accomplished, or how any care-giver might compare the relative value of different constructions, without some form of critique. Nor am I sure why such efforts falls solely upon the intellectual, or why the ethical-political project necessarily displaces the project of critical knowledge. How is one to know whether all capacities are equally emancipatory, and whether capitalism may not similarly seek the expansion of capacities as it seeks, according to such critics, the logic and practice of critique? Hardt proposes a straightforwardly political alternative (although recently, along with his co-author, Tony Negri, he has taken up an "ethics of love"); he proposes a radically anti-authority "militancy," which makes social struggles themselves into the locus of theory and the production of knowledge, and which relocates authority in the very position of marginality of those who struggle. It is as if "the theory of practice and practice of theory are superseded by social upheavals that do the work of philosophy directly." (http://www.minorcompositions.info/?p=56) Militancy not only destroys the dominant modes of authority and control, but also prefigures another form of life as truth-telling. The unanswered question is how one knows "the truth" to tell and why the fact of marginality is sufficient to guarantee truth.

There is a real if unacknowledged irony in these critiques of critique. After all, each of these theorists has, in his own work, discovered something going on in the world that ordinary people do not already know and that is not obvious, something that is "below the surface" or perhaps, it is available on the surface if only one knows how and where to look: Latour has "discovered" that everything is really composed of "actor networks;" Hardt and Negri (2001) have discovered the new reality of Empire and the multitude; and Ranciere (p. 49) calls upon intellectuals to crack open "the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible" (as scenes of "dissensus"). Why are such tasks or discoveries not forms of critique? Is it not possible to think that there are other critical relations that may exist between intellectuals, reality and people, without assuming mass ignorance or stupidity (even in the form of false consciousness that continues to plague some Marxists and even, more generally, leftists) and yet, without giving up the necessity for critical analytical work? Is there

not some relationship between the need for critique and the possibilities of the sorts of ethical and political visions that such authors offer in its stead?

I have no doubt that there are some leftist intellectuals whose work fits Latour's and Ranciere's descriptions of critique, who treat ordinary people as if they were cultural dopes, and who assume that power operates precisely by offering itself up as a hidden truth, a secret to be uncovered. I also do not doubt that there is a good deal of critical work that has become lazy, merely a matter of repeating claims and judgments that are taken for granted. As Kant said over two hundred years ago, too many intellectuals are simply too lazy (to do the hard and self-critical work) or too afraid of disagreeing with those to whom they hold themselves answerable. But that is not the end of the story, for it is not a valuable intellectual argument to dismiss an idea based on its worst versions; rather one must seek out the best critical practices. Many critical intellectuals, myself included, have been criticizing such shoddy versions of critique, and the assumptions on which they are built, for a long time. They would agree that it is impossible to build a political struggle by establishing a vanguard that thinks it is in sole possession of a hidden truth, but willing to share it with "the people" who are unaware or even unable to understand that they are living a lie or an illusion, even if the hidden truth is that there is no truth.

Latour, Ranciere and even Hardt seem to misconstrue the nature of critique. Consider Marx's (1993) critique of classic political economy, which is commonly reduced to an argument that political economy offered a false understanding of capitalism by focusing on the mere surface (market, exchange) and hiding the true reality (production). This is the image of critique that its critics put forth. But there are better ways of understanding Marx's argument, not as operating within a logic of truth and falsity, of the visible appearance and the hidden reality, but rather in a logic of misrepresentation, inadequacy, and partiality. Classical political economy tells the story of the circuit of capital with only the limited conceptual and empirical resources of part of that circuit—namely exchange and consumption. What is "concealed" is not hidden in some metaphysical sense, but simply rendered absent by the account itself, and that is the complexity of the totality of circuit, which also includes production and distribution, all in complex relations. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, Marx argued that classic political economy is flawed because it is unable to see the historical determinations of its own starting points.

It "naturalizes" its conceptual categories, and universalizes them in both time and space. Hence, in a sense, it assumed that history—of both economies and of economics—was over as soon as they began their work, that the final truth had been realized.

I want to try to move forward by turning to the important (but often unacknowledged) essay by the feminist queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1997), which describes what she calls "habits of interpretations" and points to the "methodological centrality" of suspicion in current critical practice, grounded in the thought of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. But it is not suspicion that she challenges, but the paranoia that increasingly follows—but need not—from suspicion, which is why I would prefer to talk about uncertainty. In a paranoid mode, critique always finds what it already knows, always finds the conspiracy that it expected to find behind the surface of reality. Her critique then is not of critique itself but of forms of critique that seek only to confirm what they already know, to confirm their paranoia. She also affirms another set of habits, a hermeneutics of faith or what she calls reparative criticism, although she has little to say about it beyond asserting that it is connected to pleasure and amelioration, and that it is "motivated by life." It has been read as demanding a loving support for and even celebration of the creative possibilities of and experimentations with alternative ways of living, of doing the things that enable a community to survive and flourish (thus linking it to the sorts of ethico-political visions discussed above). But I think Sedgwick is suggesting that reparative criticism depends in large part on our ability to do a better job of critique. Her argument is not with critical work, but with the saturation of critical work by a particular "structure of feeling" that makes it "less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations" (p. 4). In this way, Sedgwick may help us go on thinking about these matters productively.

I do not believe that one can strategize opposition and project futures *solely* on political-ethical grounds, without the absolutely vital intercession of knowledge as an intellectual production. I do not believe that one can build an effective political struggle without the diagnostics or analytics of what's going on, which enable people to know more than they currently know, and to be able to tell better stories. Without such work, a political-ethical project runs the danger of becoming a new universalism in which politics is freed from the specificity of its context and, as it were, reduced to ethics. And I fear that, failing to grasp and theorize the complex empirical mediations may condemn the left to what Canclini

(cited in Martín-Barbero, 2004, p. 310) describes as moving "from the sham of hegemony to the sham of democracy." Does critical work inevitably involve the search for and revelation of as yet unseen truth? Yes, it aims to tell people things they do not already know or understand. Is the invisibility of such truths always and inevitably the result of subterfuge, of nefarious machines whose work is precisely to hide their own work? That is an empirical question, which can only be answered after some research. Just because relations are not visible to many people or are not part of our shared understanding does not mean they are actively or intentionally hidden. It means that one has to do the work of making the relations visible. Are the masses incapable of finding, understanding or accepting such truths? Not at all, although one has to tell stories that speak to people, and that do not assume they are too stupid or gullible to deal with the stories one tells. (Admittedly the very crises of knowledge I have been describing seem to make the task ever more difficult.) In fact, why does what Latour's ethics of care or Ranciere's ethics of capacities mitigate the importance of concrete political understandings and transformative interventions into the existing lived relations of power in people's lives? The assembling and care of networks and capacities does not happen outside of already existing systems, organization and institutions of power. At its best, critique might be seen as seeking to understand the conditions that enable or disable the possibilities of particular relations, of particular capacities. Retuning to Bush's aide, I agree that academics do seek a better understanding of what is going on, and how it has been brought about, but they do it precisely because it opens the possibility of more people becoming actors in history. Knowledge of the actual gives people knowledge of possibilities, of the openings that might enable them to move toward a different future. And better stories allow intellectuals to speak to a broader set of constituencies, to try to win people into the struggles to establish such futures.

I refuse to accept the binarism that poses a choice between two opposed possibilities: the paranoid search for certainties already known, and the rejection of knowledge in favor of acts of creativity and love. But the problem is even greater. What is at stake here is the value and authority of (academic) knowledge, and the argument is over what appears to be an increasingly common de facto rejection of knowledge, even within the academy. Again, as I suggested, this conclusion is partly the result of a relativism that seems to emerge from the social constructionism that dominates much of recent, modernist theory: that human beings

have no direct access to "reality," that all of our experience and knowledge of the world are mediated by cognitive, cultural or social practices and structures. This transcendental theory of mediation, as a particular understanding of relationality, which can ultimately be traced back to Kant, was able to avoid the threat of relativism as long as it assumed that the mediations were themselves transcendent. But once it became clear that the forms of mediation are contingent, and that any standards of comparison and evaluation are themselves immanent to the forms of mediation, theories of social constructionism seemed to follow an unavoidable path to relativism. In more contemporary terms, if language cannot and does not simply represent a world that is objectively and independently present, then the relevant question cannot be a matter of the accuracy or objectivity of one's representations.

But if people are making reality, how are they to make judgments? In fact, what is to count as knowledge? The second alternative path, which assumes that critical knowledge is little more than either the expression of political paranoia or the reinscription of political power, means that it is both impossible and value-less. In the end, both sides have largely failed to explain how they avoid contributing to the fate of knowledge—the crises of knowledge—in the contemporary conjuncture, except to say that if there is no stable truth, then the charge makes no sense (which is sort of like saying that I cannot be guilty because there is no pure innocence). It does not convince academic opponents, and it certainly has not convinced those outside the academy. The result is a potentially catastrophic crisis—the consequence of the fusion of the different crises I have discussed (and no doubt others)—around the value and possibility of knowledge and its associated practices, like critique and education. Significant fractions of the left, and especially left intellectuals, end up participating in the construction of the very crises that undermine their efforts to construct an effective opposition. On the one hand, they continue to act in ways that undermine the very possibility of knowledge and the authority of those institutions capable of making judgments about and organizing the apparent chaos and contradictions of information and knowledge. And on the other hand, they continue to act as if the crises did not exist at all, as if the contemporary organic crisis can be solved by "speaking the truth," assuming that the left can lay claim to the truth that others do not yet have. And the very certainty with which the left makes such claims, in the face of the radical epistemic un-

certainty of contemporary society, means that it becomes yet another expression of the affective formations that are a key part of the organic crisis. It is to this affective formation that I now turn.

CHAPTER 3—HOW DOES IT FEEL?

An organic crisis is a prolonged fusion of multiple crises appearing at every level (economic, political, social and cultural) and stretching across the entire space of the social formation. It defines a society in crisis, as a problem space, although exactly how that problem space is understood is precisely the beginning of the political struggles that emerge in response to such a crisis. This would suggest that the crises of knowledge might be seen as both the result of and a response to the structuring contradictions of the broader political landscape, which puts these epistemological questions into conversation with other dimensions of the current context. Moreover, such a crisis is, in the end, not only "objectively" defined by the material and institutional limits and failures that seem to render a society incapable of adapting itself to the changing circumstances and demands of its material existence; it is also defined by the ways people experience it. I want to propose that in the contemporary context, that experience is characterized on the one hand as a rather disjointed set of personal (which does not mean they are not shared) complaints, dissatisfactions, judgments, etc., and on the other hand as a common affective organization of everyday life (which does not mean it is not lived differently).

While many people may be appalled by the objective condition of U.S. society, their political feelings and their decisions about whether and where to get involved are likely to arise as much out of their own efforts, frequently frustrated and ineffective, to navigate the complexities of their own ordinary relations to and feelings about the world—occasionally hopeless, occasionally forced to consent or even to be optimistic, occasionally cynical, and occasionally angry. While people—more often, political intellectuals and politically active people—may have a list in their heads of the "objective" crisis and problems society faces, it is perhaps more common that people have a different kind of list. I have been keeping such a list on my computer. It is composed of small statements and events. It is a rather hit-and-miss collection of all the outrages, both big and little, I have felt—how can this be happening?—and encountered in the news, at my job or in my everyday life. It is an archive of emotional, visceral and often immediate responses to what's going on around me. I have been adding to it for years, but only intermittently, because in the end, I know that "it just doesn't matter" (to echo Bill Murray's ultimate cynicism in *Meatballs*). I call the file "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to

take it anymore," borrowing from the cult classic *Network*. It is a record of sorts of my relations to the world (and to people) as an intellectual and an academic, a leftist and a citizen, a father and a son, a husband and a brother, a friend and a teacher, caught between the pleasures of everyday life (which demand a certain rigor) and the rigors of the academy (which produce all sorts of pleasures).

Many people are bothered, disturbed, and angered by many things, constantly bombarded with a sense that things are not supposed to be this way. My sense is that most people have such a list—even if they don't actually write it down. Let's call it, following Luther, a redress of grievances or (perhaps more accurately), a disorganized collection of traces of and responses to bits of information, events, messages and encounters with the world. In fact, the list is close to incoherent, impossible to organize, because it is derived from the immediacy of one's life and sentiments, and therefore, difficult to align with a single political position. It is almost always framed by comparisons (often to the past, with a nostalgic tinge), ethical judgments, political feelings or personal experiences. It may include responses to various "objective" problems but more commonly, to specific instances of these problems, already inflected by one's emotional and bodily habits, modes of attention, moods, sense of what matters, etc.

It throws together a complexity, even chaos, of feelings, traces without an inventory: of helplessness when confronting global disasters or coming threats; of confusion when faced with contradictory information or competing demands; of resentment at failed promises and policies; of *ressentiment* and envy at unearned success; of terror at certain future possibilities; of boredom with the repetitiveness of tasks; of desperation at the overwhelming but mostly trivial range of choices; of annoyance at the increasing difficulties—and the increasing demands on our time and energy—of the mundane tasks of everyday life; of incomprehension in the face of the multiplicities and often irrationalities of media messages (television, for example, is both better and worse than it has ever been, and advertising has become both exceedingly banal and increasingly incomprehensible) and acts of censorship; of anger at the hypocrisy of the greatest part of public and governmental actions (whether of legislators, courts, police, churches, etc.) whether built upon mean-spirited political platforms or self-serving responses to immediate events; of disappointment with decisions and acts of unfairness and unkindness; of dissatisfaction with our fellow citizens who embrace simultaneously lit-

eral and highly selective readings of increasingly sacred texts (the Constitution, the bible, etc.); of befuddlement at the flawed logics that seem to be shaping the world (e.g., if you cut people's salaries, they will not want to pay taxes, then you can cut services so that people will not see them as worth supporting); of desire and jealousy at the constant depictions of wealth and luxury, even in mainstream media; of despair when confronting the ever-recurring acts of corporate malfeasance and greed; of hopelessness about what one can do even in the everyday choices we make; of sadness at all the examples that hard work no longer matters; of worry at the technological and economic changes that increasingly constitute our lives; of discomfort with the changing nature of our relations with all sorts of professional (one spends much more time with medical assistants and so little with the actual doctors) and service people; of anxiety about the future, one's own and even more, one's children's; of frustration at the ways noble achievements and good actions are used for the most inglorious ends (as if WW2 was fought so people can own AK47s or refuse to pay taxes); of cynicism about the actual outcome of well-intentioned promises and acts; of incredulity at the proliferation and effectiveness of what some "know" to be falsehoods and lies; of horror at the priorities by which people can spend a fortune on luxuries and pets, while ignoring the crises of young children; of resignation at a diminishing sense of control, rights and power in the face of the growing power of the wealthy, the corporations and the government; of fear about security (in relation to computers, economics and terrorism); of shame when the nation ends up acting or looking like its "enemies" or countries often patronizingly represented as not quite "civilized" or modern, often mocking them in an effort to self-righteously reassert the nation's moral superiority; but also, I must admit, somewhat embarrassingly, of a defensive patriotism when the attacks and criticisms become overbearing, and I find myself wanting to point to the positive accomplishments and contributions of the U.S.; and yet, of disbelief at how easy it is for people to continue to act, against all the evidence (on quality of life measures), that the U.S. is the "best" country in the world.[1] But of course these rather negative sentiments are often balanced by moments of concern, sympathy, generosity, pride, joy, solidarity, hope and love. The lists cover everything from the trifling details of everyday life to the complaints about how one is treated commercially (do "they" really think "we" are so

1 Sometimes, I have to admit, it is hard to not feel that we are living through the rise and fall of the Roman Empire.

stupid as not to have noticed that "they" are screwing "us" once again?) to whatever one sees as the larger hypocrisies, unreasonableness, injustices and even coming catastrophes of public life.

The affective politics expressed in such lists, immediately and often viscerally felt, are often condensed and expressed by statements such as "the world just doesn't make sense anymore," or that things are "not the way they are supposed to be." This everyday alienation is different from other more common sentiments: things are not the way I want or expected them to be. It is not nostalgia for a past or the cry of disappointed expectations, although it may be articulated in such forms at certain moments. And while such sentiments echo the commonly observed anomie (and nostalgia) of people living through the rapid changes and creative destructions of capitalism and modernity, I do not think they can be dismissed as simply another example of the same old thing. Understanding this affective space will require exploring other questions and dimensions of the conjuncture, following a different path. Recall Latour's challenge: what if the wars, the territories and the enemies we imagine we are fighting no longer exist, and we are "thoroughly unprepared" to fight the threats of this new world. I prefer the more modest, less certain and less antagonistic path suggested by Landry et al. (1985) that we are perhaps using "the wrong kind of algebra?" What might this mean? What other logics, other ways of re-uniting broken parts—the Arabic root of the term "algebra"—might give some insight into the state of the left. The sort of list I have been describing points us toward matters of sentiment or feeling, or what in contemporary theory is broadly conceived of as "affect." I want to consider the affective territorialization of people's lived realities into a specific organization—what I will call an organization of pessimism—through the formation of what the English literary historian Raymond Williams (1961, 1977) called "structures of feeling."

I want to emphasize, from the very start, that my description of the affective organization of the conjuncture is not intended to be complete; there are other structures of feelings, formations and organizations that I am not considering, but I do believe that those I elucidate here are among the most pertinent to the paradox of the left. Yet obviously, these structures and the organization of pessimism they comprise are distributed, configured and hence, inhabited differently by people, for any number of reasons, including social and political positions. People will live this organization—and be implicated in it—in different ways, from loss to uncertainty to precarity to anger to cynicism to . . . But I fear that

left intellectuals have become so aware of the differences (often defined by sociological categories) that they avoid the commonalities. I want to try to tease out something of the common structures of feeling and their configuration into an organization of pessimism that define at least a part of the affective specificity of the contemporary problem space.

A politics of affect

It is not that affect has suddenly appeared as a political concern for the first time in the current conjuncture, but the conjuncture is posing or rather foregrounding questions that may have often remained in the background previously, in terms of the operation and organization of power and possibility. While affect is always a determined and determining dimension of the organizations of a lived reality and a distribution of power, it is not always already political. It takes work to make it explicitly political and to put into the service of particular political struggles. It regularly appears in political appeals of charisma, populism and patriotism, in tactics of fear and demonization, and in what Keynes called "the animal spirits" at play in the economy. I believe that the importance of affect has changed, both quantitatively and strategically, since the 1960s and especially since the ascension of the various alliances of new conservatisms and capitalist fractions[2], which have appropriated many of their strategies, from the various left movements of the 1960s. Affect has increasingly come to saturate political positions, discourses (e.g., campaigns) and struggles, and even some of the more "personal" and therapeutic forms of rule that Janet Newman (forthcoming) and others call "emotion governance." But just as importantly, it has become a site of political struggle in its own right, both in terms of particular structures of feeling, and of the popular "mattering maps" within which people calculate the relative importance and value of various aspects and dimensions of their lives. I believe that these affective determinations play a crucial part in the failure of the left to organize and mount effective political challenges to the directions of social transformation in the U.S.

Despite an explosion of talk about affect in contemporary academic work, affect is one of the least well-defined concepts in the current theoretical tool-chest. It is not just that the term seems to carry numerous—rather different—meanings, but even more, that its use is often, to put it bluntly, sloppy. Many arguments about and analyses of affect work only

2 Perhaps the rise of financial capital and futures markets is not coincidental since they operate to a large extent function as expressions of public mood-swings.

because the meaning of the concept continuously changes, sliding among different registers (between matters of ontology and materiality—of capacities, affordances, intensities, causalities and bodies, and matters of discourse and experience). Therefore, let me begin by explaining what I mean by affect. My use of the concept draws on a rich and diverse set of efforts to think about such matters, including work in psychoanalysis, phenomenology, anthropology, feminism, and cultural studies, as well as some anti-Kantian theory (often described as an ontological turn, see chapter 4), and joins a conversation that has been going on for a long time, with many others.[3] Affect raises questions at the intersection of the psyche, the body and the social—understood not as distinct realms but as relational dimensions of the totality of any lived reality, as historically constituted and articulated, as a socio-political rather than an individualist construction in the first instance. To talk about affect is to recognize that human life is defined at any moment by numerous dimensions or registers, which are always articulated into relations and into specific formations of lived reality or experience. More specifically, affect points to the multiple forms of discursive expression or expressivity, the variety of ways their effects are produced, related and organized, and how such expressive apparatuses organizes material contexts into lived environments.[4]

Affect actually encompasses a wide variety of effects of discourses, many of which have been ignored or under-valued by previous accounts of experience and culture. Many of the dominant theories of language, discourse and culture, under the influence of Kantian and post-Kantian thought, have involved sophisticated investigations of a limited set of effects, mostly around questions of signification, representation and subjectivity. The effects of discourse have been described, through a variety of theories of mediation, as the production of maps of meaning and subject-positions. In political terms, this has traditionally been taken, on the one hand, as the realm of rational deliberation and civic/civil politics, and on the other, as the realm of ideological conflict. But this vision offers

3 Including, among many others, Sarah Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Paul Gilroy, Ghassan Hage, Meaghan Morris, Elspeth Probyn, Renato Rosaldo, Margaret Wetherell, the ghost of Raymond Williams. See Gregg and Seigworth (2010). My own appropriation of the ontological turn discussed in the following chapter is to read Deleuze and Guattari in terms of the multiplicity of regimes of signs and mixed discursive formations, resulting in an effort to describe the varied relations between expression and content. See Grossberg (1992, 2010, forthcoming (a) and (b)).

4 Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to this as the milieu becoming a territory. I think of such discursive apparatuses or formations, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms as "collective assemblages of enunciation," comprised of multiple regimes of signs, especially what Guattari called a-signifying semiotics.

a rather flat sense of human life, and fails to capture the felt sense or experience of a lived reality. Affect, on the other hand, describes various dimensions or registers that define the density and vitality of the lived, that mark embodied experience as living and lived. It refers to a wide range of different expressive effects or experiences, including what we commonly call the passions, feelings, emotions, attention, moods (including, I might point, out optimism and pessimism), sentiments, desires, longings, investments (concerns or matterings), belongings or identifications, frenzies, etc. But affect is not the other of meaning and representation.[5] The so-called "rational" or cognitive side of human experience, partly the result and expression of specific discourses, is always intimately interconnected—and hence resonates, at any moment—with at least some dimensions or formations of affect. When, at times, cognition (meaning, reason) and affect appear to be distinct and unrelated, it is only the result of historical struggles that have empowered particular discursive formations that produce the appearance of such a radical rift.[6]

So what are that marks the "affective?" One can start by noting that affects are characterized by matters of degree or measures of intensity. Affects can always be compared quantitatively, as more or less strong for example. This already suggests that affects have an unavoidable materiality; they are always visibly embodied, manifested as bodily effects and expressions; they are viscerally lived. While contemporary theory argues that signification and representation are also material and embodied practices, affective processes (for many reasons) do seem to involve more directly matters of corporeality, almost as if they emanated directly from and operated directly on the body. But they do not and they cannot be understood as pure materialities that establish immediate relations between bodies, that necessarily produce unmediated effects. Nor does it mean that affect is either personal/individual or even more radically, pre-personal and pre-individual (or pre-social). It may seem that way because, in many forms of contemporary common sense as well as the dominant theories of social existence, experience is constituted through the cognitive/signifying production of subjectivity and individuality.

5 In fact, maps of meaning and representation may themselves be thought of affectively, but with generally low levels of what I will describe as the intensity that marks affect.

6 I am avoiding the question, intentionally, of whether it makes sense to talk about forms of "affective" intelligence.

Affect is not some sort of natural or biological reality but a complex construction (both outrage and apathy have to be produced) of embodied ways of being in the world. Contemporary theory defines discourse (including those responsible for meaning) as regimes of signs or enunciation, i.e., that produce "incorporeal transformations" or effects at a distance. Yet this does not mean that discourses do not affect bodies, or that they are not expressions of bodies, but that they always work at and through a distance, that they are always complexly mediated (although not in Kantian terms) rather than in direct and immediate contact. Hence, the affective is always relational; it is produced as an effect, and in turn, it produces its own effects, but neither of these relations is simple or linear. Affect is not autonomous but rather always articulated by and to other registers, including the discursive, the cognitive, the ideological, the bio-political, etc., although the specific nature of such relations varies greatly. Affect only exists in and as the result of specific formations. Most importantly here, I want to emphasize that affect is always the effect of apparatuses that are partly discursive. In fact, the production of any specific affect is an effect of specific discursive formations, but that does not mean that it is necessarily produced through practices of signification or representation, or that it is transparent to cognitive processes, or for that matter, that it defines its own forms of "rationality."

Finally, affect is always organized, in terms of both the differentiation and cross-fertilization of the different affective registers, and in terms of the organization of specific discursive/affective formations, however one attempts to describe them—e.g. as structures of feeling, affective economies, mattering maps, ecologies of belonging. At the same time, affect functions as the energetic glue that attaches subjects to objects and experiences, that stitches bodies and subjects into formations and organizations of social (rather than individual) experience; it provides the stickiness that binds relations together into larger and larger spaces, each with its own sense of coalescence, coherence or consistency. Affective organizations and formations can become sites of struggle.

The left need to think about how affective territories are organized, how they are produced and change, through the work of particular discursive-affective formations: according to different figurations and scales, intensities and durations; via different rhythms, forms and patterns of circulation and communication, directed by specific "affective magnets" into affective epidemics and habits. Such descriptions would avoid the sorts of

mystifications that are expressed in notions like affective atmospheres or public waves of feeling, as if affect physically overwhelmed individuals, which sometimes appear even in otherwise sophisticated cultural analysis, confusing the immediate experience with the analysis. One might think of the different articulations of affect as arrayed along a number of continua—from personal to impersonal, from cognitive to bodily, from subjective to behavioral, from individual to social, etc.—although rarely exemplifying the pure, absolute forms of any of them. Understanding the politics of affect (what I have previously called a politics of feeling) and its increasing power and visibility requires changing the all too common starting point of the left. It must take seriously Sedgwick's (1997, p. 2) demand that political intellectuals move "from the nonsensical . . . question of how people should feel to the much harder ones of how they do feel and how feelings change." Does the left actually know what people feel today? Does it know what they want? What they believe in and might be willing to fight for? Does it understand their rage, fears, uncertainties, anxieties, hopes, desires? Even more, does it know what possible ethical ground might justify its claiming to know what people should feel?

Does the left even know what people's apparent consent means? Does it know to what and how are they consenting? Perhaps the left should not assume too quickly that it always already understands how people are positioned by and position themselves affectively; perhaps it should take account of a multiplicity of possible affective responses and forms of consent to the broader forms and structures of power that define contemporary social relations. The left seems to impose a binary organization on the question of people's relation to power—either consent (acceptance) or resistance (rejection, opposition, escape). Of course, consent does not mean consensus; one can consent without actually agreeing with the content of an ideology or the actual structures of power. And moreover, consent can either be passive or active, dispassionate or passionate. But such differentiations of the affectivity of consent may be insufficient to the effort to change people's behaviors and habits, their attitudes and beliefs. The affective conditions of possibility of change might require a more complicated picture of the multiplicity of affective modes of consent, of the variety of ways in which people enact their acceptance of power and subordination: enthusiastic consent, limited consent, grudging consent, hopeful consent, hopeless consent, disaffected consent, negotiated consent, ironic consent, recalcitrant consent, desperate consent, forced consent, but also willful neglect, active avoidance, righteous

indignation, enraged impotence, and so on, shading into multiple forms of rejection, resistance and escape. Only when the left begins to address this complexity will it be able to engage with and negotiate the affective struggles and contemporary possibilities of political participation and spectatorship.[7]

I want now to describe some of the ways affect is configured and becomes a site of political struggle and possibility. These are not individuated or subjective phenomenologies; they describe social or trans-individual, historically effective realities. The first, more foundational affective organizations are the "structures of feeling," which constitute the changing texture or tonality of a lived context, but also its possibilities and limits; they define what it feels like to be alive in a specific context. They define what changes are both allowed and disallowed; they are where the struggle to make new and emergent experiences livable and knowable is carried out. Moreover, any structure of feeling is expressed in a variety of ways at different social sites for different populations. That is, different groups have available to them different possibilities for how they might be located within and occupy such affective modes of living; it is important to recognize that such locations are not necessarily determined by nor do they necessarily determine specific political positions. As a result, structures of feeling are radically contextual constructs, the overdetermined products of historical relations and struggles. They cannot be read off of texts or audiences responses; they cannot be identified with any particular practice or set of practices, many of which have longer histories, such as strategies by which optimism is always misdirected and displaced to end up in forms of radical disappointment that necessarily undermine the very possibility of optimism (Berlant, 2011).

Structures of feeling express themselves in relation to at least two other kinds of affective configurations. The first, mattering maps, define the forms and sites of investment and belonging, of attachment, attraction and distanciation. They provide an organization of orientations: on the one hand, they define the points of stability and the forms of belonging where one can feel "at home" (without assuming that home is always a safe place), where one can rest and re-energize, where one can perform

7 Here is one of those places where I have to confess my own limits. I would not be surprised to learn that there is more empirically based research in a variety of fields that do raise such concerns, but the distance between the intellectual fields often makes it difficult for them to even find each other. This is one reason we need better conversations and the infrastructure to support them.

certain kinds of actions and accomplish particular sorts of goals. But they also mark out the places where one cannot stop or stay or act. They make visible the vectors of mobility that certain people (those who can live within the specific map) can follow to get to other places, and those that are not open to them (sometimes closing off places and other times, simply making them more difficult to reach). That is to say, mattering maps do just what their name suggest: they tell people what does (could, should) matter and how much, and what does not (cannot, should not) matter. Mattering maps are not some "naturally" evolved way of living, nor some individually chosen path, nor some economically or ideologically predetermined structure, nor some autonomous plane, but a contested terrain constantly shaped by the effects of numerous discursive formations and apparatuses of power. That is, they are the affective means for accomplishing what Foucault called the conduct of conduct (i.e., as a fundamental mode of power). The construction of mattering maps is itself a site of ongoing struggle, a struggle that takes place in and through the domain of "the popular" (including what is commonly called popular culture, but also forms of common sense and the languages and logics with which people make sense of their lives and their choices within fields of possibilities and limits). In different contexts, the relative weight of the various dimensions of the popular in such struggles will vary; for example, in the 1960s, one might reasonably think that it was popular culture that defined the ground of struggles over mattering maps. The popular is the space of practices by which bodies are stitched into forms of experience, by which structures of feeling are translated into mattering maps.

At the same time, the multiplicity of structures of feeling and mattering maps always exist in or are placed into varied relations—contradictory, reinforcing, augmenting, constraining, redirecting, etc.—with each other, forming larger, more complex affective organizations. Such organizations, while constituting experience as coherent and consistent—they are what hold the world together and constitute a sense of sanity—are never completely open nor fully accomplished; they are where the struggles to structure the affective territories of social life are fought out, for this is how power constructs, among other things, the possibilities and limits of modes of consent and resistances, and the possibilities and forms of opposition. Such organizations are inseparable from the complexity of the discursive formations and material apparatuses of power in which they are embedded, constituted and expressed. The left

needs to enter into the space of struggles where the dominant affective organization is being produced as an organization of pessimism. It needs to consider the possibilities of taking up and using emergent and residual, oppositional and alternative, structures of feeling. It needs to consider how these are articulated through the popular into mattering maps, and how these might be contested. Such an approach to the politics of affect will demand a good deal of work—theoretical and empirical, imaginative and political.

Organizing optimism and pessimism

Although it is not the entire story, the contemporary territorialization of affect is partly responsible for the paradox of the left, undermining the possibility of an effective left opposition. I believe that it is negatively affecting the left's ability to work collectively, to understand what is going on, to develop effective oppositional strategies, relations and organizations, to mobilize popular support, and to imagine viable new forms of governance and everyday life. Therefore, the left has to take up the struggle over the terrain of affect. I can only begin to offer some suggestions, tentative hypotheses, to invite an investigation of the intersecting axes and contradictions, dimensions and struggles, at work in the current context, although they are the result of decades of research and writing.[8] Walter Benjamin's notion of "an organization of pessimism" provides a useful starting point, but Benjamin was describing a very specific and very different conjuncture, so one has to reconstruct its contemporary form from the ground up. If the struggle to create an organization of pessimism has a long history (although I cannot say how long), other affective elements at work today may have long histories as well. Any such organization of pessimism is always incomplete, always has the proverbial cracks, which, from some angles, let the light in. There is, therefore, a constant recalculation of optimism and pessimism that can itself be refigured.[9] Again, it is important to remember that what I am describing is only part of the affective terrain, and that there are always

8 See Grossberg (1992), my effort to describe the rise of the new right in the 1980s through an examination of their re-deployment of and struggle over the popular; and Grossberg (2005), my effort to use the changing state and "of" children and youth in relation to the changing political balances in the U.S.

9 In the contemporary context, one might say that optimism is increasingly equated with hope (they are not necessarily equivalent, because they can have different temporalities, along with wish and desire) and located in a unique binary structure that distributes the possibility of optimism into abstract visions, dispersed local alternatives or overly concretized images (of persons, memes, protests, etc.).

other—competing and complementary—structures of feeling and mattering maps at play, even in the popular. Additionally, how the various structures of feeling come together in a particular organization, how they operate, how effective they are and even how they are expressed in the popular can vary for different populations and different locations. I hope that beginning to think about the complexity and determining power of the affective will open up the possibility of imagining and realizing new forms of intellectual practices as conversations, of social movements as affective alliances, and of political struggle as the demand for unity in difference, a movement of movements.

This effort to think about a specific organization of pessimism offers up a rather obvious comparison. In the 1960s, one rarely heard anyone assert that "other worlds are possible," largely because it was so deeply felt, so enmeshed in the structures of feeling of the counterculture, than one never had to assert it. Today, on the other hand, the claim is repeated obsessively, as if one had constantly to convince oneself as well as others of its truth as a felt possibility. So, I might begin by considering, very briefly, at least one—very powerful, very important—affective territorialization of the 1960s, which I might call an "organization of optimism," in order then to better understand the specificity of the contemporary organization of pessimism. This complex affective structure was, I believe, one of the conditions of possibility of the extraordinary political energy and struggles of the 1960s, their successes and limits. The organization of optimism of the 1960s was lived in different ways, although one should avoid assuming that these populations can be described in simple sociological or ideological terms; rather it had different effects—enacted as liberal complacency and self-congratulatory conformity, hypocrisy, and the possibility for transformative struggles. It was, obviously, the latter expression that enabled the great variety and vitality of social struggles and their coming together as what I will call a counterculture. Unfortunately, the memory of such possibilities has been largely erased.

Let me begin by asking about the organization of optimism that made possible the wide range of sites and practices of political activism, their relations and effects, in the post WWII United States. This conjuncture was characterized by an apparent and strongly invested consensus around a particular set of institutional structures and compromises, commitments and expectations, combining specific forms of capitalism, democracy, difference and exclusion, social mobility, cold war politics (nuclear and containment militarisms), etc. This apparently stable social

arrangement was partly the result of a century of struggles, dating back to the end of the Civil War (which Marx described as the most important moment in the history of capitalism as the end of slave labor, and Du Bois (1935) suggested was the defining moment in modern America, denying the possibility of an alliance between white working class and ex-slave populations). The struggles continued through the Gilded Age (and the rise of progressivism), the Great Depression and the Second World War. This history juxtaposed competing visions of what it meant to be a modern society given the disruptive and determining effects of rapid changes, including the second industrial revolution and mass production, the emergence of corporate and consumer capitalism, new technologies of transportation and communication, a radical redistribution of populations and reconfigurations of labor practices, the continuing rise of science and expertise, the First World War, etc. It was during this period (especially 1870-1930) that many of the taken for granted (legal, public and economic) values, assumptions and institutions of U.S. society in the mid-20th century were established. What emerged was a somewhat limited performance of progressivism, a uniquely "American liberalism" as a particular version of modernity. It was marked by the apparent normalization of a limited welfare state and the public provision of a wide range of services, overseen by the so-called corporate compromise between capital and labor. There was a real and celebrated sense of economic prosperity and the promise of political freedom. It is often thought of as a golden moment of both rapid growth and an unusually equitable (for capitalism) redistribution of wealth, creating the largest and wealthiest middle class ever and a high degree of mobility for at least some fractions (largely white and male) of the working class. This constituted the conditions of the supposed consensus based on a sense of optimism, accomplishment, relief, comfort (fueled by an unequally distributed economic boom) and superiority, exacerbated and, in a way, contradicted by a generalized political paranoia, only partly the result of the cold war. Recently, some have suggested that rather than defining the possibility of a new trajectory of a more humane capitalism, this conjuncture might be better seen as a rather aberrant moment in the longer history of North Atlantic capitalism. Thus, what is too simplistically described as the turn to neoliberalism in the 1970s may be, in the first instance, a return to more "normal" conditions of "democratic" capitalism.

However, the post-war social formation was simultaneously riven by the contradiction between the celebration of its own assumed identity and the limits of its claim to shared prosperity, freedom and justice. As a result, the optimism, while not completely negated, was also re-articulated as hope and desire against a deep sense of frustration and anger among at least two populations: first, those who were excluded from having the promises fulfilled; and second, those who, for any number of reasons, simply rejected the vision of modernity embodied in liberalism. So this U.S. version of liberalism, despite its apparent acceptance and even celebration, came under attack almost as soon as it seemed to become consensual. In fact, the opposition to this mainstream came from all directions, from all sides and aspects of the political, social and cultural life of the nation, which saw liberal modernity as a failed accomplishment (in terms of its exclusion of some populations from various freedoms, rights and possibilities) and as an undesirable project (in terms of the inherent contradiction between its visions and the institutions that were supposed to realize them).

For the many people who joined these political and cultural struggles, whether part of some excluded population or part of one of the dominant class fractions, this contradiction was immediately felt as a sign of the inescapable hypocrisy of liberal modernity, and was experienced in different actualizations of the dominant organization of optimism, especially in the popular. I will focus here, for reasons that will become apparent in the final chapter, on that fraction of the newly empowered baby boom generation, which, to a large extent, constituted its shared politics and popular culture as a refusal of the future society had in mind for them. I can sketch out the parameters of the "organization of optimism" as it was lived by and constituted in the popular as a space defined by four axes or structures of feeling, each constituted as a contradiction.[10] The first might be seen as a vision of the contradictory possibilities of everyday life. At one end, the dominant vision was seen, by the counterculture, as a life of conformity, hypocrisy and perhaps, most importantly, boredom. What was taken to be the dominant social imaginary, the apparent social dream to universalize white middle class suburban life, was deeply compromised by a growing sense of paranoia and terror, the result, in part, of the cold war and in part, of the constantly reiterated observation that, for the first time in history, humanity

10 For an elaboration of these structures of feeling, albeit not quite presented in the same form, see my discussion in Grossberg (1992).

had the capacity to destroy itself, if not the planet. This binary expression was answered, at the other end of the axis, in the counterculture's turn, above all, to celebrations of and experimentations with forms of fun and pleasure, love and enjoyment, collectivity and spirituality.

This structure of feeling was itself re-inflected by a second largely parallel axis that might be seen as struggling over the space of difference itself. On one hand, liberal modernity simultaneously celebrated differences as diversity, and claimed that differences did not matter or could be overcome through tolerance, even as it continued to organize social space around such differences. It thus began a process, fully realized only decades later, of equalization (not equality), in which differences could be trivialized, everything given its 15 minutes of fame, or its five minutes on late night television. On the other hand, the counterculture celebrated its own difference as youth, so that youth itself became an expression of possibilities, an inherent commitment to movement and change. A third structure of feeling constructed both a specific sense of alienation and the appropriate response to it. That sense of alienation was defined in affectively totalizing judgments of (in)sanity (Catch-22) and (im)morality (evil), sometimes inflected into spiritual languages. And at the other pole of the axis, there was an explicit sense that the struggle was primarily affective and quotidian, a struggle over mattering maps and how they organized the possibilities of other ways of living everyday life.

