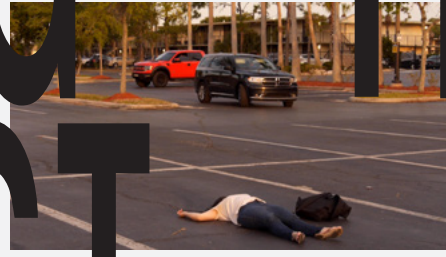


TREATING THE ABSTRACT OF CAPITAL CONCRETELY: FILMS



MELANIE GILLIGAN

AGAINST

CAPITALISM

2022

Treating the Abstract of Capital Concretely: Films Against Capitalism

Melanie Gilligan

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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A B S T R A C T

This practice-based PhD, *Treating the Abstract of Capital Concretely: Films Against Capitalism*, looks at how film can oppose the prevailing ideas of capitalist systems.

The research asks: What qualities do films have that can be used as strategies against capitalism and what knowledge do these films produce? In an understanding that capitalism projects concepts onto the world, and that mainstream film can frame people's lives through a reductive capitalist understanding, the research suggests that more politically powerful moving images need to be the focus to create societal change.

Treating the Abstract of Capitalism Concretely: Films Against Capitalism, includes six aesthetic, political and conceptual video works, and an accompanying written handbook, that together consider capital as the relation between abstract laws of accumulation and concrete lived situations.

Making moving image works against the capitalist system necessarily involves knowledge about capitalism, however, the research charts how the knowledge most central in filmmaking is often associative, affective and combines knowledge with practice. A variety of methodological approaches are pursued through practical and theoretical research about how films can oppose capitalism. This investigation is explored materially, through video projects that interrogate capitalist abstraction from inside social processes, in realities that people live. The video works present a critique of racial and patriarchal capitalism, while the written component presents a contextual discussion about films against capitalism.

The PhD submission consists of six video projects: *The Common Sense*, *The Bay Area Protests*, *Parts-wholes 2*, *Crowds*, *Home Together*, and *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social* and a PDF handbook, *Treating the Abstract of Capital Concretely: Films Against Capitalism*. The written text puts forth theoretical and practical proposals for films against capitalism as well as a script. Connections are here made between different understandings of abstraction, while bringing in ideas from political theory, as well as demonstrating allegory as a technique against capitalism in film.

The video works and handbook are accessed via: www.films-against-capitalism.com

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This PhD is in loving memory of my cousin, James.

(INTRODUCTION) FROM MY VIDEOS
TO OTHER FILMS
AGAINST CAPITAL

From the beginning, my work as a visual artist has depicted unfolding systems of the social world. Early on in my practice, I started making episodic video projects to analyze events of the present political, economic, and social crisis, and I find the most important subject that my films can address is the unfolding of this crisis. My films focus on the investigation, and opposition to capitalism. It makes sense then that once I started to clarify what I would like to write in the PhD, it became evident that I would discuss film that explicitly opposes capital. This because I found that in order to describe my art practice, I need to explain why and how my work functions as it does. I see my video projects as ways to analyze and oppose capital, and the impacts of these works register through discussion with other people. To write about this, I need to look beyond my own art practice and examine my understanding of capital and film, to think about my films in relation to other films against capital. This book will do just that, laying out provisional directions for filmmakers interested in reflecting on capital as a social form and using film as part of the struggle to fight against it. I want to write open-ended suggestions regarding how the depiction of capital can be approached. In this way, this is a theoretical and practical account in the form of a handbook. This book will gather salient approaches found in films against capitalism, to put forward insights into its contemporary forms. To do this, I establish the political, conceptual position of my argument which grew out of my understanding of my own video art practice, and quickly expanded to include concepts that other people contribute to this discussion.

One is right to ask at the outset, if film is a special kind of investigation of capital, and capitalism, what does this special form of investigation entail? What is it about film that would ever make one think that it has a special status as investigation, and opposition to capital? After all, film is most often conceived as entertainment. In many cases, film is depoliticized, and it is often a bearer of ideology, as various theorists have confirmed throughout its history.¹ This must be recognized now more than ever, in film's intensely commoditized media environment. However, it is just

1 Hector Rodriguez, "Ideology and Film Culture in Film Theory and Philosophy" in *Film Theory and Philosophy* eds. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

as often that theorists have seen political potential in film.² Moreover, the work of left filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Marcel Carne, and later the left resistance in Third Cinema in the work of filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembène, Med Hondo, Glauber Rocha, Fernando Solanas, and Octavio Getino, and the adoption of collective video practice such as the Newsreel Collective, imparts a committed history for left filmmakers to come.³ The questions posed by such filmmakers, and their works, have inspired me to ask my own questions about the present historical moment, which compels me to look at the roles played by narrative moving images in opposition to capitalism, through a Marxist, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, queer, and disability justice approach.

This introduction will lay out the qualities that make films a special kind of thought that is useful to oppose capitalism. The best way that I have found to describe films is that they pose practical thought problems. Beyond the cognitive charge that thought problems hold, films add further dimensions of perception that are connected to practice, entangling feeling and associations in the mix. This is because films outline problems differently, using action, and articulating problems that people are accustomed to dealing with in their social practices, producing very different ways in which knowledge operates. When film scenarios produce answers to questions, they are put into practice, and in this way, the ideas being tested are concretely enacted. Another drive behind this book project is the video medium's current role as a conduit for a great deal of information communication today. The moving image occupies a centrality in information communication of all kinds due to the ever-expanding fields of media, and telecommunications so that video has transformed the fabric of online communication, a trend that was further increased because of the social separation necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic. My project is thus oriented toward the least answered questions regarding the moving image as a mode of communication, particularly video's open-ended plurality that is inserted into every surface of daily life. I will describe this when I expand on what I mean when I say film against capitalism.

- 2 Stéphane Symons, "Walter Benjamin" in Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, (London: Routledge, 2011) 302. "Benjamin's realist framework is tantamount to a discovery of cinema as a means of political consciousness-raising."
- 3 Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World," *New Latin American Cinema*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997). On p. 34. "The modes of production, distribution, and exhibition continued to be those of Hollywood precisely because, in ideology and politics, films had not yet become the vehicle for a clearly drawn differentiation between bourgeois ideology and politics. A reformist policy, as manifested in dialogue with the adversary, in coexistence with the adversary, and in the relegation of national contradictions to those between two supposedly unique blocs — the USSR and the USA—was and is unable to produce anything but a cinema within the System itself."

RESEARCH

QUESTIONS

From these starting points, I have formulated a series of research questions that will carry my investigation forward. I formulated my first question this way:

Do films against capital, and capitalism offer particular qualities to the study of capital that other disciplines are not able to explore? If so, what distinguishes these from other types of knowledge, and how can these qualities be put towards struggles against capitalism?

My PhD project is both an aesthetico-political exploration of my video works, and a conceptual investigation of how film can function against capitalism. This has resulted in a parallel development of my video works in the PhD, and in this PhD writing that has taken shape without either pursuit leading the other inquiry. As such, chapter 1 begins by rephrasing my questions within the framework of my approach to making films against capital. In this chapter, I ask

What methods did I develop in my art practice that contribute to films against capitalism?

I describe how my video works developed specific investigations that contribute to a discussion of film against capital and capitalism. As I investigate my own practice, my questions dig up further queries:

How does my work conceive of capital's real abstraction, as well as abstraction in relation to ideology, and thought?

A set of research questions arise from the intersection of film as thought (as conceived by Eisenstein, and Deleuze, among other film theorists), and capital as social thought (as understood by Karl Marx, I.I. Rubin, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Chris Arthur, and other Marxist theorists)⁴. These two types of thought are connected to one another in the way

4 Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, and Chris Arthur's *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital* are well-known works on the subject. I.I. Rubin's discussion on the importance that the abstract universal and concrete universal play in Karl Marx's theory of capital, Rubin says that: "The fact that in this case Marx intended the distinction between the abstract universal and the concrete universal, which occurs in Hegel, can be seen clearly in the first edition of 'Capital' where in general the traces of Hegelian concepts and Hegelian terminology stand out far more distinctly than in the second." Rubin then quotes Marx in the Economic Manuscripts: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/appendix.htm>. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, (Norfolk: Humanities Press, 1978). Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, (Delhi: Historical Materialism Book Series/ Aakar Books, 2013).

they embody, on the one hand, the social thought of film audiences that involve various faculties of cognition (reason), and perception (intuition), while the other clarifies a type of thought operative in behavior in capitalist society.⁵ These two types of thought—film as thought that combines reason and intuition and capital as social thought—are distinct, however, their correlations draw a line from sensibility to reason via real abstraction that leads directly to capital. This is a problematic unity that this writing will seek to investigate and undermine.

How is the problematic unity of film as thought, and capital as thought visible in film narratives today? What are forms of capitalist ideology that the study of film can unearth to bring about better filmic examinations of the relations that currently govern capitalist societies?

This is important to my argument in chapter 1, and chapter 2. I will pursue ways that the link between intuition and reason have been given a possessive individual slant, shaping the understanding of need in films. Moreover, in film, one encounters many different types of knowledge happening across different registers, and part of what makes film a special kind of knowledge is that the aesthetic, and political meanings of film's theoretical, and practical aspects are thoroughly interconnected. A further question then presents itself:

Does my understanding of film as a practical thought problem lead me to a particular view on the relation between political theory, and political practice in film?

As I will discuss in chapter 1, a large part of what film offers anti-capitalist struggle relates to the interconnection between political theory, and political practice. Upon finishing my investigation of my art practice in chapter 1, my general question, does film offer particular qualities to making films against capital, leads to a new discussion in chapter 2 that gets to the center of my PhD investigation by looking closely at the work film against capitalism can do to transform the way films depict social relations and change.

What problematic social relations in capitalist societies can films as practice-thought against capital address? How do current films refrain from giving a realistic picture of the world that we live in by editing depictions of society so that they are blinkered and discriminatory? How does a film view that is determined by capital predefine how capitalist concepts are promoted by giving some outcomes more credence than others, and how can film against capital work against this?

5 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures in Logic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) xx.

In chapter 2, these questions culminate in a full theoretical response to these questions and in chapter 3 my answers crystalize, taking the form of a script.

KNOWLEDGE, AND RADICAL EXPERIENCE IMAGINATION

To answer these questions, my writing will pass through a series of investigations. My thinking on the subject of film against capital develops from filmmakers, and writers whose work describes how film, and narrative in general, can play important political and social roles. Powerful narratives have historically played, and will continue to play a vital part in how societies imagine possibilities, and forge new social forms. How such imagination is regarded, what role it is given in societies, and importantly, whether a collective imagination is treated as valuable are questions for the imperiled future. Engaging imagination, narratives show what lies beyond current conditions, conjuring instead pictures of other realities which do not currently exist. The social visions of anti-racist, and feminist science fiction writers such as Octavia Butler, and Ursula Leguin have helped me to harness the strengths of narrative. Both these writers imagine new social relationships to make readers understand new political possibilities, and see political situations differently. In *Octavia's Brood*, a collected volume of science fiction writing oriented toward social justice inspired by Octavia Butler's writing, one of the editors, Walidah Imarisha, explains that she, and adrienne maree brown, coined the term "visionary fiction" to "distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds."⁶ They explain that "in 1988, Octavia E. Butler said that she never wanted the title of being the solitary Black female sci-fi writer. She wanted to be one of many Black female sci-fi writers," and "one of thousands of folks writing themselves into the present, and into the future." Many people writing themselves into stories that voice the need for political change is a good description of how I imagine television, and filmmaking in the midst of tremendous social, and technological potential, while monumental political change is taking place. In the present, societal changes bring the realization that we could be either facing a future of thoughtless destruction or standing on the cusp of revolution. In the introduction to *Revenge Capitalism*, Max Haiven affirms that narrative provides a way of opening political possibility that other forms of political work cannot when he says: "I have been inspired by the example of many elders, thinkers, and activists in my community who use story as a means to awaken, and sharpen what I have come to think of as the radical imagination." While Haiven has identified the crucial need for a radical imagination, now more than ever,

6 Walidah Imarisha, "Introduction," in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, eds. Walidah Imarisha, adrienne marie brown, 17. (San Francisco: AK Press, 2015), ebook.

it will be up to the makers of all kinds of narratives, especially filmmakers, to develop a notion of what those radical narratives can be.

I will discuss many significant efforts in such projects throughout the book, but I would like to start with a particularly compelling approach that collides aspects of film that are most fruitful for developing film against capitalism by bringing together documentary knowledge with fictional experiences. Director of fiction, and documentary films, Raoul Peck, lays out some significant directions for conceiving of this type of work. The director's recent project *Exterminate the Brutes* combines fiction, and documentary in such a way that the viewer is able to imagine how actual scenarios of colonial domination may have played out. This blurs the lines between documentary histories of racism that give a clear understanding of the factual information while fiction scenes bring the audience into these histories. What Peck achieves is that his film enables a simultaneity of knowledge, and an account of experience that my argument will seek to follow as an example. The director comments in a trailer for the film, that the way the work pushes boundaries between fiction and documentary is a political project: "Exterminate All the Brutes weaves together archival footage, documentary footage, dynamic animation, voice over and scripted fictional scenes. It creates a new narrative that can carry the nuanced, and emotional levels of the subject matter and crack the core story from the inside out. As writers, creators, filmmakers, we have no choice than to reflect on societies, and provide knowledge, and challenges in addition to mere entertainment. And as artists we need to break the limits of our art. This is what this film specifically and concretely set out to achieve."⁷

Along a spectrum between documentary, and fiction sit many productive questions about the communication of knowledge that will assist this argument regarding film, and television against capitalism. Moreover, for conversations about a future beyond capitalism to have impact, those conversations need to be built collectively. Film and television communicate complex political dynamics in forms that do not require specialism, in other words, audience participation in film is not built on qualifications or professional credentials. Collective discussion about ending capitalism will need to involve such non-specialist conversations, where everyone can take part. For this to come about, ideas need to be shared, and resistant anti-capitalist narratives produced, that discuss what the world can become beyond capitalism. What I am proposing is that the changing forms of film, and television, specifically digital video, may be this type of tool.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

This book will pursue a description of my video projects against capitalism, and a larger discussion that theorizes what I consider some useful theoretical approaches to

7 Raoul Peck, *Exterminate All the Brutes: Raoul Peck's Statement of Intent*, HBO, April 6, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ4r3Qdrqmo> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

making films that oppose capitalism. In this sense, the book is a theoretical work that ties together those two purposes. Because I want this book to be helpful to people who make films against capital, it is a handbook of sorts for filmmakers. Chapter 1 acclimatizes the reader to thinking about film as an investigation of capitalism by looking at aims, and methods that have directed my artistic project, and this allows me to build a theoretical basis for a discussion of narrative film as a special form of investigation of capital. Chapter 2 then articulates some important theoretical approaches, and chapter 3 puts the ideas developed in my argument into action as I write a script. I arrived at this structure because a close investigation of my art practice led me to think, if my approach to my video projects is to oppose capital, after looking at my work, I need to also look beyond it to a wider discussion. This book relies on one main assumption: that filmmakers interested in making film against capitalism can work in a way that consciously promotes conversations between them.

In the present, unemployment is ever on the rise, and industrial labour was replaced a long time ago by the service economy, a major theme of *The Common Sense* and *Crowds*. The pressing matter of capital's crisis is a composite of other environmental, social, economic, and health crises that the world is facing. All of these crises are intertwined as aspects of capital. The complex interrelations between these crises are matters that film against capitalism can investigate, not because all of these crises are reducible to capital's crisis. They are not. Rather because the investigation of relations exists as aspects of Marxism, racial capitalism, feminist social reproduction theory, and other approaches, it does not make sense to artificially confine discussion of the current crisis to capital, but rather to view how the economy interconnects with political actualities. There are many aspects of the current social crisis that involve racism, and the present has brought fascist governments, and groups into power, leading to a period when people urgently need to fight the racism, fascism, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism that the far-right is promoting. These tendencies cannot by any means be chalked up to the results of economic crisis in the way that a vulgar materialist explanation might adopt. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor states that "Economic anxiety has always been refracted through the lens of race in the United States. It is almost never by accident or happenstance, but the elite always seek to cultivate that. And if you think that economic anxiety, whether it is experienced by white working-class people, Latinex, Black, Native or Immigrant, is just an excuse to be racist, it is only because the obscene material deprivation in this country is so hidden from view."⁸ Taylor's point is that economic anxiety is very real, however, as her book *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* demonstrates, it is never justified to explain situations by single causes, whether this be economic or otherwise. Rather it is essential that people look at the multi-causal relations involved in producing present conditions. Interconnected crises will continue to ramify and multiply in the coming years, and this prompts me to discuss in chapter 1 and chapter

8 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Black Lives Matter to the White Power Presidency*, Barnard Center for Research on Women, video, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyKHRXiXHZg&t=2140s> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

2 that film presents an ideal form for showing the intertwined relationships of people's conditions and social systems.

A consideration regarding the connections of my PhD video project and this PhD book may lead one to ask what is the relationship between the two? The artworks that I present in my PhD were conceived, written, directed, and edited by myself. *The Common Sense*, *The Bay Area Protests*, *Parts-wholes*, *Crowds*, *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social*, and *Home Together* have taken a variety of forms as video art projects and production scales throughout the PhD.

These video works have some significant differences from my argument in this book. While the intention of both is to investigate capital and capitalism to work against them, I would like to point out that my film works are not examples or illustrations of the ideas described in this book. Films that deal with theoretical discussion are sometimes targets for critics that equate speech about concepts in films to theory. This problem of art and film criticism relates to what throughout this book I call the thought problems of film, and how the combination of practice with thought in films often gets disregarded once theoretical speech is introduced. When film knowledge takes the form of both action, and complex discussion in a film, aspects of practice may get overlooked.⁹ I leave room for all of what my films do that could never be reducible to a book's argument. Since the intention of both my videos and my writing is to work against capital and capitalism, it is important that rather than only making logical arguments in films, I reflect on capital and capitalism with all aspects of my mind, which involve less-conscious associations and strong affects.

WHAT TYPE OF MOVING IMAGES AM I TALKING ABOUT?

I will describe my way of approaching moving images in this book. Working in the world of visual art, I am used to medium being defined as an essential characteristic of artworks and I certainly consider my own video art installations in this frame. However, I am aware that this mode of defining film through a medium-specific framework is not as relevant for a conversation about film against capitalism. The medium specific definition stems from a modernist discussion focused on considerations such as the picture plane and support fundamentally defining the painting, or the height or base defining a sculpture as two examples of medium determining an understanding of artworks. In the high period of structuralist film, this approach was adapted to fit the parameters of

9 This is discussed in more detail at the start of chapter 1.

the moving image.¹⁰ While from a visual art perspective, it is essential to know whether an artist's moving image work is in film and if so, what kind (e.g. super 8, 16mm) or if it is in video, what kind (older video formats such as Betamax or on the opposite end, 4k) for the conversation around their aesthetic choices to be specific, my use of the word film in regard to films against capitalism addresses a different discussion, while this is not intended to ignore the medium specificity of my own video practice. The reason that my approach for this book will be somewhat different is that I am talking about film as a way of presenting film narrative. For UK filmmaker Peter Greenaway, "Cinema is the sum total of all technologies which work towards articulating the moving image. Cinema is a continuum. It embraces equally the big movie and the computer screen, the digital image and the handmade film, and—importantly—such structures as speech, and writing, acting, editing, light projection, and sound."¹¹ Film thus defined, brings all aspects of moving image together under one umbrella, despite all its variations in format. This definition puts prominence on film's narrative form, which although it varies in narrative conventions across contexts and societies, has a common set of rules. I drop Greenaway's word cinema and call it film instead because the two decades since A. L. Rees published, cinema viewing in theaters has vastly diminished to near impossibility, the last still-burning embers stamped out by the COVID-19 pandemic's annihilation of public space. Film comprises cinema, television and online forms that have sprung up with youtube, tik tok, and other video sites. Yet, the word film relates to an activity, watching narrative moving images, that most people take part in even though much of the collective aspect of film viewing seems to be lost. I will refer then to all the narrative works I discuss as films, whether they are web series or programs on terrestrial television because the focus of the discussion is the style of telling, with an emphasis on narrative and documentary. Film has been artistically defined against television since its inception: in the 20th c. film ballooned into an art while television sat at home since the 1950s, boring the family into overt obedience, or so the 1960s and 70s anti-consumerist refrain described. However, more recent shifts changed both industries, including advertising-free TV subscription channels and home cinemas that undid technical and length limitations, so that they eventually gave way to sustained stories that surpassed the involvement of an hour and a half-long film. Now the lines between television and film are blurry, leaving all in a state of the digital contiguity. Film is the word most appropriate to moving image works against capitalism because the term implicitly speaks about moving images likely to conform, more or less, to narrative conventions.

From Dada to political Conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s, my practice has many influences that are aligned with everyday social and political conversations.

10 A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practices*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 7. "But the centrality of film-time to the avant-garde has other roots than realism. They include 'the moment of cubism' which introduced duration and the fragment to modern art. From these are derived the material tropes and codes of experimental film — rapid camera movement and the long-take, film grain and handpainting — which in their separate ways direct attention to film as a material construct and as a time-based medium."

11 Ibid., 4.

In my recent projects, I combine fiction film with documentary film approaches. My projects adhere to conventions in those forms to varying degrees so that I can create a dialogue with a wider viewership. At the same time, my work intertwines both the history of video art and television/online video. Video art sits in an unusual but somewhat unacknowledged position between two commercial poles. On the one side, the art market's individualized model of aesthetic judgement cultivated in aesthetic modernism, while on the other side, a subtle conditioning by mainstream media culture of entertainment commodities and information communication from which video art cannot separate itself. What I learned from the format of television was its development in connection to and immersion in a direct relation to everyday life whether as news programs or stories such as telenovelas that, in certain instances in Brazil and Mexico among other places, have a conscious involvement in societal politics.¹² As always, this involves commercialism. The extension of online video into everyday has long replaced what was once TV's presence, and now video's ubiquity and incessant flux of media invests the languages of film and television with slipperiness, while it designates its various forms as changeable. This drives me to think of film, as I define it, as a social form, which includes everything from film in traditional cinemas to various online forms. I emphasize again, I am mainly discussing conventions and economies well-known to fiction film production and documentary, that take a preponderance of digital forms. I therefore adapt Greenaway's comments on the versatility of the moving image to the 21st century and speak about video media as the form in which film is distributed. The uneven economic conditions that film supports are, of course, geared toward commercial goals, and will be for as long as capitalism exists. However, as the recent life of left tube has shown us, from *Contrapoints* to *Andrewism* to *F.D Signifier* to *Thought Slime*, left tube is always growing and changing. Meanwhile, websites such as Netflix respond to such social changes taking place by creating online films that have explicitly anti-capitalist themes such as *Severance* created by Dan Erickson, and directed by Ben Stiller, and Aoife McArdle, and *A Land Imagined* by Siew Hua Yeo, while films such as *Parasite* by Bong Jon Ho, *Atlantics* by Mati Diop, *Wild Goose Lake*, and *Black Coal, Thin Ice* by Diao Yinan are films against capitalism today.

12 Adriana Estill, "Closing the Telenovela's Borders: "Vivo Por Elena's" Tidy Nation," *Chasqui*, vol. 29, No. 1 (May 2000): 75-87.

FROM MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS, I DEVELOP A THEORY OF FILM AGAINST CAPITAL

1. FILM AS KNOWLEDGE

As I already mentioned, I believe films, especially when they aim to approach a problem such as capital and capitalism, operate like thought problems. The knowledge and questions that films present have implications that are philosophical, political and also practical. What is different between a philosophical thought problem and those that films present? The issue is that films outline problems differently. When we find answers to questions in films, these are presented as scenarios that demonstrate practices. Films give ideas forms that are concretely enacted. Films therefore communicate problems and possibilities in forms that are experienced while being thought through. To approach this question, I will break it into two: What kind of knowledge does film produce? Further, what is the political implications of this knowledge?

My project is influenced by conceptions of aesthetics which come from the Romantic philosophical tradition.¹³ Peter Osborne has presented two essays on transdisciplinarity, which draw from this Romantic philosophical approach that regards reason and aesthetics as interconnected.¹⁴ Osborne asks “Indeed, might the conceptual form of transdisciplinarity most appropriate to the arts and humanities be something structurally akin to that of early Romanticism itself?”¹⁵ It is the “exclusive focus on knowledge production as a “research process,” oriented toward “real world” problems, to the neglect of concept construction, critique and conceptual meaning” that is problematically attached to the idea of knowledge production without adequately defining the concept of problems: “This is related to an almost complete lack of fundamental theoretical

13 I describe this in more detail in chapter 1.

14 Attributed to G.W.F Hegel, F.W.J. Schelling or Friedrich Holderlin. “The Oldest Program of German Idealism” in *Friedrich Holderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 155. “I am convinced now, that the highest act of reason, which in that it comprises all ideas is an aesthetic act.” Also, apropos is this parataxical fragment of Friedrich Schlegel “...poetry and philosophy should be made one.”

15 Peter Osborne, “Introduction” in Dossier: Transdisciplinary Romanticism 1, *Radical Philosophy*, 6.

work on the concept of a problem. Is a problem something that requires the positing of practical solutions, or is a problem, primarily, something that defines a shared field of inquiry (a problematic), the investigation of which may take radically unexpected turns, leading to a reproblematicization—critical or otherwise—of the original issue? This lack of theoretical work on the concept of a problem is a symptom of an exclusive focus on knowledge production as ‘research process’ to the neglect of concepts: concept construction and theory construction.”¹⁶ In recent decades, this has led to a destruction of types of learning in the academy that are not able to be instrumentalized in capital accumulation (i.e. most often discussed as a take-over by science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) departments, which can also be understood as pushing humanities out of the study of systems (trading in the uneconomical discussion of social systems to instead cultivate other understandings of systems).

“Separated from philosophy [...] and with its criticism increasingly divorced from the study of its history, not only was the thinking of art divided up into self-contained disciplines [...] but its idea also underwent a fundamental transformation.”¹⁷ The Romantic philosophical conception of aesthetics would not treat film as unable to develop knowledge of capitalism, but regard these fields as interconnected, thus showing relationships between philosophy, and art/film that benefit film as a framework for knowledge.¹⁸ I will therefore situate film as knowledge produced against capitalism by recalling that Romanticism’s correlates philosophy with aesthetics. Films against capital communicate knowledge about capital and capitalism in a way that straddle the dual roles of purposeful communication and art as non-instrumental knowledge. Like art, film’s communication has no immediate use, but, instead, activates certain impressions, associative, unconscious, affective. It is painfully obvious to point out, but in light of my discussion it seems necessary. Knowledge that happens outside of the university is harder to recognize as such because, as Osborne avers, the university as a “...machine for training and hiring academics and providing the means of career advancement,” reproduces and dominates what is recognized as knowledge, in so far as it trains and reinforces the pathways that build knowledge.¹⁹ Osborne looks to the overlapping meanings of academic discipline to make the point. The “primary meaning of discipline as subjection to an authoritative set of practical norms, which impose order on the mind and body—and of self-discipline as the cultivation of habits and forms of care of the self (scholarship as a discipline of the self)—is in tension with the more recent use of the term to refer to those departments of knowledge, academic subjects, methods, and fields of study that became the basis of the departmental structure of the modern university.”²⁰ Knowledge in modernity is made in many moments of discipline, imposed through long-term work molding of certain types of thought, while excluding

16 Peter Osborne, “Problematizing Transdisciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol 32, (2015), 6.

17 Ibid., 8.

18 I will demonstrate this in chapter 1.

19 Peter Osborne, “Problematizing Transdisciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol 32, (2015), 8.

20 Ibid., 6.

others, and this has produced disciplinary divisions that have been central in building these intellectual terrains. Yet, when Osborne points out “Guattari’s development of a ‘French’ concept of ‘transdisciplinarity as transversality’ was perhaps the most innovative” he points towards the institutional conversation around transversality and politics which, as Andrew Goffey explains in his essay “Guattari and Transindividuality,” is “counter to the “contractual” form of relationship.”²¹ The knowledge built between disciplines by writer/filmmaker/artists such as Trinh T. Mihn-Ha, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Ousmane Sembène, and Pier Paolo Pasolini are examples of how the disciplines of writing and filmmaking exist to be expanded. This is why Sembène and Pasolini carry important weight in my argument in chapter 1 as I try to demarcate the types of knowledge that films can produce, clarifying areas that film as knowledge does and does not satisfy.²² An entirely interdisciplinary convection sits at the heart of film as it undermines preconceptions of how the faculties of the mind are ordered, starting with Kant’s theoretical edifice which underpins most views of film knowledge. Comparing academia and art to the popular field of film, we understand that the knowledge produced in film is not recognized as knowledge. “In this [...] respect, disciplines function as constraints on research, as “limits to discovery.””²³

2. WHAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE DOES FILM DESCRIBE?

In light of film’s uncomfortable connection to knowledge, I will spend a large part of chapter 1 investigating my research question does film offer specific types a knowledge that will be helpful to films against capitalism? In addition, I start to venture an answer to this question in this introduction. The filmmaker Jean Epstein was asking himself related questions about film as knowledge in his work “La Lyrosophie” when he discussed the relationship of science to feeling. Epstein says that “Any science, any logic, any knowledge rests in the last analysis on the evidence [...] Evidence, it stands to reason and almost by definition, is indemonstrable.” Since evidence is “indispensable,” the “ineffable” appreciation of it makes him conclude that “evidence is a feeling. And it is a pure feeling, a feeling that is its own species, such as those we take hold of in dreamlife.” He sees that all the cold reason of “traditional logic” “has for its unique and indispensable linchpin what it most despises: an affirmative feeling. This feeling of evidence: sciences are neither able to, nor do they want to, exclude it; yet, drawing their life from its pure integrity, they must necessarily ensure its complete isolation.” Epstein seems to say that the separation of evidence as material fact from feeling is part of what creates this sense of certainty. He goes on to mention that the “rare pure, generic feelings” “take place only in special intellectual or almost a-intellectual states,” and that

21 Ibid., 7. Andrew Goffey, “Guattari and Transversality,” *Radical Philosophy*, vol 195 (Jan/Feb 2016), 38-47.

22 Ibid., 8.

23 Peter Osborne, “Problematizing Transdisciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol 32, (2015), 8.

in life they “combine” into “the mixed and rough feelings—hatred, pride, lust—that animate us.” But by seeking to “cultivate it in a zone from which all other feelings are absent,” “this island of pure reason” becomes one where, just beyond it “there lies truly an immensity of feeling, graspable and thought-dependent at its surface; and lower, subconscious and unsayable; and lower still, unconscious, unknown, but fecund.”²⁴ Epstein shows us then that knowledge as divided from feeling is denying and suppressing what will remain ever-present. In his book *Jean Epstein: Corporeal Philosophy and Film Philosophy*, Christophe Wall-Romana describes how Epstein shows that “...Our daily life rests on a deep dichotomy: “knowledge from emotion and knowledge from science coexist.” From Epstein’s work, he derives the observation that “We would do well to reckon instead with our inner “*état lyrique*” [“lyrical state”], corresponding to the subconscious, that is, affects, desires, and love, and especially aesthetic invention” and observes that the when filmmaker “advocates for a different relationship between these two states of knowledge—the scientific and the lyrosophical—that Epstein invokes cinema.”²⁵ Wall-Romana brings out Epstein’s further conclusion, that film produces real knowledge: “the viewer experiences a fiction, her experience is nonetheless real, and thus any reflection upon it also produces real knowledge,” and this is because it “does not so much represent as present, or make present.”²⁶

I return, then, to my initial statement that film can function as a practical thought problem and add that films are types of problems that “present” or produce a different kind of knowledge by presenting or making present in ways that produce different configurations of the faculties: unconscious thought, affects, desires, love, and aesthetic sensibilities with reason. In *Film as Philosophy: Essays in Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell*, Jerry Goodenough asks “What philosophically can a film do here that a book cannot?”²⁷ He describes that commenting on the problem of other minds, Wittgenstein says “We do not often [...] reason to the conclusion that other people are conscious. It is an inevitable concomitant of our dealings with them. We do not philosophise to the conclusion that dogs and cats probably feel pain—we cannot avoid that belief if we live with them. [...] We are, if you like, persuaded at a deeper and more fundamental level than the merely rational.”²⁸ Dogs and cats do not explain that they feel pain, but we hear them cry out. To restate this within the terms of my own argument, the thinking that goes on in film takes place on a practical level, which sometimes means that such thinking does not need to go through rational deliberation. We can imagine the practical thought problems of films to work through practical recognition of causality, as well as unconscious and non-rational level of thought, in

24 Jean Epstein, *Critical Essays and New Translations*, eds. Sarah Keller, Jason Paul, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012, 283).

25 Christoph Wall-Romana, *Jean Epstein: Corporeal Cinema and Film Philosophy*, (Manchester: Manchester University, 2013, 160).

26 Ibid.

27 Jerry Goodenough, Introduction I in *Film as Philosophy: Essays on Cinema After Wittgenstein and Cavell*, eds. Rupert Read, Jerry Goodenough, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005: 12).

28 Ibid., 12.

addition to a conscious rational level. Wittgenstein's point that we can be "persuaded at a deeper and more fundamental level than the merely rational" roughly articulates a major proposal of this book, that practice makes itself felt as knowledge in film. We see that the thoughts that films elicit are not necessarily rational, but they are knowledge accumulated in practice. This begins to address our question, what kind of knowledge is produced in film? I make these assertions with the important proviso that the type of thinking that film makes possible that film can only ever be a secondary aspect in galvanizing collective struggle. I develop these arguments in the hopes that a period of sustained anti-capitalist political activity might arise that can infuse films with the impetus for having such moving image conversations as a form of resistance to the mechanisms of capital accumulation that underpin capitalist social forms.

I can now complete my claim that film is a type of practice-thought that is useful to the struggle against capitalism. This is possible because film activates different faculties of the mind than those used in rational argumentation. When I say that film relates to other faculties, I am borrowing the term from the vocabulary of philosopher Immanuel Kant to describe the different interconnected aspects of cognition, some that are closer to the pre- or unconscious aspects that correspond with intuitions while others involve the rational mind and so involve concepts.²⁹ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explains that he means to describe "the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience." Within the limited scope that I can deal with in this book, I put forward in chapter 1 a very different theory of knowledge that does not seek independence from experience, that includes the work of philosopher Walter Benjamin which lays out a critique of Kant's presentation of the faculties that demotes experience and instead asserts that experience is in fact an essential part of knowledge. This work by Benjamin is deeply helpful to forging a theoretical armature for film as practice-thought that is important in struggles against capitalism.

3. MATERIALISM AND FILM NARRATIVE

Here I encounter a significant point for my argument. Many kinds of fictional moving images, in film, television, and other developing forms, offer answers to political questions in ways that are important to address, yet because they are categorized as fictional, the efficacy of their political position would be questioned by many. In this moment of extreme social, environmental, health and economic crisis, new practices of communication that enable novel modes in which to envision and debate the future are sorely needed, along with ways of developing new political strategies. As noted above, there is an explosion of various left political episodic video programs made by people sustaining engaged political debates. In the context of the immense media transformations already described, video is very useful in aiding anti-capitalist discussion and struggle. There is

29 Howard Caygill, *Kant Dictionary*, (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 113. "There are two sorts of cognition, namely intuitions and concepts, which correspond to the two sources of cognition in sensibility and understanding."

a strong need for experimentation with video in these milieus where it is more affordable for video “content providers” to present videos on the state of things, rather than envisioning new futures. I can say that the current use of video offers the beginnings of new types of conversations that could become a wider spread phenomenon, but there are currently limits posed by capitalism. While both documentary and fiction films communicate information about political conditions and positions, the fictional exploration of imagined scenarios brings in a further aspect that documentary cannot currently access: imagination and speculation about a changing social and political world. If film is to become a discourse in which practice-thought emerges from the present forms of debate, one has to recognize that this type of film needs to connect speculative thought to affective experience through imagining realities that do not exist, presenting information and theoretical positions with associative and conjectured connections.

Adopting a new filmic orientation of materialist thought problems could bring out relationships between conditions that people live in capitalism rather than continuing the general orientation of individual-centered cinema. *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* sums up a materialist relationship between individual consciousness and social conditions. “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production [...] The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”³⁰ In this quote we hear echoes of Marx’s famous passage that people do not make their reality “under circumstances chosen by themselves,” and we also hear analysis of political, legal, social and economic aspects intertwined with production, creating conditions that define “social consciousness.” Thus, Marx emphasizes that one cannot study “a period of transformation” by observing people’s consciousness alone but that it is essential instead to look at the contradictions produced in material life. He is describing here immense social structures that affect people individually, but by impacting societies, acquire dimensions beyond the individual. He concludes that “just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life....” Thus, we pinpoint the difference between Marxism and most other forms of thought historically emanating from European traditions. Marx proposes that a social world produces the reality one experiences, and that people need to understand changes in their individual lives in relationship to the societies they live in. As we have said, most conventional Western film focus primarily on the emotional worlds of individual characters to the exclusion of social relations. Experience and emotion are extremely important areas for films

30 Karl Marx, *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1859). https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Contribution_to_the_Critique_of_Political_Economy.pdf (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

against capitalism to explore, however, it is essential that this be built from their social dimensions, thus transforming long-standing narrative and visual individualization of experience and emotion.

Such a film practice will not develop from a conception of politics that is based only in rational argumentation. It will need to instead incorporate the ways that political actions and decisions are not always straight forwardly determined by reason alone. Stuart Hall's important essay *Blue Election, Election Blues* provides an indication of what I mean when Hall asks why, in the UK during Thatcherism, does the working class vote against their own interests?

Electoral politics—in fact, every kind of politics—depends on political identities and identifications. People make identifications symbolically: through social imagery, in their political imaginations. They “see themselves” as one sort of person or another. They “imagine their future” within this scenario or that. They don't just think about voting in terms of how much they have, their so-called “material interests.” Material interests matter profoundly. But they are always ideologically defined. Contrary to a certain version of Marxism [...] material interests, on their own, have no necessary class belongingness.

Hall says the way that material interests influence people is not as “escalators which automatically deliver people to their appointed destinations, “in place,” within the political ideological spectrum.” “People” he says “have conflicting social interests, sometimes reflecting conflicting identities. As a worker, a person might put “wages” first: in a period of high unemployment, “job security” may come higher; a woman might prioritize “child care.” But what does a “working woman” put first?” Her identities could determines her political choices in many different ways, or he takes his own situation as an example as a socialist “in favour of state education” but “also a parent with a child who is taking O levels in a hard-pressed local education authority” and so has to decide to either “stick by his political principles or squeeze his daughter into a “better” school.”³¹ One's assessment is not necessarily based only on one's “material interests” alone. Rather multiple factors are involved, many of them defined by aspects of one's life and practices, and these do not necessarily lead to decisions that will benefit the class or group of which people are a part.

When Hall emphasizes that material interests are not “escalators which automatically deliver people to their appointed destinations, “in place,” within the political ideological spectrum” he responds to the position that would ignore the fact that people have conflicting interests, with collective dimensions, while others are personal that involve their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, class, income, age, disability, and countless life decisions such as having children, where to live, which, as we just

31 Stuart Hall, “Blue Election, Election Blues,” Verso, September 16, 2020, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4854-blue-election-election-blues>. (accessed Oct. 5, 2022).

read Marx point out, people do not necessarily make of their own choosing. All these collective and personal interests relate to each other on levels that are experiential and emotional. The outcome of one's political choices and allegiances cannot be reduced to choosing the best argument because people's interests intersect personal practices with larger societal responses manifesting in protests, votes, or any number of collective behaviours. Thus, my research question "do films against capital and capitalism offer particular qualities to the study of capital" starts to find an answer, because such a project must necessarily be built by people working together on the basis of interests and needs that are multi-dimensional and which are never all the same. People are also not just driven by rational thoughts, but by practices intertwined with responses, a terrain of ideas permeated by social dynamics. I thus address the second half of my question: "how can films engage in processes of thought that helps a larger anti-capitalist political project?" While Hall focuses on the interrelation of identifications with the multiple subject positions that people have which result in conflicting interests, our picture of what shapes political decisions and actions can also be aided by Brian Massumi's essay *Autonomy of Affect* that further questions why people take political positions from the perspective of affect.³² Massumi's discusses US president Ronald Reagan and examines how affect influences the political decisions that people made when they voted for him and supported him. Massumi describes Reagan's appeal as an entirely affective sensation, of "an idiocy musically coupled with an incoherence," tied together by a mellifluous "beautifully vibratory" voice. Massumi contends that Reagan was able to cause the political damage he did because his affective impact lulled voters.

FILM'S BIGGEST PROBLEMS BECOME ITS HORIZON OF POSSIBILITY

From Hall and Massumi's emphasis that the battle is not just to make the correct political argument, one can extrapolate that revolution has to be made not just from rational arguments for class antagonism but with the materials of the whole psyche. People make political decisions from their in practical experiences and needs. This leads my argument to confront some of film's biggest problems to understand its deepest significance as an art form. First and foremost, one confronts the frequent complacency that characterizes film viewing, and the spectator's removal from active involvement in the stakes presented in the film. Watching films makes one think, but it does not necessarily make one act. The viewer's immersion in emotion, identification with characters, and involvement in events can oftentimes go hand in hand with a material disempowerment. This aspect of film and television is frequently described as diverting attention away from politics. It

32 Brian Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect," *The Politics of Systems and Environments*, Part II, *Cultural Critique*, Autumn, No. 31, 1995, 102.

is well-known that television and film do not necessarily incite action, however, films can present ideas that people may not otherwise think about, introducing them in such a way that it prompts a social discussion in a diffuse form (e.g. the way people talk about television programs shows that they inform their views of society and interrelations). Walter Benjamin talks about film as an innervation that has an indirect relationship to action. “In the first version of the artwork essay, Benjamin defines “the historic task, in the service of which film reaches its true meaning” as follows: “to make the colossal technical apparatus of our time the object of human innervation.” [...] The statement that films innervate the spectator, i.e. have a direct, mobilizing influence upon his entire physical presence, is meant to illustrate the idea that their reception is itself already a form of political action, rather than [...] an event that could possibly lead to political action.” Susan Buck-Morss sees these innervations as “empowering, in contrast to [...] robbing it of its capacity of imagination, and therefore of active response,” remarking that “what matters here is that it denotes a form of experience in which external stimuli (in this case photographic and cinematographic images) reach the spectator in such a direct way that they bypass the reflective process pure and proper.”³³ Film does not necessarily lead to political action, however, Benjamin points out that it stimulates a reflective process by communicating directly with the senses to deliver cinematographic stimuli.

I would like to propose that film’s access to people’s practical experiences, the actions they do through their interests and the emotions that they have as a result, have roles that are currently in transformation because the practices of watching video are themselves changing. People who use youtube and Tik Tok are in various ways *responding* to video. Whether the focus is on communication, artistic impressions, or game-like aspects, digital media is opening practices of response and dialogue currently taking so many social media shapes. In a world where media is fast and mutable, the struggle is for people who work to make a living, or for those who are under and unemployed, to find means in which to confront and debate the conditions they live in. Film needs to become a sphere where people begin a political conversation against capital, not only through political analysis. People need to confront political narratives that they feel and can also debate. When people are moved by political issues, and social, or political conditions, facts can be intertwined with fiction to make conversations about political decisions more concrete. I am proposing that fears, desires, anxieties, and emotional needs become part of the dimensions addressed in the ongoing fight against capitalism. Continuous political reassessment of the relationship between individual and collective, as well as affective reactions through drama and action, can be part of people’s individual video spectatorship, making new conversations about our shared situations. Capital is a system of processes generated by people, that undermines many aspects of what it is to be a person, by imposing an abstract, oppressive framework on material reality. There are so many conversations against capital that need to be started, and collective struggles against material conditions that need space to be imagined.

33 Stéphane Symons, “Walter Benjamin,” *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, eds. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2011), 308.

WHAT DO THE CHAPTERS CONTAIN?

Chapter 1 looks at my video works developed during the PhD. Throughout my work I have presented capital's dynamics as narrative relationships. I can tell the story of capital most easily by starting with my films, because I am so familiar with the questions that I encountered in my work. This chapter outlines some ideas on the topic of capitalism through the lens of my projects. Capitalism is an immensely complex topic which can be approached in many ways, so it is worthwhile to propose a theoretical structure that underpins a political analysis of capital and capitalism. Throughout chapter 1, I lay out some conceptual groundwork with regard to my artistic methods, asking questions that come out of my practice as an artist. The chapter looks at film as a type of knowledge, making connections between three intertwined meanings of abstraction that are present throughout Marx's writings: capitalist abstraction, ideological abstraction and thought abstraction through my films. I look at how group characters feature prominently in my earlier films, while the approach to characters that I adopt in my projects during the PhD grow out of and beyond these considerations. This leads me to the relationship of political theory to political practice in the work of filmmakers Ousmane Sembène and Walter Benjamin. Both Benjamin and Sembène undermine a traditional Marxist approach to political theory and practice by discussing the social role of speech in narration, social histories and daily practice. Looking further at my own practice, I discuss how my particular approach to allegory as a way that my practice describes capital's abstractions, discussing my work *Crowds* as an allegory of how capital has shaped the city's concrete political conditions.

In chapter 2, I outline theoretical considerations of how capitalism functions and how films oppose it. I begin with a discussion of Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano's book *Cartographies of the Absolute*, a project that I see as aligned with my own as a Marxist reflection of film and art works about capitalism. Toscano and Kinkle see knowledge as central to any film project about capitalism, an idea that accords with my own approach, however, in chapter 2, I show how my approach to the topic differs. Toscano and Kinkle regard abstraction as underpinning an investigation of capital, yet they do not fully conceive of the relation of capital's abstraction to the concrete in films. I, on the other hand, see the way that concrete processes pass through the abstract as a fundamental interest to filmmaking against capitalism. In response, I define the approach I propose as an examination of capital's social relations. Next, the chapter looks at Adorno's reappraisal of sociologist Emile Durkheim's discussion of society as a social fact as well as views that see the social as made up of individuals, with no significance to society as a phenomenon. Looking at C.B. MacPherson's and Annie McClanahan's analysis, I find that both the social and the individual are determined by capitalist abstraction. My argument then looks at racial capitalism and social reproduction feminism as important theoretical approaches that take on a fuller account of the capitalist system because they reconceptualize constraining definitions of capitalist relations. Film shapes our thoughts on collective action, promoting a capitalist approach to social relations, and I investigate problematic filmmaking methods that cause films to represent limited social contexts. Moreover, the way that individuals and

society are conceived remakes societies along capitalist lines, while the perspectives of people of many different races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and who have disabilities, are not included in a capitalist picture. Looking at problems in how capitalism has been envisioned in the past, I critique Gyorgy Lukacs whose description of anti-capitalist workers struggle as totality problematically tacitly understands workers to be white, male, heterosexual and able bodied.³⁴ This is followed by a look at elements of dialectics such as contradiction, that help to turn scriptwriting into work against capitalist concepts, however, some aspects of dialectics are also limiting for our approach. This leads me to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, and its challenge to capitalist concepts through the notion of non-identity.

In chapter 3, the final chapter of this book, I add to these theoretical discussions, a practical actualization in a script that I have written to try them out. One can make theories dictate one's scriptwriting process, but the more the script reads as if it is according to rules, the less it will impress other ideas and emotions on the audience. So, instead of doing this, I wrote a script with my ideas about film against capital in mind, but also with some theoretical work still flux. The script is called *The struggle between labour and capital*. This approach tested my ideas from chapter 1 and 2, by presenting a script in formation that tries to lay out more complex social relations.

THE CONTEMPORARY MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

I have suggested in this introduction that it is important in this period of profound political crisis to forge new discussions for a wider anti-capitalist struggle by combining fictional film with documentary forms. This also entails finding new approaches that unsettle the relation between conventional terrains of news and fiction, instruction, and reflection. As an artist who began my video practice by making online fictional, episodic narratives about the 2007-08 economic crisis, I found it important to test my contention that information about economic and social crisis could be discussed through narrative. Since this point, I have gradually found my way to incorporate documentary-like scenarios into my fiction films. Approaching films against capitalism as a materialist project, film must truly become forms where the crisis of capitalism and its conflicts are debated, not left merely to the reporting of news. The changing media sphere has produced conditions that put film in flux, such as the very welcome fragmenting of authority in news media reportage that arrived through recent decades that destabilized conventional forms of journalism, for instance, citizen journalism in the

34 Gyorgy Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, (London: Merlin Press, 1971). Fredric Jameson, "History and Class Consciousness as an 'Unfinished Project'" *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 1, no. 1(Spring, 1988), 64.

1990s. With the rise of social media platform Twitter, alternative personal accounts of the facts became more prevalent in the news. Likewise, youtube and other video sites extend the use of video reportage as a form of witnessing the news as it occurs. The result is a more layered and variegated media sphere in which informational authority takes many forms and the factors that ensure objective reporting are continually put into relation with personal perspectives. I have developed my practice as an artist as such changes were taking place and have internalized what these changes mean for a politics of resistance. As I already mentioned, there is presently available the means for people to use video as a way to communicate about how current conditions effect their lives and the political changes that need to take place in the societies around them. I would argue that to do this, it is essential to further introduce narrative into the analysis of information because to really imagine political possibilities, individual perspectives need to be used to imagine collective needs and collective resistance in ways that do not figure into the calculus of current social media.

NBC's review of 15 years of twitter by Catherine Thornbecke explains that "by amplifying previously marginalized voices, Twitter aided in political movements and societal reckonings hashtag by hashtag—from #MeToo to #BlackLivesMatter. It also contributed to the instantaneity of information—both from traditional news media and citizen journalists, giving anyone, anywhere, an immediate window into history as it unfolded." The near-instantaneous quality of news perspectives is summed up by Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey discussing responses to twitter's first big news story: "Suddenly the world turned its attention because we were the source of news—and it wasn't us, it was this person in the boat using the service." It is the position of Twitter users to translate the news into their own personal perspective that enlivens the commodity that Twitter sells. The article goes on to describe how Twitter's democratization had another side, it "meant that others could exploit it to spread messages of hate and disinformation." In a discussion on Democracy Now, Evan Henshaw-Plath who worked on Twitter since its inception, says "There are parts of it that I'm incredibly proud of and stunned by, the way in which Black Lives Matter has used it for organizing, the way in which people in the Arab Spring used it to communicate their movement to the outside world. And there are things that are completely depressing. The byline for Indymedia was that you should be the media and at the time that seemed like a radical statement. Now that we have people being their own media, we see that there is a whole other set of problems we need to face." He goes on to state, "it didn't change who people were, although we have used it to change the world" saying that "If we give everybody a microphone, we need better tools to counteract"... "views that were right wing, authoritarian, racist, homophobic views."³⁵ This current lack of tools to counteract the proliferation of discrimination and hate is a very important part of the discussion. Twitter centers individual subjects in the relaying news of the political world, and that personal perspective is a commercial product, but as a shift in journalism, it certainly exceeds just this. The further development of video as a conversational

35 Democracy Now, "Elon Musk Has Been an "Abusive" Bully on Twitter for Years. Now He Owns It," April 26, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-6Kflh6tSc> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

form has happened in many ways, most notably on Tik Tok, where videos depart from simple youtube video responses and become reinterpetations and use parallel video images, mimetic copying and chains of associations. The configuration of video online is increasingly dialogic and there is a beauty to an ongoing, constant conversation that sees film authorship become less individual.

FROM CAPITAL TO CAPITALISM

When I speak about capital and capitalism, I am speaking about two interrelated but distinct phenomena. Capital is the system that underpins the capital relation which is based on value as the relation between labour and exchange. “A scientific analysis of competition is possible only if we can grasp the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are intelligible only to someone who is acquainted with their real motions, which are not perceptible to the senses.”³⁶ There are two things that one should point out about capital, it’s tendency to expand gives it its qualities to transform material reality: “A very distinctive thing about capital is that it self-expands and is self-moving, self-valorizing value that although it is comprised of activity of individual people it acquires a supra-individual quality that comes to accede each of those individual actors.”³⁷ Furthermore, the relations of capital change aspects of people’s lives so that “within the production process they meet as components personified: the capitalist as “capital,” the immediate producer as “labour,” and their relations are determined by labour as a mere constituent of capital which is valorizing itself.”³⁸ Capitalism is a system of social relations that springs up from the capital relation from the moment of its beginning as it dominates society. *Capital* “shows the capitalist anatomy of trans-historical laws of economic necessity, but does not analyse capitalism as a living process.”³⁹ What is important to note is that while capital puts people into the position of components personified, people live that situation every day in capitalism, participating the capital relation but regarding their lives not as abstract relations, but as situations they are concretely involved in.

Throughout this book, I regard the relationship between the abstract and the concrete of capital as having the most important bearing on what film can be. Films against capital and capitalism refer to two different things that are obviously

36 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 433.

37 Chris O’Kane, “The Critique of Real Abstraction: From the Critical Theory of Society to the Political Economy and Back Again” in *Marx and Contemporary Critical Theory*, eds. Antonio Oliva, Ángel Oliva, Iván Novara (Berlin: Springer International Publishing, 2020), <http://jjay.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/contentgroups/economics/okaneRealAbstraction.pdf> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

38 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 470.

39 Werner Bonefeld, “History and Human Emancipation: Struggle, Uncertainty and Openness,” *Critique*, vol. 38, no. 1, February (2010), 65.

connected. I have the most open-ended definition of what makes a film about capital and capitalism, and I have no interest in being a referee on what constitutes such films. Abstract structures of capital shape concrete capitalist practices and people live within these, in racialized, gendered, sexualized and disabled forms. The basis for my theoretical approach to making film against capital is laid out in these chapters. A discussion of the relation between capital and capitalist societies puts the abstract and concrete into contact, and this can be conceptualized in how capital's abstract laws and systems with their changing modes of value production are put into multiple contacts with the concrete systems with their lived conditions and implications. The aim is to supplant the Marxist tendency to resort to historical, but nevertheless abstract "laws of motion," and instead put a conversation about capital into the hands of everyone involved.

