Jonathan Beller

## WITHIN THE IMAGE

Portions of this essay were originally published as "Wagers Within the Image: Rise of Visuality, Transformation of Labour, Aesthetic Regimes" in Culture Machine, vol. 12, 2012; http://www.culturemachine.net

Let us examine a few consequences of the industrialization of the visual. As IPO after IPO seem to demonstrate, to look is to labor: looking itself is posited as value-productive labor. We know this now. In the cinematic mode of production this generalizes to what I called ‘the attention theory of value’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Today, after the internet revolution (or, perhaps equally, counter-revolution), this relation between screen-time and social production is increasingly pre-supposed. Of course the energy levels, control modules and digitized metrics of interactivity have been vertiginously intensified. Here we must remark that with the digitization of the screen as socio-biological interface, with the ramification of both its functionality and the intensive development of a metrics of attention, the stock prices of media companies such as Google are what they are because they are exploits: schemas for the expropriation of value produced by the users (and therefore the used). Early dot.com markets picked up on this shift before it was widely understood. Today, this arrangement of screen-cybernetics along with an increasingly precise metrics of attention has its sights on nearly every aspect of lived and to-be-lived time, even those forms of time that are engaged in organized struggle against capitalist forms of domination. As has been remarked, the perception of Facebook’s and Twitter’s future monetization potential increases with every ‘Twitter revolution’: unrest in Tunisia, Cairo, Madrid and New York become bankable events for new media corporations in ways at once departing from but analogous to what news has long been for print and television.

This interface between spectator and social machinery, realized as ‘the image’ (which received rigorous critical analysis by the Frankfurt School, the situationists (Debord) and feminist film theory), has been generalized to the omnipresent screen and is also being extended to the other platforms and senses: ‘the computer,’ ‘the tablet,’ and ‘the cellphone’ – all of which appear increasingly similar. Now, of course, the programme is being extended to sound, smell, touch and taste – music and game sounds, obviously, but also programmed shopping environments (which themselves extend into the urban fabric) organized by architecture, texture, scent, and arguably salt, sugar and fat. These innovations and their convergence (towards the omnipresent, omnivorous and indeed omniscient cyber-spatialized mall-military-prison-post-industrial cosmopoplex) bring about new levels of interactivity as well as new and ever more elaborate metrics for the organization and parsing of attention-production.

Such a transformation of the role of visuality, sensuality and their media technologies in social production and reproduction necessitated the formulation of the above mentioned attention theory of value, which reduces to the labor theory of value at sub-light (sub-cinematic) speeds but allows value formations to persist for a while in the electronic matrix in non-monetized forms. The theory posits that attention produces value in at least three ways:

1. Attention valorizes media bytes and pathways in ways that can be monetized – paintings, films, war propaganda, advertisements; and monetized on spec: Yahoo, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Groupon (these are all forms of expropriation through privatization of the commons). While there are various levels and/or strategies for the valorization of attentional labor (from ticket sales, to the sale of advertising, to the IPO), what needs to be remarked upon is the still intensifying capitalist ramification of the domain of the visual and, more generally, the sensual. This domain (remember the shared institution called privacy?), formerly part of the commons, is now pitted, furrowed and trolled by the avatars of private entities bent upon the capture of formerly extra-economic activities: from accessing water, to looking around, to thought. The extent of this transformation that amalgamates attention with privately owned mediation has completely reorganized the logistics of perception, along with the mental functions that have perception as their basis (which is to say all conscious, and arguably the majority of unconscious processes, including language-function) on a planetary scale.