The complex organization resulting from the interactions of these three structures of feeling provided the affective context for the emergence of a powerful popular youth culture (largely centered around popular music) and eventually, of the counterculture. These structures of feeling constituted a specific configuration of optimism, full of contradictions, and articulated to the demands of the conjuncture and to a broader set of ideological and institutional forms and struggles, opening itself up as an expanding social space of belonging. These complex relations among the structures of feeling, in other words, provided the condition of possibility—an organization that I might call a desperate optimism—of the counterculture, that empowered its ways of being and belonging. While the counterculture adopted many of the values, practices, technologies, etc., of the dominant social order, its judgment against it was affectively totalizing, rejecting the ground of fundamental structures, the ways of being, established and protected by the existing formations and practices of power. Hence, for its members, although to varying degrees, belonging to the counterculture transformed the experience of everyday

life, defining an integral and highly charged intensive dimension of shared life. As a space of possibilities, the counterculture was also a space of obligations; it made demands on those who entered its spaces. Its very texture or consistency demanded that, rather than desiring to take over the institutions of power, it had to imagine the possibility of other ways of living, of organizing society and of creating new kinds of institutions. In that sense, it was a revolution against the current state of affairs or ways of being in the world. It dreamed of a world not without power but one in which organizations and institutions, including governments, were committed to successfully realizing the substantive values of justice, equality, equity, etc., a world in which everyone would be able to realize their fullest capacities. It stood against power in order to change the relations and institutions of power.

There was an additional axis, a crucial inflection of this organization of optimism, standing against the liberal vision of the future as the repetition of the same, or a linear and incremental enactment of "progress." Against this, the counterculture was located within an ambivalent, even paradoxical temporality, which brought together a faith in the inevitability of change and a sense of responsibility to bring about that change. On the one hand, one simply had to await the arrival of the future and welcome it, let time unfold since the future was already becoming what it already was destined to be. On the other hand, one had to somehow prepare the way for what was already coming.[11] This was palpable in the very idea of the Age of Aquarius, which was coming whether one accepted it or not, although at the same time, one had a responsibility to usher it in if not to bring it about. (Perhaps this explains a continuing nostalgic memory of the 1960s that seems to assume, despite the evidence, that the "revolution" was just about to happen, were it not for the distraction of identity politics and the fragmentation it produced.) This is a contradiction that exists in some versions of Marxism: the overthrow of capitalism is both inevitable and depends upon the working class revolution. It is perhaps more iconic of John the Baptist than Jesus, through whom the very act of heralding change brings about the very change it announces. It is a politics of prefiguration, of the presence of the future in the present, a politics that brings about what it takes to be already given, even inevitable. If this organization of optimism defined the possibility of other ways of being, it imposed an obligation to both live

11 One might think here of Nietzsche's *amor fati*, or Spinoza's sense of an ethics of becoming what you already are.

differently and to change the world, as expressions of and commitments to the futurity of the present and the presentness of the future. It made the possibility of other worlds a concrete reality in the counterculture's everyday existence.

I began my discussion of the 1960s organization of optimism by referencing some of the material and social changes defining the conjuncture and it is only appropriate to at least point to such matters again as a way into the current problem space. At the very least, it is important to be aware that whatever changes and gains resulted from the variety of political struggles of the post-war years, these struggles provoked reactions from diverse social fractions, with different political interests and cultural values, representing various capitalisms, conservatisms and even to some extent, centrist liberalisms; the reaction was often against what was seen as a surfeit of democratic demands, attempts to limit the power and profits of capitalism, and threats to any sense of national unity. After sixty years of visible attacks, first from the left, including various identity formations, and subsequently from the right, after various reconfigurations of the relations among markets and business, state politics, unions and social movements, religion, media and everyday life, the liberal modern mainstream has become little more than a veneer. In fact, it has been supplanted by a series of less stable, less confident settlements or compromise formations, constituted by continuously morphing struggles, among various fractions and alliances, seeking to establish a new definition of American modernity and with it, a new organization of everyday life. This is the context in which the U.S. left finds itself, in which certain capitalist and conservative forces seem to have, at the very least, occupied the leading edge, enabling them to define the directions of historical change, if not necessarily to bring such changes to completion. And so one has to return to questions about how to mobilize and organize the popular—the structures of feeling and mattering maps—that define the spaces of possibility in which people live their lives. One has to take up questions of people's affective alienations—dissatisfactions, anger, uncertainties, collapsed dreams—and investments—expectations, hopes, and dreams. But such questions are inevitably framed and preceded by the question of the dominant affective organizations of everyday life, in particular, by an emergent organization of pessimism. This organization of pessimism can be seen as the product of

the intersecting axes and contradictions, dimensions and struggles, which constitute the contemporary structures of feeling and the space of the popular.

I will, following the model of my discussion of the 60s organization of optimism, describe four constitutive structures of feeling as axes or contradictions, and I am afraid I will be only slightly less sketchy. Taken together, they define two fundamental affective formations constituting the organization of pessimism. Some of these may be re-articulations of earlier structures, while others are emergent structures, and while I do not think that they are the result of intentional conspiracies that are able to manipulate the popular in such fine-grained details, I do think they are the result of struggles to transform an organization of optimism into an organization of pessimism. Again, this defines a space of possibilities in which different groups might be located in different ways and in different positions, which cannot always be defined according to social or political identities. (Perhaps this is one reason why the division of left and right seems so "out of place" today.)

The first axis replaces the question of difference with the problem of radical equivalence. At one pole, as many critics have noted since the 1990s, everything becomes equal, equally worthy of one's attention, concern or investment. Everything can matter in just the same way and to the same degree. In a sense, this is the full realization of a process that began much earlier (some might even say it is the result of processes of mass commodification that began in the early 20th century), in which, e.g., stories about tyranny and democracy, violence and charity, can be interspersed with advertisements for luxury goods, or claims that "American independence begins with . . . " whatever corporate product is being sold as radically innovative today. This is the affective expression of the crises of knowledge, and more generally, of commensurability, and the resulting experiences of relativism and radical uncertainty. Facing the inability to judge the comparative value or merit of anything, the "reasonable" response seems to be to treat everything equally, or at least with equal suspicion, and to refuse to seriously invest in any one option over the others. Every claim, every opinion, every choice has to be taken equally seriously or not at all seriously. The world is flattened out and the only way that anything can matter is with some degree of irony or cynicism.

At the other pole is what one might describe as a historically constructed experience of the autonomy of affect. If whether or how something matters, whether or how it demands our attention, whether or how it earns our faith or investment in it, cannot be justified by some judgment of its intrinsic worth or truth, if there is no real basis for choice, then only the fact that one invests in it, or more accurately, only the intensity of the commitment one makes, can justify the choice. One's choice is right because one has committed to it. The quantity or intensity of the investment is what guarantees its validity, independently of any content or outcome. The power of will itself is all that defines truth, success and righteousness. As one advertising campaign put it not long ago, "Where there's a will, there's an A." Sheer effort or commitment is what matters, not competence. Everyone can succeed if they try hard enough and if they do not, it is because they did not commit with enough energy and fervor. Failure is the result of a lack or quantitative deficiency of commitment. Such affective autonomy may be connected to the contemporary re-imagination of entrepreneurial individualism through which neo-liberalism makes everyone responsible for their own outcomes—as if success and failure were completely within one's own control—so if one fails economically, it is because one did not try hard enough. It is also closely related to the reconfiguration of the public and private that many social analysts have noted: everything is about one's own personal affective investment, which then has to be acted out in public, while those affective structures that have traditionally defined the public now disappear into a private realm of determinations and excuses. The statement that it is all about me—remember that people thought the 1970s was "the Me-decade"—now meets the public performance of one's most private affective self on popular and social media.

The second axis displaces and re-defines the matter of judgment. The autonomy of affect now constitutes a transverse axis of hyperinflation, in which everything is judged in terms of an absolute binary choice of affective extremes. Affect can be distributed into and located in only two positions, denying the validity of any continuum, any compromise. It creates a demand for absolute affective exaggeration. Everything has not only to serve its purpose well, it has to be great, the best. Or the worst. Sacred or evil. Every investment, every statement, every experience, has to be followed by more exclamation points than one can count. Every movie is one of the best of the year, every car is rated number one. Designing the latest new model of a car is equated with Einstein's discovery

of relativity; a single instance or image becomes the key to the universe; purchasing a new commodity recreates the courage of a war hero; and a single act of repression becomes proof of fascism.

This axis of hyper-inflation creates only two possibilities: at one end, a specific form of fanaticism[12] or absolutism—call it fundamentalism—and, at the other, forms of victimage, in a potentially paranoid circle of superiority and inferiority. If the first axis gives rise to an experience of relativism, which threatens the impossibility of commensuration, of ascertaining the merit or value of anything or comparing the worth of two competing claims, it is largely because everything that can act as an external standard or measure has been debunked, attacked or deconstructed. Only two solutions offer themselves: on the one hand, an infinitely complicated and mobile calculus (as in the imagination of the market in Austrian economists, or in the dreams of crowd-sourcing), or on the other hand, that each claim asserts that it is the source and measure of its own value, in fact, that it is the only possible source and measure of any value. This is what I call fundamentalism, in whatever realm it is asserted, whether religious, political, economic or financial. Fundamentalism is the absolute assertion of certainty. It is not an assertion that any position is particularly extreme or outside of some definition of the center or normality. On the contrary, there are fundamentalist ways of occupying the center, e.g., of being a liberal. The rise of fundamentalism, as a particular affective form of an absolute partisan investment cannot be laid at the door of any single cause, group or political position. It is the response to the dismantling of the possibility of commensuration and the rise of relativism; it is what I might call a negative economy of evaluation. In fundamentalism, some particular set of relations/values appears not only as absolute but also as the absolute negation of any other; that is, fundamentalism refuses to allow its negative to be treated simply within a system of hierarchy. Fundamentalism refuses hierarchy, refuses the reality or possibility of the other, and thus, in some sense, it demands the negation (extermination) of the other.

In any effort, the only acceptable outcome is complete and total victory; anything short of that is failure, which is simply never acceptable. Every statement or action has to be enacted with an intensity that is so complete that any criticism, as if it were merely a truth claim, makes no

12 I am aware that fanaticism is nothing new, and that it is often used to marginalize important aspects of the left, even as the left uses it against the right. I use it here not as an accusation but as a contextually specific reference that relocates such practices in a structure of feeling. For more on fundamentalism, see Lundberg (2009) and Toscano (2010).

sense. Every claim to truth becomes a claim of absolute certainty; any expression of doubt or humility opens one up to the dangers of irony and skepticism and even worse, failure. Fundamentalism becomes the new expectation; compromise is the new treachery. The result is an absolute sense of partisanship that saturates every aspect of life. Thus, the individual feeling that one has little or no control over the directions of history and perhaps even over one's own lives is reproduced at an institutional level, by the feeling, on both the left and right, that if they are not losing, they are at least being prevented from winning. Consequently both sides constantly perform a strange logic by which even their victories, which are always inevitably incomplete, are taken to be evidence of their lack of power rather than of the possibilities that things are beginning to move in the right direction or at least have become more ambiguous and open to change. In the space of affective fundamentalism, we grasp our solutions with either a certainty that can only come from absolute faith, or a cynicism that can only come from the total diminution of hope.

But of course, people and projects do fail. Hyperinflation produces the figure of failure as the victim. If whatever one does is not enough to achieve the desired image of victory, or some hyper-inflated definition of victory, then failure cannot be allowed to be one's own fault; it must be that one fails because one is the victim of more powerful forces, which, since they oppose one's efforts and goals, can only be understood as evil. Failure must always be someone else's fault, like the teacher's, or the fault of some external force, like the government's. And the other that is responsible for one's failure cannot be mundane and ordinary; it must be absolutely negative. Obama is not just a liberal—he is the devil. Obamacare is not just a mistake—it is the new slavery or Nazism. The other, the other side, cannot be granted any respect or credibility or value. This affective construction of the other increasingly cuts across politics, culture and knowledge, and characterizes a growing array of social, cultural and political positions. It can at times also reinforce the status of experience as the only true source of value, and since the truth of experience is in some sense unassailable (I usually cannot doubt what I experience), the result is a kind of sacralization of experience, which renders the demand for the performance of certainty even more absolute. And this sacralization would then extend to any object of my experience, or anything that has been naturalized enough so that it seems to be the product

of my experience rather than of historical determinations. This may help explain the contemporary sanctification of markets and the all-too-easy return of forms of inequality and prejudice.

A third axis describes the immediate tonality of lived experience in the contemporary world. Rather than the experiences of boredom, fear and terror that characterized the postwar conjuncture, I suggest that contemporary experience is marked by the interactions between a variety of forms of distracted hyper-activism (busy-ness) and, more importantly, an almost omnipresent, historically specific sense of anxiety.[13] Here anxiety is not quite the same as (but not completely separable from) a sense of risk, danger and insecurity. Unlike fear, which is always of an event or object, even if it is invisible, absent or displaced into the future, and which is generally a temporary state of affairs, anxiety is a state of being without any apparent beginning or end. It has no object, which does not mean that it has no causes. Or better, its object is life itself. Anxiety—rampant, universal and banal—incorporates everything. While some critics emphasize a reconstitution of fear as pre-emption (or incipience) by which future threats are made palpable in the present, I think this ignores the greater complexity of what I will call, in just a moment, the struggles over temporality itself. For example, it is equally true, and perhaps even more important, that the future has been rendered irrelevant in and even unreal for the present; the result is a transformation of the possible temporalities of political struggle, for one does not act now to prevent what one knows is going to happen. One only acts after the fact, when it is, for all practical purposes, too late (e.g., global climate change or, more personally, the attack on abortion rights), echoing what Benjamin might have called a kind of left wing melancholy, a quietude that Hall once diagnosed as the left's growing anachronism. It is as if it is always too soon or too late; there is no present that can be the right time.

Rather than creating singular events or moments with such affective intensity that they explode through and remove themselves from the more common affective topologies of everyday life, anxiety simultaneously makes everything into an emergency or crisis, and makes this sense of perpetual emergency into the ordinary experience of everyday life. Always experienced in the present, it is yet always a futurity, operating in a future tense. It renders crisis banal, a new normal, a never-ending normalization of the state of emergency as it were. But its banality or

13 Anxiety disorders are among the most common form of invisible disabilities in the U.S.

normalization does not mean that anxiety becomes easy, comfortable or even livable. It is a constant sense that anything can suddenly become a crisis, that it already is a crisis waiting to jump out and take over one's being. It is like existing in a perpetual state of virtual "angst" (for lack of a better term) or disquiet about life itself. Rather than compassion fatigue, we might talk about risk fatigue, catastrophe fatigue, failure fatigue, victimage fatigue. Anxiety often goes hand and hand with both hyper-activism and depression since it defines a sense that one is unable to escape from or gain control over what appear to be the externally created, constantly anxiety-producing contours of one's life.

At the other pole of this axis, the response to such anxiety is expressions of rage, enacted with varying degrees of intensity and brutality, aimed at individuals, groups or social existence itself. Here, for example, one might think of "everyday" forms of personal and group rage, ranging from acts of real physical violence like bullying to psychological acts of shaming, humiliation and intimidation, to intentionally anonymous, disruptive acts of trolling. They are expressions of public viciousness toward and contempt for an anonymous other. In the face of a constant anxiety of not winning, of being a victim, of being dismissed, in the face of an assumed superiority of will on the part of another, one seeks only to diminish the status and capacity of the other, constructing the other as victim, reducing the other to a lower state of being. To thus defeat and mortify another, for however small an audience—and to take pleasure in it—is to both assert that one is not a loser and, at the same time, to suppress the knowledge that total victory is impossible. In the context of victimage, this may help to explain the extraordinary rise of everyday violence, even of the most horrific kinds, especially those that have re-cast relations of racism and colonialism. Even 'genocide' itself seems to have become more ordinary, a reconstitution of relations among neighbors, according to principles and intensities of fundamentalism. In the final analysis, such expressions of rage are the very negation of the possibility of empathy, communication and compromise. They are the foundation of the increasing cruelty and violence of contemporary life, for it is in the eyes of the beholder rather than the sufferer. In the end, there is a tight articulation among hyperinflation, fundamentalism and victimage, anxiety and rage, as together they define a complicated, increasingly common, and perhaps ever more dominant structure of feeling. They perform the consequences of a necessary affective certainty in the face of an increasingly visible relativism. Ironically, this confluence of structures of feeling

can appear as either arrogance or humility. As a character in *House of Cards* once put it, humility is ordinary conservatives' "form of pride." It perhaps partly explains my neighbor's passionate response to my query about his grandson's college plans, as if my implicit hyper-commitment to self-improvement, self-fulfillment and self-empowerment threatened to make him into a victim, to humiliate him.

The last element of this organization of pessimism is a reconstituted experience of alienation. This alienation might be seen as a historically specific form of the anomie that often accompanies the creative destructions of modernity, but unlike anomie, the contemporary affective response is neither comparative nor substantial (as it is in other affective relations to time, such as nostalgia, hope or longing). It is not simply a matter of what Jimmy Carter once called a national malaise. Rather it is constituted through a new consciousness of time itself. This new temporal alienation, an alienation from the present, is no doubt articulated differently for particular people at particular places. It is also the result of the coming together of a series of events that have challenged and even undermined the euro-modern sense of the unfolding of historical time, of the relations of past (memory), present (experience) and future (anticipation). This has produced what the Jamaican anthropologist David Scott (2014, p. 7) describes as "an uncanny sense of divergence between the experience of time and the expectations of history." For Scott, it is the consequences of living in "the aftermaths of political catastrophe" (p. 2) and the collapse of the various visions of "futures past" and of the ideals they embodied. But Scott does not take the next step, to see that this crisis of time and temporal experience is intimately connected to, if not the direct result of, struggles that have been ongoing for over fifty years, over temporality itself.[14] Having deconstructed the claim of progress—and with it, any way to know the relation between the three moments of time, one can only feel anxious about the responsibility of the present to the future, and the reliability of the past as a source for judgment of the present. With any notion of progress—and its assertion of the promise of time itself—shown to be naive or impossible, one seems to be left only with a limited number of ways of making sense of and even living (in)

14 For a fuller discussion of this idea, see my *Caught in the Crossfire*. This is not the same as the increasingly banal observation—true of most modernities—that time is accelerating, or more accurately, that it feels that life is lived at an increasing rate of change, that it is speeding up. From my perspective, this is not only a very partial description (see Sharma, 2014, and Grossberg, 2000, 2005) that naturalizes the changes but is also only a small piece of the larger question of temporality.

time: as apocalyptic (in both its Christian, Marxist and environmentalist forms); as the perpetual repetition or mimesis of the present; or as the anxiety of unpredictability and even unknowability. All of these paradoxically serve to further free the present from any responsibility to either past or future.[15]

It is not just that it feels as though the world itself (magnified a thousand-fold by the ways it is made visible in the media landscape) has become strange: in the 1960s youths were strangers in a strange land. Rather it is an alienation in and from time: not strangers in a strange time, but strangers in a strange temporality; it is also an alienation of time itself, "the out-of-jointness of time" (Scott, 2014, p. 2). One is, as it were, stuck in time, all dressed up with no when to go. This is an affective alienation from the immediacy of one's own existence in time, and one of the real questions of our times is how one can respond or survive. It expresses a fundamental sense that the world is not supposed to be this way, because somehow—in some unspecified and unspecifiable way—time itself has gone wrong. It might be described as nostalgia for a present that never arrives, a melancholia in the future perfect (progressive) tense. Again, Scott (p. 6) describes it as a "sense of a stalled present, a present that stands out in its arrested development." Although all nostalgia starts with a certain dissatisfaction with the present, its contemporary form is not about pasts that have disappeared, nor about being haunted by futures that failed to happen. One might say that western forms of modernity invented the "present," the moment of the now, as an isolatable and privileged moment, as the moment in which "I" as the subject of my own experience lives. In so doing, it saw the present as emerging out of the past and opening itself into the future. The three moments of time, each with its own quasi-independence, were still necessarily related even if always in somewhat unpredictable and undefined ways. This historical understanding of time was, especially in the late 19th and most of the 20th centuries, embodied in a social contract that said that each present moment pays for its futures, even as it builds upon the past. But as this sense of temporality has become a site of struggle, it has been rendered unstable and perhaps inadequate to present demands; certainly conservative forces seem to be trying to undo some of its most important and visible accomplishments (including erasing the extraordinary economic successes of post-war liberalism and

15 Scott (2014) argues that this "ruin of time" is the denial of the very "temporal structure of critique," rendering any effort to renew the project of critique difficult at best.

Keynesianism). But there is much more at stake: what is too easily described as a kind of general and popular amnesia of the past is I think much more profound in its causes and implications. It seems as though our most basic assumptions of what it means to be a modern society are somehow up for grabs, the focus of political struggle.

The result is that people are stuck (Hage, 2015), not only socially and politically, but more fundamentally, stuck in a present that does not feel real, i.e., that does not feel present. It is as if time itself has stopped. This sense of atemporality—as if there is something wrong with time itself, is not quite the same as the more postmodern sense of "the forever now," which assumes that all times have collapsed into or can be inscribed within the present; atemporality is a significantly different condition, not the presence of many times, but the sense of an inability to differentiate time itself, the absence of a present. In a similar vein, the sense of debt as a claim on the future (so that the future collapses into the present) needs to be replaced by a recognition of the endless and closed—atemporal—circularity of debt. It is neither simply that both the past and the future have ceased to exist in the present, or that they exist only in the present. It is rather that time itself seems to be stuck and people are living in the midst of the multiple, fluid and unstable relations of the past, present and future. The crisis of our moment is not that the world is changing, nor that it is not changing; it is that the very notion of change itself is changing. It is not surprising that people feel—in all possible senses—out of time. Is this the unintended and unpredictable consequence of the many struggles over time, or the desired outcome of some temporal conspiracy? Does it matter, as long we do not forget that time itself has become a site in contemporary struggles of power and value?

My suggestion is that the organization of pessimism I have sketched out here as comprised of these four structures of feeling is both an expression of and a condition of possibility for the emergence of the paradox of the left over the past decades. Perhaps those of us committed to the left should not assume that our constant reaffirmation that other worlds are possible is actually a good sign, that it signals anything but our anxiety over and alienation from the need to reconstitute a relation between the past, present and future. Perhaps we should not assume too quickly that we always understand how people are positioned by and position themselves within these affective structures. Perhaps we could better understand the apparent all too common consent to the existing

power relations if we had a better understanding of the affective condition of being stuck. It may also enable us to think about the need, the possibility, and the strategies for getting people unstuck, for literally mobilizing them. Beginning to address this organization of pessimism might enable the left to learn to speak to and in the popular, something which the right has done much more successfully. It might enable the left to negotiate the necessary multiplicity of forms of political participation and spectatorship, and their limits. It might provide the left with clues about the possibility of other forms of organization, for intellectual conversations, social movements and political struggles.

This complex affective organization is, I believe, as responsible for the successes of conservative and capitalist forces as it is for the left's failure to mount effective opposition. Hence the left needs to think about the traps and hazards posed by the contemporary structures of affect; it needs to find ways to work both with and against this organization of pessimism. It needs to become more reflective about how its own practices are inflected, whether intentionally or not, into new forms of fundamentalist certainty, and temporal alienation, so that it can stop operating within it, in ways that end up reproducing it, even as it thinks it is fighting against it. It is not a matter of complicity, but of self-reflexivity, to realize that how specific practices and statements are perceived, what sorts of effects they are likely to produce, is not determined in advance, but only by their placement into a context, in this case, an affective context. The left needs to find ways not only of escaping it, of producing its own lines of flight, but of imagining another affective organization, and how to bring it into being in the popular. It needs to find new languages, new appeals, and new logics of calculation; it needs to be willing to enter into the popular, to address the affective gaps between people's fears and desires, between their sense of being stuck and their sense of possibility. And this will require not only further intellectual work—and new forms of conversation and institutional infrastructure—to understand what's going on, and new forms of political structures of belonging together and transformational struggles, but also new cultural and aesthetics practices capable of rearticulating the popular. Consequently, I want, in the next two chapters, to attend to some of the ways—first intellectual and then political—in which the left ends up operating within the very organization of pessimism that becomes its own condition of impossibility.

EXPRESSIONS

CHAPTER 4—STATES OF UNCERTAINTY

Let me begin this chapter by highlighting the complexity of the organic crisis, the multiplicity of pieces that might be part of any effort to understand what's going on, offering a partial list of "problem-sites," although many of them may be present, albeit differently articulated, in other places as well.

Environmental: climate change; pollution; species extinction; energy.

Economic: growing inequality, continuing and—despite certain statistical improvements—spreading poverty, especially linked to long-term unemployment, substandard wages, disappearing labor markets (partly the result of automation) and cuts in welfare; corporate corruption; deregulation; globalization; financialization and debt; deteriorating infrastructure; commodification and marketization of previously protected domains (including personal data and biological events).

Generational: the challenges of an aging population and an increasingly abandoned young generation.

Political: plutocratic growth of corporate power and of the electoral influence of money; attempts to restrict access to voting rights; redistricting and gerrymandering, resulting in meaningless elections and one-party states; new forms of securitization, surveillance and invasions of privacy (often in the name of the war on terror); symptomatic apathy, cynicism and disinvestment; the transformation of the ideological and material existence of the public arenas, including public services such as police, fire, education, health care and even the courts, through privatization, managerialism, etc.; the increasing use of prisons to manage populations; the rise of (new?) forms of public and institutional racist and ethnic, gender and sexual, cultural and religious hatreds, including backlashes against civil rights and feminism (even as there are some advances on other fronts).

Militarism and Violence: U.S. involvement in proliferating military engagements and conflicts, both local and regional, including civil wars, insurgencies, territorial struggles, and forms of terrorism, etc., often involving both state and non-state agents; civil repression; and continuing everyday enactments of violence and intolerance (bullying, domestic violence against women and children, rape).

Technological: capabilities spreading well beyond our ability to control them (e.g., computer hacking, genetic modification, drone warfare and surveillance, artificial intelligence and algorithmic productivity).

Cultural: a variety of fanaticisms; crises of education and knowledge; the re-entrance of religion into politics; the apparently unchallengeable existence of a "gun culture;" changing experiences of temporality (e.g., our relation and responsibilities to the past and the future); the absence of a "nomos" (Schmitt, 2003) that would make sense of the changing global world-order.

Others would no doubt add to, subtract from and reconfigure the list to reflect their own sense of the world; people would disagree about political priorities. People will even disagree about the significance of the continuing presence of these problems. For many, it signals society's inability or unwillingness to face up to the problems, to consider their natures and causes, and to enact effective and acceptable solutions. In some sense, "we" have lost the capacity to act. Perhaps the most common perception on the left is that the inherited processes and institutions of the liberal democratic state are incapable of solving the most urgent problems, whether because of inherent problems and limits, or because external forces have circumscribed their ability or willingness to act, or because of the increasing political polarization between a liberal-right center and an extremist right. But, from another perspective, it is not true that people or governments are not doing things; decisions are being made, whether through indifference, lack of action, or widely undemocratic processes, and while it may be that many people do not think these decisions actually offer viable solutions, they are defining the future in ways those on the left are likely to abhor. That is, what is really being said is that some people are not doing the sorts of things other people think ought to be done, and in many cases, the former do not see the problems that the latter see.

Such disagreements have to be understood in the context of definitions of and expectations about political possibilities established historically, first in the context of what Williams (1961) called "the long revolution," i.e., the positive efforts, however limited and flawed, of modern democracies since the 18th century to expand the social, political and cultural capacities and rights of its citizens, which were significantly enhanced by the progressive changes in the U.S. in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The relation between these two moments, with their different temporalities, is uncertain; recently some intellectuals have argued that

the progressivist victories of the Fordist or liberal welfare state may have been merely an aberration in the history of (capitalist) modernity. In any case, it seems obvious that U.S. society is retreating from the gains of the past century to return to older forms of cruelty, impoverishment and repression.

The left has always been embroiled in both theoretical and political debates, often dividing itself into camps. While many contemporary arguments may sound like mere repetitions of older ones, I think one has to look at them in the light of the conjunctural structures of feeling and the crises of knowledge I have proposed above. Every description, concept and account of what's going on is not only a response to but also an expression of its context. While any political commitment demands a certain degree of conviction and assertiveness, I think such statements take on a different resonance in the contemporary conjuncture. They sound increasingly absolutized as it were, enacting forms of certainty or fundamentalism, allowing little room for doubt, or for acknowledging that the stories one tells may be wrong, or necessarily incomplete—blind to other forces and determinations—or just getting the relations, the mix, the proportions not quite right. They become liturgical incantations, which escape from the complexity and provisonality that the conversation of knowledge should demand. Margaret Thatcher (in the UK) is sometimes credited with having developed a particular ideological strategy: there is no alternative (TINA). Yet this was not particularly new. Every organization of power, through its ideological work, attempts to naturalize itself, to present itself as the only viable possibility. So what is it that Thatcher did differently? I would suggest that TINA was, albeit in a slightly different affective context, a kind of fundamentalism that went beyond ideology's claim to natural truth.

In this chapter, I want to consider the ways contemporary left analyses might be experienced as an expression of the determinations I have described. First, I will consider some of the common diagnoses or explanations of the organic crisis offered; whether they are simply the same old stories or apparently new stories, they tend to over-simplify the complexity (if only by absence) and absolutize their own claim to truth. Second, I will turn my attention to the growing power of theory, especially in what can be described as the "ontological" or "new materialist" turn, which, in an attempt to escape Enlightenment universalism, ironically ends up offering a new universalist certainty. My claim is simple: the left divides the intellectual universe into camps, each of which asserts its

own infallibility, based on political, theoretical and ultimately ontological guarantees. Whether this is new or not, or unique to the left or not, the question is how it plays out, and I fear that it plays out as a new intellectual fundamentalism. In the following chapter, I will turn to some of the ways political debates and strategies might be similarly understood as expressions of the conjuncture they attempt to change.

What's it all about?

In one of his last essays, Hall (2011, p. 705) contemplated the failure of the financial crisis of 2007 to produce the sort of great refusal that many had expected. Surely this was the beginning of the end, a significant opportunity to address or at least reconstitute the organic crisis:

> Does it presage business as usual, the deepening of present trends or the mobilization of social forces for a radical change of direction? Is this the start of a new conjuncture?The economy lies somewhere close to the centre of that issue. But, as Gramsci argued, though the economic can never be forgotten, conjunctural crises are never solely economic or economically determined 'in the last instance'. They arise when a number of forces and contradictions, which are at work in different key practices and sites in a social formation, come together or 'con-join' in the same moment and political space and, as Althusser said, 'fuse in a ruptural unity'. Analysis here focuses on these crises and breaks. Do the condensation of forces, the distinctive character of the 'historic settlements' and the social configurations which result, mark a new 'conjuncture'? The present crisis looked at first like one which would expose the deep problems of the neo-liberal model. But so far it is a crisis which refuses to 'fuse.'

Hall's statement needs to be amended, however: it is not the crisis that refused to fuse, but the left that failed to make the various crises fuse. While statements about the operation of power and domination are often followed by gestures of complexity, contestation and contextual specificity, rarely do these make much difference. In the U.S., the left has been largely incapable of explaining what's going on, of embracing and reconstructing the complexity of the "organic crisis." in ways that make sense to people and, at the same time, enable people to imagine viable

forms of opposition and opportunity. Yes, various left fractions think they know the "truths;" they can tick off the things that are wrong; they can even give the causes—however superficial and obvious, or obscure and esoteric they may be. But they cannot bring them together, to articulate the multiplicity of problems and struggles into some kind of unity; they can't tell a better story, a story that works for the many people who, however potentially sympathetic, do not already identify with or allow themselves to be mobilized by the left. It is not that there needs to be a single, seamless story of everything, for there are many ways to tell a story and many stories that can be told. These failures are too rarely explored and even more rarely explored as conjuncturally specific events rather than as some kind of abstract or general incapacity, or the tribulations of tilting at windmills.

There are plenty of people who blame the failures of the left on the ascendance of theory—on its increasingly impenetrable language and abstract disengagement from the lived realities of power. But they are wrong. Such theoretical work is absolutely vital to the challenges facing the left in the present context, or for that matter, to any intellectual endeavor. Those who think that understanding the world, or formulating political strategies and alternatives can be accomplished without what Marx called "the detour through theory" are in fact actually assuming that the theories and concepts they already take for granted (often as part of their "common sense")—some of which were no doubt thought to be rather esoteric and abstract at some time—or those delivered in the name of an unproblematized science, are adequate to the world. They ignore not only the question of whether such theories were ever up to the task and, even if they were, whether other—perhaps new—theories and concepts may serve the left better or even be absolutely necessary given the changing realities of contemporary life.

And yet, a part of the explanation of the failure of left accounts may involve the ways the growing power of theory is played out in the U.S. left (and the U.S. academy more specifically), and how it has shaped efforts to understand the forms of domination and the technologies of power. As the human sciences increasingly attempted to declare their independence from the power of positivist and scientistic understandings of knowledge, theory became the *lingua franca*, the terrain on which attempts to move forward were constructed and debated. Critical analysis cannot do without theory, but if one starts with the certainty of the truth of a particular theory, everything changes. Instead of a confrontation of theoretical con-

cepts and empirical work where the latter might challenge the former, sending one off in new directions, disagreements between accounts become competitions between theories. Instead of seeing theory as a tool for dealing with complexity, for better understanding the conjuncture and opening up its possibilities, theory becomes an end in itself, in a never-ending search for the "right" theory. Theory tells one, in advance, what the questions are and what the possible answers are; they are deployed as if they were descriptive, without taking into account the relations among different levels of abstraction, between abstract concepts, epochal generalities, and contextual specificities. Instead, the most specific events can be taken as evidence of abstract theoretical truths—seeing the world in a grain of sand—guaranteeing that one is always right. One never allows oneself to be wrong or even surprised.

Theory often ends up abandoning the very complexity it is supposed to organize. Ironically, despite decades of arguments against forms of reduction in which, somehow, in the end, the state of the world is all about . . . something, such arguments have returned with a vengeance. One might think that the most important lesson of complexity and multiplicity, however, is that nothing is ever all about one thing, and certainly not everything is all about the same thing. Yet theory today often returns to forms of reduction, rendering the complexity invisible. This tendency is closely connected, in formal terms, to two common assumptions and rhetorics of the left. First, that most people need simple stories, that they are in fact incapable of dealing with complicated ones. And second, that the forces of oppression and domination the left faces have achieved a new level of success, in terms of both scale and intensity. The enemy has become monstrous, having apparently eradicated the possibilities of both systemic opposition and the imagination of other possibilities. It is apparently incapable of being defeated but some fight on nevertheless, making resistance—be it as romance or tragedy. Neither of these assumptions is particularly new but they are constantly re-asserted as such.

The only diagnostic question is whether one thinks that one is caught in and battling against the same mechanisms of power that have been operating and growing for centuries, or whether one is confronting something new, something that has produced a great historical rupture, rapture or evolution. The complexity of the relations of the old and the new disappears into the need to assert the singular absolute temporality (old or new) of the overwhelming forces of power. Everything is either old or new, the same old thing or the radically new, repetition or difference.

The result is that a lot of new theory is really a sheep in wolf's clothing. On the one hand, the new often turns out to look pretty much like the old, what is claimed to be new has happened before, and the claim itself has been made before, maybe in different words, in a different order. And on the other hand, repetitions of the old often fail to question why the old descriptions did not work the last time around. One is forced to choose: either assume the past is being repeated and old forms of knowledge are sufficient (although they may need a bit of tweaking), or the past has been left behind or so significantly revised that past knowledges are largely irrelevant. Both sides—those who think the world can be fundamentally understood in the same terms as previous eras, and those who think the world has changed in radical ways—have their own sacred texts, some of which they have pulled out of the closets of history, comfortable in the certainty that only they know how to read them. The keepers of the old attempt to revitalize older texts with new readings and to supplement them with occasional references to new concepts and texts. The celebrants of the new know that the old theories and the old politics don't work, so they turn instead to other new and—more surprisingly, often old, ignored—texts and concepts. But each side sees itself as the keeper of a sacred—absolute—truth. But the truth is that much of contemporary theory, despite its claims of originality, is built upon the hubris of small differences.

This does not mean that there is not still plenty of good work, both intellectual and political, which embraces the complexity, foregrounds its limits, and presents itself as part of a larger and more complicated puzzle. Unfortunately, it is often stymied by the lack of any conversational forms, translational tools and institutional infrastructure through which to assemble the pieces, including the disagreements, into an analysis of the conjuncture. And it is always in danger of being seduced into the fundamentalism of theory. Consequently, it is too often overwhelmed by old habits, which tend to read such concrete and complex analyses within a

dichotomy between the global abstract and local specificity.[1] What we need are ways of remembering that there is only multiplicity and complexity, all the way up and down.

Not surprisingly, the explosion of academic and intellectual production, and the proliferation of left struggles, media and organizations, has delivered an abundance of work diagnosing the contemporary conjuncture. What is surprising is how much of this work reduces the complexity of power and domination to two (occasionally overlapping) regimes: capitalism and/or biopolitics, each of which can be described in either substantial terms—capitalism is the production of commodities or surplus value, biopolitics is the management of the behavior of bodies—or formal terms, which assume that power can be described by a single constitutive principle—capitalism as commodification or primitive accumulation, biopolitics as normalization or securitization—or a singular logical structure—such as circulation, binary purity, fragmentation, verticality, borders, preemption, algorithmicity, etc.

Much of the intellectual left has returned to the assumption that it's all about capitalism. Gramsci said that whenever the left finds itself losing, it returns to its once solid ground of blaming it all on capitalism—and I might add, on the masses who, in one way or another, are too stupid, selfish or risk-averse to do anything about it. The fact that one cannot understand capitalism without taking into account a few political and cultural relations does not mitigate the reductionism of such economistic accounts, or the absolute authority of some reading of Marx's texts. Ironically, the left rails against the "neo-liberal" attempt to reduce everything to a matter of economics, even as it all to often does the same thing. The only difference—admittedly a significant one—is how one evaluates it. Capitalism can explain it all—from the changing possibilities of labor and labor politics, to the collapse of social democracy, to the changing expressions of social difference. In some instances, despite decades of argument, racism is still assumed to be really all about economics—as if

1 Too often, the "global" is meant to suggest the end of "internationalism" and the displacement of the West, but I think that it is more complicated. The West has not been entirely displaced from the center. Instead, the global seems to refer to a state of affairs in which nations and non-nation defined political entities and agents are both caught by and trying to negotiate a new set of maps or spatial arrangements, what Schmitt (2003) called a new "nomos" of the earth. At the same time, one has to be careful to avoid allowing "the global" to conflate a series of terms: capitalization, homogenization, universalization, and identification. It is always important to theorize both the abstract and the singular, both the conceptual and the empirical, while remembering that these are not equivalent.

its origins, transformations and continuing power—were simply the necessary result of strategies of capitalism. But, to repeat myself, it is always more complicated.

One might easily get the impression that arguments about what's going on have been trivialized into disagreements over how to name the contemporary form of capitalism (as if there were ever one form of capitalism, rather than multiple forms in multiple relations): corporate, late, post-fordist, neo-fordist, neo-mercantilist, post-colonial, managerial, stake-holder, financial, bio-, liquid, cognitive, risk, affective, digital, network, communicative, techno-, knowledge, sharing, and (most commonly albeit most problematically) neoliberal, etc. Sometimes these labels simply describe new practices or logics, and sometimes they are more radical claims about the changing essence of the epoch, as if, for example, "neoliberalism" described a new totalizing logic that has reshaped the entire field of life. A similar attempt to find the right name seems to pre-occupy the search for new, alternative forms of economic practice and life: e.g. ethical, solidarity, caring, sharing, restorative, regenerative, sustaining, commons, resilient, collaborative, affirmative —economies. Or perhaps, the task is to define the essential property, either of capitalism in general, or of its contemporary specificity. Sometimes discussions focus on quantitative changes of older elements that result in qualitative differences: the expansion of private property, commodification, individualism (possessive or otherwise), the recurrence of primitive accumulation, a return to the impoverishment and precaritization of labor, entrepreneurialism, monetarization, or marketization. Sometimes it involves the emergence of significantly new or transformed elements or accomplishments: the achievement of the real subsumption not only of labor but of life itself, market fundamentalism, financialization, the multiplication of labor, the social factory, immaterial labor, human capital, etc.

These various labels do point to significant aspects of contemporary capitalism, and economic matters/capitalist determinations do play a major role in the contemporary U.S.; additionally they have become both more visible and more assertive in recent decades. But the various capitalist logics and operations have to be interrogated, as Marx suggested in his own critique of political economy, rather than taken as sufficient accounts. Marx argued that classical political economy assumed the categories that capitalism used to describe its own workings (e.g., markets, exchange, value) as the beginning and end of its own theories,

instead of subjecting them to critical analysis. Similarly, I would suggest that many so-called critical descriptions of contemporary capitalism depend on terms (e.g., risk, securitization, cognitive value, circulation, etc.) that have to be questioned rather than used as accounts of what's going on.