THE FIGHT TO END CAPITALISM AND WHY FILM AGAINST CAPITALISM?

Recent events such as the 2020 uprising of anti-racist protests in response to the police killing of George Floyd that became an unprecedented social movement, brought together protests about racist police killings with a whole questioning of the police and the carceral system. These events suggest that a prolonged reassessment through the lens of racial capitalism is ever more pressing. The period of COVID-19 in which people were not working full-time and could attend to political discussions was short lived, however, it left a mark on a world caught in the nightmare that coincides racist policing, racialized labour regimes, COVID-19, and worsening economic situations. The first thing to do is recognize that the present is changeable, and conditions are volatile. The future's uncertainty is its most notable quality. While there is currently not a film movement made for the sake of catalyzing anti-capitalist political and social change, it is the approach of this book to lay out what might need to shift in film for this to happen. This handbook lays out questions and directions for a discussion to emerge, offering work to help it if it ever does. I am aware that in many people's eyes, the idea of encouraging the end of capitalism from the perspective of film is not only misplaced (how can film be such a tool?) but also may seem out of touch. Many might argue that there is currently not enough struggle happening to warrant a book of this kind. What I see are an assortment of struggles that are a growing watershed of left-political activity in which many revolutionary currents are mixed with many threads of desperation; a horizon of possibility and a goal repeatedly thwarted. No one knows which direction events will take yet "against the background of three decades of sustained attack on the working class, and in the face of terror, war, global financial meltdown and the threat of global

depression, barbarism seems the more likely alternative” than the development of communism.⁴⁰ However, there are challenges to capitalist power everywhere, in a society shaken by the COVID-19 crisis, shocked by wave upon wave of economic crises, in the throes of struggles against racism and class struggles that are increasingly becoming conjoined, expressing how struggle against capitalism takes form today.⁴¹ “The future [...] has not already been written. Nor will it be the result of some abstractly supposed objective logic of historical development. [...] History has to be made, and will be made. The future [...] will result from the struggles of today.”⁴²

Since Marxists (and everyone else) have long realized that history is not the consequence of abstract laws of inevitable class conflict and revolution, it is all the more essential that people build upon opportunities that events present, such as 2020s anti-racist uprisings, as well as capital’s self-undermining dynamics diagnosed by Marx. To build methods and processes through which people can transform out of capitalism will require ongoing discussion and debate: “History does not happen by itself. Whatever history there will be, it will have been made by the acting subjects themselves. The future is made in the present.”⁴³ The capitalist mode of production was established and consolidated chiefly during the period of the 1400s to the 1800s, and is still continuing to fix itself ever deeper in social relations, achieving a finer grain with each new adjustment to accumulation strategies occurring in response to its crises. The struggle against capital is likely to be long and hard. It will take renewed commitment and many generations of effort across the globe, not only to build the struggle against it, but to find systems that can supplant the capitalist reality. What is self-evident is that the problem has to be a collective struggle that comes out of a practice of posing new problems. Part of this can be helped by forms of collective and sustained conversation.

Marxists are still disengaging from centuries of theory predicated on the idea of a trajectory posed by a narrative of a quickening productive forces that spreads class conflict, a thesis challenged in many camps.⁴⁴ Capitalism is not currently ending but we see every day that we live in its afterlife, in a society that unceasingly finds stop gaps to make situations function. Wolfgang Streeck in his 2016 book *How Will Capitalism End?* observes a world that, from an economic standpoint, is teetering on the brink.⁴⁵ Cycling through crisis explanations by among others Immanuel Wallerstein, Streeck finds it necessary to explain capital’s crisis through Randall Collins’ account: “What exactly

40 Werner Bonefeld, “History and Human Emancipation: Struggle, Uncertainty and Openness,” *Critique*, vol. 38, no. 1, February (2010), 63-64.

41 There are a lot of protests that I am referring to here, so they are indexed in the appendix.

42 Werner Bonefeld, “History and Human Emancipation: Struggle, Uncertainty and Openness,” *Critique*, vol. 38, no. 1, February (2010), 63.

43 Ibid., 66.

44 Endnotes 4, A History of Separation, *Endnotes*, (2015).
Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical, Nor Horizontal*, (London: Verso, 2021).
Camille Barbaglio, Paulo Gerbaudo, Richard Seymour, Rodrigo Nunes, June 1, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUexkqVYQPI>.

45 Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End*, (London: Verso, 2016) 9.

does this crisis consist of? While labour has gradually been replaced by technology for the past two hundred years, with the rise of information technology and, in the very near future, artificial ‘intelligence, that process’ which has “in the second half of the twentieth century destroyed the manual working class,” “is now attacking and about to destroy the middle class as well” who “may indeed be considered the indispensable cultural foundation of contemporary capitalism’s society.”⁴⁶

Although Streeck does not agree with Collins’ purely structural account, he sees in capital an “an entirely endogenous dynamic of self-destruction” built on a similar understanding to Collins. He predicts a period that aligns with this account, where indeterminacy “in which unexpected things can happen any time and knowledgeable observers can legitimately disagree on what will happen” and an interregnum of a “prolonged period of social entropy, or disorder (and precisely for this reason a period of uncertainty and indeterminacy).”⁴⁷ His explanation is manifest in the breakdown of system integration—i.e. “institutional structuring and collective support”—while social integration—i.e. “shifting the burden of ordering social life [...] to individuals themselves” continues apace. Streeck claims that this leads to a de-institutionalized society. He is correct that the disintegration of capitalist institutions will have a very lasting social effect. The economics of crisis have very long-term consequences: “Capital accumulation after the end of capitalist system integration hangs on a thin thread: on the effectiveness, as long as it lasts, of the social integration of individuals into a capitalist culture of consumption and production. Institutional supports having fallen into disarray.”⁴⁸ In this account, the picture already looks like every man for himself: “In the absence of collective institutions, social structures must be devised individually bottom-up, anticipating and accommodating top-down pressures from “the markets.” Social life consists of individuals building networks of private connections around themselves, as best they can with the means they happen to have in hand.”⁴⁹ This sounds just like the world that I described when I made *The Common Sense*, where people need to rely on maintaining the relationships between themselves for support. We are not ready for the disorientation of such a society, but it is coming. “At the micro-level of society, systemic disintegration and the resulting structural indeterminacy translate into an under-institutionalized way of life, a life in the shadow of uncertainty, always at risk of being upset by surprise events and unpredictable disturbances, and dependent on individuals’ resourcefulness, skillful improvisation, and good luck. Ideologically, life in an under-governed society of this sort can be glorified as a life in liberty, unconstrained by rigid institutions. [...] The problem with this neoliberal narrative is, of course, that it neglects the very unequal distribution of risks, opportunities, gains and losses that comes with de-socialized capitalism.”⁵⁰

Streeck writes as a person accustomed to a still functioning European welfare state. A state that has taken decades to erode in the US may take one or two in

46 Ibid., 9.

47 Ibid., 10, 13.

48 Ibid., 46.

49 Ibid., 41.

50 Ibid., 37.

Europe, but if the UK is any indication, for instance, the dismantling of higher education happened much faster than ever imagined possible. The disintegration of under-institutionalized life has a terrifyingly fast-paced time frame. “With collective institutions disabled, disorder must be made to appear as spontaneous order based on individual rational choice and individual rights.” Streek predicts that “the manufacturing of ideological enthusiasm for a neoliberal everybody-for-themselves existence” will not work, perhaps as a result of “a major crisis in middle-class employment,” that “disorder will begin on a large scale and seriously to frustrate individual projects and ambitions,” that at this point “the post-capitalist interregnum may, come to an end and a new order may emerge.”⁵¹ With this new, as of yet undiscovered and undefined, order, people who want to work against capitalism need to aid the social struggles that are possible. My proposal is modest, that film could be a collective discussion in moments of such changes, even though people are increasingly defined by individualized goals and self-reliance. Film presents a type of tool that can shift some of the ingredients of rational arguments to find new admixtures of knowledge and experience, new social relations, and modes of conversation. In the years to come, the struggle against capital and capitalism could ignite in ways that are yet to be articulated but which could become solutions that are close enough to grasp.

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

BEGINNING WITH MY

(CHAPTER 1)

WORK

Value... (as a) self-mediating form of wealth becomes quasi-independent of the people who constitute it. The result is the historically new form of social domination, in that it subjects people to impersonal, increasingly rationalized structural imperatives and constraints that cannot adequately be grasped in terms of class domination, or more generally in terms of the domination of social groupings.... It has no determinate locus and although it constituted by determinate forms of social practice, appears not to be social at all.

Moishe Postone, video lecture.⁵²

To start this book, I would like to discuss how I began my PhD project at the Royal Institute of Art. I applied with a PhD project about two connected conditions in contemporary societies: on the one hand, systems of exchange—monetary exchange, technological systems of communication—through which capital harnesses social relations between people, and, on the other hand, forms of group relations, collective action, and social movements. When I started the PhD, I had spent a lot of time making art focusing on how capital as a system canalizes social relations toward the ends of accumulation. For a long time, my work has looked at how in capitalist societies social interrelation between people ceases to be for people themselves and becomes for capital. In the process, people take part in oppressive systems and forms of domination with histories that connect to, and sometimes precede capital. This has been the focus of my work.⁵³ By opposing social relations of the capitalist systems to solidarities and protest against capital, I was able to pursue how relations in capitalist societies are laden with conflict.

52 Moishe Postone, Social Theory Consortium 2014, Nov 22, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgLb2_UmAHo. (accessed Oct. 5, 2022).

53 Understanding capitalism as a relation between race, patriarchy and capitalism is an important feature of the present moment. This has resulted in many important discussions of connections between race and capitalism such as Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Michael Dawson's book *Behind the Mule* and his Race and Capitalism website, New Dawn podcast, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus and Crisis*, Keeyanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit*, Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, and Gerald Horne, *The Dawning of the Apocalypse*, Kali Akuno, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*. From the perspective of patriarchal oppression to capitalism Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Perspective," Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, Cinzia Arruza, *Dangerous Liaisons: The marriages and divorces of Marxism and Feminism*, Endnotes, "Logic of Gender," Selma James and Maria Rosa Della Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. From the perspective of queer politics Peter Drucker, *Warped*, Kevin Floyd, *Reification of Desire*. Conversations connecting disability justice politics to these discussions have included Martha Russel, "Capitalism and Disability," Ravi Malholtra, *Disability Politics in a Global Economy*.

In capitalism, activities of people are mobilized against themselves. This begins with the system of exchange that grew from pre-capitalist social relations and which constitutes the capital relation, that of value. Value by no means originates the condition of people and their activity being pitted against one another. Capital grows out of the social systems of oppression that pre-existed it.⁵⁴ However, in the moments that capital emerges, the transformation of human activity becomes a system that stands over and against people in a way that takes on a life of its own.

My PhD project from the beginning involved video installations and video works investigating social relations, struggles of social movements and the contradictions that people confront in capitalism. I have homed in on labor economies, the interpenetration of those economies with interpersonal relations, technological systems, formal, and informal as well as paid and unpaid labor economies, health care and housing systems. I explored existing systems and imagined future ones. This book has been shaped by those video projects but develops separately from them. For film to take on a role against capitalism, it needs to impact people not just through concepts alone, but through forms of experience in practice. As I outline in the introduction, such political transformations are not only propelled by ideas, but by practices. What is needed are types of thought fused with practice that can fuel resistance against capital, and find avenues in which to transform contemporary social relations from connection between people for the sake of capital, into relations between people for their own sake. This is where I want to start the book, with the idea that people's current social activity can be transformed into activity oriented toward a collective society. From here, I will build a conversation about how film (defined expansively as stated in the introduction) can be a way of transforming capitalist practices and their potential role as part of this process, despite the obstacles inherent in using the dramatic moving image for such struggle.

Since my initial PhD proposal described here, my project crystalized in differing approaches for each video work and in this book. I have realized, the best way to begin this book is from the perspective of my own video works. This chapter will present my observations as an artist who writes, directs, and edits my narrative video works that look at how capital conditions modes of practice and relations. In this chapter, I discuss my television drama-style video works as a demonstrational tool to propose tactics of filmmaking against capitalism. I make films that present arguments about capital and capitalist social systems. During the period of watching these video works, people live inside my arguments. These films develop practical and theoretical understanding of problems, much as any television or film narrative takes hold of its viewers to lead them through the problems that the narrative poses. I make my own video works the subject of this first chapter, not because they are the best examples of films against capitalism, but rather in acknowledgement of a plenitude of possible ways that people make films that show capitalist social relations. Many film narratives already tell the story of the destruction of social life by capital, each filmmaker telling their own part of the picture and perspective on the violence.

54 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 1064.

My filmmaking strategies and techniques are the ones that I know the best, so I can easily explain them and take them apart for demonstration.

There are several ways that narrative drama techniques adopted in my artworks comprise approaches to looking at capitalism: through script structure, the role of abstraction, collective characters, political theory and political practice, and allegory. I would like my films to outline theoretical and practical approaches that I have taken to make films against capital, in the same way that the work of countless filmmakers, writers and directors, outline potential roles for film to come. The type of moving image works that I will be describing are clearly already being done in many forms and what we see in the present, are components in the assemblage of what can come next. As I said in the introduction, film is only ever a secondary aspect in what galvanizes collective struggle, and in this case it can be helpful to a period of sustained political resistance to capitalist social forms. Capitalist social relations are entrenched, and people need to reproduce and maintain the capitalist economy in order to live. To remake these social systems in such a way that people are no longer governed by capital accumulation and its attendant property relations, means unraveling these social systems by finding new ones. What I propose are ways that film could be a part of such a process.

SCRIPTWRITING AND THE SPHERE OF IDEAS: HOW NARRATIVES C O M M U N I C A T E POLITICAL INFORMATION

I begin by looking at script writing as a means of communicating political and social questions. Film is itself analysis. All films communicate political ideas but clearly, they do this in many different ways. Three examples of realist dramatic narratives come to mind to demonstrate my point. The plot of Anthony Mann's film *The Furies* makes very clear reference to transformations in historical, social and economic conditions. It is a story about a rich rancher, his daughter and her lover. All the residents of the father's substantial properties have to use a currency which he instituted. Although the dramatic action never makes any reference to politics, the main points of the plot outline a social commentary about ownership's link to other forms of social domination. *Glass Shield* by Charles Burnett is an example of how a film can show relationships between characters in a way that provides an analysis of a social and political situation. The film tells a story of a man who has recently begun a job in the Los Angeles police. He and his partner uncover a series of crimes that expose structural racism operating within the

police department. While a structural level is analyzed through the main plot arch, so are interpersonal relations as the main character and his partner are confronted with daily experiences of racist and sexist behavior. Kelly Reichardt's film *Wendy and Lucy* is a narrative about the 2007-08 economic crisis without ever being conceived of as one. A woman who is living in her car is making her way to Alaska to find work. The subject of the film is the woman's ability to continue to care for her dog while in hard financial straits. In its depiction of the woman's budgeting of every aspect of daily life, and her struggle to keep hold of the few means of subsistence and close relationships that she has, the film clearly describes life in the current moment of capitalism, without explicitly setting out to do so.

These three examples can be viewed as films that are political and social analysis that depict aspects of capitalist systems. Like most narrative films, they start as a script and then the scenario is played out in actions in a social environment. As such it shows the audience how the main characters relate within social groups, institutions and systems around them. We see from these three examples how stories communicate a political argument. The three films do so differently, either conscious of the argument's message (*Glass Shield*) or less so (*Wendy and Lucy*). One of the ways that these films communicate is through the plot that orchestrates character actions. Through action, characters see out their desires, needs, and act on dynamics in relation to one another, their relationships configuring a field of outcomes. These are then read by audiences as events that have qualities of an argument because the fictional narratives are comprised of the filmmaker's decisions (often combinations of scriptwriter and director decisions) that imagine the world structuring events in a particular way. These are depictions of people and the social dynamics that affect them. Films can even be studies of dynamics between social groups or societies. Script action and dialogue provide a framework for the story which is also simultaneously a viewpoint defining how possibilities and outcomes are viewed. Every part of a film—from the interpersonal relationships, to the plot, to the world building—holds within it an argument about what kind of societies we live in. The argument may not seem like one because it is immersed in plot action, yet from these three film examples, we demonstrate approaches to conveying political, social, and economic knowledge about conditions in narrative form. While we see here how a plot communicates, there are also further considerations, for instance, how films have political impacts, a question we will explore this below. It is important to note that *The Furies* and *Wendy and Lucy* never clearly articulate the political aspects of the plot in the dialogue, whereas *Glass Shield* has moments when the characters discuss the racism and sexism operating in the police department and legal system that they are a part of. This brings us to a further point regarding narrative and the aesthetic-politics of communication. Oftentimes, political arguments are understood most clearly when they are spoken, not when they are witnessed as action. However, speaking an argument will sometimes give an impression of what, during my time as a professional artist, I have heard discussed as didacticism, and which many filmmakers eschew as too direct. The differences between articulating a political point in dialogue and showing that political point, are sometimes hard to pin down because there are so many variations in which action and spoken information can combine.

CAPITAL AND KNOWLEDGE IN ACTIONS AND WORDS

The experience of our generation: that capitalism won't die a natural death.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

It is important to consider how in film, the ambiguity of non-verbal actions relate to the communicative precision of language because to attend to capital and capitalism one needs to communicate about capitalist conditions, the real abstractions transmitted by capital and their effects on practices. This is acknowledged in one of the only major theoretical works that specifically focus on films and art works about capitalism, *Cartographies of the Absolute* by Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano. I will only mention the book briefly in this chapter and give a more complete treatment of it in chapter 2. However, it is important to state here that one of the first most prominent statements Kinkle and Toscano make regarding films about capitalism is the necessity of these films to convey knowledge. The following passage outlines this aspect of how they understand projects of representing capitalism.

The absence of a practice of orientation that would be able to connect the abstractions of capital to the sense-data of everyday perception is identified as an impediment to any socialist project. Works emerging under the banner of this aesthetic would enable individuals and collectivities to render their place in a capitalist world-system intelligible: “to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole.” While such artworks and narratives would not be merely didactic or pedagogical, they would of necessity also be didactic or pedagogical, recasting what political teaching, instruction or even propaganda might mean in our historical moment. What is at stake is the figurability or representability of our present and its shaping effect on political action. In a strong interpretation, the mapping of capitalism is a precondition for identifying any “levers,” nerve-centers or weak links in the political anatomy of contemporary domination.⁵⁵

55 Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), 27, e-book.

In this passage, the stakes are immediately defined: the aim of representing capitalist society is to understand it, in order to challenge it. I agree that a theoretical understanding of capital and its mechanisms are intrinsic to the political work of opposing capital and to understanding how to adopt pertinent strategies. I approach a discussion of films against capital differently than Kinkle and Toscano, yet I concur that an approach to film about capitalism often sparks comments about didacticism. In response to this, I emphasize that what I deem extremely important in this passage is the cultivation of new forms in which viewers “connect the abstractions of capital to the sense-data of everyday.” In other words, I see films against capital as potentially fulfilling a dual role as both communication of knowledge for the sake of opposing capital while, like art in modernity, film is considered to be a non-instrumental form, that conveys impressions and activates perceptions, unconscious associations and affects⁵⁶. Capital determines the lives of everyone on earth, and the forms that capital takes can bring perceptions that sprout myriad associations. Yet, for many commentators, communication that has a purpose within society is simply didactic. I see the major obstacle is this rigid view that cannot conceive of both purposeful communication and non-instrumental, aesthetic exploration happening in the same work. It is worth reflecting that one of the benefits of art’s autonomy is the space to be defiant, including defiance of such simple binaries. I agree with Kinkle and Toscano, film against capital may at moments be didactic and pedagogical, but it can become wildly nonsensical as well.

While the Kinkle and Toscano quote above clarifies a good deal of what is most important about film investigations into the workings of capitalism, it is important to point out that the book’s reliance on Fredrik Jameson’s framework of cognitive mapping confines the investigation of capitalism to a rather narrow set of possibilities and the decision to focus on mapping and the implication that capital can be traced through its physical residues, obscures a much more important set of observations focused on social relations. Our discussion in chapter 2 challenges Toscano and Kinkle’s approach and throughout the book, I elucidate what other directions are possible. Meanwhile, this chapter outlines concepts as well as techniques of communicating knowledge that are helpful to films against capital by highlighting those that I have found most important in my films. I look at how political and theoretical messages are conveyed in my work and the work of other filmmakers by looking at how communication happens across different registers, mainly in actions that the viewer perceives and communication in language. I begin by looking at a few questions posed by filmmakers and film theorists, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Christian Metz and David MacDougall.

Director Pier Paolo Pasolini starts his talk “The Cinema of Poetry” by describing its primary considerations. Pasolini says “Quite simply, the problem is this: while literary languages base their poetry on the institutionalized premise of usable instrumentalized languages, the common possession of all speakers, cinematographic languages seem to be founded on nothing at all: they do not have as a real premise

56 Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press / Manchester Press, 1984), 47.

any communicative language.”⁵⁷ On the other hand, “cinema does communicate” but it does so by another “patrimony of common signs.” “Cinematographic communication would instead seem to be arbitrary and aberrant, without the concrete instrumental precedents which are normally used by all. In other words, people communicate with words, not images; therefore, a specific language of images would seem to be a pure and artificial abstraction.”⁵⁸ Pasolini addresses the fact that the specific languages of images only hold imprecise meaning. This language of images engages people by another familiar language “the intended audience of the cinematographic product is also accustomed to ““read” reality visually, that is, to have an instrumental conversation with the surrounding reality inasmuch as it is the environment of a collectivity, which also expresses itself with the pure and simple optical presence of its actions and habits.”⁵⁹ In other words, the act of reading the visible world in everyday life is the basis of the practice-based communication that is activated in film.

Pasolini describes how cinematographic languages involve two types of communication: the lin-sign and the im-sign, that develop with two different communicative purposes. The im-sign “is a complex world of meaningful images—both gestural and environmental that accompanies the “lin-signs,” and those proper to memories and dreams, which prefigure and offer themselves as the “instrumental” premise of cinematographic communication.”⁶⁰ Cinematographic images only instrumentally communicate in the “deeply oneiric quality of the cinema” that is “pregrammatical and even premorphological,” “irrational” but these have a “concreteness.” Moreover, Pasolini says cinematographic communication is “characterized by a degree of unity and determinism.”⁶¹ Pasolini’s interest in the relation between communication in language and visual communication directs him to bring up a specific correspondence of the two forms of communication. This is a system where visual perception of action affects linguistic meaning: “...a word (lin-Sign or language sign) spoken with a certain facial expression has one meaning; spoken with another expression it has another meaning, possibly actually its opposite. [...] a word followed by one gesture has one meaning; followed by another gesture, it has another meaning, etc. This “system of gestural signs” that in actual oral communication is interwoven with and completes the system of linguistic signs can be isolated under laboratory conditions and studied autonomously.” In other words, Pasolini points out that the combination and contrast between the exactitude of language and the ambiguity of meaning in gesture, facial expression, and other physical bodily actions, layers multiple meanings.

Cinematographic scenes of action fuse all of these aspects. This raises the question, when the precision of linguistic communication combines with the irrational but concrete quality of cinematographic images, what does that irrational but concrete,

57 Pier Paolo Pasolini, “The Cinema of Poetry” in *Heretical Imperialism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett, (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 1988), 167.

58 *Ibid.*, 167.

59 *Ibid.*, 168.

60 *Ibid.*, 168.

61 *Ibid.*, 170.

ambiguous but, according to Pasolini, also communicative system of gestures, and actions show us? It is communication that is unpredictably open to interpretation, but it is also something else. It is a cinematographic picture of people's practices that communicate many different degrees of clarity and incorporates different levels of conscious and unconscious concepts. If we consider this, in light of Toscano and Kinkle's statement that films about capitalism necessarily involve knowledge, we find that our opening premises laid out in the introduction are confirmed, that film produces a type of knowledge that emanates out of practice. This explosive fusion of linguistic and visual meanings, generate much material that is a motor for political imagination because it reflects "the environment of a collectivity" expressed in the "simple optical presence of its actions and habits," an imagination that responds to social dynamics to make its images. Pasolini continues that the lin-sign holds an abstraction while the im-sign is concrete.⁶² This is a powerful aspect that film against capitalism put can into play. The representation of the rule of capital's abstractions over the material world can be shown through the specific constraint of film that its actions communicate in concrete way. Abstractions are all the more compelling in their material contradiction when in that abstraction film, as a witness, remains concrete.⁶³

Film theorist Christian Metz, who was present at Pasolini's lecture, focuses in his writing on the relationship of meaning produced in spoken language and film language. In *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, Metz says that it is the nature of cinema to transform the world into discourse, yet he asserts that it is not "a true articulation in the linguistic sense." In explanation, Metz continues "the first theoreticians of the cinema often spoke of the shot as a word, and the sequence as a sentence. But these are highly erroneous identifications..."⁶⁴ Metz explains that unlike language, the cinematography of a film produces infinite possible views, showing the viewer a range of undefined information. This undefined quality may seem to contradict Pasolini's description of the concreteness of the im-sign, however, in agreement with Pasolini, Metz describes what a filmmaker presents "a complete segment of reality," even in its most partial or fragmentary state, for example, in a close up shot, the image edits out everything around it yet it is still viewed as complete.⁶⁵ Another way to explain this is to say while a film only shows a fragment of reality, it is always able to give the appearance that that representation of reality is all of reality, by filling the frame of vision with that image. The shots of action can be cut up in any way, but they will maintain this impression of wholeness. Metz's idea that moving images create this impression is interestingly compared to sound, which operates similarly, but when sounds are cut off, especially when used for verbal communication, their contents have very precise rules (intelligibility of words, rules of sentence construction) that offer another

62 Ibid., 171. "The linguistic or grammatical world of the filmmaker is composed of images, and images are always concrete, never abstract."

63 In chapter 2, through discussing Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* we will explore how film projects capital's image of society, in other words the logics that capital deems worth telling.

64 Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 115.

65 Ibid.

register of communication. In this way, words and sentences can be cut off, dialogue and discussion disrupted.

One can think of many examples where films adopt approaches that intentionally accentuate fragmentary or disorienting communication to make a variety of types of statements from the formal to the political.⁶⁶ This brings to mind a comparison of two works, my episodic video work made before the PhD, *Self-capital* (2009), an allegory of capitalism in the 2007-08 financial crisis, and *Schizopolis* (1996). I made *Self-capital* at Institute of Contemporary Arts in London during and exhibiting and working in a residency as part of a group show there called Talk Show. The film portrays a character who represents the Global Economy, and she has gone into therapy. The process of imagining the psychological breakdown of the Global Economy used acting as a tool for performing writing, whereby spoken performance mixed with actions. Through this, there could be a layering of action fragments that mangle, chop up and disconnect words from certain interpretations of their meaning and reconnect other words to meanings that were previously disregarded, e.g. in a scene in the cinema and in a scene in the book shop. In contrast the film *Schizopolis* by Steven Soderberg shares some qualities with *Self-capital* in that it inserts play with words into actions and also has an aesthetic of random cuts. *Schizopolis* is a fragmented non-linear narrative that follows a story from three perspectives focused around one main character. The film has scenes that play with words in fragmented dialogues, presenting a critique of capitalist society through formal story telling experimentation and media critique that suggests then nascent reality television. While the film does not reject narrative structure for complete seriality, it instead uses the action of the film to generate drama from taking dramatic conventions of film and television, combining this with nonsensical writing. Whereas Soderberg disconnects linguistic meaning and action, for instance, when a repair man and housewife start an affair in a scene that replicates a classic opening scenario of a porn movie, while they speak non-sense sentences.⁶⁷ Linguistic play interrupts extensive scenes of action, scenes which are all assembled in ways that clearly articulate a critique of increasingly dislocated practices of social life. However, a viewer is not often made to ask themselves why this is. In *Self-capital* the word play makes very direct statements about how the economic crisis relates to certain needs of the capitalist system, such as when in an impromptu display of consuming ideas in the ICA bookstore, Global Economy says “I want workers, I want workers” while “contract” causes Global Economy to throw up. When making films against capital and capitalism there are myriad correlations between action and language as we see in

66 Jean-Luc Godard is a well-known example of left film that experiments with fragmenting the smooth flow of sound and image. For example, his 1966 film, *Masculin Feminin* has frequent cuts that draw attention to changes in the sound when it would normally merge into the background. In his film *Weekend* of the following year, the disruptive breaks in the film form build up to overturn the film’s bourgeois narrative.

67 An example of the nonsense sentences of dialogue in Steven Soderberg’s *Schizopolis* is a scene where a woman is visited by a man who works for a pest control company. She answers the door and says to him: “Arsenal, nose army.” The man responds: “nose army, beef diaper.” She smiles and comments “nomenclature” as she invites him inside.

comparing *Self-capital* and *Schizopolis*. Tying together Toscano and Kinkle's injunction that film about capitalism communicates knowledge and Pasolini's further discussion of film communication, while both films explore a highly fragmented visual language, *Schizopolis* is able, in its fragmentation of dramatic narrative and its accompanying visual grammar, to infer a wide societal commentary about its social environment. Meanwhile, *Self-capital*'s story about the Global Economy is both confined to projecting a narrower scope to the story in a West London art institution, and at the same time, it gains clarity through its verbal play that articulates political statements.

To open what this discussion might mean to films that present scenarios that have a polemic position in opposition to capitalism, it is helpful to add to this discussion the perspective of David MacDougall who is a visual anthropologist, academic, and documentary filmmaker to help us think about the im-sign and how it functions when approached as academic research. In *The Corporeal Image*, MacDougall compares textual to visual modes of research and representation "If images show us individuals as unique in consciousness and body—each person distinguishable from all others—they are less capable of showing us the rules of the social and cultural institutions by which they live. Just as speech is accompanied by vocalizations and gestures that are culturally more widespread (or more specific) than the codes of the language being spoken, so photographs and films reveal colloquial aspects of human life superimposed upon more rigid systems of organization."⁶⁸ This quote shows that both filmic communication systems have more specific qualities than their general communication, even the material qualities of language are "more widespread" and "more specific" than "the codes of the language being spoken. He returns to filmic communication to comment that "Pictures could thus be said to be like the specific utterances of language, but carrying many of their more generalized meanings. Nevertheless, *images may reveal other systems*, less formalized that are obscured by the logocentric categories of writing. For example, we may be able to see that two people are digging holes in the ground but not see that they are digging the holes for different reasons. This could be regarded as self-evident limitations of visual representation—its insensitivity to the cognitive world—but it may equally be regarded as another sensitivity, giving access to a different range of phenomena (e.g. *how people dig*)."⁶⁹

For MacDougall, the moving-image's differing sensitivity, not to why they dig but how they do it, "alerts us to a different distribution of specific human characteristics" that "concern ways of appearing, making, doing, rather than naming, conceptualizing and believing"⁷⁰. As with Pasolini and Metz, for MacDougall the difference is between the specificity of written research versus the way that visual research in anthropology "reveal[s] other systems" that are "less formalized." MacDougall gives us an unusual insight that could only come from a person who studies two knowledge systems—the linguistic conventionally considered knowledge, and the visual not as often considered so—to expose how everyday footage of "human life [is] superimposed

68 David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 259.

69 Ibid., 259.

70 Ibid., 259.

upon more rigid systems of organization.” There is a specificity of moving image communication that can be compared to the information conveyed in writing, but it is not the same. The moving image’s specificity has to do with visual recognition: “images show us individuals as unique in consciousness and body—each person distinguishable from all others” but does not necessarily explain the reasons why. This is recognition as a type of knowledge which is social and so involves social dynamics that have implications for societal structures.⁷¹ In other words, MacDougall’s example of moving images that show us how people dig but not why, opens how the gap between visual and linguistic functions, in so far as visual information is often understood as self-evidently given. However, both visual and linguistic information are open to interpretation, and to “not see that [people are] digging the holes for different reasons” relates to the visible aspects of social contexts that are communicable and those that are invisible and incommunicable. These demarcations are further described when MacDougall subsequently considers the type of knowledge that images create “A visual perspective contests many of the classical indicators of boundaries between cultural groups. It also contests the concept of boundaries, placing more emphasis upon gradual modulations between groups and upon patterns of borrowing and exchange that written accounts often dismiss as atypical, or simply ignore. Films and photographs are more likely to include telltale indicators of these contacts, however much they try to present society as isolated and homogeneous.” In other words, when one confronts the social by studying of its visual qualities, one notices the absence of boundaries between societies, and between practices, even though this may defy the theoretical separations imposed. He continues, “Furthermore, by giving equal weight to elements that social scientists may consider biological, psychological, or otherwise “outside” culture, images call into question the relative importance of “cultural” factors against other forces in human relations. For these reasons, visual anthropology, almost inevitably creates challenges to written texts. It not only opens up the transcultural as an issue for anthropology, but is counter-cultural (in the anthropological sense) by drawing attention to the significance of the non-“cultural.””⁷²

“A visual perspective contests many of the classical indicators of boundaries” because there are many exchanges within social contexts that are hard to identify through written anthropological research. In this sense, his statement has bearing on a Marxist dialectical approach to relations that regard fields within capitalism as

71 Ibid., 259. For a discussion of the politics of recognition related to racialization see Franz Fanon, “Chapter 7, The Black man and recognition” in *Black Skins, White Masks*, where a section of the chapter “The Black man and Hegel” discusses “Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized.” Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008). These social dimensions of recognition are further critiqued politically by Glen Sean Coulthard in *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

72 Ibid., 259.

mutually affecting each other.⁷³ In these quotes MacDougall contributes the observation that film's ability to "reveal other systems" of knowledge that are visual, and contest boundaries between social systems and these contribute to a consideration of film as a mode of political communication. The intermixed quality of the information conveyed in moving images is formidable in its intricacy because of the lack of boundaries between knowledges communicated in moving images. For instance, viewers, can understand information about the social and political moment portrayed alongside qualities that involve personal relationships of character's lives. It is important to apply these last observations to both non-fiction and fiction films as ways to produce knowledge about political and social subjects, through intertwined events, characters, settings, actions and changes in their relations.

To perceive the political communication conveyed in plot dynamics opens a significant area to analyze. Whether a written script plans to make a political argument or not, the scenario conveys a political position by telling a story that addresses the social world. Many contemporary films are able to walk the line between being interpreted as political commentary and not, precisely because their argument speaks mainly in plot events, for instance recent blockbuster hit *Don't Look Up* is a contemporary film made to be read as an allegory, addressing several aspects of the contemporary social, political and climate crisis at once, but because it is a fictional scenario about a comet crashing into the earth, it is able to be read as not directly commenting on any of them⁷⁴. Fiction films as arguments are infused with emotions that impact volition and action. Realizing this, one sees that film is an encounter with a set of political criteria that carry novel categories for political communication. So riven is the political history of dramatic film narratives with contradictory interpretations of, on the one hand, the expansive communication of moving images and, on the other, the specificity of spoken communication, that films are inevitably comprised of that tension.

A discussion about political objectives for films brings up the question, how can we judge the efficacy of a film's political argument when often most of the work of a film is not told in argument but in actions that elicit feeling? How can one know what the film's efficacy is? Because film is a combination of thought and sensation, analysis and feeling, one cannot know the effects of films much as one cannot know the precise effect of any other type of artwork. The idea that film or theater can do political work is often connected to the influential perspective of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht's work reflects the contradictions of working in his historical period: on the one hand, his reflections

73 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign: Illinois University Press, 2003), 13. "Rather, it is a matter of where and how one draws boundaries and establishes units (the dialectical term is "abstracts") in which to think about the world. The assumption is that while the qualities we perceive with our five senses actually exist as parts of nature, the conceptual distinctions that tell us where one thing ends and the next one begins both in space and across time are social and mental constructs."

74 It was disappointing that Nicolas Sirota co-writer who is involved with Democratic Socialists (DSA) and Marxism made a film that looked at the present political moment mainly only through a discussion of the current media environment.

on capitalism are as broad as Jameson implies when says that “one of the great historical meanings of Brecht’s work in general to have theorized and thereby foregrounded a process at work all around him [...] to have made it possible for us to perceive it abstractly, and to give it a name and an expression.” Yet, passages in Brecht’s writing on the theater such as this in his essay “Short Organum on the Theater” suggest that that in imagining the purpose for encapsulating capitalist processes, he resorted to understanding it through the doctrinaire Marxism of his time, to understand theater as applicable to a socialist “science of society.” For instance, Brecht says that “the reason why the new way of thinking and feeling have not yet penetrated the great mass of men is that the sciences” have not been applied to “the relations which people have to one another during the exploiting and dominating process.” They would Brecht says, “illuminat[e] the mutual relationships of the people who carried it out” yet “The new approach to nature was not applied to society.” This is because it was prevented by the bourgeoisie.⁷⁵ Brecht’s notion that there could be a science that understands or even predicts social developments seem to repeat Engels’ comment that “dialectics, however, is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and the development of nature, human society and thought.” This perspective was unfortunately quite prevalent in the history of Marxism especially in dialectical materialism, with very harmful effects.⁷⁶ While, as Fredric Jameson points out, Brecht’s project overall is oriented to demonstrate “the construction of the psychological and the personality” that involve structures of social systems, suggesting a more nuanced viewpoint, this passage has an erroneous emphasis on a social reduced to scientific laws.⁷⁷ It is precisely because trajectories of political events and political behaviors are not predictable that it is worth thinking about drama as political communication that engages dramatic emotion. All works of art (such as film) involve reading and so are open to interpretable ambiguity.⁷⁸ As I have already explained in the introduction, film should be valued as practice-thought that can be applied to struggle against capital not because one can know the outcomes of watching films against capital (e.g. that audiences will act in certain ways). Film is a medium that needs to be used to oppose capital because capitalism

75 Bertolt Brecht, “Short Organum on the Theatre” in *Brecht on Theatre*, translated by John Willet, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 184.

76 This Evald Ilyenkov quote points to Friedrich Engels’ unfortunate belief that dialectics unlocked all of human life to the sciences of behaviour: “This approach preserves as one of the definitions of dialectics that given by Friedrich Engels (‘dialectics, however, is nothing more than the science of general laws of the motion and developments of nature, human society and thought,’ Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic*, (Marx Engels Lenin Institute/Lulu.com, 2014). The damaging effects of “dialectical materialism politically implemented in the 1930s as “the world outlook of the Marxist Leninist party” implemented under Stalinism is commented on by Angela Harutyunyan. Angela Harutyunyan, “Hegel’s Aesthetics and Soviet Marxism: Mikhail Lifshits’s Communist Ideal,” *Serbian Architectural Journal*, no. 2, vol. 11, (2019): 274.

77 Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, (London: Verso, 1998), 70.

78 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, translated by Anna Canciani, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

is a system that involves thinking and living, political volition and perspectives that arise from a combination of thought and practice, just like film involves a combination of thought and practice. As practice-thought, film needs to be recognized as having political impacts, however, it needs to be acknowledged as well that film lacks knowable political outcomes. One cannot assume to know the efficacy of film made against capital, but one can have a sense how a film communicates its problems. Like most communication, one can be sure that one has sent a message but not how people will receive it, or act as a result. Film against capitalism is then a practice that would need to find a welcome reception.

A B S T R A C T I O N

Capitalism is the relation between concrete and abstract. The ways that concrete practices, relationships and conditions in people's lives relate to capitalist abstractions is important to understand, not only through theoretical arguments but also knowledge that comes through practice. The ways that concrete social practices, concrete living conditions and relationships express forms of capitalist abstractions is an important area for film against capital to explore. I have shown a range of social processes that relate to abstraction in my work, by involving interpersonal relations that transform through economic conditions and by constructing videos that emphasize ways that capital's abstractions are subjectivizing. In these works, the stories tend to focus on representing systemic phenomena. This is the case even in the most recent works made during the PhD, *Health as Individual vs Health as Social* which is focused on how people are able to sustain themselves, and maintain their social relationships in the health crisis of COVID-19. In order to describe abstraction in my work, I will unpack three ways that Marx discusses abstraction in his work, as outlined by Bertell Ollmann: economic abstraction, ideological abstraction and thought abstraction.⁷⁹ Looking at these three different ways that Marx describes abstraction in his work, we understand that abstraction happens in many social forms. Ollmann explains that "Marx's abstractions are not things but processes. These processes are also, of necessity, systemic Relations in which the main processes with which Marx deals are all implicated."⁸⁰ This can include abstractions that take place in social processes that are also economic ones, which is when we encounter the Marxist term coined by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, real abstraction. We will start with this type of abstraction.

79 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign: Illinois University Press, 2003), 61-62. On p. 61 "Marx uses the term in four different, though closely related, senses." Although Ollmann describes four, the first and second are the distinction of thought abstraction as a noun and a verb, so I have simplified this as thought abstraction in general.

80 Ibid., 68

REAL

ABSTRACTIONS

My works depict ways that capitalist social processes involve real abstractions. The abstractions that have primarily been a part of my work are social processes that are brought about by real abstractions of capital, the most fundamental of these real abstractions being that of economic exchange. These abstractions develop primarily from monetary exchange and come about through social processes. In economic exchange, commodities and money are understood to be equivalent in certain quantities, and they are exchanged according to this understanding. This is an abstraction, and one that becomes concrete through practice. It is not an abstraction created when one is thinking but rather it comes about through actions as a very ordinary part of everyday experience⁸¹. It is an abstraction that people live out instead of needing to focus on it in their minds. In *Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete*, Evald Ilyenkov explains that “for Marx, (abstraction) is by no means a synonym of the ‘purely ideal’ of a product of mental activity, a synonym of the subjectively psychological phenomenon occurring in man’s brain only. Time and again Marx uses this term to characterize real phenomena and relations existing outside consciousness, irrespective of whether they are reflected in consciousness or not.”⁸² Importantly for this discussion, those abstractions which happen through exchange have very real effects. Processes of economic exchange happen in which commodities, including labor as a commodity, are understood to be commensurable and this abstraction functions through a set of social processes. When these real abstractions happen as social processes and produce real effects, they become sedimented in practice by being socially valid as expectations. Individual exchanges presuppose and only make sense within a broad social system of value production and circulation.

Another example of real abstraction is a concept that Marx developed, abstract labor. From studying the processes of capital production and exchange, Marx arrived at the concept of abstract labor as integral to the functioning of capital in regulating exchange relations. Labor in capitalist production has two forms, abstract and concrete labor. While concrete labor concerns particular types of labor, abstract labor is the aspect of labor that is understood not in its particularity but in its value quotient in comparison to other values, what I.I. Rubin develops from Marx as a “social equation of labor,” through which labors are made commensurable within exchange no matter how different each type of work may be.⁸³ As Marx put it in his first draft of *Capital*, as quoted by I.I. Rubin in the essay “Abstract Labor and Value in Marx’s System”: “There

81 Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1978) 5.

82 Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960) 20. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

83 I.I. Rubin, “Abstract Labour and Value in Marx’s System,” *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (1927). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/abstract-labour.htm> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

[Marx] says: “In every social form of labour the labours of the various individuals are related to each other also as human labours but here [in capital] *this relation itself* [of abstract labour] counts as the *specifically social form* of the labours.”⁸⁴ Abstract labor is the “specifically social form” of labor in capital, it underpins the whole of capital’s operative “social synthesis” which is “the network of relations by which society forms a coherent whole.”⁸⁵ A subject that influenced all my video projects throughout my video art practice from *Crisis in the Credit System* to my recent works *The Common Sense, Parts-Wholes* and *Crowds* has been a discussion of labor in capital, value as the social form and the implications of the dynamic of value production in capitalist societies. Although Marx did not ever speak about “real abstraction,” he did say that in *Capital* that “the act of equating tailoring and weaving reduces the former in fact to what is really equal in the two kinds of labor, the characteristic they have in common, of being human labor.”⁸⁶ Ilyenkov continues the discussion of abstraction previously quoted saying “Marx speaks in *Capital* of abstract labor. Abstractness appears here as an objective characteristic of the form which human labor assumes in developed commodity production, in capitalist production. Elsewhere he stresses that the reduction of different kinds of labor to uniform simple labor devoid of any distinctions “is an abstraction which is made every day in the social process of production. It is ‘no less real (an abstraction)...’⁸⁷ We will find that abstract labor, and the exchange relations that underpin its operation, are the basis for social organization in capitalist society and as such, end up figuring prominently in my work.

Chris Arthur in his book *New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, also contributes a further point when he describes how these abstractions are brought about through social processes of equivalence that reshape social activity. “In the value form, and in the labors set in relation to each other in it, ‘the abstractly general counts not as a property of the concrete, sensibly real, but on the contrary the sensibly concrete counts as the mere form of appearance or definite form of realisation of the abstractly general. In truth this inversion in the relation of abstract and concrete is a result of the fact that the whole relation of production is inverted, that subject and object are inverted, that the producers are dominated by their product (value, capital) to the extent that it is doubtful whether the workers may be said to be producers at all, but rather they are reduced to servants of a production process originated and directed by capital.’⁸⁸ We come into contact with real abstractions on a daily basis. As Arthur says, value has determining

84 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, 1st edition, 238. This reference is from I.I. Rubin, “Abstract Labor and Value in Marx’s System” *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (1927). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/abstract-labour.htm>. (accessed online Oct 05, 2022).

85 Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1978).

86 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol I, (London: Penguin Classics, 142).

87 Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960) 20. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm>. (accessed online Oct. 5, 2022).

88 Chris Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, (Delhi: Historical Materialism Book Series/Aakar Books, 2013) 46.

agency in capitalist society, but what of real abstraction do we ever witness? We do not see tangible evidence of the real abstraction of abstract labor, for instance, though we do encounter it in a variety of ways. Nor can people necessarily know the interconnected network of exchanges that are taking place in capitalist society as a whole because this would require us to be able to perceive the whole process that renders commodities equivalent in capitalist society—processes of production of goods, their entry into markets to be sold, their purchase by consumers, and many more moments in addition to this. We cannot see it as a whole because an economy is a vastly complex system. Instead, we can only catch parts of the overall processes of exchange. How then might an artist or filmmaker deal with such subjects on a material basis, when such systemic processes occur in multiple locations, times and relations?

A large part of my practice has been to think through ways of representing aspects of capital, how it behaves as a system and continues to change today. I do this from a Romantic aesthetic understanding that views art as able to shape all aspects of existence.⁸⁹ From my episodic video work *Self-capital* onward and throughout the PhD culminating in my work *Parts-wholes*, I have tried to use video making to express some of the ways that real abstractions function and the social implications of this. Within that, I have specifically focused in my work on the way that exchange relates people's various labors to one another and the social processes that come about as a result of regulating them in a system of abstract equivalences. A good way to begin to illustrate the most significant themes in my video works is to demonstrate the ideas that I deal with in a work I made before the PhD, my episodic video series *Popular Unrest* (2010). This will establish a ground for which I can elaborate my approaches to my current projects during the PhD. For this reason, please bear with me while I describe this older work.

In the film world of *Popular Unrest*, there are three phenomena happening: there are mysterious groupings coming together all over the world without explanation and there are equally mysterious, equally prevalent violent killings happening where a knife descends from the air. No assailant is ever found. A third phenomena is the key to the first two: a system called "the Spirit" sits at the center of the story. This system oversees all exchange transactions and social interactions in this world. The Spirit is imagined as a cross between Google, the Bloomberg financial trading system and a combination of various forms of social media, but infinitely more sophisticated. We find out that it was developed after a period of economic volatility and diminishing economic returns such as capitalist economies throughout the world have been experiencing in recent years. In the film, this private-public entity, the Spirit, operates as a very obvious metaphor for capital, the unimpeded functioning of the "free market" having always needed to be ensured by the governing power of the state.

89 I am referring to late 18th and early 19th c. Romantic Aesthetics, one proponent of which was Freidrich Schlegel whose "...aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical." Schlegel, Friedrich, *Athenaeum Fragment, Lucinde and the Fragments*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

The Spirit served in the narrative as a placeholder that allowed me to materialize what is incredibly difficult to represent, capital and capitalism. It is grossly inadequate to represent capitalism through one mega-corporation the Spirit, but the fact that it oversees all social connection and provides the system of social communication itself allowed me to at least create scenarios where I could tackle a discussion of capital by having an entity in the story to refer to and address directly. The fact that capital is a system that drives society which is incredibly intricate and diffuse, makes it hard to address through artistic forms.⁹⁰ In *Popular Unrest*, I push the contradictions of this intentionally inadequate metaphor, the Spirit, for instance, when the group confront and “go into” the spirit, hoping this impossibility could express that inadequacy. I worked with a few evocative ideas to imagine my scenario: the notion of “the social body” that developed in the political theory with the French Revolution, and Marx’s concept of value as an “automatic subject.” I first explored the idea of the social body in my work *Self-capital* as a way to think through the 2008 economic crisis. I developed this line of thought from research into the social body as metaphor during the French Revolution. The modern concept of the social body replaced the notion in the French Ancien Regime whereby the social groups of Absolutist society were portrayed with the king at the head, the aristocracy and the church as arms, and the rest of the body, the bourgeoisie and the nascent working-class *sans culottes* and *bras nus*. In *Self-capital*, I saw capital as the social body in collapse during economic crisis as the character of the Global Economy went into therapy. This idea carried over to *Popular Unrest*, putting the social body into dialogue with Marx’s evocative notion of value as an “automatic subject.” Marx says in *Capital* volume 1, “money [...] is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in the movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject.”⁹¹ Capital’s dynamic of accumulation means it perpetually expands and through this expansion, value acquires needs and internal dynamics. By combining the concepts of the social body, and value as subject, a conceptual composite emerged that showed the way that capital’s need to self-expand, effects this by treating the social world as its body, making every process part of its expansion.

The combined ideas prompted scenes where the grouping put them into action: when interviewed about why they are always together, they talk about feeling like “one body”; the narration of the film is the group speaking their many voices as one voice; they literally lay down to make the shape of one body. I developed improvised scenes where actors mimed a variety of jobs punctuated by the sound of the groups’ voices conjoined in rhythmically intoned speech referring to unit costs of commodities such as “dollar,” digital commodities by “data-inch” or bio-commodities of “nerve.” These words are connected to one another by “per” which declares the equivalence of one quantity of a commodity with another commodity. This makes palpable intangible abstractions that happen in the exchange process. Exchange links many commodities, many labors, and activities into a concatenated system for the

90 I will return to the problem of representing capital in our discussion of allegory later in this chapter.

91 Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume 1, (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 255.

purpose of capital accumulation. The actors speak this together as a group and mime movements of work. As the group's refrain resounds, varying the theme of dollar-per-data inch-per-nerve, the group acts out various jobs such as washing windows, typing or answering phones, which altogether depict abstract labor. Abstract labor is an abstraction that cannot be represented by one person alone because it is an abstract comparison of multiple labors in relation to one another, which is made in exchange. In this way, the video series pushes the boundaries of what can be shown realistically to depict the effect of exchange as real abstraction. These moments where the group are conjoined into one system through exchange are important elements that I continue to explore in my works *The Common Sense*, *Parts-wholes 2*, *Crowds* and *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social*.

In the essay "The Critique of Real Abstraction," Chris O'Kane states that "the 'movement' of this process as represented in the formulas of political economy is not a "mere abstraction" but rather the representation of a dominating supra-individual socially objective "abstraction in actu" compelling capitalists to exploit workers in order to generate profit and workers to sell their labor power in order to survive."⁹² A further quote, this time from the book *Time, Labour and Social Domination* by Moishe Postone, helps to elucidate how Marx saw these social abstractions functioning. Postone says: "Everyday action and thought are grounded in the manifest forms of the deep structures [of value] and, in turn, reconstitute those deep structures." Postone sees that "the "laws of motion" of capitalism are constituted by individuals and prevail, even though those individuals are unaware of their existence."⁹³ In other words, my projects such as *Self-capital*, *Popular Unrest*, *The Common Sense* and *Parts-wholes 2* all try to show how capital's supra-individual socially objective abstraction are borne out in the lives of individuals, imposing capital's laws of motion as they are transposed on people's lived experiences. These video projects tell stories about how capital's "deep structures" are reinforced in capitalist social processes even when "individuals are unaware of their existence." These practices prevail as Postone states because they contain a host of uninterrogated abstractions, the foundational abstraction being that in capitalist society, people's contrasting desires are mediated by exchange.

Chris Arthur, wondering how this process happens comments that "Since exchange is understood to mean a voluntarily undertaken transaction, which is not indicated by any central authority, and is rooted solely in the private purposes of the agents concerned, it is on the face of it extremely unlikely that any coherent economic order could emerge at all; still less one characterised by the beneficent "hidden hand" of Smithian faith. [...] What is the form of social cohesion in a system in

92 Chris O'Kane, "The Critique of Real Abstraction: From the Critical Theory of Society to the Political Economy and Back Again" in *Marx and Contemporary Critical Theory*, eds. Antonio Oliva, Ángel Oliva, Iván Novara (Berlin: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 4.

93 Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 135.

which all decisions to produce and to exchange are private?”⁹⁴The answer to this question, Arthur says that exchange mobilizes a process which he describes as social synthesis, a concept borrowed from philosopher Alfred Sohn-Rethel. By this he means that, as I mentioned earlier in my discussion of exchange, exchange abstraction is based on a social process that links the whole of capitalist society because commodities and labour commodities are made commensurable and compared. Articulating a topic throughout Marx’s work, Arthur asserts that “We presuppose at the outset that exchange is a primary mode of social synthesis in the bourgeois epoch—it constitutes and reproduces bourgeois relations such as the dissociation of production and consumption.”