2. Thus we can say that the techno-economic shifts marked by cinema and its legacy technologies utilize attention to retool spectators, reworking on a minute-by-minute basis forms of social know-how, of needs, of semiotic and affective capacities, and demanding a constant revamping of ‘the soul’ (or of soullessness – as the case often seems to be). Workers, prosumers, playborers and those described by Flusser in a different context as ‘functionaries’ (those who work within the programme of the camera) ready themselves and are thereby readied for the developing exigencies of the market.[[2]](#footnote-2)

3. Over time visuo-attentional transformations as indexed by emerging media technologies reorganize (i.e., reprogramme) language-function along with the imaginary and performativity such that the daily retoolings can be dialectically incorporated into or functionalized by the daily advances in technical interfaces. Althusserian ‘know-how,’ the capacity to work for capital produced in schools and other ‘ideological state apparatuses’,[[3]](#footnote-3) receives ever more penetrating and subtle elaboration through the techno- capitalist capture of the ‘cognitive-linguistic.’ It thus participates in what Virno, giving new life to a term from Marx, effectively identifies as the subsumption of ‘the general intellect’.[[4]](#footnote-4) In a recent remark, Zizek has noted that what Bill Gates accomplished with proprietary software was the privatization of part of the general intellect, which we now rent.[[5]](#footnote-5) The result is that privatized media are omnipresent in the praxis of consciousness, never more than a couple of interfaces away from any and all attentional practices, such that attention to any aspect of life becomes a form of production in the social factory of capitalism.

Most of these relations discussed above could be, and indeed were, derived, in one form or another, pre-internet: they were already inherent in cinema and television, even though they have become fully manifest only in the so-called digital age. However, given that capital itself imposed a relentless digitization of life beginning in the fifteenth century, it is more accurate to think of today’s ‘digital revolution’ as Digitality 2.0. These relations of communication and social cooperation were therefore incipient in the first digital revolution, that of capital itself.

Thus, early in the twentieth century, one could already see that the extension of media pathways was, in fact, the further ramification of the life-world by capital-logic. The communist revolutionary filmmakers marked capital’s encroachment on the visual as a site of struggle; Third Cinema (the cinema of decolonization), in Solanas’ and Getino’s manifesto, famously asserted that for the purposes of colonialism Hollywood was more effective than napalm (2000). Today the habitation of the senses by the logic of capitalized visuality is widespread, structuring desire, performance, perception and self-perception on a world scale, even in the most unlikely of places. For example, a recent essay by Danny Hoffman entitled ‘Violent Virtuosity: Visual Labour in West Africa’s Mano River War’ argues that the spectacular crimes against others in the region are precisely that: spectacles of maiming and mass murder designed to garner attention in a world-media system (which includes broadcast news, the internet and the U.N.) that rewards Africa for specific kinds of self-production.[[6]](#footnote-6) As Hoffman demonstrates through a close analysis of photographic and videographic materials, ‘This was a war structured by the economy of attention. To profit in this economy, combatants and non- combatants were required to play to an audience that they knew was there, but often could only sense or apprehend in the most abstract way’.[[7]](#footnote-7) Although this should be obvious it bears emphasizing: just because there is no computer in the room does not mean that one escapes its programme.

One sees two significant factors in this global distribution of the logistics of the image-interface: first, that the struggle for attention is a struggle for existence at many levels. And second, that restricting ourselves to categories that are marked only as politico-economic ones does not allow us to resolve the specific aspects of this struggle. Very simply, race, gender, nationality and other ‘socio-historical’ categories must therefore be thought in their economic determinations within (and in excess of) the attention economy.

Within the Image / The System of Global Apartheid

The increasing power of visual and digital media gave rise to new forms of cultural imperialism (which, in case there was ever any doubt, is actually real imperialism by other or additional means). Martin Jay has identified various ‘scopic regimes of modernity,’ Regis Debray analyses the emergence of what he calls the ‘videosphere’ which overtakes the ‘logosphere’ in the 19th century and Nick Mirzoeff in The Right to Look identifies complexes of visuality spanning the plantation (1660-1865), imperialism (1857-1947), and military industrialism (1945-present, Mirzoeff’s periodizations).[[8]](#footnote-8) We can clearly grasp from this intensification of the visual (however periodized and parsed) that capital targets not just territory but also consciousness, visual relations and the imagination itself in its struggle to organize production – which is to say, value-productive labor, and therefore corporeal performance. Capital’s geographical expansion outwards is accompanied by a corporeal corkscrewing inward. Therefore, the visual, the cultural, the imaginal and the digital – as the de/re- terriorialization of plantation and factory dressage, Protestant ethics, manners and the like – are functionalized as gradients of control over production and necessarily therefore of struggle. This struggle for shares of social wealth is at once over images and within images.