More importantly, these various descriptions are rarely presented in terms of the complexity of capitalism(s) constituted by the continuing appearance of old elements and the emergence of new events, and the ways both the old and the new are re-articulated and re-shaped together. The changes marked by contemporary critics are often treated in isolation from other developments both inside and outside of capitalism (and economies more broadly), with the exception of technology and an occasional nod to the complicity of the state. They are rarely interrogated together to get a fuller picture of the complexities and multiplicities of capitalisms, of its varied temporalities and spatialities, and of the multiple ways it is expressed and lived conjuncturally. They are even more rarely interrogated in relation to non-capitalist economies or other practices and sites of power (including everything from media, science, and art, to democracy, colonialism, militarism and racism). Instead of investigating the relations between economies and cultures, following decades of work on the importance of culture, increasingly, culture is simply folded or subsumed into capitalism, but not as ideology this time. Culture as a domain of social cooperation/communication is treated as the latest site of expropriation—commodified into calculable, disembodied entities or quanta of value, or more radically, to have opened up a new mode of accumulation or expropriation of value, or even another abstract value form.[2] Many contemporary diagnoses see an economic motivation or capitalist logic at work everywhere. Capitalist power (as it encompasses all other realms) is portrayed as conspiracies (actually, too often, as a single conspiracy) and in such totalizing terms that it appears as if capitalism has finally succeeded in colonizing life, the mind and even reality itself—the ultimate nightmare realized. It is not surprising then that people would surrender to its power.

2 The important—but perhaps over-emphasized observation—that capitalism increasingly derives values from forms of social cooperation, which often are defining aspects of culture (e.g., the realms of knowledge and information, and of affect—attention, feelings), might suggest a new structure of mediation for the production of value, but it also forgets many things: that these are not entirely new expropriations; that there are many varieties of semiotic, discursive or affective formations/operations; that such modes of accumulation are not simply abstract value forms but mediating systems of social relations. And most importantly, that one can argue that all expropriation of value in capitalism depends upon forms of social cooperation, including industrial labor.

Without raising the ugly and mostly paranoid shadow of complicity, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that many of these analytic practices or logics—e.g., the claim of the new and the irrelevance of the past—often define key elements of the right's understanding of the struggle as well. Both seem to treat the economy as autonomous—undetermined by anything but itself, but determining everything else. The left might be better served by thinking of capitalism—and even more broadly—economies (for there are many co-existing organizations of labor and value that are not capitalist, although they may be articulated with and even into capitalisms), as well as its apparent (and effective) autonomy as something that is constructed. The "economic" does appear to operate with a very real autonomy from the other domains of social life and experience, but rather than take this as a sufficient account, perhaps one needs to explore the ways in which this "disembededness" is itself constructed through the economy's continuing embededness, its relations with and dependence on all sorts of other social relations.

The other regime that defines many contemporary diagnoses is often more theoretically explicit (partly because Marxist theory is commonly taken for granted), grounded in the more recent discourses of biopolitics and biopower,[3] drawn largely from the work of Foucault (2003, 2007, 2008), and to a lesser extent, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1992), the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998), and others. I do not intend here to offer an authoritative or complete reading of this work, or to try to cover the full range of material produced under the sign of biopolitics. In the broadest terms, it describes the changing ways in which bodies and life itself have become objects of power. Its interest is not in state power—although Foucault does not deny state power—but in the dispersed and multiple rationalities and technologies of the "conduct of conduct." In fact, Foucault introduced the concept—actually of biopower—as part of a genealogy of state power and the art of governance. Mainstream histories see the modern nation-state as a (limited) transference of sovereignty from the monarch as sovereign to the people, and a transformation in the ways power is enacted, from unregulated and arbitrary state violence perpetrated on the bodies of individuals to a balance between more limited institutionally controlled forms of state violence (police, military) and non-coercive forms of consent (civil society, ideology, etc.). Foucault offered a counter-narrative describing a transi-

3 Unfortunately, these terms are often used interchangeably or in different relationships, so it is often rather confusing.

tion defined not by the disappearance of sovereignty but by the appearance of forms (apparatuses, technologies) of biopower that displace (but do not replace) sovereignty. If sovereignty embodies the right to take life or let live, biopower fosters life and allows death; it is power in a productive relation to life itself.[4]

According to Foucault, in the 18th century, a form of "pastoral power"—discipline—emerged, aimed at managing individual bodies, enacted in enclosed institutional spaces (such as prisons, hospitals, schools, etc.). Discipline embodies power in practices of surveillance (and self-surveillance) in order to shape individual bodies, to enable and disable capacities of the body, and to manage the body's relation to itself and its environment. Discipline produces a "docile subject" who governs him or herself, thus obviating the need for the use or even threat of violence. Discipline "normalizes" individuals. This was followed in the 19th century by the emergence of biopolitics; in different contexts, Foucault refers to it as governmentality and securitization—as power that works on populations in terms of risks and statistical probabilities by managing their placements and movements across space. Biopolitics operates by changing the conditions of possibility in order to let things happen or stop them from happening, in specific places for particular populations (e.g., famine, disease, violence); it arranges environments and populations strategically, thereby encouraging and discouraging the flourishing of certain forms of well-being. Biopolitics mobilizes and organizes collective bodies. If sovereignty is experienced as a limit on freedom (except that of the sovereign), biopower—discipline and biopolitics—works precisely by constructing forms of freedom; power becomes the production of free subjects. In his last works, Foucault seemed to point to two additional forms of biopower: technologies of the self by which individuals work on their own conduct and subjectivity; and neoliberalism, in which economic rationalities organize the state and produce forms of *homo economicus*.

Deleuze (1992) suggested the emergence of another form of governmentality or biopower: the society of control neither normalizes nor organizes life, but modulates it according to a distribution of codes that allows or denies access. Such control is continuous and free-floating, and is capable of organizing all behaviors without defining them in relation to either individuals or populations. A society of control is pre-emptive inso-

4 At the same time, Foucault's theory addresses a different question: if modernity is supposedly characterized by a turn away from power enforced through violence, how do we account for the enormous explosion and multiplication of violence under modern rule? Thanks to Josh Smicker for helping me here.

far as it continuously modifies the conditions of possibility for the actualization of certain behaviors, for the realization of certain capacities. Preemptive power describes the operation of power in advance of itself; it evokes a supposedly new temporality of power, a future anteriority, through which power reshapes the future present by intervening into the present future.[5] Power acts now to prevent an as yet invisible threat, by transforming the future in the present. While numerous authors have taken up these concepts of control and pre-emption as descriptions of the contemporary context, the arguments and evidence for their empirical utility is at best thin, more an assumption than a description, but its very invocation seems to guarantee its truth.

These concepts have opened up important areas of research and offered important insights into the machinations and organizations of power in the contemporary world, but it is important to remember that these forms of power have a longer history than current work often suggests. This is not to say that the practices and forms have not changed, but many of the current descriptions fail to consider this more complicated temporality. Disciplinary practices seeking to produce individuals who take responsibility for their own lives, who manage their selves, emerged in the 18th century. What is the relationship between practices that demand permanent self-improvement and practices of what is currently called self-responsibilization? Notions of self-reliance, of taking charge of and responsibility for one's own destiny certainly marked the Victorian era. Practices of securitization—creating and differentiating disposable populations, populations that are required to bear the burden of social risks, and populations entirely absolved of any risk—are also not new. They define, in very fundamental ways, for example, at least one axis of colonial power. I do not mean to deny that something is new but as always, the understanding of relations of power will demand a more complicated account. Have such practices changed significantly? Have they entered into new spaces? Have their relations to other forms of power been reconstituted?

There is also a strong tendency in current biopolitical research to assume that these operations of power always succeed, e.g., always produce their own forms of subjectivity, but this move forgets that Foucault was describing apparatuses or technologies that seek to produce specific effects. He did not assume that these are the result of conspiracies (since

5 A rather trivial example would be cars that do not let you drive if you have been drinking.

they are often the result of many different intentions and projects, none of which imagined the particular apparatus which finally appeared), or that they are inevitably successful. Moreover, reality is not simply shaped by any one project, because there are always other projects. Nor is it the result of any single apparatus of power since there are always multiple apparatuses, some able to work harmoniously and even to reinforce others (as Foucault imagined discipline and biopolitics), some able to uncomfortably co-exist, and some operating against each other. Every apparatus engenders its own resistances, limiting its ability to fully realize the reality it imagines. And different people and populations may exist in different relations to the apparatus. To put it differently, people often live with and within such configurations of power in a variety of ways; there are different forms of consent and resistance to the demands of power, and to the ways such practices attempt to produce and fail to produce reality. To take only one current example, so-called neoliberal forms of governmentality supposedly demand—and produce—a new entrepreneurial subject, an individuality that treats its own life as an enterprise, as human capital. While I don't know if this form of subjectivity is new, I am pretty sure it is only ever partially successful and its successes are differentially distributed. There are no doubt instances of real success, but there are more instances of seriously limited success, cynical consent or even self-conscious avoidance. It is these complexities that need to be analyzed, for they provide the possibilities for resistance, struggle and transformation. The tendency to treat biopower as if it were new, as if it were successful and, I might add, increasingly, as if it were to be found everywhere, is at least in part the result of a fetishism of theory: concepts become certainties, demanding to be used and, in return, guaranteeing their own truth. If you go looking for biopower, you will find it.

Notions of biopolitics have been reinforced by further theoretical developments. Agamben (1998) challenged Foucault's theory by both expanding the historical relevance of biopolitics and contracting its meaning. According to Agamben, sovereignty (the law) produces biopolitical life or better, it claims the power to separate the citizen (*zoe*—a qualified life, a form of social life) from bare—purely biological—existence (*bios*); it claims the power to reduce the citizen to *homo sacer*—bare life—a product and object of power that exists in a specific and unique relation to the law and society. *Homo sacer* exists in a state of exception, an included exclusion, which is the very mirror image of the sovereign, the one capable of suspending the law in the name of the law.

The state of exception results in the inclusion of life itself in the juridical-political order by its very exclusion. Biopower, thus, takes the biopolitical life of citizens into its political calculation; it is concerned with governing the exigencies and variations of biological life. While it has a long history—at least back to the Greeks for Agamben, it has a different existence in modernity, becoming explicit and, as it were, normalized, so that it is no longer seen as that which must be excluded in order to constitute society, but precisely as the ground of social existence. For Agamben, the Nazi concentration camp has become the metonym for modern deployments of bare life, founding a society on the extended duration of the state of exception. Thus, while Agamben has in one sense a more specific meaning for biopolitics, he also offers a more general sense of power asserting itself in and through life as biopolitical production, and defining the present as a new epoch.

The turn to biopolitics more generally has had important implications for thinking about social differences and the modalities of exclusion and belonging. It has opened up new materialist and biological understandings of life, bodies, and environments as heterogeneous and dynamic. Such analyses, for example, point to the efforts by various political and capitalist agents to take up the possibilities of the new molecular and evolutionary biologies to intervene into the processes of life and the behaviors of bodies, but the place or relevance of such efforts in relation to larger organizations of power remains speculative at best. This biological naturalism also tries to make visible the ways bodies—from corporeal capacities to the bio-chemical and genetic—serve as material actors or agents in political relations and struggles. It points to a number of serious and even unprecedented bio-political and bio-ethical questions, including: environmental degradation and global climate change, with the related issues of energy, economic growth and consumer directed economies; the possibilities of genetic and technological interventions into life itself; the commodification of aspects of life; the destruction of genetic diversity, and the transformations of agriculture and food chains; political, economic and military interventions into matters of health and well-being; and technological transformations of the possibilities and relations of sensory experiences of the world. Again, one has to ask—and investigate—exactly what is new about such efforts—after all, efforts to manage and reconfigure bodies and environments have a longer history in genetics, agriculture, war, technology, labor (from slavery to Fordism), media and consumption, etc., although they may not have had the tools to

accomplish their task in such efficient, directed and complicated ways. Many critics currently working on these issues do recognize such histories, and often acknowledge as well the important contributions of feminists, class theorists and critical analysts of race and colonialism.

At the same time, however, this materialist work often assumes a historical rupture, that there is "something unprecedented about our contemporary situation in which the prefix 'bio-' proliferates," which challenges "some of the most basic assumptions that have underpinned the modern world" (Coole and Frost, 2010, pp. 15 and 4), that we have entered a new epoch, constituted by new technologies, practices and forms of power. It suggests that the new forms of biological and biotechnical intervention have opened up the possibilities of new forms of—micropolitical—control. In Foucault, micropolitics, or capillary power, describes power operating by moving through and across bodies, or better, fragments of the body (eyes, hands, etc.) without the mediation of consciousness and ideology. It is unclear whether Foucault thought capillary power has always existed, or whether it was introduced with and made possible the new forms of biopower of the 18th century. But in either case, there is nothing new about micropolitics today. Perhaps the current forms of biological rationality and technology have enabled the development of self-conscious and intentional forms of micropolitical manipulation, but these have not yet become omnipresent or omnipotent.

Within theories of biopolitics, everything can become biopolitical; to offer just one example, Hardt and Negri (2011, pp. 58-9) use it to describe the practices of immaterial labor as "the localized productive powers of life – that is, the production of affects and languages through social cooperation and the interaction of bodies and desires, the invention of new forms of the relation to the self and others, and so forth." Apparently, the biopolitical can be eerily immaterial. And I am thrown back to the old pragmatic maxim: a difference that makes no difference is no difference. If everything is biopolitical—and in one obvious sense it is, then it adds very little after its first utterance. But such descriptions of the contemporary conjuncture leave many questions unanswered and even unaddressed: Is there anything—any form of activity—that is not biopolitical? If all of human life (including, e.g., labor) is biopolitical, hasn't it always been? And if it has, then what is old and what is new? What are the consequences—the successes and the failures—of the sorts of relations and arrangements of power it attempts to map? How does biopower connect with other forms of power, including those that its

champions (on both sides as it were) seem to deny too quickly—forms of power involving cognition, consciousness, signification and representation?

While capitalism and biopolitics constitute two major theoretical paradigms defining left intellectual efforts, they do not encompass all the intellectual and theoretical work being done. Here I want to mention only two additional figures, which cannot be so neatly equated with theoretical positions per se. There is important work around the state, citizenship and civil society as the other locus of governance, and I will talk further about this figure in the next chapter. There is also, crucially, a long and substantial history of struggles to both understand and contest the various constructions, deployment and figurations of otherness, marginality, subalternity, etc.—embodied in the various apparatuses of power constructing unequal relations of gender and sexuality, class, race and ethnicity, nationality, coloniality, indigeneity, differential abilities, age, generation, etc., and their complex configurations together. Such work raises questions of identification, belonging and community, and the production of identities and differences. Some on the left would argue (and I agree) that these apparatuses of power are at least as fundamental as capitalism itself, and often operate in historically specific relations to both capitalism and biopolitics. The most common (intellectual) theories of othering see the production of difference as an operation of negation and abjection, while recent thinking has sought more positive concepts of belonging and otherness. A few dissenting critics have argued for separating the struggle against forms of othering from the celebration of particular identities. For example, Gilroy (2000) puts a wedge between a politics of anti-racism and the affirmation of black identity, separating the latter from the culture of the African diaspora and arguing for a return to Fanon's vision of a "planetary humanism." That is, he argues for an anti-racist struggle in the name of justice and shared experiences of suffering, rather than in the name of any particular identity. It is beyond my task and my abilities to engage these matters with anything like the depth they demand in this project, although they will repeatedly arise in the discussions that follow.

The ontological turn

The importance of theory in the human sciences has imposed an almost impossible demand on those attempting to do critical work, to say nothing about those attempting to make sense of the state of the left.[6] One has to be familiar with at least some of the major theoretical figures and traditions, from the rationalism-empiricism debates of the Enlightenment, to Kant and Hegel, to Marx and Freud, to the other major schools of 20th century philosophy—phenomenology, hermeneutics, pragmatism, linguistic philosophy, "western Marxism," structuralism—as well as assorted figures in social, political and literary theory. That is more than enough work. But in recent decades, the set of theories and theorists has exploded as rapidly and significantly as the other dimensions of knowledge production I discussed earlier. The floodgates have opened. There are, quite simply, too many theories on offer, with more appearing all the time. Pity anyone trying to come to grips, responsibly, with theory today, for it is like stepping into the Tardis to discover that it is bigger on the inside than the outside, or into Feyerabend's (1975) dream of an anarchic ever-expanding universe of theories.[7] What is the poor neophyte (or the established scholar) who steps through the door to do? How does one navigate a path through this theoretical bounty, to find a place where one might belong, if only for a while? This proliferation is partly an expression of the changes in academic and intellectual production I discussed earlier, but it is also an expression of a uniquely U.S academic relation to theory, a particularly fetishized and parochial relation in which theoretical fluency is evaluated separately from its political and analytic utility. Thus there is a desire for theory, as if theory in itself could be political; this desire has been repeated again and again in the past decades, for example, as post-structuralism, postmodernism and most recently, post-Enlightenment ontology.

6 *Spoiler alert*. Despite my best efforts, the following discussion will be difficult to follow—but not impossible—for those not already familiar with the discussions. If the reader does not want to get caught up in the details, I would suggest that he or she stop when I begin discussing the "three responses," and pick up the discussion of the general features and impacts of these various ontologies.

7 This heterogeneous body of theory would include Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Nancy, Kristeva, Cixioux, Irigiray, Serres, Ranciere, Deleuze, Guattari, Agamben, Latour, Stengers, Esposito, Negri, Kittler, Braidotti, Virilio, Sloterdijk, Stiegler, Boltanski, Bifo, Lazzarato, Badiou, Castells, Meillassoux, Butler, Massumi, Haraway, Connolly, (Jane) Bennett, Barad, etc.This is just the beginning—I have left off many important figures, including no doubt many "favorites." There is also an enormous body of commentary and imaginative appropriation and syntheses that has quite literally produced its own publishing industry, both on- and off-line, some of it based in interesting, non-mainstream experimental publishing programs.

This last turn has had powerful resonances on the intellectual foundations of the contemporary left, so I want to try to tell something like an origin-story about it. I will try to make it as accessible as I can, sacrificing some of the esoteric and technical rigor and detail as necessary. The Enlightenment was a response to tumultuous and uncertain times, when historical changes and intellectual developments intersected so powerfully that some found it necessary to question the established certainties and their sources. The Enlightenment, as it is traditionally understood, embodied the effort to free thinking from the constraints of authority and tradition, leading to a search for the foundations and limits of "reason," and a debate between empiricism and rationalism: is knowledge grounded in the inherent capacities of the mind or the experiences of a world existing independently of the mind? As a result, the Enlightenment was also caught up in a second set of—metaphysical—issues, framed by the binary difference between mind and body, subject and object, human and non-human, etc., what one might call a problem of "humanism." Much of the modern philosophy that followed involved various efforts to think through this doubled dualism.

As I argued (in chapter 2), Kant solved both problems by relocating the metaphysical dualism outside the realm of human existence (experience), while both leaving it to operate as the condition of possibility of the "phenomenal" world, and displacing and reproducing it inside the phenomenal realm as mediation; it is the structure of relationality that grounds Kantian certainty and asserts its universality. Kant thus defined a safe harbor for the newly emerging modernities with his own "Copernican Revolution," in which the human is defined, in now classic liberal terms, as individuated, coherent, self conscious and masterful subjectivity, as the agent or engineer responsible for the production of its own reality. Humanity is capable of knowing and judging the world because it is a world of its own creation. Knowledge, after science, involves an effort to represent a reality that still stands against the subject, outside of his or her reason even while existing within the horizon of human experience.[8] Many philosophers after Kant continued to focus on the way the dualism was both mitigated and expressed within human reality. For example, Marx made human—"a third"—reality into a domain constituted by a dialectic of social practices; Heidegger (1962) rejected the reduction of

8 It should be noted that many practicing scientists—and 20th century logical positions, which sought to legitimate and explain scientific knowledge—were to a large extent opposed to Kantian philosophy.

the world to a moment inside experience or consciousness by asserting the material belonging together of man (sic] and world, a mode of being-in-the-world.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whatever sense of stability and certainty there had been about society and reality was shaken to the core by scientific, technological, social, political and economic changes, giving rise to what has been described as a "second modernity," characterized by, e.g., corporate and consumer capitalism; new waves of migration; electrification; new technologies of communication and transportation; high modernism in the arts; the destabilizing of the Newtonian universe, etc. If there was any doubt that these were times of extraordinary change and danger, the First World War sealed the judgment. Numerous philosophical developments—including pragmatism, logical positivism, phenomenology, and process philosophies—can be seen as attempts to negotiate these rough times. But perhaps the most influential attempt to find a safe harbor in uncertain times was Heidegger's (1962) effort to turn away from the Enlightenment/Kantian tradition.[9] Heidegger refused the Kantian definition of human beings as subjectivity, as the engineers of the reality in which they live; consequently, he also refused the reduction of language and knowledge to matters of representation. He argued that the problem was Kant's abandonment of the question of reality ("Being") in a philosophy of mediation. Instead, Heidegger offered a different—hermeneutic—concept of relationality, in which relations pre-exist the terms that they appear to bring together; their "belonging together" is the "ontological" ground that precedes the autonomous existence of the terms and their difference. Human existence can be described as a particular mode of "being-in-the-world" (Dasein), which is open to truth (alethaeia) as an unconcealing of the constitutive (transcendental, ontological) structures of its own being.[10] That is, Dasein does not make truth; it uncovers it. And it seeks truth, especially the truth of its own existence,

9 There were other critiques of Enlightenment thought, including the Frankfurt School's complex negotiations with Marxism and Hegelian negativity, and structuralism's ambivalent relation to Enlightenment humanism and universalism.

10 In *Being and Time* (originally published in 1927), Heidegger admits that we no longer know how to question the meaning of Being and so he takes a more indirect path: if we cannot ask the ontological question, we can inquire into the ontology of the sort of being that wants to understand Being. What way of existing would involve being concerned about one's own existence? The answer to the question involves an ontological interpretation of Dasein's mode-of-being-in-the-world. Heidegger concludes that such a being is a temporal being, is in fact the event or happening of time itself, inscribing a path that brings together past, present and future. It is only because Dasein is "a being-toward-death" that it is concerned with its own being and hence, with the question of Being. But because Dasein is finite, its openness is always also limited and hence, every unconcealing is also a concealing as well.

of what it is to be human (or in colloquial terms, what is the meaning of life) because its life is finite. Heidegger's "ontology of finitude" rejects Kant's claims of transcendence but still offers a universal ontology of relationality and temporality.

But the extraordinary times of a second modernity increasingly morphed into what Hannah Arendt (1970) called the "dark times" of the 20th century—the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the defeat of working class revolutions of the 1930s, the holocaust, the Second World War and the atomic bomb. And still the seismic shifts just kept coming, often with catastrophic consequences: anti-colonial struggles and new imperialist wars; the continuing failures of Marxism (1956, the Gulag, 1989);[11] the cultural-political struggles of the 1960s including the civil rights movement, feminism, gay rights, the counterculture, etc.); new technologies and cultural forms; enduring forms of hatred and discrimination around matters of race, sex and gender, nationality and ethnicity, religion, etc.; the apparent resilience of capitalism, the explosion of consumerism, and the continuing presence and even expansion of economic inequality, exploitation and poverty; new forms and social organizations of violence; etc. It is not difficult to read this history as making visible the contradictions at the heart of the Enlightenment and the versions of euro-modernity that were built on it, between its barbarity and its "long revolution" toward democracy, literacy, greater economic equity, etc. But the Enlightenment offered no terms with which to confront its own dark side. Events suggested that the problems lay deep in its foundations, in the heart of the Enlightenment itself. They offered up good reasons to think that the contradictions of Enlightenment thought defined its political and social limits, hypocrisies and failures (especially between its lofty ideals about a certain construction of Europe and its barbarity towards everyone else). Of course, how one responded to these events and to their intellectual challenges depended in part on where one stood in relation to them, especially but not only in generational terms. For example, the French philosopher of science Michel Serres (1995, pp. 2 and 4), in a moving passage, describes the experience of those whose lives were marked by these changes and barbarities:

11 The failure of Marxism was also shaped significantly by a perceived failure of the dominant schools of Marxist thought to address these changes.

> My generation lived through these early years very painfully. The preceding generation was twenty years old at the beginning of these events and, as adults, lived them in an active way, becoming involved in them. My generation could only follow them in the passivity of powerlessness—as child, adolescent—in any case, weak, and without any possibility of action. Violence, death, blood and tears, hunger, bombings, deportations, affected my age group and traumatized it, since these horrors took place during the time of our formation—physical and emotional. My youth goes from Guernica (I cannot bear to look at Picasso's famous painting) to Nagasaki, by way of Auschwitz. . . . My generation was formed, physically, in this atrocious environment and ever since has kept its distance from politics. For us power still means only cadavers and torture.

Heidegger was the most obvious place to begin to challenge the Enlightenment, and philosophers as diverse as Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze have all acknowledged that Heidegger defined the challenge of philosophy for them, a challenge that was both intellectual and political. In philosophical terms, Heidegger still seemed caught in the pull of transcendence, whether in his search for an "authentic" mode of being-in-the-world, or in the very notion of belonging-together as the ontological given that transcends both identity and difference. But the political question was even more urgent: how had Heidegger's flight from the Enlightenment rejection of metaphysics to a new ontology allowed him to end up in fascism? What was the connection between the philosophy and the politics?

There were three responses to these challenges. One is exemplified in the French literary philosopher Jacques Derrida's philosophical post-structuralism (a term that is largely the product of the academic industries of the English-speaking world), which inaugurates what might be called a philosophy of failure. Derrida embraces the necessary inability of thought to comprehend either reality or its own origin as subjectivity. For Derrida (1991), what Heidegger demonstrated was the impossibility of escaping the Enlightenment; by denying the hermeneutic relation itself, Derrida asserts the impossibility of ever constituting a moment of unity, identity, presence, positivity or interiority and consequently, any reciprocal moment of externality or escape. That is, following on the

structuralist argument that language as the production of meaning worked by producing systems of differences in which each term is defined by what it is not, Derrida argued that reality itself was the endless production of such differences. Ontology itself is impossible in anything but the terms of a pure negativity. Reality is not a plenitude of beings (or meanings) each with its own positive identity, or the pre-existence of relation but a process of *differance*, a production of difference (negativity) that can never be stabilized into a single moment but is always being deferred, endlessly differentiating, endlessly negating, leaving only a trace of its own existence or operation. Derrida finds an ethics of hope in the figure of a completely unknowable and therefore open futurity, in the present, which never arrives, and which he (and others) sometimes called communism (Derrida, 1994).[12]

A second response came from Heidegger himself; following the defeat of fascism, Heidegger noted how easily some interpreters read his argument as a new humanism (as if humans were the engineers of truth) and a philosophy of transcendence. In response, he challenged his own assumption of the universality of Dasein as the mode of being-in-the-world of the human, and offered what might be called a philosophy of historical ontology. He suggested that the very nature or meaning of Being or existence changes; it is regional and epochal rather than universal. [13] For example, Heidegger (1982) argued that in the contemporary epoch (variously called the technological frame or the world-picture), reality exists as a resource for humans. This is not a false representation or experience of reality, nor a reality that humans have engineered so that they can somehow choose to change it; it is the very reality of existence, the Being of Being. He argued that the real danger of the present epoch is not that the world is given as resource, but rather that the truth that

12Philosophies of failure might also be read in such thinkers as Nietzsche, Bataille, Freud and even some Marxists like Benjamin and Adorno, all of whom deny the search for a fully realized community, either as the origin or the teleology of the social. The post-Heideggerian return to the negative has strongly influenced many contemporary theorists, from Lacan's assumption of the necessary inability of language to represent the real and of desire to be fulfilled, to Blanchot's unavoidable community, and Nancy's inoperative community, to Ranciere's politics of disssensus, and Laclau's notion of the impossibility of the social.

13 Being is "a gift," and much of Heidegger's later work can be seen as an attempt to explain this notion of the gift without assuming that there is someone or something that gives the gift. Unfortunately, Heidegger's efforts to answer the question of the "origins" of the epochs of Being leads him to a description of the poetic creativity of the plenitude of meaning (in a kind of mythical language—*Saga*), which seems to bring him back into transcendence even as he abandons universalism, and possibly back into a transcendental humanism (given the place of language and meaning as the ontological ground of intelligibility and even Being). But one can avoid both the transcendence and the universalism by embracing the idea of a historical ontology without demanding an ontological ground for the assumption that change is always a possibility.

Being is always a gift is hidden, so that humans think they construct reality and hence, fail to see the possibilities of other modes of Being. There are many contemporary philosophers (e.g. Jean-Luc Nancy, 2007) who have taken up this figure of world-making. Foucault's theory of genealogies—in which the problem of finitude itself becomes an expression of the modern epoch--might also be read as a very different take on an historical ontology of power.[14]

The final response is perhaps the most influential today; Heidegger is displaced by Baruch Spinoza, a 17th century Marrano jew, partly located in a non-European tradition of Levantine thought and modernity.[15] Yet the two shared much in common. Both opposed Enlightenment humanism and subjectivism; both rejected a representational epistemology and the resulting refusal of ontology. Both attempted to recognize multiplicity, heterogeneity and change, and to embrace the positivity of beings —something is what it is—rather than assume that things are defined by what they are not.[16] The revitalization of Spinoza in the 1960s is in large measure the result of Deleuze's intentionally skewed reading of him (1990), in which an Enlightenment thinker provides an alternative path out of the Enlightenment. That is, Deleuze reads Spinoza into a France that had been traumatized by the holocaust, its own complicity with fascism, the Algerian War, etc. He erases Spinoza's Enlightenment faith in reason and his humanism, expressed in terms of the finitude of humanity's relation to God, understood as the unity and totality of existence itself, in all time and space.

14 Foucault (1988, p. 250) has written that "Heidegger has always been for me the essential philosopher . . . I still have the notes I took while reading Heidegger. I have tons of them!—and they are far more important than the ones I took on Hegel or Marx. My whole philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger." He adds, "But I recognize that Nietzsche prevailed over him." But this is a different Nietzsche than that of Derrida for example. Foucault also distinguishes his position by refusing to give up entirely on the Enlightenment—rejecting its humanism as a now disappearing historical event; but he holds on to Kant's project of critique as the effort of the present to question itself "about its own present reality," despite its being an expression of modernity itself.

15 Spinoza is traditionally read as a representative of "the Jewish Enlightenment" (still bound up with "the will to know") in dialogue with Descartes (hence a rationalist) and, to a lesser extent, Leibniz (hence a naturalist).

16 According to Deleuze (1994), Heidegger could not accept that difference itself is a creative affirmation. In fact, I think the relation of affirmation and negation is more complicated. Spinoza argues that determination is always negation, since it is also about difference and difference can never be understood as purely affirmative. Looking back, we might argue that Hegel ontologized negation, Nietzsche attempted to transform negation into affirmation, and Heidegger attempted to subsume negation into affirmation but could only do so by re-inscribing a transcendent unity. Deleuze negates negation, in order to make difference creative but Spinoza already had a creative notion of difference without negating negation.

For Deleuze (1990), Spinoza was the pre-eminent philosopher of immanence, positivity and a naturalist monism;[17] Deleuze in fact equates them by—in his own admission—misreading Spinoza's immanence, moving from Spinoza's claim that everything exists in and is an expression of God (the One, Nature, Substance)[18] to Duns Scotus' notion of univocity, that everything that exists, exists in the same way (in terms of its capacities to affect and be affected). That is, all things exist as bodies and are defined by what they can do to other bodies, and what other bodies can do to them. Consequently, ideas (concepts, generalities, the sensible), experiences (sense) and bodies all exist on the same plane. For Deleuze, then, every existent is a pure difference, a positivity, always a matter of becoming, defined by its capacities or intensities, which are activated by its proximity to or relations with other existents. Deleuze calls this resonance or becoming, "expression." This notion of expression depends upon another figuration of relationality: rather than mediation, dialectics or hermeneutics, Deleuze proposes a theory of the exteriority of relations. Describing relations as exterior means that they exist independently of the terms they bring into relation; relations actualize the capacities of the terms, without exhausting them and without themselves being exhausted, since relations also exist as capacities.

The result is that Spinoza is transformed from a philosopher of the One and the Many into a philosopher of multiplicity, from a rationalist who elevated the possibility of a collective intuition of the unity of all things over both empiricist and conceptual thought, into a materialist of sorts. If Heidegger's ontology avoids Kant's Copernican Revolution (in which human beings construct reality) by making reality the result (a gift) of processes that transcend the human, Deleuze's Spinoza offers his own Copernican Revolution in which reality is always producing itself. To understand this claim, however, one must recognize that the meaning of immanence changes again, or takes on a second affordance, since reality is now differentiated into two modes of being: the virtual and the actual,

17 Another way of reading the difference between the Spinozists/Deleuzeans and contemporary philosophies of failure such as Derrida, Lacan and Badiou (and what distinguishes the latter from e.g., more Marxist philosophies of failure as well) boils down to the classic debate between materialist ontology (the Spinozists defend a concept of substantive multiplicities, without universals) and idealist ontology (in which universals are part of a philosophy of formal multiplicities, in what might be called an "idealism without idealism").

18 In Spinoza's architecture, expression is always mediated, although not in a Kantian sense. The One expresses itself in infinite attributes, which are themselves infinite, and which in turn express themselves in finite modes or bodies. Human beings only have access to two attributes: thought and extension, thus inscribing Cartesian dualism inside the relations of humanity to God. See Melamed (2013).

the latter being the realization of capacities (that are unactualized in the virtual).[19] The point of immanence is now to deny that one mode of being transcends the other; instead, the virtual and the actual exist on the same ontological plane. Thus, reality is constantly making itself, actualizing itself, producing particular actual realities out of and alongside the virtual through a variety of logics (connective, conjunctive and disjunctive, for example), into a variety of forms of relations and organizations (called assemblages or molarities), each of which has its own positivity and capacities.[20]

Deleuze's philosophy (constructed in large part through his 'mis'-readings of Spinoza, Bergson, Nietzsche, Leibniz, etc.) has helped to inspire a broad and powerful turn in contemporary theory against the Enlightenment and into ontology. He is however not alone. Other alter-, counter- and anti-enlightenment figures, including Spinoza, Leibniz, Nietzsche, Bergson, Bataille, the later Heidegger, the metaphysical pragmatists (e.g., James), Whitehead, Castoriadis, Simondon and Tarde, have also had a major impact, and other contemporary theorists have made original contributions. Additionally, much of this work also has roots in the challenges of late 19th and early 20th century science, which marked the end of the Newtonian universe—causal, deterministic, stable and therefore predictable, capable of being known with certainty. Besides quantum mechanics and relativity, the newly formulated laws of thermodynamics changed the way one could view reality itself. The first law postulated that reality (and matter) existed as energy or force, often de-

19 The distinction is derived from Bergson.

20 Here one can reconnect Deleuze with Foucault's (Heideggerian) historical ontology through the figure of the machine, which while not particularly prominent in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza (or for that matter, of other philosophers) becomes central in his collaborative turn, with the French radical psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, into an effort to invent concepts aimed at addressing more socio-political questions. Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1987) describe this production of the actual as machinic, to avoid any hint of humanism. Reality is produced—the virtual is actualized—by a series of machines (discursive formations or technologies of power in Foucault's terms). Deleuze and Guattari, in the course of their work, identify many kinds of machines: e.g., war machines; machines of capture; abstract or stratifying machines (Foucault's diagrams or *dispositif*); coding machines; territorializing machines. Every machine not only fails at times, but each operates in both directions: coding and de-coding, territorializing and de-territorializing, etc. Moreover, there are always multiple machines operating on the virtual, and producing multiple independent realities (strata). Machines act as maps that realize themselves, akin to how we might think about the laws of geometry 'producing' or 'causing' the very shapes they describe. But every reality depends, most fundamentally, on a random selection, distribution and differentiation of active populations into "expression" and "content": that which acts and that which is acted upon or, in Foucault's terms, the sayable and the visible (the given). Deleuze (1986) sees Foucault's diagrams—e.g., discipline, governmentality, biopolitics—as maps that organize populations and their conduct, rather than as intentional designs for social engineering.

scribed in vocabularies of becoming, affordances, rhythms and vibrations.[21] The second law postulated that any isolated system tends toward maximum entropy or chaos. In the 1940s and 50s, this became the founding assumption of cybernetics, information theory and various systems theories, all of which were concerned with the necessary production of negentropy (whether as life or information, for example) through the composition of structure. Taken together with the continuing endurance of certain Marxist concepts and commitments, the result is a universe of intersecting discourses giving rise to all sorts of transversally related positions. All I can do here is briefly identify some of the driving assumptions and directions of this anti-Enlightenment (or perhaps more accurately, anti-Kantian) ontological turn.

The ontological turn generally stands opposed to the Kantian version of constructionism, in which reality is the product of human subjectivity. Its various positions oppose epistemologies of representation, the valorization of reason, and Enlightenment claims of universalism, while affirming other concepts of relationality[22] and constructionism (world-making processes or practices). For the most part, they assert some version of a naturalist materialism, where singular bodies (which can be pre-individual, individualized, or collectivities) are seen to be complex, pluralistic, heterogeneous and dynamic. Many theorists redefine agency in non-humanistic terms, so that it can be assigned to materialities or bodies themselves, as the capacity to produce effects. They reject the notion of things or objects (including organisms) as discrete, autonomous and stable units. And they argue that many of the key transformations of reality are not the result of subjects or consciousness; they operate beyond the capacities of human perception, cognition or discursive representations. Vitalist inflections of this "new materialism" (e.g., Bennett, 2010) see reality as a process of materialization, an active and self-productive, self-creative, self-transformative force. Some argue that beyond actual materialities, there is always an excess embodying a natural form of immanent agency.[23]

21 Thanks to Lynn Badia.

22 Different positions often present themselves as if they were the only one to oppose representation or to think relationally. There are some positions (e.g., speculative realism, the first philosophy born on the web) that argue that one can escape the traps of Kantianism only by rejecting the reality of relationality in any of its theorized forms.

23 The claim that such mew materialist ontologies are based in Spinoza seems to me seriously problematic. Spinoza distinguished three modes of being and three modes of knowledge. The level of materialism—which is defined by the multiplicity of particular existences (of bodies and ideas) bears a close relation to imagination as the lowest form of knowledge—of sensations and

This materialist turn is closely related to an anti-humanist turn that rejects the ontological distinction between the human and the non-human, and often serves as an argument for materializing the human, in both naturalist and anti-naturalist terms. At its best (Hayles, 1999, Braidotti, 2013), it makes both the human and the post-human into historically specific constructions. It offers an argument against the liberal subject of the Enlightenment. This is the Kantian subject, coherent, self-conscious and active. In my opinion, this concept of the subject is actually a complicated articulation of a number of distinct assumptions, including: (1) anthropocentrism—the claim that humans are uniquely valued and valuing; (2) individualism—the fundamental existence of the human is the individual as a particular mode of embodiment; (3) subjectivity—consciousness is the author of its own experience; (4) freedom—the autonomy of the subject; (5) agency—the subject is the site of creativity and the agent of history. Against this Enlightenment humanism, post-humanism encompasses a range of positions attempting to understand or imagine the human in relation to the non-human. This includes technological interventions that reconstruct and mediate the "naturalness" of the human body, including informatic, genetic, reproductive, prosthetic, and robotic. But it also includes relations to both non-human life as well as other material realities. The result is that the lines between the human and its other become blurred, even as the very possibility of confidently defining the human has been undermined, making it more flexible, fluid and multiple.