In *Popular Unrest*, the grouping end up trying to find the source of the killings and it leads them to Zhivila Entelechy, the architect of the Spirit that was subsequently thrown out of the project. Zhivila explains how the Spirit has gone horribly wrong:

ZHIVILA ENTELECHY

... the premise is that if the Spirit can use technology to boost productivity in anything and everything it can lay its hands on that would be good for the system as a whole, but that’s not the case. You end up excluding what you’re meant to protect, life. The whole purpose of the Spirit is to integrate life in as many ways as possible. The Spirit is faced with a paradox, it maximizes and expels life at the same time.

We find out the Spirit is causing the mysterious killings, and this is the moment when capital’s real abstractions are felt most strongly in *Popular Unrest*. This comes about through a culmination of early and later scenes within the story, and acts as a revelatory prism through which to see them again. Capitalist economies drive scientific discovery and technological innovation in productivity by allowing capitalists to decrease the amount of socially necessary labor that goes into production. As productivity increases, the same amount of labor, paid at the same wage will produce more value. Therefore, less labor is required. Karl Marx calls adjusting the length of the working day to increase the production surplus value absolute surplus value, and value extraction adjusted through attaining means of greater technological control of the extraction of value from labor, relative surplus value. For instance, in capital the sciences of emotions, social interaction and biophysical aspects of social reproduction become an essential part of capital’s functioning to ratchet up value extraction. Importantly, as levels of productivity increase, the amount of human labor needed for production decreases. As the capitalist forces of production develop labor is continually excluded from the production process.

94 Chris Arthur, *New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital, Historical Materialism Book Series*, (Delhi: Historical Materialism/Aakar Books, 2013), 88

Capital's need to self-expand works against the ability of people to survive and this technologically driven transformation of relative surplus value produces prevailing conditions within, on the one hand, increasing productivity through technology and, on the other, of ejecting labor from the production process. Capital no longer reproduces the labor power of workers but rather wears them down through constant strain and overwork. States continue to aid the reproduction of capital, but have, in many ways, long ago abdicated any previous role to preserve their populations' health, provide education, or support workers joining the fast-growing reserve of unemployed labor. As the ongoing expansion of capital subsumes and expels more and more labor, proletarians in developing and affluent economies are increasingly left hyper-exposed. It becomes increasingly clear that capital is opposed to the survival of its dependent populations. By propelling accumulation ever forward capital is killing people. The last scenes of the films show how even though it is discovered that the killings are being caused by the Spirit system itself, there is no discussion of stopping that. Rather than stop the Spirit, in other words to find ways to end capitalism, so-called "Safety Zones" are created for people who can afford to be inside them, while everyone who cannot pay is exposed to the violence outside. In this way, *Popular Unrest* attempted to evoke through allegory some of the main themes of how capital currently operates and the social violence that results.

To return to our earlier point that exchange in capital is the basis of social synthesis, it is clear that capital is value producing because it orchestrates social processes of production that involve many people's labors that are put into equivalence. Arthur characterizes his project as aiming "to reconstruct the ontological ground of capitalism through interrogating the founding category of value and demonstrating it can be actual only as the result of the totality of capitalist relations." He then goes on to articulate clearly something important for my argument: "My view is that Hegel's logic can be drawn on in such a study of capitalism because capital is a very peculiar object, grounded in a process of real abstraction in exchange in much the same way as Hegel's dissolution and reconstruction of reality is predicated on the abstractive power of thought."⁹⁵

Arthur elucidates a major idea driving, not just *Popular Unrest*, but also my entire project, both in the PhD and before. The idea I that there are analogues between capital's abstraction and thought abstraction because exchange is a peculiar object that imposes a violent conceptuality on the world. Arthur's point that one can only understand value and demonstrate how it functions by discussing "the totality of capitalist relations" is true. The Hegelian dialectic is understood as extremely important for Marx's formulation of capital. One can understand my naming the metaphorical representation of capital "the Spirit" in reference to Hegel's world spirit, as pointing to this longstanding Marxist enquiry into the homological correspondences between capital and thought.⁹⁶ A discussion of capital as a total system, in *Popular*

95 Ibid., 8.

96 Such interpretations can be found in Adorno's approach to Kant and Hegel, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, and Chris Arthur among other Marxist thinkers.

Unrest particularly Marx's concept of total social capital, has long been a part of my work, however, I want to clarify, I only understand totality as the totality of capital. This question is significant aspect for understanding capital's configuration, but it needs to be distinguished from the approach historically taken in Marxism that views capital's totality as a totality of social relations and so by extension that anti-capitalist struggle would constitute a totality as well. In chapter 2, I will question Gyorgy Lukacs' conception of totality as connected to working-class struggle.

Marxist thinkers such as Ricardo Bellofiore in his discussion of abstract labour and Fred Mosley in his *Money and Totality* both assert that capital is a system that is premised on the functioning of the whole of the circuit of capital accumulation. We will pursue this further in chapter 2, but for now we need to explain that the already challenging task of representing capital is further complicated by there being a total quality of capital as a system that is always at play in order for capital to exist.⁹⁷ Ricardo Bellofiore notes how capital pre-determines its specific forms by "positing" its "presuppositions" in the way that "the 'unity' of production and circulation" is distinguishable in abstract labor. "Abstract labour is potentially latent in production, and it fully comes into being in circulation. According to Marx, circulation is intrinsically monetary, but commodities are exchanged because they are already commensurable before the metamorphosis against money. In other words, "values" as objective abstract labour (and as such, as ideal money) are a necessary pre-condition to their equalisation in monetary circulation." Abstract labor is perfected only in actual exchange, where commodities as ideal money turn into real money."⁹⁸ This discussion of capital "positing" its "presuppositions" draws from passages in Marx such as this one in the *Grundrisse*: "The first moment took its point of departure from value, as it arose out of and "presupposed" circulation [...] the second moment proceeds from capital's presupposition and result of production; the third moment posits capital as a specific unity of circulation and production. (Relation between capital and labour, capitalist and worker itself (posited as result of the production process.)) [...] in order to come into being, capital presupposes a certain accumulation; which is already contained in the independent antithesis between objectified and living labor; in the independent survival of the antithesis. This accumulation, necessary for capital to come into being, which is therefore already included in its concept as presupposition as a moment—is to be distinguished essentially from accumulation of capital which has already become capital, where there must already be capital."⁹⁹

97 For another contemporary theory of capital as a totality see Fred Moseley, *Money and Totality: A Macromonetary Interpretation of Marx's Logic in Capital and the End of the Transformation Problem*, (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016). Here Moseley makes a case for the necessity of assessing capital as a totality by arguing the total-surplus value in production and distribution must be determined logically prior to its division into individual parts.

98 Ricardo Bellofiore, "Marx After Hegel: Capital as Totality and the Centrality of Production" *Crisis and Critique*, vol. 3, issue 3.

99 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 8.

Capital (through the actions of people acting as bearers of capital) therefore posit capitals own presuppositions so that the circuit of capital is treated as if it is complete and capital accumulation will be successful along every part of the circuit. I go into more detail about this in chapter 2, but what is important for our argument now is that the presumption of completeness to the circuit of capital operates in order for capital to function. In this way, capital needs to always be thought in terms of relaying across all the points of its totality. This understanding of totality as a function of capital has been essential in my work so that I can grapple with the wide social scale in which capital operates as a system. This theme that comes across in numerous ways throughout works such as *The Common Sense* in its depiction of a technology overlapping people's perceptions and economic processes throughout society, in *Parts-wholes 1*, specific people, and in *Parts-wholes 2*, labor conditions, are connected in geometric arrangements that suggest capital's reliance on networks of exchange, in the approach in *Crowds* to look at the Orlando labor, housing and food economy and *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social's* interrogation of connected economic, social and medical crises during COVID-19. All of these works relate to my understanding that capital functions as interconnected aspects of the economy and these impose abstractions on the social. However, the distinction I make and which I discuss in chapter 2 in opposition to Lukacs' idea of working-class struggle as a totality, is that the interconnected relations of capital's economy is not the same as erroneously claiming that capital creates a social totality.

Popular Unrest talks about capital as totality and people's conditions in relation to it. A line repeated by the people who work for the Spirit is "of course, you're special, special like everyone else." Big data is a computational means of analyzing information about extremely large portions of society. The approach I take in the script is not to undermine the individual but to imagine how capital's big data perspective locates individuals in a matrix of commodified tastes. The scientists that work for the Spirit say then that people are still special, but when compared computationally for profit, their individual personalities and experiences are only ever as special as everyone else's. One might say that these are the subjective stakes of what Postone, in the chapter's opening quote calls "impersonal, increasingly rationalized structural imperatives" that "cannot adequately be grasped in terms of class domination, or [...] the domination of social groupings." When the group finds out that their connection to one another were caused by exchanges overseen by the Spirit, they continue to ask the meaning of their coming together. When John as a representative of the grouping, asks "what was so special about our moment," meaning the moment when the spirit caused the connection between them, one scientist says: "there was nothing really special, just a random comparison on the system" and another adds "I think it was something like, you all said yes to the same magazine subscription." John pursues this, asking "what magazine was it?," adamantly searching for significance, so that he can ignore the fact that their group connection is a byproduct of capital's self-expansion.

In a scene in *Popular Unrest*, the group are inside the Spirit when they see something akin to Marx's concept of total social capital (connected to a Marxist conversation on totality), as if value can be seen as a prism with which to see all the exchange-related labors across the global accumulations of value.

Stephanie: “Look at all of them. [...] think it’s everyone.”

Mensah: “everyone?”

Stephanie: “It’s everyone isolated but all linked together.”

Mensah: “There it is. The total sum that links us all.”

Stephanie: “Our action are infinitely complex calculations. Everything passes through, is made equivalent, converted into values. That’s the connection.”

Christie and Padma speak together: “We can’t kill it. It’s us.”

Christie: “I feel like I can see it all clearly now. We think and act separately looking after ourselves, but together our actions are thinking as one with one end, but that end destroys us. It’s not the spirit. The spirit has made itself in this image. We are the thoughts that the totality thinks. It holds us, it is us, holding ourselves hostage, as us but not us. Why don’t we just let us go?”

Though the film comes to a somewhat dour conclusion, with the group ending up trapped in the Spirit, the group do end the film on a high note when they say, speaking together as one: “We’re alive only in Spirit, in the relations between values... but at least we’re together.” As I explained, the purpose of this extended discussion of *Popular Unrest*, a work that predates the PhD, is to establish concepts so that I can more easily unfold them in a discussion of my next video works made in the PhD, *The Common Sense, Parts-wholes, The Bay Area Protests, Crowds, Home Together* and *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social*. When artist Allan Sekula talks about making his work that looks at economic conditions within maritime industries, he reaches for imagery redolent of a discussion of totality: “What we’re struggling with is the big story. No one thinks they can tell the big story anymore, everyone has given up. They’re feeling hopeless about the ability. And, of course, one sees that. Because I teach in an art school, I know how difficult it is for example for younger people to feel that they can tell this story. Obviously, maybe in economics its similar to the term microeconomics, away from macroeconomics, tending your little garden while the whole earth is trembling.”¹⁰⁰

The challenge, as Sekula put it, is to take on the big story as it is in reality. For me this has meant letting my work grow beyond depictions mainly focused on real abstractions as in *Popular Unrest*, to start to apply this understanding of capitalist abstraction to make video projects that tackle the economy as real lived histories and conditions. Capital sets into motion myriad layers of real abstractions that play

100 Panel discussion with Allan Sekula, Benjamin Buchloh, and David Harvey at Cooper Union, New York, May 15, 2011. Video: <https://vimeo.com/24394711>. (accessed online Oct 5, 2022).

out in systemic social processes. However, to look, on the one hand, at how people experience conditions in capitalism, and, on the other hand, to put these into relation with real abstractions is a challenging project. The big story cannot be summarized in just one method or the other, e.g. not scenarios that deal only with abstractions nor only with particular conditions. It needs to put these into relationship in some way. Film against capitalism needs to tackle the problem of manifesting this relationship to look at so many different conditions of lived abstraction. For my own part, I would be “tending to” a “little garden” if I neglect to explore capital’s abstractions as I am in the PhD.

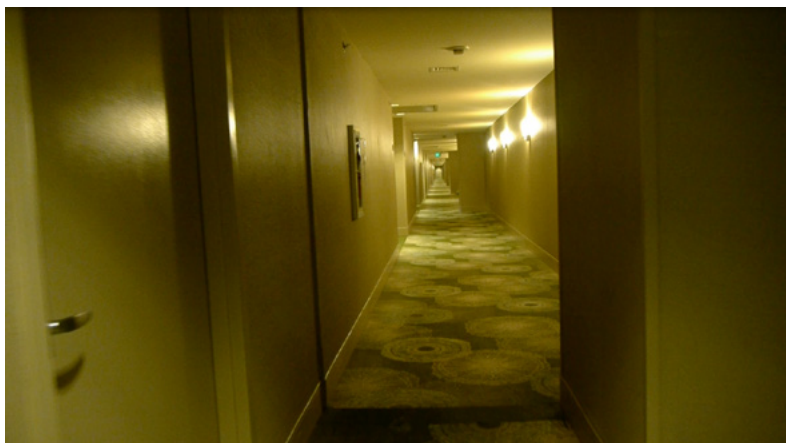
Parts-wholes is a work made during the PhD shortly after *The Common Sense*. The work is a sculptural video installation that tries to materialize the relations between equivalents in capital as they are reflected in people’s lives. Exchange is a network of relations that is immaterial and is only normally conceptualized in theoretical terms. The *Parts-wholes* works are sculptural video installations consisting of cubes whose faces are each made of twelve television screens connected through an arrangement of metal poles. I made *Parts-wholes 1* and then a year later *Parts-Wholes 2* and those works take different approaches. In both the *Parts-wholes* works, these metal bars configure the television screens into cube forms. Cubes demarcate units of space. A large part of the project is the way that the structures of metal bars that hold together the cubes actualize thoughts I have had for many years around how the abstractions of exchange connect the social synthesis in exchange. How can we picture the way social synthesis connects people’s activity? As I have been discussing, there is a brutality to the way that activities and labor conditions are linked by exchange. One is not able to know exactly how all these exchanges relate to one another within the matrix of exchanges, but what would be other ways of representing this destructive tissue of social synthesis? *Parts-wholes* is a frustrating attempt to visualize the harmful social synthesis of exchange that holds capitalist society together by confining, subjugating, and oppressing.

That process of attempting to materialize intangible connections of equivalence made in exchange is in *Parts-wholes 1* and *Parts-Wholes 2*. *Parts-wholes 1* is a sculptural arrangement of two cubes that are dense clusters of moving images that show a person during a working day. Two women who appear in *Parts-wholes 1* are people that I am friends with. One of them is Gaby, a 21-years old working as a driver with a cab company in Newburgh. I met her because for two years, I travelled to a chiropractor in Upstate New York for weekly and sometimes bi-weekly health appointments related to my health condition, multiple sclerosis. The other person that I met, Vinita, was a friend of my partner at the time, she was 36 and worked in a publishing house when I got to know her while I was doing a residency at CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Art in San Francisco. In a very modest way, I wanted to film people at work in a way that gives a sense of how different labors connect in the US economy so that the work could reflect on economic and political changes happening in these times. While making the work, I sought to emphasize particular qualities of people’s working lives, which concern uneven social conditions, and the enmeshment of the economic and extra-economic. I worked with people who are in my life, so I did not choose people to work with in an objective manner. In this way, the piece does not emulate a sociological study, however it does incorporate statistics and information

to picture labor and living conditions in the U.S. These statistics are not presented in a neutral manner and sometimes the uneven and unequal social relations and dynamics they illustrate become explicit, for instance, in figures of people moving to and out of San Francisco show that fewer people of color are living in the city, perhaps a reflection of San Francisco's gentrification making its housing economy prohibitively expensive. The inclusion of such information as part of the work was a way that the piece collided details of social conditions that impact how people live with the video footage. As MacDougall points out, it is harder for film to show abstract information, and this is true also for economic and social conditions that affect the women's experiences of their labor. The many facets of life that that people live in capitalism cannot be summed up in any way by the notion of totality. This is life abbreviated and fit within a forbidding metal structure that literalizes abstract exchange to indicate the distance between capital's exchange as structuring social relations and actual social relations of people's lives.

In the next version, *Parts-wholes 2*, I showed one cube focused on low-wage labor and living conditions in Orlando's service economy. The work did not look at specific people as nodes in the mesh of relation in capital, but rather looked at labor contexts and how work, housing and other living conditions relate to people's situations. I travelled to Orlando to research the main industries in the city's economy, the entertainment and hospitality industries. My research led me to film in a hotel, a motel and the airport, showing the ways that the housing and hospitality accommodation landscape of Orlando are intertwined with the social reproduction of people receiving low wages. This aspects of the work came out of research I was doing into Orlando's Disney theme parks after I learned about a work dispute with Disney where several unions were asking them to increase wages. Researching the project, I found out that wages in Orlando's hospitality industries were extremely low, while the rents and other costs of living in Orlando were so high that many employees have to live in low-price motels, one of which I filmed in, or sleep in their cars because they cannot afford rent. One woman working for Disney in Anaheim, California died that way.¹⁰¹ Video faces on the cube show staff working in a big hotel and promotional shots of the hotel rooms. Across two facets of the cube plays footage of an airport, the Orlando tourist economy made a prominent feature in the work. In this way, this second iteration of *Parts-wholes 2* also grew into an extended exploration of the Orlando entertainment economy, in my episodic video, *Crowds*. This shift from *Parts-wholes 2* to *Crowds*, helped me understand living in these economic conditions with more involvement in the details of experiencing those conditions.

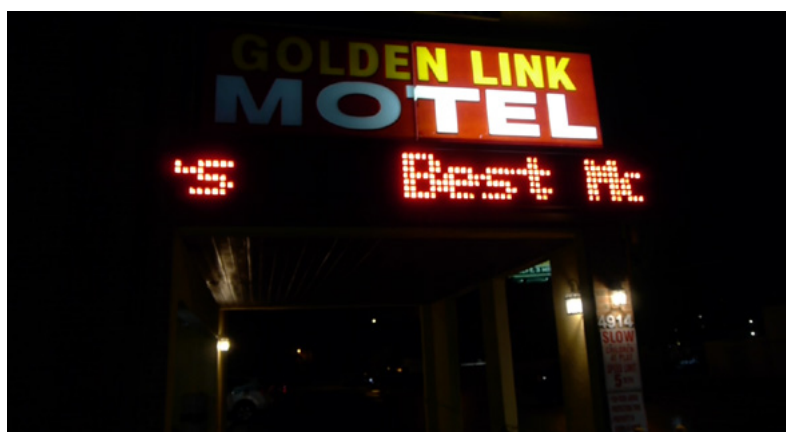
101 Vanessa Munoz, "The Price of Wonderland: Homeless Disney Worker Dies in Car," *Left Voice*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.leftvoice.org/the-price-of-wonderland-homeless-disney-worker-dies-in-car/> (accessed Oct 5, 2022)



Melanie Gilligan, *Parts-wholes 2*, 2018, multi-channel video sculpture. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.



Melanie Gilligan, *Parts-wholes 2*, 2018, multi-channel video sculpture. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.



Melanie Gilligan, *Parts-wholes 2*, 2018, multi-channel video sculpture. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

In both sections of *Parts-wholes*, I was influenced by Minimalist and Conceptual artists such as Charlotte Posenenske, Stephen Willats and Marianne Wex and in the 1960s and 70s and the documentary films of Frederick Wiseman, all of whom developed methods to reflect on social systems. With the *Parts-wholes project*, I began doing my own cinematography for the first time. I found myself very involved in the filming, getting absorbed in everyday activities, interactions and striking scenes. Holding the camera, I found myself drawn to the details of people's lives, of working and living environments. Capital's "laws of motion" may have general dynamics that can be discussed in aggregates of workers and so forth, yet in the period in which I made *Parts-wholes 2* and *Crowds*, I kept finding myself confronted by how putting the relationship between lived experiences of subjects and their labor, together with representations of structures of capital, be they in the cubes structures of *Parts-wholes* or the fiction of *Service Week*, was upsetting. I was making work about by the brutality of the economy. I made *The Bay Area Protest*, *Parts-wholes 2* and *Crowds* during the extremely alarming period of Donald Trump's presidency and, as many people did, I felt that it was necessary to confront the racism being mobilized by Trump. I wanted to confront the racialization of labor in both *Part-wholes* and *Crowds*. Meanwhile, in my research for the PhD and writing I began to research of how Marxist histories in which the idea of capital's logic and "laws of motion" have often been wielded to exclude social movements and struggles of people of color.¹⁰² That exclusion was explained as not being struggles against capital, because racialization of labor was not understood as part of capitals "laws of motion."¹⁰³ I profoundly disagree with this idea and I think that any Marxist project that reflects on capital accurately, needs to be a picture of racial capitalism. *Parts-wholes* and *Crowds* reflect two different approaches to depicting the U.S. labor economy and racialization of labor while I explored the systemic racism of police violence in *The Bay Area Protests*.

A BRIEF INTERLUDE TO DISCUSS ART, PRACTICE AND AESTHETIC AUTONOMY

I want to return to the discussion of Romantic aesthetics and transdisciplinarity in the introduction for one moment. As I have just outlined, there are ways that my video projects deal with capitalist social processes that involve abstractions that relate to larger

102 Christina Heatherton: "Not Just Being Right, But Getting Free: Reflections on Class, Race and Marxism," Verso website. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3317-not-just-being-right-but-getting-free-reflections-on-class-race-and-marxism> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

103 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Class, Race, and Capitalism*, https://advancethestruggle.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/how_does_race_relate_to_class-2.pdf (accessed Oct 5, 2022)

systemic conditions that take shape in individual behaviors, straddling distances between particular experiences and larger socio-political dynamics of capital. This makes me acutely aware that after spending this period discussing theoretical abstraction, I need to anchor this in discussion of what this means in relation to my aesthetic concerns for my work and make the work I make. To be absolutely clear, I consider discussions such as the last section on abstraction to be aesthetic. In these works, I had thoughts about aesthetics, I had thoughts about politics, I had thoughts about economics, all mixed in together. So, before I continue my discussion, I will take a brief interlude to explain how I understand the inclusion of the economic in my artwork.

In the introduction, I describe my approach as related to Romantic aesthetics, and transdisciplinarity. As I stated there, Romantic aesthetics is an expanded view that rejects the idea that aesthetics is separated from practical and theoretical aspects of life. This perspective comes across in “The Oldest Program of German Idealism,” which though written in Hegel’s handwriting, is considered to be penned by G.W.F Hegel, F.W.J. Schelling or the poet Friedrich Holderlin. The short piece states “I am convinced now, that the highest act of reason, which in that it comprises all ideas, is an aesthetic act” asserting that “one cannot be full of spirit, one cannot even reason about history with wit and spirit without an aesthetic sensibility.”¹⁰⁴ The piece impresses on the reader that one cannot use reason without aesthetics, and the authors states that: “...poetry achieves a higher dignity, she becomes again in the end what she was in the beginning *teacher of humanity*; for there no longer exists any philosophy, any history; poetry alone will survive all other sciences and arts. [...] Monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of the imagination and art, those are what we need!”¹⁰⁵ The Romantic notion of the aesthetic outlined here did not view aesthetics as a separate area of inquiry but as able to shape all aspects of human life.¹⁰⁶ This is important because I have often found that the subject matter I look at, whether it is more focused on economics or labor, and my approaches to knowledge in my work, sometimes encounter situations in art that suggest certain unwritten limits on art exploration.

As Friedrich Schlegel says in his *Critical Fragments* no. 115 “all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.”¹⁰⁷ This is very different from my criticism earlier in this chapter about Brecht and his willingness to make theater a predictive science. Schlegel is talking about the precepts of science changing because of their contact with art. He develops this in the *Athenaeum Fragments*, describing the destiny of ““Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn’t merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make

104 The Oldest Program of German Idealism in *Friedrich Holderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 155 (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

105 Ibid., 155.

106 Stanford encyclopedia <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-19th-romantic/> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

107 Friedrich Schlegel, *Critical Fragments, Lucinde and the Fragments*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 149.

poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical.”¹⁰⁸ Theoretical knowledge about life and society are fused in *Critical Fragment* no. 55 “A really free and cultivated person ought to be able to attune himself at will to being philosophical or philological, critical or poetical, historical or rhetorical, ancient or modern: quite arbitrarily, just as one tunes an instrument, at any time and to any degree.”¹⁰⁹ Why then, 200 hundred years later, would moving image artworks motivated by economic questions seen through political resistance to capitalism be considered to dabble in areas somehow less aesthetic?

I locate the answer to this question in the antinomies of aesthetic autonomy in the present conjuncture. Founded on Kant’s arguments in *The Critique of Judgement* regarding non-purposive creation, Kant emphasizes that art is rational “because of its ground and responsiveness to a claim, but non-cognitive insofar as it cannot be subsumed under concepts.” Identifying art with feeling, he says that “feeling does not determine any concrete property that its object has independently of subjectivity (as cognition would), but is rather responsive to a relation between a subject and an object.”¹¹⁰ In the face of a nascent bourgeois autonomy for art such as that described by H. Kuhn quoted in Peter Burger’s *Theory of the Avant-garde* “The various arts were removed from the context of everyday life and conceived of as something that could be treated as a whole. As the realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure, this whole was contrasted with the life of society which it seemed the task of the future to order rationally, in strict adaptation to definable ends.”¹¹¹ This aesthetic autonomy that divorces aesthetic production from economic imperatives and instrumental pressures encourages the avoidance of involvement in capitalist social processes *tout court*. In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno typifies this by saying: “Its autonomy (that of art) surely remains irrevocable. It is impossible to conceive of the autonomy of art without covering up work.”¹¹² As is well-know, Adorno put the autonomy of art in modernity at the center of his aesthetic theory. Benjamin Buchloh comments that Adorno’s argument in the book “is not historically informed by the actual transformations of aesthetic practice that took place within the twentieth century itself.”¹¹³ Adorno especially ignored the way “that the concept of autotelic purity was actually dismantled early in the century [...] in the aesthetics of Duchamp and Dada after 1913, but even more so in the wake of Constructivist abstraction and Productivist aesthetics in the Soviet Union between 1919 and 1925.” He further describes that “the actual transformation of the structure of the aesthetic object and of the author-audience relationship” among other

108 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragment, Lucinde and the Fragments*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 174.

109 *Ibid.*, 149.

110 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.

111 Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 42.

112 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (London: Athlone Books, 1997).

113 Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955-1975*, (London: Blackwell Publisher, 2002), 209.

transformations in art production were produced by social changes such as “technological advances” and “social emancipation and political liberation.”¹¹⁴ This was followed by further re-conceptions of aesthetic autonomy that responded to the autonomy of Abstract Expressionism such as Minimalism, Land Art, and Conceptual art. “What Adorno’s traditional modernist thought failed to recognize is that those aesthetic changes and those new technological and social conditions constituted a historically irreversible reality, and that they would continue to do so in spite of the subsequent bureaucratization of socialism and the conquest of the unconscious by postwar advertising and commodification. Indeed, in the meantime, they have become as much of a historical reality as the bourgeois culture of Modernism and its concepts of autonomy.”¹¹⁵ Buchloh is pointing out that while Adorno had a fairly radical comprehension of aesthetic autonomy as it relates to labor and the economy in capitalism, Buchloh describes that aesthetic autonomy is not an irrefutable state of affairs that continues to persist in the way Adorno describes. If Kant’s argument in *The Critique of Judgement* and the development of the bourgeois art market represent moments when the history of bourgeois autonomy held sway, many other moments continually occur that transform the field of arts’ autonomy as Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt describe throughout their book *Reproducing Autonomy*.¹¹⁶

Buchloh describes that in the present “artistic practices that” “incorporate those changes into their conception of art production [...] appear to be instrumental as well as [...] implicated in the totality of technocratic and administrative logic.” They are seen to behave a “rationalistic character” which is deemed “especially egregious during a period (like our own) when sudden emphasis is placed on [...] art that nostalgically turns back to the historical origins of bourgeois culture.” We are left with the contradiction that art throughout the 20th c. set up the conditions for art to contribute to what Schiller would call the endeavors of a “really free cultivated person,” however, this is often opposed by art market conditions, with an art establishment preference that demarcates what aesthetic exploration can be. To return to Adorno’s comment that “it is impossible to conceive of the autonomy of art without covering up work,” he raises a difficulty. Work reproduces people’s lives in capitalism. Art’s autonomy repels art that involves the quotidian and practical need to acquire a means of subsistence “Apartness from the praxis of life, which had always been the condition that characterized the way art functioned in bourgeois society, now becomes its content.”¹¹⁷ This “apartness” that now becomes art’s content explains the relative silence of art and film on the economic, social, political and environmental crises of the present. Recent Marxist art theoretical work such as Marina Vishmidt, Dave Beech and Stewart

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy*, (London: Mute Magazine Publishing, 2016).

117 Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, University of Minnesota Press, Cambridge, 1984. p. 48.

Martin's have dealt with imbrication of art in capital's logics and particularly Beech has emphasized art's distinction from the commodity.¹¹⁸

Thierry De Duve asks a perspicacious question in *Kant after Duchamp Art*: ““...everything we call art.” What at first rose before you [...] now appears to you as the necessary object of a consensus—a consensus, furthermore, that ought to be universal. [...] You cannot nor do you want to neglect the fact that despite its social weight, consensus—in art as in other domains of social life—is always somewhat blurry and unreal; that it is never anything but a statistical distribution of opinions, bunching up around its mean but significant above all in its standard deviation; that it is suspect even when it is that of the majority, because the unequal spread of cultural capital tends to base all polls on art on some cultural poll tax. You are highly aware that the inventory of things constituting our cultural heritage does not equally belong to all of us.”¹¹⁹ De Duve does not pretend that consensus in the worlds of art equally belongs to all of us. Instead, it displays formations of power. Art relies on a social consensus of acceptance as art, and equally, the ways that art subjects are considered relevant or disregarded requires a certain degree consensus. The period since the 2007-08 economic crisis when the world descended into an economic downturn that has not yet abated, we saw an ongoing period when social movements have addressed the destruction propelled by capital and its institution. It is clear that artistic exploration of political and economic conditions that we live in are particularly relevant at a moment when conditions are very dire and are increasingly becoming unbearable. Yet many of the rules of art's autonomy that are “contrasted with the life of society” hold back aesthetic investigations, keeping art in check. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno completely clarifies what political situation this aesthetic autonomy produces when he says the artwork as “the absolute commodity would be free of ideology inherent in the commodity form, which pretends to exist for-another. Whereas ironically it is something merely for-itself: It exists for those who hold power.” Even though power can hold sway, incredibly thought-provoking work and endless dissent finds audiences, and more is waiting in the wings, as we plunge into new waves of social crisis. Art that challenges prevailing conditions reflect the type of thought that Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt say has an aesthetic “autonomy of materialisations,” rather than the modernist “autonomy from materialisations.”¹²⁰

118 Marina Vishmidt, *Speculation as a Mode of Production: Forms of Value Subjectivity in Art and Capital*, (London: Historical Materialism Book Series/Brill Publishing, 2018); Dave Beech, *Art & Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*, (London: Historical Materialism Book Series/ Brill Publishing, 2015); Stewart Martin, “The Absolute Artwork meets the Absolute Commodity,” *Radical Philosophy*, 2007.

119 Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 15.

120 Kerstin Stakemeier and Marin Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy*, (London: Mute Magazine Publishing, 2016).

IDEOLOGICAL ABSTRACTION

The next type of abstraction we will discuss is recognizably the purview of art: the realms of political ideology. Beyond the real abstractions of capital, Postone’s statement about deep structures that reproduces capitalism leads us to a kind of abstraction that Ollman says Marx discusses in his work, ideological abstraction that shape the political possibilities in a society. “...Abstractions are the basic unit of ideology, the inescapable ideational result of living and working in alienated society. “Freedom,” for example, is said to be such an abstraction whenever we remove the real individual from “the conditions of existence within which these individuals enter into contact.” Omitting the conditions that make freedom possible (or impossible)—including the real alternatives available, the role of money, the socialization of the person choosing, et cetera—from the meaning of “freedom” leaves a notion that can only distort and obfuscate even that part of reality it sets out to convey.”¹²¹ Ollmann discusses the types of abstraction as “different, though closely related” and one can see, after looking at capitalist abstractions, that ideological abstractions are also reproduced in social practices. The correspondences between these two types of abstraction are not direct, but it is clear that material, economic conditions effect political ideology and vice versa. Ideological abstractions are then a type of abstraction that have a complex relay between practices and thoughts, that people live out as ideas propagated in society, distinct from, but connected to, how capitalist abstractions relate to practice. In the preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*, Marx says: “a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, *ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict* [i.e. that between the material productive forces of society and the existing relations of production] and fight it out.”¹²²

I did not initially have ideology as the main concern in my work, but rather approached the topics I look at through how capitalist practices inform thought. For this reason, reading Marxist analysis of ideology, for instance, the analysis of Gramsci or Althusser, has not previously played a large role in my video projects. However, my works in the PhD, *Parts-wholes*, *The Bay Area Protests*, *Crowds*, *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social* and *Home Together* play out in the field of ideology. This was already prominent in my work *The Common Sense*. It is notable that I arrived at questions related to ideology through an interest in the economic conditions of capital, and these led me to look at legal systems, policing, housing and its economies, capitalist infrastructural systems such as transportation systems, and how these impact people in their daily lives. The ideologies that shape bias and discrimination including racism,

121 Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 62.

122 Karl Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface-abs.htm> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and many further forms of discrimination are reproduced in capitalist societies and it is incredibly pressing that these are combatted. For this reason, a discussion of ideology has become very prominent in my work. By changing my work to focus, not on stories that I conceive of as playing out entirely on film sets but instead happening on the streets in cities, in people's homes, in the social conditions of daily life in capitalism, the topics that I explored in the PhD took me in new directions. One might say, I started looking at ideology more closely because, as I worked in this way that came into contact with everyday conditions that people live in, I encountered a lot of capitalist ideologies. With *The Bay Area Protests*, the work reflected on the imposition of austerity ideology in California after the 2007-08 crisis in relation to the social crisis of systemic police violence against people of color. In *Crowds*, I observe the capitalist flexible and unstable service economy of Orlando, and this comes across through interviews discussing the low-wage conditions in the city and filming protest about how undocumented immigrants are being criminalized in the state of Florida. I found myself looking at conditions that reflect the ways that ideologies can make connections between aspects of capitalist systems, for instance, between areas of the labor economy with histories of racism in *Crowds*. The intertwined nature of these ideologies with capital has made adoption of theoretical frameworks such as racial capitalism and social reproduction feminism that recognize interrelations and distinctions that are extremely important for my practice. My video projects lead me to overlapping sets of social discussions. It was important when I was making these projects to reflect how capitalist real abstractions are intertwined with ideological abstractions in ways that are multi-causal, for instance, in the interrelation of capitalism with social systems of racial, gendered, homophobic, transphobic and ableist oppression and the relationships of these to class. Working on these projects, I increasingly see that filmmaking is highly suited for showing and articulating in practice-thought how ideologies are abstractions that arise in practices. These are part of systems of social relations that capital is dependent upon. In *Crowds*, Irene connects to a group of people involved in the union Unite Here at a protest in the Tallahassee legislature against the state passing racist immigration laws that criminalize undocumented people.

The Bay Area Protests was made during a residency at the Wattis in San Francisco in 2016. It depicts a recent history during the period from 2009 to 2011 which involved a series of protests that happened in the San Francisco Bay Area. The series of protests erupted after the killing of Oscar Grant by a white police officer, Johannes Mehserle, in Oakland, then student strikes took place against the 35% increase to university tuitions across the UC system as a result of the California budget crisis. This was followed by the Oakland Commune, an encampment during the Occupy movement which was much more radical in its attitude regarding police, the state and its intention to challenge capitalism. My approach with *The Bay Area Protests* was to imagine documentary style depiction of events combined with fiction filmmaking that imagined the political possibilities that these protests outlined. The film had two different filming scenarios with very different meanings. One was the imagined space of the Kaiser Convention Center, a building that the Oakland Commune tried to occupy toward the end of the occupation of Oscar Grant Plaza. Although in actuality, the Oakland Commune never occupied the Kaiser Convention Center, in *The Bay*

Area Protests it is imagined that they did. The Oakland Commune built a collective and autonomous struggle against capitalism visible from banners and literature produced during the events. The scene opens with four Oakland Commune members setting up in the Kaiser Convention Center, waiting for others to arrive to a meeting. As they do this, they act out scenarios where an interested person from the nearby neighborhood comes up and asks the occupiers questions about the camp in Oscar Grant Plaza. Then the members of the Oakland Commune ask each other questions about the daily life of the camp and we hear about their political intentions behind the camp as well as what they were addressing. In the other scenes in the film, we watch imagined versions of court cases where the characters from the imagined Oakland Commune Kaiser Convention Center occupation circulate between playing different roles of court judge, defense lawyer, prosecuting lawyer and witness to tell major events that sparked the protests of these years: Oscar Grant's killing is recounted and the protests that erupted afterwards, students who get arrested during the university protests are on trial and the court discuss events during the Oakland Commune. Thus, the story is retold in the framework of the state repression that these protests faced. The events when told in a California state courtroom make evident how the repressive framework of the court, constrains communication of events and misrepresents them.

These scenes are a stark contrast to the Kaiser Convention Center's imagined characters. The intention of this telling is to convey that the litigious framework of the courts prevents events of the protest being experienced as sympathetic to these movements and cut off from the experience of protest. Instead, the framework imposes limits on how events can be understood. The viewer hears how different logics of the two discussions are. When the characters who occupy the Kaiser Convention Center switch to a discussion the court room the court scenes are intercut with found footage that show us the span of time of these events took place in news reports and uploaded footage. The courts ignore the ideology in their austerity policies and structural racism of policing, imposing normative legal frameworks that conceal the oppression and bias of its laws. The prosecution makes moralistic arguments against protest echoed by unsupportive media centered in defending private property. The systemic racist violence of policing and the legal system that was exposed by the extrajudicial killing of Oscar Grant, can only be addressed by systemic change. The court scenes are starkly disconnected from the experiences of the protests. The two scenes embodying these two perspectives express how social movements are facing off with racist, classist, capitalist ideologies. The people in the Oakland Commune tried to meet people's needs for food and shelter, when so many were encountering deepening poverty because of the ongoing crisis of capitalism known as the Great Recession. Events of the Oakland Commune, such as the 2011 Oakland General Strike when protesters shut down the Port of Oakland, play alongside footage about the historical context of the struggles. We hear about the camp's response to the police, the media and other members of the public, getting across how the Oakland Commune was a collective action that addressed the deteriorating economic conditions and joblessness, thereby the camp both prefigured better societal forms than capitalism while within the movements, people questioned these approaches. The Black Panthers were a major influence on the Oakland Commune as the vision of the Black Panthers was to address the needs of Black communities ravaged by the myriad societal impacts of structural racism.

The film weaves together past events in the Black Panthers struggle against police repression along with other dimensions of 1960s and 70s anti-racist, anti-patriarchal anti-capitalist struggle. A strong seam of found footage interwoven with the acted scenes in *The Bay Area Protests* is a recurring theme of social movements in the 1960s against police repression, where we see extensive footage of Angela Davis speaking against state repression of political prisoners in the U.S. An aspect of the video shoot that was a poignant coincidence was that all the court room scenes were filmed in the Marin County Courthouse, the site of the shoot out when the Jonathan Jackson, brother of George Jackson, tried to get the Soledad Brothers released. The violent state repression against Black struggle led to the death of Jonathan Jackson, and the people who helped him. The event also led to Angela Davis's jail sentence.



Melanie Gilligan, *The Bay Area Protests*, 2016-2022. single channel video.
Still image credit: Cyrus Tabar. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

The work looks at many facets of police violence and state repression in order to trace some of the ways that violence gets meted out against protest, though various factors make this violence extremely different, a prominent one being how structural racism in laws and policing creates conditions anti-Black violence. Perry Anderson points out that Gramsci speaks of the “problem of the consensual legitimacy of parliamentary institutions in Western Europe” as happening alongside coercion.¹²³ Police repression is one of the ongoing methods of constraining protest.

To tell the story of how the economic crisis of 2008 hit California is to tell how it hit different social groups distributing its violence unevenly across the social field. To put this in relation to systemic police violence against Black people happening simultaneously opened up the connections between capitalist violence and state violence, especially its systemic racist violence, while not asserting simple causal correspondences between economic conditions and racial violence. Rather I understand racist violence as historically and currently entrenched within US society, so this

¹²³ Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonia Gramsci,” *New Left Review*, Nov/Dec, (1976).

aspect of the state is in no way reducible to the capitalist social crisis of that moment. It is essential that we look at the racist ideologies that change alongside racist laws and how they adjust in tandem with racist state and private economic policies. Against the notion that anti-Black violence such as Oscar Grant's killing is extra-economic, my research in this project follows thinkers such as Ruth Wilson-Gilmore and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor that treat such violence as complex conditions of racial capitalism. In recent years, an ending to *The Bay Area Protests* has been possible because of protests in 2020 that shook the US and the world, when protests against the police killing of George Floyd culminated in worldwide protests. Black Lives Matter was at the center of that. The movement began after Oscar Grant's killing, when Trayvon Martin was killed by white vigilante, George Zimmerman. However, Alicia Garza has discussed that Oscar Grant's death at the hands of police officer Johannes Meserle a few years earlier was an influence that helped to start the movement. In *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor points to a type of policing oriented around productivity quotas with the police monitoring their progress in "daily measurables" and metrics satisfied by increasing arrests, which are all too often systemic racist arrests of Black and Brown people. This project delves into the ways that racist ideological abstractions are interspersed with economic abstraction. In writing his essay "On Race, Violence, and "So-Called Primitive Accumulation,"" Nikhil Singh describes police violence in these terms: "insofar as this variety of capitalism reproduces divisions between (re)productive humanity and disposable humanity, might we not further recognize how this very division is mediated by the shifting productions of race as a logic of depreciation linked to: 1) proletarianization as a condition of "wageless life"—the norm of capitalism insofar as it produces radical market dependency and surplus labour—and 2) the regular application of force and violence within those parts of the social that subsequently have no part?"¹²⁴ *The Bay Area Protests* is a social history of struggles against capitalism and state, of how people who no longer want to live in brutally violent and deteriorating conditions resisted and fought.

THOUGHT

ABSTRACTION

A further statement from Bertell Ollman's book *Dance of the Dialectic* where he outlines the forms of abstraction discussed by Marx, this time not as capital's abstractions nor as ideological abstraction, is instead his description of thought as a process of abstracting "the mental activity of subdividing the world into the mental constructs with which we think about it..." Elsewhere "the role Marx gives to [thought] abstraction is simple recognition of the fact that all thinking about reality begins by breaking it

124 Nikhil Pal Singh, "On Race, Violence and So-called Primitive Accumulation," *The Futures of Black Radicalism*, (London: Verso, 2017), 53.

down into manageable parts.”¹²⁵ Ollman goes on to ask a series of questions about these thought-abstraction that make us understand the importance of abstraction for our own discussion of film against capitalism. “What do such abstractions make possible, perhaps necessary and what do they make difficult or even impossible? Consider what a wide-angle photograph does in giving value to what is included, to what crowds the edges as well as what appears at the center. Notice the relations it establishes as important, or at least relevant, and even the explanations that are implicit in what is included and what is left out.”¹²⁶ This helps us to return to the simplest meaning of abstraction that holds together all of these forms of abstraction we are discussing. Abstraction is “the mental activity of subdividing the world into mental constructs that separate “and categorizes, applying various understandings.”¹²⁷ Bertell Ollman calls this process of thought abstraction “rather like a microscope that can be set at different degrees of magnification, [...] enable[ing] us to see the unique qualities of any part”¹²⁸. Ollmann uses metaphors of vision, degree of focus and frame of perspective and I am struck by how similar these descriptions are to process of framing and focusing with a film or video camera. A filmmaker shows the world they construct through framing the aspects of their visual and conceptual schema they want to show the viewer. The filmmaker abstracts from situations, editing and implicitly shaping the many types of knowledge that come across on the film, which Ollmann describes as the level of focus to be used in the story. Beyond the director, a film writer, and editor focuses a scene on certain aspects of plot structure, action, character development and dialogue writing. To continue Ollmann’s photography metaphor, along with denoting the angle of view, and the degree of dilation of the lens, it is also very interesting to think of the level and quality of focus on particular subject (e.g. intense, soft and the degree of intensity through affective strategies), the lighting on the subjects in the shot.

My interest in a discussion of film as thought is influenced by my own approach in my practice of seeing films as thought problems.¹²⁹ It is also connected to Sergei Eisenstein’s idea of film as thought which has subsequently been explored by Gilles Deleuze who describes Eisenstein as theorizing film as connecting the percept to the concept.¹³⁰ Can Ollman’s discussion of thought abstraction as discussed in Marx’s writings be applied to these filmmaking questions? I consider this discussion of thought abstraction to be relevant to filmmaking about capital because film as thought about practice, relations and social dynamics are depicted in films, though

125 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign: Illinois University Press, 2003), 61-62. As I have already described in a previous note, although Ollmann describes four, the first and second are the distinction of thought abstraction as a noun and a verb, so I have simplified this as thought abstraction in general.

126 Ibid., 76.

127 Ibid., 62.

128 Ibid., 75.

129 Melanie Gilligan, “Affect & Exchange,” *Filip*, (2012).

130 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, (London: Athlone Press, 2000) 157. “According to Eisenstein, the first moment goes from the image to thought, from the percept to the concept.”

their portrayal in ways that open political discussion may be infrequent. A discussion that can tease out the political implications of framing that thought abstraction does in film, is Diana Kendall's close study of film, television and media representations of class in the United States, *Framing Class: Media Representation of Wealth and Poverty in America*. Kendall shows that the media in the U.S. tend to glorify the upper class because of an implicit hierarchization of class interests. She does this by demonstrating the way that "the framing of stories about the middle, working, and poor classes may maintain and justify larger class based inequalities in the United States."¹³¹ "Media products [...] have the symbolic capacity to define the world for people and to limit the terms of debate if someone challenges ideologies implicitly or explicitly set forth in the media product."¹³² Her book directly addresses how formal qualities of film and television representations make aesthetic and political meanings at once. "By analyzing how the media socially construct meanings about class, we can more clearly see how ideology and everything that passes for knowledge in our society can affect our thinking about inequality and our personal identity in regard to the class structure." A theoretical approach referred to as the social construction of reality, Kendall describes how the information that people "gain from the media to construct a picture of class and inequality" that they "come to accept as reality" is in the words of sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, a "socially constructed reality."¹³³

The aspect that Kendall describes that is most akin to Ollman's visual metaphors for thought abstraction is the elaboration of framing. "Framing is the process by which sense is made of events. When we read a newspaper or watch television or a movie, we live vicariously: we do not actually experience firsthand the event that we are reading about or seeing. Instead, we experience a mediated form of communication in which images and words supply us with information that shapes our perceptions of the world around us. The media selectively frame the world, and these frames manipulate salience, meaning media direct audiences to consider certain features or key points and to ignore or minimize others."¹³⁴ Framing directs the audience to consider an idea or ignore it, shine light on the parts of a scene and obscure or crop out other areas you do not want to show. In the introduction and chapter 1, I talk about the connection between film as practice-thought and capital as thought as it is dealt with in Marxist writing. It is helpful that Kendall speaks of framing in terms of thought, articulating why framing is an overtly cognitive act, as this makes us realize that the correlation between film as thought, and capital as thought is occurs in the way that in film, framing is a cognitive act and it is a process of forming capitalist concepts, an idea we will elucidate in chapter 2. "According to Goffman, frames serve as cognitive structures that guide perception and the representation of reality. Frames denote schemata of interpretation that make it possible for people "to locate, perceive, identify, and

131 Diana Kendall, *Framing Class: Media Representation of Wealth and Poverty in America*, (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 4.

132 Ibid., 6.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., 8.

label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large. However, Goffman did not believe that individuals consciously manufacture frames; he thought that we unconsciously adopt them in the course of communication so that we can deal with reality and attempt to choose appropriate repertoires of cognition and action. Thus, a key argument of Goffman’s frame analysis is that individuals make sense of their everyday lives by devising frames that shape and compartmentalize their experiences and help them explain the realm of objects and events around them.”¹³⁵ This discussion brings us closer to how films can create pictures that are politically biased toward interests of one group over another, but also how they can reframe the concepts that are currently being used to present the world from a capitalist perspective.

COLLECTIVE COLLECTIVE

NARRATIVES, CHARACTERS

One of the main arguments of this book as it progresses will be that films against capital are much stronger by focusing on social relations, rather than uncritically adopting the idea that films about capital need to depart from the concept of cognitive mapping employed as a theoretical framework in Toscano and Kinkle’s *Cartographies of the Absolute*. I will tackle this in chapter 2 through an extended discussion of Kinkle and Toscano’s book. Before arriving at this, my reflections on my own work will look at one extremely potent aspect: how social relations are configured in film. In this section we will see the three forms of abstraction that I just elucidated influencing the type of social formations I deploy in my videos. Films present ideas and in so doing obscure other emphases, as our discussions of film communication and thought abstraction has emphasized. It is not particularly visible how oppressively film promotes one idea of the social over other possible social pictures because filmgoers and TV audiences are extremely familiar with dramatic conventions. Conservative politician Margaret Thatcher’s infamous statement that “There is no society. There are only men women and families” could easily be seen to reflect the tendency of mainstream film storytelling to shape narratives around a few main individuals, showing us why films abstract the elements of stories from society in the ways they do. There are many ways films imagine social worlds, yet it is extremely notable that the films that predominate, imagine a particularly isolated picture of the social world. The well-known scriptwriter and scriptwriting coach John Truby says most scriptwriters write their characters as if “their hero is alone in a vacuum, unconnected to others. [...] In these stories, the hero seems to be the only person that matters.”¹³⁶ Throughout my video works, I have taken

¹³⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁶ John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*, (2008), ebook, 75.

an approach to these works that has been focused around giving social relations a shape that resembles collective action.

From my first video project *Crisis in the Credit System* onwards, I have told stories that emphasize group experiences, and the roles each person plays within larger stories about capital's movements. In many of these projects there are no main character but rather a cast of many people who have equal roles to play. In *Crisis in the Credit System* and *Popular Unrest*, the narrative involves a main group that encounter major events as a group. In this way, the characters of those works are for the majority of the scenes not seen separately but as part of a social context. I will briefly compare the narrative structures of these early works to *The Common Sense*, which was made during the PhD, and employed a different approach to characters. This allows me to discuss how this aspect of my work transforms. Further, I will look at how a change in my approach to characters that began with *The Common Sense*, took new forms in *The Bay Area Protests*, and continued in my work *Crowds*, when I worked with one character, and culminated in my approach to my video installation, *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social* that addresses the relationship of individual and collective in societies shaped by capitalist ideologies that negate the existence of social dimensions. In this way, I will show how my work's approach to social groups, and individual characters has been changing during the PhD, whereby my attention to how characters are conveyed has allowed me to explore how individuals are depicted in relation to larger groups and the ways that film narratives configure images of society.

GROUP

CHARACTER

My tendency in my video works *Crisis in the Credit System* and *Popular Unrest* was to emphasize group relations and perspectives rather than form a dramatic narrative around the personal situations of separate individuals.¹³⁷ In *Popular Unrest*, I looked at relational dynamics between characters rather than elaborate the personal drama of separate individuals where my focus was on script writing that represents dynamics of capitalist social systems and the narratives of individuals happen as part of that. One of the ways I found that a drama that has multiple characters can change into a collective narrative is through less emphasis being put on the changes happening with individual characters and more focus on the interrelation between the character and their involvement in groups and larger social structures. This is distinct from an approach such as Sergei Eisenstein's idea of *typage*, because even though there is a similar emphasis on character's roles in societal structures, it differs in that the groups of characters in *Crisis in the Credit System* and *Popular Unrest* were made up of very clearly articulated

137 Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, (London: British Film Institute, 1972), 37. Regarding the avoidance of developing individual characters in Sergei Eisenstein's films, Peter Wollen discusses that Eisenstein received disapproval from the film critics Ivan Anisimov and Robert Warshow for making "films without individual characters."

individual characters that do not fit types. Nevertheless, those characters intentionally did not focus on the dimensions of personal story or when they did, it was connected to the social scenario.¹³⁸ Eisenstein's notion of *typage* emphasized characters roles within social structures rather than their specific individual characters. This reflected an approach found throughout the aesthetic and theoretical work of the historical left of the 19th and 20th c. whereby a preferred radical political approach was collectivist. This left political approach that avoided emphasis on individuals to tell collective social narratives influenced my approach in my first episodic video project, *Crisis in the Credit System*, because I had not yet brought my own perspective to these questions. I adamantly defend the idea of shifting the perspective away from individual narratives, and find that only focusing on individual narratives is detrimental to telling social narratives. However, I equally find the approach of Eisenstein's technique of *typage* to problematically flatten a social picture by not showing distinctive qualities of people and differences between their perspectives.¹³⁹

Crisis in the Credit System and *Popular Unrest*'s approach to characters were influenced by reading volume 1 of *Capital* by Karl Marx. In *Capital*, Marx approaches labor from the perspective of the aggregate of the total social capital, and describes the roles of workers and capitalists from their position within capital. This account was focused on the structural meanings of people's positions within events rather than their individual characteristics. Bertell Ollman describes how Marx's writing depicts the qualities of classes: "Marx's abstraction of extension for class brings together many people but not everything about them. Its main focus is on whatever it is that both enables and requires them to perform a particular function in the prevailing mode of production. Hence, Marx's frequent reference to capitalists as the "personification" (or "embodiment") of capital, grasped as the function of wealth to expand through the exploitation of wage-labor."¹⁴⁰ Two or three years after reading *Capital*, I made *Crisis in the Credit System* in 2008, whose script writing was very much focused on capital's social effects rather than the individual. This "focus [...] on whatever it is that both enables and requires them to perform a particular function" is a quality that appears in *Crisis in the Credit System*. However, by the time I made *Popular Unrest* in 2010 the work varies a great deal from a straightforward analysis of a "particular [economic and political] function." A great deal of *Popular Unrest* is a mediation of the impacts of the present effect of capital on individuals and collective social relations as well as a sustained contemplation on how capital's current technological configuration in big data that reflects how the specifics of people's buying habits and tastes are considered, all the better to take account of vast numbers. In this way, *Popular Unrest* coupled my

138 Ibid., 26. Peter Wollen explains that "Eisenstein has described how he developed the idea of *typage* from his thoughts about the *commedia dell'arte* with its stock types who are immediately recognized by the audience. He wanted faces which would immediately give the impression of the role."

