

## A BLINKING SPHINX

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### THEORETICAL CURIOSITY IN POSTWAR MARXISM

He turned into Cumberland street and, going on some paces, halted in the lee of the station wall. No-one. Meade's timberyard. Piled balks. Ruins and tenements. With careful tread he passed over a hopscotch court with its forgotten pickeystone. Not a sinner. Near the timberyard a squatted child at marbles, alone, shooting the taw with a cunnythumb. A wise tabby, a blinking sphinx, watched from her warm sill.

James Joyce, *Ulysses*

**T**HE EVERYDAY REMAINS largely undertheorized as the locus of individual and collective transformation. The world of daily experience is the crossing point and frontier for critical interest, theory and passion. The quotidian, comprised of habitual contacts, frames of reference, identity formation and solidarity, presents the matrix of experience, providing the context and content for the workings of a critical theoretical curiosity.

In this article, I will describe specific intersections of a critical, theoretical curiosity in postwar modernity. In its transversals within critiques of everyday life, the conducting currents of theoretical curiosity acknowledge the contingency and aleatory aspects of lived experience, spurring a continual reinvention of intellectual and critical thought. An emphatic interest and care characterize the workings of critical thought in thinkers like Lefebvre, Debord and Althusser, whose approach departs from a scientific model of dialectical materialism. Their critical engagement is propelled by an intellectual passion for not only knowing and discerning the intricate mediations within and between present relations and conditions, but for seizing opportunities for their structural transformation. The elusive, often oblique powers of theoretical curiosity stir the green fires of what Hume called one of the 'calm passions.' In the interest of subverting the mundane, this 'passion of the mind' interposes itself between the cracks of conceptual order and rationality. As both excess and trace, it plies through the fibers of ossified

historical organization of representation, countering the cohesion and logic of the proper, the placeholders of language and symbolic order.

Critical theoretical curiosity, as I profile it here is a form of disquiet, an abiding and resilient doubting or troubling of the fixed and familiar. For writers like Lefebvre and Althusser, it is an ongoing intellectual operation, a willingness to test and try the prevailing tensions and antagonisms of social life. It maneuvers in tactics of waiting, detour and intervening when opportunities arise or, in provoking activity, keeping all premises, including its own theoretical development, unsettled. It is a detective work in vigilant scrutiny for novel patterns and resistances arising within the arbitrary, repressive and discontinuous order of social relations. In its variant formulations, theoretical curiosity is generative of counter-constitutive forms of power, sustained and given momentum within the materialist encounter and contingent convergence of thought in the everyday. Theoretical curiosity, formative of a multiplicity of materialist practices, is at the same time always situated in alliances and strategic interests and positions within a continuing class war within theory itself, as illustrated by the very distinctive and antagonistic formulations developed between the humanist practice of Hegelian Marxists like Lefebvre and the theoretical antihumanism of Althusser's circle. The debates over questions of humanist practice also entailed foundational questions regarding the limits of representation and historical agency within Marxist theory and practice. For the postwar thought reviewed here, a critical curiosity always involved participation and experimentation, vivid adventures of the power and labor of the negative, combining attempts at intervention that engaged the panoply of aesthetic and intellectual activity, political and cultural forces as circuits of power that might regenerate forms of knowledge and social life.

Theoretical curiosity conventionally connotes inquiries that test and resist imposed limits to thought within existing forms of intelligibility of a given representational episteme, as illustrated by the heterogeneous phenomena which have appeared and variously been identified as post-Fordism, 'empire', globalized, 'late' or network, capitalist postmodernity. Hans Blumenberg's sweeping historical critique of the 'trials' of theoretical curiosity documents its perduring contestation. From classical *theoreia*, an originary sight or gaze, through the trial of Socrates, its condemnation by St. Augustine, the scandal of Abelard, and then, later, Galileo, Copernicus and Bruno, theoretical curiosity carried the epistemic and moral weights and balances of specific historical and epochal conjunctures.<sup>1</sup> In the unprecedented ventures and discourses of early modernism, a *contretemps* was

maintained between an emergent empirical practice, *scientia*, which would valorize it, and the prevailing theocratic and patristic order that confined and regulated it through its canons, pedagogy and doxa. Theoretical curiosity presents a cloud chamber in which the traces and collisions of thought can be observed as they radiate from disciplined epistemological centers of gravity. In this essay I want to advance the claim that theoretical curiosity is expressive of the configured mediations of sustained practices of thought in their emergence and resistance within the incalculable productivity of any social ontology.

The writers discussed here evince a theoretical curiosity and care for the unknown valences and resonances of the phenomenally contingent. It is a multifaceted, heterogeneous practice setting into motion oppositional tenets to all expressions of totalizing and abstracting rationality, while at the same time acting as calculating, tentative exponents for the aleatory or contingent. The heterodox tenets of these postwar thinkers are divergent in important ways, yet they cohere in a rethinking of the negative and contingent as material appropriations of convergences of theoretical critique and historical experience. They generate particular ways of theorizing upon what before the war had remained for historical materialists the scantily theorized issues arising from consideration of the everyday. In resisting their own critical resistances, they rarely make a complete rupture with the forms of rationality they would subvert. Whether capitalist exchange value relations, French Communist Party and reductive economic Marxism, or the ghostly and restless negativity of Hegelian dialectic, they continue to resist in both senses, propagating a theoretical curiosity engaged in everyday life in its plenitude and contingencies. Althusser and Foucault in particular suggest cunning interceptions into the managing operations, at once epistemological, material and contingent, for abstracting rationality, both in the constituent discursive powers at work in forming subjects and states, as well as in the logic of a social synthesis that survives spectrally through the commodification of life.

As advanced by critical theorists of everyday life, contingency provides neither a mere potentiality, nor a calculability and cunning of reason. It exists within a plurality of intersecting, aleatory worlds of the virtual, spheres of knowledge; relation and experience that need not, out of necessity, become manifest, but are material as conceptual horizons nonetheless. Contingency is the hesitating beauty of history. It names a subjectless coincidence of forces, dispositions and apparatuses, at once physical, conceptual and identifiable within social histories of struggle. Projects generating the energies

deriving from the aleatory and contingent ply the unforeseeable depths of actual historical conditions of possibility. Their practices run the often random course, momentum and current of histories of the multiple and convergent, of 'now-time,' of Benjamin's *jetzeit*. The contingency of praxis is never accidental or capricious; and curiosity's singularities are not pure chance encounters even while they resist systematization. A resistant, insurrectionary curiosity hovers cunningly, prepared to pounce across the borders of constrained time and *space* of the everyday, seizing a situation's release of collective desire, readying its practices and tactics for integration into the irreducible momentum of bodies and minds moving beyond the limits of what Marx observed as a "civilization trapped within the crude barbarism of need."<sup>2</sup>