A final tendency within the new ontologies is the re-theorization of organization. The demand for organization articulated in the 2nd law of thermodynamics was profoundly influential in the second half of the 20th century, moving out from its more scientific expressions into the numerous and varied forms of structuralisms and systems theories, many of which have entered into contemporary ontologies, including versions of cybernetics, network theory (Castells, 2009), assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006) and actor network theory (Latour, 2007). Additionally, some of its current versions in the sciences have been taken up, both

experience. His own philosophy is written at the second level of knowledge, which attempts to use concepts (common notions) to develop adequate ideas of the universal or at least generalizable properties of things. The third kind of knowledge or intuition is the truly adequate knowledge of truth, of the One, of the unity of all existence, and is only possible if every being achieves it.

metaphorically and literally, in contemporary ontologies, including complexity theory (through the work of Bateson, 2000, Maturana and Varella, 1992) and, closely related, chaos theory (Protevi, 2009).[24]

Since the concept of affect plays a major role in my own argument, I want to take some time to consider how the concept has appeared after the ontological turn, often under the sign of "the affective turn" or "affect theory."[25] Affect as ontology is all about the possibility of action at a distance, the non-subjective capacity of a body to pass from one state to another, or to change the state of another body. Affect concerns the effects of bodies on one another—matters of bodily habits and comportments—producing particular sensations. A typical example, from Spinoza, is that the sun affects the skin, producing a sensation of warmth. But affect also refers to the passions, or what we might more commonly call feelings, moods, sentiments, etc. As such, affect is used to describe the qualitative, intensive experiences of, or better, relations to, the social world. Most people who write about affect (myself included) do assume that the two meanings (the corporeal and the intensive) are closely related, so that the intensive or passional experiences cannot be entirely explained in terms of consciousness or cognition, signification or representation alone. Ontological theories of affect go further, assuming that

24 Such post-Enlightenment theories of organization tend to be largely descriptive, with little interest in explaining why such organizations exist, how they come into existence or how they can be changed. With a few exceptions (e.g., DeLanda's assemblage theory), they often treat any system as isolated and decontextualized. Even theories of auto-poiesis tend to render the system in solipsistic terms, largely immune to external influence except insofar as they introduce imbalance into a system that seeks to maintain homeostasis. Consequently, they tend to offer ontologies without a politics, or at best, a naturalized ethics defined by the necessary continued existence and normative functioning of the system. Finally, because such theories describe the behavior of any specific organization in terms of the general properties of systems, it is often impossible to know what constitutes the specificity of any kind of organization. For if, as Latour would have it, an empiricism of constructions entails that everything is taken as exactly as what is given (thus closing off the question of how they are produced and consequently, the multiplicity of ways in which they might be engaged), how are we to judge the variety of possible constructions? What constitutes the specificity, for example, of social assemblages? Are they all to be protected? Although Latour's Actor Network Theory, perhaps the most visible of such efforts, can tell us that society is assembled, it cannot tell us what makes a society a different sort of assemblage than other networks, or what sort of politics might enable us to make it better.- Much of this work differs from Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of historically contingent ontologies because the latter refuses a reductionism, common in many new materialisms and most systems theories, in which every level is the dynamic result (emergence) of the previous one, leading ultimately back to a singular reality or force. Nor does their theory of machinic production offer a theory of autopoiesis as self-organizing complex systems, for machines operate on realities other than themselves.

25 Key figures include Brian Massumi (2002), Nigel Thrift (2007), Patricia Clough (Clough and Halley, 2007), and Teresa Brennan (2004). There is another formation derived from feminist/queer theory, literary criticism anthropology (not ontology), exemplified by Lauren Berlant (2011), Kathleen Stewart (2007), and Heather Love (2007).

the intensive passions can be reduced to the corporeal, since both are merely expressions of affect as effectivity.[26] Affect becomes a mode or expression of bodies effecting and controlling other bodies.

Massumi (2002), perhaps the most influential ontologist of affect, assumes that all the forms of affective expression can be explained in purely neuro-psychological terms (a biological naturalism) as accounts of bodily encounters and brain activity. He cites experiments that purportedly demonstrate the "incipience" of affect, that the brain is actively engaged before any conscious awareness or decision. This makes the distinction between affect and emotions (the latter being individualized, subjective, conscious, and "thoughtful") absolute and crucial.[27] As a result, Massumi asserts that affect is autonomous—immediate or unmediated, pre-cognitive, pre-discursive, pre-personal, pre-individual, and pre-social.[28] Affects are the result of the material, precognitive capacities of bodies (understood in physical or behaviorial terms) to communicate or affect other bodies causally, immediately and directly, even if at a distance. They are not socially produced, nor located within either individual or social subjectivity. It describes a world of signals that produce an immediate (and somewhat predictable) effect between bodies or states of bodies, activating bodies below the level of consciousness, before any possibility of thought or decision (echoing earlier theories of subliminal communication). Affects are literally transmitted, acting as contagion (images of viral communication abound). Thus the cognitive—discursive, semantic and representational—determinations of experience

26 Although Spinoza does seem to equate these two, this is only possible because of his theory of parallelism. As long as every event in the attribute of the body is also an event in the attribute of mind, the two have a certain relation, which is not to say that they are equivalent, or that one can reduce all experience to the body. But contemporary readings of Spinoza have largely abandoned this parallelism, while trying to hold on to the relation among the various dimensions of affect.

27 This appropriation of selective experiments, often built on contested assumptions and interpretations, from what may well be the most reductive science to appear since behavioral psychology—namely neuropsychology, has been contested by critics such as Wetherell (2012). The specific experiments are often treated out of context, as transparently clear and uncontested. Similarly, specific cognitive theories (e.g., basic emotions) are accepted as obviously true because they can be read into presupposed ontologies, despite the fact that they too have been challenged within the context of larger conversations.

28 The very claim of "autonomy" should give us pause, since the fundamental assumption of relationality would seem to preclude the possibility that anything is autonomous, unless one argues that such apparent and even effective claims to autonomy are themselves conjuncturally produced, as part of a larger set of struggles. In point of fact, many arguments depend on rhetorics that slide from one meaning of affect to another, or that assume their equivalence, usually by assigning all of its resonances to the materiality of bodies.

are simply inoperative in the domains of affect or if they are active, it is to interrupt or capture the affective flows and resonances. Ironically, the result is a new dualism between mind (cognition) and body (affect).

Massumi's position does call to mind older behaviorist model of social life, now couched in ontological, neuropsychological and aesthetic vocabularies. But there is at least one important difference, for affect is always both actual and virtual, both the lived reality of bodies in relations, and the as yet unrealized potentialities that resonate between them. That is, the ontological status of affect guarantees that there is always an excess of capacities that are not actualized by power, leaving affect, in the final analysis, untamed and unassimilable. The result is that any instance of corporeal affect and passion is always circumscribed by the ontological excess that escapes the encounter. This excess means that other possibilities are always real (at least ontologically). Most commonly, this excess is located in the creativity of the arts and the revolutionary impulse behind the act of resistance.

As one begins to think critically about the ontological turn, it might be reasonable to start by returning to the Enlightenment, for all too often, the Enlightenment is mis-represented as a singular thing: first, by failing to recognize that there were a number of different Enlightenments and second, by assuming that all of the elements or assumptions comprising Enlightenment thinking are necessary and necessarily stitched together into a seamless, harmonious whole. On the contrary, I think of the Enlightenment as a heterogeneous set of elements in various relations, as a set of discursive formations. I have already described five "bits" constituting the Enlightenment in the discussion of the liberal subject above. Other elements might include: (6) rationalism—the human mind, as the locus of reason (often identified with a rather loose understanding of science as opposed to faith or tradition) is capable of understanding reality and of grasping its own limits; (7) a logic of dualism—subject/object, mind/body, culture/nature, language/reality, individual/social, etc.; (8) a linear conception of time, in which time rather than space is the active dimension of change; and (9) universalism —as both a metaphysical and normative claim which, in large measure, allowed European Enlightenment thought to assume that it defined the necessary and proper being of humanity and the world, and therefore to justify the assumption that its responsibility lay in bringing this already universal but unrealized state of being to actualization everywhere. The

articulation of Enlightenment humanism with an assumed universality of the human (to be protected by the state) helped make euro-modernity inseparable from the barbarity of racialization, colonialism, patriarchy, etc.

One might ask about the relations among these various assumptions: are they substantively or formally equivalent? Do they all have the same status? Are they all always and necessarily a part of every enlightenment? Are they necessarily or contingently connected? Were there (and are there?) other enlightenments besides the normative set of positions that were articulated in the dominant northern European forms of Enlightenment thought (and the varieties of euro-modernism that followed). But even this dominant version of the Enlightenment is not a singular homogeneous philosophy but a variety of often-difficult articulations. For example, the assumption of transcendence so commonly attributed to the Enlightenment might now be seen as the articulation of dualism and universalism. Even more importantly, nowhere in my list is any reference to a single assumption that can be described as humanism, often thought of as the most common element of Enlightenment thinking; my earlier description of the humanism of "the liberal subject" invoked at least five assumptions. That is because I think humanism is an articulation of discrete assumptions into a quasi-coherent understanding of the human. In the case of the dominant forms of Enlightenment thought, what emerged was a kind of hyper-humanism, which articulated anthropocentrism, individualism, subjectivity, freedom and agency. This articulation made the individual subject into the free author of experience and the agent of history. It is but a short step to the Kantian image of the human subject as the engineer of his—the gendered nature of the subject is not incidental—own reality.

One can easily ask whether other articulations of humanism are possible, as one re-articulates some of the terms and their relations. After all, while some of these assumptions—e.g., anthropocentrism, universalism, dualism—present a simple choice—either you accept or reject it, other assumptions—e.g., agency or rationalism or even humanism itself—might offer any number of possible ways of being actualized. This may open up possibilities for re-imagining or reconfiguring any number of these assumptions as themselves historically specific constructions whose work might be redirected into other ethical and political visions. The result is that the critique of Enlightenment thinking is a complicated endeavor,

which, if done carefully, can open up wonderfully creative possibilities for thinking, even as one recognizes the ways it has closed off other paths of thought in the past.

I am interested in the "truth effects" (to use Foucault's term) of the turn from Enlightenment thought to ontology. It has created a context in which theory increasingly provides answers in advance to socio-historical and political questions, trumping empirical investigation and political complexity. All too often, grand claims of theoretical innovation, after taking us down fascinating paths, end up producing surprisingly little that is useful in the way of either conjunctural diagnoses or concrete political strategy. Sometimes the conclusions are obvious, sometimes they simply reproduce the conclusions of other non-ontological arguments in new languages (in either case, one needn't have gone through all that theoretical effort) and often, they cannot be contested because they are guaranteed by their ontological premises (a tautology then). While the turn away from the Enlightenment opens up new and important challenges and opportunities, I fear it also expresses secret and perhaps impossible desires: to make philosophy immediately relevant to political struggles, and to grant political struggles a new kind of theoretical certainty.

Thus, for me, the real problem is the way ontology itself is deployed, not as a set of possibly useful tools, but as a new claim to certainty and universality. The turn away from Enlightenment rationality returns to its most problematic commitment: the assertion of a universally true philosophy. Even the philosophies of failure, insofar as they claim that failure is ontologically guaranteed, are forms of universalism and certainty. The critique of the various commitments of the Enlightenment, and of the ways they are defined and related in different formations, especially in the Kantian hyper-humanist versions of relationality and constructionism, is absolutely vital for the intellectual challenges the left faces; but it should make intellectuals more humble and uncertain. Instead, the effort to ground some faith in the possibility of small—contextual—truths becomes the universalist appeal to an ontological materialism, etc. It appears as if every investigation must now be ontological—the ontology of derivatives, of television, of the state—although I have to admit that I am often at a loss to know what work the term is doing or what meaning is being assigned to it. Too often, it seems to refer to claims to understand the (universal) essence of some phenomenon, whether through

appeals to science and/or materialism, and to lay claim to an unearned certainty.[29] Such appeals can only shut down the possibilities of intellectual-political conversation.[30]

This explosion of theory and the turn to ontology *has* enabled voices that have been silenced or ignored to be heard, but perhaps not as many or as richly as one might hope. While it has questioned taken for granted assumptions, it has also enabled schools and theorists instant visibility without much in the way of rigorous definition, differentiation, debate or judgment. While it has enabled critical intellectuals to think about the multiplicity of discursive effects beyond signification and representation, it has done so often by refusing the reality of representation itself.[31] While it has expanded and even, to some extent, displaced the notion of agency beyond the human, it has sometimes denied the very possibility of human agency. While it offers a conceptual vocabulary for thinking through the contextuality of reality, it often ends up conflating ontological processes with historical actualities, so that the latter become little more than evidence of ontological assertions and the former become assumed descriptions of actual realities. Thus, somehow, rather magically I fear, the statement of an ontology of materialism (as corporealities, affect, etc.) or of an ontology of structures (as networks, assemblages, etc.) is taken to be sufficient to diagnose the concrete conditions and contradictions of the lived context, as if nothing stood between the universal and the concrete. Operating on the highly abstract levels of ontology, which are often (re-)presented as if they were the most concrete materialist claims, the ontological turn has deconstructed the universal humanism of the European Enlightenment, only to establish a new universalism, one that is at least as absolute and fundamental as Enlightenment metaphysics (which, as Hume saw, often ended up with the necessity of appealing to common sense to avoid skepticism). These contradictions and paradoxes result from the new ontologies' erasure, in historically

29 Often, this use of ontology seems to return it to the very structures of metaphysics or ontical observation to which Heidegger opposed ontology. Neither of these captures the sense of ontology as the investigation of the regional–non-universalist—nature or meaning of Being or existence, the multiplicity of modes of being-in-the-world, of relationality itself.

30 This is not the first time ontology has trumped other possibilities. See Cruse, *The Crisis of the Intellectual* (1967), which struggles against a political ontology of whiteness.

31 Thus, to return to my argument in chapter 3, I argue that culture or discursive formations transform materialities (or what Deleuze and Guattari call a milieu) into expressive territories of the lived. The multiplicity of discursive formations or forms of expression (mixed regimes of signs) offer an account of the complexities of affect, beyond signification and representation. But it also means that the body as lived materiality—including its cognitive and sensory capacities—is always cultural. One cannot reduce the lived body to the materialities of the milieu.

specific ways, of their own historical specificity, in much the same way that Marx critiqued classic political economy. That is to say, like postmodernism before it, it lays claim to concepts capable of grasping the universal Truth of reality, forgetting both Heidegger's lesson—that there are only historically determined ontologies, and Marx's—that the path from the concept to the real is measured by complex mediations and determinations.[32] If one is interested in ontology's bearing on the analytics and politics of concrete, social existence, it requires the empirical and conceptual work of moving from one level of abstraction to another, from the universal to the concrete. This challenge is too easily displaced by the claim that the universal is being derived from the particular.

What else has this turn away from the Enlightenment into new ontologies accomplished? Its most visible impact has been the continuing bifurcation of the field of theory (and as I show argue in the next chapter, of political opposition as well) into the old and the new: structuralisms against humanisms; post-structuralisms against both structuralisms and humanisms; post-modernisms against modernisms; and now, post-Enlightenment thought against the Enlightenment. While these are by no means identical, in each case the old is presented as an assumed unity and the new, as some vision of difference or multiplicity. The new is juxtaposed against some artificial construct, which paints old theory in simplistic and rather unsophisticated terms. (Think of the critiques of critique described in chapter 2.) Or consider, for example, Latour's (1993) influential argument that "we have never been modern." Defining modernity as the project to maintain the absolute purity of opposing dualistic terms (e.g., nature versus culture), he then rightly observes that modernity was never able to be anything but hybrid; it follows that 'we have never been modern.' Of course, the claim that the essence of modernity is in the project of purification that is opposed by the reality of hybridity (a claim that, by the way, sounds a lot like critique) is itself questionable. One might ask whether that is a sufficient understanding of the complexity of modernities. One might ask what the role of this assumption of difference as purification was, and how it was articulated into other assumptions and relations.

32 It is interesting that Serres, the most self-conscious theorist of his generation in relation to their historical and political context, is also the most committed to contextually specific analyses that emphasize complexity, impurity, concreteness and singularity.

The irony here is that often, those following the ontological turn end up creating their own oppositions, purified by their own logic, rather than embracing the very complexity, heterogeneity and multiplicity they claim to champion. The post-Enlightenment ontologists might do better to enter into conversation with other more historical and political engagements with the Enlightenment, such as postcolonial and feminist reconsiderations, which understand that the Enlightenment was never about the sorts of simple, pure dualisms that the former take for granted; all there ever was, even in the Enlightenment, were particular forms of multiplicity and hybridity, articulations of structures, organizations and unities, and the struggles to manage them. Instead, everything "old" is collapsed into a single position (Enlightenment rationality or humanism) and everything new stands outside the well-defined space of the old. The pull into a totalizing division of the theoretical field results in the fetishism of small differences and the erasure of big similarities, and the constant need to reproduce its own binary logic. The theoretical field is constructed, over and over, almost in a fractal logic, as a chasm or rupture: on the one side, all of the previous—bad, wrong-headed, politically flawed—theories and then, a leap to the other side, and a new set of concepts that have to be embraced in all of their theoretical purity to avoid the fall back into that failed history. This is one might say the ultimate rationalist (Enlightenment) illusion. The irony is that a theoretical turn built on a rejection of the binary thinking which, it is claimed, defined Enlightenment thought, is all about the constant re-construction of an absolute binarism.

It seems, according to post-Enlightenment theory, that we live in an age that can only be described via the claim of the "post," a very modern gesture if ever there was one. Like many postmodernists (e.g. Baudrillard, Jameson) before them, many post-Enlightenment thinkers tend to legitimate the constructed intellectual rupture by appealing to a fundamental rupture in history. While postmodernism's understanding of history was often predicated upon a vision of the contemporary world in terms of fragmentation, the negation of difference, and the disappearance of materiality and agency, post-Enlightenment thinking assumes the multiplication of differences, the materiality of existence and the dispersion of agency. To take just one example, Latour (2010, p. 481) links his theoretical turn to epochal and ontological (rather than conjunctural) historical changes: "micro and macro-cosm are now literally and not symbolically connected, and the result is a kakosmos, that is . . . a horrible and disgusting mess . . . it certainly no longer resembles the

bifurcated nature of the recent past." Or in other terms (p. 472), "it is the time of time that has passed . . . If there is one thing that has vanished, it is the idea of a flow of time, moving inevitably and irreversibly forward that can be predicted by clear-sighted thinkers." Here Latour operates with a new kind of guaranteed equivalence or determination: since all is materiality (network), the end of history as expression is the end of history as lived/ material temporality.

One might well respond that if the past were not so absolutely bifurcated and time not so linear (even if they were sometimes represented and experienced that way, partly as a result of political and economic struggles), then the present may not be so horribly messy. Need I point out that such challenges to progress and the ability of some to predict the future have a longer history, and a more complicated set of political articulations, and that such observations have been made by a wide variety of even recent modernist/Enlightenment thinkers, from Hayek to Gramsci? Or to offer another example, the ontology of affect, in a sense, sees itself responding to the appearance of new technologies of social control that work on the materiality of the body and the immediacy of affective responses. This vision re-invents a long-standing fantasy/nightmare of a new kind of power that cannot be resisted, a pre-emptive politics that works through the affective modulation or attunement of bodies and populations. It re-animates a long history of fears of the operations of communication and power—imagined in such forms as propaganda and subliminal communication, as well as postmodern celebrations of new media—of a communication without mediation.[33]

This habit of inscribing dualisms in the name of refusing dualist thought echoes throughout the turn away from Enlightenment thinking into ontology. Power itself becomes ontologically divided. On the one hand, power is absolutely dispersed into the very processes by which reality is produced, by which relations are made, by which capacities are activated. Power is everywhere, *potentia* in Spinozist terms. It is the multiplicity itself, for it is the capacity to have effects. This is power as purely positive, as creativity. On the other hand, power is the One, structure and unity as the negation of the multiplicity, or *potestas* in Spinozist terms. In one sense, power in its negative manifestation as unity appears as the ab-

33 Massumi (2005) writes for example about the color of security codes as having an immediate impact—the production of fear as a bodily resonance—upon populations, as if it were not determined by a number of other social and discursive formations.
34 I am grateful here to Andrew Davis for this insight. If one thinks of theories contextually, one

comes when one considers that most analyses of contemporary power, including those generated out of such post-Enlightenment ontologies, generally emphasize either the very impossibility of any moment of unity, or the radical dispersion of contemporary power. That is, power today is never the presence of the One but always its multiplication and dissemination. What starts as an attempt to flee the univocality of fascism by an assertion of multiplicity becomes the denial of the very need for commonality in an age of the increasing dispersal of power.

Perhaps the most serious limit of this binary articulation of certainty, absolutism and universalism is that in the end, it does not really offer any politics.[35] Instead, politics is transformed into ethics, sometimes in rather individualistic or even humanistic (communal) terms, defined by the constant effort, at every moment, to "fight the fascist within us." If power as fascism is a demand of unity as pure negation, a composition with no affirmative power of its own except to interrupt the creativity of becoming, then power as capacity raises the ethical challenge of finding modes of living that embody pure affirmation, pure creativity, pure multiplicity. It offers what looks like a utopian vision except for the fact that any semblance of a positive vision is defined only as a refusal of anything that would close off or capture the infinite creative possibilities. Its politics is, in the first instance, a negative one, a formalist practice of escape from, of the deconstruction or deterritorialization of any and all structures. In Deleuzean terms, it often appears to be a politics of becoming virtual, and it often finds its purest expression in the very act of experimentation, whether as creativity (aesthetic practices[36]) or resistance. I do not mean to deny the importance of such ethical work, only its sufficiency as a basis for political strategy.

Some versions of this ethics blur the difference between the Derridean and Deleuzean ontologies, embracing (refusing to limit or manage) infinite relationality (Jeremy Gilbert (2014), following Arendt), difference, contingency, heterogeneity and creativity. Remember Latour's "politics"

has to note a certain irony in the appropriation of continental philosophy in the U.S., despite the understandable intellectual fascination. These traditions are predicated on a long history of the intellectual and political visibility of the variety of Marxisms, anarchisms, libertarian collectivisms and the politicization of aesthetics (e.g., Dada, situationism). While such discourses and oppositional practices have existed in the U.S., they have never had the same sorts of significance or credibility and have rarely operated in what one might think of as the center stages of state or even leftist political struggle.

35 The relation of universalism and certainty needs further work. Does one need either or both as a condition of decision-making? Does one need an ethics or telos?

36 Remember that Adorno (2006) also thought art the last refuge of a true negativity.

of care, and Ranciere's redescription of emancipation in terms of capacities. Recently, Hardt and Negri (2011, p. 181), drawing on Spinoza's concept of joy, offer an ethics of love: 'Every act of love is an ontological event in that it marks a rupture with existing being and creates new being…To say that love is ontologically constitutive then, simply means that it produces the common." Such arguments foreground the question of how one lives a "good" life, whether individually or collectively, of the proper way(s) of being in the world. They are, I think, caught between two possibilities: they offer a valuable vision of the possibility of a life of radical multiplicity, but they can also be appropriated into a rather liberal demand to "live and let live," which raises another issue—whether every possibility is equally worthy. Whatever the difficulties of ethical argument may be, they are circumvented here by deriving an ethics directly from an ontological description of the nature of existence itself. In part, my discomfort with such ethics derives from the fact that, once again, it assumes yet another absolute binarism—between affirmation and negation, a binarism that Deleuze (1983, 185) himself denies: "The yes which does not know how to say no (the yes of the ass) is a caricature of affirmation."

One of the most interesting versions of such an ethics—sometimes rather confusingly referred to as ontological politics—is embodied in the description of reality as a pluriverse—the assertion that there are literally many different (actual) realities existing in the universe (Escobar 2012, Mignolo 2011). This concept moves beyond the more common western understandings of change and difference as operating within a singular (metaphysical) reality according to certain unavoidable laws and limits. There are then not only different ways of living or being, but radically other relations of time and space, matter and energy, life and spirit, nature and culture. These realities haves to be taken ontologically if the pluriverse is not simply to be another version of cultural, ideological or phenomenological relativism but as such, it cannot be taken to do anything more than provide a new and radical—ethical—challenge (rather than a political answer), that people allow other realities to exist in their own places, even if, occasionally, these other places overlap with their own. But the demand is often something more, for it often presents us with impossible ethical choices. Anthropologist Mario Blaser (2009) poses the following dilemma: an endangered whale is "trapped" in an ocean inlet. Greenpeace wants to lead it back into the ocean where it can rejoin its pod; otherwise it will die. The local indigenous people, however, whose

very existence is threatened by increasing development (after centuries of slow genocide), know that the whale is the reincarnation of their founding chief, who has returned to protect them; consequently they know that if the whale is taken from the sound, they will die as a people. While the Enlightenment might dismiss the indigenous claim as little more than superstition, ontological politics demand that we recognize the reality of their world. It cannot, however, tell us which world to choose except by adding something else to the argument: in this case, for example, even a commitment to support those who are marginalized and subjugated is not likely to help us decide, unless we appeal back to some forms of humanism. Still the example shows that the multiple worlds of the pluriverse are connected—rendered visible and invisible, possible and impossible—according to relations of power (e.g., coloniality and indigeneity). Such an ontological politics, with its demand for ontological multiplicity, is logically independent of the question of the choice among worlds, but many intellectuals who defend such an ontological politics add an assumption that some worlds—more ecological, more "relational," more democratic and equal, or perhaps simply non-modern—are better than others.[37]

Still others have attempted to draw a direct link between politics and ontology: for example, democracy (Connolly) and communism (Derrida, Badiou) are advocated as the expression or actualization of such an ontology itself and thus assumed to guarantee the full reality and creative possibility of every individual.[38] While I am sympathetic to such ethical/political arguments, I am suspicious of both an ethics and a politics that assumes it is simply trying to let reality be what it is.[39] The relation of ethics and politics is a difficult one but I think, at least for the moment, the left should avoid equating ethical visions with the more strategic and technical problems of political organization and action. If ethics is about how to live a good life, politics is about how to win others to such a vision, and how to make it possible for them to succeed.

37 Perhaps there are ways of living together in isolation—not tolerance, not a conversation but a "letting be" that does not assume we are together. Here the enemy is the expansionary zeal of proselytizing but such a vision also comes perilously close to that of possessive individualism and utilitarianism, despite the fact that it is driven by precisely the opposite values.

38 Persuasive examples of this include Gilbert (2014) and Braidotti's (2011) affirmative-nomadic feminism, a theory of "becoming-woman."

39 There is a long-standing philosophical argument about whether one can derive an "ought" from an "is." I worry that such a derivation makes the political ultimately dependent upon the certainty of ontology.

Still, post-Enlightenment ontologies offer us, importantly, ways to begin to rethink the fundamental commitments and articulations of the Enlightenment, as well as non-anthropocentric and non-subjectivist but deeply humane ethics as alternative grounds for political struggles, imagination and experimentation. One can affirm the notion that a new humanism might advocate a vision of humanity of a mosaic of radical differences, but that does not tell one about the possibilities of collective social life. One can embrace the possibilities of living a life of "joyful affirmation," of bringing new worlds into existence, of imagining other states of being, of enhancing the potentialities for transformation and for re-inventing oneself (not only moving beyond the dominant binary categories, but also into new more fluid forms). But the absence of a real politics means that such visions remain just that, for there is no consideration of how we get from here to there, or of the forces arrayed against such changes and even against the very concept of change being put forward. One needs tools for analyzing the differential distribution of possibility, of access to whatever mechanisms or practices might enable such change—what the British geographer Doreen Massey (1994) might call geographies of power and possibility. It can feel that such calls are effectively addressing only those who already accept the vision, or who are at least already involved in political and creative struggles, or have the capacities and the resources (e.g., of time) to take up such challenges—which may explain the enduring importance of the arts in such ethical-politics. In the end, I cannot help but think that there is little effort being made to win people to such struggles and visions.

The final irony, perhaps, is that despite the radical claims of post-Enlightenment ontologies, they often mean business as usual in the academy; they offer little challenge to institutional practices, values, or even the sorts of trends I have identified. They have, in fact, contributed rather unreflectively to the crises of knowledge. Still, the point is not to decide whether to embrace or criticize them. After all, every theory can be criticized; every theory has it strengths and weakness, its contributions and its limitations. It is never possible to declare the end of the need to go on theorizing; the issue is never about the "right" or "true" theory, but about the useful theory: does it enable people to hear the questions that are being asked, to see some things not otherwise available, to begin to seek answers that might get the left a bit farther in its efforts and struggles? Does it offer guidance and direction—a conceptual roadmap—that can help the left think about how to think, that can pro-

voke thought, investigation and struggle? The point is never to "buy into" a theory, but always to wrestle with it, to win something of what one needs to construct a better story. It is difficult to know how to move forward, other than to suggest that the intellectual universe of discourse might itself be thought of as a multiplicity in need of new imaginations of unity or, in this case, new kinds of conversation. Such conversations would embrace the differences, and find joy in the arguments, while refusing both skepticism and certainty. They would not be content with ambiguity, with merely measuring the distances between theoretical, moral and political concerns, but would find ways of being open to moving through conflict to forge new relations. It is not just that, as the pragmatists understood, the search for both truth and democracy depends upon such open-ended conversations but also that, however much one may believe that these are unique times, one is always part of a larger historical conversation, and a longer set of historical transformations. But I have to admit that such a conversation among intellectuals, even those who are purportedly on the same political side, seems as unlikely as a conversation across the political divide. All I can say is that, maybe, recognizing the complexity of the conversation may enable the left to reimagine its own possibility.

CHAPTER 5—THE POLITICS OF CERTAINTY

The desire to intervene into the processes of social transformation poses problems beyond those of critical analysis and visions of alternative possibilities; it inevitably raises questions about strategies—of struggle, resistance, and opposition, and of organization. I have suggested—and will argue more explicitly in the final chapter—that there has been an extraordinary amount of left activism over the past decades, and that much of it has been highly tactical, well formulated and imaginative. Activists have offered many wonderfully exciting ideas about how one might change social relations and relations of power, but unfortunately, to many people, such visions and the actions supporting them appear to be little more than fantasies, in part because the practices and statements of the left are articulated into the contemporary organization of pessimism, especially in the perceptions of those standing outside such activisms.

Many of the key—often disabling—debates on the left revolve around how one negotiates the relation of unity and multiplicity. There is something ironic and misguided about assuming, in the contemporary conjuncture, that power resides in any and all efforts of organizing unity, at structuring multiplicities. I have been trying to suggest the value of exploring and even re-imagining the multiplicity of forms of organization and unity. My problem is that it has become all too common to think that there are only two approaches to the relation: on the one hand, structure entails hierarchy, homogeneity, permanence, rigidity and impermeability; and on the other hand, one refuses structure in the name of an undifferentiated or equalized, heterogeneous, temporary, flexible and porous assemblage. So much for the challenge of imagining possible ways to forge unities out of and alongside multiplicities. This binary often operates within the left according to the same logic that too simply defines the relation of left and right: a politics is built upon shared perceptions of common external threats and a shared enemy (Schmitt, 1996),[1] even if the enemy thinks it is part of the left, and is moving in the same direction albeit along a different path. Every unity (even one that appears to deny unity) must be opposed to some other unity (especially one that demands unity). The universe is divided into the good and the bad, the right and

1 It is ironic that while many decry Heidegger's Nazism and search for the connections between his politics and his philosophy, there is less soul-searching around the figure of Carl Schmitt, an avowed Nazi whose politics are written across his philosophy, and yet, his construction of the nature of the political realm is commonly taken for granted today.

the wrong, the ethical and the unethical, us and them. Gilroy (2001) described this as "camp thinking,"[2] embodying the fundamentalism, absolutism and certainty I have been decrying.

Consider the resonance between the following statements by Stuart Hall: "Isn't the ubiquitous, the soul-searing lesson of our times the fact that political binaries do not (do not any longer? Did they ever?) either stabilise the field of political antagonisms in any permanent way or render it transparently intelligible?" (1996, p. 244); on the other side, defending his own strategic choices against attacks from leftists who were sure they knew the proper way to struggle: "Our mode of political calculation is that of the taking of absolutist positions, the attribution of bad faith to those genuinely convinced otherwise—and thereby, the steady advance of the death-watch beetle of sectarian self-righteousness and fragmentation" (1987, 51). The irony today is that so many people, thinking they are affirming the first statement, practice the second. My point in this chapter is not to argue against any particular strategy or vision of struggle, but rather, against any and all strategies that are so sure of themselves, that assume they are necessarily and even universally right, that they have a singular hold on the moral high ground or political Truth. While I would not choose to describe it as "sectarianism" today, I will consider two of the most powerful and visible performances of fundamentalism: the return of forms of political correctness based in the certainties of the experience of the subjugated; and the division of the political left into two camps—"verticalists" and "horizontalists."

A new political correctness

The left often blames its ineffectiveness on the media, and I don't deny that the media's habitual ways of dealing with the left are, at best, irresponsible and, at worst, damning. When the media do include images of the left in popular discourse, they often represent it as utterly impractical if not extremist. It is not surprising that the left often accuses them of being complicit with the existing systems of power, of failing to criticize them except in terms of scandal and occasional "rotten apples." And yet, especially in the popular media, one certainly finds critical representations and discourses aimed at a broad range of established forms and embodiments of domination and oppression, including corporations, capitalism, conservatism, racism, domestic violence, and contemporary forms

2 Gilroy's book, released in the U.S. as *Against Race*, was originally titled and released in the U.K. as *Between Camps*.

of government. They may not be numerically dominant; they may not be pure and uncompromised; and they may not present arguments and hopes in the terms that the majority of left fractions would prefer. But they are there nevertheless, waiting to be taken up, reframed and rearticulated. The question is: How might one use these openings? What (if anything) can or does the left do with them? Actually, for the most part, the left ignores them or focuses on the limits and compromises that enable the popular media to be assigned to the enemy. Understanding and possibly using what cracks there are to open new discursive and political possibilities demands more and other kinds of work.

Significant elements of the left, despite their own skepticism, continue to act as if the simple act of speaking truth to power were sufficient to change the world. They assume that people do not know what is going on and that if only people knew what the left knows, everyone (or at least significant numbers) would join them. Much of the left continues to assume one can define a confident line between free communication (and truth) on the one hand, and strategic communication, persuasion and manipulation (lies) on the other hand. But what if people already know, or at least have their suspicions? What if the problem lies elsewhere, at least partly in the ways the left communicates? Too many elements of the left seem uninterested in communicating beyond their own spheres of loyalty; they say what they think they have to say, even if no one is listening, even if it does not address the ways people understand themselves, their lives, their fears and disappointments, and their hopes and sense of possibilities. Various lefts talk without considering whether what they say makes sense. This is not a matter of the language they use or of the appeal to theory, but of whether the judgments, logics, categories and strategies on offer have any possibility of galvanizing people into action, of how the stories being told are heard by others, or even if they are recognizable as stories, of how their practices are reconstructed, beyond their own intentions, by the contexts in which they are offered. It appears that the left constantly reinscribes and, somewhat surprisingly, finds pleasure in, its own marginalization.

Meanwhile, much of the space of *popular* dissent, complaint and opposition is left to the work of conservatives, who continue to struggle either to articulate such affective responses into quasi-coherent political positions or to dissipate them into ineffective voices of confusion, apathy and cynicism. Of course, the left can always blame this too on the media, but such appeals only serve to relieve the left from the responsibility of

critically examining its own practices. I believe the left has to find ways to work with the media against the media, to turn consumerist impulses to radical ends, to use the popular—as culture, common sense, feelings, etc.—to open up possibilities for political struggle. Negotiating these matters has become even more difficult given the left's perceived inflexibility, its contextually constructed position of fundamentalism. The more the left performs its certainty, if only by constantly attributing moral failure or "bad faith to those genuinely convinced otherwise" (Hall, 1987, 51), the more it cuts itself off from those caught in the middle.

Nowhere are the complicated problems of negotiating with different audiences as well as with the media more obvious than in the behavior derogatively referred to as "political correctness." Although PC does not belong solely to either the right or the left, it is a charge most commonly laid at the feet of the left, which has rarely acted in ways that refute the charges (despite its constant denials). If one is to challenge the discourse of PC, if only for the sake of how it constructs the left for broader constituencies, one needs to critically examine both the discourse and the sorts of practices it purports to describe. The discourse of PC usually conflates a variety of different practices, then assigns them to particular "militant" political positions or identities, which are constructed as irrational or extreme as compared with supposedly more rational moderates, and then—in a brilliantly paradoxical move—generalizes the charges to the entirety of the left. Whether the charge of PC describes the practices of a small group located in particular, intensive, enclosed environments (universities, social media) or the attitudes of the broader left, or whether it is used by one fraction of the left against another, one should not dismiss the "kernel of truth" it may contain.

I want to distinguish two forms of PC; both concern the problem of belonging, the logics of inclusion and exclusion, the relations of identity (unity) and difference (multiplicity). Both have long and continuing histories, although they have each taken on new shapes and meanings over time, even as their relative importance has shifted. The first meaning concerns the question of "belonging" to the community of the left; it makes the "right" to belong to "the left" into a demand for total agreement and consistency, based in absolute political certainty around a whole set of issues. Moreover, the "correct" position on each issue is somehow known in advance, guaranteed as it were. Disagreement or deviation is often treated not only as political error but also as moral—personal—failure. It cannot help but appear (and feel) that admission into

the left is being policed according to political criteria that have not been publicly debated, or in terms of some judgment of personal moral quality. Any criticism of specific analyses, agendas, core positions, statements, or strategies puts one at risk of being ignored, judged and even expelled from the community, and sometimes even branded as an enemy.[3] The pragmatics of political struggle gives way to an absolutist certainty. It appears, both to broader publics, as well as to individuals or groups who have been subjected to such treatments, to inconsistently and undemocratically circumscribe the boundaries of disagreement and thought (although those making such exclusions no doubt think these positions have been arrived at democratically, within their own communities, and are the necessary moral foundations of any meaningful left). PC then describes a practice of exclusion and condemnation aimed at defining the internal composition of the allowable left community. Politics becomes morality and sociality is seriously restricted to a community of agreement, so that political strategy in the end gives way to judgments of moral impurity and political complicity.

While this meaning of PC and the practices it describes have not disappeared, their visibility has been eclipsed recently by a second meaning of PC, which involves, more explicitly, questions of otherness and marginalization within the left. It is often derived from the variety of (failed?) attempts to negotiate the consequences of the proliferation of differences; the sheer number of identity positions (and hence political struggles) expands faster than the community can respond and adjudicate. The proliferation can be attributed in part to the fracturing and visibility of intersections among different identities, but instead of seeing the intersectionality of struggles and the hybridity of identifications, the result is often multiple forms of mixed and hybrid—individuating—identities, each claiming its own authenticity and the right to speak for itself, in a kind of a narcissism of small differences. Politics is defined largely as a matter of representation—of who gets to speak for whom, of who gets to speak at all. As each new identity produces its own political position that demands—and no doubt deserves—a voice at the proverbial table, the conversation becomes increasingly difficult if not impossible. The left seems to lack a calculus capable of answering the problem posed by the multiplication of differences, localities and seemingly reasonable de-

3 We have all seen this happen. I was profoundly shaken when one of my beloved professors, and one of the most charismatic speakers on the campus, a committed leftist Catholic and therefore a consistent defender of life (against war, famine, poverty, violence, etc. . . . and abortion) was shunned by the leaders of an anti-war protest.

mands; the solutions are at best uncertain. This does not mean that the issues are not important or that the battles are not worth fighting; but it also does not mean that all issues and voices are equal or that their demands are equally urgent—although this is a question that has to be addressed in contextually specific ways. And I do not have any answers to propose.[4]

But in recent decades, partly as a result of the growing intensity of the contemporary organization of pessimism, questions of otherness and marginality have taken on new forms, even as they have become both more visible and more powerful. The question of marginality or otherness has been transformed to some extent from representation to recognition —ironically, since much of contemporary theorizing around the politics of differences (e.g., Brown, 1995; Hage, 2003) has argued against a politics of recognition because it often ends up in a politics of *ressentiment* or what Foucault called "the consoling play of recognition." According to Charles Taylor (1992, p. 25), a politics of recognition involves "The thesis . . . that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves." Such a politics importantly establishes the social or relational basis of identity in practices of perception, representation and differentiation. At the same time, perhaps at the confluence of largely essentialist theories of identity with contemporary ontologies that establish every identity as a singularity with its own capacities, the proliferation of identities claiming authenticity has gained momentum and intensity. But a politics of recognition can also too easily substitute the social determination of identity, embodied in individual actions and capacities, for the operation of less visible oppressive structures, as well as of cultural practices within which identities are shaped, often in complicated relations, both negatively and positively.