139 In chapter 2, I will elaborate on the need for films to represent the interrelations of individuals with larger pictures of social relations.

140 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 80.

interest in capital as a social form, which I described above, with an exploration of how this impacts collective social relations. One might go further to say, in the film I explore the political and dramatic dynamics of capital as social form.

INDIVIDUALIZED IN CAPITAL

In my next video project, *The Common Sense*, I wanted to make a film about how capital shapes subjects through abstract and internal processes. I wrote my essay “Affect & Exchange” which looked at the interrelation of economics and emotion, and wrote about explorations of economic subjectivities in crisis and entrepreneurial subjectivity with Marina Vishmidt.¹⁴¹ With *The Common Sense*, I took a new approach to characters that encompassed the fullness of individual subjective experience while unfolding how subjects are shaped by capitalist social processes. *The Common Sense*’s fifteen episodes depict a social situation of a technology and its impacts of society, but this is fragmented into many individual experiences. The intention of the film was to focus on a more detailed conception of individual experiences as perceptions and as individual needs. The plot of *The Common Sense* is a story about the Patch, a technology which links people by joining their sensations and perceptions in a way that fuses their subjectivities. The film demanded an approach to characters that was more attentive to details of people’s lived experience. Yet, I sought to go beyond conventional film and television industry ideas of deepening characters. Such conventions focus narrative on character’s inner world in ways that disconnect the character’s story from wider social conditions.¹⁴² In opposition to this, *The Common Sense* narrative looked at technological change that causes huge social transformations by opening up new profitable spaces to exploitation. With the Patch, economic conditions impact people deep within their subjective lives. The characters in the work do not form groups but their individual stories form separate strands that tell stories about systems of labor and exchange. This was a new kind of script for me that combined more aspects of personal narratives while the work was primarily a story of social and political transformations caused by the technology’s economic use. Scenes communicate how relationships change within the current moment of capitalism, for example, when in several instances, characters such as Liz or Gibson get pressured by the demands of their jobs. Individual narratives of university students and entrainment business people’s stories, all tell how capital remakes the biophysical

141 Melanie Gilligan, *Affect & Exchange*, Fillip; Melanie Gilligan and Marina Vishmidt “Economic Subjectivities in Crisis,” ... *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, MUMOK catalogue, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König 2013; Melanie Gilligan and Marina Vishmidt, “The Property-less Sensorium: Following the Subject in Crisis Times” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, July, (2015).

142 This can be seen in the advice given by script writers such as Robert McKee and John Truby. John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008), ebook, 75.

qualities of perception. On the one hand, the film looks at subjectivity in a society that relentlessly makes people look out for themselves because that society does not support them. On the other hand, perceptions overlap in a confusing dissolution of separate subjective experiences. The borders between subjectivities that were previously separate stretch the individual into the social through commodified social connections.

I started imagining *The Common Sense* and the Patch by thinking about another technology, that of monetary exchange, and how such exchange determines and connects goods, practical needs and social processes. I came to this by considering how capitalism is understood to be an economic system of exchange through which people satisfy their needs. People have many divergent needs and ostensibly, they are all related to one another and made commensurable in exchange as theorized from the political economy of the 18th c. to Neoclassical economics.¹⁴³ That picture provided by ideologs of capital, however, is disconnected from the reality that an increasingly small proportion of people have their needs satisfied in capitalism. Marshall McLuhan proposes that “money has reorganized the sense life of peoples just because it is an extension of our sense lives.”¹⁴⁴ I interpret this to mean it is an extension of how people express what they need. In *The Common Sense*, the sensory technology of Patch overlaps with various roles of monetary exchange as a way to secure means to satisfy individual needs. Characters use the Patch to replace eating when they have no money to eat, while other characters conduct experiments to use the Patch as a form of money. In such ways, the film thematizes the specific experiences of each person in their individual, separate circumstances, circumstances that are broken open by the Patch, so that the affects that constitute individual needs and experiences are mediated even more directly by money.

THE SOCIAL IN THE INDIVIDUAL

After making *The Common Sense*, through considering the aims of my practice through conversations with my supervisors and my PhD cohort, I moved toward a new direction with my work. The next projects I made were *Parts-wholes* and *The Bay Area Protests* a work that deals with the recent history of protests in the Bay Area from 2009 to 2011. While *Popular Unrest* reflected the fraught situation of collective relations in contemporary capitalism, *The Common Sense* and *The Bay Area Protests* looked at social movements from different perspectives.

143 This picture was projected in the work of Neoclassical economists, Friedrich Hayek such as “The Use of Information in Society” where he discusses how markets satisfy different needs through the price mechanism, and Milton Friedman in works such as *Capitalism and Freedom*.

144 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, (Cambridge:MIT Press, 1994). 19



Melanie Gilligan, *The Bay Area Protests*, 2016-2022, single channel video.
Still image credit: Cyrus Tabar. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.



Melanie Gilligan, *The Bay Area Protests*, 2016-2022, single channel video.
Still image credit: Cyrus Tabar. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.



Melanie Gilligan, *The Bay Area Protests*, 2016-2022, single channel video.
Still image credit: Cyrus Tabar. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

The political and aesthetic strategies that I adopted in *The Bay Area Protests* took the form of political questions: What relationship can I establish between the locations of events and participants in the events? How can fictional elements relate to the documentary aspects of the project. Should I work with actors or non-actors? What style of acting should I adopt and why? The actors use of Meisner acting technique is very focused on personal character motivation. The focus on exploration of personal experience characters in Stanislavski acting method is tempered with less focus on the actor's own self, concentrating instead on responding to other actors. As a result, we feel the characters heightening the emotional intensity of their statements. The point is that in order to tell a story of collective struggle the work takes on the way that different characters view and contribute to deciding on collective action. The Meisner acting method is focused on homing in on the reality of doing. A well-known Meisner technique is the actor's repeating what the other is saying which allows them to focus on the way that repetition of dialogue changes the meaning in the dynamic between the actors as they respond to one another. The narrative of *The Bay Area Protests* does not focus on individual stories or personal desires of the actors, but the acting style helps to contribute many indications of subjective reactions and experiences. As a result, *The Bay Area Protests* brings out characters, and this is affected through combinations of what the character's performances contributes to discussions of the political situations. Characters open up qualities of the larger social struggles represented in the acted sequences of the film. As a result, characters bring further interpretation and emotional intensification to their statements. The point one notices is that in order to tell a story of collective struggle one needs to show the way different characters discuss and decide their collective action together. This gets to the root of why I have altered my treatment of characters, it is because a realistic approach to collective action needs to take individual reactions and motivations into account. The focus in this project is the collective struggles of these three protests. The film is not about individual struggles with personal desires, but it still involves strong individual characters. To incorporate individual desires into the depiction of a collective project means one understands collective struggle as a composition of the motivations of many individuals and the tensions that arise. Each character brings many social qualities and personal views on events, for instance, in characters' commentary and monologues. The mode of writing and acting style gives the characters pronouncedly different positions on events so as to bring out political questions that were happening in the Oakland Commune. *The Bay Area Protests* has strong themes of the individual and social, specifically in the contrast between the acted scenes at the Keiser Convention Center and compared to the distorted representation of society by the court. Media coverage of the protests and archival footage conveys dimensions of the broad social impact of these protests.

After making *The Bay Area Protests* and *Parts-wholes*, a new direction began to take shape in my work. Now I write my scripts in order to encounter social conditions that I want to explore. My project *Crowds* used social situations and conditions in Orlando, Florida as its starting point. They are explored through one character, Irene, and her life working in low-wage jobs. However, the film's narrative is continually overwhelmed by living conditions in Orlando, whether this is in the scenes immersed in the Orlando landscape, or through interviews with low-wage workers interspersed throughout the film. *Crowds* centers around Irene's character, yet all the time we spend

with Irene, the narrative foregrounds how her story interrelates with the social environment around her. *Crowds* tells the story of Orlando's environment where social conditions of its economy produce an alienating landscape geared around a tourist economy that maximizes profit. Orlando's labor economy has the lowest wages of America's 50 largest metro areas, and it is the only metro area in the country where one out of every four jobs pays \$11.08 an hour or less.¹⁴⁵ Interviews about Orlando living conditions throughout the film produce a collective voice of a different kind than *Popular Unrest* where the characters were linked into one character, but there is a similar sense of people existing with different situations in capitalism, but being brought together in a collective situation. In this way, *Crowds* bears out reflections that I began a couple years before in *Parts-wholes*. When Irene meets people who are mobilized around this issue that brings together labor politics with issues of racist discrimination, this unfolds on two levels: one the one hand, Irene's personal isolation dissolves once she meets other people involved with political struggle, while the story also tells the story of systemic conditions within the Florida economy that disconnect people and put them under pressures. An important aspect of how the film communicates a collective dimension are interviews in the film. By bringing in these interviews, the story shifts living and working conditions that individuals experience into conditions that many people share throughout Orlando.



Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019, video installation. 5 episodes. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

These reflections on individual characters in relation to society take a further turn in my work *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social*, a two-screen video installation that responds to the emergence of COVID-19 with a dual reflection that puts the relationship between the social and the individual into the center of the discussion about illness.

145 Scott Maxwell, "The truth – and lies – about low wages in Orlando," *Orlando Sentinel*, Dec 10, 2019. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/scott-maxwell-commentary/os-op-low-wages-orlando-laborland-scott-maxwell-20191210-7234cfehezbsfa4cybjwkgzxtu-story.html> (accessed Oct. 5, 2022).

The work consists of a large projection screen that is playing one video and a smaller television screen inset within the projection screen that is playing a different video. Both screens play simultaneously, showing the two very different videos at once. The two videos reflect diametrically opposed approaches to dealing with the relationship of health and society. On the projection screen is a video dealing with social dimensions of illness, consisting of vox pop interviews by myself, a German translator and a Turkish translator, speaking to people on the street in Berlin about social and labor situations during COVID-19. Through many different discussions with doctors, people with health conditions, housing activists, and many other people, the film investigates the social dimensions of illness. The video that plays on the television screen inset within the projection screen is about my own health challenges. It tells the story of events following my diagnosis with multiple sclerosis at age twenty-one and the resulting isolation that I experienced; it felt as if I had to deal with my illness on my own, which had very negative effects on social aspects of my wellbeing. Sadly, I dealt with my health problems in a way that was too focused on trying to protect myself. In this way, my own response was indicative of how health problems are dealt with as issues that people are made to handle on their own. Through the lens of my experiences, this part of the work presents how capitalism atomizes health to the level of the individual.

The work ends up producing two very different videos, one inserted into the other, forming one flat plane. In this way, *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social* is a project that, through the contemporary health crisis of COVID-19, shows how capitalist ideologies of individual property are transposed onto people's health as their individual responsibility. This generates societies that treat illness as solely situations that unfortunate individuals have to deal with, eliminating the social dimensions of illness and health.¹⁴⁶ In COVID-19, this becomes a destructive social crisis as governments who have throughout modernity assumed the task of protecting the health of populations from diseases, increasingly promote ideologies of individualized responsibility, and see health care in terms of private investment ideologies.¹⁴⁷ The formal qualities of the video work to drive home the fact that this individualized understanding of health as one's individual property is causing immense hardship, yet the terrains that this ideology occupies are not clearly articulated. When I made this work, my ongoing investigation of individual and social through how I write characters underwent a major transformation. I had reflected for some time on how my illness had made me live in a highly self-protective manner, and I had ended up being socially isolated because of it. I wrote a monologue and asked three actors from my work *The Common Sense* to perform it. I filmed each actor separately as they stood in the exact same spot on a hill high above a city that spreads out behind them. The camera is positioned so that, when there are fades and cuts from one image to the next, the three women seem to slip into the exact same space. Each woman delivers the monologue as her own story

146 Nancy Sheper-Hughes, "The Mindful Body," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1987) 10.

147 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). Paul Langley, "Uncertain Subjects of Anglo-American Financialization," *Cultural Critique*, no. 65, Winter, 2007, 67-91, University of Minnesota Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4539797>.

from her perspective, fracturing my personal account of illness into an arrangement of perspectives. My monologue becomes a story that many people tell. My ill body, assumed as sovereign, personal and private, becomes open to deliberation about how I acted, and in turn a discussion of how people act when impacted by the current capitalist crisis. My story resonates with the actors and audiences because the work reflects how it feels, even when people do not have serious health conditions, to feel like, for example, one will be penalized in one's job for having any health problems, or wonder whether it is safe to show vulnerability. The monologue describes how during a moment of the worst disability that I have experienced, I still continued to "work [...] when I should have been resting, very frightened that persisting would mean I could not work at all"¹⁴⁸. I was tied into overtaxing work demands that made my illness worse by imposing unrealistic demands on myself, yet the sense is that ever-more competitive conditions contribute to individuals feeling this sense that they must look out for themselves because no one else will. The contemporary social situation has the subjective effect of drilling into one's mind the notion that each person is alone and must protect themselves in a Hobbesian war of all against all.

In the video that is shown as a projection, we watch interviews focused on how illnesses such as COVID-19 and all types of illness, are impacted by societal conditions such as jobs, housing, discrimination regarding race, gender and sexuality, the built environment and social forms of support. Discussions of housing and the medical system, racial discrimination in housing and in jobs, and against patients with HIV. A person with diabetes brings up the relation of sexuality to health; housing activists discuss how housing is intertwined with other aspects of life on low incomes and we had discussions of how daily existence is impacted by social and political conditions such as systemic forms of discrimination. The present is a moment of acute global crisis in capitalist societies. COVID-19 emphasized the importance of looking at people's social conditions as part of diminishing the spread of the disease. One's ability to be protected in the pandemic is greatly affected by one's income, job, housing and other aspects of living conditions. One example is the clear correlation between access to housing and protection from COVID-19, for instance, the expiration of eviction bans across the U.S. from March to September, 2020 caused as many as 433,700 COVID-19 cases and 10,700 deaths, as people were forced into new social situations such as staying with friends and family¹⁴⁹. Another very clear example of this in the COVID-19 pandemic has been the effect of the type of labor people do on the ability to stay healthy. People with public-facing service work jobs in areas such as mass transit, home health care, retail, and service, are some of the most severely impacted during the pandemic because they are constantly exposed to potential infection through their work. These

148 This is dialogue from the script of this section of *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social*, published in the *Illiberal Arts* catalogue by Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. Anselm Franke and Kerstin Stakemer, *Illiberal Arts, Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, (Berlin: Polypen, 2021).

149 Annie Nova, "Evictions have led to hundreds of thousands of additional Covid-19 cases research finds." Nov. 27, 2020 <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/27/evictions-have-led-to-hundreds-of-thousands-of-extra-covid-cases-.html> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

jobs are also often poorly paid. This in turn is linked to forms of exclusion already at play in labor markets, such as racial discrimination, that decide the jobs that people have access to. These social conditions have only become more violent during the pandemic, trapping people in unsafe jobs.¹⁵⁰ The response to the pandemic in most countries has overwhelmingly been to see it through a political understanding based on individual responsibility as opposed to seeing the pandemic as a problem that needs to be treated through addressing a host of social issues. The Individual choice is made to obscure what is much more salient, that underfunded social systems and social institutions, and unevenly distributed support related to housing, hospitals, jobs, schools, are at the center of the political and health changes we are currently seeing. Now, three years after the start of the pandemic, the conflict between keeping people safe and forcing people back to work continues, as the health risks of COVID-19 of immediate death are diminished but renewed pressure to go back to work increasingly exposes people to severe physical dangers such as long COVID.¹⁵¹ The reason that it is proving so difficult to put people's safety and health before the concern of keeping the economy open is because the imperative to accumulate drives capitalist society.



Melanie Gilligan, *Health as Individual vs Health as Social*, 2021, 2-channel video installation. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

150 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "The Black Plague," *New Yorker*, April 16, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-black-plague> (accessed Oct 5, 2022)

151 This refers to the immediately life-threatening effects of COVID-19 for some but more ominously, also the health effects of long-COVID for everyone else.



Melanie Gilligan, *Health as Individual vs Health as Social*, 2021, 2-channel video installation. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

FORM-DETERMINATION OF THE SOCIAL

From *The Common Sense* to *Parts-wholes* to *The Bay Area Protests* to *Crowds* to *Health as Individual vs Health as Social* to *Home Together*, there is a common investigation in all my video projects in the PhD into the ways that capital shapes lived experiences of subjectivity. This relates to our discussion of economic abstraction by elucidating Marx's term form-determination which sums up the way that value has effects in shaping practices and social relations. It is observable that there is a form-determination that shapes people's actions and relations. A well-known fundament of historical materialism found in Marx's writings *The German Ideology* and *Theses on Feuerbach* is that material practices determine mental states. One can see from my projects, I regard it as necessary to elucidate value's determinations of the social, because the matter of unfolding its mechanisms is central to understanding how to unwind capital's destructive social filaments. Marx comments in *Capital* that: "The secret reason why these products of the dissolution of commodity value constantly appear as the premises of value formation itself is simply that the capitalist mode of production, like every other, constantly reproduces not only the material product but also the socio-economic relations, the formal economic determinants (form-determinants) [Formbestimmtheiten] of its formation."¹⁵²

Form-determination is a decidedly abstract concept in contrast to the very concrete ways that we have been describing social formations in this section. The way that value determines socio-economic relations is made evident in the shapes of people's lives. My work during the PhD has been focused on the close-up investigation of lived experience, while maintaining an analysis of the effects of the value form. Conveying value's determining role in details of daily life is a matter of understanding how practices, built around the operations of value, shape the ways that people conduct their lives. The ways that capital's social forms impose and determine material life in capitalism is

152 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, (London: Penguin Classics, 1991) 1011.

a major focus that my work has repeatedly taken on. When Marx talks about form-determination, he heavily references Hegel's use of the term determination. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel talks about presentation and determination of the concept. There he talks about Hegel defines that "the true be "just as much" subject, that it be not merely substance but also subject."¹⁵³ This conception of substance and subject overlapped is found throughout Hegel's work. For instance in *Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* where he points out that "What is required is a synthesis which yield the identity of subject and substance, that is, the identity of subject-object and objective subject-object, that is, the identity and non-identity."¹⁵⁴ The subject "has no being proper, no subsistence," but rather is "'act" and nothing but act, specifically, the act of positing itself subject is a movement of self-positing, hence, as both positing and is "a necessary identity of subject and object: subject-object."¹⁵⁵ This corresponds with how Michael Inwood describes Hegel using the term determination in The Blackwell Philosopher Dictionaries, *A Hegel Dictionary*, in addition to the standard meaning "to mean "to determine" in the sense of delimiting, demarcating or defining a concept by giving the features that distinguish it from other concepts," he adds that "determination is given an added sense of (a) "delimitation, DEFINITION"; (b) making a concept or a thing more determinate by adding features to it, or the feature(s) so added;[...] The addition of self (selbst) gives "self-determination" (Selbstbestimmung), the autonomous DEVELOPMENT or operation of something, e.g. the WILL, in contrast to its determination by external forces."¹⁵⁶ Hegel's interest in the subject that posits itself "...the act of positing itself subject is a movement of self-positing" and the "necessary identity of subject and object: subject-object" as well as will as self-determination, works its way into his definition of determination¹⁵⁷. This overview is intended to show the way Hegel's use of the term is reoriented and inverted in Marx who regards value as the self-determining automatic subject which has the traits of Hegel's fusion of substance and subject having "no being proper" apart from self-expanding action. All of this meaning comes across in Marx's discussion of form-determination whereby there is a parallel causality in value as a social form and the individual subject in formation conditioned by the social subject, i.e. social activity mobilized for the production of value. It is thus perfect to end our discussion of subjectivity in my video practice with the antinomy of capital as a subject and form-determination because it is the ongoing attempt of my films to focus on social relations that oppose this.

153 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 4.

154 G.W.F. Hegel, "Difference between Fichte and Schelling," (New York: Suny Press, 1988), 77. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/fs/index.htm> (accessed online Oct 5, 2022).

155 John Sallis, "Hegel's concept of presentation: Its Determination in the Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit," *Hegel-Studien*, vol. 12, (1977), 135.

156 Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, (London: Blackwell Publisher, 1992).

157 G.W.F Hegel, *Grundlage der gesumnten Wissenschaft*, second edition, note added in 1802. *Werke*, (1802), 98.

SPEECH AND POLITICAL THEORY IN FILM

Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers.

Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

What are the differences between a film that produces political analysis through spoken or written words and ones that analyze through actions? Looking at Pasolini, Metz and MacDougall gave us a sense of film's combination of linguistic and visual communication. As Pasolini emphasizes, associative, non-verbal communication is intrinsic to film, but according to Pasolini and MacDougall, the spoken and written communication of abstract political concepts are conveyed with more clarity and reliability in language, building different forms of knowledge. Written and spoken theoretical analysis has often been a strategy adopted in political and militant filmmaking to discuss political subjects in more detail than what actions shows. As MacDougall comments about film's "insensitivity to the cognitive world," film is sometimes a complicated medium for representing political thought. The relationship between cognitive and the perceptual offers a framework for thinking about how film can reflect on political conditions. I want to attend to this problem because, as I showed with my comparison of "*Self-capital*" and "*Schizopolis*," spoken dialogues has often had a prominent role in my work from *Crisis in the Credit System* to *Health as Individual vs Health as Social*. Presenting conceptual arguments have a distinct importance in my work, yet my aim is to give knowledge a variety of forms that elicit affect and emotion, not simply inserted as dialogue, but motivated by action. In these works, prior to and during the PhD, I sought to orient knowledge about capital toward practice through staging theoretical discussions in conversation and social processes between characters, thereby treating knowledge as a part of experience. Against opposing the theoretical to the affective, my methods focus on how to produce scripts that structure political, theoretical arguments that are articulated not only through speech but also action, eliciting affect as well.

To explore these themes in filmmaking against capital, Sergei Eisenstein's writing has been useful because the filmmaker speaks about film as thought on the one hand, while he also highlights film as a series of shocks and impressions on the other. Eisenstein conceived of a dialectical method for his "intellectual cinema" and brought together the logical and the affective in his work as well as his theorization of cinema.¹⁵⁸

158 James Goodwin, *Eisenstein*, "Ideology and Intellectual Cinema," *Quarterly Review Film and Video*, (1978).

An example of this discussion in Eisenstein's work can be found in the way he understood the montage of attractions.¹⁵⁹ In one discussion, he describes how cinema exceeds the constraints of theater, but as he does so, he recounts how theater has its own set of "attractions" or affects. He says "the shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown ... (The path to knowledge encapsulated in the phrase, "through the living play of the passions," is specific to theater.)"¹⁶⁰ This tendency in Eisenstein's film theory to make such correlations between affective shock and ideology, between feeling and thought resonate with much discussed in this chapter. As I describe from the outset, visual and physical action in filmmaking articulate a politics, yet linguistic communication in left film is often understood as more overtly political. A well-known example of a left political approach that regards language as the most effective form of communication is Jean-Luc Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group. The Dziga Vertov Group made several films that explicitly adopt strategies of communicating theoretical knowledge while communicating in ways that disrupt immersion in the narrative in favour of materializing social and economic relations through spoken language. In a memorable scene in *Ici et Ailleurs*, made with Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Pierre Gorin, the film discusses problems of political filmmaking in a way that communicates through practice. A narrator describes the way that editing assembles images, wiping the previous image from the viewer's memory, and so each political representation replaces the one that came before. Meanwhile, the viewer sees a line of people, who move one after another toward the camera, each person holding still images of the film frames. This scene transforms a technical process into one that can be understood in terms of actions and social relations, by people physically acting out the way political information is arranged in a film, each person's still image being replaced by another focus for attention, and then another, much as film footage does, becoming more faded as the viewer's gaze passes on. The effect is less immersion in this scene because it does not exactly effect a realism that you can get absorbed in, yet the scene is still entrancing because the film editing process is made into a physical demonstration.

In *British Sounds*, the mechanisms of how to express theoretical ideas are sharpened. The film begins with a long continuous panning shot along the floor of an automotive assembly line while a narrator reads passages from Marx's *Capital*. The tracking shot is a camera movement that best mimics the conveyor belt and so readily connotes industrial automation in automobile production as well as filmmaking. The scene shows commodity production full of activity and visual interest with no lack of material detail. The narration talks about the wage relation over this depiction of material production and labor. The wage orchestrates the commodified processes of actions counted and time managed. Here the abstract and the concrete are thoroughly conjoined. It is a site of labor exploitation connected to a larger social scale of production and exchange. This approach to narrate passages of Marx, overtop of the concrete actions of employees is an aesthetic strategy of direct theoretical communication

159 Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Attractions" in *Eisenstein Writings*, vol. 1 1922-23, (London: BFI Publishing/Indiana University Press, 1988).

160 Ibid., 34.

frequently found throughout Godard's oeuvre. Another strategy in the film, is to reject the traditional "voice-of-god" narrator, a common theoretical convention of documentary, political or otherwise.¹⁶¹ Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin reject this disembodied style of narration, replacing it with a myriad of narrators. The neutral, abrasive, proletarian or ruling class quality of their voices evoke a variety of political characters and dramatic confrontations (e.g. the judge as an on screen narrator yells to characters who are shown listening). This attention to questions of political theory's relationship to practice is important to these filmmakers working during the May '68 movement of political unrest in France. The voices in which a story is told, and how the voice becomes a way of directing the story, is at issue. While the track in the car production plant can visually transport the camera, other scenes in *British Sounds* act and speak about political and social relations through a narrator that is both a subject who describes and is subjected to the power relations she discusses. The character is naked and walking through the hallway landing of a house, while narrating various everyday moments of on capitalist and ideological abstraction. The presentation of political theoretical information breaks into her firsthand account regarding women's traditional domestic and sexual roles. She narrates daily experiences of sexism. The conventionally valid forms of theoretical information slip and her narrated experience mix with theoretical narration, making the relationship of theory to practice nuanced.

Yet, while *British Sounds* like much of the Dziga Vertov Group's work demonstrates a complex understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, a major quality in Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group's approach to political theory was evident in Godard's approach to formal experimentation. In his online essay "The Filmmaker Activist and the Collective, Robert Kramer and Jean-Luc Godard," Donald Foreman writes that "Godard had been intervening in the smooth cinematic transmission of reality since the beginning of his career. But [...] those interventions had not challenged mainstream cinematic forms" and had instead "been incorporated by them" disruptive montage with its self-reflexivity effects had become arty gimmicks "to spice up lack luster products."¹⁶² According to James Roy MacBean, Godard's position was that aesthetic experimentation alone cannot have a political impact because of a dominant approach in art and film that projected film's autonomy. "...the dominant idealist thinking [...] has the effect of [...] limiting to a very minimal level of his intelligence and imagination [...] untainted by "politics." Is this pervasive devaluation of politics accidental? Or does the history of class society indicate that time after time and place after place art has been in the service of the ruling class elites."¹⁶³ For the Dziga Vertov Group, the aesthetic aim was to speak to militant social movements of the time. To do this, Godard developed strategies that increasingly relied on a preference for theoretical knowledge over practice "Godard really wants us to consider that

161 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xiv.

162 Donald Foreman, *The Filmmaker-Activist and The Collective: Robert Kramer and Jean-Luc Godard*. <https://donalforeman.com/writing/godard&dvg.html> (accessed online Oct 5, 2022).

163 James Roy MacBean, "Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group: Film and Dialectics," *Film Quarterly*, (1973) 33.

the act of developing a point of view which will enable us to comprehend situations (presented in the film as life) is above all *a mental act* in which [...] the act of seeing is not necessarily the primary one and may indeed be much less constitutive of a point of view than listening to the spoken word. [...] recently [...] his investigation (starting with *Le Gai Savoir*) have led him to probe more deeply into epistemological questions.”¹⁶⁴ In the period, Godard made shifts in the vocabulary of his films that reflect political views that held sway at the time. In particular, the way that political theoretical practice was given precedent over the visual was prominent as in this quote from *Pravda* “...like Delacroix in Algiers to Chris Marker in the strike torn factories of Rhodioceta. *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* call it news. And I agree with you Rosa, that it is not enough. Why? Because it is only the knowledge perceived by our senses. Now one has to make the effort to rise above this perceptual knowledge. One needs to struggle to transform it into rational knowledge.”¹⁶⁵ Julia Lesage says that “contemporary political filmmakers” need to “use film as a blackboard on which to write analyses of socio-economic situations. Godard rejected films, especially political ones, based on feeling. People, he said, had to be led to analyze their place in history.”¹⁶⁶

In distinction to an approach such as Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group’s that implicitly opposes practice and knowledge, and by extension the involvement of feeling in practice, a militant political left approach to theory both needs to combine theoretical knowledge and to consider how knowledge is related to experience as a social process. It needs to take seriously the assertion of Marx in *Theses on Feuerbach* that “all social life is essentially practical” and that “the comprehension of this practice” includes “practical activity.”¹⁶⁷ Marx points out that Idealist bourgeois philosophy denies that practical activity and drives away from collective processes toward the “contemplation of single individuals and of civil society,” obviously not what the Dziga Vertov Group were trying to achieve.¹⁶⁸ I consider film’s connection to knowledge as social communication and social relations to be a powerful political tool, and so I chose this example of the Dziga Vertov Group to note that despite an attention to the relation between political theory and political practice, the Dziga Vertov Group’s approach problematically followed a logic that ultimately regarded political practice as subordinate to theory. The work of another militant left political filmmaker, Ousmane Sembène, and the discussion of knowledge and experience in the early work of Walter Benjamin have informed my considerations of these questions related to knowledge and practice. Benjamin’s argument and Sembène’s approach to filmmaking have

164 Ibid., 35.

165 Ibid.

166 Julia Lesage, *Godard and Gorin’s Left Politics 1967-1972*, Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media, <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC28folder/GodardGorinPolitics.html> (accessed online Oct 05, 2022).

167 Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

168 Ibid.

connections to my films because they push the viewer to understand knowledge through social processes and the social transmission of knowledge between people.

Filmmaker Ousmane Sembène was well-known for his literary work before he began making films. His films evince a consistent awareness of social and political roles played by interpersonal communication. The films such as *Xala* or *Faat Kiné* confront issues of crucial political importance in the compositions of their scripts and filmmaking techniques. One form in which this is demonstrated is in the way that Sembène's films such as those mentioned or his film *Moolade* involve the recurrent appearance of narrators within his stories who are griots, traditional official speakers within West African social communities. These characters articulate and recount some of the action of the scenes in the film. For instance, in *Moolade*, when the character Ducure, the son of a wealthy head of the community, arrives home from France the griot for the community speaks in front of many people gathered, to welcome him and praise him publicly as brave, generous, and bold. The narration of events supplied by the griot character in that moment creates an interesting difference from narration supplied by the "voice-of-god" narrator that offers expository analysis in the classic documentary or even the many narration voices of the Dziga Vertov Group.¹⁶⁹ Sembène says of his approach that "...I remember that in the so-called classical Africa of the past, the griot was not only the dynamic figure of the tribe, clan, or village, but also the chief witness to every major event. It was he who recorded and who, under the palaver tree recited the events and acts of everyone before the entire community. My conception of my work flows from this teaching: one must remain as close as possible to reality and to the people."¹⁷⁰

As Sembène indicates, in his films the griot narrators recount the social practices of communities and play a social and political role within the story and in so doing they bring analysis. Mbye Cham, in his essay on Sembène, begins by quoting well-known griot, Diali Mamadou Kouyaté: "I am a griot... we are the vessels of speech... history has no mystery for us... for it is us who keep the keys to the twelve doors of Mali... I teach the kings the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve them as an example. For the world is old, but the future springs from the past."¹⁷¹ Mbye Cham describes how throughout his work Ousmane Sembène looks to popular memory as a source to reconstruct past events.¹⁷² Within the narratives the viewer

169 For a discussion of expository role of narration in the classic documentary see Bill Nichols *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xiv.

170 Ousmane Sembène, "Author's Note" in *L'Harmattan*, trans. Jen Westmoreland Bouchard quoted in "Portrait of a Contemporary Griot: Orality and the films of Ousmane Sembène," *Journal of African Literature*, (2009).

171 Mbye Cham, "Official History, Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the Films of Ousmane Sembene," *Contributions on Black Studies A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies, Ousmane Sembene: Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, vol 11, (2008), 23. Mbye Cham is quoting the griot Diali Mamadou Kouyaté whose Sundiata epic is transcribed by Djibril Tamsir Niane.

172 *Ibid.*, 24.

has a heightened awareness of the way that the political situation is presented socially. In *Moolade*, Ducure, the son of a wealthy head of the community, arrives home from France. The griot welcomes him back on behalf of the community and announces Ducure, to the town's people and gives a view of his accomplishments to the audience of community members. Large social groups are a prominent in some of Sembène's work, such as *God's Bits of Wood*, a narrative about a railroad workers strike against colonial bosses. Sembène's orientation toward the social communication of political theory provides a model for looking at the social role of language in film.

Mbye Cham describes Sembène's approach to struggle as a "preoccupation with history, and its implications for the present" that has influenced a wide range of filmmakers," and goes on to say that "what emerges in recent African film is a radical revision and representation of the African past in ways which not only purge it of imposed European and other foreign remembrances, but which also foreground the relevance of the new reconstructed histories to the present challenges of post-colonial African societies." For Cham, Sembène's films "constitute some of the most compelling and indeed radical filmic revisions and reinterpretations of history in Africa." Cham describes that

it was in reference to [...] this living memory of Africa, that Hampathe Ba made his now canonical statement that in Africa an old person who dies is a library that burns. The filmic reconstruction of history, in the work of Ousmane Sembène, rests solidly on this heritage of oral tradition and memory. From this base, with the true griot as a model, Sembène enters into a battle for history and around history. Official versions of the past, Western as well as Arabic, are contested, revised, and/or rejected, and new, more authentic histories are put in their place. Sembène's films may partly be seen as undertaking what Teshome Gabriel has labeled "a rescue mission," to the extent to which their recourse to popular memory aims to recover, privilege and articulate the historical significance and the contemporary, as well as future, implications of what official histories insist on erasing.¹⁷³

Teshome Gabriel, a theorist of Third Cinema, a film movement of which Sembène is a major figure, is then quoted by Mbye Cham on the topic official as opposed to popular history.

Official history tends to arrest the future by means of the past. Historians privilege the written word of the text—it serves as their rule of law. It claims a "center" which continuously

173 Mbye Cham, "Official History, Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the Films of Ousmane Sembene," *Contributions in Black Studies A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies*, Ousmane Sembene: *Dialogues with Critics and Writers*, vol 11, (2008), 22.

marginalizes others. In this way its ideology inhibits people from constructing their own history or histories. Popular memory, on the other hand, considers the past as a political issue. It orders the past not only as a reference point but also as a theme of struggle. For popular memory, there are no longer any “centers” or “margins,” since the very designations imply that something has been conveniently left out.¹⁷⁴

Gabriel continues, saying that “Popular memory, then, is neither a retreat to some great tradition nor a flight to some imagined “ivory tower,” neither a self-indulgent escapism, nor a desire for the actual “experience” or “content” of the past for its own sake. Rather, it is a “look back to the future,” necessarily dissident and partisan, wedded to constant change.”¹⁷⁵ In this way, Sembène’s centering of griot characters in many of his films takes on the role of contestation for the purposes of “the recovery and deployment of popular memory to recompose past events” in such a way that “the past not only as a reference point but also as a theme of struggle.” As Cham describes, such a reconstructed history can be the foundation for a future.¹⁷⁶

What if a future understanding of film against capitalism involves a new configuration of our understanding of political theory? Theoretical analysis is most politically relevant when it is part of social and political action in Sembène’s films; in the filmmaker’s words, “one must remain as close as possible to reality and to the people.” In a discussion of Sembène’s work, Amadou T. Fofana demonstrates the importance of orality for the filmmaker’s production but points out the political and social tensions that spoken communication engages, a fact which Fofana situates within the history of colonialism: “because it does not produce written text, orality as the traditional source of knowledge has been dismissed in the European tradition.”¹⁷⁷ Thus among the multiple meanings of Sembène’s emphasis on griot characters in his narratives is a challenge to the epistemological categories of political theory in the European tradition, Marxist or otherwise, which separate theoretical knowledge from social communication, first-hand accounts and oral traditions. Language when spoken in social contexts, has the purpose, not just of communicating facts, but also has the ability to transform social possibilities in a situation. The basis of what is deemed theoretical analysis in European contexts puts limits on the transformative possibilities of language activated in spoken accounts as social knowledge. This is visible, for example, in the approach of the Dziga Vertov Group that privileges theoretical, political knowledge over political practice and in the process, upholds such epistemological conventions. While the Dziga Vertov Group undermine the “voice of god” narrator through using first-hand

174 Ibid., 22

175 Ibid., 23.

176 Mbye Cham, “Official History, Popular Memory: Reconfiguration of the African Past in the Films of Ousmane Sembene,” *Contributions in Black Studies*, (2008), 22.

177 Amadou T. Fofana, “Sembène’s Borom Saret: A Griot’s Narrative,” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 33, no. 4, (2011): 255.

accounts, Sembène's films show a much more committed involvement with remaining close to people's accounts when accessing knowledge, and in this way, Sembène's work is "necessarily dissident and partisan, wedded to constant change," envisioning a type of political practice that recognizes social forms of narrating knowledge that thereby allows knowledge to transform in the social.

Walter Benjamin's well-known essay *The Storyteller: Observations on the works of Nikolai Leskov* has been long been an influence on my work and led me to question epistemological categories that undermine the significance of oral forms of knowledge communication. Benjamin opens an important discussion in that essay, which sits within a group of essays he wrote on the connection between knowledge and experience. As we will see, Sembène and Benjamin present important questions with regard to film as producing a type of knowledge against capitalism.¹⁷⁸ In *The Storyteller*, Benjamin proposes to find a new interrelation between knowledge and experience by telling narrative through social experience. He looks at the social roles that storytelling plays to better understand this. To further open up the discussion of the narration and political communication being conveyed by the griot narrators that reoccur in Ousmane Sembène's films, we will describe the arch that brought Benjamin to writing *The Storyteller*. The role of experience in relation to knowledge is developed throughout an early period in Benjamin's work. In the opening section of "On the Program of The Coming Philosophy," Benjamin says that "the central task of the coming philosophy will be to take the deepest intimations it draws from our times and our expectation of a great future, and turn them into knowledge by relating them to the Kantian system."¹⁷⁹ For Benjamin, this undertaking, if it is to be adequate to the great future intimated, must consist of a crucial reformulation that brings together knowledge and experience. For Benjamin, Kant's limiting conception of experience in relation to knowledge would be shifted, ushering in "a great future" making possible the transformation of these concepts beyond capitalism. "The decisive mistakes of Kant's epistemology are, without a doubt, traceable to the hollowness of the experience available to him, and thus the double task of creating both a new concept of knowledge and a new conception of the world on the basis of philosophy becomes a single one."¹⁸⁰ We will now briefly look at Kant's concept of knowledge, and then that of experience, to show Benjamin's formulation of this project and we will introduce ideas that are helpful for our discussion regarding how film contributes different kinds of knowledge to the struggle against capitalism.

Benjamin formulated a reassessment of the Kantian categories of intuition and intellect that would transform the concept of knowledge. He said that "in the development of philosophy called for and considered proper here, one symptom of neo-Kantianism can already be detected. A major problem of neo-Kantianism was to eliminate

178 Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Observations on the works of Nikolai Leskov," *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2002).

179 Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2002), 100.

180 *Ibid.*, 102.

the distinction between intuition and intellect, a metaphysical rudiment that occupies a position like that of the theory of the faculties in Kant's work. With this—that is, with the transformation of the concept of knowledge—there also began a transformation of the concept of experience.¹⁸¹ Intuition in Kant is the culmination of a tradition of thinking that comes from Aristotle's account of demonstrative knowledge in *Posterior Analytics* and the concepts of *noesis* (intelligible perception) and *aisthesis* (sensible perception) in *De Anima*.¹⁸² Aristotle saw intuition as linked with sensible perception and “that intuition is the “originative source of scientific knowledge.”¹⁸³ In the *De anima*, knowledge arises out of the abstraction of *noeta* (intelligible perception) from *aistheta* (sensible perception), but with the proviso that the intelligible and sensible elements do not exist separately, or in Aristotle's words, “that the mind which is actively thinking is the objects which it thinks.” Intuition as formulated by Kant relates *noeta* and *aestheta* to one another.¹⁸⁴ As Howard Caygill explains, this Aristotelian tradition influenced philosophers preceding Kant's discussion such as Descartes, Spinoza and Locke that in turn influenced Kant's formulation of his transcendental philosophy.¹⁸⁵ As we speak of Kant's transcendental philosophy, it is worth noting here vis a vis our conversation on experience still to come that, as Adorno points out, Kant intends the transcendental aspect of his philosophical focus to mean transcendental in the sense that it is opposed to experience, preceding experience as a precondition for it.¹⁸⁶ To return to Descartes discussion of intuition, Caygill notes that “Descartes own concept of intuition departs little from the Aristotelian tradition” in that he “distinguishes [intuition] from the “testimony of the senses”” and defines intuition as an “undoubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind [which] springs from the light of reason alone” emphasizing *noesis* as intelligible perception and reason. A defining feature of intuition is that “unlike deductive knowledge it is immediate and simple, and is exemplified by the individual's “intuition of the fact that they exist, and that they think.”¹⁸⁷ Descartes focus here is reason, not sense perception and this relates to the individual's “intuition of the fact that they exist, and that they think” forms much of the basis of Kant's understanding of knowledge and experience.

181 Ibid., 105.

182 Howard Caygill, *The Kant Dictionary*, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 264.

183 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, trans. Immanuel Bekker, 1941, 100b.

184 Ibid., 262.

185 Howard Caygill, *The Kant Dictionary*, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 263.

186 Theodor Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 21.

187 Ibid., 263. Spinoza takes a similar approach as well and sees “distinguishing between three forms of knowing: knowledge of opinion grounded in the senses and imagination (broadly Aristotle's *aistheta*), knowledge of reason grounded in common notions or concepts (*noeta*) and, finally, immediate, intuitive knowledge of the formal essence of the attributes of God and things in general.” However, Spinoza did not emphasize the individual subject in the same way as Descartes.

Regarding experience, Kant conceives of it as mediating between the particulars of perception and the universal of knowledge.¹⁸⁸ Experience is accordingly synthetic, described as “this product of the senses and understanding” which may be analysed into elements.¹⁸⁹ This containment of the concept of experience conditioned by the logical mind is indicative of an attitude found in much philosophical thought of Kant’s time as Adorno clearly states when he situates Kant’s view within a longstanding intellectual tradition that saw a timeless “world of truth that stands opposed in principle to the fleeting nature of the world of phenomena. This world of phenomena represents something of a delusion and is therefore inferior when compared to the truth.”¹⁹⁰ This tendency to relegate the sensory and phenomena to fleeting insignificance reminds one of Benjamin’s unequivocal statement in “On the Program for the Coming Philosophy,” Benjamin’s most sustained and concentrated analysis of Kant’s philosophy: “...this is precisely what is at issue: the concept of the naked, primitive, self-evident experience, which, for Kant, as a man who somehow shared the horizon of his times, seemed to be the only experience given—indeed, the only experience possible.” Benjamin goes on to say that Kant was able to take on this immense project “under the constellation of the Enlightenment indicates that he undertook his work on the basis of an experience virtually reduced to a nadir, to a minimum of significance.”

What does Benjamin claim is lost in Kant’s Enlightenment account of experience? Kant’s understanding of knowledge and intuition in relation to the concept of experience indicates that intuition is conceived along the lines Descartes articulated that situates an individual’s awareness in an individual’s being and their body.¹⁹¹ One understands from this that Kant sees “experience thus mediates between the particulars of perception and the universal of knowledge” in connection to reason. The particulars of perception in Kant are those of an individual while the universal becomes

188 Ibid., 186. “...experience thus mediates between the particulars of perception and the universal of knowledge and was consistently considered in medieval philosophy as the class of knowledge associated with sense perception, and characterized by being received from an external source.

189 Ibid.

190 Theodor Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 24. To clarify Kant’s general use of the term phenomenon “being simply “objects of sensibility” as opposed to noumena or intelligible objects which can only be “cognised through the intelligence” p. 317, Howard Caygill. *The Kant Dictionary*, (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

191 Theodor Adorno understands that the centrality of the “I” in what he calls “subjectivist philosophy” is what locks it in a particular epistemological impasse. “This entire strand of subjectivist philosophy, cannot avoid the issue since experience can be generated only through the reference to a personal subject.”

defined specifically in terms of universally valid categories.¹⁹² In other words, the individual mind knows through reason and it is theorized by Kant that there is a universality of reason that is the sole possibility to connect the transcendental subject to the social sphere, what Adorno calls the “social subject,” insofar as it is through universal concepts that knowledge achieves a universally demonstrable quality as socially verifiable.¹⁹³ One might say that through Kant, the Enlightenment’s contribution to the concept of experience is that one can connect to the universal as social dimension only through knowledge. As a result, the physically embodied conditions and qualities of experience in social processes is severely undertheorized. The “fleeting nature of the world of phenomena” are disregarded as elusive and unpredictable. If Kant posits only knowledge as having a universal and therefore social dimension, it is a decidedly individual access to social knowledge focused on individual experience and individual physical awareness. In this way, cognition as the means to a social subject achieved through universal knowledge produces a type of knowledge disconnected from experience. It is easy to see why this is of prime importance for my work, whether this be the emphasis in my video projects such as *The Common Sense* where the experiences many subjects merge (i.e. the opposite of the transcendental “I”), my communication of knowledge through experiences in *Health as Individual vs. Health as Social* or in my writing on economic subjectivity during the ongoing economic crisis. What does the elimination of social communication negate in experience? How does film as a type of readily available social and cultural form of practice-knowledge make “we”s become “I”s?¹⁹⁴ Let us return to Benjamin’s intervention in this predicament and how this relates to the work of Sembène.

Benjamin challenges the Kantian system in his essay “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov” which is effectively Benjamin’s demonstration of the connection of knowledge to the social and how it is being lost in capitalist society. “On the Program for the Coming Philosophy” is Benjamin’s farewell to Kant’s system “It is of the greatest importance for the philosophy of the future to recognize and select which elements of the Kantian philosophy should be adopted and

192 Theodor Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 171. “It [the transcendental subject] undoubtedly has one feature in common with society. This is that only the global social subject – not the contingent individual subject – possesses that character of universality, of all-encompassing totality, that Kant ascribes to his transcendental subject. We may add that behind the idea of constitution stands that of labour as social labour – and not just isolated, individual labour. On the other hand, however, in contrast with that global social subject which may be regarded as the summation of all the concrete factors of society, the Kantian transcendental subject, that is, the famous ‘ “ I think ” that accompanies all my representations’, is a complete abstraction that has nothing in common with it.”

193 Ibid., 171. From p. 171 to p.173, Adorno describes an antinomy regarding the “I” and the “we” in Kant’s transcendental philosophy “the latent social motifs that are objectively present in the so-called problem of constitution.”

194 In chapter 2, we will further review this problem.

cultivated, which should be reworked, and which should be rejected.”¹⁹⁵ The following passage in “The Storyteller,” is an example of Benjamin “extending philosophizing beyond philosophy” when he comments on how a culture based on a Kantian notion of experience had been producing an impoverished notion of experience. “...Experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it may fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper shows that it has reached a new low [...]. Beginning with the First World War, a process became apparent which continues to this day.” Benjamin describes how “the flood of war books ten years later was anything but experience that can be shared orally. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horsedrawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body.”¹⁹⁶ What Benjamin emphasizes here is not just the destruction of tradition in the transformation of experience into instrumental and form-determined shapes of capitalist life. What he is saying with this passage and “The Coming Philosophy” is that the current conceptions of knowledge and experience have been formed by capital’s needs to be reproduced in the capitalist system, but the connection of knowledge and experience is not just a connection to the traditions of a pre-capitalist past but can also be defined for the future. Putting this argument together with “The Program for the Coming Philosophy” one can read that the loss of “experience that can be shared orally” to a concept of experience that has been whittled to “a minimum of significance” in Kant because the impoverishment of experience stems from a peeling away of the intersubjective aspect of experience. In so far as Benjamin proposes to break down “the distinctions between intuition, understanding and reason” as Howard Caygill describes, Benjamin is “transform [...] the transcendental philosophy of experience into a transcendental but speculative philosophy,” in other words, a means for a dialectical understanding of where experience will need to go next.¹⁹⁷ “Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn” Benjamin explains.¹⁹⁸ One imagines that Benjamin hopes that social communication of experience is adequate to his “expectation of a great future” described in “The Coming Philosophy” in the face of the unlimited capitalist destruction of that experience. Benjamin lays out in *The Storyteller* on the one hand how in Kant we see how in modernity reshaped experience and knowledge

195 Walter Benjamin, “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy,” *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2002), 102.

196 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2002).

197 Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

198 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations of the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2002), 144.

through a new informational paradigm which he sums up in the paradigm of “verifiable information,” which is accompanied by a new view of experience characterized by the emergence of the novel¹⁹⁹. The difference of information from knowledge is its very disconnection from experience. The essay does not go further with attacking the modern scientific paradigm itself and it seems that this is not Benjamin’s main target. Benjamin seemed to regard the issue as important for addressing how the modern world can find social forms that would offer resistance to the capitalist, fascist and imperialist forces of the time. This focus in Benjamin’s writing reveals that the Kantian transcendental subject, by propagating a conception of knowledge and experience that belong to individual subjects alone, leaves behind an intersubjective experience. Instead capitalist society leaves people alone in a social world dominated by individualized experience reconfigured to resemble monetary exchange and its attendant property relations.²⁰⁰

In the contemporary media sphere, we see the re-emergence of knowledge conjoined with experience and this frequently involves the form of video. There has been a welcome fragmenting of authority and control in the fields of news media and the explosion of many contexts of reportage through decentered information such as eyewitness reporting, citizen journalism, cell phone video footage, multiple modes of sharing and narrating information on social media platforms such as twitter and instagram. Some of the changes that Benjamin calls for in “The Storyteller,” came about, at times in inverted forms, in the changing media sphere that has destabilized conventional forms of journalism since the 1990s, which I discuss in the introduction. These not only involve uncentering the authority of information sources, but also the purposes of information, interrelating public communication of knowledge with personal accounts in a constantly changing lattice of media inputs. Likewise, the rise of youtube extends the uses of video so that a spectrum of forms emerge from video reportage into all manner of personal video as forms of witnessing news as it occurs and creating new media experiences. Recall we described one of the strengths of Sembène’s films to be the way that knowledge is mutable because it is communicated socially and has social effects. Film and television are in flux because of all the new authorial forms that video makers are inventing, transforming modes of transmitting knowledge and consuming fictions in tandem. Considering Sembène’s model of keeping close to the people sets up conditions where knowledge can be people’s knowledge—i.e. what if conversations against capital were ongoing and self-directed, so that knowledge can

199 Ibid., 146. “The earliest vindication of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel.”

200 Theodor Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 174. “This chasm is the chasm of the alienation of human beings from one another, and the alienation of human beings from the world of things. This alienation is in fact socially caused; it is created by the universal exchange relation. Through the idea that our knowledge is blocked Kantian philosophy expresses as an experience the state of philosophy at the time. In particular, it expresses the idea that in this universally mediated society, determined as it is by exchange, in this society marked by radical alienation, we are denied access to existing reality as if by a blank wall.”

be mutable, taking cues from how it's employed socially. What we already have is a sphere in which informational authority takes on many forms and the "verifiable information" that ensures objective reporting of facts are continually put into relation with personal perspectives. What we need are new types of practice-thought in new stories to act on when we face future events. This is where media development would be most valuable. The difference today from Benjamin lost social context that made storytelling possible prior to modernity is the role the social plays. Sembène and Benjamin's discussion of storytelling relate to communities that are in proximity to one another. In the present moment, storytelling is knowledge connected to people's experiences through distributed communities tied together through the circulation of media storytelling in unmoored social contexts. This is not a problem and instead brings so many new possibilities. The issue is that the web of social relations that make social media commoditized phenomena. What would it mean to establish connection between knowledge and experience today without communication taking the form of media and communication commodities?