Theoretical curiosity as a practice is distinguished from its conceptual counterparts, especially defamiliarization, estrangement and the uncanny, in the workings of thought that it conducts.<sup>3</sup> In thinking the singular, theoretical curiosity confronts its own premises; working thought's historically imposed constraints, including the production of the givenness of its theoretical objects. While sharing with practices of defamiliarization a decontextualization of unreflected objects of experience and perception, theoretical curiosity, in encountering the contingent, distantiates itself from elements of its own premises and arguments, and as a consequence, is dialectically changed within those encounters. As a materialist practice it is engendered and embodied in social relations and the antagonism of everyday life. It is not disinterested speculative practice, expressive of the leisure and remove of classical *theoria*, the realm of Hegel's 'spiritual animals,' who, in Pierre Macherey's phrase "remain without works," never partisans, they remain "devoted to the pure practice of his capacities."<sup>4</sup> A critical theoretical curiosity, pace Spinoza, refers here to the power of thinking-bodies, at the individual and collective level, to act in sympathy with each other in their natural right, in their disposition and powers to coalesce and cohere as thinking and acting interrogators of the dominant, if discontinuous, epistemic structure and coding of social experience. As reciprocal and mutually interacting bodies, the passion of a critical curiosity is generated and augmented by collective social movements, interests and interventions that engage and challenge the nature and constitution of the everyday life. It is a primary catalytic element for thought's germinal pursuit and production of an open-ended futurity.

Theoretical curiosity as a practice operates and is generated by the specific historical experiences and instances of contradiction. In the interest of

mobilizing transformation, it acts within and against the grain of everydayness, a friction within the ontic. Arising from the conditions of possibility, as much actively present as absent from a historical conjecture, theoretical curiosity is alert for unexpected opportunities and moments, readied for the aleatory gambits that might suddenly be offered. It is a critically informed practice, one that confronts philosophical and disciplinary limits in thinking philosophy and theory's own outside. Theoretical curiosity problematizes the immediate and generates the labor of Foucault's 'specific intellectual.' Foucault, who "dreamed of a new age of curiosity," undertook his genealogical studies and 'history of the present' as a process of constant problematization. As a philosophical immersion within and against the facticity of the everyday, it proposes movement from stasis and reified determination. Foucault regarded theoretical curiosity as primary, stating that

it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and essential we must multiply the paths and the possibility of comings and goings.<sup>5</sup>

In Pierre Macherey's phrasing, philosophy as an operation is practice itself, "as it puts back into question the limits inside which its activities are carried out." Theoretical curiosity as philosophical practice and operation continually unsettles the quotidian, and the grounds of ideology as embedded within existing templates of objectivity and subjectivity. For Macherey, such a philosophical practice "is the movement of going past limits, of reflecting the immediate in the mediated."<sup>6</sup> It is a practice that intervenes within the sometimes volatile, sometimes frozen determinate conditions of the inherently antagonistic social relations of capitalist hegemony which works the opportunities presented within unanticipated occasions and historical conjectures.

In claiming its materialist grounding, I want to maintain theoretical curiosity as a practice that arises from actual and contingent social relations, eluding the lures of an irrationalism that would champion absolute indeterminacy, chance and the calculus of the possible, as well as idealist and monologizing nets that recuperate it, drawing it down for normative liberal critique in the interests of instrumental reason. Foucault delineated ways by which 'dispersed knowledges' are normalized, including disqualification of

what is officially sanctioned as useless knowledges, the normalization process itself by which forms of knowledge, their proponents and their specific mediations and transmission, become interchangeable, reproducible and generalized, as well as hierarchical and 'pyramidal centralization that organize these 'subordinated' knowledges for their effective management. The varied disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms that normalize such subordinated, dispersed forms of knowledge, for Foucault, compose the structural armature of the modernist episteme in which theoretical curiosity operates. In Foucault, these mechanisms correspond to the permeability of military and political regimes and their maintenance of order whose legitimacy, deploying knowledge, is often reducible to "who has the weapons."<sup>7</sup>

As a punctuating point for critical reflection, the everyday situates a problemization of our time and its episteme. For Kristin Ross, "everyday life harbors the texture of social change. To perceive it at all is to recognize the necessity of its conscious transformation."<sup>8</sup> The critiques of modern urban daily life discussed here, as formulated by Lefebvre, Debord and others, present ways of distancing from the grain of 'facticity,' of the givenness and resistances of circumstance, necessity and repetition. The purpose of this essay is not to render a historicist account of a distinct conjuncture whose leading agencies and determinate conditions can never be fully discerned. The discussion of the intentional interceptions of theoretical curiosity of Althusser, Debord and Lefebvre is intended as an analogue of the problematic and impasses of the contemporary North American left and a rethinking of the conditions by which the political is produced. This demands frank acknowledgment of the self-reproducing limits of existing interventions of the progressive movements of the left in America and its cosmopolitan cultural milieu, whether localized in organizations working for environmental justice, school reform, healthcare, workplace contracts, or identitarian struggles for recognition. This requires ending all pretenses to notions of reflecting and representing their various constituencies and interests.

Theoretical curiosity is not intended to define a particular practice or enduring trait; neither does it delineate any given form of situated intellectual activity, training or position. It neither mirrors everyday life nor exists autonomously, independently speculative as a mode of theoreticism living in the intentionally atemporal realm of Hegel's 'spiritual animals.' As a practice open to engaging and actualizing all resources, it works a temporality not confined to an abstracted reading of the nature and experiences of the 'present.' It raises the stakes for any vital future for the left and progressive

struggles for social justice by scratching through surfaces and the often unthought premises guiding all manner of current strategies and tactics. It attempts to address, what, in another context Negri and Hardt identify, in their problematic project of the 'multitudes,' as a "conceptual lack concerning what the Left is and what it can become."<sup>9</sup> The practice of a critically sustained theoretical curiosity advocated here would raise the stakes in confrontation with the absolute exhaustion of social democratic reform strategies, organizational structure and agenda, including many 'grassroots' movements of all stripes in their naïve claims of a 'realist' activism free from or independent of ideological labor and theoretical practice. It is a calling to account for an intense and constant questioning of their grounding motivations and purposes for existing as movements.

My intent here is not to claim any strong mutual influences among these select authors whose differences with regard to key questions and commitments range the spectrum of the humanist and anti-humanist currents of postwar thought and practice. I do wish to offer a brief portrait of some of their shared theoretical field and problematizations in which experiments and innovations in Marxist practice became necessary and desirable. Implicit in postwar critiques is an encounter with the everyday as a vanishing point and limit to thought. Since Sartre, the unraveling of grand historical and speculative narratives, whether Hegelian, Marxist or in the legacies of the Enlightenment Reason, revealed the negative power of the myth of a progressive and totalizing rationality. Whether Hegelian, Marxist or in Republican principles founding modernist secular states, their critical inquiries shared an intense recognition and rejection of the hollowness at the heart of systems of thought, including dominant and official canonical renderings of historical materialism and dialectics, that frequently mirrored capitalism's own abstracting rationality. For Althusser and Lefebvre, in particular, the chance to intervene was in large part made necessary and possible within the PCF's (Parti Communiste Français) 'outstretched hand' policy of gradual and controlled de-Stalinization, in what increasingly came to be seen as an instance of class struggle within theory itself. As in the case of Merleau-Ponty, these 'adventurers in the dialectic' and laborers of the negative, while in no way representative of autonomous theoretical productivity of the postwar *gauchiste* movements, nonetheless are of ample interest in signaling some of its tensions and critical affinities.