The movement from print and semiotics to visuality and affect, which could broadly be said to characterize the current politico- economic transition from the paradigm of the factory to that of the social factory, dialectically produces the increasing slippage of the signifier from the signified. This slippage and the consequent vanishing of the Real should be historicized and thus understood as a result of the penetration of the life-world by images; the increasing gap between signifier and signified indexes technical degrees of social cyberneticization and real subsumption. In historical order, linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, deconstruction, postmodernism, virtual reality and reality-TV are all symptoms and accommodations of the scrambling of traditional language function by the intensification and increasing omnipresence of images. As argued in *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, the rise of late- 19th and 20th century humanistic disciplines can be characterized by innovations in their treatment of language and therefore can be used to index or periodize the quantitative intensification of visuality.[[9]](#footnote-9) Each intensification of the disruption of linguistic function by images along with the consequent denaturing of ‘natural’ language requires a new discipline capable of negotiating a receding Real; the sheer quantity of visual processing required by techno-capitalism inaugurates changes in the qualities of thought. The linguistic commons along with its ability to slow down images and configure the Real is put under siege by visual and then digital culture. This siege results in a continuous and radical re-programming of the cognitive-linguistic. The structure, functions and capacities of words themselves today bear the mark of digitization. Though this hypothesis remains to be demonstrated in detail, we might glean from the mutations in the form of literature during modernity and post-modernity the breadth and consequences of such transformations. A line drawn from the fragmentation of narrative at the turn of the 20th century to the veritable demise of English departments at the turn of the 21st pretty much tells the recent story of language’s purchase on the world. If we were serious about taking the measure of linguistic decay, the withering of the Real, the absolute failure of semiotics and, more generally, of representation we could ruefully add to the evidence the 2012 U.S. Republican primary debates.

If capital expands through the development of visuality and the consequences of visuality include the evisceration, or at the very least, the reprogramming of linguistic capacity, then it is clear that socio-historical categories, themselves nothing other than the organization and semioticization of appearances, are also economic ones. While there is significant work tracking the interpenetration of economic vectors and those of race, nation and gender, disappointingly, it has also been possible for a self-identified leftist political economy to view racial and gendered formations as somehow epiphenomenal. This is a political as well as an analytical error. ‘Race’ and ‘gender’, which is to say race and gender as such, are from (at least) the early modern period onward ineluctably tied to scopic regimes and therefore to economic ones. In other words, these dynamics are constitutive of technologies themselves. Thus it is incorrect to just state, for example, that photography objectifies women or racial minorities. Rather, one has to see the social role of the media platform as also constitutive of the platform. What photography ‘is’ has everything to do with its social functions, meaning that the objectification of women is part of what photography is, and the legacies of colonialism and slavery are embedded in its history and technical form.[[10]](#footnote-10) Otherwise, one grasps a platform fetishistically, as a reification of social relations. IBM developed the punch card to cross-reference German populations for Nazis looking for Jews, gypsies and homosexuals during the Holocaust and this development was a precursor to modern computing.[[11]](#footnote-11) The social function is embedded in the machine, just as the role of computation in financialization and in the organizing of labor practices in China is also part of the meaning of the computer. Race and gender are endemic to technological form and technological form is endemic to political economy. To argue otherwise is to engage in technological determinism and fetishistic abstraction.

The investor consolidation of major industrial media platforms, from photography through cinema, video, reality-TV (which, for a decade at least, has made the hyphen between ‘reality’ and ‘TV’ mandatory) and the ambient computer is to be understood in part as a series of endeavors to profitably manage the transformed and transforming situation of language, race and gender vis-à-vis real transformations in techno-social mediations. Here we might identify four fundamental visual media shifts along with their disciplinary consequences: the visual marking and promulgation of race and gender differences alongside modern sociology (Stage 1: the art of photo-graphy); Hollywood’s splicings of black musical talent onto white faces and the generalization of montage alongside psychoanalytic attention to language’s break-down products and the dream as rebus (Stage 2: the rise of cinema); the promulgation of a mythically all-white, consumerist world bent on denying racism and imperialism on U.S. television alongside deconstruction’s placing of the signified, experience, the Real and ‘being’ under erasure (Stage 3: television/video); the emergence of virtuality alongside the imperative to virtuosity (Stage 4: digitality). Taken together these periodized clusters assemble techniques of subjectivity, of profitably re-mounting a worker-subject able to function in a political economy characterized by the long movement of value extraction from the scene of the plantation and factory floor to that of the deterritorialized factory, aka the scene of the screen and the social factory. Together these stages create the conditions of possibility for the current regime of Global Apartheid.