The result is a personalization of difference as if it were a politics. This forms of PC transforms the crucial feminist argument that the personal is political into the more problematic claim that the political is personal, which is then invested with the affective intensity of moral certainty. Politics becomes a matter of personal acceptance, personal

4 This problem has led some (e.g., the feminist journal *m/f*) to suggest that there could not be a coherent single feminist movement, and it has caused serious rifts among groups even though they shared some dimension of common identity.

feelings and the expectation of *feeling* safe and being *comfortable*. That is, politics is reduced to the level of subjective experience, which is privileged and absolutized, and this in turn is justified by the social position of marginality itself. The result is that politics becomes a therapeutic discourse of personal feelings, especially of comfort and safety, allowing anyone who can claim subordination to demand the right to be protected from anything experienced as a threat, a risk or even discomforting. The certainty of such feelings and experiences are, by definition, available to no one else except the subject now defined entirely by his or her marginality, so no one except the subject can know what might produce such experiences, and even the subject may not always know this in advance.

The demand for comfort, the legitimation of any perception of discomfort and the right to demand the elimination of whatever one assumes to be the source of the discomfort are equally disturbing. As many critics of PC have argued, the universal right to *be* safe cannot be equated with a presumed right to *feel* comfortable. But it has given rise to all sorts of new habits and demands that depend almost entirely on the subjective experiences of those who feel themselves always and already victims. The perception of perceived slights and micro-aggressions has to be acknowledged, but that does not mean that one constructs a politics simply based on their being made visible (humiliating the perpetrator) and then demanding their negation; this simply ignores the ways such behaviors and their perceptions are socially and culturally determined and contextually experienced. Certainly people have a right to "call out" those whom they think are, intentionally or unintentionally, reproducing practices of subordination, oppression, collective denigration, etc. But if these are purely personal matters, they become infinitely expandable: everything can be threatening or discomforting to someone because it is all about individual affect. And almost everyone can claim to be marginalized in some ways, often in ways that may not be obvious or visible (e.g., my own disabilities). How does one then limit this except by creating a hierarchy of suffering and grief—a dangerous path for any collective, but especially for the left, which should be struggling against any and all forms of marginalization? Whether such a personal-individual approach to affect is a good way to think about social relations and power is at best problematic, since it seems to reproduce many of the most serious limitations of liberal individualism.

This politics of recognition also constructs a political calculation based on judgments of privilege—both the "unearned" and unacknowledged privilege of those who occupy positions of power and/or valorized social positions, and the positive privilege of the oppressed (usually measured by degrees of subordination, oppression and suffering). The result is often that such politics privilege the authority of marginalized experience as the ground and limit of political comprehension, commitment and value. Within such a logic, the truth of one's statement and the political significance of one's actions can be judged—only by the marginalized—by determining one's social position. So if someone says something a marginalized other disagrees with or does something that makes him or her (or them) feel uncomfortable in some way (whether one could have predicted this effect or not), rather than engaging based on an assumption of cooperation and commonality, the marginalized other is privileged to attribute such action to the "privilege" of the perpetrator, which can then be taken as grounds for the global dismissal of their political (and moral) credibility. Privilege then becomes a trump card that only the marginalized can play, but which depends upon the prior assertion of being marginalized; it cannot be challenged, since for someone to deny the charge of privilege (either their own or that of the marginalized) only further proves the point. But there is a difference between denying that one's social position is, relatively speaking, privileged, and that one's privilege is sufficient reason to dismiss the validity of one's argument or one's political position. The question is whether the fundamentalism of experience can be used as a selectively distributed right of refusal of any one or any claim that one does not like. The assumption that social position both guarantees and enables judgments of truth and value, which can be measured in terms of the personal feelings that they produce, is at the heart of contemporary PC. When it is used to avoid argument and even confrontation, when it is used to deny another the right to his or her own opinion—because a marginalized subject "feels" it is discomforting or insensitive—then it becomes an assertion of nothing more than absolute moral superiority and certainty based on personal experience. The question is never really privilege but the relation of social position to experience on the one hand, and to opinions, experiences, and claims to knowledge on the other.[5] Certainly there are occasions when someone's

5 Experience can even be used to reject knowledge and expertise as the product of dominant privilege (of the academy as white, male, colonial, etc.) echoing the struggles described in chapter 2. This becomes most controversial when it is presented not only as an attack on the "privilege" of academic knowledge and of those who generally speak it, but also as an argument

argument may be based on a lack of knowledge or understanding, or political insensitivity and failure, or even unconscious and unexamined prejudice, and these should be challenged and explored. But disagreement is not the proof of error, and experience is not a sufficient basis for truth or judgment.

I fear that the left has helped construct a situation in which the recognition of differences has scared people from thinking about the necessity for and existence of forms of commonality. Acknowledging the realities of oppression and subjugation does not mean that the left must privilege any group's experience of suffering. As Gilroy (2001) has eloquently argued, the political significance of suffering does not only concern its victims; suffering does not belong only to those who suffer, since it concerns relations of empathy and matters of justice, which should concern us all. The left has to imagine "how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for eternity" (Hall, 1996, 444).

A Cartesian politics

In recent decades, long-standing strategic differences within the left have been re-inflected into modes of certainty and fundamentalism in which each "side" denies the moral and political validity of the other. This intensely felt reorganization of the left into two camps divides the heterogeneity of the left, and distributes the possibility of relations among them, along the two geometrical axes of Cartesian space (which in itself should sound the warning bells): vertical and horizontal. I do not want to criticize or reject either set of strategies. I believe they both have their strengths and weaknesses, their contributions and limits, especially in the contemporary context. Rather, I believe that this two dimensional model of political strategies is inadequate to the challenge, but in order to get there, I will have to spend more time exposing the wall that increasingly separates the two axes.

against freedom of speech and academic freedom. The argument depends in part on the ability to conflate these two freedoms, since most people allow limits to the former (although they may disagree over what they are), while in the academy, the latter is—at least in theory—absolute and sacrosanct, for it refers to the freedom not to say whatever one wants, but to the freedom of inquiry and of the expression of the fruits of such inquiry.

Vertical politics attend to the operation of power within, through and around the state—including its various institutions, apparatuses, policies and practices—as well as its ancillary sites and practices. It is concerned with civil society, publics and counter-publics, and ideological and electoral struggles, as well as the articulation of more "private" social domains (e.g., domestic and familial politics, and the organization of social differences) into public and state political struggles. The "verticalists" defend the possibilities of political change through struggles over the representative democratic state and they often continue to have faith in deliberative democracy. Vertical politics can be involved with a variety of political—often hierarchical and/or bureaucratic—organizations, such as political parties, trade unions or large-scale social movements. They engage in a variety of activities, including electoral politics, mass demonstrations and mobilizations, lobbying efforts and petitions, and judicial appeals, as well as a variety of protests, strikes and boycotts, attempting to change or pressure those in power. The pragmatic aim to win control of the state (or at least to transform its policies and redirect its energies) often leads to a variety of coalition and alliance politics. Vertical politics usually seek to develop more equitable institutions and policies. Even socialism, with its concern for the management of the production and distribution of wealth in the name of the workers, embodies a vertical politics.

On the other axis, horizontal politics advocate remaining outside the sphere of such institutions, undermining their ability to rule and creating alternative spaces and forms of social cooperation.[6] In fact, horizontalists often see the state as the enemy, sometimes as much or even more than capitalism. They argue that it is the "state form" itself and not just the specific states, which is the root of the problem; consequently, the failure of—traditional, mainstream—left politics results from both its efforts to reform the state while continuing to work within its form, and from its appropriation of strategies that cooperate with and even reproduce that form. The problem then is with the very power of institutions; although some horizontalists would argue that they reject only hierarchical organizations while embracing flat organizations, I will suggest that this is disingenuous. Insofar as any institution requires stable structures, and performs many roles including coordination, mediation, differentiation

6 So many books and magazines, blogs and websites, devoted to horizontalist politics have appeared in the past decades that I hardly know how to select examples. So I will just refer to three books that were recently recommended to me by my "horizontalist" friends: Sitrin (2012), Dixon (2014), Haiven and Khasnabish (2012).

and aggregation, what horizontalists embrace might be better described as the conditions of possibility for the processes that they advocate: the creation of alternative, experimental spaces, autonomous zones, and voluntary collectives or affinity groups, free from diffentiating power and structures that refuse equivalences. Horizontalist politics claim to be prefigurative, enacting in the present the very possibility of other forms of sociality. It is a politics defined by its own practice, in which the process that is being enacted is the political end itself. In the current moment, it often involves some form of radical, direct or participatory democracy, usually enacted through such practices as working groups, general assemblies, consensus, stacks (and in Occupy, progressive stacks, facilitators and hand signals).[7]

Advocates of a horizontalist politics draw on a long and scattered geo-history of anti-systemic political struggles, strategies of interruption and insurrection, and interventions based on acts of creativity and imagination. Three overlapping traditions are worth mentioning:[8] First, there is an anarchist tradition, which can be traced back to Lao Tzu, Diogenes and the Cynics, through the English Levelers, Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin and Goldman, the Spanish Civil War, etc. Anarchism had a significant popular revival in the 1950s and 60s, in the works of Saul Alinsky, Paul Goodman, Murray Bookchin, The Living Theater, Black Mask, etc., and in the 1970s, through groups associated with "ultra-left" Marxism like the Anger Brigade, Big Flame, and the Red Brigade, as well as others associated with punk rock (Crass), the squatter movements, etc. It continued to be active in in the 1980s and 90s, in key figures like Bill Hicks and Hakim Bey,[9] becoming highly visible during anti-globalization movements of the 1990s, especially in the "black blocs," which often broke from other participating groups to use limited forms of violence

7 Occupy was its most recent, highly visible, manifestation. I suppose I should admit that I was not impressed by most of the iterations of Occupy; it rendered invisible a broader history and geography of struggles that might have enabled the creation of a broader movement; it reduced complex class and financial structures to a simple meme (the 99%) as if it were an adequate analysis of or a good basis for political organization. However, on the positive side, it helped raise issues of economic inequality and later, of personal debt, inside the popular, although it did not and does not seem to know what to do with that, except fade into invisibility like so many promising actions before it.

8 The formalism of horizontalist politics can be read in both poststructuralism and postmodernism, for example in de Certeau's (1984) distinction between tactics and strategies, and Baudrillard's (1987) distinction between hyper-simulation and resistance.

9 Bill Hicks performed his anarchist philosophy as a stand-up comedian. Hakim Bey's (1991) influential book *TAZ* set the stage for the highly influential contemporary anarchist collective and publishing group, Crimethinc. My thanks to Andrew Davis, according to whom it is important to take note of the fact that Bey already had constructed an ontological anarchism as both strategically and ethically crucial, as well as having offered in it a self-reflexively contextual way.

and property destruction, but also in the emergence of a new generation of anarchists, shaped by the lessons of environmentalism, feminism, and anti-racist, anti-colonial and indigenous struggles (Graeber, 2002). There are many forms of anarchism, including individualist, socialist, collectivist, anarcho-communist, anarcho-syndicalist, collectivist-syndicalist. And while anarchists may disagree on matters of strategy, from pacifism to revolution, all are committed most fundamentally to radical ideas of freedom and liberty, and to a society without force or coercion.

Second, there is a century-old (European) tradition of politicized cultural and aesthetic practices, which embody what might be described as deconstructionist and performative impulses (poststructuralist *avante la lettre*), with a commitment to interruptive and disruptive performance/art. One might rather arbitrarily begin this history with the Dada-ists (1916-1922), who offered a practice of "anti-art" as a critique of the war and the meaninglessness of modern bourgeois society. The surrealists (emerging in the 1920s) emphasized the importance of the ordinary. Using Marx and Freud, they attempted to free people from false rationalities and restrictive social relations by liberating imagination itself. As Breton put it, "Long live the social revolution, and it alone." The influential College of Sociology (1937-9), most commonly associated with Georges Bataille, rejected surrealism's focus on the unconscious as too individualistic; it sought to foreground the heterogeneity of social existence by taking up the excluded, the transgressive, and the excessive, including moments of communal intensity (the sacred, the sacrifice). In the 1940s, the surrealist movement splintered into a number of fractions, including Lettrism (under the leadership of Isidore Sou), which practiced a politics of interruptive cultural performance (and "invented" "psychogeography"). Lettrism itself splintered (over whether to protest an appearance by Charlie Chaplin, who by then had become on icon of the U.S. film industry), eventually giving rise to the Situationist Internationale (1957). The situationists combined a performative aesthetics with a commitment to the "revolutionary proletariat," rejecting all ideologies as the expressions of a universalizing will that inevitably leads to the production of illusion (spectacle) in the service of power. Offering a critique of everyday life through the assertion of passion, desire and imagination, the movement became both more political and more exclusionary under the leadership of Guy Debord (who had been a member of *Socialisme ou Bar-*

barie as well) and Raoul Vaneigem; in the 1960s, it supported the Workers' Council movement and the occupation of factories, as well as the uprising of May 1968.

Third, there is a tradition of Trotskyite and post-Trotskyite fractions, closely connected to some versions of anarchism, starting with the Council Communist movement that had its roots in the Second Internationale (1898-1914).[10] It appeared again in the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) in 1905, again in the German Worker's Council movement in 1918, and yet again in the 1920s and 30s with leaders like Otto Ruhle and the feminist Sylvia Pankhurst. In the 1940s, this tendency was most visibly expressed in a number of groups that broke from the Fourth (Trotsky-ite) Internationale, founded in 1938, including the Johnson-Forrest Tendency (visible in the activism and writings of C.L.R. James and Grace Lee Boggs), centered largely in Detroit, articulating industrial workers' struggles to various radical black struggles and traditions, and in *Socialism ou Barbarie* in France (under the "leadership" of Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort). These movements, sometimes described as libertarian socialist or social anarchist, were vehemently opposed to socialist vanguardism (Leninism) and state socialism (Bolshevism), and all forms of coercive social relations (including wage labor) and organization (including unions and parties). They advocated fluid and temporary voluntary associations as a model of uncoerced political participation. Opposing structured power in all its forms—because it destroyed both the one who has power and the one who is subjected to it—they championed free association, workers' self-organization, non-hierarchical and non-bureaucratic—and, therefore, stateless—societies, direct democracies, etc. These tendencies were sometimes grounded in direct—activist or militant—research in factories with workers, in order to understand the changing nature of capitalist social relations and to reassess the history of working class struggles. They were interested in the growth of resistance and insurgencies among workers (and racial minorities in some cases) in the post-war years, suggesting the existence of new forms of working class struggle that neither the communist (or labor) party, nor formal trade unions, had initiated or could control. This history had an immediate influence, in Italy, on the Workerist movement (Autonomia) in the 1960s and 70s, and the "movement of movements" that played an important role

10 It is sometimes described as the left communist movement but has to be differentiated from the Sparticist movement affiliated with Rosa Luxemburg.

in the anti- and alter-globalization movements[11] It can be seen at work in the 1960s counterculture (in both France and the U.S.), in various libertarian efforts of the 1970s, and in feminist strategies for direct action and non-hierarchical (network) organizations.

This strategic split, however, did not mean that proponents of both vertical and horizontal politics could not align themselves, even if temporarily, in a variety of forms of unity for political purposes, often including strategies of mass mobilization in order to put pressure on institutions of governance. Such pragmatic coalitions might include Abolitionism, the struggle for unions, the Progressive Movement, the Popular Front (against fascism), strategies of the United Front, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the civil rights movement, the British New Left, and the Mobilization against the Vietnam War. Even the Zapatistas launched an admittedly failed effort to get involved in national policy and politics. Additionally, one might see various 60s countercultural and New Left formations, the Italian Movement of Movements and the anti-/alter-globalization movement (beginning with Berlin 1988 and Seattle 1999 but rapidly disappearing after Genoa 2001) as moments of a newly configured unity. Many of those involved in the latter movements joined the social forum movement, beginning with the first World Social Forum in 2001, and some moved into more governmental—vertical—struggles. However, many leading horizontalists have increasingly renounced such large-scale and quasi-organized movements and advocated a more pure and formal anti-organizational practice, embodied in squatters communities, affinity groups, citizens assemblies, alternative cooperatives, etc.

Many of the most visible and powerful commitments of horizontalist politics—a libertarian sense of freedom, a rather romantic celebration of creativity and experimentation, and an equation of subjectivity and agency—whether in terms of individuals or communities—are actually not far removed from Enlightenment notions of human freedom, autonomy and choice, forms of individualism, and even assumptions about the natural forms of human collectivity as community, as what human beings would create if left to their own devices, without the interfering power of

11 In addition, current horizontal politics have been enriched and deepened by a growing awareness of global struggles and traditions of anti-colonial, anti-racist and indigenous struggles, the most visible of which have been the Black Panthers and the anti-systemic revolutionary form of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. The Zapatistas were masters at cultivating an international visibility, and a network of political and intellectual support. In fact, one of the ironies of contemporary political scholarship is that U.S. intellectuals often focus more on the (more interesting?) things that are happening elsewhere (e.g., Latin American).

the state.[12] But horizontalist politics are increasingly being inflected by post-Enlightenment ontologies. A difference of strategy, operating with what might have been seen as a porous and shifting border, has become skewed, creating an inescapable dichotomy grounded in matters of ontology and ethics. In the past decades, horizontalists have increasingly renounced any alliance, of any sort and for any purpose, with verticalists, even to the point of rejecting popular mobilizations, at least in principle (although in reality, many do participate at unavoidable moments, such as anti-war or anti-racist demonstrations). Die-hard horizontalists have made any form of vertical politics into an enemy. On the other hand, verticalists often dismiss horizontal politics as selfish, indulgent and infantile utopianism.

This turn to the ontological is visible in three interrelated figures or visions of strategies that animate contemporary horizontalist politics, but which do not correspond to the traditions already identified. All of them affirm the possibility of other ways of living, of imagining the world otherwise. But most importantly, all of them define a formalist sense of political radicalness;[13] they are all about the absolute refusal of organization and hierarchy. The first echoes the ethic of the new ontologies, emphasizes the creative possibility of capacities, defining a "politics" of creativity, becoming, emergence, process, multiplicities, pluriverses, etc. I have already suggested that I think it is at best a stretch to describe this as a politics, since it is, in Deleuzean terms, about the escape from the actual rather than the construction of an-other actuality. It is about deterritorializing or deconstructing the structures and organizations that limit creativity, becoming virtual (or in some sense, immanent) as it were.[14] Since it values experimentation itself, it seems compelled to assume that all experiments are equally good, but surely one does not want to embrace all experiments. Yet the only apparent way to avoid it is to fall back on liberalism's own formalist appeal—anything is good as long as it does

12 Libertarianism is, after all, at best, an ambivalent political position, since it has no single or necessary place on the traditional political spectrum—it can be articulated into any number of diametrically opposed political positions.

13 "[T]he argument that only 'deconstructivist' texts are truly revolutionary is as one-sided a view as that which suggests that forms have no effect. Besides, it is to adopt a very formalistic conception of form, which, in fact, accepts the false dichotomy between 'form' and 'content'; only, where the left has traditionally been concerned exclusively with the latter, this view was concerned only with the former. There were other calculations to be made." (Hall, 1987, p. 50)

14 Yet Deleuze and Guattari argue that both actual reality and actual resistance always involve structures or organizations (molarities) so that the attempt to follow an "absolute line of flight" out of every structure, which would deny all molarity, which would become completely rhizomatic, is a profoundly dangerous and wrong-headed one.

not limit or hurt another. Consequently such a politics seems to have little to say after negating or escaping existing structures since it has no interest in building new structures that could be defined in any terms other that they would have to avoid (inevitably) limiting creativity and experimentation. It seems to imagine that one can exist in a state of pure experimentation, process or capacity. I fear, with Foucault, that the dream of a world without structure, a world without power is at best utopian and in reality impossible.

The second figure celebrates the event of revolution, insurrection or insurgency itself. It is in the break, interruption or disruption, always temporary (and always a critique of any and all institutions) that power itself is negated. Such negation presumably enacts an affirmation of other possibilities, although it is a purely abstract affirmation of an ontological sense of possibilities; that is, it affirms the excess, the virtual, the omnipresence of other capacities. This strategy does not construct a line of flight or escape from power but an arrow directed at power itself. It is often closely aligned with attempts to rethink "communism" as a revolutionary event (Badiou, 2015, Bosteels, 2015) or with radically alternative conceptions of democracy (Ranciere, 2010) as the insurrectionary statement of "the part that has no part" (erupting through institutionalized power, or what Ranciere calls the police). It is in such an event that the demos, the people as the subject of democracy, is called into being and performed. But such strategies seem to have abandoned the possibility of a popular struggle, which is built not upon the revolution itself but upon those who watch the revolution and take it as a sign that other concrete possibilities exist (Foucault, 1997). Moreover, the existence of such insurrectionary moments does not guarantee anything about its politics or its desired aims: one can have a fascist revolution as easily as one can have a democratic or communist one. Such events might—and in contemporary times, more often than not, do—fail, even undermining advances made toward more democratic societies, ending up with unintended and unappealing consequences.[15]

The third figure, perhaps the most visible and influential among current horizontalists, refers back to what was called "autonomist Marxism," "Workerism" or Autonomia, a reconceptualization of Marxist theory in Italy in the late 1960s and 1970s closely connected to the sorts of Trotskyite workers' council movement discussed earlier. [16] It influenced a

15 Consider not only the Arab spring but also events in Thailand, Ukraine, etc.

16 See Lotringer and Marazzi (1980). It emphasized the necessary relationship between theory,

number of political activist collectives in the Americas in later decades. Its early advocates entered the factories to research both the changing nature and forms of coercive social relations of production.[17] They were interested in the emergence of new forms of struggle outside the imaginations of either the communist (or labor) party, or formal trade unions. Such struggles formed the basis for new imaginations of the left, not tied directly to the organizations and visions of state defined politics. Working both inside and outside the academy, the autonomists attempted to understand the transformation of capital and the changing role of the state, often predicated on an assumed historical break with earlier forms of capitalism (and labor) and state power. They researched the concrete emergent processes of the technical composition (division of labor) and the political recomposition of the working class.

As important and innovative as this work was, in some ways it was often taken up apart from both its specific context and its historical ties to other intellectual and political traditions of Marxism and social anarchism. etc. Many of its proposed tactics—such as an "exodus" from capitalism, the refusal of work, the commons, and a universal basic income—were neither particularly new nor necessarily tied to its theoretical arguments and historical analyses. For example, the concept of the commons has a long conceptual and political history, going back at least to the 17th century Diggers. Today, it is often posed as a vision of the appropriation of resources and values that stands against any and all forms of property rights that restrict access—including private property (usually based on commodification and capitalism) and public property (usually mediated through the state, whether in capitalism or socialism); "commoning" might be a better description. The commons refers to resources (material, social and cultural) held in common; it claims property

the empirical study of the changing conditions and nature of labor, and the emergence of new forms of political struggle; it was, in my opinion, very similar to the earlier British New Left and might even be described as a formation of cultural studies, a conjuncturally specific theory, as I will describe it in the next chapter. Members of various formations within this broad movement offered radically original rereadings of Marxist theories, partly by introducing new sociological theory and methods into Marxist philosophy and eventually, in some cases, new philosophical supplements (e.g., Tony Negri's use of Spinoza). The commitments and project of this often diverse body of work have continued to develop ("post-autonomia") and proliferate, even as they have continued to be very influential in contemporary political strategizing.

17 In Raymond Williams' quasi-autobiographical novel *Second Generation* (1964), the hero, caught between his working-class roots and his still politicized academic calling, chooses to leave the academy to do sociology in the factory, to pursue his research on changing labor practices by joining with the workers in the factory.

for the people, although it implicitly assumes the existence of both the world as resource[18] and "the people," without asking how either has been or is being constituted.

Its work can also be connected to that of the English Marxist historian, E.P. Thompson (1963), who sought to recuperate the voices and actions of those marginalized and excluded from the dominant histories of modern societies. He wanted to reinsert the active participation of peasants and laborers into the history of the construction of both the working classes and capitalism. Thompson argued that power always involves two sides, that domination is always resisted and is defined as much by the forms of resistance as by its own templates. People are not passively shaped by power, but have a power of their own, derived from their own lives, which has to be recognized and engaged by the emerging forces of domination and oppression. This argument, made over fifty years ago, was a weapon of optimism, a way to argue that the battle was not lost in advance.[19] People struggle against power; they struggle to do the best they can, often in unpredictable ways, with what they are given, even if they are subordinated and subjugated in a variety of ways; sometimes they struggle in a variety of organized ways. Consequently, wherever there is power, there is struggle and at least the possibility of resistance. History is a matter of contestation rather than simple domination and manipulation.

But this important insight should not be taken out of its context and extended beyond its strategic utility. If it is, such statements can become rather predictable and banal. Even worse, one forgets that such resistances of the subordinated only make sense alongside an adequate understanding of the specific forces of domination set against them.[20] It can easily transfer the weight of intellectual analysis from the study of the balance between forces and the struggles between the dominant and the subordinate (or subjugated), to an almost complete focus on the form of activities of the subjugated themselves, leaving the nature of the forces of domination to common sense or taken for granted analyses. Analysis

18 Again, I am grateful to Bryan Behrenshausen.

19 This argument was at the heart of cultural studies, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

20 This was E.P. Thompson's (1961) critique of Williams' *The Long Revolution* (1961), and perhaps John Dewey's (1927) discovery when he realized that the forces of domination stood against his dream of a Great Community being established in the U.S. on the back of social scientific knowledge and communication technology. In much contemporary work built on autonomist theory, the analysis of capitalism is left to rather speculative theoretical claims, such as the social factory, real subsumption of life, General Intellect, etc.

can become a history of resistance. It can also become too easy to find resistance—the creative power of the subordinated—everywhere, and even more dangerously, to forget that the power of the people is not an innocent power of pure creativity that stands absolutely outside of and opposed to all forms of structure as oppression. One cannot assume that any event "driven by the margins" (as I heard one scholar put it)—including the demand for greater access to consumer economies (which in the case being discussed, was being financed by Chinese capital)—is good. One might want at least to assume that it is both good (the consumer economy should not be the privilege of only the wealthy, or the North, or . . . , and there are many consumer goods that would significantly improve people's lives) and problematic. One might even suggest that the production of the demand for consumerism might be more complicated than simply being "driven by the margins," without going so far as to assume that people are manipulated, or that they are "cultural dopes."

But I do not intend to diminish the importance of the contribution of the autonomists, for they theorized what Thompson and others only described. In particular, they offered two powerful conceptual insights: labor is autonomous; and capital itself is a social relation. The former made labor visible as the unpredictable element in capitalism; it has the power to initiate struggles and to force capitalism to reorganize and develop itself in response. Its power then exists, in some sense, outside of and before capital itself. But that also means that the working class is always and already included in capital, which is to say that capital, as the class struggle itself, is a social relation. The history of capitalism is a history of the class struggle inside capital. One might understand these theoretical moves as an attempt to address the problem of agency, especially the agency of resistance, which has challenged theorists since the Enlightenment.[21] And yet, in their very effort to establish the autonomy of labor, the autonomist Marxists took two steps onto the path of ontological certainty.

The ontology of autonomy

The autonomist Marxists began by significantly linking the questions of autonomy and agency to a reconceptualization of the concept of constituent power. In Renaissance and Enlightenment political theory, constituent power referred to the originary power of the people to consti-

21 In either a determinate or a stochastic universe, how is resistance possible?

tute themselves as "a people," and hence, to give themselves the power to constitute the state and the law (a constitution) as "constituted power."[22] While this does not deny the necessity of state politics, it does suggest that the relation of organized or constituted power and constitutive power is not simply dialectical, each determining the other. Rather, the ensuing dialectic depends upon the prior (autonomous) existence of constituent power. But in a very real sense, it was not an answer to the question but an acknowledgment of its impossibility. Constituent power simply had to be taken for granted to allow the very possibility of the organization of social power. The autonomist Marxists identified constituent power—as the condition of possibility of any form of constituted power—with labor as subjectivity itself, "the excessive power of being in its subjective form." In other words, the autonomists not only followed the Enlightenment in articulating subjectivity and agency, they grounded the very possibility of agency in an ontology of subjectivity. Or to reverse the direction of the equation, they held onto subjectivity by grounding it in a materialist understanding of agency. Thus they re-inflected Enlightenment humanism to draw radically different conclusions. For them the power of labor, embodied in working class struggles, precedes and prefigures at all times the changing organization and power of capitalism. Consequently, both critical analysis and political strategies had to focus on the self-development, the autonomous struggles and strategies, the subjectivity, of the working class; the result was a demand that workers produce themselves as value (self-valorization), without the mediation of capital. The posited a new form of politics, demanding new ways of working (or of refusing to work) and living.[23]

This is only the first moment of ontologization; the strength of the contemporary wall between horizontal and vertical politics relies even more on the second moment of ontologization, built on the post-Enlightenment theories I have described. While not all horizontalists have

22 It is Schmitt's (2006) problem of the state of exception: how can the law be inaugurated *ex nihilo* since it is the condition of possibility of its own existence? This problem was taken up again by Agamben (2005).

23 This argument has recently been encapsulated in a revised concept of the multitude, a concept that was first used in Machiavelli and Spinoza, both of whom had a deeply ambivalent response to the phenomenon it named—namely, the existence of the people as a non-unified population prior to the establishment of effective sovereignty. A number of Italian thinkers associated in various ways with autonomist Marxism have used the concept to pose the possibilities of multiple and fragmented collectivities (subjectivity/agency), against both liberal and conservative assumptions of homogeneous individualities and groups. It refers to a heterogeneous, dispersed and creative multiplicity of autonomous subjectivities capable of political self-determination. There are disagreements among those using the concept concerning its political valences, and its relation to capitalism.

followed this path, I think that very few contemporary articulations of horizontalism have completely escaped the resonances of this ontological turn. This second retheorization of the notion of constituent power and, hence, of the very concept of autonomy, moves away from Enlightenment assumptions of the freedom of the subject (Kant) and the creativity of human practice (Marx) to a different kind of universal claim. Despite differences, this ontological turn creates an absolute binary difference in the domain of power and politics: in the most common—Spinozist-Deleuzean—terms, between *potentia* and *potestas*, as virtual (pure) capacity and actualized capacity (structure) respectively.[24] Constituent power as potentia is pure creative potentiality, the (virtual) infinite capacities of any body: a body is what a body is capable of doing and no one knows what a body can do. It is the immanent and creative potency of any being, expressed in its potentiality (rather than its actuality) to affect and be affected. It is the existence of anything as more than just what it is in any specific actualization. And constituted power as *potestas* is the structured organization and limitation of potentiality, the power of authority and sovereignty, of domination and command. In one sense, it is a transcendent power that can be used for good or ill, the unequal power by which one body controls another. For horizontalists, it is the essence of verticality and so must be shunned.[25] The result is that politics increasingly seems to become the practice of a philosophical concept.

One might well ask, what does *potentia* add to our politics, other than a name for the possibility of change—whatever it source. There is a long history of theoretical efforts to understand the source of resistance, the possibility of change, and for many, for a long time, the necessarily unsatisfactory answer was constituent power. In fact, one might say it is one of the driving questions of contemporary cultural and political theory. After all, any political intervention into socio-historical reality, even from the vertical left, requires an assumption that history is both contingent and constructed, and therefore, that it could have been and can be different. In other words, other worlds, other ways of living, are possible. The discovery of radical contingency, the end of the Newtonian universe—a

24 The names change from author to author—as if to mark some non-existent originality. Among my favorites, however, is promethean versus anti-promethean.

25 As I have suggested, it is difficult to read either Spinoza or Deleuze as offering such a simple and absolute binary, or to suggest that either would, politically, support assigning an absolute privilege to potentia as inherently and exclusively creative and resistant, nor did they think that there could be an actual (concrete) reality without structures. The assumption depends in part on a misreading of the relation between the two terms of power and the relations between the molecular and the molar in Deleuze and Guattari.

predictable universe or one in which the limits of predictability are the result of humanity's limits—revitalized the problem of agency and resulted in a broad search for an ontological guarantee of the possibility of resistance and of the world being otherwise. In a contingent universe, change is inevitable and ongoing, but that is not enough to develop a politics. Is change directed in any sense? Does it involve forms of agency? Or even agents? Is it the result of subjective intentionality? Or of the excess that necessarily escapes power? Or is it the result of the contradictions among the many subject-positions into which we are placed by determinant forces? Materialist ontologies often effectively elide the difference between agency, effectivity, and even capacity. Agency is not opposed to determination but redefined as the creative production of difference, i.e., sometimes ignoring effects that maintain an existing state of affairs against other forces of determination. That every body (material and immaterial, singular and assembled, from pre- to trans-individual) is active, that it has effects and can be defined by its capacities to produce particular effects, does not mitigate the need (often re-introduced into post-Enlightenment theories) to postulate a qualitative difference of effects.[26]

This still leaves open—and perhaps unanswerable—the question of whether such activities demand the assumption of some excess of subjectivity, whether it is understood as "revolutionary or insurgent subjectivity, a "law" of social existence ("where there is power, there is resistance"), an abstract ontological principle (Foucault referred to the "pleb"), or the effects of various "technologies of the self." (I have never really understood how such concepts solve the problems or even what they add to the story.) And this is probably not a good time, conjuncturally, to give up on the notion of human agency. Thus, both Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault, recognizing that "the human" is not a universal accomplishment but a continually produced and changing form of relations within historical formations, offer a kind of revised, non-Enlightenment, humanism. Both see agency in the actualization of fields of possibilities, the capacity to affect the determination of a social formation, through specific and particular choices and actions, mediated through human collectivities, apparatuses or institutions, which, while never able to control the final outcomes, do act on the bases of intentions or interests. In fact, I will go

26 For example, cybernetics distinguishes goal-seeking behavior from functionality, and second order autonomous systems able to regulate their own first order, regulatory systems; system theories often distinguish between composite unities that are self-producing (biological) and the medium in which they exist, as well as non-living, non-auto-poietic systems. Again, I am grateful to Bryan Behrenshausen.

one step further: anti-humanist (as different from anti-individualist and anti-universalist) ontologies do not offer much help in the way of political strategies. One is hard pressed to derive a politics from such theories, and even Foucault, who offered brilliant post-Enlightenment analyses of power, nevertheless advocates and engages in what appear to be fairly traditional and even humanistic (albeit not understood in Enlightenment terms) strategies of struggle. Perhaps this is what Stuart Hall had in mind when he described himself as a theoretical anti-humanist and a political humanist.

This ontologization of constituent power as *potentia* provides an illusion of real content to a necessary formal possibility. And in so doing, it not only legitimates but also necessitates the absolute rejection of anything that seems to limit, capture or contradict the apparent content of a formal contingency. Politics is no longer understood in the more traditional leftist terms of the possibility of creating more equitable social institutions and structures, but as a continuous deterritorialization and the construction of a reality defined entirely by the possibility of continuous creative experimentation, the multiplication of capacities, change and emergence. John Holloway (2002) condenses this vision into a dream to "change the world without taking power," that is, without constructing any reasonably stable or fixed institutions of power, which must be refused in any and all forms. Compromise is complicity, mediation is failure, so the only possible political actions are defined by refusal (e.g., of work), escape, insurgency, and prefiguration. The turn to ontology thus constructs a new absolute binarism which is expressed in the same form in both the conceptual and political realms: on the one hand, verticality, transcendence, difference, negativity, opposition, vanguards, state-forms/struggles, authority, structure, determination, hierarchy, etc.; on the other hand, immanence, flatness, horizontality, multiplicity, becoming, capacities, positivity, spontaneity, autonomy, auto-production, self-valorization, creativity, prefiguration, insurrection, etc.

The Mexican political theorist and activist Raúl Zibechi (2010) provides an exemplary expression of the horizontalist argument, contrasting the dominant forms of struggle—state politics and a politics of everyday life—with something radically different: "Although a good many revolutions have improved people's living conditions, which is certainly an important achievement, they have not been able to create new worlds . . . the fact remains that the state is not the appropriate tool for creating emancipatory social relations . . . the most revolutionary thing we can do

is to strive to create new social relationships within our own territories" (p. 4). Yet, despite the real accomplishments of state politics, any continued allegiance to these former concerns stands condemned as expressions of the enemy: "These state powers present in the left and social movements seem to have two sources that ultimately spring from the same genealogy: the military machine of the state apparatus and the Taylorist organization of work" (p. 45). Apparently, the only battle really worth fighting is not that seeking to improve people's lives, but the creation of new worlds.

For Zibechi, the possibility of an-other politics depends upon an appeal to the concept of potency as an-other—ontological, unstructured—form of power: "So potency is never realized . . . it is always the unfinished becoming. It tends toward the autonomous, because it only depends on itself . . . the capacity to build non-state power—decentralized and dispersed" (p. 6). Zibechi's ontology of power leads him not only to focus entirely on the local, but also to understand struggle solely in terms of "lightning" or insurrectional moments, which offer a kind of epistemological break. It is the transience of the moment—and hence, the complete denial or negation of structure—and above all, its (pure) intensities, which define the essence of horizontal mobilizations. He advocates a power in motion, and a refusal of any power over the collective, advocating the imagination of power as imaginative, the power of imagination as the performance—prefiguration—of alterative possibilities of living, the creation, necessarily local and perhaps temporary, of other ways of being, of other worlds.

But the price of such a politics seems to be, as stated above, that so-called traditional understandings of power, traditional forms—state, mass, vertical—of politics, are not only wrong, not only doomed to failure, but even worse, they reproduce the very structures and logics of power that the horizontalists seek to undermine and reject. As a result, they are unavoidably and always complicit with the enemy. The paradox of such an argument is that this logic can be reproduced ad infinitum, as when Ranciere (2009, p. 33) complains: "All our desires for subversion still obey the law of the market and . . . we are simply indulging in the new game available on the global market—that of unbounded experimentation with our own lives . . . even our capacities for autonomous, subversive practices and the networks of interaction that we might use against it

serve the new power of the beast—that of immaterial labor." One needs to ask whether one wants to follow Zibechi, Ranciere and others down the rabbit hole.

The ontologization of the division of the field of political struggle has radically reinforced an understanding of horizontalist politics as being all about the process; in fact it is the process, the prefigurative enactment—often of radical democracy or of voluntary collectivity—that defines the politics itself, a politics in which the means is not justified by the ends but in which the means embody the ends, a politics all about the means without an end. At the very least, such horizontal or autonomous struggles are supposed to perform or enact the possibility of another organization of life, another way of living, another world. Again, one might say, politics becomes the practice of a theoretical concept. It is as if the process somehow guarantees the politics itself. In a paradoxical sense then, it doesn't matter if one wins, since one has always and already won. Compromise is not only wrong, it is impossible; there can be no imperfect realizations of one's ideals insofar as they are inseparable from the process itself understood as the unfolding of the practice of potentia, which must always refuse to define any long-term strategy or goal other than its own continuing effort.

How does one understand the connection between process and outcome, or in other words, how does one understands the process of democracy? In an obvious sense, democracy refers to collective decision-making. In political terms, that would seem to presume that people, left to their own devices, naturally as it were, will necessarily come to see the rightness and righteousness of the left's—or, more specifically, the horizontalist left's—commitments. Unlikely at best. The answer must then be that one controls those allowed into the community, limiting it to those already committed to the values and visions—and ignoring the question of the conditions (economic and temporal, for example) that enable only some to participate[27]—guaranteeing that such communities remain small and local. It is as if, unable to find ways of changing the world, people shrink the space of struggle to something more manageable. In practice, radical democracy seems to mean that those who already accept the validity of the process (as well as its larger political vision) are empowered to work out the details. To a large extent, one ignores the larger social calculations of, for example, the production and distribution of wealth,

27 For example, changing rates of unemployment and of access to welfare.

and the not uncommon benefits that derive from the occasional efforts of centralized powers to limit the injustices that are allowed to flourish when left to other forces and determination.

But the left cannot afford to ignore the complexity of the politics of democracy. There is nothing inherent in democracy that guarantees any outcome, including a progressive outcome. Local democratic communities can end up in very dangerous conservative politics. Nor is there any reason why every popular mobilization, even if it operates through democratic principles, has to be devoted to what the left recognizes as democratic values. I recently heard a horizontalist colleague say that true democracy involves people continually protesting. I respectfully disagree; true democracy involves people protesting, organizing and changing the forms of governance, and then protesting some more. At its most strident, especially among those who embrace an increasingly apocalyptic vision of the future, horizontal politics can end up sounding like another version of survivalism, akin perhaps to building bomb shelters in the 1950s, with little concern for mobilizing the possibilities of popular change. The result is a politics that prefigures a future that it cannot imagine how to bring about, because it rejects in the abstract any and all appeals to the possibility of better, perhaps even more democratic, institutions and states.