The conceptual apparatus of contemporary thought remains ambivalently locked in an uneasy relation to the power and passion of theoretical curiosity. As a formative and initially unstructured aspect of consciousness, atten-

tion, perception and affect, it has remained marginal to the purposefulness and historical self-conscious of the collective mobilizations and projects of late modernity. Idealized as a timeless and disinterested virtue, it is more commonly trivialized, disparaged and appropriated. For Martin Heidegger, curiosity represented a 'tendency' within the vicissitudes of being. Sharing a disdain for the everyday with contemporaries, Lukacs and Adorno, he claims that "curiosity is everywhere and nowhere."<sup>10</sup> As a characteristic of Dasein it is actualized in human experience as a continual engagement with "idle talk," the chatter of the mundane and the ontic. Rendering a modern, existential analytic reading to its classical, Platonist ontology, it is an instance of the modality of appearance and simulacra. As a diversion, covering up or forgetting, it is also a "veiling," flight or veering away from being.

Theoretical curiosity interleaves exteriors and interiors, surfaces and depths, remembrance and futurity. It tracks thought's involutions – the spacing and pulse of thinking, the emergence and dissolution of percepts, notions and concepts. As a tendency, pace Heidegger, it is thought's own temporality, placing and displacing experience and knowledge in the quotidian world. It is the restlessness of the experience of time and negativity, a conduit for continuities and dislocations alike. In challenging Heidegger's dismissal of it as a flight from 'authentic' experience, projects like those initiated by Freirean critical pedagogy begin within the textures of daily experience under present social conditions. A care for being impels a reordering of the nature of lived experience. As the object of disparate revolutionary projects, such as those of the Popular Front, the Surrealists, the Situationists and critical pedagogies, an untaming of this otherwise innocuous passion could constitute a shifting of the known coordinates of the phenomenal world, including the production of social space and time. The passions untamed could become the eloquence of everyday life transformed.

## THE EVERYDAY

By lorries along Sir John Rogerson's quay Mr. Bloom walked soberly past Windmill lane, Leask's the linseed crusher's, the postal telegraph office. Could have given that address too. And past the sailor's home. He turned from the morning noises of the quayside and walked through Lime Street. By Brady's cottages a boy for the skins lolled, his bucket of offal linked, smoking a chewed fagbutt.<sup>11</sup>

The everyday presents the possibility for interpreting the convergences of affect and reason. It is the locus for a reassembling of the losses of communal and historical experience within contradictory forms of contemporary social organization, temporality and space. It is a conceptual and experiential crossroads at whose junction's philosophy makes its forays as a critique of existing social space, conditions and problems. As a mobile site for a "history of the present," the everyday announces a threshold for theoretical curiosity. The notion of "irreducibles," traces, or resistant remainders is important for a critical rethinking of social space. The irreducible or trace presents the resisting power of objects that do not correspond with subjects in relations of identity, as discrepant oppositions and anomalies that, crystallized in the quotidian experience of whole social formations, jab at the smooth surfaces of a social totality and its triumphal claims to progress. In Lefebvre's formulations, temporality and spatiality are contingent, capable of being fundamentally realigned. The administered life is never absolute, and agency reappears in the unexpected, in the irreducibles. He claims that

if the circuit is not completely closed it is not for want of purposes or strategic intent but only because 'something' irreducible intervenes, 'something' that is perhaps Desire, or Reason (dialectics) or even the City... The only way to stop the circuit from closing is to conquer the quotidian.<sup>12</sup>

"The everyday escapes," Maurice Blanchot suggests. In response to Lefebvre, Blanchot cautions, phenomenal experience resists any detective work and all processes of unconcealing. The everyday eludes systematicity, representation and conceptual rigor. It is the expanse and containment of non-reflective experience. In its arbitrary but usually unquestioned regularity, it is the domain of the commonsense order and rhythm of a world with others.<sup>13</sup> For thinkers like Barthes, Blanchot, Lefebvre and Benjamin it is the blur of the familiar, characterized best perhaps by street traffic, conversation, noise, graffiti, handshakes, lights and signs, all often anonymously choreographed in their patterns. An undifferentiated subjectivity, knowledge, and objectivity occurs in the absence of critical awareness of the historical origins and structures of daily life.

In Bradley Macdonald's reading of the place of the 'figure of desire' in Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "desire represents the constant striving of historically embedded humans to overcome their socially constructed limitations and strive toward their human potentialities."<sup>14</sup> Lefebvre, who first translated this early treatise of Marx into French,

was profoundly influenced by its ontological orientation. For Marx, the human condition is characterized historically by distinctions between thinking and being, between what has distinguished modern variants of idealist and materialist thought. As a natural being, “as a living natural being he is on the one hand equipped with natural powers, with vital powers, he is an active natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as drives.”<sup>15</sup>

Desire and curiosity intersect in the contingencies of collective life, as intensities of experience; congruent but differentiating as degrees of care and a detecting of difference. Theoretical curiosity, working the edges and absences in everyday life, attends to desire’s savor of the sensuous, the grain and textures of things, notions and images that arouse its own continuity. Desire and curiosity conjoin in daily life, in their utopian moments, recalling imaginary worlds hospitable to pleasure, to an economy of difference that is not cumulative and accountable, in situations and moments of rupture of the quotidian where exuberance and creation arise. Desire as a generative principle of life is perhaps the ancestor that travels with curiosity in its errant flights and investigations; together, as irreducibles, as fonts of abundance contained within historical experience and memory, they gather the kindling for the building of future fires, in the taking back of time and urban spaces to compose another world here.

Evident in the surfaces and textures of urban life, cultural and political modernity offers itself to theoretical curiosity, critical reflection on historical being and the composition of everyday life. Jostled in the scramble of urban transport, or observing street life in the poses of a hawker, a hustler or flâneur, a critique of everyday life can only emerge from the claim of things on us. A critique of modernity and modernism questions the given relations of everyday life, including their transparent order, design and patterns, in all their symmetries, dissonances and arbitrariness. The everyday as a conceptualization of the elusive nature of collective experiences of modernity, is, in Lefebvre’s formulation, a simultaneously intensive and extensive reading of the phenomenological screens of the spectacle of the ordinary in its continual repetition and difference. For Lefebvre, the power of the everyday requires a critical labor of the negative, the qualitative change of daily life offering up connections formative of subjectivity and historical agency. It is the actuality of historical desire in its “ability to create in terms of everyday life from its solids and its spaces— to make something lasting for the individual, the community, the class; the reproduction of essential relations.”<sup>16</sup>

Lefebvre sustained an ongoing examination of the everyday and the disparate significations of the collective experience identified as cultural modernity. Arguing that the quotidian and everyday were invented with the rise of industrial capitalism, he proposed a reinvention of a “style” counterposed to the reproduction and repetition of an everyday still dominated by antiquated, repressive cultural practices. A style designates ritual aspects of premodern or precapitalist organic communities, social relations and integration into the workings of cyclical time. It can include styles of power, cruelty and wisdom, in *techné*, organization and the productive skills of a world of experience without the quotidian. The alienation of workers from control of their productivity, wage labor and the compulsions of consumerism have all contributed to the creation of a world restricted to quotidian relations wherein objects, appearances and possessive individualism reign sovereign. In seeking release from the depths of alienation, social mobilizations can realign temporal and spatial relations, and, resetting the clocks and calendars of modernity, release the productivity of thought that would actualize the ‘extraordinary in its very ordinariness’ within the everyday.