Clarity about the reconfiguration of subjectivity, language function and of interiority by the intensification of visuality, along with the consequent recession (devaluation) of the signified (Real) vis-à-vis the inflation of the sign (image) reveals that there is not a single iteration of social form that is separable from political-economic history. This dialectic further insists that we consider the mediological basis, that is, the system of support-apparatus- procedure that Regis Debray argues underpins ‘mediological’ transmissions (in his view incorrectly identified for the better part of a century as ‘communication’), of some other recent endeavors to treat the transformation of the value form and the transformed situation of labor.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In Empire, for example, Hardt and Negri return to Marx’s idea of social cooperation as endemic to production and argue for the real subsumption of society by capital. This real subsumption is stated as a fact, but we might ask how is it accomplished? What is the material basis of subsumption? What are the media of Empire? Paolo Virno (2004) has argued convincingly that capital has captured the cognitive-linguistic capacities of the species. Pointedly, he argues that we are now all virtuosos who perform speech acts in accord with ‘the score’ orchestrated by capital – this, precisely, is the operation of the general intellect. Post-Fordist production requires virtuosity for the maintenance of capital expansion. Our cognitive-linguistic abilities have been conscripted and expropriated. But again, what are the mediological conditions of possibility of post-Fordism, and what are the raced and gendered dimensions of the ‘servility’ Virno identifies?

Relatedly, we also have the work of Maurizio Lazzarato (1996), Christian Marazzi (2010), Tiziana Terranova (2003) on ‘free labor’ and ‘cognitive capitalism,’ providing us with a set of post- Fordist variants in which, given the sublime expansion of the financial system, virtuosos, by and large, accommodate themselves and their situations to the requisites of capitalist society in the performance of cognitive labor in a way which, according to some of these theorists, renders value immeasurable and the significance of post-Fordist input potentially undecidable.

One might identify in these innovative modes of conceptualization a relatively unacknowledged debt to the apparatus theory of Louis Althusser (1971), to feminism (Kristeva 1982, Cixous, 1994, Haraway 1991) and Marxist feminism (Fortunati, 2007; Maria Mies, 1999), to de/post-colonial and critical race theory (Fanon, 2008; Spillers, 1987; Spivak, 1999), and to media theory. However, the dominant post-Marxist arguments could be more cognisant of their conditions of possibility, both in terms of the history of raced and gendered labor (the socio-political techne) that inaugurated the very changes in the mode of production being theorized, and in terms of the intellectual debts owed for their own theoretical formulations. This debt is a matter of citational politics, clearly, but not in any simple sense. These theories have been built upon the labor of long suffering communities as well as on their labor of insurrection and insurrectionary critique. For let us agree to consider it a fact that revolutionary energies large and small have advanced planetary intersubjectivity in their quest for liberation even if these same energies have been domesticated by the financialization of media platforms. We must therefore be relentlessly critical when we observe that in spite of the mass basis of mediological transformations, some critical micro-cultures now proceed as if the only people worth having a conversation with are those avid readers of Badiou and Agamben, a posture that belies the highly circumscribed standpoint of the Franco-Italian insights. This insularity, palpable to readers with roots and affinities in queer, of color, and global south communities, underscores a widespread if disavowed complicity with racism, sexism and eurocentrism in still all too Western theory.

The dearth of awareness of these multiple debts and of the historicity of practices that form the new economic order of Empire is least true for Terranova, who draws on feminism, cyber-feminism and critical race theory. Because of this she is sometimes wrongly perceived as being less original and innovative than her male counterparts. However, in arguing that ‘the digital economy [i]s a specific mechanism of internal “capture” of larger pools of social and cultural knowledge [and that t]he digital economy is an important area of experimentation with value and free cultural/affective labor,’ Terranova is clear that the exploit of digital capitalism draws upon practices and inequalities that were ‘always and already capitalism’.[[13]](#footnote-13) In other words, for her at least, racism and sexism are embroiled in capitalism, and it would seem senseless to talk about (or critique) the latter in the absence of the former.