ALLEGORY AS A STRATEGY TO REPRESENT CAPITAL

The epistemological boundaries set up by Kant's transcendental subject leave a great deal wanting in the relationship between knowledge and experience that defines the Western intellectual tradition. The conception of theory and practice that come after it has left us unable to oppose capitalist individualism. We are left wondering, what form can film narratives take that can communicate the layers of practice and knowledge against capital that might constitute the coming struggle? For my own video works, I found this in variations on forms of allegory. In my first video projects from 2008 to 2010, *Crisis in the Credit System*, *Self-capital* and *Popular Unrest*, I looked for an approach to talk about capitalism in a moment when capitalism by most accounts was an inevitability. I tried to bring salient characteristics of capital into the audience's awareness so that the narrative could speak about capitalism in many registers. At the time of making my early video works, among artists and art theorists, from Jameson, who states "the local items of the present and the here-and-now can be made to express and to designate the absent, unrepresentable totality" of capital, while Tom Holert commented to a similar effect in an interview he and I did in the journal *Grey Room*, the

general consensus is that capitalism cannot be represented.²⁰¹ Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle emphasized Jameson's description of conspiracy as paranoid mapping as if to demonstrate that impossibility. It is generally understood that the artist cannot look at capitalism as a whole nor will fragments ever be sufficient to aid a complete understanding of capital. This is where it is helpful to make a distinction. Capital is complex but it is a system that Karl Marx describes, defining its dynamics. I consider the theoretical system defined by Marx as needing to be receptive to new perspectives that transform it. Yet I think it is safe to say that capital has been represented as an abstract system. When Jameson, Holert, or Toscano and Kinkle make comments about capital's unrepresentability, what they are saying is that all the specific instances of capital cannot be represented. This focus on the impossibility of the representing the specific instances of capital can be meant in a two-ways. It can be meant as a spatial and quantity problem e.g. it is not possible to represent the extent or volume of capital in a work of art. It would be hard to disagree. One cannot show the world in a work of art; editing will always be needed. Film's non-instrumental deliveries of affect at times defy logic and communication so how could the apparently unrepresentable density of information that makes up capitalism be depicted? It is precisely here in the foggy categorical terrain that we find the most interesting questions regarding images that are both aesthetically challenging while conveying political communication and struggle? My answer involves showing relations in capital but not as Toscano and Kinkle generally pursue in their book, *Cartographies of the Absolute*. Nevertheless, in this section, I will lay out an approach to capital's relationship to environments dense with social relations such as cities.

Craig Owen's characterizes allegory as "occur(ing) whenever one text is doubled by another"²⁰². Allegory's "origin in commentary in exegesis as well as continued affinity to them" makes the technique useful for telling one story by telling another. "...in allegorical structure, then, one text is *read through* another, however fragmentary, intermittent or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for allegorical work is thus the palimpsest" i.e. the fact that one leaves traces on the other. In *Brecht on Method*, Jameson sums up allegory in Brecht's plays in a way that pertains to our discussion of films against capital. Allegory, Jameson notes, has a tendency to proliferate histories being read in relation to many others, says "a text is always proto-allegorical and always implies that the text is a kind of allegory: all positing of meaning always presupposes that the text is about something else." This is the foundation of the

201 Tom Holert, "Subjects of Finance: Melanie Gilligan Interviewed by Tom Holert," *Grey Room Journal*, (2012), 87. "As much as contemporary capitalism is marked by an overwhelming (and awe-inspiring) ideology of the complexity of the cyberneticized financial markets, of seemingly incomprehensible and eventually uncontrollable feedback dynamics of speculation, betting, risk calculation, stochastics, and probability, it appears to find impossible the creation of an appropriate, comprehensible visualization and narration of the virtual processes that led to the recent crunch and crisis."

202 Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Post-Modernism," in *Art and Theory 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (London: Blackwell Publisher, 2002).

allegorical work, that it is a way that one meaning or text is compressed into another. Readers and viewers then make narrative sense from the fragments, from the wreckage of colliding narratives. The intention of this discussion of allegory is to elaborate some of the modes in which fragments of capitalist life can be discussed. Benjamin writes about this with regards to Baudelaire in *The Arcades Project*. Benjamin's well-known analysis of Baudelaire in *Paris Capital of the 19th c.* is that the poet's works convey capitalist modernity that come across in his focus on fleeting temporalities of the commodity in the period of high capitalism such as fashion or the immediacy of illustrator Constantin Guys. Allegory communicates the way that the commodity changes forms of everyday life and Benjamin especially contributes an understanding of the impact of the commodity form on the city.

In Caygill's view, comparing Baudelaire's allegory to *Origin of German Tragic Drama* is looking at different moments of capital. The "'fetish character of the commodity" identified by Marx in the early pages of *Capital*: In the Baroque age, the fetish character of the commodity was still relatively undeveloped. And the commodity had not yet so deeply engraved its stigma—the proletarianization of the producers—on the process of production. Allegorical perception could thus constitute a style in the seventeenth century, in a way that it no longer could in the nineteenth." It is as if the allegorical dimension created by the commodity reconfigures all social processes to be read as capitalism extends itself into more and more processes of daily life. What is especially striking is that Benjamin says "the commodity fetish is itself allegorical, modern culture is intrinsically allegorical, with the exchange value of the commodity devaluing all other traditional or use values but being itself prone to crises of the inflation and deflation of values. Allegory is no longer a stylistic choice, but a predicament." Benjamin describes the transformation that value effects on the city landscape "'value," as the natural burning-glass of semblance in history, outshines "meaning." Its luster is more difficult to dispel. It is, moreover, the very newest. [...] Baudelaire as allegorist was entirely isolated. He sought to recall the experience of the commodity to an allegorical experience. In this, he was doomed to founder, and it became clear that the relentlessness of his initiative was exceeded by the relentlessness of reality."²⁰³ Benjamin sees Baudelaire as holding onto the process of commodification that he witnessed whereas for everyone else commodification of daily life has become naturalized in the "relentlessness of reality." "the allegorist rummages here and there for a particular piece, holds it next to some other piece, and tests to see if they fit together—that meaning with this image or this image with that meaning. The result can never be known beforehand, for there is no natural mediation between the two."²⁰⁴

"How the price of goods in each case is arrived at can never quite be foreseen [...] And though it once may have acquired such a meaning, this can always be withdrawn in favor of a different meaning. The modes of meaning fluctuate almost as rapidly as the price of commodities. In fact, the meaning of the commodity is its

203 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1999), 347.

204 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1999), 369.

price; it has, as commodity, no other meaning.” Focusing as it does on the allegorists familiarity with “commercial wares,” where the “price tag;” becomes “the object of his broodings—the meaning” is the crucial formulation. The experience of high capitalism, much as it is in late capitalism, is a landscape expounded in price differentials. This is what *Crowds* centers on, the unaffordability of everyday life where the housing crisis is caused by the commoditized environment. One can hear and see allegory everywhere in the capitalist every day. For Benjamin the predicament of living in capitalism is living out an allegory that happens every day, causing a layering of readings of one text on another throughout daily life.

PUBLIC SPACE AND ACTING: ALLEGORY AND ACTUALITY AS ABSTRACTION

This section will describe how *Crowds* is a work constructed from a matrix of allegorical meanings that include locations and acting intersect. The processes Benjamin describes whereby value turns the built environment into an allegorical schematization is represented in the form-determined landscape of *Crowds*. The plot of *Crowds* is that Irene loses her job and has to do a series of temporary jobs throughout the city. We see the city of Orlando as we watch Irene doing jobs as a housekeeper, pool cleaner, nanny, child minder, handing out flyers and buying groceries throughout the city’s commercial and domestic private spaces. With *Crowds*, the allegory of the film is shot in everyday life so that the scenes have a closer relation to daily sites and practices. *Crowds* is very much a narrative about how the city of Orlando is particularly entwined with the entertainment and hospitality industry. While *Crowds* follows the concrete social conditions that Irene encounters, a formal consideration of the work is the way it affects a special kind of allegory by overlaying partial fragments atop the story through the use of the city and improvisation. Scenes were set in locations found throughout Orlando, such as a mall, a parking lot, a park, a grocery store, a fast food restaurant and a Starbucks. I worked with Irene, who was both the main actor and production organizer for the film, to find locations around Orlando for filming each scene. We would try out scripted improvisations in these public and private spaces. By making a narrative film in public space this way, I was able to be responsive to the locations and their particular social and political conditions. This is partially because the filmmaking process was malleable and responsive to the social and political conditions of that environment.

Throughout my work I use theatricality and performance to present abstract processes that are difficult to depict as concrete situations, characters and events. I believe that through using locations around the city of Orlando in *Crowds*, allegory is created that has a stronger relationship to capitalist conditions than in my earlier works. In *Crowds*, I structured improvisation around locations and social relations happening in the city. Filming in public locations anything could take place. If the value abstraction that constitutes allegory is created in the relationship to the environment

via performance, what capitalist exchange does is it alters the character of the relationship to the built environment. In other words, people's social relations are shaped as a result of the thorough commoditization of Orlando's built environment. Irene's actions are performed to make significant connections to that social environment. Benjamin recognizes in Baudelaire's poetry a response to capital's abstraction that remakes the city's landscape into an allegory. In present day Orlando, the commodity and exchange relations are more thoroughly expanded into every aspect of daily life than in Benjamin's time. The city transmits the quality of allegory because its details speak of a more intensified and brutal version of what is going on in cities environments all over the U.S. In Orlando, space and everyday life are further commodified and labor is paid less, but it hints at what is happening everywhere. In this way, Orlando plays a double role just by playing itself, because Orlando is a city that at this point, its very low wage labor conditions effect most of the city, dragging Orlando's population into severe wage crisis. Through improvised acting combined with aspects of the city's social environment, the film builds an allegorical performative framework to discuss capital's impacts on social relations. This approach to the films locations has developed from site-specific art practices influenced by Minimalism, Conceptual Art and Institutional critique.

In *Crowds*, material conditions of Orlando's social environment are the film's focus. *Crowds* starts with tourists arriving at the airport, having their pictures taken at a theme park, cars driving on the highway, announcing that the video work will put observation of the city of Orlando at the center of its narrative. As this introduction draws to an end, we begin the first scene where Irene is at work at the restaurant chain, Denny's. She is clearing tables on the front patio outside the restaurant on a major road with many with cars driving by. Then the next scene she is at the front window inside the restaurant cleaning a booth with another employee. After a spontaneous shoot of Irene cleaning the tables outside the restaurant, we needed to find other situations that would seem as if Irene was an employee. It was not planned that a drink spilled on our table and Irene helped a waitress to clean this up, but that was incorporated into the opening scenes of the film. This simple example shows how this work involved responding to situations in the social world around us. The semi-improvised quality of working this way in public spaces is a method not unlike candid camera-style comedy films such as Eric Andre's *Bad Trip* whereby scenes are improvised from conditions in the environment, adding layers of meaning to the film. Such scenes developed through acting improvisation are allegories that are necessarily contingent on what occurs at the time of shooting, so that the practice visible in the work is the way the piece was conceived as contingent interaction with sites and the social relations that result. A scene in *Crowds* is a series of scripted improvisation that happen in a Home Depot parking lot. In the scene, Irene makes movements and actions as non-realistic performances and as such these moments produce an allegorical doubling of readings. The script of actions which Irene follows include walking along lines demarcating a parking space, jumping up and down in the parking space, opening and shutting a car door in different rhythms, lying down in the parking space for long period of time. The act of demarcating the boundaries of parking spaces in a city where, as in most cities in North America, public space is built to be navigated by car. These privatized environments are how space and property are regulated, making some areas expensive, less

accessible and gated communities proliferate. Irene's performances are a commentary on the alienating environment dominated by driving, calling the city into question as a social space. At this point in the narrative, Irene's character does not have a car until she is evicted from her apartment in a scene at the end of the film and buys a car that she will sleep in, in lieu of paying rent, the way many employees working in the hospitality and entertainment industry in Orlando.



Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019, video installation, 5 episodes. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

Earlier on, I discussed the quality of performative theatricality in the directed improvisational scenes in *Popular Unrest* that enact abstract relations when actors miming actions of working at jobs came to signify as abstract labor in the film. I have just described a scene in *Crowds* that breaks the filmic illusion that the narrative creates because it shows the viewers that Irene is performing actions that do not preserve a realistic scene, but instead suggest artifice. At the same time, Irene's performative actions make comments directed at the viewer about the concrete social situation playing out before them. We have the construction of two layers of the narrative, one in which the scenario that is otherwise realistically depicted, is being commented upon by the actor, and then the other, Irene's performance whose artificiality is self-evident.

Crowds shows Irene's isolated daily life and focuses on how the social and political environment of Orlando hurts its residents. The spaces where Irene finds herself reflect a dwindling public space that happens alongside an Orlando tourist economy so powerful that it modifies all social relations in its orbit. In one scene, Irene is in a public park, doing a temporary job for a children's party, placing a stack of water balloons on the base of a sculpture where a group of children are playing. The children look on inquisitively, eventually picking them up. Irene's job is to give the children more water balloons when they run out, and to clean up after them. As the children play, the viewers of the work watch a moment of free time and playful activity. We note the parents nearby. They have created time for their children to play. In a similar way, the theme parks, resorts and restaurants of Orlando create space where visitors enjoy themselves. The story of *Crowds* is orchestrated around the city's entertainment service economy where guests are able to use Orlando as a playground where their

enjoyment of their experience is the top priority. People access these experiences as customers who pay for hotels, theme parks, restaurants and bars. In an early scene in *Crowds* after Irene is fired, she practices her service work demeanor in front of the mirror. She tries to perfect her behavior saying phrases such as “have you shopped with us before?,” “can I help you find anything?” and “can I help you carry that?” She ends by saying “have a good day!” Her expressions are precisely pitched in a happy style while an empty expression between smiles undermines its effect. We watch as Irene demonstrates how social contact is emptied of its social meaning, replaced by an experience transaction of friendly service, a social commodity that Orlando has perfected.

My video works put abstract processes that are difficult to represent into understandable forms as concrete situations and events. This is partly because in these singular moments, acting becomes visible as acting, drawing attention away from the main plotline, creating a second conceptual layer of abstraction that unfolds in the story. Jameson says in *Brecht and Method* “Allegory consists in the withdrawal of its self-sufficiency of meaning from a given representation. That withdrawal can be marked by a radical insufficiency of the representation itself [...] but more often [...] it takes the form of a small wedge or window alongside representation that can continue to mean itself and seem coherent.”²⁰⁵ Jameson’s point is that allegory operates by referring to another text or story fragments that can pry the main story open so that it serves as a window. He goes on to say that “theater is [...] a peculiarly privileged space for allegorical mechanisms” in that “no matter how sumptuous and satisfying their appearance, no matter how fully they seem to stand for themselves, there is always a whiff and suspicion of mimetic operations, the nagging sense that these spectacles also [...] stand for, something else.” This awareness that the work is a constructed semblance “lends the allegory power” and “an allegorical distance, ever so slight is opened up” “into which meaning of all kinds can cumulatively seep.”²⁰⁶ What Jameson is talking about is very useful to films against capitalism that often need to use allegories to address the difficult to represent elements of capital and capitalism. The insufficiency of the representations themselves contributes to a heightening of layered readings in the work, creating a sense of allegory. This is a good description of what makes it compelling to look closely at aspects of Orlando’s social relations otherwise treated as unremarkable. Andre Bazin, in his essay *Theater and Cinema—Part Two*, maintains that to elucidate the differing dynamics of distance and identification at work in theater and cinema, “the characters on the screen are quite naturally objects of identification, while those on stage are” “objects of mental opposition.” For the audience to “transpose(s)” the stage actor “into beings in an imaginary world” “the spectator [has] to intervene actively, that is to say, to will to transform their physical reality into an abstraction.” In other words, to go back to our example when Irene is visibly acting out enjoyably non-naturalistic actions in the parking lot, Irene’s transforms her “physical reality into an abstraction.” The shift out of immersion in the film to an awareness of watching a constructed scene is also an awareness of abstraction created through the indiscernibility between filmic immersion and non-naturalistic performative action. In this way,

205 Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, (London: Verso, 1998), 153.

206 Ibid.

the audience is snapped out of their immersion in sense of identification. This major form of abstraction and of real abstraction as non-naturalistic, theatrical performance breaks the illusion of the film

We come upon discussion of acting in Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama* where he speaks about qualities of performance as it is read within the allegory "... the divinations of Novalis are again correct: "Scenes" which are genuinely visual are the only ones which belong in the theatre. Allegorical characters, these are what people mostly see. Children are hopes, young girls are wishes and requests."²⁰⁷ This passage affirms that theater is part of how allegory creates a narrative that the audience reads, however Benjamin is also pointing to how in Baroque drama, characters took on abstract significance within the allegorical narrative. Contemporary allegories, where situations depicted stand in for further situations and meanings, appear frequently in film and television today, from *Severance* created by Dan Erickson and directed by Ben Stiller and Aoife McArdle, to *Underground Railroad* a series created and directed by Barry Jenkins, to the film *Don't Look Up* created and directed by Adam McKay. In those examples, the narratives convey the allegorical meaning of their story through the concepts and structure of the story. However, there are no allegorical meanings to the characters in the way that Benjamin describes in Baroque drama but rather characters are depicted with a focus on their concrete experiences. This is an important aesthetic-political distinction that will be further elaborated in chapter 2, where I will discuss the conception of this book that film against capital is very different from political theoretical conceptions such as Gyorgy Lukacs notion of totality of working-class struggle that imposed an exclusionary abstraction of the working class on individuals.

Likewise, when I am discussing acting's relationship to allegory as it appears in my work, this does not relate to allegorical characters but rather to the quality of performance as vacillating between two realities of filmic immersion and acknowledged performance that abstraction is created. Acting is a part of the insufficiency of the mimetic representation in creating an illusion that is complete. The viewer can immerse themselves in a story but still have an awareness that it is telling them a layered narrative that discusses more than the situation depicted. In this way, *Crowds* tells more than just the story of Orlando at the present moment. This will not be a situation wholly represented in lin-signs of the film, the landscape "the faces of people who pass by, their gestures, their signs, their actions, their silences" answer and present a telling of the narrative of Orlando's service and hospitality economy. It was a frequent occurrence in *Crowds* that a good deal of information about Orlando's social conditions were communicated inside the frame. The rhythm of unchoreographed and spontaneous actions punctuated and timed the scenes. The decision about what im-sign information to compress into scenes was continuously made as the scenes played out. The situation produced is one where Orlando conditions: the city's buildings, businesses, streets but also Orlando's social systems and the state of social relations in the city interrelate to Irene's actions, and they comment on each other. It is important for my practice that I do not simply make works that depict the structures of capitalism in

207 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (London: Verso, 1998), 191.

terms of their logics and their changes but also works that show social changes in the systems we live in. It is significant that during this PhD, my video works are closer to the lived experience of capitalist abstraction. This happened by incorporating new methods to approach my subject matter differently, so that my projects increasingly come into contact with political conditions in the contemporary social environment.

In a similar way, the use of Orlando's locations in *Crowds* is intended to comment on a wider social and political context through acting and action while the fictional elements float with a quasi-allegorical status. In one scene, we see a wealthy neighborhood filled with big houses. We see a couple of women in jogging clothes walk a dog between the streets, then a segments from an interview where Irene is speaking to Bryant Coleman, a member of Unite Here. Bryant says: "We can work together, I can work for you and all this other stuff but I can't live next to you." Then we see Irene working as a housekeeper, bringing goods into a large mansion. We see a car parked in the street. The Black driver of the car has stepped out to deliver something to a white person who lives in one of the houses. Three elements are present, the fiction in which Irene is working, the documentary shots of the neighborhood activity and the documentary interviews they all combine in this scene in the wealthy Winter Park neighborhood. I had researched Winter Park because of its longstanding history of racial segregation that was established during the period of Jim Crow laws in the U.S. Southern states. In her history of Orlando "Segregation and Desegregation in Parramore: Orlando's African American Community," Tana Mosier Porter describes "The Jim Crow system of institutionalized segregation" that "emerged in the post-Civil War South to keep freedmen in their "places" was a "system of complete segregation developed slowly and insidiously. Eventually, states created formal legislation to separate the races, and in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision, the United States Supreme Court legalized these measures in a "separate but equal" doctrine that controlled the South for more than half a century." From that period, Orlando wealthy residents have relied on racialized labor. "In Orange County, Florida, white employers established early African American settlements to provide separate but nearby housing for black domestic help and grove laborers. [...] Developers who platted the wealthy resort town of Winter Park in 1881 laid out the adjacent community of Hannibal Square for anticipated black employees"²⁰⁸. The Winter Park neighborhood shows very tangible evidence of this history with its design for oppressive spatial control with its winding cul de sacs that seem constructed to limit access to people attempting to navigate these

208 Tana Mosier Porter, "Segregation and Desegregation in Parramore: Orlando's African American Community," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Winter, 2004, Vol. 82, No. 3, (2004), 291.

securitized private environments.²⁰⁹ This control is reminiscent of an oft cited passage in Benjamin's Paris capital of the 19th where he talks about Baron Hausmann's redesign of the city. "Hausmann tries to shore up his dictatorship by placing Paris under an emergency regime. [...] he estranges the Parisians from their city. They no longer feel at home there, and start to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis. [...] Hausmann seeks to neutralize these tactics on two fronts. Widening the streets is designed to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets are to furnish the shortest route between the barracks and the workers' districts."²¹⁰ The spatial environment of the Winter Park neighborhood controls people's movement and this is a spatial strategy to maintain racist domination found throughout Orlando. The combination of Bryant's interview segment and the footage from the scene becomes a critique of the continuation of the segregation and its link to the city's continued reliance on racialized work. These are always disconnected from the action insofar as the people interviewed speak about conditions in Orlando. Bryant and other interviewees appear in sequences, their commentaries always connected to the scene. Rather their comments on conditions in Orlando are disjunctively disconnected but also immediately connected to Irene's narrative interweaving the documentary interviews with the social conditions discussed so that the fictional scenario is understood to reflect the wider social context. The interviews continue to ask questions of the scenes shown in the film, their political questions are introduced into those posed through documentary-style views of Orlando's social reality.

The scene continues with shots of cars driving along streets and teenagers as they drive a speedboat on the lake. Orlando's violent racist history has always been a regime exercised on the level of the built environment. Tana Mosier Porter mentions in an article the "popular belief that Orlando's Division Street was

209 Ibid., 292. "In Orange County, Florida, white employers established early African American settlements to provide separate but nearby housing for black domestic help and grove laborers. [...] All of these places, established by whites to house black workers, became thriving African American communities through the efforts of their residents. A similar pattern arose near Orlando. Around 1880, Sam Jones's family set up housekeeping on the southeast side of the small town, near a large sinkhole north of the Greenwood Cemetery. Other African American families followed, including several former slaves." The following describes how the Orlando area Parramore came into being from the practices of segregation: "In the 1880s, James Parramore platted an area on west side of Orlando, across the newly built railroad tracks the downtown business district. This development was of particular interest to Rev. Andrew Hooper and his neighbors who employed black maids, cooks, and gardeners from Jonestown every day. [...] Yet, residential segregation restricted black housing to the least desirable places, usually poorly drained and unimproved, as the names of the settlements suggest."

210 Walter Benjamin, "Paris Capital of the 19th c.," *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, (Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2002) 2002, 42.

intended to mark the division between Black and white residents.”²¹¹ The same article on Orlando’s history and present segregation, describes that “Orlando began in the 1920s to systematically segregate the Black community” pointing out that “in 1927 Orlando adopted a zoning code identifying most of these areas, already occupied by Black residents, as industrial, but evidently still suitable living places for them. White citizens began to demand that Black residents be removed from their homes, especially those in Jonestown, where they had lived for a half-century, and be forced into the new segregated areas.”²¹² This scene ends, and we see an interview with Isaac Croft, a Unite Here union representative describing another part of Orlando, Orange Blossom Trail. Orange Blossom Trail relates to the city’s history of spatial segregation: “The southern area, bounded by the Orange Blossom Trail [...] The raised expressway permanently closed some streets, isolating Parramore and creating a new boundary for the still-segregated community.”²¹³ A car drives along Orange Blossom Trail and as we advance along the road, Isaac describes how the area along the street is the home to a lot of run-down hotels that become homes for people. Isaac talks about how a lot of people who stay at these hotels are immigrants that have moved to the US and who stay there because they are inexpensive. Isaac tells us that a lot of the people who live and work there are undocumented immigrants, going into detail about these labor conditions where employers can get away with taking advantage of workers. Throughout Florida’s history, the state has been a site for one of the US’s largest leisure economies. This economy was conceived by white Florida business owners as a place where low wage Black and Latinx labor would be exploited, a racialized hospitality and entertainment industry labor that was stated in some its earliest promotional guidebooks.²¹⁴ In *Emancipation Betrayed*, Paul Ortiz describes how The Florida booster sold an image of Florida as the “Land of Flowers” where “sick Yankees” and wealthy Europeans would spend their money. [...] At the bottom of this entrepreneurial plan rested a disfranchised and powerless black population whose low wages and hard work would underwrite the booming agricultural, service, and shipping sectors.”

Since these earlier stages of racialized labor market that Ortiz describes, a current racialized workforce of undocumented labor continues in Orlando’s service economy and much of that population has to deal with expensive and unstable housing conditions. Moreover, in the low-cost motels that Isaac describes, employers practice wage theft with employees being asked to clock out and continue working,

211 Tana Mosier Porter, “Orlando’s Division Street: The history behind what became a symbol of segregation” Originally published in the Winter 2016 issue of *Reflections from Central Florida*, the magazine of the Historical Society of Central Florida. <https://www.yourcommunitypaper.com/articles/orlandos-division-street-the-history-behind-what-became-a-symbol-of-segregation/> (accessed on Oct 5, 2022).

212 Ibid.

213 Ibid.

214 Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organization and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election in 1920*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 16.

taking advantage of employees with no legal recourse to fight back. Orlando's social landscape bore repeated attacks through racial segregation imposed through the built environment.



Melanie Gilligan, *Crowds*, 2019, video installation, 5 episodes. Still image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Mayer.

As Isaac finishes speaking, we see the opening of a new scene where Irene has appeared at a protest at the Florida state legislature in Tallahassee where law makers are debating passing a bill that would require local law enforcement agencies to carry out all federal immigration enforcement requests, thus criminalizing people who are undocumented and making them more susceptible to arrest and deportation. People attending the protest walk down the steps of the building toward the initial gathering point. There people congregate to eat food supplied by the organizers of the protest, participate in discussion and take part in the protest against the bill. The criminalization of undocumented workers by the state of Florida is part of the state's ongoing racism and oppression. The state of Florida imposes laws that make people vulnerable to arrest and deportation and in turn this impacts people in their jobs so that they are more likely to take lower wages. This is commented on by union organizer Jose Castro during an interview that did not appear in the final edit of *Crowds*:

Jose: ...You have certain companies that they don't care about the status [...] you need somebody to clean a room and because you're a citizen you need to get paid the minimum wage, but I'm not a citizen and I'm going to do it for three four dollars, obviously you're going to make a decision right. It's going to be in favour of the person who pays and not the person who is going to do the service. That's something that most of the people that hire undocumented do in terms of economy but also do in terms of another kind of discrimination because now they're creating a modern slavery and that's a bigger problem.

The Orlando low wage economy is racialized through many discriminatory labor practices, and the vulnerable status of undocumented people is part of the city's economy of low wage work. I adopt a few different strategies in order to bring across how the low wage economy impacts people's lives. One of these is that several times throughout the work, Irene is shown traveling through the city distances as cheaply as

possible on the bus. People who live on low incomes in Orlando have to use the bus to navigate the sprawling city built for cars. *Crowds* incorporates these rides on the bus into the story to create scenes that communicate the expensive living conditions in Orlando. When I wrote the script of *Crowds*, it was important to me that scenes

would take place on the bus because the bus is a public space where we, the film crew, could interact with Orlando's social life, yet Orlando's bus system does not have an adequate amount of frequent buses to cover the huge space of the city. Transportation is a major aspect of the allegory of unbearable living conditions in *Crowds*. In one scene in particular there is an interview that sets up a contrast between, on the one hand, the choice that many people make to buy a car despite the high costs of upkeep and, on the other hand, choosing to rely on the bus system.

One of the main themes in *Crowds* is the crisis of capitalist social reproduction manifest in the housing crisis that is currently affecting people across the US and the effects on people on low incomes who are continuously unable to pay for their everyday living costs. Costs of housing are continually going up along with other rapidly increasing costs such as food and transport. The narrative of *Crowds* focuses on the high costs of living in Orlando and the very low wages that exist in the Orlando service industry. I see *Crowds* as showing a situation that is present through the U.S. economy where there has not been an increase in real wages for decades. In a scene in episode 5, I look at this when Irene, who has been evicted from her apartment, packs up her things and loads the car. While she does this, she begins to tell herself a story about a town that is becoming poor. The story begins with her describing how the town "knew it was becoming poor and it tried to stop the situation from worsening. It tried to encourage more new businesses, more industry, more new stores and tourism" but it continues to become even poorer. This is an account of the situation of the US and global economy whereby a slow collapse of the capitalist economy is visible in the deterioration in capital's rate of productivity which, among other things, is an effect of the inability of businesses to productively reinvest. In this situation, capitalist businesses suffer systemic weakening of accumulation and find it difficult to realize profits because of a declining profitability, which has resulted in a steady decline of capitalist economies, leaving many people in the U.S. underemployed, underpaid and working multiple jobs to pay for an increasingly high costs of living.²¹⁵ *Crowds* reflects my interest in interrogating Orlando as an example of this decline. This situation seen

215 Robert Brenner, "What's Good for Goldman Sachs is Good for America," *Center for Social Theory and Comparative History*, UCLA, (2009) (accessed online Oct 5, 2022). "The bottom line, all rhetoric to the contrary, is that the most recent business cycle, which began in March 2001 and ended in December 2007, has been the weakest in the last half century in the US, western Europe, and Japan, and this despite the titanic government-sponsored stimulus. Lacking an engine to drive it once the housing bubble had begun to deflate, the economy was sliding toward recession well before the banking-cum-credit market crisis struck with a vengeance in mid-summer 2007." Joshua Clover's book *Riot, Strike, Riot* synthesizes the analyses of Robert Brenner and Giovanni Arrighi when he writes about the capitalism's "concurrent" "retreat of industrial production in the leading capitalist nations."

in Orlando and elsewhere, is one where the abstraction of capital is imposed on the concrete conditions of its landscape to the point where capital's tendencies destroy the possibilities of life for many people. In recent decades, the service economy has had expanded growth, but this is as a product of capital's crisis of profitability, not its state of good health.

For allegory to operate, one discussion needs to be read against another. *Crowds* offers Orlando as a singularly significant example of the capitalist service economy and conditions. However, in delving into what has created and propagates the city's conditions and its service, hospitality and entertainment economy, for instance the way its legal system and policing makes its work force vulnerable as well as the politics of space built on white supremacy, *Crowds* is an allegory in that it shows instances of capital's domination that are exercised in many cities all over the world, but in showing the conditions thrown up by Orlando's specific combination of factors, it locks together a concrete and particular situation to make its depiction of the city. Benjamin identifies allegory in Baudelaire at the friction point where capital's abstractions meet actuality. Our look at techniques and concepts developed in my video works during the PhD points to areas that film against capital can attend to more closely and why an increased focus on refining film as practice-knowledge is badly needed. This chapter has shown that film produces knowledge that fuse theory and practice and the combination of acting, and the histories and current practices in *Crowds* build a kind of allegory that shows capital's form-determination in Orlando but also the contestation that results.

(CHAPTER 2)

MAKING FILMS AGAINST CAPITALISM

In the last chapter, we looked at methods employed in my works to demonstrate ways that films against capital and capitalism could be approached. Chapter 2 will widen the scope of the discussion to describe provisional theoretical directions beyond the concrete examples of my work. I will look at certain discussions that film against capital should take on board and others it can leave behind with the aim of developing new directions for moving images as social knowledge. This chapter offers a set of concepts needed to construct films against the capitalist system by discussing some important theoretical strategies that oppose racial and patriarchal capitalism. The argument of this chapter is that capital transforms social processes and the material world with many tools that are ideological and economic, abstract and concrete. Building from the last chapter, this chapter defines some of the manifold interconnected questions that filmmakers against capitalism confront. In the awareness that each film against capital takes on problems of addressing racialized, patriarchal, hetero-normative, transphobic and ableist structures of economic exploitation and domination, I will put forward steps to help reach that goal. One way this chapter does this is by describing links between capital's abstract, systemic dimensions, and the concrete instantiations of these abstractions, doing this primarily through a discussion of film representations. This chapter could, of course, take on many more aspects of how capital's abstractions manifest concretely but it is led by theoretical direction set out in the previous chapter. My aim will never be to set limits or preferable modes of depiction but rather to outline improvements to concepts that have influenced my theoretical understanding of capital, so that I can contribute to expanding the tools available for making films against capitalism.

As the last chapter notes, capitalism is the relation between the concrete and the abstract where concrete conditions of people's lives are constantly transformed by economic abstractions. An investigation of methods for making films against capitalism could start by looking at the concrete and the abstract as a way to consider the relationship of large scale social, political and economic dynamics to lived realities in capitalism. I start my argument with this investigation because it shows something fundamental to what film can contribute to a struggle against capitalism: it can provide insight into practical, lived conditions and relations as they continuously transform and drive social processes. Yet the depiction of social relations needs to focus on more than individuals. Our argument will stay in contact with, but also diverge from, seeing films as stories about individuals and will turn to group social relations as an important shift in films against capital. My project draws from theoretical analysis of racial and

patriarchal capitalism that imposes heteronormative, transphobic, and ableist frameworks, and a Marxist analysis of the capitalist system. As a result, I start this chapter by returning to look at *Cartographies of the Absolute* by Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, which I already discussed in the last chapter. From there, I will dig further into issues raised in chapter 1 and lay out three points: that social relations in film need to be transformed beyond simply depicting the individual by showing group social relations, that these depictions of social relations need to incorporate a rejection of racist and patriarchal structures with its connection to gender, sexuality and ableism in order for films to accurately show social relations, and lastly I will present ways that social processes can reflect different notions of change that do not articulate narratives in terms of a capitalist conception of possibilities.

WHAT IS CONCRETE? RELATIONS ARE CONCRETE.

In its opening section, the book *Cartographies of the Absolute* focuses on films that dramatize a shift from a micro to a wider, macro view of a scene by beginning in a close up and moving to an expanded, “God’s-eye” overview. The writers indicate that the movement between the two scales articulate different degrees of knowledge. This can be understood as knowledge that can be derived through proximity to a problem or through gaining an overview depending on the size and breadth of the phenomena. Evincing a spatial conception of the conditions of knowledge, this opening passage in *Cartographies of the Absolute* provides a fairly distinct conception of one of its main objects of inquiry, the concrete, built environment: “Arguably, the language of cartography and planning allows the political and aesthetic problems of representation or “figuration” to be given a more concrete cast, a rooting in everyday life. [...] Beyond the contemplation of the “image” of the city, mapping is above all a practical task involving an individual’s successful, or unsuccessful, negotiation of urban space.”²¹⁶

What is so distinctive about the account of God’s-eye filmic views that begin the argument of *Cartographies of the Absolute* is that they use the movement of the camera from a close up to a distant overview, from the micro to macro in such a way as to narrow the field of knowledge to the visible environment that is being mapped. Furthermore, the movement itself evokes and emphasizes a shift from concrete particularity to the abstract, while flattening these knowledges to the changing scales and spatial dimensions. If one recalls, David MacDougall’s point in the previous chapter, that film is insensitive “to the cognitive world—but it may equally be regarded as another sensitivity, giving access to a different range of phenomena (e.g. *how* people

216 Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), ebook, 32.

dig)” one starts to see the problem. Counter to the cognitive mapping approach of *Cartographies of the Absolute*, a focus on representing capitalism does not need to revolve around relations that sediment in the built environment, nor the physical production and circulation of commodities. It is clear that these God’s-eye-views give a sense of access to information about the capitalist system, yet this is not the same as materialist knowledge of capitalist social relations. When seeing from above, because of film’s inherent insensitivity to the cognitive world, one does not see the concrete nature of social relations nor does one see how they come about. Instead, the phenomena appear abstract. To extrapolate from the cognitive mapping framework of Toscano and Kinkle, to look down at a city one sees details of streets and highways, conceiving of how the city’s overall route system connects to the houses and commercial buildings. Yet with most of the complex, non-spatial relationships that define capitalism, e.g. the social and institutional systems, they function in relation to one another in ways that cannot be perceived, nor is it possible to view the way that people interrelate to make up its social systems. When confronted with the many relations at play, Toscano and Kinkle evoke conceptual devices such as the macro view to describe a visual comprehension of systems that interrelate across the capitalist landscape. For Toscano and Kinkle, these are abstract and connected to a general invisibility of the processes of capital:

Though our concern here is primarily visual, when issues of opacity and invisibility are at stake it is not possible to ignore that the impasses of an economic aesthetics sometimes escape the tyranny of sight over cognition, that representational dramas may play themselves out through other senses. The notion that capital—as an infinitely ramified system of exploitation, an abstract, intangible but overpowering logic, a process without a subject or a subject without a face—poses formidable obstacles to its representation has often been taken in a sublime or tragic key. Vast, beyond the powers of individual or collective cognition; invisible, in its fundamental forms; overwhelming, in its capacity to reshape space, time and matter...”²¹⁷

Their argument is that capitalist systems present “formidable obstacles” because they are “vast, beyond the powers of individual or collective cognition,” and difficult to represent in that they are “invisible” in their “fundamental forms; overwhelming” in their “capacity to reshape space, time and matter.” This suggests that to analyze capitalist dynamics that require “cognition,” not simply the “visual,” might require narrative scenarios. They go on to say that “...unrepresentability need not be approached solely in this iconoclastic, quasitheological guise. A surfeit of representations—of personae, substitutes, indices and images—may turn the unrepresentability of capital into something more akin to a comedy of errors, a sinister masquerade. Those abstractions that

²¹⁷ Ibid., 69.

in one register are as immaterial, mute and unrepresentable as the most arcane deities, reappear in another as loquacious, promiscuous, embodied.”²¹⁸

This mention of turning to comedy and masquerade to depict what is supposedly unrepresentable in capitalism, to give “loquacious, promiscuous, embodied” forms to these unrepresentable qualities, indicates a needed narrative direction in the primarily visual and spatial framework of cognitive mapping which is focused mainly on showing capitalist processes. Toscano and Kinkle suggest that in light of “our cognitive and political deficit, faced with the unravelling of a system whose intelligibility was always partial but is now suspended,” they are interested in “looking instead at “artificially constructed representations and the individual and collective organs of perception.”²¹⁹ I concur that it is through constructed representations that tangible points of contact between the concrete and abstract can be developed. However, unfortunately the representations discussed in *Cartographies of the Absolute* do not look very different from the parameters one might associate with cognitive mapping. For instance, one of the main areas of focus in the book is the movement of shipping containers and their impact on supply chains, where “the devastation of port and ship-labour” “dislocat(e)” “transport and production centres in new spatio-temporal fixes.” Kinkle and Toscano suggest that they chose this focus because “the container is both a crucial operator and a symbol of an all-encompassing regime of materialized abstraction.”²²⁰ However, in the book overall, they overlook many other modes of abstraction that take place in capitalist everyday life

It is understandable that the shipping container is perceived as synthesizing a host of relationships that connect maritime industry distribution to global systems of capital flows. While a quality of abstraction is described as conditioning the concrete, the container and “containerization is shorthand for a complex assemblage of labour (living and dead), capital (fixed and variable), law, politics, energy and geography.” In other words, the picture of the maritime industry found in projects such as Allan Sekula’s photographic and film work condenses and stands in as a depiction of relations of production within the transformation of capital’s overall reproduction under conditions of increasing unemployment and intensification of labor productivity. In this discussion, Kinkle and Toscano emphasize the relationships within the many systems that reproduce the shipping industry as do artist and filmmakers such as Allan Sekula and Noel Burch in their film *Forgotten Space*. Yet the general tendency is to find the relations of those systems in the sites themselves, in the ports, ships and machinery thereby giving these relations a relatively static form. One is reminded of the observation of Walter Benjamin that “As Brecht says: “The situation, is “complicated by the fact that less than ever does a mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in

218 Ibid., 70.

219 Ibid., 66.

220 Ibid., 274.

fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed.”²²¹ By likening the attention to logistics and containerization to the problem of the Krupp factory, I want to ask, is it through showing transformations in industry that one gains a view onto abstract capitalist processes? A depiction trained on functional operations is restricted to the realm of congealed and reified relations that amass in fixed capital. To distinguish their own approach, Toscano and Kinkle raise a point made by China Miéville that diagnoses the problem quite clearly “China Miéville notes, many of these discussions digress into a crass commodity-fetishism themselves: properties that are the result of the social relations between human beings are yet again confused for innate properties of objects themselves.” While through Miéville, Toscano and Kinkle are able to forestall the critique of overemphasis on the commodity, from my perspective, while their approach perceives that other aspects of social life are available for anti-capitalist filmic analysis, there is a definite predisposition to seek out the analysis of capitalism in its commodity chain symptoms.

Looking at these issues, we find two tendencies that raise questions. As we have said, seeking to explore social relations through trade links and supply chains limits the scope of the conceptions of capitalism that are possible. The avowed aim is to look for “materialized abstraction” however there are so many other ways that abstractions are made manifest in the capitalist social world all the time. For the most part, the book does not deal with many other ways of approaching capitalist abstraction except in a few discussions of important television and films. A second point is that this orientation established through the framework of cognitive mapping conditions the way that the film or artwork that “has actually to be constructed, something artificial, something set up” is understood. It sees them as necessarily oriented around the accretions of fixed capital to be found throughout the capitalist, built environment. However, the authors of *Cartographies of the Absolute* certainly understand that films about capitalism do not need to directly address capitalist production, distribution or circulation. The book takes up television series such as *The Wire* and the film *Wolfen* as significant works that deal with interlinked formal and informal economies and capital’s transformation of the city respectively. Importantly, a chapter of the book perceptively surveys many films and art works that address the conditions of the 2007-08 economic crisis as well as correlated economic and labor-related subjects. These sections are especially important for thinking about what films against capitalism can be. Reading the argument in *Cartographies of the Absolute* produces the distinct sense that there is much more that can be explored in order to understand and build potential analysis in anti-capitalist film as a practice. Regarding *The Wire*, Kinkle and Toscano say that the TV series represents “capitalism, in its uneven and combined geographical development” and that it is “one of the most challenging, popular and multi-faceted attempts to give aesthetic and narrative shape to the comprehension of contemporary society.”²²² Narratives such as *The Wire* provided an important direction

221 Walter Benjamin, *Short History of Photography*, 24 https://monoskop.org/images/7/79/Benjamin_Walter_1931_1972_A_Short_History_of_Phography.pdf (accessed online Oct. 5, 2022).

222 Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), 198, ebook.

in *Cartographies of the Absolute* because it opens up productive investigations of capital and capitalism focused on capitalist social relations.

After discussing narratives that look at the 2007-08 economic crisis, Kinkle and Toscano address Benjamin's point that the image of the Krupp factory is an inadequate representation to condense the "reification of human relationships," saying that "to echo Brecht, as our reality continues to 'slip into the domain of the functional', a tracking shot past a stack of servers running algorithms, or the mere ventriloquising of capital's ceaseless chatter, is unlikely to reveal any more about the institutions of contemporary finance than a photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG could tell the spectator of the 1930s about those pillars of German militarism. 'The reification of human relations ... no longer discloses these relations. So there is indeed "something to construct," something "artificial," "invented."' To make such constructions possible, it will be necessary to take a far greater distance from capital's ubiquitous clichés than works 'about' the crisis and finance have done hitherto, to leave the echo chambers in which the language of commodities natters incessantly."²²³ Toscano and Kinkle see films that reproduce clichés of the world of finance as akin to Brecht's observation about depictions of the Krupp factory. If Kinkle and Toscano claim that the contemporary films addressing the 2007-08 financial crisis that they surveyed were for the most part unable to overcome the impasse whereby "the reification of human relations ... no longer discloses these relations," this diagnosis tells us that currently moments of the most disastrous wreckage produced by capitalism are not being adequately understood or represented in films. The shared images and stories that capitalist society currently produces are often not able to depict and rigorously reflect on capitalism's violence. Here I will bring in my research question from the introduction, "what are forms of capitalist ideology that the study of film can unearth to bring about better filmic examinations of the relations that currently govern capitalist societies?"

It is important to find a theoretical and practical approach that adopts the analysis in *Cartographies of the Absolute* while pushing beyond it. In the interest of building upon problems of unrepresentability and abstraction associated with films about capitalism, I would like to focus on one particular aspect of what I have discussed thus far. This is the relationship between the abstract and the concrete. In other words, how capital's abstractions have deep roots in the concrete social relations that make up our lives.²²⁴ A passage from Evald Ilyenkov's *Dialectics of the Abstract and Concrete in Marx's Capital* defines concreteness in a way that is very useful to our discussion. "When Marx defines the concrete as unity of diverse aspects, he assumes a dialectical

²²³ Ibid., 259.

²²⁴ Ibid., 69. *Cartographies of the Absolute* also puts a great deal of emphasis on the interrelation of the abstract operations of capital to the concrete, for instance in the following passage "if Marx is still relevant then to the question of capitalism and its representation, it is to the degree that his theories—of crisis, of value, of increasing misery in the shadow of towering wealth—remain analytically and critically incisive even when his (borrowed and dramatised) descriptions of the cruelly concrete effects of abstract domination become anachronistic."

interpretation of unity, diversity, and of their relationship. In dialectics, unity is interpreted first and foremost as connection, as interconnection and interaction of different phenomena within a certain system or agglomeration, and not as abstract likeness of these phenomena. Marx's definition assumes exactly this dialectical meaning of the term 'unity'.²²⁵ Ilyenkov suggests here that to describe something as concrete is to discuss relations between elements. The concrete can be a relation of a collection of phenomena as a system. This passage regarding a definition of concreteness is helpful for considering our discussion of representations in capitalism because as we understand from Ilyenkov's clarification, the concrete is an arrangement of unity, diversity and their relationship. This helps us think further about the abstractions of capital that Toscano and Kinkle describe as those "vast," "ramified" systems that because of their complexity, pose an undeniable obstacle to representation. Ilyenkov's passage suggests that what may seem abstract is filled with "unity" (as connection or interaction), "diversity" and "their relationship," the detail of specific situations that have relations within a larger conglomeration. The abstract may be hard to grasp as concrete because of the concatenation of elements within systems, in other words, the people and their relationships that exist within houses and buildings shown by cognitive mapping, depictions of capitalist systems described by Kinkle and Toscano, the relations that play out across the route systems, in social institutions and infrastructures, interrelating groups to individuals, that need to be perceived. These relations extend to become a system that can be complex but need to be understood in their concrete specificity.

I would argue that this is an important aspect of the attention that needs to be applied to constructing representations of capitalism. If depictions that show and oppose capitalism focus on constructing methods to elaborate relations within capitalism, this would not make the obstacles to representing capital miraculously disappear, but it raises a wide set of questions that are touched on in *Cartographies of the Absolute* but need to be further elaborated. These questions are how one shows relations, how what is shown is understood and how it might be dramatized? To do this, one needs to build upon the evocation of "intangible but overpowering logic" and depictions of tangible production and distribution chains. This can be done by bringing up further discussion of social relations, and asking how films show social relations in such a way that makes them perceptible as produced through capitalism and the systems of oppression that subtend it? Films can show such specificities of how social relations and social systems interrelate, but currently this needs to happen much more frequently.

Film theorist Nora Alter raises a major stumbling block of film presenting ideas that oppose capitalism when she describes films as beginning beyond the space of work. "One could even say that most films begin where the identity of the protagonist as a worker ends. They begin at the moment, when the protagonist leaves the factory behind, and in this sense, the Lumières' film is a precursor to the rest of cinema,

225 Evald Ilyenkov, *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 19. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

with its inclination to tell the story of life that is left to the individual after work is over, or indeed of the life that one dreams of and wishes for beyond the realm of work.”²²⁶

This notion that life is worth representing in film only when it is leisure time, while it well-meaningly recognizes work as stealing time from people throughout their lives, the lack of imagination regarding people’s identities as full of complex contradictions, of their relations as occurring across fields of endeavor while thwarted by waged work, is drastically limiting to film. Firstly, the way this divides economic and extra-economic, assuming that securing one’s subsistence in everyday life is inherently inaeesthetic, curtails the conversations to be had about labor. Time spent in the throes of paid work cannot not be truly dealt with if filmmakers do not continue to give it new shapes.

The daily evidence of how economic fluctuations shape life’s possibilities is still, despite the best efforts of many filmmakers, rarely dealt with in film, never mind the ways that economic logics increasingly influence lived conditions. The dramatic and emotional outcomes of economic difficulties: foreclosures and evictions, layoffs and weak job markets, play out in the diminishment of possibilities across people’s lives. When films edit out the economic practices and systems that govern society, this disavows the economic causes in social narratives while economic logics become ever-more dominant in everyday life. Such dynamics only get shown at moments of economic crisis, otherwise the conversation stays on the shelf, never scrutinized by art and film in time to contest responses to new crises. One of the high-points in economic education through media so far has been since the 2007-2008 economic crisis with its deployment of increasingly sophisticated infographics and some attempt at giving narrative form to the causes of the crisis, but this is not in any way adequate to the need to bring the economic into narrative telling.

I would like to draw attention to my essay “Affect & Exchange” to point out the ties between economic and other dramatic concerns in people’s lives “Crises of the capitalist system hit us in the belly, in the nervous system, they mobilize our desires and fears, the place where the body’s physical needs and drives meet thought. In a capitalist economy, people satisfy their needs (for nourishment, shelter, etc.) through the use values of commodities; yet at the same time the availability of these commodities is determined by their exchange values [...] in an economic crisis like the one currently unfolding, people become acutely aware of how these exchange fluctuations control the most basic conditions of their physical existence.”²²⁷ The profoundly heightened emotions of vulnerability and uncertainty felt in situations where economic stability is undermined opens our analysis for this chapter. In a capitalist society, unlivable contradictions are naturalized. In an essay on entrepreneurial subjectivity in crisis that appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly* that Marina Vishmidt and I wrote: “Many protests in the past years have been sparked by actual operations of markets themselves—for

226 Nora Alter, “The Political Im/perceptible: Farocki’s Images of the World and the Inscription of War, Harun Farocki: Working on the Site Lines,” *New German Critique*, No. 68, Special Issue on Literature (Spring / Summer, 1996), 277.

227 Melanie Gilligan, “Affect & Exchange,” *Intangible Economies*, Fillip Editions, 2012.

instance, the attitude that the market took toward the treasury bonds of some European nations during the Euro crisis. Agency exerted through the financial markets in such events is so distributed that it becomes increasingly difficult to direct concrete practices of protest toward specific targets. As capital's crisis of valorization pushes national governments into further neoliberal restructuring, one witnesses alongside the planned orchestration of protests movements the reemergence of an older practice: the riot. The eruption of struggles in the immigrant suburbs of Stockholm, the battles against market-fueled state violence in Greece, or the fight against a repressive state in Turkey are a few examples of situations in which disenfranchised people found that direct action and antistate violence was the only option."²²⁸

While the concrete conditions of people's lives are shot through with economic abstraction, films against capital and capitalism need to show these damaging conditions, complete with the relations that may be difficult to represent. To further develop the relationship between concrete and the abstract as articulated by Ilyenkov, the abstract that is declared unrepresentable in *Cartographies of the Absolute* can in fact be understood as concrete relationships. This does not necessarily make these relationships easier to represent, but it offers routes to determining how a conception of relations can determine the process of filmmaking against capitalism. To return to Ilyenkov, he describes how Marx and Engels in *Theses on Feuerbach* "were the first to show, from the materialist viewpoint, wherein lies the genuine concreteness of human existence and what is the objective reality to which a philosopher is entitled to apply the term "concrete" in its full meaning. They discovered man's concrete essence in the overall process of social life [...] rather than in a series of qualities inherent in each individual."²²⁹ A specific meaning of concrete emerges here: the concreteness of social processes and social relations. I will therefore put at the center of my examination the relationship between concrete social relations and social processes, living conditions and the conflicts that result from living in capitalism. To do this, I describe how film can depict concrete particularity as a process of relation, connection, and change, through which capitalist processes unfold. Will a focus on relations devise methods of representing capitalism through a framework that is less reliant on visual and spatial metaphors for the development of knowledge of capitalism than *Cartographies of the Absolute*? What if one were to show a high rise building not as a façade with occupants of the building obscured within it, but as a transparent structure that, through intelligent mechanics of telling, teases out a story of social structures that once elaborated can fill up the building. What if rather than focusing on one person's story, one starts from a wide angle shot that takes on the difficulties of showing society?

228 Melanie Gilligan and Marina Vishmidt, "The Property-Less Sensorium": Following the Subject in Crisis Times," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, (2015), 612.

229 Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectic of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 48. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm> (accessed on Oct 5, 2022).

ABSTRACTION AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

The relationships between the concrete and abstract that this argument will show are the real effects of capital's abstraction, whereby social relations are impacted by concrete abstractions. *Capital's* abstract social relations are inserted throughout daily life, and transform it through means that are intimate, and inter-relational. I have described in chapter 1 how economic abstraction forms the social basis for capitalist society. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx points out that "individuals are [...] ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another." Marx indicates that forms of social abstraction have come to dominate people's lives as the "material relations which are their lord and master."²³⁰ In Marx's work, the dialectic between the abstract and the concrete has an immense importance. Throughout the categories Marx employs, from the conceptual pairing of use value and exchange value to that of concrete labor and abstract labor, one finds repeated the relation between concrete and the abstract. As *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* explains, "the simplest economic category, e.g., exchange-value [...] cannot exist except as an abstract, unilateral relation of an already existing concrete organic whole." Recall for a moment the reference in the introduction raised by I.I. Rubin to the abstract universal and concrete universal. Here, in *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, when Marx refers to capitalism as a concrete whole, he is talking about its operation as a system whose functioning relies on capitalist activities that "posit its presuppositions" as a system of social reproduction. I will return to this positing later in this chapter. For now, it is important to note that capital's mode of reproduction is perpetuated in the meeting of concrete conditions of individual's daily life conditioned by the abstractions of capital.