For Lefebvre, writing without the ability to foresee the events of May 1968, this meant recreating the communally based “festival and gather together culture’s scattered fragments for a transfiguration of everyday life.” As a tenet of a left militancy, unrestricted by dogmatic and reductive economic determinism, the intent of projects inspired by a ‘cultural turn’ constitutes a revolution of everyday life. For Lefebvre, it bears the banner for a new social order freed of the systematic reduction in the quality of everyday experience. Proclaiming the arrival of the Festival, he writes:

The revolution of the future will put an end to the quotidian, it will usher in prodigality and lavishness and break our fetters, violently or peaceably as the case may be. This revolution will not be restricted to the economy, politics and ideology; its specific objective will be to annihilate everyday life: and the period of transition will also take on a new meaning, oppose everyday life and reorganize it until it is as good as new, its spurious rationality and authority unmasked and the antithesis between the quotidian and the Festival—whether of labor or of leisure—will no longer be a basis of society.<sup>17</sup>

Lefebvre was a self-styled ‘utopian’ marxist. In rejecting a totally administered life, a ‘bureaucratic society of controlled consumption,’ he promoted the creation of ‘moments,’ situational interventions into the tangled sameness of

ordinary life in cosmopolitan cultures. Specifically, his philosophical and political projects included interventions into the 'closed circuit' comprised of production-consumption-production, in which 'desires are run to earth.' His stated intent was to "prove the existence of irreducibles, contradictions and objections that intervene and hinder the closing of the circuit, that split the structure" of production and consumption in the formulation of a new unity, or "style" of life reminiscent of the organic totality of communal life in medieval and precapitalist social patterns. <sup>18</sup>

Lefebvre's reading of everyday life as the place of transformation encourages a materialist understanding of desire, or what in Marx constitutes humanity's 'vital powers', 'dispositions' and 'passion.' The intent of his critique of the quotidian is in large measure a historical re-reading of Marx's theory of accumulation and alienation. It is also a stance against the sociologists and political economists of postwar Europe who would, often inadvertently, represent a return to Hegel's invocation of the State as *geist*, the spirit of history incarnate. "Will this age witness the triumph of Hegelianism and of the totalitarian state rather than achieve the philosophy of a human totality?" he asks, remarking on the incomplete rationality and instrumentality of techniques for administering human desire, productive power and labor, in both capitalist and state-socialist countries. <sup>19</sup> For Marx, objectification and alienation are not continuous or inescapable aspects of a fundamental ontological condition, as influential interpreters of Hegel, like Jean Hyppolite (whose seminar Althusser attended) aver, but the specific reified character of one form of objectification under the reign of a world dominated by economy. In Macdonald's formulation, a "materialist conception of desire potentially engenders a way of understanding all the ways in which desire and pleasure become invested in everyday life, be they practices related to the capitalist economy, patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, or other spheres of power that reside within our life-world and are neither clearly nor necessarily reducible to the economy." <sup>20</sup>

In the pre-war context, the fleeting luxuriance that Benjamin's *personae*, including the Idler, the Student and the Gambler, partake in is one that beckons and flickers at urban edges, the banlieus of the capitalist spectacle. They carry on their non-productive activity drifting at the peripheries of a Calvinist economy of austerity within abundance, of consumerism and want, libertinism and moral order. Prefiguring the Situationists own *derivés* and "psychogeographies" of the city, the Idler shares the singular discovery and pleasurable exploration of multiple and intersecting urban times with the Student and the Gambler. Existing on its own peculiar mappings of

urban terrain outside the circumscribed instrumentality of productive, alienated labor and utility, the Idler is personified by the flaneur in an “unlimited duration which fundamentally distinguishes it from simple sensations of pleasure.”<sup>21</sup>

Unlike Benjamin, however, for whom the irreducible, as a excess that has not been absorbed into the totality of capitalist reifications of labor and commodities, and for whom it requires a conceptual labor of decipherment, Lefebvre’s cross point, *chiasmus*, is the place and non-place where philosophy encounters its other. “Everyday life is the object of philosophy precisely because it is non-philosophical.”<sup>22</sup> This encounter, a tension in becoming is also a frontier for theoretical curiosity, bringing up to the surface the resistances brought to bear upon any conceptualization of the cohesive structuring of society organized through the mediation of objects, as commodities, whose value and valences are reduced to their traffic in exchange.

Lefebvre renders Marx’s insights, particularly the influence of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (which he first translated into French), into contemporary cultural politics. In the hypermodernized France of the 1950s and 60s, which witnessed the aggressive transformation of its society to an American style of corporatization and consumerism, and, as Kristin Ross documents, one exemplified by cars, movies and household cleaning goods, the everyday life familiar for generations never returned with the ending of the Occupation. Lefebvre brings into focus the repetitive nature of the everyday, the quotidian as a rhythm appearing outside of time, in the cycles of alienated urban lives in general, but in particular the lot of women in traditional, patriarchal family economies. For Lefebvre, the misery of the quotidian is measured in the weight borne by women in “basic preoccupations with bare necessities, money, tradesmen, provisions, the realm of numbers, a sort of intimate knowledge of things outside the sphere of material reality: health, desire, spontaneity, vitality; recurrence, the survival of poverty and the endlessness of want, a climate of economy, abstinence, hardship, repressed desires, meanness and avarice.”<sup>23</sup>

In the new modernization that affected France more quickly and intensely than other European countries after the war, a new privatization reinforced perennial gender partitions within a previously unimaginable economy of consumerism. Daily life is newly configured in intensified divisions between public and private lives, between sexuality and technique, politics and domestic concerns that also witnesses a disciplining of these divides. Shopping, fashion, the care of the house constituted the

daily lives of women, and in the new magazines, such as *Elle* and *Esprit*, the domains of romance, fashion, beauty, cooking and practical advice comprised the circumscribed content. As Kristin Ross notes, “career, politics, science and economic information are relegated, in a strict gender division of access, off limits”.<sup>24</sup>

The skeins of everyday experience are material in their patterns, habits and relations. Lefebvre’s ongoing critique of everyday life traces out to some degree the fortunes of dialectical materialism in the postwar period. As Diana Coole observes in her commentary on Adorno and Merleau-Ponty, it is a “junction where negativity was becoming associated with a wilder process of an anti-rationalism which distanced it from its Hegelian and Marxian formulations, while its importance for an emancipatory political project and rationality was yet ... retained.”<sup>25</sup> As desire is actualized in an everyday that it flees, so too curiosity inhabits the quotidian, usurping conventional discourse, structures and habits of mind, on its uncharted, capricious and nomadic routes. As the work of the concept, in dialectical language, it is for Hegel and his materialist interpreters, an active absence, the virtuality or plenitude immanent to historical existence in its unfolding.