Given these observations, one should see that the concrete elements of the social: the ideological state apparatus, racial formations, the visual turn, the cultural turn, the feminization of labor and the servility and virtuosity of cognitive capitalism as part of the same equation. This is one in which the capitalized image reconfigures cultural praxis as a wholesale production site in ways that impose servility and would delimit and even foreclose the emergence of practicable anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-racist and anti- imperialist speech-acts. Material formations precisely delimit speech-acts thus, because, generally speaking, the post-Fordist attention economy still depends upon the patriarchal, white- supremacist, imperialist organization of the global imaginary to maximize returns. The ambient machines of the social, be they concrete machines (cameras, cell phones, networks) or abstract machines (races, laws, nations) are in fact real abstractions, that is, cut-n-mixable instruments available for the virtuosic configuration of social relations such that they adhere to the requisites of raced and gendered capitalist exploitation.

To give but one example here of how a critique cognisant of these relations might take form, Cindy Gao (2012) examines a series of videos by Asian-American YouTube celebrities, including vlogs of NigaHiga and KevJumba, and Wong Fu’s Yellow Fever, and characterizes their practice of performing race as ‘virtuosic virtuality’.[[14]](#footnote-14) Without essentializing identity (Gao sees the term Asian American as itself a form of virtuality), the construct ‘virtuosic virtuality’ cranks up the stakes of the virtual and suggests that, here at least, these technologically enabled performances of ethnicity are subsumed by a capitalism that still requires and indeed develops the racial regimes that are the legacy of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Indeed Gao shows that one can investigate this subsumption without insisting that Marxism trumps critical race theory. It is rather that in making the critique of a narrowly empowering Asian-American performativity (narrow because achieved through the trafficking in gendered and racist stereotypes), anti-racist and anti-capitalist critique go together. To be a bit reductive, it is arguable that in the absence of anti-racist, anti- capitalist critique the cultural movement is inevitably towards a system of structural inequality that invents and indeed requires new forms of racism – which is precisely what is going on with many of the popular Asian-American YouTube celebrities (there are certain advances but somebody has to pay, e.g., women, South Asians); or, the movement is towards a critique of capitalism that sees racism as epiphenomenal rather than constitutive and therefore uncritically replicates the racist and eurocentric assumptions of the era.

Thus equipped we must confront the fact that increasingly, every ad we see, every page we browse, every email we send, every word we say, every thought we think and every dream we have is part of the production and reproduction of capitalist society – sensuous labor 2.0. The various media platforms, social categories, and imaginal iterations are one with capital and these would script our participation in order to allow capital to think in us and through us. I italicize ‘would’ here because this point is both complex and contentious and appears to be moving towards a genuine crisis. The dialectic requires that we have it both ways. On the one hand, capitalist expropriation has never lain so closely upon thought, utterance, the imagination and bodily practices – it has engineered a networked cybernetic matrix of control, an occupation that has seized the bio-social commons. Anti-racist, anti-capitalist critique is ever more difficult to launch effectively, since the general intellect, increasingly expropriated, thinks for capital. On the other hand, and without doubt, real subsumption can never be complete if it is to matter at all, which it does, if, obviously, the thoughts (and indeed the material connections to life) in, say, this essay, are to be anything more than a means by which you advance your career. And whilst non-proprietary file sharing, p2p, creative commons, copy-left, etc., are laudable endeavors, and ‘gateways’[[15]](#footnote-15) that may open to a post-capitalist society, it seems premature to claim for any of these innovations that the medium is the message. For these practices at present do not contain within themselves a genuinely revolutionary critique or message (anti-racist, anti-imperialist, prison abolitionist, environmentalist, feminist, queer). It is not even clear that some of them are anti-capitalist.