Ilyenkov describes how Marx initiated a new line of economic and philosophical inquiry by being the first to describe value as a form of abstraction, as a concept more complex than the term value in its traditional usage. Marx "...raised the question, quite explicitly and directly, of the real source of the value properties of things, of the substance of value." This "achievement lay precisely in that" he and Engels "attempted to strictly define the substance of value through considering elementary commodity exchange. Owing to this, they discovered that the substance of value was contained in social labor [...] they [...] closely studied the exchange of one commodity for another [...] to understand why, on what objective basis, within what concrete substance, one thing was actually equated with another. In other words, without realizing clearly the logical essence of their operations, they actually considered one specific case of the movement of values, namely the fact of simple commodity exchange. Analysis of this specific case yielded the concept of value."²³¹ In this way, the abstract structure of Marx's inquiry was derived from capitalist procedures

230 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), 164.

231 Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectic of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 54. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm> (accessed online Oct. 5, 2022).

themselves, out of concrete processes and this is a defining feature of Marx's analysis of capitalism. It may seem like a stretch, but it is relevant to imagine a film method intended to study capitalism might similarly start from concrete relations and processes. From them, film can capture an understanding of capitalist abstraction that has yet to be imagined. This revised notion of the concrete, whereby the complexity of capitalist systems is viewed not as abstract but as concrete relations that comprise a "unity [that] is interpreted first and foremost as connection, as interconnection and interaction" will lead me to explore areas of film that are overlooked by Toscano and Kinkle, namely that of social relations. I will pursue this proposal through looking closely at the relation between the concrete and abstract. Another useful definition from Ilyenkov describes the abstract as not reducible to a concept and that the abstract is instead based on social relations. "Insofar as 'the concrete' is opposed to 'the abstract' the latter is treated by Marx first and foremost objectively."²³²

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIETY AND THE ABSTRACTION OF INDIVIDUALS

This leads us to direct our discussion of the abstract and concrete to inquire whether filmmaking about capitalism might be helped by orienting itself around Marxist concepts? The abstract and concrete are dealt with here but there is so much that has historically been left out from Marxism. It is relevant to look at an example raised by Theodor Adorno in his *Introduction to Sociology* lectures, where the philosopher analyzes Durkheim's notion of society as a social fact to start this discussion. In the lecture, Adorno describes this problem in such a way that he develops many implications for our investigation of the concrete and abstract: "...a certain moment of 'impenetrability'" that "constitute(s) the very essence of the social. When you come across forms of collective behaviour which have an element of inaccessibility about them and, above all, are far more powerful than the individuals who manifest the behaviour, one might say that you are on the receiving end of society. With slight exaggeration one might say, in keeping with Durkheim's observation, that society becomes directly perceptible where it hurts." For example, one might find oneself in certain social situations, like that of someone who is looking for a job and 'runs into a brick wall' has the feeling that all doors are shutting automatically in his face; or someone who has to borrow money in a situation in which he cannot produce guarantees that he can return it within a certain period, who meets with a 'No' ten or twenty times in a definite, automated manner, and

232 Ibid., 20. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm> (accessed on Oct 5, 2022).

is told he is just an example of a widespread general law, and so on—all these, I would say, are direct indices of the phenomenon of society.²³³

Adorno's phrase "society becomes most directly perceptible when it hurts" is telling here. It is a comment that pertains to capitalist society where individual interests are given precedence over collective ones, where collective interests and needs are not acknowledged or put in a considered relationship to individual needs so that the distribution of wealth is uneven, and people are marginalized and disregarded in varying and uneven degrees. For Adorno the main problem with Durkheim's position is that society is viewed as a cause that operates on a higher level, on the one hand, or in opposition to this, one is presented with views that society is as a sum total of individual actions with no further effects produced by the social. Adorno claims that neither pole is satisfactory. "Because society is not physically given, not directly tangible, it is elevated to the status of a mental or spiritual entity" by Durkheim. Adorno continues "to the extent that it is a category of mediation and is thus conceptual, this has a certain truth. However, society should not on that account be regarded as a "second-degree datum." The "peculiar tendency of Durkheim's entire sociology: although he is "fully aware that social facts cannot be equated with isolated sense data, he nevertheless attributes to them the character of palpable realities..."²³⁴ Adorno explains.²³⁵ The philosopher warns against the "reification of society" and claims that emphasizing "the thing-like quality of society as something positive" is "to hypostatize this relationship as a "higher-level reality" is to disregard the fact that society is always composed of individuals." Adorno goes on to state that "... I believe this is very important for a definition of the concept of society—this view suppresses that fact that the concept of society refers to a relationship between people..." In other words, society is not a phenomena that can be commented on separately from the actual social relations that people engage in, but is instead something that forms the basis of larger social relationships that comprise many people. To forget this would be "no less absurd than the opposite concept which regards society as something reducible to the various individuals making it up." To sum up, it is a problem to avoid confronting the complexity of social relations by hypostasizing society as a cause, and it is equally problematic to imagine that society as simply the sum of the activity of individual activity. I would propose the first problem that films against capital to tackle is to produce depictions of society that both contend with effects of social behaviors, showing how these relate to specific of social processes. Adorno goes on to explain that a dialectical approach involves looking beyond both reified poles: "I am therefore quite pleased to [...] to show you, by the example of the relatively simple model I have developed, in what sense the concept of society is, and must be, inherently dialectical."²³⁶ This provides, combined with Ilyenkov's points on the topic, a useful method of conceiving the relation of the

233 Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 36.

234 *Ibid.*, 37.

235 *Ibid.*, 47.

236 *Ibid.*, 36.

concrete and abstract so that it can be applied to our overall discussion of filmmaking against capitalism.

My argument proposes that the relationship between concrete and abstract finds film to be an appropriate medium to depict constant transformation and the particular ways that each moment of relation occurs in social processes. I believe that telling such stories allows people to re-imagine situations, showing one another that the reality in which we exist is not the only set of possibilities. In capitalism, people's actions are often orchestrated through the abstract relation of value that decides concrete relationships. However, film narratives can envision a move away from capitalism, and this chapter will discuss how film is a force in this movement. The abstractions of value operate in a social system that is form determined, whose social forms are constantly made and remade by relations of value. Adorno perceives in the dialectical method a way to understand how a form determined society and the individuals within that society relate to and affect one another. Adorno's account of the link between individuals and wider social processes is a dialectical understanding of capitalist, bourgeois society as it is configured through exchange. "...Once you grasp this functional exchange relationship as constituting the essence of socialization, with all the social problems which the elaboration of the exchange principle entails, the concept of society ceases to be the seemingly empty abstraction stating that everything is connected to everything." Here Adorno brings up a premise that seems derived from his conversations with philosopher Alfred Sohn-Rethel. In Sohn-Rethel's book, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, he describes a process of social synthesis whereby a social context is brought about through exchange relations. As philosopher Jason Read explains, Sohn-Rethel's "attempt to answer the question as to how society coheres, holds itself together: in other words, why is there society rather than nothing? This problem becomes particularly difficult in a society defined by the competition of isolated individuals. As Sohn-Rethel writes: "How does society hold together when production is carried out independently by private producers, and all forms of previous production in common have broken asunder?" The answer is social synthesis, and the particular form that this synthesis takes in capitalist society. Capitalist society is held together through the concept of value, and the abstraction that it makes possible, despite the fact that physically, at the level of laboring bodies and the accumulation of use values, it remains distinct."²³⁷

Adorno's lecture regarding society that begins with a discussion of exchange points out that social instances only become palpable and start to "hurt" because the relations of exchange exert pain through their contradictions. Crucial aspects of people's survival in capitalism are impacted by capitalist transactions in a social world of commodity relations. Some examples of hurt are the social imposition of decisions or societal norms regarding a particular person. Some laws, rules, mores and norms are transmitted and enforced. An example that crops up later in this chapter, is what Chris Arthur describes as Adorno's interest in "a conceptuality which holds sway in reality [Sache] itself', a conceptuality 'independent [...] of the consciousness of the human

237 Jason Read, "Abstract Materiality: In Praise of Alfred Sohn-Rethel," *Unemployed Negativity*, Nov 9, 2009. <http://www.unemployednegativity.com/2009/11/> (accessed on Oct 5, 2022).

beings subjected to it” describing a peculiar interpenetration of “ideality...” and “materiality.” This dimension of conceptuality advanced in needs and imperatives expressed in capitalism will become more prominent in our discussion as this chapter progresses.

It is worthwhile to add one element to Adorno’s discussion here. For all the importance of market relations to the definition of his concept of society, Adorno neglects to address the way that in capitalist society the individual is also constructed through those same market relations. While Adorno sees Durkheim’s notion of society as a reified abstraction, he leaves out the individual’s basis in abstraction. The individual, on the one hand, may appear less abstract because it is less complex than society, yet the historical form that individuality takes has been greatly shaped through the relations of the modern bourgeois market. In his book *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, C.B. MacPherson argues that Hobbes’ conception of the individual initiates “the original seventeenth century individualism” that “contained the central difficulty, which lay in its possessive quality” which “is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them,” in other words excluding social relations from an understanding of a person’s life in a position akin to what Adorno describes as opposed to that of Durkheim.

Hobbes understands the individual to be self-interested. According to Hobbes, “every man’s actions are determined by his appetites and aversions, or rather by his calculation of the probable effects on the satisfaction of his appetites, of any action he might take.”²³⁸ Hobbes arrives at this conception through an abstracted formulation of a “state of nature” in which the individual “would necessarily” live in “an incessant struggle of every man with every man, a struggle of each for power over others.” MacPherson shows that while Hobbes attributes his observations to an understanding of man’s state of nature, he in fact developed his conception of self-interested individuals from his own conception of society. Competition is assumed to be part of this natural state however what is not explained is that this understanding is in fact derived from interrelations formulated on market relations. “His model of society contained a similar incessant competitive struggle.”²³⁹ Hobbes describes the individual’s fear and desire to protect what they possess from other people. “It is the man who would ‘plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient Seat’ who must expect to be invaded and dispossessed by others seeking to enjoy the fruits of his labour”²⁴⁰. Without fear to guide their relations with others, Hobbes judges that people would only have their self-interested pursuits.²⁴¹

The context of Hobbes’ formulation of self-interest is the transformation of a society where increasingly people became dependent on wage labour. “All the evidence, then, points to seventeenth-century English society having become essentially a possessive market society.” The “evidence bearing on this question” is

238 C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford Paperbacks, 32

239 Ibid., 22.

240 Ibid., 24.

241 Ibid., 27.

“Hobbes’s statement that “a mans Labour also, is a Commodity exchangeable for benefit, as well as any other thing” [...] evidence that he was taking for granted the normality of the wage relationship.”²⁴² MacPherson claims that “Hobbes’s explicit postulates (notably, that labour is a commodity, that some men want to increase their level of delight, and that some have more natural power than others) are essentially those of a possessive market society...” MacPherson avers that “he was aware of the peculiar suitability of his analysis to” the nascent capitalist sensibility of “seventeenth-century society.”²⁴³ Such a theory of individuality assumes that in order for people to realize their needs, they must rely on a capitalist mode of accumulation on the basis of market relations. MacPherson says, in Hobbes the organization of markets are a deciding logic in social relations: “The market is the mechanism through which prices are made by, [...] individual decisions about the disposal of energies [...] Exchange of commodities through the price-making mechanism of the market permeates the relations between individuals, for in this market all possessions, including men’s energies, are commodities”²⁴⁴ MacPherson concludes that Hobbes arrived at this notion of the individual not through simply observing his own historical context but through “a considerable amount of abstraction,” adding later in the book that “...there is in Hobbes’ model no measure of merit other than the actual market assessment of a man’s merit.”²⁴⁵

THE IMPACTS OF METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALISM

How then might one consider some of the further ways that the economic theory presented by theorists of capital have influenced other aspects of capitalist ideology? I will venture a brief look at Annie MacClanahan’s article *Methodological Individualism and the Novel in the Age of Microeconomics, 1871 to the Present* which charts the general social influence of ideas in economic theory of the period, specifically the microeconomic view that the only relevant aspect of the social world is individual interactions. The configuration of the theory of methodological individualism in microeconomics developed in the so-called Marginalist Revolution was the basis of neoclassical economics. It had two operative ideas: that social theory and “social phenomena (the macro) should be explained through reference to the intentional states that motivate individual actors (the micro)” and second that “there is no such thing as society,” Margaret Thatcher’s

²⁴² Ibid., 62.

²⁴³ Ibid., 68.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 31, 65.

riposte to Durkheim's frustrating reification of society as a univocal cause.²⁴⁶ At the present moment in history, the market is often given precedence over many societal forms of arbitration. Today, the market decides by virtue of investor activity as a sort of planless decision making. This is the non-collective group decision making on topics that affect the financial markets, a resounding yet speech-free voice of the markets where economic imperatives drive markets to "decide" yes or no on investment decisions such as is a CEO making good decisions, as one generic example. When there is no answer to climate change within capitalist logics, market solutions prevail such as carbon offsetting, when an artist is widely acknowledged as important, the market is increasingly considered as the arbiter of such judgements. Whereas some societal conditions can still demonstrate that markets are one of many arenas where societal productions receive public forms of judgement and legitimation through a host of affiliations²⁴⁷, increasingly today financial investment decisions made through markets underpin decisions. Mediation through economic markets occur this way because, at this point, all life is only considered sustainable when it is economically sustainable under capitalist conditions.

While McClanahan's area of study is literary theory, her observations on the effect of methodological individualism have deep implications on the general suffused influences of individualism on preferred story structures in cultural production, and so is pertinent to the focus on individual characters in film in the 20th c. The key to methodological individualism is that it is conceived not as an accurate account of individual behavior but rather as "formalizing ideal behavior" in such a way that, as economist Fredrich Hayek puts it, microeconomics "classif[ies] types of individual behavior" rather than to understand the motives behind behavior or to judge the reasonableness of another's preferences."²⁴⁸ In other words, it is abstracting from the social to devise emphases on an individual focused economic picture of interaction: "consider[s] the individual — with his given indifference map and initial endowment—to be a utility computer into which we 'feed' a sequence of market prices and from whom we obtain a corresponding sequence of 'solutions' in the form of specified optimum positions." As historical context, McClanahan points to: "the Austrian marginalists" who as early as the 1870s and 1880s, leading to the "calculation debate" of the 1920 and 30s "were engaged in a protracted "war of method," or Methodenstreit, against the German Historical School. The marginalists sought to refute the historicists' social theory as well as their socialism by insisting to the contrary on individualism as both

246 Annie McClanahan, "Methodological Individualism and the Novel" in *Timelines of American Literature*, eds. Cody Marrs and Christopher Hager, (2019), 265.

247 One of the ways people involved with visual art reflect these forms of legitimation by institutional arbiters as well as through different organs of literature on art. Ulf Wuggenig and Steffen Rudolph present an interesting study in the sociology of art which looks at how visual art is a field currently legitimated by a variety of sources. ng study in the sociology of art which looks at how visual art is a field currently legitimated by a variety of sources. Ulf Wuggenig and Steffen Rudolph, "Valuation Beyond the Market: On Symbolic and Economic Value in Contemporary Art," (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013).

248 Ibid., 269.

an intellectual and a political imperative. [...] MI became central to debates in philosophy and sociology throughout the twentieth century, theorized by Max Weber, Gabriel Tarde, Karl Popper, and Bruno Latour. For the marginalists, as for some of the social theorists named above, MI refuted both the intellectual claims of historical materialism and the politics or ideology of collectivism...²⁴⁹

Thus, individualism is instated as the ideology of the present moment after proliferating amenable social theories that produce compatible images of society. McClanahan emphasizes that individual decisions are subject to the market's decision making powers: "no political individual or even institution— could ever organize the world more rationally and justly than the market, which aggregates all that dispersed individual knowledge"²⁵⁰, culminating in the fact that "a contemporary microeconomics textbook is likely to ironically invoke the "benevolent social planner" only to assure us that he does not really exist— real benevolence, after all, would mean "letting the market decide."²⁵¹ In capitalism not only is the non-collective, social measure of judgment of the market favored over other social relations, so that its individualized decision-making negates how social relations constantly direct decisions, but as we will see, this denial of the social dimension in the practical theories propagate narratives that become prevalent in capitalist societies.

IMAGINING MORE COMPLEX SOCIAL RELATIONS IN FILMS

Film is a medium that, as it is currently practiced in the mainstream of cinema and television, focuses primarily on relationships between people as they conform to something akin to methodological individualism: one or two people are made most central to the story, the relationships developed in the story are between a small number of people with each of their personalities accounted for in limited ways related only to depicted personal character changes.²⁵² Well-known script writer and consultant

249 Ibid., 268.

250 Ibid., 270.

251 Ibid., 270.

252 Annie McClanahan, "Methodological Individualism and the Novel in the Age of Microeconomics, 1871 to the Present," *Timelines of American Literature* (2019). Luis M. García-Mainar "Contemporary Hollywood Crime Film and the New Individualism" (2009). Anita Martinová, "Individualism and Relationships in American Film," *European Journal of American Studies*, (Autumn 2021). Ida Rochani Adi, "Remythologizing Individualism in American Action Movies," *Humaniora*, vol. 20, (February 2008). <https://media.neliti.com/media/publications/12033-ID-remythologizing-individualism-in-american-action-movies.pdf> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

John Truby, says that: “Most writers come at character [...] by listing all the traits of the hero, tell a story about him, [...] they think of the hero and all other characters as separate individuals. Their hero is alone, in a vacuum, unconnected to others. [...] In these stories, the hero seems to be the only person who matters.”²⁵³ In conventional mainstream film, as well as in various international art house genres, the experiences of these main characters are made the primary story building element. In many of these films, this experience is understood to be a primarily internal process. While different approaches to film associated with various film histories and different funding structures, have promoted experimentation with character desires, interests and choices with external and internal factors motivating them, the film history I will respond to is the history of individual character focused cinema to be found primarily in the capitalist Western world.

The existing individualist film grammar has been forged in bourgeois modernity’s crucible for the last two centuries. It depicts social relations by flattening them. With some very important exceptions, the focus on one, two or at most a few characters brings conventions such as script dynamics propelled by opposing desires of protagonist and an antagonist; the main character has internal conflicts; there is, more often than not a focus on the main character’s romantic relationship. To demonstrate this, let us look closer at a section from John Truby’s book, *Anatomy of Story*. He outlines seven steps writers should follow in their story’s progression based on character’s development throughout a narrative. “All living things appear to grow in one continuous flow, but if we look closely, we can see certain steps of stages in that growth. The same in true of a story. A story has a minimum of seven steps in its growth from beginning to end:

1. Weakness and need
2. Desire
3. Opponent
4. Plan
5. Battle
6. Self-revelation
7. Equilibrium”

He continues “... these seven steps are the nucleus, the DNA, of your story... because they are based on human action.” Later on in the book, Truby fleshes out what that growth is: it is a process of having a desire and then encountering opposition. “The hero decides to go after a goal (desire) but possesses certain weaknesses and needs that hold him back from success.”²⁵⁴

This idea of story centers the narrative squarely on an individual’s actions, their weakness, need, desire, their discovery of an opponent, their plan, subsequent battles and their culmination in self-revelation and eventual equilibrium. In effect,

²⁵³ John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008), ebook.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

this system of filmmaking limits activity to a person's individual situation and closes off the fullness of social relations. It limits the perspective and social world of the film to only the small fragment of social possibility. At its worst this narrows social relations to a backdrop or side story. In contrast to this, a better grammar of filmic action needs to comprise *the ways that social processes actually play out in actions of many characters at once*, registering the multiplicity of social relations and interactions in any narrative. The richness of social processes warrant storytelling that can adequately portray them. Drama is the way that social processes change over time. How can we envision multiple changes of multiple characters, not just changes centered around one or two?

THREE PROBLEMS WITH CAPITALIST CONCEPTS IN MAINSTREAM FILM

Capitalist, possessive individual film elevates moments of transformation and diagnoses them as self-actualizations or falls from glory, individual passages in stories, unencumbered by social context. As we have just stated above, John Truby emphasizes that when scriptwriting the way most people approach “creating character is that [...] their hero is alone in a vacuum, unconnected to others.”²⁵⁵ It is clear that with the individual as unquestioned starting point, will never make truly anti-capitalist film. It is essential for film and television to be adequate to its historical moment when today's social and political world holds a plethora of positions, perspectives and voices. Old monopolies on political conversation have exploded. In this context, stories need to change. To let storytelling depict lived conditions from multiple perspectives and while producing methods to fully show social changes, a functional film story telling vocabulary is necessary.

Three major aspects of how film currently functions that do not give a realistic picture of the social world we live in and as a result, produces harmful ideology. The first has to do with how expansively one frames social relations or how individual centered film reduces the scope of social relations that are shown in film. The second is how people are represented in film. It has been the case throughout the history of film, and later television's history that some people, mainly white people, have been shown as actors and their perspectives have been represented as directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers in film production while other people who are Black, Indigenous, Latinex, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and other

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 75.

people of color, are not shown as often in film and their perspectives have not been represented.²⁵⁶ In addition, these representations frequently do not represent people accurately. The third aspect of how film does not give a realistic picture of social relations has to do with change and outcomes of social processes. I will investigate what dialectics can contribute to picturing change. This will lead me to discuss a problematic past Marxist approach to imagining the struggle against capital and I will further uncover disturbing qualities of how capitalist conceptions of possibility are shaped in mainstream film.

CHARACTERS AND GROUPS

Many examples exist of filmmaking that is not centered on characters and their internal world, such as films by Raul Ruiz's films *Hypothesis of a Stolen Painting*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films such as *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall his Past Lives*, Jordan Peele's film *The Others* and *Nope*, and Guo Xiaolu's film *UFO in her Eyes* and Jacques Rivette's film *Out 1* as just a few examples. Repositioning individuals in a wider web of social relations could take on wider social purpose. What is most needed are larger stories that center social relations. One might look to unconventionally collective film structures for ideas, such as *The Red and the White* by Miklos Jancso that orchestrates action without main characters or events singled out as important over other parts of the film. Set two years after the revolution, the film shows the war between the Communist "Reds" and the Tsarist "Whites" during a battle for control of the hills along the Volga River. Another film that has a similar mode of dispersed action with no main characters, but a very different type of structure is Richard Linklater's film *The Slacker* which follows person after person in an Austin, Texas suburb as they start conversations with each other while walking along roads.

256 Adam B. Very, "Women and People of Color Still Underrepresented Behind the Scenes," <https://variety.com/2020/film/news/diversity-hollywood-behind-the-scenes-ucla-study-1203494631/> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).



Miklós Jancsó, *The Red and the White* (1967)



Miklós Jancsó, *The Red and the White* (1967)



Richard Linklater, *Slacker* (1990)



Richard Linklater, *Slacker* (1990)

One of the reasons that dramas put a limited frame on the social relations shown is that it is assumed that viewers' interest only stretches to focus on a few people. This is a model developed in film, but it is challenged by the more complex multistrand storylines of television's current Golden Age. As John Truby says of television "The multistrand plot is clearly a much more simultaneous form of storytelling, emphasizing the group, or the minisociety, and how the characters compare. [...] [it] changes the developing unit from the single hero to the group."²⁵⁷ Television episodic narratives stretch over several seasons and can in some sense reflect the complexity of life events because of the length of episodes involving many different characters, they are yet to come fully into fruition. Society is comprised of myriad social relations, yet in capitalism, films reflect a context of possessive individualism, so that relations are often narrowed to only include love relationships, friendships and relationships of opposition. In mainstream Western film, possessive individualism reinscribes people's sovereign, individual subjecthood and their relation to property, shaping relationships between individuals in society. I described above an observation Ilyenkov's observation that people's concrete qualities can be found in "the overall process of social life [...] rather than in a series of qualities inherent in each individual"²⁵⁸ What this formulates is a basis for a nuanced imagining of social dynamics that listens to how people are changed by their social conditions, and social environments. Adorno's description of the dialectic between individual and society shows the relations between people and societal structures to be more porous, and the social more expansive and differentiated than the current narrative narrowing. In order for films to shift focus, social relations in films need to consist of actions among multiple people in the same scene or take place across many scenarios. I would argue with McClanahan that individual-centered plot lines still hold sway over narrative film form because a capitalism operates through individual-centered conception of needs.

Reframing social process to depict more people in films has to be aware that one of the main problems that occurs in telling a more expansive scope of social relations is that when there is a focus on social processes, this will often happen at the expense of the narrative. A pronounced example in this vein is the well-known film *Powaquaatsi*, an expansive visual exploration of social processes arranged in sequence not privileging any one character, each action seen in detail but passed on to represent the social context as a whole. Yet, there is little story dynamic, apart from the movement between social contexts. Giving focus to more people, and depicting events from multiple perspectives does not have to happen at the expense of narrative. Group activities involving many people could be showed from differing points of view, these could be interchanged with other scenes that focus more on individual characters. What needs to be adjusted most in these films is the degree of entanglement within scenarios. Entanglement here means the inter-relations between many people that

257 John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*, (2008), ebook. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008, 365.

258 Evald Ilyenkov, *The Dialectic of the Abstract and the Concrete in Marx's Capital*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 54. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/index.htm> (accessed online Oct. 5, 2022).

scriptwriters often neglect to write or otherwise the film process eliminates. If film and television scriptwriting, directing and editing pays attention to the entanglement in the social landscape, stories would look very different.

This is where Aristotle's *Poetics* is helpful. The ancient work that has for many years been turned into a veritable scriptwriter textbook of the individual-centered script variety, yet it includes an interesting statement regarding characters. In a passage of particular importance, Aristotle puts his focus on events of the plot, not the characters: "i) Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality. People possess certain qualities [...], but they achieve well-being or its opposite on the basis of how they fare. So, the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included along with and on account of the actions. So, the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all." It is worth listening to Aristotle when he asserts that there is no story in characters and their qualities, but only in people's activity. For Aristotle, the most important aspects of storytelling revolve around events in a social world, not "the imitation" of characters. In terms of concrete filmmaking practice, this means relations between people need to be the focus, not people themselves. One very depressing example of the way mainstream films edit out wider social processes is the way historical narratives get told as if they revolve around only a few people rather than as whole set of people who took part in events. The film *Danton* is an example. It presented an image of watered-down social exchanges in the place of the widespread social and political upheaval of the French Revolution, making it a backdrop in which to set the individual story of Danton.

RACIAL CAPITALISM, SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY AND THEIR ROLE IN FILM AGAINST CAPITALISM

Two areas of theoretical analysis, racial capitalism and social reproduction theory help me to think about how political narratives can go against capitalist concepts and overturn problematic Marxist historical accounts as well. Films need to represent narrative histories, the lives and conditions of people of color all the time, while questioning arguments that offer only a politics of recognition.²⁵⁹ Racial capitalism and social reproduction theory make connections that emphasize important yet often

259 Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 185-197.

neglected aspects of capitalist economic and social systems through looking at how racialized labour and gendered labour are central to capitalism. By rewriting a traditional Marxist understanding of capitalism, these theoretical frameworks contribute to producing more realistic views of people as the products of relations.

RACIAL CAPITALISM

Racial capitalism is a theoretical framework that puts different systems into relation. When Ruth Wilson Gilmore, a thinker associated with the tendency, adopts a section in her book *Golden Gulag: Prison, Surplus, Crisis in Globalizing California* that ties together the perspectives of all the people traveling on a bus to a protest, Gilmore chooses to configure a narrative through a relational analysis that links people through various dimensions of the situation.²⁶⁰ The people are riding the bus to petition politicians to undo prison laws. The discussion connects California's geographic and economic modes of exclusion and demonstrates how capitalist violence and racial domination through the carceral system happen as a result of, among other things, discipline through economic policies and legal frameworks. In the book, Gilmore articulates how rapid expansion of the California prison system was propelled by many parallel changes such as a waning agricultural economy, changes in state laws, and increased levels of unemployment, demonstrating the relationship between state enforcement within the legal and carceral systems and multiple changes in exploitation and economic capitalization in and by the state. The comprehensive relational approach taken in the book moves a Marxist economic analysis beyond formalist divisions that would, in blinkered fashion, limit what constitutes anti-capitalist analysis or struggle.

Gilmore starts by telling us about people who ride a bus on their way to a protest at the Sacramento County courts “A dream crowd rode for freedom: red, black, brown, yellow, and white; mothers, fathers, grandparents, sisters, brothers, children, lovers, and friends; gay men and lesbians; interracial families; English, Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, Polish, and Hebrew speakers; Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, and Quaker. Their diversity embodied some 150 years of California history and more than 300 years of national anxieties and antagonisms.” Gilmore continues, “the riders didn’t worry about it; they got on the bus because of their sameness: employed, disabled, or retired working people, with little or no discretionary income, whose goal was freedom for their relatives serving long sentences behind bars” [...] “summoned by a nightmare, made palpable by the terrifying numbers of prisoners and prisons produced during the past generation....” The section follows the struggles of the different people as the bus passes through the state, commenting on how capital flows intersect intimate thoughts of incarcerated loved ones “They stopped in Bakersfield to pick up more people: a farmworker, an unemployed journalist, some prisoners’ mothers

260 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1-4.

taking an unpaid day off work and contributing from their slim wages toward the \$1,000 charter cost. [...] These concentrations of light in farmland are many of California's new prisons: cities of men, and sometimes women, that lie next to the dim towns that host them."²⁶¹ The passage goes on to tie together the dying industrial economy, state conditions calculated to encourage business, the military industrial complex and the spread of suburban housing sprawl, as well as the wars and political struggles against Jim Crow laws that pushed many people to move to California. After painting a picture of the economic, state, legal and farming context, Gilmore situates people within the picture of capitalist social processes in such a way that fully articulates how events and people's actions interlock with political and economic structures. Here we could imagine this providing a departure point for a film that presents a complex and concrete social and political level of cognitive mapping, about historical, social and political interrelations with the built environment.

Keeanga-Yamatta Taylor work connects economics to the fabric of political and social life and develops a breathtaking social analysis. Two important books by Taylor—*From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* and *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* demonstrate the interrelation of structural racism in police violence, housing and politics in the U.S. *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* takes a relational approach to multiple intertwined discussions, tracking the current social movements confronting structural racist police violence by tracing connections to the structural racism of US society. The book emphasizes how the situation of Black people in the US is impacted by a host of systemic political, social and economic issues caused by structural racism. Taylor outlines the situation of Black proletarians in the US continuously impacted by the cutting of state funding to essential programs, so that few forms of social support mitigate the economic and societal effects of structural racism impacting Black neighborhoods.²⁶² Taylor traces such conditions coupled with structural racist policing and cost-saving practices to make policing focused on “measurables” in areas where Black and Brown people live, and encourage racist police to feel empowered to be violent.²⁶³ In another section of the book, Taylor points to three main types of discrimination that Black people reported experiencing in 1967 when asked by the Kerner Commission Report: police brutality, unemployment and underemployment, and substandard housing, and throughout the book Taylor continually looks at interrelated systems such as these. Importantly, the book looks at how that collective Black struggle of the 1970s was abruptly brought to a close when politicians such as Richard Nixon reoriented the political conversation in the US away from a focus structural racism and toward individual responsibility.²⁶⁴

In *Race for Profit*, Taylor investigates the politics of housing as spatially imposing racist dynamics in capitalist value accumulation and predatory lending practices. Housing is a central node in American participation in the life-value nexus

²⁶¹ Ibid., 4.

²⁶² Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

²⁶³ Ibid., 79

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 63.

that the market performs. Taylor tracks how Black participation in the housing market was ostensibly encouraged by government funding but practically speaking was undermined. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) touted “the right to free and open housing” and “a basic expression of American democracy,” and, through the supposedly race-neutral impartial market forces, brought Black buyers into the housing market. Both the FHA and the National Association of Real Estate Board defended centuries old practice of housing segregation. “The market was championed as a neutral space where capital or credit flattened or eradicated difference. The market was the great equalizer. The consumer experiences of African Americans, however, painted a much different picture. From the inception of the housing market in the United States, its viability had been structured around a scaffolding of racial knowledge that presumed insight into the speculative elements of “good housing” and “good neighborhoods,” which could then be actualized through ascending property values.” As Taylor describes in many places the propensity to transmogrify “real estate into homes and then again into financially accruing assets depended on the alchemy of race, place, and the perceptions of the buying public—or “property values are where culture meets economics.””²⁶⁵

Film storytelling has remained relatively closed to telling the breadth of the US’s history of structural racism. Considering Taylor’s argument, it seems particularly urgent to consider ties between structural racism and property ownership in the US. Such economic and political topics are normally disregarded as drama, and this attitude poses serious social and emotional obstacle to drama. Houses hold major emotional histories and physical comfort, components that should be given narratives dynamics. Yet when the film industry attempts a film about housing, it is in the film *Money Pit* starring Shelley Long and Tom Hanks, a white middle class couple that move into a financial sinkhole. No one so far has told the story of the many Black home owners on whom overpriced and dilapidated housing was systematically imposed as a product of systemic racist practices by the state and real estate industry, that turned “homeownership” not into “the fulfillment of the American dream” but “the beginning of an American nightmare.”²⁶⁶ This is one of many examples of systemic racism reflected in a film industry attracted to what it considers money making plots.

One connection back to anti-Black police violence is gleaned from an interview by Taylor, who comments that “We have to decouple the economic benefits of homeownership from access to the bounty of social goods it currently guarantees for some.” If college was “available and accessible so that you don’t need to draw on the equity of a house in order to afford higher education” or if people were supported in their retirement years, “then it wouldn’t make the purchase as consequential as it is now.”²⁶⁷ This lack of governmental support ties real estate owners

265 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 9.

266 Ibid., 3.

267 Democracy Now interview ““America’s Moment of Reckoning” Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor & Cornel West replayed on Uprisings Against Racism,” Dec 31st 2020 (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

into the system of property ownership that gives racist police the authority to do violence. In the article “Necrocapitalism, Or, THE VALUE OF BLACK DEATH,” Kwame Holmes says that Philando Castile’s death is “not a failure of policing or a constituent of crime anxiety” but rather that Philando Castile’s death was propelled by the general “obsession with growth, and in particular, the middle class’ reliance upon property values for economic security.”²⁶⁸ Taylor points out a corollary to this, that in U.S. society, Black property is always being devalued citing how buyer choice is exercised as a type of unchecked discrimination.²⁶⁹

Gilmore and Taylor both adopt writing methods that highlighting capitalist contradictions constituted through systems of relations which Ollman characterizes as a Marxist mode. Gilmore’s relational approach is clear in a recent interview, where she commented that “the multiple struggles that come together against police brutality, against police killings, against mass incarceration, against austerity...” it is clear “how the struggle is class struggle, always, always, always.”²⁷⁰ This statement goes against many Marxist thinkers and opens up the scope of social theory to interlinking with economic theory. The forms of structural racist and economic violence that Gilmore and Taylor describe are enmeshed in class struggle against the imposition of economic exploitation, exclusion, domination, and criminalization of racialized populations. Anti-racist struggles against the state are class struggles because the state uses its monopoly on violence as “indispensable contributions to maintaining capitalist social relation” with capitalism as the only means through which people can live and be reproduced. For political theorist Nikhil Pal Singh, “racism is a dimension of the form of capitalism” where living in conditions of domination through market mediation is intertwined with other more overtly violent modes of domination such as police violence.²⁷¹

Film can help build theoretical arguments regarding urgent political and social discussions currently at the center of conflict in the U.S. and internationally. Such films can interrelate topics that have unfortunately not always been connected enough in sociological study and political theory. It is important to do this in the knowledge that Black, Indigenous, Latinex, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern filmmakers and filmmakers of color from a variety of other backgrounds, have had their fiction and documentary film systematically excluded from mainstream distribution, while many

268 “There’s No There There: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor on the Future of the Left” <https://www.publicbooks.org/theres-no-there-there-keeanga-yamahtta-taylor-on-the-future-of-the-left/> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

269 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

270 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition,” *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/> (accessed on Oct 5, 2022).

271 Nikhil Pal Singh, “On Race, Violence and So-called Primitive Accumulation,” *The Futures of Black Radicalism*, (London: Verso, 2017).

more have never received adequate funding.²⁷² While many film industry decisions that excluded BIPOC stories have masqueraded as choices about profit margins, allowing film executives to limit who is seen in film based on projected audiences—with all the racism those projections entail—such curtailment of possible film characters and subject matter with its overt racial discrimination and exclusion, obviously changes possible meanings produced in film and weighs films towards, at the very least, covertly racist outcomes through exclusion. In *Forgeries of Memory & Meaning: Blacks the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before World II*, Cedric Robinson gives an account of film as a process of sustained construction of race.²⁷³ We have a two-pronged discussion then, of films that do not depict people with any realism or honesty, and instead through a lens of racial discrimination, and films that have not represented BIPOC histories and politics, in the U.S. and internationally. Just as the previous section discusses film as a framework for depicting a wider scope of social relations, it is equally important that social relations include people in society, not edit out many of those people based on the discriminatory bias of a white dominated film industry. With far fewer film directors of color funded to make films, the process has to be corrected through a variety of methods at once. For decades, debates have taken place in the international film world related to the representation of people of color in film. In a broader field of scholarship, representation debates have also been correlated with a related discussion of the politics of recognition which comes from the chapter “The Black man and recognition” in Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask*.²⁷⁴ A book which responds to these debates is *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* by Glen Shawn Coulthard comments on the colonial oppression of Indigenous people, that “the politics of recognition has come to serve the interests of colonial power,” with its representational correlates.²⁷⁵ Coulthard explains that “in situations where colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence, its reproduction instead rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to identify, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition either imposed on

272 Adam B. Vary, “Women and People of Color Still Underrepresented Behind the Scenes.” The study explains that “In 2011, people of color made up 12.2% of directors of theatrical films. While that percentage has spiked in the ensuing decade — to 17.8% in 2013, and 19.3% in 2018 — the overall trend line has remained flat. In 2019, just 14.4% of directors of theatrical films were people of color.” <https://variety.com/2020/film/news/diversity-hollywood-behind-the-scenes-ucla-study-1203494631/> (accessed on Oct 5, 2022).

273 Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory & Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film Before World II*, University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

274 *Black Skin, White Masks* in “The Black man and recognition,” section “The Black man and Hegel” discusses that “Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized.” Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

275 Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2014).

or granted to them by the settler state and society.”²⁷⁶ One sees then that recognition within representation has been used as domination, however, from the perspective of making films that depict history and the present moment clearly, not through a lens warped by many layers of structural racism, this will require material representation of and made by people of colour in film with complete inclusion throughout the film industry. Fighting on terrains of film representation will never stand in for struggles over very material conditions such as land and economic considerations. An awareness of how recognition and representation can function as domination can help forge something in line with Fanon’s proposal of a “cultural practice [...] of critical individual and collective self-recognition” that oppressed and “colonized populations [...] engage in to empower themselves” as a significant form of struggle.²⁷⁷

Alongside the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, theorists studying racial capitalism clarify the ways that capitalism has developed in part through the racialization of groups through the state, institutions, labour and economic processes involved in capitalist social reproduction.²⁷⁸ A relational approach, challenges traditional Marxist perspectives that have disregarded the ways that racism has shaped Marxism’s own historical Eurocentric perspectives. The influential work of Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, a book dedicated to clarifying the social, theoretical and economic connections between European racism and the development of capitalism, synthesizes a great deal of historical and theoretical information to make its argument on the history of racialization in capitalism. In the process, Robinson discusses Marxism’s shortcomings in recognizing the struggles of Black radicals. The book’s foundational contribution to analysis of the relationship of race and capitalism presents connections previously unexplored by a conventional Marxism. Robinson achieved a major step in what David Roediger and many other thinkers work towards, a discussion of capital’s logic that includes racialization and racism, as well as patriarchy, by laying out the details of how racialization and gender functions for capital.

A relational approach of crossing disciplines taken in film can move the goal posts of documentary and fiction. Med Hondo’s production, *West Indies: The Fugitive Slaves of History* reenacts and fictionalizes its historical documentary. The film’s novel approach heightened by a constructed set design of a boat doubling as a town hall and center of colonial government driving home the colonial past in the present, the set, accentuating the narrative of people caught in colonial exploitation, and violence. A similar quality of parallax, of seeing the past from the perspective of the present was brought about in a recent lecture by historian Robin D.G. Kelley outlining Robinson’s argument in *Black Marxism*. Kelly describes that: “... what he wanted to show was how European racism, racialism, and nationalism preceded capitalism. [...] It existed before capitalism emerged, when it emerged in the 13th and in the 15th centuries, between that period. And in doing so he directly challenged the Marxist idea that capitalism

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 131.

²⁷⁸ David Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism*, (London: Verso, 2017), 2.

was a revolutionary break from feudalism. Now capitalism and racism, he says, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from [...] the old feudal order, to produce a modern world system of racial capitalism dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. [...] the tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate, to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into racial ones, and that's within Europe.” Such a political, historical contribution has a lasting meaning for the analysis of capitalism. Kelley points to Robinson's address of a common Marxist argument that capital necessarily does away with differences, cultivating grounds for abstraction.²⁷⁹ Other aspects of capitalism's continuity with racist domination cannot be ignored, for instance, in slavery's more recent continuation in prison labor. Films delving into the radical histories of Black resistance have included Charles Burnett's *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property* up to the recent past in William Greaves chronicle of the National Black Political Convention and the Black Power movement in *Nationtime*.

Racial capitalism presents racist oppression as operating throughout many social systems and economies, through the operation of state and capital. In the present moment, the immense conflicts thrown up have become more polarized than ever before. The far-right turn in recent years that included Trump's emergence as far-right US president in 2016, and the rise of far-right leaders such as such as Bolsonaro in Brazil, Boris in the UK and the rise of the far-right in Bolivia has had frightening implications globally. As racist police killings continue, 15 to 26 million people took part in the anti-racist struggles of the George Floyd Rebellion in 2020 in the US and the struggle became global. The innovations in struggle at that time echoed the relational analysis of racial capitalism in how they connect broken social systems such as challenges to electoral politics in the occupation of New York City Hall, the redistribution of looted

279 To briefly sum up one of the recent debates on race and capitalism that upsets me the most, Ellen Meiksins Wood makes the following statement: “To put it another way, it is worth considering how the specificities of time and place are shaped by capitalism's general operating principles. My argument is simply that, if we want to understand how racial hierarchies reproduce capitalist class relations, we have to understand the basic requirements of capitalist reproduction itself, as distinct from the rules for reproduction that govern other social forms. Let me begin by making one bald statement: that class is constitutive of capitalism in a way that race is not. Capitalism is conceivable without racial divisions, but not, by definition, without class.” Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Race, Class and Capitalism*, https://advancethestruggle.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/how_does_race_relate_to_class-2.pdf Moreover, Wood says that “Class exploitation is constitutive of capitalism as gender and racial inequality are not.” Wood also claims in her book *The Origins of Capitalism*, that slavery is only connected with the development of capitalism in the case of slavery in the UK where labor was first organized through a capitalist means of production. Ellen Meiksin Woods, *The Origins of Capitalism: A Longer View*, (London: Verso, 2017), 148-149. Another Marxist I would align with Wood's argument is David Harvey. David Roediger pairs Ellen Meiksins Wood and David Harvey as having a “the dominant interpretation within Marxism.” David Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism*, (London: Verso, 2017).

goods, the 800 strikes that occurred in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, to protesters setting free people as they are arrested and in New York, the refusal of bus drivers to transport arrested protesters, to the establishment of Camp Maroon in Philadelphia, the CHAZ (Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone) in Seattle as protection from police temporarily closing a police station and protesters, rioters and unhoused people occupying a hotel in Minneapolis to shelter from police and COVID-19. In all these examples, the possibility for another future is held open and imagined collectively, making the present suddenly much more bearable than it would be otherwise. Meanwhile, the vulnerability imposed by racialized labour economies become painfully evident in the COVID-19 pandemic when people of colour are proportionately more likely to be in front facing service jobs so are more likely to contract COVID-19. In the George Floyd Rebellion, many events of the protests drew together aspects of social life, social reproduction, with jobs, racial discrimination, housing, and health in connection with COVID-19.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY

Social reproduction theory is a Marxist, feminist framework initially focused on the unwaged status of women's work in the domestic sphere. While social reproduction theory focuses attention on how labor that takes place in the home reproduces workers, contemporary writers such as Susan Ferguson also expand their work to include a broad picture of people maintaining their lives in capitalism, with the gendered and racialized characteristics of this labour. This is defined against the idea that the home and family are considered a private sphere of relations offering refuge distinct from the rest of capitalism. Tithy Bhattacharya's edited volume *Social Reproduction Theory* invites discussion of this approach, extending the scope of the conversation beyond the family to other areas of social reproduction such as pensions, childhood, domestic labour, migration and social support networks.²⁸⁰ The relational analysis observed in racial capitalism also appears in social reproduction theory in drawing connections between areas of overlooked in the capitalist economy such as unwaged labour.

Tithy Bhattacharya highlights that "social reproduction theory [...] proposes a commodious but more specific reading of the "economy." By this, Bhattacharya is referring to the way that social reproduction theory encompasses much broader of an understanding of the work and different economies involved in supporting the social reproduction of people in capitalism. As Susan Ferguson has recently pointed out, "our understanding of capitalism is incomplete if we treat it as simply an economic system involving workers and owners, and fail to examine the ways in which wider social reproduction of the system—that is the daily and generational reproductive labor

280 Tithy Battacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, ed. Tithy Battacharya, (London: Pluto Books, 2017).

that occurs in households, schools, hospitals, prisons, and so on—sustains the drive for accumulation.”²⁸¹ As a mode of analysis, it includes work in formal and informal capacities as well as indirectly paid and unwaged forms. Ferguson begins her article “Children, Childhood and Capitalism: A Social Reproduction Perspective” with a discussion that unsettles what is normally considered free of capitalist imperatives: one’s childhood. Ferguson explains that capitalism’s “market in consumer goods and services owes its [...] existence to the ongoing availability of another market: a market of potentially exploitable labor power.” “The vast majority of children, even in the Global North, cannot escape their fate as capital’s present and future laborers.”²⁸² This needed but relatively under-discussed conversation is emblematic of a perspective that Ollman describes in Marx that develops relations and connections where they have not previously been made.²⁸³ Ferguson asks “...what exactly are capitalist productive relations” when children become “implicated in them.” “Conventional Marxist analyses define productive relations narrowly, as constituted by workplace (i.e., direct labor / capital) relations.” By looking at children as labor, “A social reproduction feminism perspective, on the other hand, directs our attention to a broader definition—one that includes those relations that generate and sustain workers for capital.”²⁸⁴ This focus on generating and sustaining life is in concordance with the way that unfortunately in capitalism, “life itself appears only as a means to life.” In other words life is lived to work and earn money so one can gain the means of subsistence.²⁸⁵ In their well-known work “The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community,” Selma James and Maria Rosa Della Costa characterize the struggle within families, homes, workplaces and schools as central sites of struggle within communities. Their account of education and its relation to capitalist reproduction, and state violence recounts political conflicts in social systems and institutions. Denaturalizing family support by considering it “as the way that capital moves through the aspirations of the parents to enlist their help in disciplining fresh labour power” is a way that their social reproduction theory perspective reorients familial and societal norms to interpret them from the perspective

- 281 Tithy Battacharya, “Introduction,” *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithy Battacharya, (London: Pluto Books, 2017), 3.
- 282 Susan Ferguson, “Children, Childhood and Capitalism: A Social Reproduction Perspective” in *Social Reproduction Theory, Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithy Battacharya, (London: Pluto Books, 2017).
- 283 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign: Illinois University Press, 2003), 23-50.
- 284 Susan Ferguson, “Children, Childhood and Capitalism: A Social Reproduction Perspective” in *Social Reproduction Theory, Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, ed. Tithy Battacharya, (London: Pluto Books, 2017) 113.
- 285 Ibid., Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 quoted in Tithy Bhattacharya, “Introduction,” *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Ed. Tithy Bhattacharya, (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

of struggle.²⁸⁶ Bhattacharya reminds us that “social reproduction theory is unique in the sense that it theorizes the relationship between the market and extra-market relations” which is a very important distinction, because extra-market relations are the seam that joins what were previously supposedly separate aspects of capitalism or even aspects not considered to pertain to capitalism. By elaborating connections between waged and unwaged labor, social reproduction attends to labor processes and their relations that are currently undertheorized in conventional Marxism, social reproduction shifts the focus to societal and personal aspects of how people are reproduced in capitalism. This is exciting as a framework for thinking about film against capitalism because a social reproduction framework gives the lie to the belief, as we heard Nora Alter express, that individuals have private lives that are somehow separate from the parts where they work and make money, instead showing how this supposedly personal activity is shot through with contingent economic relationships to labor conditions and price differentials.

Recognizing the impacts of racialization on waged and unwaged, work formal and informal labour constitutes a significant aspects of a social reproduction theory understanding. Theoretical writings by The Combahee River Collective Statement which discuss how race and gender are “manifold and simultaneous oppressions,” impacting Black women facing “membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes”²⁸⁷, while Evelyn Nakano Glen’s *From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Labour of Paid Reproductive Labour* and Melissa Wright’s *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* unpack different amplitudes of how these conjoined oppressions resonate within waged and unwaged, formal and informal spheres.²⁸⁸ The emphasis described above on a social analysis of the home and the personal sphere more generally, are aspects of social reproduction theory that are particularly useful in for envisioning filmmaking against capitalism in the context of conventional Western individual focused drama centered on personal lives. For instance, a powerful example of this is how the horror film *Madres* brings the relations between racial and gender violence into the overtly private realm of motherhood. The film recounts the true story of systemic forced sterilizations among Latinx women in a 1970s California community. *Madres* collides the grief of the Latinx community with the unspeakable horror and deeply undermined safety of racist domination from labor and medical establishments that collide so many horrifying levels of public and private, care and intimacy with violence and racist hate. The terrifying imposition of

286 Selma James and Maria Rosa della Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, (London: PM Press, 2019).

287 Combahee River Collective Statement, in *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985, A Sourcebook*, (New York: Brooklyn Museum/ Duke Press, 2017), 176.

288 Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1981). Evelyn Nakano Glen, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Labour of Paid Reproductive Labour,” *Signs*, vol 18, no. 1, Melissa Wright. *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, (London: Routledge/Taylor Francis, 2006).

racist white male doctors who felt able to forcibly sterilize Latinx women comes across so vividly it is painful to watch such racial and patriarchal violence head on.

This discussion of racial capitalism and social reproduction theory bring to the fore my main argument in this chapter: that films against capitalism need to show the places where the abstract meets the concrete of people's lives, even in the horror of conditions. Such social systems need to be more broadly shown and discussed in the social and political context of filmmaking so that people can be involved in their radical stories.

DIALECTICS AS A WAY TO DEPICT RELATIONS AND CHANGE

Let us now take a foray into dialectics because the dialectic involves opposition between positions and a shift through them. It has come out in the filmmaking of Sergei Eisenstein, a director dedicated to revolution, and it has even appeared in scriptwriter Robert McKee's definitively committed while theoretically flimsy and silly scriptwriting theory of conflict and negation.²⁸⁹ Whether it be character positions, themes or threads in a narrative, or concepts, dialectics as a method gives one ideas about how opposing positions come into interrelation and conflict. The argument earlier on in this chapter prominently featured Adorno's discussion of the dialectic of individual and society to clarify that imagining society as many individuals, on the one hand, or various impactful yet remote societal structures, on the other hand, demonstrates that society needs to be represented differently in films, because it is not one or the other pole but their combination. For the sake of our discussion, dialectics is a way of organizing thought. Werner Bonefeld says that dialectics "is not a formal procedure or method applied to reality. [...] it focuses on social contents and does so by moving within their social forms."²⁹⁰ Dialectics oppose differences between ideas and emphasize the movement from one to another. It is a mode of thinking that tends to point up contradictions and this is the heart of why it is useful for films against capitalism. Dialectics can function in ways that are fruitful, while some of their meanings have caused harm. Beyond this, the major dialectical themes that I propose are relations and change. Andrew Cole points out that, "Hegel [...] witnessed events, personal and social traumas, as well as wars, that transformed the Middle Ages of his birth into modernity, such as the dissolution of the estates, of the Holy Roman Empire, and of all that goes by the name ancien régime. Here, however, because we are dealing with Hegel, whose own dialectical

289 Robert McKee, *Story*, (New York: Harper-Collins, 1999), ebook. 317-333.

290 Werner Bonefeld, "Emancipatory Praxis and Conceptuality in Adorno" in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, eds. John Holloway, Fernando Matamoros and Sergio Tischler, (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 139.

habits of mind meant that there is never a clean and easy break between past and present, we must linger not only on the new but also on the old, not only on the emergent but also the residual, not only the modern but also the medieval.”²⁹¹ Cole argues that Hegel’s work is born out reflection on a period of historical change. This perspective helps one to understand that dialectics grew out of a capitalist world in formation as it coalesced in modernity.

C H A N G E

Change over time is an incredibly important aspect of a dialectical theoretical approach and it is well known that change is also an important part of scriptwriting. Heraclitus famous statement that a person never stands in the same river twice indicates that one cannot avoid change.²⁹² Life changes all around us, new conditions bringing the need for new responses. All films dramatize change but how a film chooses to unfold those changes makes all the difference. Are events seen as able to shift? Is the audience shown a single causal trajectory?