I wish to claim a kinship for theoretical curiosity and the power of the negative. For Hegel “thinking is, indeed, essentially the negation of that which is immediately before us,”<sup>26</sup> or, as Paul Valery phrased it “thought is the labor which brings to life in us that which does not exist.”<sup>27</sup> It is a historical desire, given shape by the contours and conventions of daily experience. Theoretical curiosity, as a political talisman, propels thinking and practice as operations within a field of powers and resistances, of always questioning and engaging with and against a facticity that would eviscerate and reify historical consciousness. For Coole, “negativity and critique are intimately related, indeed almost synonymous, since negative thinking is immanent critique.”<sup>28</sup> As a social force critical curiosity is thought of as a form of material power of relays between bodies and minds, what Coole describes as a “vibrancy” and “multiplication of connections and relations, oppositions and difference” formative of new social formations.<sup>29</sup> Its acts are tenuous, uncertain, working a negativity that would steal into the solidified domains of disciplined and absolute temporality and spatiality. It is the material, rhizomatic power of thought that acts in the realization of virtuality of a political imaginary, working toward what Deleuze asks of thought’s responsibility when he questions

“to what are we dedicated if not to those problems which demand the very transformation of our body and our language?”<sup>30</sup>

For Lefebvre, philosophy's limit and pedagogical purpose is a “practicing a sort of maieutic in assisting the birth of everyday life's potential plenitude.”<sup>32</sup> In Spinozist fashion, it is an affective-epistemological power between bodies. As a critical project this power is a singularity and intensity within everydayness, the potential plenitude or virtuality that could sustain a qualitative and collective leap within the everyday in its transformation. This excess resists and contests the constitutive forces of reterritorialization. Projects and practices sustaining and sustained by a theoretical curiosity deploy the productive agency and material resources held in reserve and compromised by conditions within the everyday, what in John Roberts' commentary grounds phenomenal becoming, and that is always “ontologically given through the autonomous self-positing of human beings.”<sup>33</sup>

### STRIKING THE MATCHES

Cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too: other coming one, passing on. Houses, lines of houses, streets, miles of pavements, piledup bricks, stones. Changing hands. This owner, that. Landlord never dies they say. Other steps into his shoes when he gets notice to quit. They buy the place up with gold and still they have all the gold. Swindle in it somewhere. Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves. Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left. Round towers. Rest rubble, sprawling suburbs, jerrybuilt, Kerwan's mushroom houses, built of breeze. Shelter for the night.<sup>34</sup>

Seeking the openings and moments when change seems imminent, an insurrectionary spirit takes advantage of their rarity to act. In taking Rimbaud's cry to 'change life,' avant-garde interventions of the twentieth century, particularly in their dadaist and surrealist incarnations, were intent on the transformation of daily life, one that would merge the aesthetic with the quotidian, the marvelous and the mundane. These movements were resources for the Situationist International's (SI) formation in 1957, the groupuscules composed largely of former or continuing artists and intellectuals who vowed to bring the surrealist project to fruition in a supersession of art itself as it melded with everyday life. The Situationists were key to the energies released in the Events of May 1968 through their employment of dispersive strategies and in tactics promoting a 'propaganda of desire.' They proposed an end to all specialization of knowledge and

activity, including art in a world in which estrangement would be replaced by a 'thoroughgoing fusion of reason and passion.' The short-lived strategic alliance between Lefebvre and SI's most audible provocateur, Guy Debord, is evident in their program: "we still have to place everyday life at the center of everything... everyday life is the measure of all things: of the fulfillment or rather the nonfulfillment of human relations; of the use of lived time; of artistic experimentation; of revolutionary politics."<sup>35</sup>

Reinvigorating the pose of wandering flaneurs, the Situationists advocated a new urbanism, sharing concerns also articulated throughout the later writings of Lefebvre, Debord; and the SI, in their publications as well as their actions, devised strategies for new ways of knowing and experiencing city life.<sup>36</sup> The *derivé*, "the technique of locomotion without a goal" was intended to reawaken elements of mystery, eroticism and surprise into the experience of perambulating the streets. As Sadie Plant explains, the *derivés* were one aspect of an effort to promote a 'psychogeography' of a revitalized urban life, in situations, events and moments conjoining architecture and passion, the contours of streets, lighting and voices with the affective intensity of individuals. The *derivés* would make one notice "the way in which certain areas, streets, or buildings resonate with states of mind, inclinations, and desires, and to seek out reasons for movement other than those for which an environment was designed."<sup>37</sup>

In their experimental militancy against lives lived as spectators in contemplative passivity, Debord and the Situationists advocated ways to merge theory and practice, individual and social, private and public aspects of estranged commodified existence, insisting that "revolutionary organization must learn that it can no longer combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle."<sup>38</sup> The new urbanism of the *derivés*, of accelerating and suspending situations, spaces and moments, would constitute an active, communal 'critique of human geography.' It would be located in multiple, shifting places of play, by 'virtue of freely chosen variations in the rules of the game.' Ludic spaces and temporality, freed, even if fleetingly, from instrumentality and divisions into parcels of labor and leisure, of productivity and stupefaction, would be an attempt to "construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer just of their labor, but of their total history."<sup>39</sup> In a Benjaminian perspective, it is the world of the Arcades, the luminous objects of desire and distraction, existing in their own spectral and numinous glow.<sup>40</sup>

As a theoretical curiosity, the Situationists strategic repertoire also proceeded to resituate existing dogmas and practices through the process of

*detournement*, calling it “not a negation of style, but the style of negation.”<sup>41</sup> Debord and the Situationists violated intellectual propriety by intentional plagiarisms and appropriations that reversed or inversed meanings. At the linguistic level, Debord speaks through the ‘reversed genitive,’ citing Marx’s own turning around of Proudhon’s ‘philosophy of poverty’ into the ‘poverty of philosophy.’ In claiming this rhetorical tactic as the ‘antithesis of quotation,’ Debord intended a critical, reflective distance to “whatever has been turned into an official verity.” It sought a rupture with totalizing discourses, and the fixing of theory in monologic, ahistorical perspectives that deny their interests and positionality. *Detournement* is a form of intellectual force that “mobilizes an action capable of disturbing or overthrowing any existing order” through parodic inversion, destabilizing binary divisions governing thought and experience. Drawing inspiration from Lautrémont and Rimbaud, the Situationists linguistic and voluntaristic performances, including the writing of an alternative dictionary, were intended to fulfill the revolutionary promises of avant garde experimentation through practices of incitement and provocation.<sup>42</sup> Most importantly for Debord and the Situationist’s was their determination to end the contemplative existence of spectators of the spectacle. The intellectual and revolutionary vanguard would reanimate marxian intent and praxis as a “reminder that the existence of the theoretical domain is nothing in itself, that it can only come to self-knowledge in conjunction with historical action.”<sup>43</sup> *Detournements* were claimed as their ‘signature,’ emblematic of an interventionist spirit seeking, and, very briefly finding, in Europe’s largest twentieth century general strike of ten million, students and workers, a carnivalization of daily life.