Even before its ontologization, such process-based, anti-structural and anti-systemic notions of politics were seriously championed in the 1970s, and seriously challenged. Landry et al. (1985) make a number of arguments worth repeating. First, they suggest that horizontal politics simply replace one organizational dogma (hierarchy) with its opposing dogma (structurelessness). The question of politics has to be approached contextually. Horizontal politics refuses to consider the possibility that specific contexts and tasks may require organizational forms, even forms of hierarchy and expertise—"the skills you can't admit to having." They point to Jo Freeman's (1972) important feminist critique, which argued not only that real structurelessness is impossible, but that the belief that it can be actualized and the effort to do so has serious negative consequences because it simply means that structure will appear in non-obvious and non-self-critical forms. What one will achieve is not the absence of power but the appearance of "informal elites" and the hidden operations of power.[28] Realizing that structure is inescapable, one can be-

28 I would add, following other feminists, that such efforts at achieving structurelessness may be valuable and even necessary at particular moments in particular contexts.

gin to ask what sorts of structures one wants or needs to respond to specific conditions. Realizing that constituted power in unavoidable, one can begin to ask how to control it, how to make it accountable, how to make it better. Second, they point out that if collective process is everything, if one is primarily concerned more with one's own internal processes, success can only be measured by one's own sense of moral self-righteousness. Therefore, it does not matter if one wins according to any external calculation since one assumes that one has won by virtue of one's very practice. In the end, "there's no success like failure." The result is the "pure but vicious delights of ideological piety."

Ontologizing the difference between strategies exacerbates the sense of absolute (moral) certainty and constructs an unbreachable wall of exclusion. Ironically, in the name of multiplicity, such ontologized politics embrace only those multiplicities they have already decided to embrace. Having ontologized the very calculus of political judgment (although older judgments often continue to persist, for example, in the privileging of marginalized populations, thus simply turning old differences on their head, despite long-standing feminist arguments against such simple solutions), those who believe in vertical logics of power and authority are no longer merely misguided and ineffective, they have to be seen as ethically and politically complicitous. Ontology thus closes off any possibility of a conversation or cooperation among verticalists and horizontalists.

Assuming that a more radicalized democracy will ensure particular —intelligent—outcomes can only work if one knows not only that one is right but also that all "rational" people will eventually agree. Of course, free democratic conversation can change the field of possibilities, and introduce insights and problems that might otherwise be ignored. What too often happens is that the assumption that collective intelligence is embodied in democratic practices actually operates in reverse, mirrored by the assumption that bad outcomes (i.e., ones to which one is radically opposed) are taken as evidence that the process failed, that this was not real democracy and, more often than not, that (other) people have been manipulated. The contemporary celebration of democratic decision-making is predicated on the assumed superior rationality of the collective mind; if group think used to mean conformity, today, as crowd-sourcing, it promises transcendence. The problem is that while the possibility of emergence might enhance some practices, it is not guaranteed to do so in any particular instance. The ontologization of horizontal politics can also

deny the complexity of the relations among knowledge, prejudice, understanding, and persuasion. And it can lead to the rejection of the academy and of academic knowledge as "vertical" and thereby, largely by definition, complicitous with power. It can construct its own forms of certainty that dismiss the need for the rigors of knowledge and critique, both in the name of pure horizontality (which then, intentionally or not, comes to suggest that all opinions—except those that claim vertical authority or defend verticality—are equal), or in the constant deferral of expertise in the name of the primacy of process and the necessity of activism and insurrectionary struggle. While democratizing decision making and pluralizing the interests taken into account are vital struggles, this does not mean that democracy should trump expertise, including academic expertise.

Mirowski (2013) points out that there are real similarities between such celebrations of the rationality of participatory collectivities and the arguments of the Austrian school about the nature of the market; perhaps instead, one needs to think about collective intelligence as something that needs to be constructed and articulated into specific political possibilities. I do not want to fall into logics and accusations of complicity or blame, which are too easily reversible. After all, one could argue that the horizontalists share with the right an attack on state (centralized, hierarchical) power, on the relevance of older knowledges and strategies, and on the value of expertise. Both tend to fetishize the claims of the new and the local and both displace intelligence into the collective (e.g. is crowdsourcing really all that different from Hayek's vision of the market?); there are also strong similarities between the emphasis on horizontality, process and localism in such politics and some formations of capitalism and corporate practices. And as Virno (2004) suggests, the ethics of much contemporary ontological thinking can sometimes sound a lot like the ethics of contemporary forms of capitalism and dispersed power. Again, this is not to claim complicity but rather to issue a warning to think about what feminists have called "perverse confluences." One needs to see such assumptions as expressions in part of the contemporary conjuncture.

Horizontal political strategies distance themselves from politics organized around the state often by foregrounding the barbarity that has resulted from such politics, and the inevitable limits of what could be accomplished by vertical politics. And they are not wrong. In fact, it is rather easy (and necessary) to criticize many contemporary forms of ver-

tical politics, especially its more commonsensical and mainstream practices. Some verticalists sound at least as fanciful as they often accuse the horizontalists of being. On the other hand, without some vision of transformation, their pragmatism ends up sounding desperate and depressing. Of course we should choose the lesser of two evils because it harms fewer people and less. But how long? How many times do we support a system that has perverted its own project, as limited as that project has always been? And the critique has become even easier in the face of the contemporary loss of faith in the state and public decision-making among the broader population. The sense of the state as the democratically constituted expression or representation of popular demands and interests, and as a set of institutions capable of addressing and finding solutions to the very real social problems facing the nation and the world, have been undermined as money and special/structural interests have seized state power. One does need to ask how the belief that society's problems can only be solved by fiddling around with the practices and policies of state governance, whether through judicial, legislative or executive powers, or by bringing some greater degree of democracy into these already existing institutions has been working out, especially over the past four decades. Yes, some problems can and must be addressed by institutional reforms, new policies and increasing democratization, and we should not abandon these possibilities, for we do not want to throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater; but we also need to think more critically and more creatively about the sorts of institutional and infrastructural transformations that may give rise to new practices of governance and new structures of state apparatuses.

The fact that large parts of the vertical left seem incapable of facing this reality, and are caught in a nostalgic fantasy of returning to an imagined moment when vertical politics worked or when one could still believe that it worked, has driven many already distanced from it to see it as beyond the pale, especially since the moment verticalists refer back to was deeply problematic. Too often, they seem to have forgotten that the institutions and policies they now champion and hold up against both the right and the horizontal left (e.g., welfare, unions, public services) were not only limited but deeply flawed, and that many of them were subject to intense criticisms and attacks by previous left formations in the 1950s and 60s, not only as anti-humane, paternalistic and moralistic bureaucracies but also as embodying forms of gender, racial and ethnic inequalities. It is the case that the traditional left too often tells the same

stories, appeals to failed notions of the social and publics, and proposes the same strategies as if little or nothing has changed in the past 50 years. Clearly, such glances backwards seem unable to answer whatever doubts people have about the directions of history. On the other hand, the traditional left has too often failed in the present context to tell the stories of why people struggled to create these institutions and practices in the first place, and of the real sacrifices that previous generations made while fighting to win these battles, even if almost always in compromised forms. And perhaps the vertical left has failed to adequately analyze and communicate how such compromises were forged, and how whatever victories were gained were increasingly undermined and transformed through continuous struggles from the other side as it were. And many verticalists have exacerbated the division by simply dismissing the horizontalists' arguments as naive, childish, libertarian, individualist, utopian, hyper-theoretical, privileged, etc.

Still, there is something odd about this argument. If one starts by granting that state politics, with its affiliated institutions and apparatuses, and various social movements aimed at moving them in new directions, have had significant successes over the past centuries, and even more so in the late 19th and much of the twentieth century, in what Williams (1961) called the long revolution, one must also acknowledge, with a sense of urgency, that many of these advances as well as the promise of expanding them to other populations and in different areas of life, are being withdrawn. Those successes were at best mixed, limited in many ways, unequally distributed, and often at the cost of excluding some populations and places tout court. (One also has to admit the barbarity of the modern state over centuries, and perhaps even more so in the light of what the state has become over the last decades.) But it is one thing to say that the various strategies—whether counter-hegemonic, reformist state, social movements, etc.—of the past century have failed to *radically* alter the course of history, to achieve the full measure of their stated goals. It is another to ignore the very real accomplishments of the modern liberal state unless one rejects the past as a source of useful knowledge and strategies, echoing a basic commitment of the right. And it is yet a further leap to say that it is the strategies themselves—rather than the outcome of competing projects, of changing balances in the field of forces, and struggles over the configuration of the popular—that

are to blame and, therefore, that the left can and should abandon such struggles and strategies completely, to say nothing of deeper efforts to reinvent the state, to create new institutions, to build new social movements.

And although many horizontalists, caught up in these figures, refuse the calculation of success and failure, it is not unreasonable to add such calculations into the discussion. For if one is honest, one has to admit that horizontalist struggles have had an even more mixed record than state-defined strategies. In fact, it seems only fair to suggest that, excluding violent revolutions (which are problematic in many ways and have led in many cases to places less desirable than those first imagined), the various horizontal (anarchist, aesthetic, social libertarian and voluntary collectivist) strategies do not actually have much of a record of significant accomplishments, beyond highly circumscribed and largely local manifestations on the one hand, and globally circulated aesthetic and aestheticized discourses on the other. Instead, they proffer a romantic imagination of (largely peaceful) revolution, insurrection and utopian collectives. Where is the revolution? Where are the alternatives? Yes, alternative social and economic sites do exist, but they have for centuries. And the fact of their existence is a good thing and should be expanded; that is not the question. One should ask how such struggles are related to the most common reasons that most people engage in political struggles—in the name of opposing existing forms of injustice, inequality and inequity, in the effort to find other ways of being and living together. Kant may have advocated autonomy as a goal for all people, but he was just as sure that this was not going to happen without significant educational efforts, and the political power of the state. One could ask, after centuries of such efforts, why one would assume that process, even democratic process, in and of itself, can guarantee change and better outcomes. One can and should ask whether the abandonment of electoral politics is the best conclusion to draw from the critiques of its limits, failures, hypocrisies, etc.

One might want to weigh the celebration of the fact of insurgency and autonomy against institutionalized governments, for example, against the more common failures of such struggles (e.g., the Arab Spring) or at least recognize that such insurgencies are often actually struggles for better governance or, in Foucault's terms, demands to be governed a little less, rather than a rejection of vertical politics. They also raise very

difficult questions about the authority of one group to negate the choices of another; in some circumstances, this becomes doubly difficult: no matter how much we question the legitimacy of electoral politics as democratic, simply asserting the right of a minority (which claims to have a popular mandate, although the basis of this claim remains unclear) to overthrow an elected government is a potentially dangerous strategy, since it can easily be taken up by any political group (e.g., the Ukraine, Egypt). The important and increasingly urgent question of the relations among insurrectionary events of protest, practices of radically democratic forms of self-government, and ways of addressing those who are, as it were, "observing" the revolution, remain unasked.

Horizontalists seem open to only one of the many senses/practices of democracy—its grassroots, participatory forms, rejecting, for example, any sense of a democratic civil society on the basis of the (not complete) failure of its liberal forms. Further, they conflate two distinct but closely linked claims within democracy: first, that it defines a set of practices for giving everyone equal access to be heard and second, that it empowers people (although this is where it gets sticky—which people? all of them, all the time?) to determine the outcome. Neither of these guarantees nor even directly addresses what may be the real issues for many on the left—matters of justice, equity, etc. If, as is often the case, what is at stake in such articulations of contemporary democracy is really a matter of fighting against the powers of various capitalisms, or the entrenched institutionalized structures and habits of racism, sexism or homophobia, or the inadequacies of contemporary education, one might reasonably point to the necessity of vertical institutions (including the state) as the only forces capable of standing its ground against such forces, structures and habits; whether it is doing so at the present is a different question. This does not deny the importance of local struggles or alternative collective spaces, but it is worth pointing out the some of the most interesting local struggles—in terms of both their successes and failures—have been fought by local (municipal) *governments* (e.g., in Jackson Mississippi) and all too often, have been fought and won by largely conservative forces.

Even when horizontalists do reach out, it is less than whole-heartedly and often appears disingenuous. A number of authors, including Hardt and Negri (2012), whose roots are in an ontologized autonomist Marxism, and a number of Marxists who have taken anti-systemic movements seriously (e.g., Wright and Fung, 2003) have recently called for the need to develop institutions that operate through more radical forms of

democratic practice and that are committed to fostering the creativity and expanding capacities of the population. And yet, they have little to say about what this might mean beyond their demand that verticalist politics take on the strategies, values and commitments—the politics—of horizontalism. The other half of the equation—of whether horizontalist politics needs to be reshaped by verticalist politics—is, for the most part, unasked and unanswered. Gilbert"s (2014, p. 205) summary of Wright and Fung's argument that "this countervailing power must be deployed by forces which are strong and well-organised, but whose relationship to government is not habitually adversarial, but instead collaborative" offers no suggestion as to what this might say about how such relationships are to be defined and forged. Recently, I have heard a number of advocates of horizontalist politics offer the hand of friendship—in a way that guaranteed it could not be accepted and thus absolve themselves of any political fault. These efforts usually start by offering a virulent attack on vertical politics and a theoretically sophisticated political sermon on the virtues of horizontalism, followed by a grudging acknowledgement that—we (horizontalists) wish it were not so but—we appear to need some vertical politics. In one example, an intellectual defender of autonomous politics described his relation to vertical politics as a serious allergy, but allowed as how he might have to suffer the symptoms. I doubt that any defender of vertical politics felt this invitation to be sincere, or felt moved to accept being cast as an allergen.

The state of play

While "horizontalists" eschew state politics on the assumption that the "state form" is inevitably and essentially hierarchical (and all that is supposed to follow from that), I am unwilling to assume that there is a single and universal "state form," guaranteed in advance. The state is both a historical product of contextual determinations and struggles, and a complex articulation of multiple formations, functions and modes of governance. I leave open the question, always answerable only in the context of specific epochs and conjunctures, of what functions and operations are vital to the imagination of the state. While I might hope that the apparatuses of force (both military and policing) would be severely limited or even abolished, I want to defend the continuing necessity, in some forms, of the state's educative, distributive and regulative functions.

Short of an impossible revolution that overthrows not only capitalism but also all forms of inequality and injustice, the state (at its various levels of existence) provides vital forms of protection and enablement.

Recent history (e.g., in South America and Southern Europe) should remind the left that, for many people, the state is both desired and necessary, and struggles are often about who has access to and controls the state, and what the state does. It also reminds us that the encounter between strong social and political movements and existing states does not have any guaranteed outcomes. Why is that surprising and why would failure justify a politics of abandonment? When institutions fail, why would one think that the best strategy is to abandon all possible institutions instead of seeing institution-building as a form of imagination and experimentation? No construction is guaranteed in advance, and I assume that none can ever perfectly produce the results desired by any single project, but that does not mitigate its positive and transformative possibilities. In the end, both horizontalists and verticalists fail to challenge the assumption that there is a singular state form; both misrepresent the state. Hence questions about the organization of the state, and the imagination of other ways of governance and the provision of services, are left to others.[29] The state is not the singular straw dog constructed by horizontalists: homogenous, absolutely hierarchical, fixed, stable, impenetrable, and invulnerable. (Horizontalists often fantasize every site of dominant power in such terms, whether bodies, societies, or states). Nor is it the democratic representative of the will of the people, both the result of rational deliberation and the practice of rational deliberation, as the verticalists often pretend.

Both camps seem to picture the state as a simple and transparent instrument, a coherent and completely one-dimensional object. Both camps agree that the old assumption that a sense of the public interest would arise out of the multiplicity of interests no longer holds (although the horizontalists doubt that it was ever true)—partly because of the capture of the state by elite interests and lobbying efforts, partly because of the increased opportunities for any group to block reform on a micro-level, and partly because the courts (neither democratic nor administrative) have come to be used to trump electoral will, to both limit regulation (by business interests), to expand state policing powers (in the name of security), and to protect civil liberties (by some on the left). The left has

29 The right is radically re-imagining the state, couched in a new "literal" interpretation of the Constitution as a sacred text.

to reimagine the possibilities of the state, of the "architecture of governance" (Newman, in press.), of the provision of public services and of the strategies for incorporating people and publics into governance. This cannot be accomplished by naively dreaming of putting better people or even good leftists into power, as if the individuals in structurally defined positions can somehow magically transform the state. Nor can it simply be a matter of changing one isolated policy after another, through either serial or simultaneous struggles. On the other hand, for the moment, the left probably cannot afford to abandon such efforts; but it cannot be satisfied with them either. Some of the most recent and encouraging campaigns have involved the media, especially the battle for net neutrality (an FCC decision that could, theoretically overturned by either legislative or judicial action) and the successful effort to block the Comcast-Timer Warner Cable merger (the proposed merger was with withdrawn when there was reason to believe that the Department of Justice was going to oppose it). Both of these are significant accomplishments, the result of a "network" that brought together the efforts of many grassroots, lobbying and online organizations such as Free Press, Fight for the Future, Demands Progress, Color of change, National Conference for Media Reform, etc. The left—and especially those who put in the work and the support—should take the win, but the left also has to think about how much labor time and money it took to win these specific campaigns, and how fragile they are. While I read some reports that suggested that this is the beginning of a new anti-trust movement,[30] I do not think this is likely without deeper, broader and more popular efforts. The simple fact is that too many activists get burned out, fighting one battle after another, winning some, losing more, and watching the victories being later lost. Even people who simply click support, or sign a petition or donate money eventually get tired of so many appeals, so many groups, so many particular battles to fight. The left has to re-imagine its strategies, and that means re-imagining its visions and its stories. It must not only re-imagine the state, it must strategize how such an imagined state can be brought into existence democratically. As I shall argue, it might begin by identifying key structural weaknesses—e.g., campaign funding, redistricting, demands for proportional and preferential voting—which might begin to loosen the bonds of existing powers.

30 The anti-trust movement began over a hundred years, and was supported by presidents both Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt, the rise of the new right in the 1970s took serious and successful aim, as witnessed by the merger madness that has characterized the U.S. economy for the past decades.

The modern state is a complex historical construct, an articulation of various apparatuses and forms of governance; much of its work is carried out administratively (by civil servants, recruited experts, advisors and consultants), often but not necessarily operating bureaucratically,[31] rather than through electoral legislative and executive powers. It also exists, simultaneously, at many sites and at multiple scales. Many of the best and the worst political developments in the country have taken place at the level of state and city governments, whether through government actions or local movements initiating important changes (e.g., social impact investing, minimum wages, preschool program, land use, public transportation, new initiatives in health, food, housing and environmentalism). At each of these sites and levels, the state demands and encourages multiple forms of civic engagement. But this multiplicity cannot completely displace the role of the national state, if only as a practice of "meta-governance." The state, in all its diversity of forms and of loci, has always been the site of struggles and, as a result, it has changed in significant ways over time and place. Numerous struggles—for example, progressivism—have endeavored to transform the practices, relations and structures of state governance. So why can't the left reimagine it again, aim to reconstruct it in new ways, directed toward more progressive possibilities?

Since the ground-breaking work of the Greek Marxist Nicos Poulantzas (1978), left intellectuals have argued that the state has never been unified and stable; it has always been an evolving and contradictory unity of difference, an hybrid assemblage of discourses, practices, projects and technologies, of internally and externally directed forms of organizations and calculative logics of decision-making, all traversed by competing political forces. As both Clarke and Newman (both separately and together) have argued, the state is always attempting to govern the turbulence of the social, to manage the contradictions, antagonisms and contradictions. One must, following Clarke (2004, p. 116), think of "the dynamics of governing as a response to previous blockages, failures and resistances; as producing new contradictions and resistances of its own; and as having to negotiate a landscape [of antagonisms] that includes 'other projects,' knowledge's and practices."[32] Newman and Clarke (2009,

31 One should also remember that in the 1950s, the bureaucratization of state services was done not only in the name of efficiency but also in the name of treating all people equally.

32 This does not mean, following certain readings of Foucault's concept of governmentality, that the power of the state has been dispersed into indeterminate institutional space in still coherent forms. Such analyses too quickly assume that what Foucault describes as projects are always ac-

p. 49) argue that the state is "field of graduated and overlapping sovereignties" across a variety of formations of space and scale, producing an "imagined topography of governing" that also "differentiate[s] populations and subject[s] them to different kinds of rules."[33] And in so doing, the state seeks to organize a differentiated public, to find different ways of "enrolling, engaging and displacing" publics, different ways of recruiting "'ordinary people' to the processes, relationships and practices of governing" (Newman and Clarke, 2009, p. 45).

What is the left to do? I do not think that the left can either settle for fantasies of a return to some imagined state, or reject the need for the state, assuming it necessarily stands against all democratic demands. The left needs a new imagination of political possibilities—of both prefigurative collectivities and pragmatic governmentalities; and it needs to experiment with new figures of both flexible institutions and popular movements that can traverse the spaces between them, producing new configurations of relations and new possibilities of shared existences. I am not suggesting a politics of compromise, but of relationality. Ironically, in the name of relationality, there is a deficiency of relational thinking. Relationality stops abruptly when ontology and politics collide. Relationality—except when one's political desires demands autonomy—the autonomy of labor, the autonomy of affect, the autonomy of struggle. Relationality—except when one is so enamored of participatory democracy that one does not feel compelled to explore how it might be related to and rearticulated by structured and structural struggles. Relationality—except when one is challenged to imagine more effective forms of relational politics that are attuned to the urgent challenges of contemporary life. Ironically, ontological commitments and political desires—even of multiplicity—end up limiting the possibilities of multiplicity and heterogeneity, of imagination and experimentation. The left needs to embrace and even expand the multiplicity of strategies, struggles, relations, and choices, the possibility that both horizontal and vertical strategies are vital. In one sense, this seems to be a no-brainer and its a priori rejection seems to be a failure of both urgency and imagination and an abandonment of any significant popular transformation. Why do we need one solution, one strategy? Why do we only take up multiplicity when it is convenient? Williams (1977) suggested there are different possible rela-

tually successful, and do not depend upon the continued presence of the state.

33 They distribute forms of sovereignty and governance along two axes: the strength of centralized control, and the source of legitimacy (defined by either process or output).

tions to forms of dominant power: from subtle resistance to explicit opposition, from the attempt to establish alternatives within the spaces of domination or at its margins, to efforts to escape dominant spaces altogether in order to found independent possibilities, from the revival or continuation of residual practices, to the rearticulation of dominant practices, to the search for emergent possibilities. The real question is how does one articulate together an ontological (horizontal) and a hegemonic (vertical) politics? How does one make the connections? More accurately, how does one think in the middle, to recognize what I will call the transversal nature of political strategies, and to imagine new forms of differentiated unities that cut across scales and dimensions.

Too often the left defines victory in singular terms, defined by its own strategies. A democratic politics would seem to demand that the left reach out to broader audiences, to those who are not already committed to or confident of their commitment to the changes the left seeks, and to those who, for whatever reason, are not yet willing to participate in its struggles. This does not mean the left has to recruit everyone (nor am I suggesting one measures democracy by electoral majorities), but it does mean that one speaks to and takes account of the forms of common sense and structures of feeling. If the left seeks to change taken for granted realities, it must meet people where they are, understand the complexities and contradictions of their positions, their fears, hopes, etc., in order to move them, and that requires it to be willing to be moved by them in the encounter. Can one even assume that all people oppose capitalism rather than wanting more of it or at least more of the benefits that they believe it alone is capable of delivering? Can one assume that people's increasing frustration with and withdrawal from state politics means that the state (and its related institutions) no longer defines the limits of their political imagination? Can one even assume that all people desire democracy or even justice before all else?

Without taking up such questions, and the obligations they seem to impose upon intellectuals and activists, one can easily fall back into new fundamentalist forms of vanguardist politics, in which a minority presents itself as the only ones who know what real changes are necessary and how to bring them about—and those who do not agree or who hesitate to participate are either misinformed, manipulated (to believe lies, to feel scared, etc.), or morally and politically flawed and, therefore, part of the problem. When does a minority get to determine the majority's future? When it is sure it is right and acting in their best interest? When it is act-

ing in the name of the subjugated or marginalized? I believe that the left should use all the tools and strategies available to it, in order to weave them together into the larger calculations of oppositional strategies and the constitution of effective oppositional movements. For example, recent victories around gay rights and gay marriage (as important as they are in terms of the larger struggles to grant equality to all people) are commonly celebrated in almost total isolation, dislocated from larger struggles over domestic lives, gender and sexuality. Is it not ironic—without suggesting that I understand it in advance—that when the right tried to pass state laws that would use the cover of religious freedom to limit gay rights, there was a loud outcry from, among others, business leaders? On the other hand, the attack on abortion rights and even birth control has not elicited comparable protests, even when the right has used similar arguments of religious freedom to limit women's right to control their own bodies. And when these victories are accomplished through court battles (as the legalization of gay marriage has been[34]), it is easy to assume that the left has won rather than assuming that the battle has just begun, because it still has to make that victory meaningful and livable to those who were not in agreement. Such victories—and in the contemporary world, all such victories are important—too often remain formal (e.g., judicial) or local, rather than popular, and therefore, they remain open to future blowback (e.g., consider the return of virulent and even structural racisms). If the left loses faith in people, all that remains to it are acts of moral witnessing (necessary but insufficient) and ineffective gestures of insurrection, revolution and autonomy. Ironically, in the very name of democracy, certain that it knows what real democracy is, the left all too often abandons popular democracy.

34 This is being written as the Supreme Court is hearing what will no doubt be the deciding cases on the issue.

ARTICULATIONS

CHAPTER 6—ANOTHER KNOWLEDGE IS POSSIBLE

Any struggle over the existing relations of power and organizations of lived realities is a moment where passion and vision meet the demand for critical analysis and intelligence. Today, there are many academics and independent researchers, activists and activist collectives, artists and cultural workers, writers and journalists, investigating the conditions of possibility and impossibility of political transformation and struggle in the contemporary world. They have offered important insights toward understanding what is going on, yet they have rarely been able to embrace and organize the complexity, to tell better stories that "work." The most common response—especially of intellectuals and activists—has not been self-reflection and critique, leading one to seek out better tools to meet the challenges, but rather, echoing Erich Fromm (1941), to escape from complexity, at best turning it into an ontological category or a methodological mantra. Much of what's going on in the political-intellectual world might be explained by the strategies we use to avoid the complexities of problems, analyses, solutions, positions, struggles, and constituencies. But the need for such knowledge of complexities are more than just a matter of intellectual curiosity; they are matters in part of strategies and tactics, and of the possibility of popular politics, of how one gets other people to change directions, to move from here to there with us. And whatever the left may think of itself, it has yet to tell many compelling stories that both embrace the complexity and are capable of moving and mobilizing people into its struggles.

These investigations demand that one goes beyond common sense, that one is willing to question one's assumptions, that one chooses the best tools available, especially (but not only) theoretical tools or concepts that enable one to understand what questions can and need to be asked, how the conjuncture as a problem space (rather than one's theoretical or political agenda) defines the questions, as well as the possible answers. Doing so means investigating how some realities are made visible (and others invisible), how some realities become sayable (while others, are forced into silence); it means deconstructing and reconstructing the relations, analyzing the field of possibilities open to us and the transformative strategies by which we might realize some of those collective possibilities together. It means questioning the forms of resistance and opposition, both actual and virtual, in the past and present, in terms of their suc-

cesses and failures, their strengths and weaknesses. The struggle to change the world also raises questions about the imagination of and desire for alternative ways of living, questions about where the left, and people more generally, might want to end up. But, to be honest, I do not think it is given to political intellectuals as such to tell people what to desire or value, what should or should not matter, or in the end, how to change the world. People have to discover what kinds of futures they are willing to struggle for, but they have to discover it together, in conversations that allow for the possibilities of education, correction and redirection.

Precisely because of the crises of knowledge, the affective organization of pessimism that makes fundamentalist assertions of certainty and victimage into the default responses (and even how other responses are heard), and the temporal alienation that makes the burdensome relation of the present to the future invisible, the left needs better and more critical knowledge if it is to begin to understand what's going on. That does not mean discovering secrets unavailable to ordinary people because they are too stupid or too blind or too manipulated to see them, but the interrogation of what we think we see and know, by looking at the world (with the help of the best tools we can find) as the ongoing effort, even the struggle, to construct systems and structures of relations. It is the responsibility of political intellectuals to produce the best knowledge possible, to gain a better understanding of the state of play of power, the balances in the field of forces, in a particular context. One has to know what one is fighting against, what one is trying to transform, what the conditions of actuality and potentiality are, and how they are being constructed, changed and sometimes maintained, for these define the openings and limits of any possible struggle to change the world.

What then is the work of critical intellectuals? What is at issue is whether the left already understands the world and the operation of power within it, and what sort of work it takes to found a politics. What is at issue is whether what Santos (2007) calls a sociology of emergences is possible without the other side of his analytic—namely a sociology of absences, a diagnoses of the ways in which existing relations, structures and processes both enable and limit the possibilities of opposition, creativity and change—including the ways they produce forms of consent, acceptance, resignation or resistance that undermine or support the efforts to create better ways of living. I remember a story that my mentor Jim Carey told me about Lewis Mumford. Having decided to enter into

the intellectual field of environmental (urban) planning, he went to visit the pioneering Scottish figure, Patrick Geddes. Geddes took the young Mumford on a walk around his estate, asking him to identify the various flora and fauna, which Mumford said he could not do because he was not native to this part of the world. So Geddes asked him to identify the species that were indigenous to the region where he lived. Supposedly, Mumford said he could not, and Geddes told him, in essence, before you start changing the world, perhaps you should know what it is you are changing. Transforming the world depends upon understanding what one is transforming. It is too easy to abandon what Sedgwick (1997, p. 2) called the necessary "accountability to the real" or what Hall (1988, p. 162) called the "discipline of the conjuncture." Similarly, Foucault (1997, p. 84) suggests that any political struggle to realize other possibilities has to begin by recognizing that "The question of today [is] . . . what is our actuality . . . what is the present reality? . . . what is happening today?" Because only then can we know "the field of possible experience." Only then can we "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking as we are" (p. 125). For him this implies a sense of "historical" inquiries that are as precise as possible. This is, for Foucault, a modern practice, because modernity is the very discovery of the present as an object of knowledge, and as a demand that it be otherwise.

I believe that there are better and worse stories (although I doubt that there is ever, finally, the one and only best story), and I believe that bad stories make bad politics. A better story is determined in part by its relations to the world. A better story is one that listens to the demands of the empirical world as a problem space and allows it to answer back to our efforts to describe it. A better story allows for the possibility that it may be wrong or dangerously oversimplified. And a better story is concerned, in the final analysis, with making visible and opening up possibilities for transforming that world—for enabling change toward a more humane world—that perhaps were not so visible before. A story that dismisses the meaningful possibility of real change is not a very useful story. And finally, a better story is one that allows for the possibility of being spoken in different ways, through multiple discourses, including forms of the popular that may enable one to prise open and work on the contradictions of common sense. It has to allow itself to be translated into popular formations in effective ways. I believe it is the task of critical work to make visible the relations that remain invisible or even refuse to

appear, not because they are necessarily hidden secrets nor because we are blind or stupid, but because we have not looked with the other tools (concepts). It is the task of critical work first to separate and then to fuse a multiplicity of demands and powers, of failures and limits, into the possibility of finding the unity and commonality in the difference and multiplicity. But this is only possible, I believe, if one avoids both the Scylla of relativism and the Charybdis of certainty, if one navigates between the rock of universality and the hard place of particularity, if one refuses to choose between the vital passion of political commitment and the necessary rigor of intellectual work. Such a critical practice defends the possibility of truth by grounding it in the complexity that defines any specific contexts of power and struggle.

Such a practice of knowledge production is difficult, especially within the existing habits and values of the academy; it has to be performed through forms of democratic conversation and organization that neither abandon authority and expertise, nor cede all accountability to them. The left needs to rediscover that truth is a conversation in which any individual or position is but a small contributor; it requires a conversation with multiple speakers and multiple agendas. I used to think that the point of professing was to defend what one knew to be true; now I understand that professing a position is an ever-changing adaptation to a conversation that is always threatening to leave you behind even as it beckons you to join in again. And the conversation has to extend not only across particular academic institutions, but also reach beyond the academy, which can no longer claim to be the only authoritative site of such conversation, although it may still be the best place to host such conversations. And yet, the academy cannot relinquish its authority, despite the fact that even academics are often constituted in relations to social movements, popular constituencies and publics. But academics must also acknowledge the limits of the academic production of knowledge; they must reflect on the sorts of knowledge they can produce, what it enables them to say, and where they must be silent or, at least, speak without claiming special privilege, authority and expertise. For example, I believe that the last expression of unearned privilege, which too many academics hold onto, as the last refuge of universalism, is the power to define the questions that one assumes everyone, everywhere, has to address.

The fact that the academy can no longer claim to be the only legitimate site of knowledge and knowledge production makes such reflections all the more urgent, as left intellectuals seek new forms of authority and

new ways of voicing "expertise." I believe that knowledge production is a conversation in which everyone is equal (i.e., they have a right to speak and be treated with respect) but not everything that everyone says is of equal merit. That is, it is a conversation punctuated and differentiated by a distribution of expertise. Moreover, I would suggest that there is a difference between deconstructing the absolute truth of our claims, and denying the relative authority of a practice specifically defined by the conversational necessity of always being open to the possibility of being wrong. There is something unique and uniquely important about the academy, for it demands that one always assume that one might be wrong, that one not take for granted the "truth" or utility of knowledges. And while academic knowledge production has to find more modest forms of authority than many have claimed, it must also accept that the privilege of the academy (if for no other reason than the luxury of intellectual labor-time it is supposed to afford, and the value of rigorous intellectual judgment) imposes the responsibility not only of subjecting oneself to criticism and disagreement, but also of being accountable to the world and those attempting to make it better. Such a practice need not deny its own validity and truth; it needs only to limit it. Attempting to tell a better —critical—story demands the humility of continuously trying to establish a conversation across differences—without appealing to any universal certainties and without denying the possibility of agreement.

There is at this point a convergence between the intellectual challenges of critical work and the political challenges of strategic opposition and transformation: each demands that one find a way to avoid both chaos and rigidity, both the certainty of the literal and the ambiguity of the plural. Each involves the interconnected tasks of selection and organization. Both suggest that one has to move people (and in the process move ourselves, perhaps unexpectedly), whether intellectual colleagues and/or political comrades (perhaps they are the same?) patiently and humbly, not only or always into the ends one had imagined and valorized, but perhaps instead into new directions, into new forms of participation and conversation, into surprising places. Both have to speak to people where they are, where they live their lives, in terms of their own hopes and fears, capacities and needs, beliefs and doubts. I realize that this is both an impossible and a rather mundane sounding project. All I know is that the political tasks we face call on us to approach the world with a sense of humility, which I will no doubt continue to fail to perform. I am looking for a modest project, one that simply seeks a better ending

through the collaborative effort to produce better stories. There are a variety of intellectual projects that might fit the bill here. I will illustrate the possibility by drawing upon my own commitment to cultural studies (Grossberg 2010a, forthcoming (a)) as one project of critical knowledge production.[1]

Actually, cultural studies has never really found an academic home in the United States,[2] although many institutions and disciplines now claim to own it. Over the years, the name has been appropriated to reference broad questions of cultural politics (usually based in textual and ethnographic concerns) or even broader matters of high cultural theory; at other times, it has been largely ignored or dismissed. Over the five decades of its explicit existence, cultural studies has been dismissed at least five times: first, by Marxists who accused it of taking culture too seriously; second, by structuralists who accused it of taking human agency too seriously; third, by post-structuralists who accused it of taking structures too seriously; fourth, by postmodernists, who accused it of taking reality too seriously; and currently, by post-Enlightenment thinkers who accuse it of taking contexts too seriously.

Cultural studies focuses on how specific realities, understood as contexts, are produced. Its intellectual practice can be described as radical contextualism. It answers to the demands of the contingency and specificity of contexts. Thus, cultural studies refuses any universalizing or essentializing appeals, an opposition it shares with a number of other critical practices that attempt to 'decolonize" thinking; but cultural studies parts company with such efforts not only because it questions the image of "unlearning" often used, but also because it does not believe that the political implications of knowledge (or anything for that matter) can be known on the basis of its social origins. The novelist Barbara Claypole White once told me that you don't have to know the end to write the beginning. I would go one step further and say that you cannot know or guarantee the end of the story based on the beginning. Nor is it sufficient to deconstruct and multiply knowledge claims, as much as cultural studies embraces difference and multiplicity. It insists on taking positions, but always provisionally, always to keep on moving, to keep on working.

1 Cultural studies emerged in multiple contexts in the post-WW2 era, in the effort to account for the changing place of culture in social transformation. It often emerged in places (e.g., Britain, Latin America) that did not have strong indigenous traditions of Marxist or sociological theories of totality—often instead drawing on traditions of literary-cultural creativity and critique.

2 It entered the U.S. academy at public universities rather than the more prestigious private ones, and in less respected disciplines, such as education and communication.

Such an approach is not only consistent with, but seems to follow from the assumption that every reality, every situation, is a configuration of relations; reality exists relationally. Things are what they are only by virtue of the relationships into which they are inserted. But no relations are ever necessary or universal or "guaranteed" in advance. And yet, at the same time, relations are real (and not illusory), the result of struggles and work, and they have real—and often complex—effects. They are the sites of contestation at which historical realities are made, unmade and remade. This means abandoning the twin assumptions of the necessity and universality—of social organizations, structures of power, definitions of normality and humanity, modes of rationality, etc.—that legitimated the barbarities carried out in the name of various versions of Enlightenment reason and modern civilization.

It also means that one has to avoid the seductions of reduction and simplification, as if any event or situation were somehow, whether in the first or the last instance, in the beginning or the end, all about one thing, caused by or an expression of one thing. Critical knowledge must avoid looking for the bottom line, the single story that would sew everything up into a neat simple unified and harmonious package, identify the bad guy on one side and the good guy on the other. For cultural studies, nothing is ever all and only about one thing. Nothing is ever completely reducible to a single plane of effects, a single structure of power, a single political site. But it must avoid, as well, two other assumptions: on the one hand, that binary thinking somehow escapes the charge of simplification— because thinking that everything is either a or b is not really much better than assuming that anything is either all a or all b—and, on the other hand, that the affirmation of absolute multiplicity (without any unities, or structures) is somehow not a form of reduction.

Instead, cultural studies embraces the complexity, multiplicity, differences, of the world, and part of that complexity etc. is that it is structured or unified in a variety of ways. It does not claim that the world has not always been complex, although perhaps the complexity has become more visible and unavoidable than in previous eras. Nor does it assume that intellectuals have only recently realized the necessity of a concept of complexity.[3] But embracing complexity has profound implications. The world is too complicated for historical moments to be simply

3 As Henry Adams put it in the 19th century: "Since monkeys first began to chatter in trees, neither man or beast had ever denied or doubted Multiplicity, Diversity, Complexity, Anarchy, Chaos. Always and everywhere the Complex had been true and the Contradiction had been certain" (1906, p. 380). Again, I am grateful to Lynn Badia.

distributed or organized into easily divided epochs, the old and the new, the before and the after, the local and the global. Social formations are not simply straightforward continuations or repetitions of the past, the same old same old. Things do change—that is the nature of history and worlds. But they rarely if ever change through absolute or radical ruptures from the past determined entirely by the emergence of the new; they are articulations of the old and the new. The old continues to operate, sometimes in close to the same way, and sometimes in different ways because it is placed into other relations, operating in a different context. Things change because new relations come into existence, changing the capacities and effects of elements that continue, that have moved into the present, taking only some of their old relations and effects with them. And new elements enter into the mix that is the reality of the present, either by emergence or radical transformation or invention. New elements not only produce new and unexpected effects but they also transform the effects of older elements and relations. The question then is always to understand the balance of the old and the new, to understand what is new and what is old, and how they impact one another. Hence, for example, the fact that some of my observations about the contemporary U.S. conjuncture have been rightly said of other times and places does not mean that I am saying the same things. Similarly, the fact that the left says some of the same things it has said before does not guarantee that they are heard in the same ways, or have the same resonances. In either case, the specific ways events or statements take shape and the specific effects they produce—distributed across different regions and populations—are the changing results of the articulation of the old and the new.[4]

This commitment to complexity and opposition to reductionism extends to questions of power; power cannot be reduced to some singular determining principle or force. Cultural studies does not privilege any one dimension—whether the problem of capitalism and class, biopolitics and the body, race, gender, coloniality, environmentalism, etc. It refuses to define its own responsibility by an appeal to the pre-constituted interests or perspectives of a specific political constituency or social position. It refuses both the individualism and universalism of liberalism, and also the all-too-common particularism of communitarianism, with its impervious boundaries of difference, compromised only after the fact by forms of

4 See Morris (2013), and Clarke (1991).
5 It often speaks for a cosmopolitan post-capitalist democracy, perhaps, following Fanon (1963)

dressing a conjuncture that is raced, gendered, classed, etc., a fragile unity of multiplicities in relations. This requires us to investigate the reach, purchase, strength and hybridity of specific emergent events, including technologies and organizations of power, and how they contribute to, constitute and participate in the construction and organization of a complex assemblage and, in particular, of a conjuncture. This means that the outcome of any project of power itself is not guaranteed; no structure of power is ever completely successful; structures of power are always leaky. Hence the relations of power defining the ongoing struggle to maintain or transform the existing state of affairs have to be understood in terms of a rather fragile and mobile balance in a complex field of forces, rather than in terms of either the potential for the complete victory of one cohesive and homogeneous camp over another, or the complete fragmentation and dispersion of power. Moreover, power is always resisted and subordination is always actively lived. It is not enough, according to cultural studies, to describe power as if it were successful and then, almost as an after-thought, point to the resistances or escapes, for power is always being reshaped by and in response to such resistances and escapes. Sometimes power is about change; other times it is about maintenance and stabilization, and at still other times, it is about managing failure, since projects rarely produce the expected results, rarely come to fruition.