Dialectics is not simply a philosophy of a changing mode of production, it is also set of proposals about the conflict of our present moment. George Ciccariello-Maher’s book *Decolonizing Dialectics* points to an “historically fraught relationship between dialectics and decolonization, one long characterized by mutual suspicion” that is important to hold in mind at the moment in order to take on board the depth of the rift and what needs to be done to repair such divisions between anti-racist, anti-colonial struggles and Marxism.²⁹³ A good deal of the Marxist-Hegelian baggage that produces the depressing lack of Marxist support for BIPOC struggles circulating around, on the one hand, Marxists such as David Harvey or Ellen Meiksins Wood’s resistance to race becoming a part of capital’s laws and on the other hand the need to challenge a concept of universality that accompanied Marxism throughout the 19th and 20th c. As Ciccariello-Maher states “...the opposite direction, however, this postcolonial suspicion is not without reason, since despite the undeniable resources that Hegel and Marx furnished for later decolonial thought, many contemporary neo-dialecticians have done little to alleviate the concerns of their would-be decolonial allies.”²⁹⁴ Speaking of Arab Spring, Indignados in Spain and Occupy in the United States, Ciccariello-Maher comments that “not surprisingly, this newly combative moment has been accompanied by [...] a rebirth of dialectical thought. Whether in recent attempts to rethink the Hegelian

291 Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), xxi.

292 Catherine Osborne, *Heraclitus in From the Beginning to Plato*, ed. C.C.W. Taylor, (London: Routledge Press, 2003), 99.

293 George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 2.

294 Ibid.

legacy, to renovate the Marxist and communist tradition, or to mobilize against the current political and economic crises racking the globe, the question of dialectics—the dynamic movement of conflictive oppositions—is once again firmly on the table. In this process, the dialectical questions par excellence—what to preserve and what to discard, how to move forward without reproducing the errors of the past—are re-posed with heightened urgency.”²⁹⁵

By outlining how the dialectic needs to change and how it encounters conflict, I arrive at the dialectics of our changing present moment. Our current situation of change is struggle between the left and an increasingly far-right. Because of this change today is experienced as a swing from, at one moment, taking on political challenges that fight against the fascism, racism, patriarchy, ableism and economic destitution which so many people are facing. For instance, the possibilities of challenging capitalism have seen numerous optimistic hopes in the past few years coupled with defeats. In the U.S. 15 to 26 million people were part of the 2020 anti-racist protests after the police killing of George Floyd. These protests across the US and the world challenged policing and the carceral system while solidarity labor strikes and protests that accompanied them. Since COVID-19 began at the start of 2020, labor struggles have been ongoing. It resulted in protests of food delivery workers and meat packing plants. Now Amazon employees are about to form a union. First Nations people protested COVID-19 being imposed on their communities, while the deadly impact of COVID-19 on Black, Indigenous, and other people of color doing essential work has had a lasting effect. Before that, months of protests and militant resistance in Hong Kong in 2019-2020. The years of gilet jeune protests from 2018 and anti-racist response of gilets noirs protests in France. The long protest at Standing Rock movement began its encampment in April 2016 to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline, and since the pandemic South Africa riots in summer of 2021, Colombia protests in 2021, India farming protests in 2020-2021.

Intermittently things swing back in the other direction, first to far-right killings and violence immediately after Trumps election, Charlottesville fascist event where a far-right person murdered a left protester, Heather Heyer, with his car, and LGBTQ2S+ people face ongoing violence.²⁹⁶ Recently there was the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse who killed two protesters. infuriatingly was not found guilty. The fascist so-called “freedom convoy” in Canada. The fascist attack on the White House in the US on Jan 6, 2021. In the UK the right and far-right are in power attacking critical race theory and queer studies programs at universities under Johnson, the Tory Brexit supporting prime minister and now Liz Truss imposes new cuts. The loss of the basic liberties, and securities essential to people’s happiness in the ongoing rise of fascism and racism, the loss of abortion rights in the U.S., an ever-worsening climate crisis, and the normalization of the COVID-19 health crisis. Governments are not sufficiently responding to any of these crises. Sometimes they are themselves the crisis. More

295 Ibid.

296 Sam Levin, “Legitimized in their hatred’: a weekend of violence in Trump’s America,” *The Guardian*, 13 May, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/31/portland-train-stabbing-racial-violence-trump-america> (accessed Oct. 5, 2022)

importantly, people and societies face the inability to register and discuss these terrifying changes, let alone to address them and make collective decisions as societies who will face collective outcomes together. This is all part of what is deeply upsetting. The extremes of change keep swinging further from each other, but no one has any plan to stop this.

On its own, making films will not address these impending conflicts. Opposition to fascism, racism, patriarchy, violence against LGBTQ2S+, ableism, economic and health crisis can be helped by film, but these would need a context of left political resistance and protest that spreads so far as to involve film against capitalism in the process. As C.L.R. James clarifies, dialectical “thought is not an instrument you apply to a content. The content moves, develops, changes and creates new categories of thought, and gives these direction.”²⁹⁷ Film against capitalism needs movement in left political practice.

R E L A T I O N S

The dialectic is a type of philosophical thought that abstracts concepts. The purpose of abstract thought can be to clarify and put emphasis on shapes of ideas. Film is a type of thought that abstracts for different reasons, to entertain, make its versions of reality compelling and communicate effectively. There is a relation between these two types of abstracting. Both involve taking away what is seen as extraneous depending on what is considered important and we have already read how social relations are often simplified in film.

Dialectics in thought and film simplify shapes, yet it is important that films convey stories with complex multi-character plot structures which involve more than two opposing viewpoints. When people make films they edit, they chose what areas to obscure and what areas to bring into relief, thus often deciding to limit the scope of social relations. Marxism brings a relational model to thinking about society. Bertell Ollmann sees Marx’s concept of relations as “interaction [...] properly speaking, inner-action (it is “inner connections” that he claims to study. Of production, distribution, consumption, and exchange, Marx declares, “mutual interaction takes place between the various elements. [...] This is the case with how Marxism deals with everything by treating its entire subject matter as “different sides of one unit.”²⁹⁸

Relations are always happening in changing conditions “...any entity in changing one or more of the relations that make up other entities [...] each one develops with the direct and indirect aid of everything else, operating on various levels, to single out any aspect as determining can only be a way of emphasizing a particular link

297 C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics, Hegel, Marx, Lenin*, (Connecticut: Lawrence & Hill Co), 15.

298 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign: Illinois University Press, 2003), 27.

in the problem under consideration.”²⁹⁹ This argument connects up to our discussion of Bertell Ollman’s observations on thought abstraction. Ollmann draws a parallel to abstracting as clarifying which situations one wants to connect with other aspects into a discussion. The decision which relations one wants to show is a process of thought which, for Marx, is connected to how one wants to show relations.³⁰⁰ It is much the same as a filmmaker who needs to think about how to show relations in situations, groups, temporary assemblies, institutions or societies.

DIALECTICS AS KNOWLEDGE BUT NEVER AS PREDICTING MOVEMENTS OF THE SOCIAL

From the beginning, it is important to distinguish dialectics useful to our discussion from what has been harmful about dialectics. I chose not to look at the dialectics that from Engels into the period of Stalinist dialectical materialism was seen as an invulnerable science of the social. I am not interested in Brecht’s idea of a drama that reflects a Marxist science of the social nor am I referring to Engels notion of dialectical materialism. Dialectics are simply a set of thoughts about how change happens and how the movement of concepts interrelate with one another. However, in dialectical materialism this is reduced to simplified and formulaic application. “...The Soviet school of “Diamat,” rooted in a vulgarized version of Engels and Plekhanov [...] was presented as a universal ‘world outlook’ and universal method. [...] Even the great pan-logicist Hegel warned against this sort of procedure. [...] Science, he said, “demands surrender to the life of the object” as opposed to [...] “formalism...”³⁰¹ In reference to Engels statement cited in chapter 1, dialectics is not the true understanding of nature and society. Dialectics abstracts dynamics to focus on changes in thought. Moreover, dialectics is applicable to movements of capital because capital itself is a system of real abstraction imposed in practices without the mind.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Angela Harutyunyan, “Hegel’s Aesthetics and Soviet Marxism: Mikhail Lifshits’s Communist Ideal,” *Serbian Architectural Journal*, no. 2, vol. 11, (2019).

DIALECTICS OF CAPITAL

This brings us to the question why is it helpful to look at the configuration of capital through the lens of dialectics? What do dialectics do to the concepts that they are applied to? When we are speaking of capital, dialectics gives the changes at work a shape. Chris Arthur claims that “Hegel’s logic can be drawn on in such a study of capitalism because capital is a very peculiar object, grounded in a process of real abstraction in exchange in much the same way as Hegel’s dissolution and reconstruction of reality is predicated on the abstractive power of thought [...] It is in this sense that it may be shown that there is a connection between Hegel’s ‘infinite’ and Marx’s ‘capital’.”³⁰² In Hegel’s “idealist ontology” logic is effective because for “good material reasons an objective reality has the shape of an ideality.” Arthur recognizes the way that money operates through “... logical categories (that) are effective because the signaling devices that regulate the market are indeed abstractions, real abstractions.”³⁰³ This thought that Adorno refers to as well, is a social form of thought happening for instance in markets “...money (to take the most obvious case) stands in a logical, rather than material relation to commodities. It ‘stands for’ their universal aspect, their identity with each other as values ideally posited through exchange. Capital itself is in part ‘conceptual’ in nature (as Adorno saw), albeit that as an objective ideality it must inhere in material practices and structures. [...] This is why it is possible to model it on Hegel’s logic of the concept.”³⁰⁴ This point about the “concept” that the material abstraction of capital articulates influences our use of the phrase capitalist or capital’s concept. It is taken from Adorno’s work as well as the work of other thinkers and but will be important as we discuss films against capital and bring our discussion of dialectics to its conclusion with *Negative Dialectics*. What we should here is how Hegel’s dialectics correspond to capital’s dialectics because the material “real” abstraction put in motion through exchange behave, as Arthur says, like concepts and these take the form of dialectics.

SOCIETY REPRESENTED AS A TOTALITY IN FILM

Before I go into more detail on dialectics in film, I will take a moment to address the idea of totality as pertinent to a Marxist investigation of capital and capitalism. Throughout

302 Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, (Delhi: Historical Materialism/Aakar Press, 2004), 8.

303 *Ibid.*, 9.

304 *Ibid.*

Cartographies of the Absolute Toscano and Kinkle speak about totality as a “social totality” a “non-perceptual, spatial- totality” of Imperialism.³⁰⁵ I, on the other hand, as I have explained earlier in this chapter, distinguish with Ilyenkov, between abstract and concrete by recognizing that some of Toscano and Kinkle’s statements of capitalist abstractions are actually referring to aspects of capitalist systems that are concrete, “unity” of connection and interaction, “diversity” and “their relationship.” A further point I would now like to add is that capital is a totality, however I do not understand social forms of struggle and contestation to coalesce in a social totality but instead have numerous concrete and varied responses to capital’s determinations. Films that extend beyond the individual can depict large social scales as we have seen. The type of film I associate most with what Kinkle and Toscano discussion of “seeing it whole” and the cognitive mapping of *The Wire*, is what scriptwriter John Truby calls an explosive story structure to be found in films such as Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Magnolia*. *Magnolia* is for me the quintessential totality film with all the problems that entails.³⁰⁶ As such it represents a correspondence between a totality built on abstractions, mainly thought and ideological abstractions, that conforms reality to its shape. Before I get too far ahead of myself, I will deal with this question through the film’s themselves, before turning to totality’s connection with capital.

What do I mean when I say *Magnolia* offers the viewer a perspective that appears related to the Marxist concept of totality? I am pointing to how the film invites the viewer to effectively see an image of society all at once through a series of disconnected yet interrelated scenarios, and in the place of showing relations, instead gives the effect of simultaneity and mysterious connections. *Magnolia* and other films that take the form of explosive and branching story structures present interesting possibilities, such as Robert Altman’s film *Short Cuts*, Steven Soderberg’s *Traffic*, and stories that are organized as chains of interconnected stories such as Max Ophul’s *La Ronde* and Jim Jarmusch’s *Night on Earth*.³⁰⁷ The main quality that these films share is their unconnected stories occurring in close proximity, never satisfactorily intersecting, arbitrarily criss-crossing the narrative, but they eventually reveal their connection. This style of film with its eagerness to thematize disconnection but culminate in correspondence offers an inadvertent and up to date road map of film cliché misunderstandings of complex social relations. We see this in the meaningless encounters in Robert Altman’s *Short Cut*; and in the random convergences that reveal a hidden order in *Magnolia*. The intentional coordination of events created by the film apparatus is pleasing, and outright miraculous in the example of *Magnolia*, yet everyday life offers no such reverie. This style produces a rather hollow “totality” effect by structuring stories in a way that signifies correspondence between events. My interest is in connecting what films are currently being made with what could, in fact, offer better forms of film experimentation against capitalism. In this way, I question such totality effects of correspondence and ask if they have troubling parallels with similarly abstract

305 Ibid., 30, 31.

306 John Truby, *Anatomy of Story*, New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, (2008), 16, ebook.

307 Ibid., 16.

totalities effected in previous Marxist constructions. In short, the dynamic matrix of relations and processes that make up any film is treated in totality film as a figurative bird's eye view. In contrast, the filmmaking I find more sensitive to its forms, searches for knowledge but comprehends that simplifying relations, while it heightens dramatic effect, can do so at the cost of understanding. It is important to note that this erroneous totality relies on vision and uses the diachronic vs. synchronic opposition.³⁰⁸ At root, the conceptualization in totality film—imagining being able to contact everything all at once—works against the more nuanced, multiple shards of perception in montage and moreover, the concept of change in general because it elevates the synchronic as form of total knowledge. In contrast, why does the simultaneity of a film like *Magnolia* shrivel up in the face of Richard Linklater's *Slacker* with its meandering stories or Max Ophul's *La Ronde* with its vignettes, films structured as manifold sequences, not as simultaneous. In the awkward transitions between modes of life-cum-systems of interpretation (*Slacker*) and sexual encounters (*La Ronde*), the structure of presentation and timing determine much of the film's political, social and theoretical implications. Underneath *Magnolia*'s disparate characters converging through chance events, we find abstraction that connects everything. *La Ronde*, on the other hand, stretches out like an endless line, a prostitute meets a soldier, the soldier meets a chamber maid, and around they go, the chain of lovers curving until an aristocrat visits the bed of the prostitute, bringing the story back to its beginning.



Robert Altman, *Nashville* (1975)

The first approach I would like to look at is that of director Robert Altman whose filmmaking changed writing, cinematography and sound recording to cover multiple points of focus. A major area of innovation in Altman's work was that scenes connected many character's actions into an interrelated panorama of activity in the camera's roving frame, as demonstrated in *Nashville*. One of the significant observations that Altman had was that assembled, fragmented camera and sound are able to create complex social pictures. Altman's focus on a wide social picture influenced his

308 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" in *Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding, (London: Routledge, 2004). In this text Haraway makes a similar correspondence with vision.

style of filming continuous coverage with wide frame action among many characters at once. Interlinked simultaneous conversations either improvised or rehearsed were multiplied character point of views through continuous shift in focus between people, moving the cameras over a variety of different people's activities and conversations.



Mike Leigh, *Peterloo* (2018)



Robert Bresson, *L'Argent* (1983)

Mike Leigh's *Peterloo* is an example of a film whose scenes involve many different points of activity and millieus of political tensions that culminate in dramatic political events. This film offers a variety of thoughtful strategies for how to combine scenes that reflect both interpersonal relationships while weaving together large scenes of social contestation and revolt in many social contexts. On the other hand, Robert Bresson's *L'Argent* is an example of a different picture of social brought about in exchange. Scenes show many people involved in a chain of monetary exchanges, in a series of scenes connecting diverging actions adopting the chain structure mentioned above. The audience follows from one exchange to the next, with characters handing over and taking money in fragmented shots focusing on hands, arms, through which a commodity passes, allowing them to see the impact of value relation's on rarely tangible commodity exchange. The story incorporates these connecting interactions

while the direction does not veer from Bresson's well-known stylistic tropes, except in one technique that is distinctive from those used in the director's other films. In these sequences, the people involved are reduced to the functions of exchange, propelling the movement between each scene.



Alfred Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954)



Alfred Hitchcock, *Rear Window* (1954)

A well-known film depiction that shows many character experiences in one film scenario is Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window*. The film's opening scene presents a view of many separate lives shown through the rear facing window of their apartments. Each person contained in their apartment, never realizes that their lives coalesce in one scene viewed by James Stewart. The film's scenes weave together many private realities and narrative connections indicate filmic possibilities when focusing a story on many people in more complex social relations.

These films all offer a different model of social relations that are more expansive than narratives centered on individuals. Documentary film can equally give a vertiginous sense of correspondences without a fiction that arranges abstract coincidence. It is easy to encounter the massive scales that boggle the mind, though rather than evoking a totality such films are wedded to particular situations. The

documentary *Behemoth* is exemplary in this respect in so far as people are brutalized, their lives are treated as secondary to the operation of the coal industry. The film is “a portrait of modern-day China built from the blood and sweat of its proletariat class.”³⁰⁹

CAPITAL AS TOTALITY, NOT STRUGGLE AS A TOTALITY

As I discussed in chapter 1, in my films I have always looked at big social pictures in a way that resonates with Allan Sekula’s comment in chapter 1, that the challenge is to take on the big story as it is in reality, to apply my understanding of capitalist abstraction to tackle the economy as lived histories and conditions. Yet, I have always worked against the “totalizing” aspects of totality. Eventually I broke my analysis of social movements and struggle away from an understanding of totality altogether and took up my interests in the social systems of capital within the more worthwhile framework of relations. I have left discussions of totality behind in every aspect except when it comes to discussions of capital as a totality, in which case, I see the topic is still entirely relevant. Capital involves the abstractions already mentioned that are necessary to instantiate the discussion of totality because it is through social abstraction that correlations across economic conditions are made. However, the idea of totality has been applied to the social beyond this, which will be addressed in this section as well. On the one hand, I would like to emphasize larger social processes in films so that these can come into view instead of only relationships between a few individuals. On the other, I want to veer completely away from the pernicious problematic abstractions at play in ideas such as Lukacs’ conception of working-class struggle as totality. This notion relied on an understanding of the division of labor in industrial production, that brings workers into a state of combined labor that transcends their individual qualities. This imagined abstraction of Lukacs’ was built on a historical period of collective labor struggle (Lukacs wrote *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923 shortly after the Russian Revolution and at the height of the labor movement), but this concept was never based on a concrete situation but rather false assumptions of coherence.³¹⁰ It is incredibly important, then, that I make clear I am not arguing that capital’s abstractions can be a way of unifying characters in films. I am talking about something that is very much the opposite, films that show everyone as specific people in specific conditions.

Dialectics have a relationship of homology with the development of capital, and this is demonstrated nowhere more than in the concept of capital’s totality. As I just

309 John Cronk, “Behemoth – First look,” <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sightsound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/behemoth-first-look> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

310 Endnotes, “A History of Separation” in *Endnotes 4: Unity in Separation*, (2015).

mentioned, I see capital as a totality for very specific reasons that relate to how capital is configured. In chapter 1, I looked at Marx's understanding of capital positing its own presuppositions that he raises in the *Grundrisse*, when he describes that ““The first moment took its point of departure from value, as it arose out of and presupposed” circulation” while “the second moment proceeds from capitals presupposition and result of production; the third moment posits capital as a specific unity of circulation and production””³¹¹ There are many moments when capital presupposes itself by positing the realization of its full circuit before that circuit is complete. Chris Arthur agrees that capital is not able to be this self-positing system without first presupposing the circuit of capital as a totality. “Although in the derivation it necessarily must appear as result, it is really the presupposition, and the starting point [...] although industrial capital lies at the heart of the matter, it is important to grasp circulation as a developed totality, before turning to production; for the latter cannot be studied in determinate form, and its existing law of motion comprehended, unless the intentionality it is infused with, i.e. valorisation, is understood as deriving from these forms.”³¹² In other words, before imagining production capitalists must presuppose a plan for commodity circulation. However, Marx shows that this is even more causally complex. “Only on this presupposition is Marx entitled to formulate the key contradiction: “Capital cannot arise from circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation.””³¹³ Capital is built on a practice of assuming the social relations that will make capital possible, will arrive and then willing itself into existence. Capital positing its presuppositions does two things. It posits the whole of the circuit of capital as a totality, as I have already stated, and second when it posits that whole circuit, what “it is heading for must be granted,” i.e., it puts a process in motion before it is fully in existence, assuming it will come true. By virtue of willing it, the circuit of capital is set into motion and the whole process of valorization is assumed. This does not mean early capitalists imagined a total system of production and circulation in advance of it being realized, though they may have. What Marx wants to show is that capital sets up conditions for its realization that involve transformations of concomitant processes to realize the goals of valorization. Arthur describes Marx's theorization of capital as a social system which is mobilized in the absence of its total realization: “...the object is a totality where every part has to be complemented by others to be what it is; hence internal relations typify the whole. A thing is internally related to another if this other is a necessary condition of its nature. The relations themselves in turn are situated as moments of a totality.”³¹⁴

Relationships of exchange thereby posit the whole of circulation so that totality is an operative assumption. Other Marxist thinkers beyond Chris Arthur are interested in this. Fred Mosely develops other aspects of how capital functions as a

311 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1999) 319. “This accumulation, necessary for capital to come into being [...] is therefore already included in its concept as presupposition.”

312 Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, (Delhi: Historical Materialism/Aakar Books, 2004), 32.

313 Ibid., 32.

314 Ibid., 24.

totality in his book *Money and Totality* “...the necessary condition for the appropriation of surplus value by the capitalist class as a whole—the existence of a class of wage labourers who own no means of production themselves, and therefore must sell their labour power to capitalists in order to survive. This precondition clearly applies to the capitalist mode of production as a whole. [...] Marx is not talking here about individual capitalists nor individual industries but rather the capitalist mode of production in its entirety.”³¹⁵ Moseley shows how Marx conceived of the general theory of surplus value in terms of the whole of the value created by workers and he looks at statements that show that Marx theorized value production by looking at the economy as a whole, such as his comment “the labour which is set in motion by the total capital of society may be regarded as a single working day.”³¹⁶

In this sense, totality is a way to understand capital’s social paradoxes as a system of relations which constitute a kind of operative economic whole, one which has contradictory internal correspondences. Yet beyond this there are troubling ways that the concept of the totality has been metaphorically applied to understanding the “mediations that articulate different horizons of social reality” in capitalism³¹⁷. The concept of totality has often been charged with eliding difference by assuming a totalizing picture of society, identified historically with an emphasis on the worker as subject of history. Totality is taken up by philosopher George Lukacs in this way. Lukacs interprets the abstraction through which exchange value establishes an abstract unity as changing the qualities of work and of solidarity. He says that “by contrast, work which is represented as exchange value has for its premise the work of the isolated individual. It becomes social by assuming the form of its immediate antithesis, the form of abstract universality.”³¹⁸ This dialectical move is obscurantist, able to construct a faulty solidarity as correlate to the “abstract universal” of exchange.³¹⁹ Lukacs envisions the working class as having a social and universal dimension that accompanies individual labors, and he thinks that this social component emanates from the production process of industrial labor itself. “The category of totality begins to have effect long before the whole multiplicity of objects can be illuminated by it. It operates by ensuring that actions which seem to confine themselves to particular objects in both content and consciousness, yet preserve an aspiration toward the totality, that is to say: action is directed objectively

315 Fred Moseley, *Money and Totality: A Macro-Monetary Interpretation of Marx’s Logic in Capital and the End of the “Transformation Problem,”* (London: Haymarket Books), 2016, 108.

316 *Ibid.*, 109.

317 Kevin Floyd, *Reification of Desire*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2009).

318 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, (London: Merlin Press,) 168.

319 In *Abstract Labour and Value in Marx’s System*, Rubin talks about Marx’s description of “abstract universal” as “the form of equation with all other kinds of labor.” I.I. Rubin, *Abstract Labour and Value in Marx’s System*, (Moscow: Pod Znamenem Marksizma, 1927). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/rubin/abstract-labour.htm>. (accessed Oct. 5, 2022).

towards transformation of totality.”³²⁰ Elsewhere this has been called “collective worker.”³²¹ This idea of totality is understood to define a unity of subjects and struggles in capitalism, however it was developed within Marxist history so that it presupposed a homogeneity of the working class was implicitly imagined as white, male, conceived to be able bodied and taking part in heterosexual family life. This idea that defining workers in terms of a totality they could embody had a damaging and lasting effect.

Fredric Jameson in his essay “History and Class Consciousness as an ‘Unfinished Project,’”³²² sees this differently. Jameson considers Lukacs’ position as acknowledging the epistemological confines of immediate individual experience while he suggests how the “effects of a whole range of social and historical forces” are exerted on that individual perspective.³²³ Jameson therefore describes totality as a method of defamiliarizing the individual as the vantage point of aesthetic work, instead focusing on interrelationship of people and their social and political dynamics. While this point is worth considering, Lukacs’ pronouncement in *History and Class Consciousness* had a direct political effect by virtue of its reliance on the constructed (almost performative) notion of a collective worker that founded many social practices and political decisions of the historical workers movement. Such a notion would have served to justify discriminatory decisions where white male workers chose to support the interests of other white male workers over those of people of color, women, queer and disabled people.³²³

Marxism has been “criticized for an emphasis of sameness rather than difference, for subordinating the particularities of, for example, discussions of sexuality to what are supposedly “more ‘total’ concerns.”³²⁴ Although Kevin Floyd, wrote both the last two quotes in the service of arguing to repurpose the Marxist concept of totality for queer theory, his work on totality encompasses a far more inclusive perspective than Lukacs’ inherently white male and otherwise normative worker subject.³²⁵ Floyd asserts that the value of thinking around the concept of totality by saying that “if Marxism aspires to understand the mediations that articulate different horizons of social reality, if it tends to emphasize connection rather than differentiation, this is because social and epistemological severing of connections is precisely one of capital’s most consequential objective effects, the result of which is a lack of understanding of

320 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, (London: Merlin Press,) 175.

321 Endnotes, “A History of Separation” in *Endnotes 4: Unity in Separation*, (2015).

322 Fredric Jameson, “History and Class Consciousness as an ‘Unfinished Project,’” *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 1 (1988).

323 David Roediger, “What if Labor Were Not White and Male? Recentring Working Class History and Reconstructing Debate on the Unions and Race,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 51, Workers in Racially Stratified Societies (Spring, 1997), 76.

324 Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2009), 6.

325 Ibid. Fredric Jameson, “History and Class Consciousness as an ‘Unfinished Project,’” *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 1, (1988).

the connection between various capitalist phenomena.”³²⁶ What Floyd finds appealing about totality can be found in the analysis of relations and does not require extending the concept of capital’s totality to encompass people’s struggles and society. The distinction that all the thinkers in these discussions of capital agree about is that capital’s abstractions do not encompass people’s lived experiences. Yet this still leaves us with the problem that in actual history Lukacs’ theory was used to support a social unity of the labor movement that was exclusionary. When one looks at the racist, patriarchal and otherwise exclusionary labor history of the 20th c. in Europe and North America, the exclusionary aspects of the labor movement are undeniably the case.³²⁷ The impacts of Lukacs work on such exclusionary practices is a topic worth studying further.

CONTRADICTION AND CONFLICT

Dialectics involves an understanding that contradictory tendencies are part of the same system. Relations in capitalism produce inner contradictions that are found throughout capitalist social systems. According to Marx, “in capitalism everything seems and in fact is contradictory.”³²⁸ Marx believes the “contradictory socially determined features of its elements” are “the predominant characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.”³²⁹ Lucio Coletti points out that dialectical opposition is “traditionally expressed by the formula ‘A not-A’. It is the instance in which one opposite cannot stand without the other and vice-versa (mutual attraction of opposites).”³³⁰ Ollmann typifies contradiction as a response to different areas within the capitalist system that “are connected to one another, so that different elements relate in such a way that puts them into potential conflict.”³³¹ Ollmann emphasizes that “For Marx, contradiction belongs to things in their quality as processes within [...] developing system(s). It arises from within, from the very character of these processes (it is “innate in their subject matter”), and is an expression of the state of the system.”³³² In capitalism, people live in conditions of

326 Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 2009), 6.

327 David Roediger, “What if Labor Were Not White and Male? Recentering Working Class History and Reconstructing Debate on the Unions and Race,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 51, Workers in Racially Stratified Societies (Spring, 1997), 72-95.

328 Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1863). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/cho3.htm> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

329 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

330 Lucio Coletti, *Marxism and the Dialectics*, New Left Review, no. 93. (Sept/Oct, 1975) 4.

331 Bertell Ollmann, *Dance of the Dialectic*, (Champaign, Illinois University Press, 2003).

332 Ibid., 18.

exploitation and they “act over and against themselves through the capitalist system of social reproduction.”³³³ This theoretical aspect of Marxism is a way of thinking how the dialectic is at work in the ways that systems, relate on larger social scales. In Ollman’s description of Marx’s method, it is a consequence that “their paths of development do not only intersect in mutually supportive ways but are constantly blocking, undermining, otherwise interfering with, and in due course transforming one another.”³³⁴ Ollman suggests that the aim is to be able to respond with a conception of contradiction that “that bring(s) such change and interaction [...] into [...] focus.”³³⁵

To focus more closely on how contradiction and conflict are part a contemporary political film viewpoint, I want to bring up an interesting passage in David Roediger’s *Class, Race, and Marxism* about the film *Ferguson: Report from Occupied Territory* made by Orlando de Guzman. Roediger explains how struggles in Ferguson are part of a larger picture of anti-capitalist struggle. Showing how police impose state fines on people based on structural racist discrimination by police, meanwhile the courts bring a steady flow of income for the state. In this way, the *Ferguson: Report from Occupied Territory* shows that the political stakes of the Ferguson uprising were the communities response to the discriminatory policing and political system of the lived environment. Narrow minded Marxist readings of the Ferguson uprising do not understand that political opposition to capitalism involves much more than just workplace struggles.³³⁶ Many interconnected social systems reproduce capitalism, namely the state and the deadly racist violence of police, harassment, fines, racial profiling and its relation to racial discrimination. The people who took part in the protests in Ferguson are Black and proletarian. “We see the vast expanses of closed factories and the abandoned neighborhoods lost to deindustrialization and unfair housing practices that provide a backdrop” Roediger points out. “Those interviewed in the film” he explains “clearly understand their problems as those of the working poor and the deindustrialized, as well as of those victimized in schools, courts, and on the streets because of their race.” This is Roediger claiming the false distinction that Marxist theorists such as David Harvey have made that protests such as riots do not express proletarian forms of struggle because, according to the theorist, they are not “asking the right questions” and articulating their protests within the framework of class struggle.³³⁷ Yet this an unfortunate viewpoints that demands that people explicitly articulate their struggles as anti-capitalist while overlooking the racist and economic discrimination happening as part of the wider context of racist police killing. The interrelations between race, gender and class are undeniable.

333 Ibid., 17.

334 Ibid.

335 Ibid.

336 David Harvey, “David Harvey on the English Riots: Feral capitalism hits the streets,” Aug 11, 2011, <https://climateandcapitalism.com/2011/08/11/david-harvey-on-the-english-riots-feral-capitalism-hits-the-streets/> Article first appeared in <http://davidharvey.org/> (accessed Oct 5, 2022).

337 David Roediger, *Race, Class and Marxism*, (London/Verso, 2017) 2.

POSITING VALUE AS A NARRATIVE OF CAPITAL AND FILM AS CAPITALIST POSITING

Chris Arthur has a further set of observations that will enlighten us to how capital as concrete has a life in capital as abstract. Arthur claims that “use value positing of labour” gets “abstracted from” so that it is understood “merely as the bearer of value positing insofar as all concrete determinacy involved” “is absented leaving the logical category of positing *per se*.” We have described this in chapter 1 and now chapter 2 we see that the concrete reality of daily life is reconceived in terms of exchange so that capital posits possibilities so as to shape them. “Self-valorising value posits itself in comprehending within itself production, through negating dialectically (i.e. preserving the material side within it) the realm of the real labour of production.” Part of this are the presuppositions integral to the abstraction of value as it comes to dominate production. In this way, possibilities in capitalism are subtended by capital’s logics of success and failure (of valorization) where outcomes are made to register within a system of valorization with its rigid outcomes. The understanding that capital posits its conditions of production is a reversal of causality because the whole circuit of capital is posited and these conditions are anticipated as driving production in order for capital produced to be valorized. Marx saw this dialectic at play in capital when he described this. This is one of many moments in my argument where dialectics both lends a shape in which to analyze the movements of capital and at the same time is useful in thinking one’s way through the problems of undoing capital as a system that regulates human activity.

Marx understands capital’s dialectic as Hegel conceives of the dialectic as it is outlined in the *Logic*. Hegel describes the dialectic of being and becoming as the way to think through the transformations of capital’s system in becoming as positing potential valorization. Arthur relates this back to Hegel’s unstable unity of Being and non-being, always active, confronting its need to ensure the process of valorization. This orientation around futurity is an aspect of the dialectic that Marx extended out of Hegel’s initial stages of the dialectic. “When ‘Becoming’ comes to rest in a result, namely a marketable commodity, value is posited. The result value, abstracted from its contingent use value support, has to be considered simply as what has become from the unrest of its becoming”³³⁸ Positing presuppositions is a dialectical movement of “what has become to the unrest of becoming” which revolves around possibility as the result of value realization, outcomes circumscribed by value. Capitalist ideas configured through this version of possibility are a complicated knot of imaginings in which

338 Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, (Delhi, Historical Materialism/Aakar), 1169

possibility has fixed outcomes registering as victory or failure of valorization. These presuppose and pass on unquestioned ideological structures of power that shape the way possibilities in capitalism are imagined. Marx states in *Grundrisse*: “In the completed bourgeois system every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition... This organic system itself, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality.”³³⁹ This dialectic of being and becoming sets up “the activity of value-positing and the resulting value,” an abstract possibility, that involves risk and aleatory outcomes.

The view of possibility modelled on capitalist valorization promotes the saddest form of in which to imagine events. These moments defined by a society that is increasingly interested in mastering the aleatory because capitalist endeavours are oriented around taking hold of chance in a society whose “development to totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself”³⁴⁰. Capital always involves investment in the realization of future value, a wager on future outcomes that attempts to harness future possibility. As capitalism posits the most advantageous valorizations and presupposes societies that are constantly remade as more deeply capitalist, they transform the fabric of everyday life. From job applications to investment companies, maximized potentials is an immediate assumption of most situations. This transforms how possibilities are conceived. In film scenarios these are the palpable manifestation of possibilities which feel like shocks or inevitabilities. When possibilities are outlined by capital’s horizons, they are schematizations of the aleatory that converge to create predicted outcomes. Many forms of narrative tell the value-positing that capital does as a social narrative. In these narratives, risks are taken with unknown outcomes, and possibilities come to fruition. These narratives are limited because they regard the future based on the model of investment and individual payoff. When narrative events come to fruition it is through a framework of individual needs.

Reconsidering mainstream film’s emphasis on individual characters must challenge these possessive individualist, investment-led models that imagine valorization in advance of its realization. What about outcomes that are not individual that happen to more than one person?

Causality is not a capitalist concept per se. It is relevant to note what Alfred Sohn-Rethel describes as a narrowing of possibility in capitalist exchange (as a portion of the positing of value). What Sohn-Rethel describes is the way that exchange processes construct the satisfaction of one’s needs in a specific way: as individual, not collective, needs satisfied by one object through exchange. “...The interest of each is his own interest and not that of the other. Similarly, the way each conceives of his interest is his own, the needs, feelings, thoughts that are involved on both sides are polarized on *whose* they are. A piece of bread that another eats does not feed me.” Sohn-Rethel suggests that the way one conceives of one’s needs changes them, edits out ways that needs can be fulfilled through collective goals. In other words, capitalism turns what

339 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973).

340 Ibid., 74.

could be a collective imagining of needs into “Not what two people need but *whose* need.”³⁴¹ The possibility of joint needs, of interests without objects, needs that are not specified or localizable are the type of experience immediately foreclosed by the way need is construed in exchange. Forgotten is, as Sohn-Rethel phrases it, “*what* we communicate to each other.” This canalizing of outcomes through individual needs and disregarding how needs can be more than just individual is communicated in how Kant conceived of the relation of the faculties of sensibility and reason. In Adorno’s lectures on *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* the philosopher says “You will constantly hear about ‘firm’ or ‘lasting’ ownership and similar figures of speech in reference to propositions we possess” [...] “there is relationship of equivalence such that nothing can emerge without entering into it, that is, nothing that does not by whatever has first been *posited*. And in the process only these. And in the process only this exchange [...] only this becomes the thing that endures, the lasting product.” (Adorno’s italics). As I said in the introduction, the connection of sensibility and reason via real abstraction is made continually in film. In this way, people’s needs, interests and desires are continually ostensibly satisfied in exchange through a panoply of commodities, yet following Sohn-Rethel, the possessive individualist/methodological individualist framework of needs, feelings, thoughts as understood in capitalism, canalize people’s needs into fewer possibilities than the social world could otherwise offer.

A film like *Top Gun* epitomizes some of the attitudes toward individual goal-oriented accomplishment conveyed in films in the 1980s. The film is set in the top gun military school for elite pilots, with the military’s culture of authority, co-operation between soldiers, and the drama of the competition / camaraderie balance as it is unsettled by Maverick, the son of a famous air fighter pilot. Portrayed by an especially smugly self-confident Tom Cruise who cannot stop exclaiming that he is the best to anyone unfortunate enough to engage him in conversation, *Top Gun* inadvertently portrays education as a period inculcating deep sense of rivalry. Maverick lives by his own rules which fly in the face of an order-based institution like the military and gets him in a lot of trouble. His antagonist, another hot shot pilot, Iceman, lives by old military code and sticks to the rules. The film ultimately shows military discipline where people follow orders, on the one hand, and Maverick, on the other hand, is portrayed as unhindered by rules—he is simply too much of an individual that he cannot be held back by them. In a scene toward the end of the film, Iceman demeans Maverick by asking if he will be able to go into combat, because he says that the other pilots cannot trust him. However, the writing and directing is communicating to the audience that Iceman does not understand Maverick as representing the ascendant force of individualism against collective work. In the final battle scene, Maverick learns to support the other pilots including Iceman, but he still does it in his inimitable personal style that succeeds because of its idiosyncratic, unexpected dare devil-ness. The moral of the film is that the co-operation required for people to pull off a team effort is there to support the individuals that take risks and are the best at what they do.

341 Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1978), 41.

Reframing risk outside of the register of aggressive male competition, other film genres reflect the same emphasis of acclimatizing people to individual risk. *Sliding Doors*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow, gives us a perspective on these same problems through the norms imposed on women in capitalism. It is similarly about individually driven risk-prone behavior but through a narrative that circulates around the idea of missed opportunities. Helen gets fired from her PR job and, heading home dejected, she runs to catch a tube train when suddenly one version of Helen is carried off on a trajectory where she makes the tube train, while another starts where she misses the train and starts another trajectory in her life. In the first, Helen meets a man on the train, then arrives home to find her partner cheating on her, later recovers, and falls in love, starts a PR company, and ends up much happier. Meanwhile, the Helen that missed the train does not find out her boyfriend cheated on her. This sexist film frames all the possibilities presented to Helen as relating back to her romantic relationships. The film is then a stripped-down, nuts and bolt capitalist vision of possibility as the opportunities accrue to risk-prone Helen while risk-averse Helen misses out on life. In the second Helen's trajectory, pouring effort into a bad relationship is the main theme. This thwarted trajectory plays out in contrast to all the new horizons in the first Helen's life: her new relationship with James complete with musical medley sequences showing Helen's enjoyment of life with James and new friends she meets, all enabled by finding a new relationship. While this depiction shamelessly narrows the scope of woman's lives through this imagining of possibility, the film also truncates possibility in general through an investment and risk model. The film communicates that if one is not taking risks, one is held back. The film ends with the same parallel twist in both scenarios where Helen loses her baby. In one branch of the narrative, she would have had a baby in a new relationship, opening up promising avenues in her life, while in the other she would have had the baby in a relationship that is hurting her. The film says that what defines women's success and meaning in patriarchal society is motherhood, and this is conditioned by how all one's choices decide one's success-failure matrix. A pivotal moment happens when as Helen is recovering James says "I'm glad you caught the train that day. I'm going to make you so happy. I promise" which drives home that risk-prone Helen will be happier. The film ends with risk-averse Helen finally bumping into James as she leaves the hospital, presenting the viewer with a sentimentalizing idea of fate that ties up a film glued to the idea of success-focused relationships and entrepreneurialism.

Point Break puts chance and the unexpected as extreme experience as worth engineering one's life around by taking the ultimate risk. It's a film about risk as lifestyle and belief system. While *Top Gun* showed an individual driven by competition, *Point Break* is a film about exorcising the collective out of the risk. Keanu Reeves is Johnny Utah, an ex-quarterback FBI agent pursuing Patrick Swayze and the group of "ex-president" bank robbers. He discovers the identities of the group when he detects their cohesion through their collective surfing choreography and propensity for irreverent fun e.g. they mooned each other during surfing and during a bank robbery. The story frames the group as able to have a collective surfer lifestyle because they rob banks, and shows a conflict between their individualized quests for the perfect wave contrasting with the group's internal closeness and comradery. Although the group are averse to being part of the capitalist economy, this is only dealt with through

their propensity to rob banks as a vehicle for the film's anti-collectivist moral lessons that frame the collective mindedness of the group as fragile. The characters talk about being opposed to "the system" but the film avoids questions of class and race focusing instead on the group's ersatz collectivity of surfing as unrestricted personal risk taking, with collectivity seen, as at worst, an instrument of individual power.

This brings me to comment on another dimension of how possibility is construed within the ideologies of individualized capitalist filmmaking. To do this I'll contrast the people who act in ways deemed illegal in *Point Break* with the 1960s film *Le Trou* by Jacques Becker which depicts collective proletarian life in conflict with that of bourgeois society. In *Le Trou* this antagonism is embodied throughout the film. It is there initially in the wariness of the proletarian cell mates when the bourgeois Gaspard first arrives. We find out it is because the cellmates have a plan to escape. When the group accepts Gaspard, deciding to work with him and thus trust him, this comradeship seems to give Gaspard deep delight. The group work tirelessly together to dig a hole to escape prison. They are asking the question that Sohn-Rethel raises regarding "what (several) people need," each putting their own abilities and contributions into the project. The style of filmmaking does not make any one character more prominent than the others. It is announced at the end, however, that Gaspard betrays the trust of his cell mates. Gaspard has asked himself "Not what (several) people need but *whose* need." The political problem of oppression is encapsulated in this scenario where Gaspard shows himself to feel close with his proletarian cell mates, but then truly is only concerned with his individual interests, dramatizing the class conflict of their structural positions without treating anyone as wooden embodiments of class positions. However, the story has a deeper implication of questioning the whole construction of individual needs. The film, however, would have been more interesting if it had included people who are not white in the narrative.

In contrast to *Le Trou*, *Top Gun*, *Sliding Doors* and *Point Break* all show an individual framework of needs. Like many films of the period of the 1980s and 1990s, they emphasize moments of decision that lead to fateful outcomes, focusing on individual possibilities, in order to overlook other possibilities that have social and political ramifications. The way that possibilities are imagined in the films narrow those possibilities. There is no monolithic category of "capitalist ideology" when it comes to film, rather many different positions of writers and directors come across, many of which happen through chance circumstances related to professional possibilities and funding sources. However, the individualistic attitudes constrained by a focus on individual need and antagonism toward collective practice found in films such as *Top Gun* and *Point Break* have for too long constrained an imagining of possibility in the stories we tell about change and possibility. We are in a period when society needs imagining of collective need to stop the crises that we are facing. Collective desires have to be imagined. The routes between a sensibility of needs and desires to reason does not need to be imagined via real abstraction so that it is solely a way to separate people's needs. Needs can also connect people. Needs would be irremediably transformed if they incorporated the political perspective of people who have labored to satisfy the needs of other people, for instance, through analysis of structural racial and gender discriminations that have accompanied this labor. Relational and dialectical analyses of racial capitalism and social reproduction feminism can help us to think how transformations can

be thought beyond this constrained, capitalist, form-determined version of possibility based on abstraction. Exchange, while it is configured as a dialectical self-posting that shapes capitalism, a further movement of thought could be anathema to capitalist logics. When needs are shared and connect people, it is a very powerful process that gives rise to collective struggles and plans. I propose a shift in films against capitalism to a different, non-capitalist imagining of possibility and need. Stories told by film against capitalism have to figure out what possibility is without capital, in order to understand what joint needs can be.

NEGATIVE DIALECTICS AS A BETTER DIALECTIC

While Adorno describes Hegel's "much admired material richness," he is opposed to Hegel's dialectical method in some fundamental ways, and he regards the dialectic as suffocating.³⁴² His critique of dialectical synthesis and discussion of the non-identical encapsulate his problems. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno says "The whole is false," calling into question the way the totality of Hegel's system exercises the totalizing pursuit of concept in Marxism.³⁴³ In his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, Adorno describes the place where he parts ways with the Hegelian system of dialectics. This is the idea of the dialectic as confining thought to thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis and identity. "The thought that carries out the act of identification always does violence to every single concept in the process. And the negation of the negation is in fact nothing other than the ἀναμνησις, the recollection, of that violence, in other words the acknowledgement that, by conjoining two opposing concepts, I have on the one hand bowed to a necessity implicit in them, while on the other hand I have done them a violence that has to be rectified."³⁴⁴ Adorno regards the Hegelian stage of dialectical synthesis as a violation whereby a concept is made to become like another concept, and he extends this to the submission of non-concepts to determination through ideas. Walter Benjamin agrees with Adorno that "besides the concept of synthesis, another concept, that of a certain non-synthesis of two concepts in another, will become very important systematically, since another relation between thesis and antithesis is possible besides synthesis."³⁴⁵

Negative Dialectics does more than unfasten such well-rehearsed dialectical tropes. Werner Bonefeld in his essay *Emancipatory Praxis and Conceptuality in Adorno*

342 Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993).

343 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, (London: Verso, 2000), 49.

344 Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 30.

345 Walter Benjamin, *On the Program of the Coming Philosophy*, (Cambridge, Belknap/ Harvard University Press, 2002) 106.

gives an overview of Adorno's contribution in *Negative Dialectics*, demonstrating that a close reading of the book discovers the depth of Adorno's undermining attack on dialectical philosophy. In Bonefeld's view, Adorno's understanding of dialectics is not limited to purely theoretical ramifications. The Frankfurt School philosopher discusses the conceptual and non-conceptual in *Negative Dialectics* to highlight that dialectics is a problematic system that subjugates things to concepts. Bonefeld speaks of the "cognitive confrontation of concept and thing." As the disappeared essence of things, *human practice is the non-conceptual content of things*. Confronting the thing means deciphering the non-conceptual in the act of conceptualising it. For example, the conceptuality of the wage-labourer as a personification of variable capital confronts what it denies—human sensuous being—and this non-conceptuality belongs to the concept wage-labour and therefore haunts and contradicts it. Sensuous being exists within the concept of variable capital in the mode of being denied." Bonefeld extends this idea of sensuous being to the sensibility of laborers by saying that "for variable capital to function, it requires the ingenuity and spontaneity of human purposeful practice. Yet, this in such a way that it is in fact a meeting of thought with material social relations."³⁴⁶

Bonefeld interprets the schism between the concept and the thing that is not identical to it as the basis of Adorno's formulation of non-identity. Consequently, it is important to understand that Adorno is not arguing for simply an interpretation of the relation between concepts but there is a set of concrete concerns linked to Adorno's interrogation. Bonefeld says that what is ultimately argued is that: "To bring things to their concept requires that concepts are open to the experience of the thing. The freedom of the wage contract challenges the concept of freedom in its experience." What is notable here is that Bonefeld sees dialectics as able to open the concept to its non-conceptual component. "Dialectics opens concepts. Dialectics is not a formal procedure or method applied to reality. Instead, it focuses on social contents and does so by moving within their social forms." As a result, Bonefeld sees in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* a philosopher that destroys "the categories of bourgeois political economy." Bonefeld says that "For Adorno, "a dialectics that deciphers the social constitution of things "extinguishes the autarky of the concept, strips the blindfold from our eyes." Bonefeld tells us "That the concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being does not change the fact that on its part it is entwined with a non-conceptual whole"³⁴⁷. History does not make history. Man makes history. [...] History is nothing but the activity of Man pursuing its ends. [...] Adorno's negative dialectics [...] penetrates reality and dissolves its dogmatic posture by turning towards the non-identical in the identical, the non-conceptual in the conceptual. Especially in miserable times, it thus makes sense to look at Adorno's negative dialectics to see the mole at work, to appreciate its philosophical destruction and subversive cunning, and to ask about the (non-)conceptuality of human social practice in a world governed by things."³⁴⁸

346 Werner Bonefeld, "Emancipatory Praxis and Conceptuality in Adorno," in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2009), 139.

347 Ibid., 126.

348 Ibid., 125.

Reading *Negative Dialectics* and *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, I see that Bonefeld is correct in this understanding. I will first lay out the argument on capital and concept as it is to be found across Adorno's work. Bonefeld clarifies that "conceptuality has to do with the recognition of reality—not with the analysis of concepts." He says this in a longer passage in which he describes why, if Adorno's project is aiming at describing social relations, it puts such intense pressure on concepts: "In the critical tradition, conceptualisation therefore does not mean the expounding of meta-theories, which [...] finishes up akin to the doctrine of the Invisible Hand with deist conceptions of social existence, whether in their religious or secularized forms—the so-called logic of things. Instead, it grounds the existence of invisible principles in human social relations and argues that it is these that produce their own enslavement to the invisible. [...] *To conceptualise means to bring the thing to its concept. Conceptuality has to do with the recognition of reality—not with the analysis of concepts. Concepts are required to recognize reality.* Conceptualisation goes beyond the immediate perception of reality in order to comprehend what is hidden in its immediacy..." (my italics) Christopher Arthur concurs. Arthur states that "capital itself is in part 'conceptual' in nature (as Adorno saw)."³⁴⁹ We come to a point that my argument hinges on, that I have been indicating throughout the introduction and chapter 1, that capital's abstraction is in contrast to the concrete which it dominates and this is a moment of complete rupture that sits at the heart of my project from works like *Self-capital* and *Popular Unrest* to my current considerations of the contradictions between abstract system and specific conditions in *Parts-wholes* and *Crowds*. The non-identity in Adorno gives us this idea in an aesthetic form—as contradiction expressed as dissimilarity. It is evident that by the time of writing *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno was unpacking the implications of this notion of capital's concept throughout his work in ways that are pertinent to our argument. "...a striking feature of capital" is "that it has a certain conceptuality to it. Adorno was one of the few to have understood this: he spoke of 'a conceptuality which holds sway in reality [Sache] itself', a conceptuality 'independent both of the consciousness of the human beings subjected to it and of the consciousness of the scientists.'"³⁵⁰

For Arthur as for Adorno, this conceptual aspect of capital is the result of the exchange relation. "...this ideal aspect springs from the inversion characteristic of the system of production for exchange, as we have argued throughout. The result is a peculiar interpenetration of 'ideality' and 'materiality' situating 'a contradiction in essence', which we have shown comes up whenever we try to locate 'productive power' in capitalism; it cannot be unequivocally assigned either to capital or labour.[...] I have presented an original interpretation of capital as an ideal totality that takes possession—like a malevolent spirit—of the material world of labour and goods."³⁵¹ Arthur says too, in the same passage where he comments on Adorno's work on capital's

349 Christopher J. Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, (Delhi: Historical Materialism/ Aakar Books, 2004), 9.

350 *Ibid.*, 244. Chris Arthur quotes Theodor Adorno in *Sociology and Empirical Research*, 80. Adorno's work on Sociology was central in his development of the concepts in *Negative Dialectics*.

351 *Ibid.*, 243-244.

concept: “...Capital contracts an unacknowledged debt for this; in totalising labours only as abstractions of themselves, it cannot account for what is in excess of its concept of itself, the concrete richness of social labour.”³⁵²

Capital’s concepts subsume “materiality” through “ideality” that instead finds contradictory meaning as “productive power.” This Arthur emphasizes in the same passage, puts Adorno’s response to Hegel’s pronouncement in the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: “The truth is the whole” in a further light, not just as a comment on the philosophical implications of Hegel’s conceptual totality. When Adorno responds to Hegel with his own declaration “the whole is false” in *Dwarf Fruit*, Arthur understands this as a response to the way Hegel’s conceptual totality’s instates a concept that contradicts the concrete but nevertheless bulldozes it, in Adorno’s words: “subsumes it in its concept.”³⁵³ For Adorno, truth would involve such a revolt. Unequivocally, the non-identical is the crux of Adorno’s argument that frames capital’s concept as occupying a central place in Adorno’s understanding of Hegel’s dialectic in *Negative Dialectics*, and ultimate rejection of it. Adorno says that: “On the other hand, philosophy in its highest form hitherto, and that was Hegelian philosophy with its attempt to comprehend the non-identical, albeit to comprehend it by identifying with it—this philosophy is beyond redemption. The assertion of the identity of being and thought, which stands behind the entire philosophical tradition, has succumbed irrevocably to the protests against it. If the world were truly at one with spirit, if it were the product of spirit, permeated with spirit, this would mean with inexorable necessity that the world would be meaningful in its current form.”³⁵⁴ Adorno concludes that in order to come to terms with the problem of capital imposing its concept on the non-conceptual, it is a matter “of comprehending it in its non-conceptuality.” This for Adorno is the key to redeeming dialectics “In Hegel, in the sense of the identification of the non-identical, in the sense of the questions I am describing to you, it is a matter not of incorporating the non-conceptual, but of comprehending it in its non-conceptuality. If that could be achieved, and so as to become able to speak of the essential matters that so often elude it, philosophy would have to come to terms with the very things that it has always suppressed in its traditional form right down to Hegel.”³⁵⁵

To return to what this means in terms of the open-ended quality of Adorno’s dialectics that eschew the step of synthesis, Adorno sees *Negative Dialectics* is a process against resolution because resolution is the reconciliation of the thing to its concept, a process of identification in thought that is violent. Adorno explains this throughout his work and Bonefeld reconfirms this: “What appears identical in exchange is non-identity under the aspect of identity. Although no atom of matter goes into the determination of value, use value “constitutes the substance of all wealth,” whatever the social form of that wealth.[...] Negative dialectics is “suspicious of all identity” and hinges on this

352 Ibid., 244.

353 Theodor Adorno, *Minimal Moralia*, (London: Verso, 2000) 244.

354 Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008) 59.