Instigative critiques of everyday life such as those advanced by Lefebvre and the Situationists adamantly opposed institutional and reductive theoretical dogmas and programs, whether doctrines of state bureaucracy and the new technical intellectuals of post-war Europe or those, like the PCF, that they viewed as hobbling the potential for revolutionary action. The European Marxism inaugurated by critical projects such as Lefebvre’s fifty odd years of concern with developing a sustained critique of daily life under the conditions of capitalist modernity labor under the solar glow of an idealized totality. In Lefebvre, as well as in Debord, this ideality is that of a robust and authentic humanist subject. Disregarding the unreflected masculinism of their vision of the ‘total Man,’ despite Lefebvre’s attention to the intensity of privation and privatization of oppression in the everyday life for women, they often assumed, uncritically, the coming to fruition of a fully present, autonomous subject released and liberated from the trammels of capitalist

alienation. The divisions in the spatial and temporal aspects of life could be reintegrated into a seamless unity of sensuousness and intellect. Their work was motivated by an abiding critical curiosity for ways of trespassing not only the estranged conditions of labor under capitalist relations of production, but of traditional, entrenched and ultimately collusive work of intellectuals and philosophers and theoreticians of all alliances, including historical materialists, in bridging the seemingly intractable chasm between thought and action, intellectual and manual labor, speculative passivity and material, active intervention, reflection and practice.

### EXPERIMENTS IN THE ALEATORY

Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more,  
thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to  
read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot.  
Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane.  
But he adds: in bodies.<sup>44</sup>

A subordinate if not heretical discourse within any materialism, a thinking of the aleatory transmits currents of a theoretical curiosity that elude a productivist teleology of progress and the humanist subject's coming to realization. The recognition of the aleatory, the indeterminate and radically contingent, acknowledges the simultaneous arrival of multiple converging forces, alliances and powers, providing particular agents and interests to form and intervene in the course of history. For Lefebvre this is formulated clearly in his writing in the aftermath of Khrushchev's revelations of the deformations of socialism committed under Stalinism. In his perspective "the new, the unforeseen, comes into being from inside that old bag of tricks known variously as destiny, man's history or prehistory, chance, historical determinism, economic determinism. Just like a ship history can drift off course."<sup>45</sup>

A critical curiosity regarding the material forces latent in the contingent attends to the folding and unfolding of historical conditions, their pliability or susceptibility to provocation. In the texts and comic book detourments, in manifestos, pamphlets and proliferating graffiti, as well as in their *Internationale Situationiste*, provocateurs like Guy Debord, Raoul Vaneigem, Michele Bernstein, and Mustapha Khayati sought very specific occasions to catalyze awareness and resistance to the society of the spectacle in all its alienating tawdriness, elegance and ubiquity. Situations were intended to

facilitate a revolt against conditions of alienation in every aspect of daily life, claiming “we will only organize the detonation.”<sup>46</sup> A revolutionary experience in turn would be one that constantly generates situations, festivals, new uses of space and time, occasions for transgressing the terrain of capitalism’s reign of private property as well as its psychic taming of the passions within and between classes.

Within twentieth century Marxism, an interest in the aleatory, the radically indeterminate and contingent can be discerned as early as in Rosa Luxemburg and the Spartakists in Germany. As Michael Lowy observes, “with her famous slogan, socialism or barbarism, she broke, in the most radical possible way, with all deterministic teleologies, proclaiming the irreducible factor of contingency in the historical process.”<sup>47</sup> Lukacs regarded this interest, the *augenblick*, a detecting of the “moment when, briefly, there is an opening for an act to intervene in a situation— the art of seizing the right moment, of aggravating the conflict before the system can accommodate itself to our demand.” Rejecting historical agency in its reductions to existing historical circumstances and causal, chronological determinism, this art of reading social conditions waited expectantly for signs for action, encouraging eruption, the flare of Events without evident precedent. Zizek appositely and ironically quotes Lenin when he stated “history will never forgive us if we miss this opportunity.”<sup>48</sup> A sphinx blinks.

An active theoretical curiosity for the aleatory element in the edifice of capitalist rationality, reappears within the proposals for a ‘new materialism’ by Althusser, Lefebvre and the Situationists. As potential alternatives to the centralization of the Comintern led PCF, articulations of a critical curiosity worked against the grain of a bureaucratized, economic reduction of historical materialism, their open ended theoretical and dialectical speculations on indeterminate historical processes were important aspects of a distinctly French cultural history and politics. French *gauchisme*, also evident in the projects of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, with which Debord was briefly affiliated, was a renegade historical materialism refusing Dialectical Materialist prioritizations in its underdetermined reduction of the complexity and contradictions of alienated experience in capitalism to economic forces as well as their variant mechanistic base/superstructure and attendant reflection and correspondence explanatory models of culture.

The writers and contributors to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, including Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and Daniel Blanchard, who constituted a split within the Trotskyist movement, were influential at the time in advocating

self-management on the model of the revolutionary councils of the Spartakists. Anselm Jappe points to their critical engagement with the traditional Left in their opposition to its myopic advocacy of objective productivism, concerns about working hours, leisure time, the provision of better educational institutions and social services. Their advocacy of the 'subjective' and 'poetic' resonated with the stirrings of the Situationists and their intentionally fleeting alliances, in their dissemination of the possibility of self-management in all aspects of life. Anselm comments that these writings cumulatively "argued that the true content of socialism was neither a planned economy, nor simply an increase in the material standard of living, but rather the prospect of giving meaning to life and work, releasing creativity and reconciling man with nature."<sup>49</sup>

For Althusser, the aleatory is constituted in a philosophy of 'encounter.' As a distinct reading of materialism, it stands "completely opposed to the various registered materialisms, including the materialism commonly attributed to Marx, Engels and Lenin, which, like every materialism in the rationalist tradition is a materialism of necessity and teleology."<sup>50</sup> For Althusser, taking his cues from Machiavelli, theoretical practice is a crucial site for class struggle within Marxism. It is a continual war of positions, of insistent antagonism. A 'thinking in the extreme' it instantiates a theoretical curiosity in which the appearance of the fox, rather than the lion, becomes the emblem of a rigorous engagement with the materiality of conceptual labor. This meant also a reconsideration of the elements of contingent relations for both linking the politics of the PCF to a mass base as well as the unity of theory of practice through concrete analysis.