At the same time, cultural studies refuses to be overwhelmed by multiplicity, complexity, contradiction and differences, which offer another kind of seduction that pushes us too quickly into the singularity or hyper-differentiation of the particular and the chaos of the accumulation of particularities. Relations are always articulated into concrete organizations (assemblages, formations) and contexts of lived reality and power. Hence, cultural studies tries to analyze the actual processes and practices by which any context is constructed as an organization of relationships. It embraces what Marx called historical specificity; and this is why I referred to it as a practice of radical contextuality. It is always attempting to understand events in the world as parts of contingent contexts. A context here does not refer to an isolated spatio-temporal bit, or to a rather amorphous background, but to a complicated and contradictory set of relations, differentiated unities, organized multiplicities. This dialectic of complexity and organization means that the actual con-

and Gilroy (2001), by envisioning a re-imagined—pragmatic planetary humanism.

texts of lived reality, like any relation, are never guaranteed in advance; their structures never necessary and unavoidable; their effects and expressions never inevitable. There were and are always other possibilities. The realities we live in are contingent, the product of processes and struggles, natural and social, of various forms of agency, that forge relations and condition their effects. Human beings are certainly part of this ongoing history, but that does not mean that human beings are somehow in control.

Cultural studies believes one must always begin by denaturalizing what appears to be obvious and taken for granted—call it de-mythologization, de-fetishization or dis-articulation—prising apart relations that appear to be natural, inevitable, necessary and universal and showing how they have been constructed. It demands an openness to being surprised, a self-critical willingness to have its concepts shown up for their inability to take us further. It asks that we be willing to discover that what is at stake politically is other than what we thought it was, that the world is not what we thought it was, that it is not operating according to our theoretical or political assumptions. Cultural studies seeks to discover what it does not already know, what its taken for granted concepts may not let it see or say; it has to approach its own tools with suspicion and hesitation. It operates in the confrontation of theory, politics and empirical realities. This does not mean that the empirical is available without theoretical (conceptual) work. Understanding the world depends upon some sort of confrontation or conversation between the invention of concepts and the mapping of concrete empirical relations. Concepts are in fact tools for mapping, for organizing the somewhat impenetrable complexity of the empirical world. Each must, long before the final instance, be held answerable to the other.

Theory itself has to be constantly questioned, treated as a set of profane tools that one takes up, reshapes or puts aside depending on their ability to offer insights into and understandings of a particular context, and to open up new possibilities for struggling to rearticulate that context. Cultural studies actively fights against academic habits that increasingly allow theory (ontology) to define in advance its diagnoses of empirical realities and political possibilities, as if one could be certain of the truth and utility of one's theoretical concepts and assumptions. Theories can appear to guarantee their own analyses and, in that process, exclude those who are skeptical about the theoretical starting point, or who may well choose not to enter the conceptual wonderland. It thus can

quickly close down the conversation or limit it in all too predictable ways. Theory too easily lets us off the hook, telling us in advance what we know, or simply repeating what we want to hear, rather than leading us to explore what we do not already know and may not expect. Cultural studies argues that theory serves as a set of tools enabling us to hear the questions being asked, and to begin to answer them in ways that make visible some things—including possibilities—otherwise not seen. But the figure of the toolbox perhaps obscures the fact that, as Marx put it, "even the most abstract categories . . . are . . . themselves likewise a product of historical relations and possess their full validity only for and within these relations" (cited in Hall, 2003, p. 135). Cultural studies is built, in Hall's words, on "the mutual articulation of historical movement and theoretical reflection" (p. 137), the complex relationship of concepts and social contexts. This doesn't mean that concepts are entirely bound to their origins —that would contradict the assumption of contingency—but that to make use of concepts in other contexts, "they have to be delicately disinterred from their concrete and specific historical embeddedness and transplanted to new soil with considerable care and patience" (Hall, 1996, p. 413).

Crucially, cultural studies is about producing useful knowledge that can be put in the service of political struggle and historical change. As in other versions of critical work, political struggle and imagination often go hand in hand with the difficult work of knowledge production, work that may occasionally say no to our most precious theoretical assumptions, empirical hypothesis and political strategies. But it does not presuppose the nature of the relation, nor does it prescribe a particular normative practice of the relation, whether of theory, empirical research, or strategic intervention and activism. What it does propose is a particular and unique object of study. Cultural studies' object is not any of the usual disciplinary objects—and it is not culture; it is contexts themselves, but it also makes a further specification; it makes a political choice to operate at a particular level of abstraction and effectiveness, which it refers to as conjunctures. While some people use conjuncture to simply mean a particular context, cultural studies uses it to signal its gamble on what sorts of knowledges and political strategies might have the best chance of moving the world in more humane directions. There are always many levels of contexts and many forms of understanding and struggles, and I do not mean to render them unintelligible or invisible. On the contrary, I want to emphasize that from the point of view of cultural studies, every level of

abstraction is characterized by its own specific forms of complexity and multiplicity on the one hand, and by its own organizations or "structures in dominance" of those complexities. Every level, from the grand sweep of epochs to the concreteness of situations, has its own political struggles and possibilities. Conjunctures are not defined merely by specific events or situations, by definitive spatio-temporal boundaries (localism) nor by the larger expanses of epochs that may extend across centuries, often signaling grand changes in the fundamental structures of power. But a conjuncture is also not simply the fact of the complexity of a social formation.

Conjunctural analysis attempts to map the temporal, spatial and causal multiplicities and heterogeneities, and the interactions of multiple determinations, crises, struggles, and conspiracies. This mapping is a creative act. Rather than assuming that all the pieces somehow neatly fit together and that these unities can be known in advance, it sees such articulations as the site of practice of the struggle of power: the effort to create relations and forms of organization (e.g., of relational assemblages, discursive formations, apparatuses of power, and specific political alliances) capable of offering a new "settlement," a new temporary balance in the fields of forces, a new understanding of the present and the possibilities of the future. A conjuncture describes an articulated and complex unity that does not pre-exist political struggle and intellectual work, with specific and changing degrees of stability. It is always itself a construction—the articulation, disarticulation, rearticulation of relations—neither simply determined by the agenda of the analyst nor objectively waiting to be discovered by a dispassionate observer. It has to be carved out as it were, a configuration of forces producing a temporary "place" within a more complicated geography of interlinked places and spaces. It is never completely enclosed or isolated for there are always lines of connection and determination, cooperation and antagonism, connecting it across broader geographies and histories. Every conjuncture carries with it an exteriority that is operating within its spaces, just as it is always locatable within larger configurations of conjunctures. Hence, conjunctural analysis also requires us to look at the balance between forces specific to the conjuncture, those that extend across conjunctures, and those that operate only locally or situationally. Consequently, a conjuncture cannot be defined as a historical period or a specific geographical place, although these may be the result of the limits of our abilities to construct the conjuncture. It is in fact the complex articulation of the efforts at po-

litical analysis and transformation. Thus, thinking conjuncturally is not the same as thinking locally; it may well require one to think globally, but it is also not the same as the negation of the local, for the question is a political one: how does one organize political struggle, and how does one move people from where they are to get them to think about the global as an integral and immediate part of their lives?

A conjuncture is an analytic and political response to a period of relative instability, not by a single or singular contradiction or struggle, but by an articulation, accumulation or condensation of multiple struggles, contradictions and vectors, with different spatialities and temporalities, fabricating a temporary, fragile and complex "totality," one without a simple unity or identity. These contradictions, taken together, disrupt or unsettle the taken-for-granted structures of identity and stability, creating a sense of social crisis (although whether the multiple crises fuse into a single moment is itself part of the conjunctural history), often experienced as a kind of historical disruption or unsettling, a change of the texture and tempo of everyday life, and marked by the emergence of new sets of relations. This sense of social instability and uncertainty leads to a search for settlements, new structures and appeals that might offer some sort of resolution. How this conjunctural history plays out is, consequently, never guaranteed in advance; its specific realization is never necessary. The conjuncture is what David Scott (2004) calls "a problem space;" it poses its own questions and demands. To fail to grasp the problem space—although there may be more than one that can be heard or made visible—is to fail to grasp what it going on and hence, to fail to open up viable political possibilities. Or in other terms, a conjuncture is the attempt to "represent" and re-articulate an "organic crisis."

Hence, cultural studies does not offer itself or its practice of radical contextuality as a new universal practice, but as a strategic intervention, operating at what it takes to be a politically important level of abstraction, into an organic crisis. It is a self-reflexive project insofar as it sees itself as a specific contextual response to complexity. It is not complexity or contingency that calls it into existence, but the specific forms of complexity and contingency of these—in Arendt's (1970) terms—"dark times." Again, cultural studies is a response to the appearance of an "organic crisis" and in particular, to the organic crisis that began to take shape following the Second World War. Therefore, cultural studies imagines the possibility of its own demise, of a time when its particular project of radi-

cal contextuality, when its particular practices of rigor, authority and provisionality might not be, strategically, the most useful way to tell better stories.

In part, that effort is defined, as I have been suggesting all along, by a different sense of authority and truth. Cultural studies accepts that it will always fail to comprehend the indefinable totality, so that offering conclusions is always a risky endeavor, but the political need to answer the questions posed by the problem space, to address the organic crisis, as best one can, demands that one not renounce all authority, that one not give up the effort to tell a better story. Yet one's analyses are always provisional, always incomplete, offered without certainty and what Stuart Hall once called "the solace of closure" (1996, p. 138). Admittedly, the vision of cultural studies I have offered is that of a project, an imagination of intellectual work; perhaps it has never been fully realized but that does not argue against the value of the effort. Moreover, the project does not dictate ahead of time how it might be realized in any specific context. That is to say, the specific formation of cultural studies depends in part on the particular ways in which the problem space expresses itself, the ways it calls conjunctural analyses and politics into existence—as well as on the intellectual and political resources that are available to it.[6]

Cultural studies is hard work, probably not best thought of as a task for a single isolated intellectual or a community of agreement and common expertise (although given the state of the academy, this is often how it appears to be undertaken). As I have said there are many ways of doing it, and which one is most likely to produce the sorts of useful understandings one seeks depends in part on the particular contextual variation of a conjuncture one takes up. But I want to at least try to offer a sense of some of the ways cultural studies might encourage forms of intellectual experimentation: I think of such experiments as ways of mapping a conjuncture, of looking across maps to see their relations, and of articulating one's efforts to those of others invested in the conversation. I think of such maps as mega-jigsaw puzzles without the pictures that enable you to know what you are trying to reassemble. Each piece is likely to change

6 Thus, in my own case, my "version" of cultural studies is defined at the intersection of a number of theories/practices of radical contextuality: the conjuncturalism of British cultural studies (Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart are often identified as the founding figures, with Stuart Hall as its most profound and successful expression) and the sorts of the historical ontology practiced by Heidegger, by Foucault's genealogies of the technologies and rationalities of power, and Deleuze and Guattari's effort to describe the "machinic" production of the actual (especially the multiplicity of regimes of signs and expressive assemblages). See Grossberg (2010, 2014, forthcoming (a) and (b)).

your sense of what is going on, and each piece added can modify the significance of all the other pieces. So the puzzle is constantly changing, constantly re-making itself. Now imagine, ultimately, a multi-dimensional jigsaw puzzle, and you have some sense of the task we confront. The richer our efforts, the more maps we can construct and relate, the better our understanding of the conjuncture and our imagination of its possible transformations.

I want to identify some of maps that might be assembled for the sake of conjunctural analysis, and I want to expand the possibilities beyond the taken-for-granted practices of the intellectual left, and to acknowledge the impact of other political-theoretical projects, including the new materialisms and the ontological turn. First, one can construct what might be called a structural-materialist map of the structures of and relations among the political, economic, cultural and social instances or dimensions. This is perhaps what we are most comfortable with, although each of us is likely to stay within the comfortable borders of our own disciplinary objects—the result of cutting out some subset of relations and objectifying it as a reality in and of itself, often pushing the relative autonomy of each instance into the illusion of absolute autonomy—and even of our own theoretical and methodological commitments within the discipline.

Too often, discipline-trained intellectuals assume that they can simply add such disciplinary knowledges together and come up with an interdisciplinary totality that is greater than the sum of its part. We need to take the challenges of interdisciplinarity more seriously, not only in terms of a conversation across disciplines, but also as the prerequisite for such a conversation. That is, each discipline has to become an interdisciplinary formation in its own right, reinserting its object back into the complexity of relations in which it is embedded, in order for there to be a common reality as the basis of our interdisciplinary conversation. If each dimension has its own practices, logics and temporality, it is also the case that in being articulated together, each provides conditions of and resistances to the others, each partly constructs and deconstructs the others. Hard work indeed! For example, instead of thinking of politics in terms of a preconstituted difference between ruling blocs, bureaucracies and "the people," we might begin to think of it as a range of apparatuses of governance, including biopolitical (discipline, normalization, securitization), cultural (ideological, affective), subjectivizing, organizational, differentiating and violent, as well as a range of counter-organizational

apparatuses of resistance, cooperation and escape. Instead of seeing economics as a predefined arena of markets, exchange or exploitation, we might begin to see it as a complex set of apparatuses of value production, transformation and capture, which cannot be separated from organizations of affective obligations, social relations, discursive rules and commensurating logics (Grossberg et al., 2014). The result would be hybrid Venn diagram-like maps of the multiple logics, practices and structures of power and resistance, creativity and constraint. But we might also expand and supplement this materialist map—a materialism of practices if you will—with another dimension, by incorporating the insights of the new materialisms (and of expanded notions of biopolitics) by attending to the ways bodies (not necessarily equated with individuals) have themselves become implicated in the creation and distribution of new affordances, new capacities and new forms of power.

A second map diagrams the realm of culture, or what one might call, in less parochial terms, the expressive. It is here that I believe the new ontologies have the most to contribute to cultural studies, as a way of understanding how various discursive formations or regimes of semiotics produce the plane of a lived reality. If the first map describes what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would call a map of a milieu, the second describes a territory as an expressive space of mediations (but in a non-Kantian sense). The territory is not reducible to the specific forms of expression identified in Enlightenment and Kantian traditions—signification (meaning), representation and subjectification (including forms of ideology and common sense)—but that does not mean that they are not real. One need not assume that the lived or experience always takes the form of experience as it is phenomenologically understood, in terms of individual subjectivity and consciousness; one need not assume that experience itself provides a universal, privileged measure of truth. Instead, one can locate experience as part of the context, a complex effect of the interaction of a number of semiotic regimes, an empirical reality that is no more or less real, no more or less self-defined, than other discursive effects. This may enable us to understand that there are other productions of experience, and thus challenge the hubris and fetishism of the human against other forms of life.

Culture as the production of the lived can encompass multiple semiotic regimes, including but not limited to meaning, representation and subjectification. But it is not sufficient to simply identify the semiotic regimes at work in a particular conjuncture; one must investigate as well

the ways they are articulated in complex, hybrid discursive formations, producing different kinds of effects, some of which I have described as "affective."[7] This map of expressive reality, of lived reality, diagrams how people live with, within and against the organizations of reality described in the first map. (Hence, my description of an organization of pessimism might be part of such a diagram.) It would describe how people live their everyday lives, their commonsense understandings of the world, the logics of judgment and calculation by which they confront the choices they are offered, and the organizations of affective possibilities and limits (structures of feeling, mattering maps, etc.) that shape the energetics, cohesiveness and textures of their lives. This is not to say that the first map is materialist, while the second is somehow idealist. Rather, it says that the body and its capacities—both cognitive and sensory—exist materially as both milieu and territory, so that its capacities to immediately affect other bodies, which defines affect as a material effect (in a milieu) are always also doubled by discourse, giving affect other—expressive—possibilities (to have effects in a territory). One cannot reduce the lived body to the materialities of the milieu, and one cannot erase the materialities of bodies from culture.

A third map constructed at the intersections of these two maps would perhaps allow us to further address the paradoxical state of the left which serves as the prism, the crystallization or the point of condensation at which I have entered into the conjuncture. It is a diagram of the distribution of lived and perceived crises that define the felt need for change and the demand for political struggle in people's lives. Left intellectuals often reduce such matters to the first map (as I did in chapter 4), locating particular struggles within specific domains, and seeking the relations that cut across the domains. Instead, this third diagram would resemble a spider-web-like (non-linear, rhizomatic?) distribution of instabilities and uncertainties that make lived reality into a "problem space" and define an organic crisis. For example, I have elsewhere suggested that there is a dispersed set of crises defined by the lack of ability to commensurate or calculate the comparative worth or value of anything (commodities, financial instruments, art, knowledge, etc.) (Grossberg,

7 One might turn here to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) discussions of "collective assemblages of enunciation" and regimes of signs (in which they propose, as a beginning, signifying, post-signifying or passional, pre-signifying and counter-signifying regimes) as well as Felix Guattari's (1984) own discussion of semiotics (in which he distinguishes a-semiotic encodings as the formalization of matter, from a-signifying and signifying semiotics). As soon as one models a-semiotic formalizations, of course, they become semiotic substance rather than a-semiotic matter. My thanks to Bryan Behrenshausen.

2010b).[8] I might also point to other dispersed lines of crises, including lines defined by an inability to translate across cultures and, more broadly, to define the commonalities that cut across differences, as well as a line of scattered crises of temporality. It may be that it is on such a map that one can locate the sorts of key structural weaknesses that I mentioned in the last chapter, for these webs of lived "troubles" might identify points of concern and weakness in the existing balance of forces.

Cultural studies is not supposed to be easy, and it almost always contradicts the habits of the academy. It depends on seeing knowledge production as an ongoing heterogeneous conversation. This conversation must be broader than cultural studies, even broader than the academy. It has to involve intellectuals across a wide range of institutions, as well as activists, educators and cultural workers. It probably has to involve people who are, as of yet, uncertain about where they want to locate themselves in the space between the status quo and the possibilities of transformation. It has to be historical and spatial—both in terms of its particular context but also in terms of the distribution of relations constituting the context—even as it recognizes the numerous forms of spatialization[9] and temporality. It has to speak many languages, ask many questions and embrace many answers, all the while looking for the ways to organize them, to see the commonalities across the differences, while refusing to subsume or subordinate the differences to the commonalities. Cultural studies is risky work, in terms of both its outcomes and the systems of academic rewards. But then, interesting and important work—whether intellectual or political—is always risky. It is possible if we approach it with both passion and rigor, with generosity and humility, as always significant and inevitably provisional.

From my own position as an intellectual (hopefully) addressing other politically sympathetic intellectuals and intellectually sympathetic leftists, I think we face an urgent task to transforms the practices—and institutions—of knowledge production. This is not a task that only concerns the university but we cannot afford to abandon the imaginative

8 These are not the expression of some general crises; each is the result of specific events, or struggles, which have undermined the existing logics of commensuration without offering alternatives, and in some cases, refusing the very call for alternatives. For example, the various attacks on established aesthetic and intellectual criteria from various marginalized groups has left a vacuum of commensuration. I am not condemning such attacks, quite the contrary. I am simply pointing to their lived if unintended consequences.

9 See the work of Doreen Massey, Paul Gilroy, Kuan Hsing Chen, Meaghan Morris, etc. Such authors have taught us not to think of a single global new world order or epoch, nor in terms of unrelated locales, but as a complex articulation of multiple, overlapping contexts.

possibilities of the university. The fight to reinvent the university in ways that allow us to address (and answer) the crises of knowledge, that reconstruct the terms of valuation of the institution, that embrace the legitimacy of the many forms of knowledge, that perform and make visible the ongoing conversational nature of knowledge itself, and that acknowledge the political responsibility of the intellectual—this is as important as any other struggle we face.

CHAPTER 7—ANOTHER POLITICS IS POSSIBLE (THE INEVITABLY DISAPPOINTING LAST CHAPTER)

What is the left to do? That is the question I want to raise (but not answer) in this final chapter. I will begin by considering the problem of organization, trying to imagine and recover the possibilities of heterogeneous unities and structured unities (formations) that embrace heterogeneities. I will offer a reading of the U.S. counterculture and refer to the efforts of Podemos (in Spain). I will conclude by reflecting on the possibilities of mobilizing against the specific organization of pessimism.

A politics of organization

Cultural studies agrees with the new ontologies—almost always materialist albeit not in the same ways—that the behavior or comportment of any element, its capacities or affordances, are the result of its relations. It disagrees, however, because cultural studies assumes that reality entails the ongoing struggle to construct (or deconstruct and reconstruct, or maintain) more than just an assemblage but an organization or arrangement, a unity of difference, or what Deleuze and Guattari call molarities. Human history involves the ongoing configuring of a field of possibilities, and thus, a modulation of potentials or capacities. It is, as Foucault might suggest, the non-subjective but intentional enactment of governance, or the conduct of conduct.

I want to suggest that the left cannot address the problem of organization if it begins by constructing absolute and exclusionary dualisms that have to be magically overcome: state versus anarchy, institutions versus voluntary collectives, etc. Unfortunately, this theoretical and political bifurcation is already built on a fundamentally inadequate theory of organization and an absolute division of the possibilities of organization; many horizontalists, explicitly or implicitly, start with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) description of three kinds of organizations (molarities): arborescence, radicle and rhizome, although contemporary theorists often take up the radicle as little more than a non- or less materialist version of the rhizome. The result is two camps: those (verticalists) who champion arborescence, and those (horizonalists) who champion rhizomes. Arborescence describes verticality, any organization structured by

a single axis (or point), whether hierarchical, centered (concentric), or teleological, a structure in which there is a master term (above, at the center, or at the end). The radicle is a structure in which the source of aborescent unity is negated and dispersed—fragmenting every unity or totality, deconstructing every hierarchy, displacing every center. But as a result, it can never completely escape the claims of unity, which are only indefinitely deferred; the ghost of unity remains as an absent presence, a memory, a promise, a trace. Finally, the rhizome is pure multiplicity that has to be made by subtracting every moment of unity. The rhizome has no pre-determined configuration; it is the product of a radical and ongoing experimentation of making connections everywhere. Like crabgrass it has no center, no structure, no permanence, no plan or intention. Everything can be and is related to anything else. But in any "actual" reality, the various forms can never exist independently of one another; they are always intertwined, always connected: roots and radicles in rhizomes, rhizomes in roots and radicles. This suggests a more heterogeneous picture of reality as always transversal. And there is certainly no reason to assume that particular forms of organization are inherently and universally good or bad, progressive or conservative. Nor is there any reason to think that this triad exhausts the multiplicity of possible organizations.

Nothing exists as purely vertical or horizontal, as arboreal or rhizomatic; these are the fantasies of a Cartesian universe. There are no purely vertical formations other than perhaps fascism; there are no pure horizontal formations other than perhaps absolute anarchism, and certain imaginations of capitalism as pure circulation. What exists are all and always hybridities or, better, transversalities. Formations can be more or less vertical, more or less horizontal, depending on the contexts in which they are deployed and examined. They are not ontologically different; they are not necessarily opposed. Formations can change, adjust themselves to the demands and determinations of different contexts. One can surely imagine the possibilities of making connections among multiple transversal strategies and formations. And so one can imagine (and even make) organizations or configurations of the multiplicities of political practices, struggles and movements. Every form of organization, and every organization itself, is its own event, with its own capacities as configured and configuring, its own composition and composing powers; as it changes, or as it enters into new relations (perhaps with other practices, struggles and movements), so do its capacities. So, for example,

there is a significant difference between what the networks of social media can do, and the grassroots movements that literally deploy the passions of embodied presence.

This does not mean that there can or should exist a fixed definition, a singular organization or a homogeneous space of the left. Rather, my argument is that people opposed to the forms of injustice, immiseration, inequalities, etc. of the contemporary modalities and structures of power —call them progressives, leftists, socialists, radical democrats or whatever you want—have to find ways of coming together organizationally in forms of unity that are sustainable and visible, even as they embrace heterogeneities and change. The refusal to imagine, talk about and assemble such possible unities (e.g., the constant argument that there is and should be no such thing as the left) not only guarantees that such unities will not be allowed to exist, it also makes it more difficult to talk to people who might share some but not all political concerns and commitments. The left often treats disagreements as if they were all that mattered, as if they were inscribed in stone, as if they trumped all other possible responses to the current situation. The left needs forms of unity in which contradictions, inconsistencies and even, in the end, disagreements, are not expelled from the conditions of possibility of cooperation. The question of whether it is useful, necessary or even possible to construct "the left" as an oppositional force is not merely a matter of internal difference but of conjunctural challenges and the demands of a popular politics. I am not advocating a politics that normalizes compromise but rather opposing one that absolutizes the refusal to compromise.

Can one imagine forms of organization, cooperation and even totalization that could claim a coherence and continuity, but would not reproduce the problems of older forms of alliance or coalition? There cannot only be waves (as some has suggested) that rise up (yes, again and again) but then crash into the shore and disappear back into the ocean (each wave claiming its minutes of fame, although some continue to do important work out of the limelight and therefore, to some extent, out of the domain of the popular). Nor can there only be tower blocks, capable of standing up to the waves. There must be movements that reconfigure the land and its relation to the ocean in sustainable ways, and that can hold back the tide that would immediately wash away the changes, however progressive and beneficial they may have been. There have to be the moments of more formal organization or institutionalization, which seek a politics that endures. Can one imagine multiple unities that refuse, on the

one hand, to homogenize difference, impose an external logic or identity, or assume a fundamental underlying truth or essence and, on the other hand, to give into the chaos of multiplicities?

I recently came across the following statement (Cox and Nilson, 2014), which seems to sum it up nicely, although I would argue that we need to stop thinking of the struggle in terms of defeating the right but in the broader terms of transforming the directions of history:

> The idea that because movements do not have a homogeneous base, disagree about strategy and tactics, contain various political tendencies and work differently in different countries, they are therefore "not a movement" depends on a caricatured notion of movement.
>
> The making of EP Thompson's English working class was a complex and contested achievement of bringing together hugely diverse groups within a very loose cultural and political identity; as Barker points out, movements are necessarily fields of conflict as well as collaboration; while the historiography of 1968, the Resistance or even the early Comintern shows just how diverse these movement waves—flattened in memory and representation—actually were.
>
> Communication and collaboration, a shared sense of "we" and "they", compatible strategies and analyses are all achievements of shared struggle: they do not precede it but are part and parcel of how people remake themselves in movement, as they articulate their local rationalities to one another, combine their militant particularisms into campaigns and articulate movement projects.

I think this would be a form of political unity constructed affectively, a coalescent, sticky unity which, rather than stably binding elements into relations, constructs multiple ways of belonging, of entering and leaving, of consenting to temporary identifications and allegiances, of constructing stability. At the same time, it needs to reach beyond itself and have a better grasp of the possibilities of engaging with people in the name of forging a popular politics. "Where is the outrage?" is the wrong question, for it assumes that the left already understands people's everyday and affective lives. Moving beyond that assumption would require the hard

work of engaging the popular, of addressing and winning over those who are not already committed to the goals and practices of the struggle as they understand them, or who agree (but perhaps not with everything) but are not yet willing to politicize their feelings and values in the available forms of action, or who have convinced themselves that the only battles worth fighting are the small ones where there is a greater chance of victory or have lost faith in the possibility of actually producing change, or . . . A radical politics that does not find ways of calling people to action, and of inviting people into its spaces and offering them a variety of ways of inhabiting them, of making its practices meaningful, mattering and enjoyable, is doomed to fail. The fundamental question that such a politics has to face is how to organize political possibilities in a necessarily open and contingent field? How to organize a politics that does not run away from complexity, a politics not organized as a war between two homogenous and totally opposed camps but as an adaptable distribution of positions and struggles, in what Gramsci called a war of positions? How to understand theoretical, analytic and political statements as transversal lines that can intersect and articulate each other into multiple configurations with overlapping and differing commitments and strategies? In the end, the question is not whether one acts horizontally or vertically, locally or nationally (or even globally), but how we act together? And this depends, I believe, on the affectivity of one's actions: does one act in certainty or with humility? Does one act in ways that resonate with people's lived realities?

A politics of countercultures

The question of organization—and its multiple possibilities—is instantiated at numerous sites, with a variety of temporal and spatial scales, and with different capacities, including: state and governmental formations and apparatuses, political parties, NGOs and non-state agencies; legal and "private" institutions such as corporations, banks, trade groups, unions, non-profits (as well as public-private hybrids); civic organizations—both formal (e.g., schools and churches) and informal or voluntary ones; social movements, local protests and alternative communities.

I want to focus here on the possibility of social/political movements capable of intervening, in multiple ways, to significantly alter the current balance of forces and directions of historical change. I do so because this

is, I believe, where the left must start if it is to face the realities of the conjuncture and the possibilities of effective opposition: to construct an effective unity in difference, to engage a war of positions in which the different alliances called into being at particular sites, to fight particular struggles, still see themselves as part of a common struggle, a unified movement to change the world, embodying a new shared historical project. Such movements must find strategies that can make a difference, even if the spaces won are few and far between, often compromised and limited, policed and regulated. But it may still offer real advances, and it may well be that this is how the world changes, by various steps of different sizes, here small, there a bit bigger, that define a common path and a common trajectory. Dismissing such victories as too little or as nothing but the continuation of the same, may be a re-assertion of the absolute certainty of one's commitment that participates in the dominant organization of pessimism. I also believe that one possible lesson of history is that the most powerful forces for change are those that have embraced the multiplicities available to them. Perhaps one might think of this as a "movement of movements." It need not seek to take control of the state, but it cannot abandon the effort to influence and even transform state politics. It has to face off against the full range of forces that might oppose it, from entrenched defenders of the status quo, to conservative revolutionaries, to capitalist expansionists, some of them marginal and isolated, others strongly woven into formal political institutions and struggles. And while it need not understand politics solely in prefigurative and processual terms, it cannot deny the necessity of foregrounding imagination as the condition of possibility for any transformative political struggle. I am not saying that such a movement is sufficient by itself to address all the problems the U.S. must face; other sorts of organizations and institutions, including, as I have suggested, various state apparatuses, corporations and financial institutions have to be re-imagined as well. But I think these are intertwined: one needs such a movement to push entrenched political parties and state apparatuses in lasting and significant ways.[1] So I offer the possibility of such a movement of movements as the starting point for a conversation and as a conjuncturally specific political strategy.

1 This is different than the sorts of recurring temporary pressures that are regularly raised in electoral moments, often in the primaries and which are often, in the long run, unenforceable.

It is only in the context of such a movement of movements that one can judge the capacities of various tactics and alliances, since the same practice can have very different meanings and effects in different contexts and in different conjunctures. What are the contemporary utilities of direct actions, demonstrations, mobilizations, petitions, occupations, performances, free spaces, alternative community economies, online networks, boycotts, refusals, etc.? As I have suggested, too many contemporary tactics operate with and for what is largely an already defined political community of agreement, and think they are merely engaging in an act of "truth-telling" but (given everything I have said) it is difficult to know what people "know" or believe, why they believe or think they know, what sorts of evidence or reasoning counts for them, and what sorts of logics, appeals and authorities they use to make judgments and draw conclusions. Without such self-critical consideration, the crucial differences among effective protest, acts of moral witnessing, and the attempt to win people to one's cause—all of which are sometimes vital and often personally necessary—can become invisible.

I want to discuss one such movement of movements, recognizing that there have been many such efforts in different times and places. In particular, I want to discuss the 1960s counterculture, not only in terms of its failure but also in terms of its success. I am not calling for a return to the counterculture, but for a critical reconsideration of the various attempts to create a movement of movements. I want to confirm that such creative forms of alliance are possible, whatever their ultimate outcome. Too often, especially in the academy, the U.S. counterculture is overshadowed by the events of Paris, May 1968, which is celebrated as a moment of insurrection, or in terms of whatever specific theoretical figure of opposition and possibility the critic wants to embrace. As a result, much of its ethnic, geographical, and substantive diversity etc. has been erased.[2] At the same time, the messier, temporally scattered and fluid events that constituted the counterculture in the U.S. and elsewhere have been treated mostly as the occasion for popular history and nostalgia.

The 60s counterculture's vectors have powerfully shaped the politics of the past fifty years; the U.S. continues to live in its shadow in both positive and negative ways. It opened up a space for the multiplication of sites and forms of struggles, and as a result, it changed many fundamental social relations and cultural assumptions of life in the U.S. It also

2 See Ross (2002).

provided the retrospective justification for a powerful conservative backlash, and as a result (however unintentionally and indirectly, or as much as one might like to pretend otherwise), it provided the occasion for the emergence and establishment of a conservative countermovement that has at times articulated—affectively—a changing diversity of conservatisms, pro-capitalisms and militarist hawks; one might argue that it has at times operated in the formal terms of a counterculture. It is also worth acknowledging that the new right alliances not only took up tactics and strategies of the 60s counterculture, they also took up many of the criticisms of the liberal society that were offered by the counterculture and the movements that preceded and helped to shape it (e.g., civil rights).

But the U.S. counterculture may have more important lessons for the present moment. I want to return to 1960s counterculture, not in a nostalgic glance back to the 1960s, but to inquire into its existence as a particular kind of organization—an articulated unity in difference—as an organization of political multiplicities that embraced the co-existence of multiple forms of organization. I am not suggesting that the 1960s counterculture was a moment when the left was victorious or on the verge of victory, or even that it had its act together as it were. It was seriously flawed, crucially limited and disastrously deficient. It too often refused the intellectual and analytic challenge of producing a better understanding of what was going on. It had no analysis of the complexities of power; it deeply underestimated the flexibility of capital. Some elements took an expanding affluence to be the new desired norm of capitalism so that they could celebrate consumption; too many elements focused on questions of equitable distribution of wealth, and largely ignored the continuing politics of scarcity and the practices of wealth-production. Some key fractions overlooked the overdetermination of the politics of lifestyle—for some, apparently, the primary concern—by gendered and sexual relations. Many failed to adequately take account of some of the most powerful political forces shaping U.S. society and politics, especially the continuing power of racialization and coloniality. It underestimated the complexity of the relations between institutional and quotidian power, and between local, national and global spaces of power. And as a result, among other things, many assumed that the Vietnam war was a key articulatory node in U.S. power which, if successfully attacked, would have expansive implications and precipitate a real crisis for U.S. society.

The term "counterculture" was invented in the 60s to describe what its inventor, Theodore Roszak[3] (1969), thought to be a new phenomenon, but Roszak confused empirical description with conceptual invention. He assumed that any possible counterculture would closely resemble in content and substance that of the 1960s, instead of seeing the counterculture as a particular realization of a movement of movement. Even within Roszak's terms, there are significant disagreements about exactly which aspects of the 60s counterculture were most significant: was it about beliefs, values and imaginations, or behaviors, or lifestyles? Did it demand nonconformity or a more radical inversion? Was it the expression of conflict or anomie? Was it opposed to scientism, technocracy, capitalism intolerance, hypocrisy, and injustice or, more globally, authority, power, tradition? Was it opposed to modernity or just one version of it? Was it in favor of love, tribalism, spiritualism, individualism or something more general—change, experience, experimentation, and creativity? What after all was its relation to the anti-war movement and to the various social justice struggles? Was it, as some have argued, a crucial opening of the space of political possibilities, engendering new political struggles? Or was it, as some of its political critics assert, merely a matter of lifestyle choices built on consumer economies, a rebellion of the petit bourgeoisie against the bourgeoisie, or the libertarian demand for the individual's right to pleasure or a expression of a ill-formed anti-establishment ethos?

The concept of a counterculture has to be rethought both conceptually and conjuncturally. I do not want to define it by the 60s but rather, to define the 60s as one conjunctural actualization of a counterculture as a form of political formation. The dominant stories of the U.S. counterculture simply reproduce the absolute binaries that I have opposed here; they assume that it was divided into two autonomous, exclusionary and even antagonistic groups—hippies and politicos—and some argue that "counterculture" should be applied only to the former. This story is both inaccurate and unproductive, ignoring the ordinary everyday experiences of those who were involved and invested in the counterculture, which suggest a more complicated picture of overlapping and intersecting social groups and political struggles, of some shared values and some shared enemies, of agreements and disagreements, of cooperation and indifference.[4] There were certainly some groups linked to recognizable

3 Although this "origin" is contested by some.

4 This story was reinforced by a "decision" by leading elements of the counterculture to abandon

forms of directly political struggles, whether in terms of community organizing, movement protests or state politics (e.g. the most visible was SDS —Students for a Democratic Society) and even violent, militant revolutionary vanguards (e.g., the Weather Underground[5]).

There were also some groups that generally refused to think of themselves as political in any traditional sense, and sought routes of escape and independence from state and electoral politics. But there were also various utopian projects, drug cultures, communes (both rural and urban), prefigurative lifestyle groups of all sorts, participatory and affinity groups, insurrectionary and insurgency groups, artistic and aesthetic projects, performance groups, anarchists, socialists, Marxists, Christians, Buddhists and atheists, and media practitioners. There were efforts to change one's own consciousness and lifestyles, efforts to change others' consciousness and lifestyles, and efforts to change institutions and structures. Some people thought the revolution could only be made by changing one person at a time, others that that transformation had to be accomplished collectively and in public, and still others that it required new alliances and new forms of solidarity. And there were all sorts of connections, interactions and networks. And all sorts of events, everywhere, all the time. This multiplicity of multiplicities was intersected by and overlapped (along different time lines) with the anti-war movement, civil rights and Black power movements, and even anti-colonial struggles, La Raza and La Huelga, struggles over and within the university, as well as feminist and gay rights struggles. All these differences and fractures, all these multiplicities and possibilities, were lived out in various combinations in people's lives, changing from day to day or week to week, in the ways they organized their investments, commitments, involvements and actions.

There are, additionally, two persistent myths about the 60s counterculture that need to be dispelled. The first is that it was a gathering of white middle class (or perhaps petit bourgeois) students revolting against the bourgeois society of their parents. It was simply and only an individualistic, libertarian, hedonistic and largely privileged form of anti-establishment protest. In this story, the counterculture came to an end when its young participants had to grow up (get jobs, get married, have

electoral politics (i.e., the Democratic party)—but not all state politics—over the issue of the Vietnam War in 1968.

5 Which, perhaps inadvertently, helped undermine the strength and credibility of SDS. It should also be remembered that there was more violence during these times perpetrated by the right—by groups such as the Minutemen and the KKK.

children and, hence, live the life of their parents, which they had fought so hard to resist) or when the costs of resistance became too high for youth (i.e., only when the repressive violence of the dominant powers were aimed at white college youth). While there is some truth here—for a variety of reasons, white youth defined its center, its majority and its dominant image—the counterculture was more diverse and there is a cost to ignoring this. It is probably true that the all too common assumption, even within the counterculture, of a shared sociological—generational—identity helped to bring about its rather sudden demise. Or perhaps it is more useful to think about the specificity of the generational argument in the 1960s, where it was as much about style, affect and the popular as it was about any particular political strain or claim. After all, it was only a small fraction of the generation that came of age in the 60s that participated in the counterculture, and there were many participants not of that generation. Still, accounting for the dissolution and disappearance of the counterculture will require a more nuanced and complicated story, one that recognizes its failure to sustain and augment its ability to reach out to and recruit the full measure of U.S. society. The second myth, closely tied to the first, is that the counterculture was really equivalent to the antiwar (Vietnam) movement and when the movement was convinced either that it had won or that it had done all it could—the very fact that those who tell such stories cannot quite figure out how to end it is itself telling—the counterculture fell apart. Again, the war obviously played an important role in the popular affective economy of the counterculture; it galvanized and drew in many people but it was not the only issue, the only way in which people were involved, the only measure of its efforts and effects. This story ignores the full measure of peoples and politics that were moving through and constituting the counterculture's spaces and relations.