355 Ibid., 57.

“turn towards nonidentity” within the concept.”³⁵⁶ In accordance with Bonefeld’s view, one can look at the following passage from *Negative Dialectics* as clarifying that when Adorno discusses the non-identical, his comments are directed at social processes in capitalism. Adorno comments that an imagined “thinker immerses himself [...] in the concept, and as he perceives its immanently antinomical character, he clings to the idea of something beyond contradiction. The antithesis of thought to whatever is heterogeneous to thought is reproduced in thought itself, as its immanent contradiction. [...] *The barter principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no barter; it is through barter that nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. The spread of the principle imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total.*”³⁵⁷ (my italics)

The dialectic here has two roles: as an analytic tool for filmmakers to think problems of individuals and society dialectically and, in addition, *Negative Dialectics* opens up a way to undermine conventional dialectics and this helps us think about film against capitalism. Bonefeld interprets the schism between the concept and the thing that is not identical to it, as the basis of Adorno’s formulation of conceptual, non-conceptual and non-identity. Capital’s conceptuality establishes an objective ideality whose traces inheres in material practices and structures. The “idea” of capital articulates reality in the forms of its thought. Films that promote capital’s concepts operate in such a way as to create identity between capital’s concepts and the non-conceptual, for example, the social relations that do not fit in capital’s concepts. A fascinating quote in *Negative Dialectics* beautifully illustrates Bonefeld’s point: “contradictoriness is a category of reflection, the cogitative confrontation of concept and *thing*. To proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions, for the sake of the contradiction once experienced in *the thing*, and against that contradiction. A contradiction in reality, it is a contradiction against reality. But such dialectics is no longer reconcilable with Hegel. Its motion does not tend to the identity in the difference between each object and its concept; instead, it is suspicious of all identity.”³⁵⁸ The rift Adorno implies in his argument is to undo the identity of capital’s concepts with the non-identical. This is the political strength of negative dialectics. According to Bonefeld “Dialectics is thus not a form of thought that pacifies the contradiction, [...] by means of reconciliation, integration, incorporation or simply formalistic indifference [...] to social contents. Dialectics recognises the non-conceptual in the concept and so illuminates the contradiction...”³⁵⁹

356 Werner Bonefeld, “Emancipatory Practice and Conceptuality” in *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2009) 140

357 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, (London: Routledge, 1973) 146.

358 Ibid., 144.

359 Werner Bonefeld, “Emancipatory Practice and Conceptuality,” *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2009)139.

Adorno tears Hegel's dialectics apart to expose the tyranny of capital's conceptual fortress and retrieve from deep inside, its most intrinsic element: the strength of the non-conceptual to defy capital's concepts. Here Adorno articulates the core of my argument, that there is so much that exceeds capital's concept that need to be articulated, so many stories, so many promises, so many conclusions.

Let's then spell out the implications of Adorno's discussion of the conceptual, non-conceptual and non-identity through Arthur, Bonefeld and film against capitalism. Adorno's concept of the non-identical brings us to realize that capital's concept as expressed through film is woefully inadequate to people's lives and worse, capital's concept punishes all who are near it by asking all to confirm to capital's needs. Film against capitalism can offer a version of the non-conceptual because it is practice-thought. Adorno's non-identity of the concept with the non-conceptual is perhaps another way of saying film as practice-thought. Film against capitalism needs to disprove capitalist concepts. "Critique, then, deciphers the world of things on a human basis and does so by showing that the forms of capital are constituted by and subsist through the social practice of "active humanity."³⁶⁰ In other words, capital is a form people made and can also unmake, and enjoyably film "entails the deciphering of things as "relations between humans."³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 141.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

(CHAPTER 3)

SCRIPT: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LABOR AND CAPITAL

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LABOR AND CAPITAL

Season 1-Magnitude
Episode 1-Consistency

TIMELINE OFFICE-LISA, DAVID & JOANNA-NIGHT

Lisa, David and Joanna are working at desks in a large office at an immense technology company, Timeline. It is the end of the day and most if the employees are leaving to go home.

Lisa, David and Joanna continue to work. The company's logo is on Lisa's screen. A banner runs next to it:

Onscreen text

"Timeline: The company that saved time forever."

Lisa is using Timeline's monitoring system as she scrolls through office stats from the past day and makes changes in the settings. She rapidly adjusts gradations in measurements.

David is doing a similar task nearby. Joanna, their manager, returns to her desk near to theirs. Joanna calls her boyfriend. They speak for a short while.

JOANNA

Hi, I've got one minute...

MELANIE GILLIGAN

PETER

I'll be late tonight. Dinner with my colleagues and the head of the department.

JOANNA

That's alright. I'm finishing up here.

PETER

I'll see you later then.

JOANNA

How late?

Our attention returns to Lisa and David. They are finishing up their work. A cleaner is making his way through the office. He turns some of the lights down. It is dark outside.

DAVID

There. I'm done. What about you?

LISA

I just checked office metrics for the day and I've implemented Joanna's changes.

Joanna comes and looks over her shoulder.

JOANNA

Good.

LISA

Results show productivity is consistent.

JOANNA (SMILING SARCASTICALLY)

Consistency is what we do.

LISA

...But most of the office has increased levels of physical strain.

DAVID

There's always consistency there.

Lisa laughs. Joanna is surprised.

JOANNA

I don't think that's especially funny.

LISA

Sorry, I just heard the pun.

Joanna and David both look at her questioningly.

LISA

Nothing. It doesn't matter.

JOANNA

I really do not appreciate this tone you've been taking recently. Is there a problem we need to discuss?

LISA

No. Definitely, no. Everything is fine.

Joanna picks up her bag and takes a coat from a nearby rack.

JOANNA

I'm assuming all is in order and I can leave you two to wrap up.

DAVID

Yes, no problem. See you tomorrow.

Joanna walks off through the long open plan office. Once she's gone, David turns to Lisa.

DAVID

The pun?

LISA

I'm just laughing because the Timeline main system revolutionized work by ensuring consistent output morning to night. But there's no consistency in the experience of that time. It's emptied.

DAVID

What do you mean? You just said it's consistent...

MELANIE GILLIGAN

LISA

No, I mean the consistency, like the quality of the time is empty. There is no richness in the experience.

DAVID

Who needs richness?

LISA

I don't know. Optimized time is productive but very...(searching for word) ...thin.

David doesn't look interested, keeps working. But then he looks up.

DAVID

You know that's fine, but it's not doing you any favors with Joanna. Did you even notice that big conflict we just narrowly averted.

LISA

I guess.

DAVID

I would be worried at this point. I'm telling you as a friend.

LISA

Right. Thanks.

Lisa is upset. She scrolls through numerous graphs, trying to slow her breathing. Then she eventually breathes in deeply and pushes her chair back.

LISA

I'm going to clock off.

Lisa looks at her phone and sees a message from her friend Grace from 5 minutes ago.

GRACE

Want to get Ramen?

Lisa checks the time and turns off her monitoring app. She replies to her friend.

LISA

Ok. See you outside in 10 minutes.

Lisa picks up her coat.

LISA

Do you want to get dinner?

DAVID

I'm going to keep working. See you tomorrow.

Lisa leaves her colleague in the dimly lit open plan office. She walks down a long flight of stairs. We watch from the outside of the building while Lisa walks along a windowed corridor. Now in a wide shot from above, she makes her way into the upper level of a foyer at the front of the building.

Lisa passes a large flat screen playing a video about Timeline. Having watched the video many times before, she looks away uninterested.

On the screen a video shows a Timeline employee playing pinball on a retro pinball machine.

ADVERTISEMENT NARRATOR

Timeline made the most successful office software of the 21st century by inventing an employee time management system with a major difference.

The video is shown close-up.

ADVERTISEMENT NARRATOR

Our groundbreaking innovation was to tap into your natural rhythms and synch them to the rhythm of life.

LISA (SARCASTICALLY)

Rhythm of life...

The ball bounces in the pinball machine from region to region, lighting multiple areas up.

ADVERTISEMENT NARRATOR

Timeline management system Pulse regulates your body to help you and your company to reach every goal.

Every rhythm we touch we monitor. The clock never misses a beat.

The ball bounces into the air as Lisa leaves the foyer.

Lisa crosses the large glass foyer. It is mostly empty but there are still people around. Lisa exits the building.

LISA-STREET-EVENING

Lisa walks out the huge glass front doors of the building. She walks down the street when she sees Grace.

LISA

Working late again?

GRACE

It's busier than usual. The whole office is resurfacing a new location and it's more work than we can handle.

LISA

Poor Grace. Your high-powered position carries too much responsibility.

GRACE

What about you? How are the Divisibles doing?

She puts her arm on her friend's shoulder.

LISA

I don't know. I'm getting depressed there. I used to think my job helped people steal time back so they can do better at their job.

GRACE

And now?

LISA

Now I'm good at stealing back time but no one benefits apart from Timeline clients.

GRACE

Why don't you come work in resurfacing? We always need more Divisible expertise?

LISA

I bet.

GRACE

I'm not talking about working on bull shit employee spec sheets. The Divisibles team in my office deal with new real-world problems every day.

Lisa notices her friend's change of mood.

GRACE

No seriously, it's gratifying working on this project. I've seen how much communities desperately need Resurfacing. They need the changes we make. There's no other alternative for people to keep their jobs today.

LISA

What would I be doing? Tell me about a typical day.

GRACE

Right now, we're resurfacing regions of London. It's a demanding and absorbing process.

LISA

All of London?

GRACE

Regional boundaries don't define it, industry partnerships do. So we can be working outside city boundaries and legal frameworks too, wherever we need to work.

LISA

Sounds like a big project.

GRACE

Huge. We need so much manpower right now. For the next two months the team is resurfacing key service industries. The city is structured around them and so recombinatory social planning is at the top our list.

LISA

Too many unemployed?

GRACE

No, that's still preferred. It's that there is too little space in the job market in London's landscape now. The country can't support most industries anymore. So the clients we work with only use the most cost-effective surfaces.

LISA

You mean low-cost labor, but they want to find savings in other stuff too..

GRACE

Exactly. Every surface is potentially cost saving.

LISA

Which means?

GRACE

You wanna see?

Lisa looks at her watch.

TIMELINE OFFICE, RESURFACING DIVISION-LISA, GRACE, JOSE,
PIA-NIGHT

Grace walks Lisa into an enormous, open-plan office bustling with activity. Too many people around for late at night.

Grace and Lisa walk into an immense low-ceilinged room off to one side of the main space. In this room the lights are dimmed. Lisa slowly discerns that hundreds of people are there quietly working.

Image of lights moving, images transitioning in and out of focus as Lisa steps in front of the camera. As she moves we see a system spread out in front of us. Across its map, people walk to and fro in front of a massive display screen that spreads across the room. It shows an intricate system map of a section of London, teeming with life.

LISA (V.O.)

These are people?

Small square units dart around images of streets that make up sections of London.

LISA (V.O.)

Are you allowed to show me this?

GRACE (V.O.)

Of course, you can see how public it is.
Grace motions at the room.

GRACE (STEPS INTO FRAME)

There's even government oversight.

LISA

But this is a notoriously secretive industry.

GRACE

I would say it's competitive and hard to succeed. That's different.

LISA

How so?

We look closer at the map. A large three-dimensional diagram shows the movement of thousands of people shown as square units. They receive inputs and outputs while other information on the diagram is constantly shifting.

GRACE (TO LISA)

This is what I meant by cost-effective surfaces...

Grace points to a group of units clustered in a location.

GRACE

Individual homeostats feed us information as they're at work, leave for lunch, go home. That's how we know what surfaces are cost effective, which ones are not.

LISA

Surfaces?

GRACE

It's the word that sums up all the social conditions involved.

LISA

And these are homeostats... because they are people in London, adjusting to their environment, right? As homeostatic units.

GRACE

Kind of. Imagine this homeostat represents you. It shows this information about you interacting with your condition.

Grace points to the display.

GRACE

We see what happens to your labor price, the costs paid by your employer and the profits they make. So, it's not the homostat that Ashby invented that is a single self-sustaining unit. Instead, our homeostats comprise many homeostatic units in a system that act like a field. We focus on stability and growth for companies, not the individual units.

LISA

So not for people?

GRACE

Not really.

Lisa looks at Grace a bit stunned by what she is saying. Then she gazes at the map in front of her.

LISA

What's happening now? And why do keep hearing an explosion sound?

GRACE

Because these homeostat fields are a system that calculates the exchanges in society. The explosions happen every time an equivalence is established.

LISA

What?

GRACE

I know it is eccentric to say the least, but we have to do it. It's at the heart of everything.

LISA

How so?

GRACE

It evaluates equivalence everywhere, from jobs to the processes that aren't currently delivering returns because they're not approached the right way. The system finds new correspondences in society that we aren't even aware of. It has to in order to restructure a better accumulation environment.

LISA

Exchange on a deeper level.

It suddenly becomes clearer to Lisa.

LISA

So when you say "every surface is potentially cost saving" you mean that literally every surface in the world is subjected to money making evaluation.

GRACE

Yes. That's it.

Grace brings up an area on the map.

GRACE

It's morning in London so we're looking at working populations across a field of industries: service industries, administrative, office employees. There are major service industry hubs over here, her and here, all across there.

Grace reaches across the map. As she does Jose and Pia come in.

JOSE

Have you sent me that revision placement? Oh, hi, didn't mean to interrupt.

GRACE

I'm showing Lisa homeostats for London. She's in Divisibles for main division.

JOSE

And you're interested in social resurfacing? Excellent. Divisibles is the inspiration for our whole philosophy of resurfacing.

LISA

So I've heard!

GRACE

I'm showing her the system.

Grace turns back to the map.

GRACE

So yeah, they're all being reevaluated and optimized as we speak.

PIA

Cost-efficiency metrics are applied to their biorhythms as you of all people know. Resurfacing provides a new field for that Timeline technology to really do its work. In a way, it's like having a productivity paintbrush to touch up anything that needs it..

Lisa holds back a laugh and listens.

JOSE

Sure. Efficiency metrics are simple to attain after resurfacing. Most of London is resurfaced, some zones never needed it, and then there are un-resurfaced zones on the periphery.

A few other employees working nearby come to join them.

PIA

It's surprising but there are still quite a lot of areas of London that have never been resurfaced.

LISA

How do you address them?

PIA

They take longer.

JOSE

It's actually one of the places that Divisibles teams get very involved.

LISA

I heard about the way communities get reorganized.

JOSE

That's a part of it but there's more going on than that. You, of course, would understand being in Divisibles.

PIA

Oh, you're in Divisibles. You must have a lot of thoughts about what we're doing.

GRACE

Actually, she does. I brought her to look at the system because I'm trying to entice her to come work in our department.

JOSE

I see.
(a vaguely scrutinizing tone)

JOSE

What are some insights you can offer us from a Divisibles point of view?

LISA

Well, I'm astounded. The timekeeping system is unimpeded in its work. My only question is, if your system works by deriving profit from finding the ways that people and their conditions are malleable...

JOSE

Yes.

LISA

...isn't there a point when people hurt too much?

JOSE

Well, we can't tell if people hurt. HR is responsible for that.

GRACE

The truth is it doesn't matter if it hurts. The process keeps going.

Grace points to the map on the square that is moving quickly.

GRACE

For example, look at this: a delivery person on a scooter.

The group look closely at the unit on the map.

GRACE

He needs the work so he can eat, so he can stay in his apartment. Costs rising and his work keeps pushing his wages down, but he keeps driving.

CUT TO

AAFTAB-SCOOTER, LONDON ROADS-EARLY MORNING

Passing a long row of cars, Aaftab turns his scooter left and speeds up. The camera is in Aaftab's helmet visor, perspective close to the road. Then in a wide-angle static shot, we see the light breaks over buildings in the early morning. The quiet is broken by engine revving as Aaftab speeds up on the empty road.

Aaftab's visor shows information on his current job, timing data for hand over, meet up spots available.

When Aaftab finishes the delivery, he stops by the side of the road and saves a video that he shot, a recording of the drive he just finished. He plays the recording back, watching it.

Then he uploads the video with the message:

These are my thoughts today.

Aaftab is driving again. He passes areas of the city that are being torn down, other areas that are being rebuilt. Early morning commuters sprint through the streets.

LONDON ROAD-AAFTAB, GREGORIO-LATE AFTERNOON

Aaftab drives through a peripheral area, arriving at the food hand over spot. He pulls over into a small empty parking lot and parks his scooter.

There Aaftab meets a colleague, Gregorio. They greet each other, embracing. Gregorio unloads some food from his car and hands it to Aaftab. Aaftab puts it into the back of his bike.

GREGORIO

Clock time.

AAFTAB

On the hour.

GREGORIO

Cheers, mate.

MELANIE GILLIGAN

AAFTAB

I want to show you something.

Aaftab pulls out his phone and plays him a video.

GREGORIO

What is it?

AAFTAB

It's a video made by a collective community in an un-resurfaced zone. It's about how they live.

Aaftab starts to play the video. The two men watch.

AAFTAB

They are taking their lives back.

Gregorio knocks Aaftab, teasing him.

GREGORIO

This is what you do in the evenings...

The two men laugh and go back to watching the video. They catch a fragment of speech.

VIDEO VOICEOVER

...experiences they never fulfilled when they were working all the time. They decided that all they had to do is focus on the memory and expand it. It took forever but they started to feel it changing.

Cut to:

Aaftab waves to his friend and drives away.

On the road, we see several windows pop up giving significant stats on Aaftab's performance at work.

Routes per day

230

Driver rating:

100%

Premium user points

9478

Driver status

12 years

There are two survey fields to be filled in.

Time of hand over partner?

Rate your hand over partner?

On screen text:

From the start of a job to the finish

INT. BEDROOM, CRETE, NEBRASKA-KYAW WIN-EARLY MORNING

Kyaw Win is getting ready in the early morning. His partner is also awake and getting prepared for work.

INT. BATHROOM, CRETE, NEBRASKA-KYAW WIN-EARLY MORNING

He looks at himself in the mirror and then leaves the bathroom.

EXT. ROAD, CRETE, NEBRASKA-KYAW WIN-EARLY MORNING

We see an empty road in a rural area. It is not fully light yet, And mist hangs in the air. Kyaw Win is walking quickly along the road, wearing a coat, a scarf and a hat.

KYAW WIN (V.O.)

There is a process that starts when the company hires the worker. It ends when it doesn't need the worker anymore. It's that last day at a job that I wait for. That day when you don't need to do what the boss says anymore.

Kyaw Win arrives at an intersection where there is a convenience store and a small repair shop. They are both still closed.

He stands outside, holding his arms close for warmth.

His ride share arrives to pick him up.

KYAW WIN

Good morning!

The other workers in the car say hello and introduce themselves.

ANTONIO

Are you feeling good?

KYAW WIN

Yeah.

The other workers continue to look at Kyaw Win, so he continues.

KYAW WIN

I got instructions for my first day so it should be a good start.

We see large fields used for industrial agriculture spread before us in the half light. The car passes small roads and then a larger highway exit. The car approaches the meat packing plant. Some cars are parked in the parking lot along a large metal clad industrial building.

KYAW WIN

I expected a newer building.

ALMA

They're about to update it in the resurfacing.

Kyaw Win looks at her questioningly.

ALMA

Haven't you heard about the resurfacing?

KYAW WIN

I just moved here.

INT. MEAT PROCESSING PLANT-ALMA, KYAW WIN, ANTONIO-EARLY MORNING

Alma and Antonio walk into the large meat processing facility. People who work there are all wearing plastic aprons and plastic hair nets. Alma and Antonio lead Kyaw Win to a place where he can get changed. Now dressed appropriately, Alma and Antonio show Kyaw Win around.

ALMA

The break room is at the back, behind the main packaging hall.

ANTONIO

You should see the supervisor. Her name is Charlotte.

Alma points him along the side of a corridor of administrative offices.

CHARLOTTE'S OFFICE-CHARLOTTE & KYAW WIN-MORNING

He walks along the side of a large processing plant. He arrives at a small office with a window looking into the plant. He knocks on the open door.

Charlotte, the supervisor steps out from behind her desk.

MEAT PROCESSING PLANT-ANTONIO-MORNING

Antonio walks through the meat processing plant. He stops at an area of the plant where he can see rows of busy workers sorting meats. He watches the actions of the people in the room working at equipment. He stays very still as he watches them.

The camera sees Antonio's POV as he stares at the workers and moves his head slowly. He watches every movement closely and moves as if he is doing the motion in his mind, concentrating, imaging it in his mind's eye. Antonio nods his head slowly as if the series of movements that he is watching has a slow regularity and rhythm. Then, as if pulling himself out of it again, he continues to walk through the plant.

MEAT PROCESSING PLANT-ANTONIO, KYAW WIN, CHARLOTTE-MORNING

Antonio continues, walking to an area of the plant that is emptier than the other rooms.

He arrives at Charlotte's office and sees Charlotte and Kyaw Win speaking outside the door.

CHARLOTTE

We'll have you on the shrink wrap machine this week to get you started. You'll work in a few different areas.

MEAT PROCESSING PLANT-ALMA, KYAW WIN, ANTONIO & FURTHER CHARACTERS-MORNING

This scene is choreographed so that it plays out in an interesting spatial configuration that happens across the processing areas.

After work stops and everyone is finishing up, Kyaw Win meets several people from the meat processing line.

ALMA

I'll introduce you to a few people.

Antonio calls over to one person, a man in his 50s.

KYAW WIN

Kyaw Win, this is Luis.

Luis explains over the machines.

LUIS

I'm friends with Antonio.(laughing) We go out to bars on the weekends.

Alma introduces Kyaw Win to a woman standing further down the line at a row of machines, Daniella. She is in her 60s.

ALMA

Kyaw Win is starting today. He just moved to Crete.

DANIELLA

I'm very sorry for you.

Daniella jokes, smiling at them both.

DANIELLA

Where did you move from?

KYAW WIN

I just moved here from Denton.

DANIELLA

There's a protest against the resurfacing tomorrow night. You should come.

ALMA

I was just going to invite him.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LABOR AND CAPITAL

Season 1-Magnitude

Episode 2-Practice

MEAT PACKING PLANT ASSEMBLY LINE-ALMA, KYAW WIN,
ANTONIO-DAY

We see people working in the meat packing plant. A conveyor belt is running through the room. The plant workers labor intently. Most people are sorting pieces on the primary processing conveyor belt while other people clean areas of the room and bring the meat on and off the belts.

Alma, Kyaw Win and Antonio are working among the other people, sorting pieces on the conveyor belt. Alma is looking down at her work, but looks troubled, like she's thinking about something.

ALMA

When I left my husband, I moved into a new apartment and came to work here. A new start. The phone is ringing because I made new friends.

Alone. No people around to say what's right anymore. No time anymore because I work. What's happening with you? I don't know anymore. How do you feel? I don't know anymore. Why is this happening? Because I let it.

I said, the point is to start a better situation. Better in steps, steps farther apart. Each step gets harder and farther.

CUT TO camera shot looking down the line with Alma in the foreground and Kyaw Win in the background down the line.

ALMA

Until the pause is eternal and the days become roads.

Alma and Kyaw Win are both visible in the same shot. Kyaw Win's first line of dialogue overlaps with Alma's.

KYAW WIN

The days are roads with no exit ramps.

KYAW WIN

When the eviction happened, we had one week to move out. Now we had a decision to make. Do we stay or move to a new town? Now that she's gone, we decided to choose a new situation.

CUT TO Kyaw Win from another angle, and we see Daniella also in the shot, further down the conveyor belt.

KYAW WIN

She grew into an amazing young woman and moved on. She is already gone. We only had one week's notice.

As Kyaw Win speaks the last line we see Kyaw Win in the foreground and Daniella in the background. We hear both characters delivering the same line: "We only had one week's notice."

DANIELLA

We only had one week's notice and I'm out of a job. I took my things from the drawers and left. That evening I went out into the yard behind the house. I took the path next to the yard, and I walked until my legs were sore. Then I went home. The next morning, I woke up and said to myself that they aren't looking for someone like me.

That's when I found out that I love bowling and pickle ball, playing tournaments on weekends. I knew this was the last thing they would expect of me.

All four employees are standing at different points in the sorting line. We cut into each monologue at points as the build into a larger interwoven story.

Camera begins moving at a steady pace along the path of the conveyor belt, at the speed of the belt. The camera starts at Alma who continues to tell her story.

ALMA

My best friend in high school was very smart, she had really good grades. She was leaving Crete and had plans for the next years of her life.

She had my back in everything. We spent all our days together. We always met in the bathroom, to smoke cigarettes and talk about our day.

The camera moves at the speed of the conveyor belt onto Antonio working next to her. The camera is shifting to show Alma and Antonio at the same time, standing next to each other.

ALMA

One day, we were smoking a cigarette and talking about classes we hated when the principal came in. I got suspended and my friend lost her scholarship.

Alma and Antonio the monologues overlap when the words intersect: "lost her / my scholarship"

ANTONIO

When I woke up, I found out that I had lost my scholarship as a football player at University of Nebraska, losing my place in the Computer Science program.

The conveyor belt speeds up and the camera speeds up with it.

ANTONIO

The car accident had left me devastated, my life decimated, my legs seriously destroyed in many places.

Antonio and Luis are both in frame for a while and their monologues overlap, both people speaking different monologues until their speech intersects for a moment with the words: "in many places."

LUIS

The strikes had broken out in many places. I was watching online and so I had a sense of what we could do I. The rest of the employees listened to me. I said to them, at the start of the working day, it might not seem that bad. It might seem like you can make it but by the end of every day, the frequency, the intensity, the percentage, it all keeps tumbling forward.

We watch the room of plant workers as we listen to Alma speak.

ALMA (V.O.)

What companies see in the working body is a level tumbling up. Falling upwards. For reaching an end point up is never enough.

The management encourage you to think you have an endless capacity. To push yourself like it isn't just a job. You're lost without it, so it isn't only a job to you but it is. So, you stretch in finitely, if the conditions are right.

SMITHFIELD, NEBRASKA—PAUL & AMELIA—DAY

Amelia, one of Grace's managers exits the offices and walks into the driveway.

PAUL

You coming with me?

AMELIA

Of course.

Amelia gets into the car. Paul drives along a road near the plant.

PAUL

So I guess you've heard, some disruptions happened recently.

AMELIA

We're already working with our representatives in the community but we need to expand that team.

Amelia stops and waits for Paul to speak but he is silent and continues driving.

AMELIA

It's become a more significant issue than we initially expected and we have to stop the spread to other locations.

PAUL

My job involves seeing the situation from the inside, so finding the conflicts you can use, finding out what people's personal costs will be. On my end of the resurfacing, we often find that conflicts can only be resolved spatially.

AMELIA

You mean by firing people?

Paul turns a corner.

PAUL

Yes. Or creating space in some other way.

They drive in silence for a while.

AMELIA

Some of your team says that the meatpacking plant has become a center of the protests. Can you fill me in?

PAUL

Sometimes it takes a lot less than you'd think to get a town upset...

Paul pulls up to a non-descript temporarily built building and parks. He turns to Amelia.

PAUL

We've established controlled zones where low-paid labor is consistent, and we have the next stages of social resurfacing coming into effect soon. The problem is that people are less concerned to speak up now because they know they can't live on these wages. That's more serious than we thought.

AMELIA

I get that you're concerned but we have all the outcomes mapped out. We know there's still lots of wiggle room in the resurfacing plans.

STREET-LONDON-MORNING

Lisa is on her way to work. She picks up a coffee from a cafe. As she is walking, she receives a message from Grace.

GRACE

I'll be away for the next month, for another project. Sorry I can't be there for you first day!

TIMELINE OFFICE, RESURFACING DIVISION-LISA, JOSE, PIA, MOURIB, ALIYA, GEOFFREY, RUPRECHT-NIGHT

JOSE

Where's Grace? I asked her to show you around?

LISA

She's been called away on an assignment. I thought you'd know.

JOSE

Oh yeah, of course.

(Jose looks across the room, distracted)

MELANIE GILLIGAN

So welcome to Resurfacing. I know it took a while to get you here, but your skills are very much needed on our team.

LISA

Thank you. I'm so happy to be here.

Lisa is looking into the darkened room with the homeostat system. She hears the gentle boom that simulates an explosion sound resonate throughout the room.

JOSE

The system is beckoning you.

(laughs)

So, I hope you've already prepared what you'll be doing for your first month. You don't need me, right?

LISA

No, of course, I'm fine.

JOSE

Great. I'll be in there if you need me.

Jose sees Pia and stops her.

JOSE

Wait, Pia, will you show Lisa around. Make sure she finds a workspace..

PIA

Hi again. You're on our team now.

LISA

It was a bit of a struggle, but my bosses caved in eventually.

PIA

Take any of the hot desks. For London, we generally have to move across the map fortasks so it's best to be mobile.

MOURIB

Meaning leave your laziness by the door.

PIA

She already did. She's from Divisibles.

Lisa looks around the room inquisitively.

PIA

Has anyone given you an introduction to system?

LISA

Jose sent a lot of information, but I'd love to talk through it with you, if you're free.

MOURIB

It's enough data from markets and other indicators around the world to give real time labor cost estimates...

LISA

So it is...

Mourib excuses himself and steps away for a moment.

MOURIB

I'll be one minute.

PIA

That way resurfacing automatically brings down labor prices to preferred levels. It's automatically adjusted based on indicators.

LISA

There are never any labor disputes?

PIA

Oh, wow, you must think... no, there's no possibility, not even if they wanted to try.

Mourib comes back and joins the conversation again.

PIA

The way the system functions is built into all agreements and there is such strong interdependency within the environment once the process of resurfacing has happened that it achieves ideally malleable conditions.

MELANIE GILLIGAN

MOURIB

The decisions are always made on our side.
All resurfaced environments have that built
in.

GEOFFREY

Through price metrics, resurfacing becomes a
process of holding our ideal up to the real
world and forcing the world to meet it...

MOURIB

...weeding out every aspect that disrupts
productivity. One thing that's an important
development for London is to make the
disaggregated service economy reorganized to
increase work efficiency.

A new person steps into the conversation.

ALIYA

Here the homeostat system is heightening
the productivity of cooperating workers in
relation to what's happening in the labor
market and economy overall... If you watch
it, you see how the projection changes and
how their work expands these areas of the
business.

Lisa's eyes widen at she watches the interactions
proliferate. A few more people working in the room join the
conversation.

MOURIB

But now watch how when they walk out into
the environment the interactions multiply.
Once the area has been resurfaced it is
phenomenal how productivity metrics conform
to our needs.

LISA

That's a lot of information.

PIA

With enough information we can remake the
world.

Laughs from the room. Then peoples' attentions shift. Geoffrey points Aliya to look at something on the map that he seems happy about. One employee teases another. Then there is a bustle of activity nearby and a couple people who had been listening leave the conversation.

ALIYA

If you look here at this group.

Close up on the area.

ALIYA

...the groups working together have better metrics on average...

PIA

...look how their cooperation increases productivity.

MOURIB

The metrics change. There's production overlap and cost saving.

ALIYA

This is another company that uses cooperation but the workers are not in the same location.

RUPRECHT

Our homeostats shutdown levels of employee contact and social time that could lead to labor organizing.

LISA

And the system calculates this all this complexity from the perspective of...

RUPRECHT

...Our needs. Well, the needs of the businesses, which are our needs as well.

LISA

Businesses already implement cost reduction algorithms. What other gains can be found?

MELANIE GILLIGAN

ALIYA

There's a further peak that comes that we're still learning about.

PIA

Once resurfacing wears off any processes that drain productivity, we reach a new level where people's biorhythms are productively optimized with no details to hinder them.

MOURIB

It's called pressure. There is no type of pressure as complete as total capture.

INT. MOBILE PHONE STORE-PATRICIA-DAY.

Patricia and several colleagues are working in the busy shop. Customers are browsing and looking at phones.

PATRICIA

Can I help you with anything today?

CUSTOMER

Is this available as a package?

PATRICIA

All our products are...

Camera wanders through the room along a line of other customers waiting for Patricia's attention, past other shop attendants. One excuses himself while serving someone in order to pick up the phone. Another employee is explaining the phone's features.

The camera delves into the back area of the shop, where an employee walks out quickly while behind him a manager leaves the storage area. An automatic light in the storage room switches off after a second as the camera follows him from the storage room.

The manager tells a nearby employee that there is a line of products that she should unpack. He leaves keys to the storage room on the counter. The camera return to Patricia and picks up her conversation again.

PATRICIA

If you're interested, we have several promotions on right now.

CUSTOMER

Does this have the high-density screen?

PATRICIA

This model doesn't but we have some, they're just not on the floor yet.

Manager speaks to Patricia.

MANAGER

You're needed at the cash.

PATRICIA

Excuse me for a moment. I'll be right back.

Patricia gets behind cash register and starts ringing someone's purchases up on the till.

The customer that Patricia was serving comes up to the cash to ask her a question.

CUSTOMER

Can I see the phone you were talking about?

PATRICIA

Of course. I'll be with you in just one moment.

Patricia finishes at the till and walks toward the storage room. On her way her manager approaches her.

MANAGER

You know, you're below sales figures today. We have two hours to go.

PATRICIA

I'm working on a customer purchase right now. I'm just getting stock for him. Can I use the key?

Patricia arrives at the storage room and opens the door. She's looking for the phone on shelves. After a few seconds the manager follows her in.

MANAGER

You know with resurfacing if you don't make your quota your pay is lowered automatically. You won't get away with days like this.

The storage rooms automatic light switches off. We hear the door slam. The manager hears a voice from outside.

PATRICIA

I quit!

The manager rushes to the door but it is locked.

EXT. MOBILE PHONE STORE-PATRICIA-LATE AFTERNOON.

Patricia quickly leaves the shop, walking calmly down the street the street.

Her manager has been let out of the storage room. He chases her down the street and throws her telephone after her.

DELIVEROO STAFF WEBSITE

We see a series of messages of Deliveroo employees:
Aaftab: I measure my best time. I've perfected staying continually at the speed limit, never passing over it. During a route, I set an alarm for under or over.

AAFTAB (V.O.)

Through a beautiful and frozen landscape, the roads are narrow and empty. My mission is to cross the delta before sunrise. In the night you can't judge corners. You just live into them and hope your reactions won't fail. Along a high pass, I look across and see the landscape from above.

AAFTAB-HOME-EVENING

Aaftab sits on this couch, speaking into his phone. It is recording.

AAFTAB

The road is thin. Driving to get there fast. The road runs a high pass along a long aqueduct. The drop is vertiginous with a sliver of space to maneuver. I catch my heart as I look down.

Aaftab's roommate walks by him, and they say hi. The roommate goes into the kitchen.

AAFTAB

My dreams are high pressure. They're the only way I work the adrenaline out of my day. Although I've left the road, my dreams leave the bike running. My group have reached a point where there are no more plans to improve. We recognize that we might be reaching an end, or a new beginning.

He posts the voice recording.

Then he posts two videos from that day of driving. Lots of people post comments.

Aaftab opens a window where he joins a conversation with many people. Dim lights, bright lights, many different screen rectangles showing people in their individual spaces. In the group of people are many people who sit and play an online game while listening to the conversation. They are intent on their activity, moving in the way that Antonio moved in the meat packing plant in episode 1.

A scrolling text on one of the screens repeats the phrases:

Everything we have is a collective struggle.
Everything we have will be taken away.
Everything we have is a collective struggle
Everything we have will be taken away.

In amongst the players on multiple screens some people are having a meeting. On a few of the screens many people sit together involved in a conversation. The first person speaking, Helen, is in a space with three other people. It's a room filled with bright afternoon light.

MELANIE GILLIGAN

HELEN

The practice teaches you to steal back time. You make a space beside so you can have that for yourself.

Asoese on another screen responds.

ASOESE

Sometimes the experience of time feels like it can extend forever but the amount of work that people are doing has reached a limit.

Aaftab's roommate, Apolenka joins him on the couch while he is watching the video. She starts watching the video too.

CHIKONDI

Yeah, for capital our time is infinitely divisible. But people don't experience it that way. That's why with the practice we can steal back time. We take time that's divisible for capital and make it divisible for us.

ASOESE

In the practice, we feel like time is infinite for us. Time that is extendable in the mind can be a respite.

People across the many screens suddenly get more active. Many of them stand up, intently playing as actions unfold on their screens.

SAANVI

...but on a practical level we know that it's not a respite. We know that we're still pushed into a corner, confined to less and less space.

Silence in the rooms disturbed by sounds of many people moving around as they play.

Saanvi stands up and walks toward her camera.

SAANVI

Alright, does that make sense to everyone? This is the end of the instructional part

of the session. Now we'd like to have a discussion where people can ask questions.

Aaftab's roommate, Apolenka, taps him on the shoulder and our focus shifts from the video screens into the room. She asks him a question.

APOLENKA

When they say they steal back time what are they talking about?

AAFTAB

When I'm listening to music or doing things that are new for me, or when I have experiences that burn into my mind because they're so intense, those are things that stretch my experience of time. When I'm typing to people that often shrinks my sense of time. People have a subjective sense of it so it's open to techniques.

Their attention turns back to the video. A person is in the midst of asking a question.

LOUISE

...people are trapped in an ever-stretching accordion of work-time in these towns and cities.
We're all abandoned but we know living in resurfaced communities brings a very particular kind of pain. People can't live when their lives are emptied of all details. Since Resurfacing took hold, the technique has become more and more essential. Do you have specific techniques that people can use against the devastation of work in resurfaced environments?

ASOESE

You'll find that in resurfaced life the technique becomes more potent too, almost eerily so.

SLAUSON

Do people use the practice to make work bearable?

Shane is sitting in a cluster of people. Asoese is also there.

SHANE

The practice isn't about making the trap of work more bearable, but, of course, you can use it that way. That helps a lot of people.

ASOESE

But we don't make space for work. Every comrade across the world is fighting against work time. We just teach people to survive.

Chikondi picks up a handset.

CHIKONDI

When you start playing it's weird and boring at first, but the technique can be developed pretty quickly. For the next part, we're going to show you on our screens how playing works so that you can see what it's like.

All the players that are playing in all the screens are suddenly seen from different angles so that they are facing cameras directly in front of them on their screens.

CHIKONDI

You can't retreat into yourself to fix how unbearable life is today. But what you can do is find a new space for yourself because a space that isn't work is also a place for struggle.

CHIKONDI

Like a lot of games, it gives you tasks to complete and perfect while you go about activities that help you live out a story. A lot of the tasks involve a fight that all of you fight every day, a fight over the pace of things. That fight is normally internal to you. What the game does is it makes that problem external and allows you to work on it, to affect it. And in the process, you change it dramatically.

Several players that we see on the screen have stopped playing and we see them turned away from their screens. Instead, they're all enrapt watching one person playing on the screen.

We see both the players face and the game they are playing. The players are watching Emiko as she plays, moving slowly.

CHIKONDI

Ok, this is happening before I expected but this is a perfect example. Emiko is playing a rapid movement sequence where she needs to contain and subdue her experience of time in order to prevail. This move takes a lot of training but it's an important part of the technique.

We see Emiko is very relaxed as she plays. Her movements barely perceptible. All the other players watching start getting very excited as the scene plays out. We see Emiko do a series of extremely fast movements and then an infinitely slow culmination. When she is finished the players watching all begin cheering.

One of the players turns and looks at the rest of the people in the meeting.

GUS

Sorry! We're still with you. We just had a really good game.

CHIKONDI

Can you explain what you mean when you say "we had a good game." Why do you say we?

Aaftab and Apolenka are still watching. Apolenka asks Aaftab another question.

APOLENKA

In the practice, do you get absorbed in a story line?

Aaftab nods.

APOLENKA

And it trains you?

On screen one of the players answers Chikondi's question.

GUS

Because playing gets better as you do it with other people.

AAFTAB

Once you get really good at it, it's like you're there but you leave the time we experience. You're around other people but also not in the same dimension.

Several people have just come into the conversation that are walking through a dilapidated city street.

ASOESE

Work-rhythm timekeeping, resurfacing, they are capital's tools to open pauses that they immediately fill with efficient work. We're trying to erase that.

One of the people standing in dilapidated streets joins the conversation.

CHARANPREET

I know a lot of people in your group are unemployed and live in vast cities of unemployed such as this one. A lot of people are playing the game here, but for very different reasons than in the resurfaced towns. Can you talk a bit about that?

COMMUNITY PROTEST-KYAW WIN, ALMA, ANTONIO, DANIELLA & LOTS OF OTHER PEOPLE-EVENING

A protest against resurfacing is happening in the community. A street leading up to a square is filled with people. Beyond it, an open area of a very large parking lot is filled with an enormous crowd of people.

We see Alma having a conversation with a woman at the protest.

ALMA (V.O.)

My first job was a lot like my current one, but it wasn't in such a big plant. I worked

in a factory packing boxes and working on a shrink wrap machine.

Nearby, many groups of people hold banners that read:

Resurfacing maps the needs of capital onto life

The people won't pay to destroy the community.

COMMUNITY PROTEST-XIMENA, KYAW WIN, ALMA & ANTONIO-LATER EVENING

Alma, Kyan Win, Antonio and Daniella are still in the crowd. Alma nods to someone that she sees from the plant. A man holding a sign that says: "Stop the resurfacing before it is too late" walks up to them and throws his arms around Daniella.

Antonio is speaking to a woman beside him.

ANTONIO

I'm part of a group where we talk about moments when we feel like we're getting to live our lives. Those aren't moments that happen at work.

They turn as a person addresses the crowd. Ximena speaks while other people gather around her

XIMENA

We stood here two years ago and tried to stop the Resurfacing proposal. Now after a year of Resurfacing, lives are being emptied of everything but work. Things are so much worse than before and it has caused incredible damage.

Now there are no barriers to total efficiency, to the point that it will break all of us apart. For the past two years, Timeline has destroyed our community. The companies that have exploited Crete for many decades continue to do so, but the difference now is that the community pays for the exploitation.

They say that because the economy is so bad we need Resurfacing, that it's the only way we can survive. That companies will only work in business-friendly conditions. They say we're free to create them or not. It's a lie.

What they don't tell you is resurfacing is not a choice anymore. Resurfacing has become the standard and all the communities have to be like Ann Arbor and Peoria. What they also don't tell you is that once resurfacing is done there is no longer any resistance, not in the town or city, not in its institutions, not in the community.

But Crete is fighting. We're joining together and with struggles in other resurfacing towns in La Junta and Sioux Falls to put an end to this now.

COMMUNITY PROTEST -KYAW WIN, ALMA, ANTONIO, DANIELLA & LOTS OF OTHER PEOPLE-LATER EVENING

We watch from slightly above as the crowd of thousands of people walk through the main streets of the town. The roads are big, uninviting spaces dominated by gas stations and big box stores. The protests fill the streets. The sounds of the protest rings out as people yell in unison.

"Stop the Resurfacing." In other parts of the protest people are yelling "whose streets, our streets."

A large portion of the protest is still making its way through the main streets. Many people are watching the protest from the sidewalk and cheering, some are joining the protest. Other sections have split off and walk together through nearby areas of the town. Many people walking in various directions to and from the protests.

Cars that drive by are honking. We hear radios playing loudly from different cars through streets of the town where protests are spreading.

Close on one parked car with the radio playing. Several people sitting in the car are listening to a woman DJ speaking.

RADIO D.J.

Crete has been burning for years. This is just the first night that it shows.

Cars pulling onto major commuter roads and highways where protests have spilled out. Large groups of people taking the protest onto roads not made for walking.

RADIO D.J.

People in Crete know what's happening to their community.

The voice of the DJ connects events in the protests and riots across moments and locations dispersed around the city.

The protest spreads across town. Large groups are gathered on roads. We hear voice messages with locations around the city, we hear other transmissions about what's happening in different parts of the town.

RADIO D.J.

They know that the maze has now shut them in. That the roads that are leading to center are leading them to certain destruction.

We see from out the window of a driving car. The car passes huge groups of people walking through the protests, then spaces with fewer protesters, running in groups on to a join other events that are happening. The car radio is playing the DJ's voice.

RADIO D.J.

The people in Crete are awakening. They are showing that no one here is afraid.

The car passes as stores and buildings that are part of the resurfacing have their windows broken. We see from the car more scenes of the protests and riots happening around the town. Several construction areas in the neighborhood

are being resurfaced get rearranged and torn apart when the protest passes through.

RADIO D.J.

They are running in the streets..

Driving seen from another car, some parked along highways as people have got out and other cars are slowing down, people are stopping other cars. It passes as one of the major bodies of the protest that has taken a major shopping street are confronted by police.

LATER

We are in another car driving along the edges of town. The DJ continues to speak.

RADIO D.J.

..brave like the night.

We see out the car window that the protest activity hasn't diffused, it is continuing late into the night. The driver is following another car as the passengers watch out the window.

CAR DRIVER

Where are they going?

CAR PASSENGER

To the plants. People are already there.

(CONCLUSION)

BEYOND
INDIVIDUALISM:
RESISTANCE TO
CAPITAL'S CONCEPT,
RESISTANCE TO
RESURFACING

There are two endings in this handbook, that are different but connected. One is the ending of chapter 2, where Adorno presents his notion of opposition to capital's concept found in the non-identical. Then there is a parallel argument, told in the TV series of chapter 3, where "The struggle between labor and capital" draws to a close with people fighting against a mega-corporation that optimizes every process beyond even what is currently possible. In that story, the processes being imposed, reshapes the ways in which money is made from labor to the point of resurfacing the very landscapes in which people live. This is equally a place to end this discussion. These are two strands of two stories, neither of which over-state the situation. They are statements about a life where capitalist logics have been incorporated into the sensation and reason of people's practices, where attaining needs, and desires, are processes modelled on accumulation. Capitalist societies show people how to manifest their desires and needs through investment models of possibility, however the capitalist systems of organizing life are foundering on their incapacity to support and give life. Rather capitalism lets only a few people's needs prevail over other people and capitalist norms offer no options except the eventual death of the planet and the terrible violence of getting there. Yet, there have to be ways to assemble people's needs and interests, their different positions, and histories, to shape new discussions that can carry everyone to the future, not repeatedly return people to the individualism of the present.

In my reading of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno draws together many of the themes found throughout Marxist thought on the conceptuality of capital to articulate a way to oppose it, and in the way I apply this, the non-identical becomes a framework for film to become oppositional thought. However, this discussion remains in the abstract. One reads that the non-identical is the key to breaking from capitalist concepts, but concretely what does this mean for film? This idea gets more concrete if one sees that films can themselves be non-identical outcomes, that show the lives and groups of people and possibilities that do not submit to the capitalist concept. If films are the ways that concepts can be given practical forms, films against capitalism are non-identical thoughts that can be launched into the destructive atmosphere of the present in order to change it. Film can chart the ways that accumulation ideas become social forms in the present as they are imposed on the physical landscape, the houses, and streets of societies. Then working against this, films can also produce structures, spaces and landscapes that do not fit a capitalist concept. Film is a type of practice-thought that can help people to undo capitalist concepts, because the world can do without a picture of the future based on the model of investment and individual

payoff. Instead, people need to proliferate possibilities that involve collective struggle, collective needs and collective change, approaches that come out of action and respond to new realities as people make new possibilities together. When people watch films, they watch practical situations that elicit responses and actions on screen. Films give rise to enjoyment, excitement, frustration that, while it all remains internal and rarely incites action, these responses teach people ways of thought, and sensibilities that are useful to producing different narratives.

This brings the book to a complete argument, that leaves us off where people can tell us new and endless stories of what the future will hold, and what many episodes are to come. People need films that project views of reality that show people's own experiences of the world from start to finish, not these film projections of capital's concept in self-realization stories that only tell an individual centered view of possibility. In capital's concept, change and growth are construed through the lens of individual goals. Those narratives may not seem brutal at first, but the implications produced by their framing impose norms and produce situations that exclude and discriminate based on logics of what fit goals of capital's expansion, while they shutdown narratives about collective needs, collective goals and a world where life is better if it is realized together. Films can be guidebooks for people to dismantle the systems that oppress them. People can find emotional and unexpected guidebooks in films, through which oppressive logics can be taken apart. These are ideas made from many people contributing, successes that many people make possible and share in the outcomes.

Close up or in wide panorama, it is time to grow films that show more full, comprehensive, and complex social relationships. The tools are available, the knowledge is available, and the collective strength of all the people who want to end racial and patriarchal capitalism has made people ready to make these stories. If film is one of the ways that contemporary societies imagine futures to come, this will be done by prying apart the current fiction film fantasies of racist, patriarchal capitalist society that are currently shown, and remaking them. The biggest obstacles to this idea are, obviously, film budgets, and the fact that everyone works constantly to survive, and so no one has any time to work on film, and learn some of the skills needed to have a film conversation. However, Youtube and Tik Tok have shown how many people can pick these skills up really fast, there just needs to be ways for people to be supported as they do this. Practical problems of making films would be a big part of this question, but they are not insurmountable. What would be most important is that a sustained struggle would need to happen in societies, and people win fights to have more time, better wages, and better care. Then people would find it easier to start film conversations, and plan through their ideas of what could happen next. When people reject film's positing presuppositions and instead imagine their interrelations differently, of people in different relationships, conceiving of people in groups and showing individuals differently, centering narratives around people of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, living on a variety of income levels, and in different classes, and when people who have illnesses, people with physical and mental disabilities are included in narratives, when all of these people are shown in the films and become filmmakers, that tell different histories and narratives in film, then this can all seem more possible.

As I said earlier, there are possibilities that racial capitalism, social reproduction and other types of theoretical approaches can help film discussions to deal

with wider systems to give more full pictures of how capitalism impacts people's lives. Watching a lot of mainstream films, one can feel how they are partial views (as Christian Metz discusses), editing out the parts of reality, and framing a view on reality, as Kendall discusses, that is often blinkered, and is exclusionary, limit the picture of what possibilities can be, and producing versions of the world that often leave out collective struggle.³⁶² Solidarity and strength are rarely depicted and, as I have tried to show, films first have to find modes of storytelling to give the fullness of many different people's experiences at once to communicate how essential solidarity and cooperation is. Film, if it is a medium where people may lose touch with immediate action because viewers become so absorbed in the illusions, it is also a place where people empathize and feel involved in the hardships of characters, becoming excited about other people's experiences, so that they can really be felt to the core. Now imagine this framework as a way of relating to other people in a discussion. Answering propositions and formulating new situations in this way can allow one access to arguments that are also experiences, providing so much on which to base a new politics resistant to capitalism, racism, patriarchy, fear, and domination.

There are many ideas offered in this book that I hope people will take away from reading it. All the many filmmakers that exist today, working in many styles and making different types of films, will have their own ideas of what is lacking right now and what needs to be encouraged. Narratives do not need to come to fruition through a framework of individual needs. What is possible is so much bigger than that. With environmental disaster in the late stages of catastrophe, the polarization of political life, and the social responses to COVID-19 pandemic and other illness, exposing the impoverished state of individual-led life, people urgently need to begin collective conversations. The proposal is simple: that the activity of telling one another stories in video can become conversations about a better society. Such a conversation is so much bigger than each one person, but people's desires and goals are equally important in these films. What is required are big narratives that take on large societal structures, with lots of small scenes that are close to people and what is happening between them. People need space to think about new social situations for a new set of purposes, and how to encourage one another to join up with other people despite the individualized logics that prevail in the daily practices of capitalist societies: one's job, one's education, one's rent and insurance, expenses and eventualities. People need struggles that provide ballast against the individual costs incurred in life, so that they can find support through collective struggles. What works against such a system of mutual support is the harmful, erroneous narrative that each person is looking out for themselves, that their own interests are paramount. Today, the separation of one's own interests, which are seen as one person's problems alone, are being exposed as a capitalist fantasy when one observes the environmental disaster, pandemics and repeated political and economic turmoil that people live in today.

362 Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Diana Kendall, *Framing Class: Media Representation of Wealth and Poverty in America*, (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2011).

Many films are already responses to other films. People need to start responding to the sparks that show new situations, new goals, new windows onto situations until new social forms come into focus. This can be a process where people contribute to building another way of living. Filmmakers can think about film frames as spaces to set up thought problem for practice. The parts can be assembled so that filmmakers can show and comment on lived relations in the architecture of abstraction imposed on concrete situations: in angry conflicts between state and the people, between capital and state, between grandparents, children, people who are ill, people made politically or socially vulnerable. Or are victims of conflicts that tear apart lives. Or conflicts that satisfy no one, but the creditors, the investors, the state, the jailers. The examples of what needs to be shown and reconceived can be reeled off endlessly. Then there are the films that imagine what may come next. The films that can be made are infinite, and this is the point. The endless production needs to start being worth something for people's own reality, not as a commodity to be sold and licensed, but as a pronouncement of possibilities to come. Films against capital could become a prolonged and ongoing collective conversation, formulating new shapes for societies. The ideas that people can develop in the process using film would be more beautiful than anything people can create on their own, without dialogue and purpose to the discussion.

There's nothing more that I need to add. The rest is up to whether people want to make such films and what they will do. One thing I know is that an idea started from the place of random imagining is more powerful than the grip of tested conventions. There is too much intelligence in the world not to develop the tools of everyone to clear their paths, decide their fights, articulate their questions and do this in ways that talk to many people at once about what they are imagining. There are too many ideas for the series to end.

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