It was the figure of the Prince, and an enigmatic Machiavelli in his *virtu*, who becomes here a theorist of 'concrete conjunctures.' For Gopal Balakrishnan, this interpretation makes the Machiavelli of *The Prince* the crafter of an "art of thinking focused wholly on the conditions of undertaking tasks immediately at hand, without anchorage in any underlying movement of history: a supposedly deeper, albeit more unstable kind of knowledge."<sup>51</sup> While, as Balakrishnan indicates "neither a monistic ontology, nor a claim about the primacy of the economic in history." Althusser's language of the aleatory is one of a vigilant alchemist, in which 'concealed vectors' are capable of suddenly igniting 'immanent possibilities' in a volatile present. It is a thinking of the unfinalizable project of human community, of a world without origin, formal causes or determinate ends. Theoretical practice is here thinking the singularity of theory's own production. Theoretical curiosity as practice is co-determined by its outside; the everyday and contingent as the necessary

crossing point for parallel, autonomous series or attributes of a singular encounter of 'heterogeneous orders.' It is, as Jean-Claude Bourdin describes, a working through of a distinctive materialist practice committed "to thinking randomness, the uncertainty of the events of the world". It is a materialism freed from the idealist foundation of the principle of sufficient reason, of having to explain itself on the basis of the relation between thought and being. It sets into motion the "idea of process without subject or completion, the affirmation of the necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity, the possibility of things being rooted in the concept of an original disorder, the constitution of the world as singular events."<sup>52</sup> For Althusser it comprises revolutionary theory's own indeterminacy as a praxis, operating outside of historical conditions of revolutionary necessity, circling over the streets its one winged dialectic. An intriguing question that remains, as Balibar poses it, is whether there can be negativity without a subject.<sup>53</sup>

Althusser depicts a relatively indeterminate historical subjectivity, one materially produced in the circulation of discourses. These discourses, social practices, distributions of knowledge and power are, *pace* Spinoza, considered immanent to the constitution of a subject. Key to dialogues between Deleuze, Foucault and Althusser is a resituating of the place of the subject as a function of ideology. For Foucault and Althusser, in distinction to Lefebvre and the humanist, mimetic representational legacy adopted by classical Marxism, the subject has been dethroned, its pride of place in the humanist pantheon as a substantive consciousness and intentional agent of action sundered. In Warren Montag's incisive assessment, ideology is interrogated as a process by which subjects are materially inscribed, through specific discourses, practices and disciplines. These expressions of power are symbolically imprinted; as writings on the body, they represent the effects of discursive processes of subjectivation.

Both Althusser and Foucault, (who eschewed the word ideology), developed their influential projects as critiques of humanist historical representations of subjectivity. In both thinkers interiority and exteriority are displaced. A subject is produced and always active within force fields that suffuse and ripple through both mind and body. Interiority is an ideological space, the imaginary, secondary effect and doubling of the materiality of everyday practice. Individuation and the partitioning of role, personhood, identity and its concomitant values of conscience, intention and will are thrown off of their Enlightenment orbit. Critical agency remains possible despite the formidable character of the processes of subjectivation that Foucault and Althusser delineate. In Deleuze's materialist ontology, and in Foucault and

Althusser's elaborations of a political ontology, it is also a philosophy of difference. Reflecting on these critical theoretical premises is important for rethinking agency. If critical praxis floats in the unpredictable material currents of power it must also negotiate, then it is confronted continually by questions of how to act in the moment in the interest of political and cultural change. Agency informs political and pedagogical projects and is arrayed in its deployments by the very material productions of power that must often be resisted. In the Spinozist terms favored by Foucault, Althusser and Deleuze, it is the power to act upon the actions of others.

The aleatory was staged in decidedly utopic gestures in the hands of the Situationists. Contra Gramsci's close encounter with Machiavelli, in which the conjunctural and chance elements for radical action are coordinated within a general understanding of the long, organic and historical conditions for revolutionary practice, the groupuscules of the *gauchiste* sixties veered toward a voluntarism and politics of spontaneity without mass base, organizational structure or a critique of the limits of subjectivity and desire under the realm of capitalism. In the writings of Raoul Vaneigem this subjectivism emphatically marks an advocacy of what amounts to personal or group lifestyle choices, what ultimately could constitute forms of radical imposture or youth cultural practices, ranging from countercultural movements, yippie activism, or the foment of Dutch Provos that Debord and the SI came to condemn as recuperable to the society of the spectacle. The Situationist's singular inspiration fused aspects of a Lukacsian *augenblick*, a seizing of time against its commodification of consciousness with surrealism's challenge to bridge the chasm between lived experience and artistic freedom, in an uncompromising, often anti-ideological dogmatism.

The non-repeatable and singular activities leading to the events of May in France evidenced a dynamic convergence of multiple sources, sites of power, theoretical practice and resistance. In its resistances and circuitous troubling of notions of progress, history or economic determinism, a critical, negative and theoretical curiosity might emerge as one of the vital forces and driving energies of social movements in their vision of an alternate present. France's imperial 'maintenance of order' in Vietnam and, later against the NLF in Algeria, so vivid in the thought and practice of the generation of 68, left no space for intellectuals and workers of that generation to remain spectators. Idle, speculative theory, as removed from partisanship in the issues confronting them internationally and nationally, galvanized millions to take sides, to become engaged, seeking alliances for the transmutation of the culture as a whole.

When historical conditions are favorable, it is a catalytic agent, seizing the chances and rare opportunities that present themselves, in taking time back from its spectacular consumption in alienated existence. That this catalytic action can prise power and the imagination was most remarkably demonstrated by the Events of May. Rene Vienet, one of the members of *enrages* at Nanterre in the winter and spring preceding, writes that “the agitation launched at Nanterre, by four or five revolutionaries, who would later constitute the Enrages, was to lead in less than five months to the near liquidation of the State... Never has a campaign undertaken by so few individuals resulted in so short a time in such circumstances.”<sup>54</sup> The energies released by the events of May were also deployed within the proliferation of *Comités Vietnam de base (CVB)* groupuscules, organized by Maoist tendencies in opposition to their Trotskyist CVN counterparts. As Kristin Ross reports, these student splinter groups were not only active at the university level but most importantly within high school and community organizations. Among them was the UJC(m-l), which Ross describes as a “Maoist group originating in December 1966 among the Althusserians of the rue d’Ulm.”<sup>55</sup> A resolution from 1967 declared the necessity of forming a united front of youth against the intransigence of American imperial rule and the formation of revolutionary intellectuals “who will join with the workers and working people, who will institute new forms of organization that will make possible the realization of such a task.”<sup>56</sup>

Theoretical curiosity emerges in a surplus of experiments in praxis; the post-war theorists surveyed here, pursued, in their own distinctive and eclectic formulations, currents of thought whose origins derive outside of the Marxist tradition, while reworking some of its central tenets and commitments. For Althusser, this critical theoretical curiosity and concern is evident in the exploration of a non-teleological, aleatory materialism, his actualizing appropriations of Spinoza and Machiavelli, and the attention the latter afforded him to think singularity, and the contingent conjunctures of *virtu* and *fortuna*. For Lefebvre, it is demonstrated by his continual renovations of Marxist theory after his break with the PCF, in his critiques of everydayness, modernity, bureaucratic consumer society and his pioneering ventures toward a spatial politics and urbanism. For Debord and the situationists, it is manifest in their modes of incitement, provocation, and attempts at puncturing through the fiction of totality at work in maintaining and managing the society of the spectacle. These practitioners and practices shared a restless and intensive reconsideration of the singularity of specific historical conjunctures, a theoretical curiosity attentive to the potentials presented by history’s dealing up of unexpected cards. Each opened up

alternative materialist interventions into the cracking fabric of the everyday in a tireless will to formulate new tactics and strategies within specific, often unpredicted circumstances and tensions of late capitalist development.