What forms of organization and agency constitute the specificity of a countercultural politics? A counterculture exists without a singular identity; it has no unifying singular value, politics, ideology, strategy, etc. It is rather a space of variation, hybridity and experimentation, whose practices, movements, formations and struggles are dispersed throughout the spaces of social institutions and everyday life. In one sense, then, a counterculture very clearly resembles a war of positions—a constantly shifting multiplication of struggles, each of which has to assemble its constituencies at each moment, rather than a war between two gigantic and homogenously conceived camps. In the case of the 60s counterculture,

that heterogeneity could be mapped in a number of different dimensions including: (a) a variety of political relations to the dominant forms and forces of power; (b) a variety of normative maps of values and themes, without any guarantee about what those values are or how they are configured—the map of the 60s counterculture is often assumed to have included central notions of love, experience, creativity, the present, authentic individuality, etc. as well as any number of contradictions, e.g., individual/community, but this is a very narrow picture; (c) a variety of strategies and practices, including political, spiritual, communal-lifestyle, and cultural; and finally, (d) a variety of identifications with sites and ways of belonging, including forms of subcultures, political radicalisms, communalists, spiritualists, and aesthetic-performances. Moreover, each of these maps was not simply defined by a distribution of discrete positions but by many hybrid formations, groups and practices.

But like a war of positions, which cannot simply be dispersed, for the battles are connected in a hegemonic struggle, a counterculture does have a kind of unity. It is not hierarchical, nor an alliance or coalition, nor simply some sort of rhizome. It is not built upon consensus, hierarchy, abstraction, essence or identity. Its unity depends partly but not even mainly on its sense of opposition to an enemy, not a singular (monstrous) enemy—although elements of the 60s counterculture sometimes fell back into that—but an organization of powers, discourses and affects that is as simultaneously dispersed and organized, flexible and structured, as the countercultural assemblages resisting them. Its unity is not created from the outside (by the media), despite efforts by the media in the 1960s and mainstream opponents of all political stripes to simultaneously normalize and neutralize it by representing it in traditional terms. The 60s counterculture was in fact never particularly preoccupied with its own unity (like the Popular Front or the Progressive Movement) or the efforts to negate that unity; it simply took it for granted, it lived its unity. But this depended on the fact that there were many people working to construct and sustain it.

A counterculture then is a kind of organization, a specific space of the unity—a constant effort to organize and reorganize itself—of heterogeneous practices, values, styles, politics, and strategies, and organizations, but also of movements, strands, connections and divergences. It is a transversal and multidimensional structure, neither purely horizontal nor determinately vertical, a constantly changing, contingent, negotiated, creative structure in process(es). It is a configuration with its

own capacities, but it is also always reconfiguring itself and hence its capacities. It is stable enough to mobilize and act, and unstable enough to change and adapt. The unity of a counterculture is constantly shrinking and expanding; it encompasses a wide range of trajectories of determinations and struggles, each vector with its own speed and reach, its own rhythms and resonances. It is a space of vibrant commitment and open temporalities of belonging, a space of recruitment, conversion and commutation, a space of possibilities and obligations. It exists as a unique space or territory of improvisation, sometimes of the sort in which musicians play to and around a common riff, and at other times, of the more radical improvisations in which there is no common riff, in which the players come together and move apart through the construction of common rhythms, textures and timbres, in which riffs appear and disappear, temporary, partial and creative. And yet the riffs, the relations, are absolutely necessary—they are what the music is all about. There is, nevertheless, a commonality, a unity, a kind of structure—not simply rhizomatic—of the music and the group constructed together.

The appeal to music is not coincidental, because the unity of the 60s counterculture was not ideological, nor ethical, nor even immediately political. A counterculture is an affective composition! This is why a counterculture is always a popular politics, formed out of the contradictory experiences, mattering maps, and commonsense according to which people calculate their choices and actions, and in the 60s counterculture, expressed in popular cultural forms. A counterculture's sense of unity, possibility and agency is defined by an affective commonality, by its location within and its response to and creation of common structures of feeling. And just as importantly, its visibility—to itself and to its outside—and its ability to bring people into its spaces (and hence to grow), is the result of its ability to take up and reconfigure these structures of feeling into new mattering maps. It synthesizes culture and politics into a movement lived as a space of affective possibilities, but it is also a space of affective obligations—not only to individuals and communities but also the project of changing the world that defined its affective *raison d'etre*. Its affective unity creates a social imaginary that enabled people to reimagine themselves and thus to become its subjects.

The 1960s countercultural popular has to be understood as a specific inflection of the structure of optimism that I described in chapter 3. It not only expressed a particular sense of alienation, it held up, against it, a commitment to fun, youth and change. It was, however unreflec-

tively, an attempt to make culture political and politics cultural. The 60s counterculture assumed that its popular culture—not so subtly described as "sex, drugs and rock and roll"—somehow belonged to it (that sticky and mistaken generational identification) and necessarily expressed its own alienation from and resistance to the mainstream/dominant ways of life. While the fact that this popular was closely tied to a commercially and technologically defined popular culture (and I do not mean to suggest that any popular culture can be entirely free of such determinations) gave the counterculture a brilliant visibility and served as a powerful tool for recruiting and expanding its territory, it also meant that its "popular" pulled it in competing directions. This created a contradiction that, in a relatively short period of time, the counterculture was incapable of winning or even, of continuing to fight, at the heart of the counterculture itself. And yet, not surprisingly, it was not that simple, because the affective conditions of possibility of a counterculture, the articulation of the popular, cannot be simply equated with popular culture. The 60s counterculture's experience of alienation, differently experienced by different fragments, was itself paradoxical: on the one hand, it defined a rather totalizing judgment and rejection of the existing ways of living and the existing structures of power; on the other hand, it often involved a selective appropriation of and investment in the enabling capacities of some aspects—including technology and consumerism—of the existing ways of life. It did not, taken as a whole, refuse structure or even necessarily power, but it did imagine a world in which structure and power would be organized in the service of a different vision and hence, organized differently. That contradiction was powerfully embodied in its particular temporality—for that better world ("the age of Aquarius," for example) was coming, but somehow the counterculture was doing work necessary to bring it about.

These contradictions within the affective popular of the 60s counterculture (along with some of the other aspects I have already mentioned) no doubt contributed to the failure of the 60s counterculture—its all too fleeting existence and its eventual inability to sustain or regenerate itself, and to adapt itself and its participants to the changing historical context and to the changing demands its members had to face. But in another sense, it is important to refuse to see the 60s counterculture as a failure. It profoundly changed U.S. politics and everyday life, even if some of the most important advances it enabled are being eroded and abrogated as a result of the successes of various conservative—in the many senses of

that term—alliances and the absence of a new effective left opposition. Moreover, the counterculture did not simply disappear; it gave rise to—and influenced—continuing forms of cultural and political innovation and struggle, which, in different ways, selectively appropriated (and sometimes re-articulated) at least some of the commitments, styles and practices of the counterculture. Not surprisingly, these continuing inheritances of the counterculture have reproduced its ambivalences and contradictions: on the one hand, some have produced admirable and important traditions of progressive struggle—what I will describe shortly as the social consciousness movement (e.g., *Yes Magazine*) while others have ended up in forms of techno-capitalist utopianism (Turner, 2008).

But I fear that one of the primary lessons of the counterculture has been lost: that political struggle has to work on and through the popular, that it has to work affectively. I have tried to argue that the left today faces a society increasingly saturated with a specific organization of pessimism, and that at least some of its own ways of struggling can be understood as expressions (and hence, reinforcements) of that affective organization. The question is, how does one struggle—affectively? How does one rearticulate the popular? How can we expect to communicate with people and to move them, if we cannot contest their affective comportment, and find discourses and actions that affectively resonate with and energize their own mattering maps? The all too easy answer of the 60s counterculture, which identified the popular with popular culture, does not seem quite so reasonable today given the increasingly blatant commercialization and fragmentation of popular culture. A Mexican journalist is purported to have responded to the Seattle demonstration against the IMF, an early moment of the anti-globalization struggle (and the first promise of the possibility of a green-red alliance), that it was bound to fail because it had no music. Can there be a counterculture "without a song"?

Politics without a song: A movement of movements

One of the premises of my argument has been that there is (and has been for some decades) more progressive activism today than perhaps any time during the past century, including the 1960s. Yet it has been unable to organize itself into an effective oppositional force and political vision. The contemporary left seems unable to imagine how its various multiplicities can belong together in new forms of unity, cooperation and

solidarity. Perhaps I should take a moment to explain if not justify my assumption of the levels of activism and political participation on the left. However, how does one describe a non-enumerable set that refuses to organize itself? I will point to a variety of formations and movements, which are probably not as unified as my descriptions may suggest. They are each heterogeneous assemblages, cross-cut and constituted by a wide range of arguments and positions, which do not necessarily see themselves as unified, either internally or in relation to other such formations, even as many of them overlap. Many of them have longer histories, although they have no doubt changed over time as well. All of them believe in alternative futures, alternative worlds, alternative communities, although they may mean different things by such terms. For some of the participants, these struggles are the source of their identities, for others they are vital and constitutive elements of their lives. For some they are matters of lifestyles, and for others, they define a fraction, more or less important, of their energies and activities. For some, they are simply one activity of many, often assumed to be temporary (although the result may be more long-lasting involvements). It can sometimes seem like there are just too many groups, too many issues, etc. This is partly the result of a number of developments: the increasing global awareness of such groups juxtaposed to their often increased sense of localism and differentiation; the tendency of some to refuse to unite with other groups (and hence a proliferation of groups) even if they are battling over the same issue, or the tendency to organize only around that issue (even if they do have a sense that everything is connected); and finally, an increasing sense or desire to believe that it is possible to struggle closer to and even inside "the mainstream" itself.

Still, let me try to describe some of the current multiplicity. Like my previous lists, I am sure that everyone will have their own list of groups that I have missed, or groups they refuse to allow as part of the left, or their own sense of how to organize the differences. Nevertheless, I want only to open the conversation. First, consider the various voluntary or autonomous collectives, which often refuse to get involved in state politics. As I have already said, these include a variety of anarchist, aesthetic, performative-situationist, autonomist, social libertarian, militant and squatters groups[6] Second, the social consciousness movement or new communitarianism is the most direct inheritor of the legacy of the 60s

6 See, e.g., www.weareeverywhere.org.

counterculture, especially its more hippie and spiritual elements. Like autonomous politics, it is opposed to capitalism and while perhaps not quite so hostile to the state, it is for the most part uninterested in electoral politics. And it is also committed to the construction of alternative and prefigurative possibilities. However, it does not generally think in revolutionary-militaristic images, favoring more evolutionary, mythical, spiritual and organic vocabularies. It tends to focus on the coming catastrophe (primarily environmental and secondarily economic) as the end of an epoch, which both poses the need for forms of de-linking and survivalism, with a complementary emphasis on DIY, and the optimistic possibility of the emergence of new forms of human cooperation and conviviality in the emergent epoch. Its prefiguration is not defined in terms of democracy as much as in a variety of communal lifestyles, "intentional communities" and social cooperatives. It sees itself as an emergent popular majority rather than a vanguardist movement; as David Korten—perhaps the most widely read critic of capitalism in the U.S. and co-founder of *Yes Magazine*—says in the revealingly titled, *The Great Turning* (2007), it is "the leading edge of a national supermajority." It is, finally, unashamedly humanistic, with an emphasis on consciousness, self-awareness and co-creation, and so tends to put changing people's consciousness ahead of institutional change, although the possibility of such transformation is often located in the project of establishing new forms of community organizations and styles. Some within this movement place an even greater emphasis on the often implicit spirituality of the social consciousness movement; these "new spiritualist" groups, which share some features with "new age movements," are visible in figures like Starhawk (1979, 2003), Joanna Macey (2005) and Ken Wilbur (2000). One can also see some of these 60s imaginaries enacted in a number of largely apolitical hippie-nomadic subcultures (e.g., techno-rave culture).

Third, some formations appear more at ease with capitalism, although they imagine it being significantly re-formed. Techno-utopians, cyber- and new age capitalists propose that technology (an all too American propensity), wedded with a cultural bohemianism, will bring about a radically new reality, with profoundly new social possibilities, thus solving many of our current problems. Such critics of contemporary power—including Stewart Brand (2010), the founder of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Howard Rheingold (2000), R.U. Sirius (2004), Kevin Kelly (2011) and Douglas Coupland (Coupland et al., 2015)—place their faith in the imaginative potential of the technological products of capitalism. Sometimes,

they assume that technology provides us with new models of society (flat anti-hierarchical, peer-to-peer networks and crowd-sourcing, decentered), which links them to both left-wing autonomous and ontological politics groups as described above, and to some conservative libertarian proponents of anti-statist deregulation. In Brand's case, for example, it is the hippie "back to earth" morality meeting up with yippie entrepreneurialism and popular technophilia. Add to this those who believe that forms of social entrepreneurialism and conscious capitalism [John Mackey (Mackey and Sisodia, 2013), Bill Drayton (Thompson and Drayton, 2014)] can harness the power of the market to socially beneficial causes to address the injustices of contemporary forms of power. Such strategies often reproduce the conservative economists' promise of a "new economy," in which technology guarantees continuous growth and the end of recession. Schumpeter's (1962) creative destruction becomes repackaged as disruption, trumping the need to consider its real impacts on wages, job markets, costs of living, etc. The most recent example—the "sharing economy"—imagines everyone an entrepreneur through technology, although it does not significantly question the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and labor.

Fourth, consider the very large and heterogeneous sets of people, groups and movements struggling over particular issues or vectors of power: the environmental movement in its many ideological, rhetorical and strategic manifestations; the variety of resistances to the power of corporations and capitalist markets; struggles against austerity and the growing economic inequalities; campaigns against militarism and violence of all sorts; the continuing struggles against racisms, sexisms, homophobias, ethnic hatreds and anti-immigration sentiments; and the many faith based and charitable efforts to mitigate the worst effects of power. Some of these groups approach their struggle in broad terms, while others might be seen as what I might call fractal struggles (where one assumes that the greater structures of power are reproduced in their more specific manifestations): struggles against campus rape, or against police violence aimed at black bodies, or against the prison system, or local struggles for living wages, sometimes for a specific group of workers. The scale of such struggles can vary greatly, as can their strategies—many use what can be seen as traditional forms of protest, while others seek more innovative tactics.

Fifth, one should add those who continue to believe in the possibilities of the formal political system, its ability to both transform itself so as to embody more adequately the values it purports to defend, and to address and transform the injustices and inequities that it has too often exacerbated. These groups and movements are enormously diverse, not only in terms of values, definitions of "the enemy," strategies and practices, but also in social terms: they are widely dispersed across all the possible social categories, including generations, nationalities and ethnicities, class, race, etc. Here one might point to the ACLU, Public Citizen, Move On, etc., on a national level but there are also many groups—both formal and informal—operating at local and state levels as well.

And finally, one might want to argue for another category, often overlapping with those already mentioned, defined by the emergence of a wide variety of groups whose political deployments depend largely or entirely on social media. Some of these might be better described as hybrid formations, which have an online identity that provides the basis for efforts to help organize off-line activities and communities. Many of these groups remain invisible except to those already committed to the left, although they often offer less demanding forms of involvement. They often have very different temporalities, some enduring over time while others disappear as soon as their public exposure disappears (or becomes too great). The groups seem to proliferate at rapid speeds, many overlap; some create networks of organizations (including grassroots and direct action groups; their aims include communication, leadership training, community organization, public opinion, etc., and they often use a broad range of strategies. To give just a sampling of some of the more broadly based groups: National People's Action, Campaign for America's Future, USAction, Alliance for a Just Society, CREDO Action, AVAAZ.org, Change.org, ActBlue, WiserEarth, People for the American Way. Others are birthed around more specific protests, such as EndCitizensUnited to, most recently, #BlackLivesMatter and Millennial Activists United.[7] One might add here the latest group of cultural heroes of the left—the various hacker groups, such as Anonymous and Wikileaks, often in the end reduced to individual actions and the actions of individuals, for whom questions of information, security, transparency and privacy make any and all governments and corporations into targets.

7 The latter are currently being touted as the "new civil rights movement, " but I have to say that I have my doubts, precisely because (1) they depend so much on media visibility and (2) because there is a difference, as I have already said, between online networks and social movements.

My point here is simple. This multiplicity of struggles, styles, imaginations, practices, ideologies, issues, etc. seems to provide all the makings of a movement of movement—and in the contemporary conjuncture, I would suggest, such a movement needs to organize and express itself counterculturally—that is, in part, as an affective space and a struggle over affective organizations. Such a movement would have to work on the terrain of the popular—to work on the contradictions of common sense (e.g., of popular Christianity), to stop re-inscribing the organization of pessimism and to find ways of re-articulating new forms of optimism and possibility, and to do the work, both mundane and imaginative, to build new forms of organizational unities that can construct forms of common purpose and solidarity. And yet, despite the vast numbers and varieties of struggles, the existence or even possibility of such a counterculture remains largely invisible, both to itself (many formations and even groups do not even seem to know the others exist, or that they are, in some real sense, potential co-visionaries) and to the broader audiences of media, government and possible sympathetic participants. I am not suggesting that such a movement would be a sufficient condition for social transformation, but I do believe that it is a necessary condition for an effective left opposition and redirection of social change into more progressive directions.

The left cannot assume that those issues it cares about will bring people into common political cause. That means that while people may, in the first instance, struggle for those changes that are most immediately relevant, or most immediately felt, an effective left has to find ways of linking the struggles, to show people that issues and positions are not as separate as they might seem, that, in fact, they are connected in intricate and important ways. The fact that lots of people are, or even might be, willing to struggle to change some part of the world does not guarantee a movement, and not only because such actions are sometimes selfishly motivated (NIMBY), radically short-term or competing. They can often define themselves with narrow goals that can be accomplished (or judged to fail) in a relatively short time. Efforts to escape, or to construct alternative possibilities, are often unable to speak to broader communities and to the longer temporalities that social change demands.

Moreover, there are different kinds of political engagement, often involving different degrees of investments, and making different sorts of important contributions. The point is not to choose between these different kinds of struggles—they are all vitally necessary—but to develop a

strategic organization of struggles that might effectuate real social change. It is not even a matter of having everyone agree on a single hierarchy of priorities; perhaps one can be satisfied with reaching agreement about everyone's second and third priorities. Sometimes, they offer symbolic and public victories but have few structural, ideological or material reverberations. Still, especially in depressing times, these can be absolutely invigorating and vital. Sometimes, struggles aim to immediately benefit specific populations or places —for example, winning specific rights for groups of people (e.g., gay marriage, or the freedoms to live as trans-gendered) or specific victories in the environmental struggle. One may hope that such victories are generalizable, so that their effects extend across broader scales and spaces, but contemporary conditions often act against this possibility, even if they cannot stop such victories from being recreated in multiple sites (e.g., legalizing marijuana). But such struggles do not necessarily produce a large enough benefit or exact a high enough cost; they do not necessarily transform people's affective or ideological positions or challenge fundamental underpinnings. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that, too often, those committed to these various forms of struggles may stop with their immediate victory rather than continuing to articulate their struggle to other more intensively felt and extensively powerful matters. This is not merely a matter of whether individuals are good or bad, or how seriously they are committed. It is also a matter of the place of time itself in the organization of pessimism, and in what I have talked about elsewhere (2005) as the conjunctural struggles over temporality itself. Many of those who do struggle operate with a sharply truncated sense of temporality, a short-termism that has become increasingly common since the 1960s: we want the world and we want it now.

There is yet another kind of struggle. In fact, the right is better at focusing on struggles that have real articulatory power, starting with their constituencies but extending the possibilities of winning over others: gun rights perpetuates and materially enables a culture of violence; anti-union decisions undermine the power of labor and, in some instances, the investment in public and governmental responsibilities; recent attacks on teachers' tenure and core curricula continue the deconstruction of public education; anti-abortion struggles significantly undermine efforts to contest the broadly effective operations of patriarchal power, etc. And even while such struggles may be constructed as single-issue politics, this is probably not the best way of understanding

them. Instead, one might see them precisely as struggles that can be given such powerful affective charges that they "leak" into and link with other issues, creating affective forms of political identification and unity. This may clarify at least part of the affective strategy of the contemporary war of positions. The right succeeds in part because it identifies "high-cost" (affective) struggles that strike at key potentially disruptive "tipping points" in the larger edifice, like the weak pieces in a game of Jenga, which, if put under pressure to the point of collapse or transformation, might have broader repercussions across the entire conjuncture. Such nodes both mobilize people and move them almost seamlessly from one issue into broader political identifications. That is, they are highly affectively charged; they are capable of articulating multiple relations and sites of power; and they offer themselves as viable points of intervention. They offer a way to move forward, one step at a time, for or against some of the most difficult and sutured structures (e.g., the piety of the market, the evil of big government, or American exceptionalism).

These nodes might not correspond to what appear to be the most urgent sites of struggle (e.g. global climate change), and I am certainly not suggesting that one put aside such urgent struggles. It is perhaps obvious where some of these nodes might be: e.g., at the very least, "capitalism gone mad" (corporate rights, election by money) and structures of othering (including the increasing acceptance and violence of forms racism, sexism, and gender normalization). But this does not necessarily tell us what the actual strategically effective nodal points might be (although I would like to think that the multiple maps I proposed for cultural studies might enable the left to begin to identify some). Nor is it a matter of choosing one strategy or one struggle over another, but of multiplying and connecting struggles. I am suggesting that all of these struggles be understood as part of and in the light of a larger movement of movements, a counterculture. How does the left materialize, in affectively powerful ways, the struggles against capitalism, which may often appear too abstract and global, in which people find it difficult to imagine viable alternatives? One might start with the question of corporate rights, the claim that certain (but not all) institutions are constituted as legal individuals possessing constitutional rights, even while they have few if any social obligations and responsibilities other than those which they assign themselves (usually in terms of profits). They embody the fantasy of individuality without sociality. This contradictory position is inseparable from practices that are redefining electoral democracy in the U.S., such as the

changing nature of campaign and the return of gerrymandering. The fact is that corporations are vulnerable to popular attack. Another possible nodal struggle might be organized around the demand for a universal basic income.

And these issues are, I believe, intimately and necessarily linked to multiple struggles against racism. How does the left realize, again in affectively meaningful ways, struggles against forms of racism that have so deeply polarized the nation? It is certainly not that one cannot imagine the alternative but perhaps that the left has not articulated it in clear and popular terms: a world in which all races (and identities) are treated equally, or one in which races—as the product of racisms—no longer matter (although diverse cultures do). How does one imbue a defense of black bodies against police brutality that both recognizes that this is a long-standing problem (although no doubt enacted in different ways) with a new affective urgency, while connecting it on the one hand to visions of better policing and, on the other hand, to popular fears of crime (often racist) that have been constructed over decades (going back to Nixon's 1968 campaign) but also for centuries? How do we avoid past errors: e.g., too quickly assuming that the governmental victories were sufficient to trump the deeply ingrained racisms of much of the U.S. white population? Will the current focus on the repeated enactment of racism by the systems of policing and justice suffice? I am arguing that this immediate struggle has to be connected not only to broader struggles against racism, but to other forms of othering, and to other forms of inequalities and injustices, and even further . . . [8] That is, unless it can find ways of locating itself within and contributing to the organization of the larger movement of movements.

This brings me back to affect, the popular, and their relations to forms of public engagement. I realize that the call for a popular politics often slides into a call for a left wing popular culture—nostalgically the left often looks to music—which is likely to take the left back into pessimism: because there seems to be so little political music/culture; because popular music /culture no longer seems to be a place where popular opposition can be mobilized;[9] and because the universe of popular

8 See Angela Davis's (2003) important work on the prison system.

9 "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance . . . It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture—already fully formed—might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why 'popular culture' matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about

music/culture has expanded and fragmented so much that there is no possibility of a common culture. But the left cannot afford to fall into pessimism so quickly and so easily. I do not think one can assume that there are no musics, no popular forms, capable of constituting spaces of belonging together.[10] Or perhaps it should not assume that what is needed is a single sound. What if there were many sounds, many styles, creating unimagined resonances and relations amongst those caught up in their affective spaces?

This brings to the fore questions about the relations among audiences, about the various constructions and organizations of, and appeals to, public participation.[11] Commonly, the concept of public(s) is associated with citizenship, state politics and democratic governance, and defined by an assumed relation between a collectivity and some interest(s) or concern. But since the work of Warner, Fraser, Calhoun and others rethinking the concept of the public sphere, and the work of cultural studies figures like Clarke, Newman and Mahoney, this simple assumption has given way to a more problematized, plural and contingent notion of publics, one that blurs the lines between the popular and publics, between cultures and political engagements,[12] operating at a variety of scales and through any number of media (Mahoney and Clarke, 2012). Mahoney (2014) identifies three ways in which publics are both conceived and operate: represented, normative and emergent. Representation, the most commonsensical, treats publics as real, pre-existing social groups, so that debates center on whether publics can and should be represented (through various techniques of either aggregation or delegation) or should be provided with opportunities and techniques of self-representation (e.g., petitions, crowd-sourcing, oral histories). Normative views of publics—defining what publics should be—seek to understand how they might be constituted and how their capacities and

it." (Hall, 1981, p. 219)

10 This is not to say that popular culture—or popular music—does not matter to its fans, but that it does not matter in the same way, for very complex reasons, including the changing affective place of "youth" and the increasing importance of both technology and economics as sites of popular insecurity and investment. On the other hand, there are still lots of musical and popular performances that belong within the spaces of left struggle, that articulate oppositional political affect and that reach for a new organization of optimism. My favorite at the moment is "Bugger the Bankers," available on YouTube.

11 These questions touch on matters of both participatory/engaged scholarship and political intervention. See my keynote address at the launch of the Creating Publics project at http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/media/lawrence-grossberg-publicly-engaged-social-science

12 The notion of public engagement contravenes the increasingly dominant, individualized forms of participation that aim to make "citizens" into responsible subjects. See Clarke (2013).

roles in larger processes of governance should be deployed. Normative conceptions might distinguish engaged citizens committed to democratic politics, marginalized citizens committed to activist and oppositional counter-politics, and "creative" or alternative publics, which construct a variety of atypical experiences, events and performances. Finally publics can be emergent phenomena, summoned or called into existence through various determinations and mediations. Mahoney (2014) also argues that publics can be differentiated by how they are targeted, whether they are directed at some final outcome (solution, consensus) or seek to facilitate more open-ended processes, and whether they operate through highly structured and managed processes (e.g., participatory budgeting) or by providing spaces and tools for self-organization.[13] Mahoney and Clarke (2012) further complicate the map of the diversity of publics by distinguishing three imaginations—abject, audience and agentic—of publics. Abject publics are atomized, passive, anxious and dysfunctional, unable to develop their own capacities to shape their own futures. Audiences are more flexible and adaptive, acting like consumers who are only capable of making choices from a predefined set of options. Agentic publics are creative, mobile and open-ended, without any fixed identity or outcome. It is important that this map of the multiplicity of forms of public participation does not correspond to the differences between dominant/mainstream and leftist visions, or even between vertical and horizontal imaginations of the possibilities of popular politics.

All of this suggests that any movement of movements has to create the possibility for multiple modes of participation and identification. There have been a number of attempts, especially in Latin America and (more recently) in Southern Europe, to redefine the relations between grassroots struggles, social movements, electoral parties and state apparatuses.[14] Many of these experiments involved alliances among intellectuals, activists and politicians, constituting and then mobilizing "the people" against contemporary oligarchies. One can think here of Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. While they are very different in very important ways, they have all attempted to change the politics of the state in significant and mostly progressive ways, through a variety of policy changes and, especially in the latter two cases, through innovative

13 For presentations of this heterogeneity and its usefulness, see: http://oro.open.ac.uk/42551/, http://www.open.edu/openlearn/society/politics-policy-people/participation-now

14 I am well aware of the dangers of appealing to non-U.S. examples, which have very different histories and very different conditions of possibility (including, e.g., the difference between parliamentary and congressional states).

constitutional reforms that have challenged what horizontalists think of as the state form. Similarly, in Greece, Syriza arose out of a movement of movements, the Space for Dialogue for the Unity and Common Action of the Left, founded in 2001. It defined a common ground to enable diverse groups with different ideological and tactical positions and overlapping concerns, to work in common. While not thinking of itself as a formal political organization, it did provide the opportunity for the formation of a number of electoral alliances, culminating in 2004 in Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left. Syriza has moved from a consensus based coalition of autonomous groups to a pluralistic but more unified formal party with individual membership, and became the ruling party in 2015 (largely based on its strong opposition to the punitive austerity imposed on Greece). At the same time, it helped create a new movement of movements, Solidarity4All, and to work alongside various social movements and public assemblies. Not surprisingly, there have been passionate debates about whether Syriza's new position of power has forced it to make compromises that contradict its commitments and popular support. Let us admit that it has. The question is whether this is entirely bad, whether we understand this by falling back into camp thinking, or hope that people will continue its efforts to find forms of governance capable of standing up to European austerity.

Perhaps the most interesting recent effort is the Spanish movement Podemos (Seguin and Faber, 2015), which has embraced many forms of political belonging and commitment, as well as a variety of forms of collective association, mobilization and membership.[15] Podemos' roots are in the 2011 Indignados and 15-M movements protesting austerity conditions in Spain, and which, like Occupy, refused to offer a political program. These movements were largely built on autonomous models of assemblies, although they also gave rise to a number of collective political manifestoes. Podemos' identity is difficult to define: it is a movement, strongly defined by intellectuals, ironically organized by more formal political entities. It does not present itself as a political party or coalition of parties in what one of its leaders (ex-professor Pablo Iglesias) calls "the electoral marketplace" (although it is one of the two leading parties in Spain). Instead, it is a campaign for popular sovereignty, which fervently embraces the media as a space of the popular and attempts to speak to

15 Even as I am writing this, Podemos seems to be in danger of falling apart as a result of the sorts of internal arguments I have been talking about on the left. Another interesting example is the English Red Pepper, which among many other strategies, supports the creation of local parties to contest local elections and issues.

and with people's everyday realities. It is perhaps an attempt to construct a new kind of home (a counterculture?) for anti-establishment politics, without assuming that its disgust with existing parties means that it must abandon electoral politics completely. It connects local and grassroots struggles, with social movements and the possibility of a different kind of political party, a different relation to electoral politics. Each has and sustains its own constituencies, issues and languages, its own logics and temporalities, although many people participate in more than one of its political forms of engagement. In fact, that seems to be the key to Podemos: to multiply the forms of participation and organizational processes, mixing online media, collective assemblies and electoral politics, each with its own intensities, demands and conditions of entry, and to make the various forms work together and even strengthen one another. Its network of informal grassroots "circles," organized around a variety of issues, interests and communities, works by consensus-building; anyone can participate in any one or more of these; they provide the content for larger more fluid discussions carried out through innovative uses of social media. And these together constitute a social movement that is both the ground of and "counter-force" within the party. Each of these organizational moments has its own expectations, interest and practices of expertise; and while Podemos affirms expertise, it insists that it can only operate in the context of open democratic discussion. It reaffirms what I have already suggested: democratizing expertise does not make everyone an expert. The party organization is not in charge, and does not attempt to universalize its claim to power. For example, instead of running candidates in local elections, the party chose to support only candidates of local popular coalitions. But this is all only a fragile experiment, and everything I have read suggests that Podemos is pulled in two directions: centralization versus the dispersal of power; pragmatic compromise as it attempts to expand its appeal and win elections versus a commitment to its founding principles of egalitarianism and self-government. Once again, some people want to impose on it the choice between verticalism and horizontalism.

Finally, closer to home[16] but on the other side of the political equation, one might look to the history of the changing relations between various conservative/capitalist alliances and the Republican Party, which demonstrates a number of different strategies, from constructing a broad

16 One might also look to the various moments of the Progressive Movement in the U.S.

space of conservative differences (Reagan's eleventh commandment —"Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican"), to various conservative movements' efforts to remain outside the party while pushing it in desired directions, to the Tea Party's absolute enforcement of political correctness; from the Reagan campaign's effort to empower ordinary people by getting them actively involved in electoral politics, to the organized strategy of using grassroots participation in local party committees to literally take control of the Party, to active intellectual efforts to persuade and recruit both journalists and business leaders (e.g., the Powell Memorandum, 1971) to the conservative causes and positions.[17]

In the end, there are no easy answers here, and certainly no single solution to the complex articulations that we are seeking to make. There are no guarantees. Sometimes an experiment will fail or fall back into practices that deny its very principled origins, or at best, it may achieve limited benefits. But sometimes, limited benefits are worth fighting for. Sometimes, its victories may be temporary but even that can be an important advance, if only to remind us that other ways of doing things, of governing, are possible. I have been trying to make the case for embracing complexity and contingency, and all that follows from it. It's one thing to want to change the world, to know that other worlds are possible; it's another to actually seek out strategies and organizations that might be able to re-organize the fields of political possibilities. It may mean that one's politics are never quite as pure and unassailable as one might hope; it most certainly means that one's politics have to be more provisional and humble than one might dream.

17 This diversity contrasts sharply with the starkness and ambivalence (and yes, that is a contradiction) of the left's relation to the Democratic Party, starting with the anti-communist purges of the fifties and the very partial and limited alliance between the party and the civil rights movement (severely limited by the opposition of the Dixiecrats, and weakened by the turn to black power and the rise of the Black Panthers, as well as the paranoia of the FBI). However fragile the relation, it was broken by the anti-war left's refusal to support Hubert Humphrey's 1968 presidential bid, given his refusal to oppose Vietnam War, and given the rather questionable defeat of Eugene McCarthy at the convention and the assassination of Robert Kennedy. For the most part, this serious split continued unabated until a second moment, when the first Obama campaign successfully mobilized popular involvement. However, despite statements to the contrary, it failed to provide any organizational opportunity for continued investment (even in social media, the power of which it perhaps overestimated from the beginning). And for whatever reasons, the left's expectations were so high and Obama's performance so compromised that the relation was broken long before the second presidential campaign. Even in the present, the left seems incapable or unwilling to create a movement with enough power to force its agendas on political parties, leaving it to specific individuals who at best claim to represent a certain abstract electoral power.

POSTSCRIPT—A PARTING WALK AMONG THE BLACKBERRIES

I have spoken of the possibility of imagining new forms of political struggle and organization, but I have also suggested that my arguments can and must be brought to bear on the questions of knowledge. Both fights must in part be conducted by rethinking the nature of intellectual and political conversations. Let's admit that while we often talk about the impossibility of a conversation across the academic/popular divide, or between right and left, conversation seems almost as difficult among the fragments of the intellectual left. Whether within or outside the academy, it is hard to avoid allowing at least some of our assumptions to define lines in the sand; it is even harder to imagine conversations where there is no assumed common ground. It is often easier to be intellectual and/or political partisans, to deal with and communicate with those already in our "camp." But if we are to stop thinking in those terms, if we want to think more collectively, strategically and humbly, we will need also to reinvent—through imagination and experimentation—the forms of conversation and argument that constitute understandings of what's going on, and that serve as the ground of our efforts to change the world. We need to discover the value of listening to those we cannot hear, not only to begin to understand the ways they affectively navigate and negotiate their anxieties and investments, but to find new ways of managing, even valuing, discursive and epistemological differences. Only then will we be able to accept the complexity and multiplicity of the realities and challenges with which we have to engage. We need to find ways to bring our stories and struggles together, to have conversations capable of constructing better, more useful and more compelling stories and movements for change. Of course, it is possible that one does not want that unity, whether of knowing or living together. It is possible that one wants an epistemological anarchy in which all truth have their claim, and a sociopolitical anarchy built only on voluntary collectives. I do not mean to dismiss such desires, only to suggest that they still raise serious questions about how one gets from here to there, and whether one does so in both democratic and humane ways. Presumably one still have to find ways of convincing broader publics if only to allow such perpetual experimentation, but more pragmatically, of how such forms of social cooperation can operate on scales or across spaces (and numbers) that already challenge the most sophisticated thinkers and organizers.

I am not presupposing some ideal form of communication or trying to reinvent a public sphere or civil society. I am not advocating communication as persuasion, as if we should see it as a battle to win, or to claim the high ground. Rather, I understand communication as creative, as the construction of new forms of relations and organizations, both amongst those involved in the conversation and between the conversationalists and those living in the world the conversation attempts to "know." But I also believe, as both Raymond Williams and the pragmatists suggested, that forms of communication have a real effect on the forms of social relations, and vice versa. If knowledge is always a conversation, then conversation is the construction of new relations and unities, and one might ask whether there are possibilities for conversational organization that resemble in some ways the countercultural possibilities I discussed above. This would entail not only re-imagining our own practices as intellectuals and activists, and our own institutional conditions, but also entering into and struggling over institutions implicated in the larger conversations of knowledge, especially the academy and various media. We have to recognize that every form of conversation has its inherent strengths and weaknesses, its capacities and limits, which often remain invisible, and have to be rendered visible.

I am advocating conversation as a kind of dissensual conviviality, what the Women's Studies Group at the CCCS (1978) called a "community of dissensus." Neither love nor argument, neither alliance nor consensus will suffice. What we need are loving arguments, full of passion and knowledge, in an effort to move the conversation and the world forward. What we need is the constant imagination and embodiment of relations in which both sides are willing to be transformed by the conversation, by the connection, by the demands of common struggle. Can we not find more creative and imaginative ways to use the possibilities of digital media? Yes, the democratization of speech and information is valuable, but the endless proliferation of individual (even if collective) voices and positions, the endless formation of communities of already-constituted agreement, the endless proliferation of potential sites on our mattering maps, is not necessarily the best way to change the world. For all the talk about the possibilities of the internet—and there have been some wonderfully inventive uses—for the most part, its uses have been rather predictable and banal, reproducing the practices of older modes of communication of previous eras. Where is the imagination of new conversational possibilities, not to arrive at a conclusion that we all agree to,

but to keep the conversation moving, changing, gaining better knowledge, developing better stories, finding new strategies, and creating new organizations and movements? Might such conversations allow us to construct more complex maps of what is going on in the world? Might we not find ways of working together to reconstruct the lines of determination, the configuring relations, and to begin to identify some of the key points of articulation and determination, the points at which a combined and concerted struggle might actually resonate more broadly through the organizations of pessimism and power?

I have tried to call attention to the contradictions that inhibit such a project, both intellectually and politically: the constant calls for imagination and experimentation are all too often limited by a preconceived set of binary normative judgments, too often grounded in universal ontologies and ethics, or too often predefined by taken for granted certainties about the nature and necessities of practices of governance. The left needs new forms of cooperation and organization, conversation and disagreement, new ways of belonging together in intellectual, political and transformational struggle. But these are never merely formal matters. It also needs practices that might enable people to challenge structures of inequality, inequity and injustice, and institutions that might enable society to realize more humane ways of being together, not only with other humans, but also with the earth and with other forms of life. It needs to find ways to embrace those trying to walk on the same roads, in the same directions, even if their paths and their rest stops occasionally diverge from each other. Those differences may be defined by what they are struggling against or by what they are struggling for; yet common ground can always be constructed out of the substance of what people are seeking if we avoid declarations of certainty that can only break apart fragile relations of solidarity as a way of living together without guarantees. We can build anew a sense of belonging in and to a present that, in ways yet unimagined, empowers both the past and the future. The left needs a politics capable of embracing the multiplicity of grievances, demands and struggles, without trying to adjudicate competing priorities and forms of suffering. That may require a new imagination of humanism not as an assumption but as a project, not as a triumphant universalism but as a fragile and continuing effort to live together in better ways. Can we not find better ways of changing the world? Maybe the world does not change with a revolution but with a small collective walk among the blackberries.

The Future
NEXT EXIT

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