Championing cunning interferences whenever possible, theoretical curiosity maneuvers the conceptual, intellectual and material resources, tools and inventions to intervene, pursue and make multiple other 'comings and goings.' Theoretical curiosity is a call to constant reinvention and presentation of political coexistence. Burrowing beneath the endless reflecting surfaces of the spectacles of everyday life, theoretical curiosity would crack at the bad infinity of its reflections and speeds for its ungrounded ground, the substance and tain behind its glass. The rhythms, embodied habits, spatiotemporal multiplicity and incoherences of everyday life will not be reduced to any political representation attempting to reflect it. The stakes to be raised here are indefinite, uncertain and perilous. Like Joyce's watchful and sometimes blinking Sphinx, opening up to what lies contingently before and after doctrinal orthodoxy, positivism and pure practice exposes the real and usually hidden fractures that hobble the actualization of a genuinely social futurity and plenitude.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Vintage International, 1990, p. 77.
- 2 Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, MIT Press, 1983.
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- 4 I wish to acknowledge Michael Pelias of Long Island University for raising this question and his generous support for this project.
- 5 P. Macherey, Philosophy as Operation, in *In a Materialist Way: Selected Essays*, Verso, 1998, p.31.
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- 7 P. Macherey, Philosophy as Operation, in *In a Materialist Way, Selected Essays*, Verso, 1998, p.36-7.
- 8 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended, Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*, Picador, 2003, p. 158.

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- 10 M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Multitude, War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin, 2204, p. 219.
- 11 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Harper and Row, 1962, p. 217.
- 12 Joyce, *ibid*, p. 71.
- 13 Lefebvre, *ibid.*,p.73.
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- 15 B. Macdonald, Marx and the Figure of Desire, *Rethinking Marxism* 11:4, 1999, p.28.
- 16 K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in Karl Marx: Early Writings, L. Coletti (Ed.), Penguin, p. 389.
- 17 Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Penguin, 1971, p.35.
- 18 Lefebvre, *ibid.*, p.37.
- 19 *ibid.* p.75.
- 20 Lefebvre, *ibid.* p. 56.
- 21 Macdonald, *ibid.*, p.32.
- 22 W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 806.
- 23 Lefebvre, *ibid.*, p.17.
- 24 Lefebvre, *ibid.* p.35.
- 25 K.Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies, Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, MIT Press, 1996, p.85.
- 26 D. Coole, *Negativity and Politics*, Routledge, 2000, p.122.
- 27 In Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, Beacon Press, 1960, p.vii.
- 28 In Marcuse, *ibid.*, p. xi.
- 29 Coole, *ibid.* p.55.
- 30 Coole, *ibid.*, p.59.
- 31 G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Columbia University Press, 1995, p.192.
- 32 K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Penguin, p.363.

- 33 Lefebvre, *ibid.*, p.18.
- 34 J. Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: The Philosophy of Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Studies*, *Radical Philosophy* 98, p.23.
- 35 Joyce, *ibid.*, p. 164.
- 36 S.Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*, Routledge, 1992, p.63.
- 37 Debord, author of *Society of the Spectacle*, articulated a vision of an unestranged experience. Influenced by the surrealists as well as by George Lukacs, the formulations of a 'spectacular' society written in 1967, offer a prescient analysis of the commodification and containment of all human experiences, including dissent and radical gestures, through the administration of capital's techniques of managing and substitution of desire. "Of arms and the man the spectacle does not sing, but rather of passions and the commodity...the commodity's becoming worldly coincides with the world's being transformed into commodities," he writes, declaring the "commodity's mechanical accumulation unleashes a limitless artificiality in face of which all living desire is disarmed," comprising a seamless 'falsification of life.'" G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Zone Books, 1994, pgs.42, 44. Debord, *ibid.*,p.126.
- 38 Plant, *ibid.*, p.59.
- 39 Debord, *ibid.*,p.126.
- 40 A. Jappe, *Guy Debord*, University of California, 1999, p. 92. Jappe comments on Debord's readiness to engage in provocations that rework the torn texture and substance of the everyday and the spectacle. He observes that "throughout his adventurous life and continual conspiracies he was motivated not by ambition but the desire to rejoice in the drama of situations, to dabble with sets of historical contingencies"(113).
- 41 L. Mulvey, *Fetishism and curiosity*, Indiana University Press, 1996, p.62. Perhaps Kristin Ross' call for transformation of everyday life is an invocation of a new image of Pandora. The legend of the first woman, fabricated by the gods in reprisal for Prometheus' theft of the first technology of fire, suggests a critical agency within the confines of daily life. Laura Mulvey reads the myth closely, tracing how the curiosity associated with her looking into her vase delineates a long historical association of women's relation to enclosures, to secret or forbidden places. Mulvey regards Pandora's gaze an "active look," one that discerns relations between interiors and exteriors. Her fateful gesture, in opening up the container, "may be read as curiosity about the enigma of femininity itself"(61).
- 42 Debord, *ibid.*, p.144.
- 43 Mustapha Khayati, writing in a preface to a Situationist dictionary, claims that a new vocabulary will comprise a complement to the freeing of the proletariat that will give it voice. He compares their project to that of the encyclopedists, maintaining that theirs will express the "qualitative and of the still-absent potential victory, the repressed of modern history (the Proletariat) and the return of the repressed. We are proposing the true liberation of language, for we propose to put it into practice free of all fetters." *Captive Words*, in T. McDonough (Ed.), *Guy Debord and the Situationist International*, October, MIT Press, 2002, p.179.
- 44 *ibid.*, pgs. 145-146.

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- 46 H.Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, Verso, 1995, p.37.
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- 49 S. Zizek, Suicide of the Party, *New Left Review*, 238, 1999, p.39
- 50 Jappe, *Guy Debord*, University of California, 1999, p. 92.
- 51 F. Mulhern, Machiavelli and Us, *Radical Philosophy*, 101, May 2000, p.40.
- 52 G. Balakrishnan, Florence/Moscow, *New Left Review*, 3, May 2000, p. 159.
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- 54 Etienne Balibar, Structural Causality, in, Callari and Ruccio (Eds.),*Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory*, Wesleyan, 1996, p.119.
- 55 R. Vienet, *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupation Movement*, France, May '68, Automeia, 1992, p.19.
- 56 K.Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago, 2002, p.89.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p.89.