With our language de-fanged, our critical theory suspect, and our machines and imaginations complicit, where to turn? I suggest below that there are discursive and aesthetic dimensions to contemporary life that are incompletely explored. Here we must reconsider the third world, its legacies of survival and heritable corporeal commons and the possible non-capitalist transmission of these resources. The reconstitution of consciousness in post- Fordism materially links each to all in ever more intensive ways and raises question of solidarity, democracy and social justice in new domains. As I will show, the attention economy induces a movement from the wage to the wager, and with this shift demands an analysis of the politics of the utterance and aesthetics of survival.

Experience teaches me that when discussing the logistics of the image and social production/reproduction through digital interactivity and human attention, I am obliged to add that none of these statements regarding the violence of media-capitalism and its subsuming of the life-world as well as many of its ‘alternatives,’ means to say that ‘prior’ forms of exploitation that are characteristic of feudal serfdom, slavery, proletarianization, prostitution, domestic work, migrant labor, or the labor of survival in either camps or the postmodern slum have ceased to exist. Rather these persisting modes should be viewed as conditions of dispossession which are coordinated and legitimated, marginalized or made unrepresentable by the command-control apparatus of the digital-visual via a calculus of the image that enlists our for-profit participation in the capitalist military-media-prison-industrial complex. From a macro-structural point of view, human becoming is bent toward two dialectically identical ends: capital accumulation and radical dispossession. The overall result is the immeasurable violence of the world-wide suppression of democratic becoming. We participate in this totalitarian systemic practice despite the relatively clear facts that the earth is headed towards environmental catastrophe and that two billion people (the entire population of Earth in 1929) are even now laboring to survive actually existing Armageddon. Given their intimate and indeed inescapable connection to the world media- system and the attention economy, the dispossessed have thus become the living substrate of contemporary systems of representation.[[16]](#footnote-16) We write our revolutionary tracts on the backs of slaves. Radical dispossession as the other side of a world-media system is in the most literal sense the condition of possibility for our contemporary thought and writing. It bears asking, under what image or images do the radically dispossessed labor? And also, what’s it to you?

The questions I pose at this point concern the images written over and on the historically produced informatic black hole smothering the bottom two billion denizens of postmodern globality. They are questions about subalterns whom I have come to think should never be designated by the sign bare life, but, at the very least, by the sign ‘bare life,’ now in quotation marks. The quotation marks are there in order that the signifier registers its own constitutive performativity in relation to those who are being signified upon. ‘Bare life’ neither merely exists nor merely appears but by virtue of a signifying process – a signifying industrial complex – that codifies its messages on bodies presumed to be incapacitated and unaccommodated to such an extent that they are beyond the reach of dialogue. These bodies are thereby made to signify the limit of sociality and presumed to exist in a condition of social death. My point here is that whether it is Agamben selling philosophy books or bankers and policy-makers selling bailouts and weapons, we find bodies and populations being constituted as surfaces of inscription: bodies whose living labor of survival serves to make them fodder for philosophy, statistics, political theory, entrepreneurs, militaries, banks and states. Subalterns are actively configured as the living substrate of representation for capitalist mediation. In other words, the unceasing dis-figuration of the masses is the price of success, but the success belongs to someone else: the celebrity capitalists, militarized nations, and some of their aspirant followers. Such is the enclosure wrought by the world of technical images. Squatters, trash-pickers, illegals, displaced populations, post-modern slaves, and billions for whom we here have no names and whose deaths will not appear in any newspaper, attend to the historically imposed exigencies of life. Their attention to the world-machine of survival, their endeavors to constitute themselves in myriad ways, underpin the spectacular- digital of meaning, agency, and global citizenship. For the world- media system, subaltern survival or death is mere raw material for semiotics, affect and intensity. As threat, tragedy, irrational irruption or non-entity, entire populations are bundled and sold, converted into semiotic and affective chits for capital’s master-gamers.

We must register the violence endemic to the conversion of historically dispossessed others into images and signs – in addition to objects (a concern central to the work of the young urban photo- graffiti artist JR) – because in being figured as bare life, multitudes, refugees, tribes, slum-dwellers, or terrorists, and even when not being figured at all, the capitalized universe of images and signs constitutes and de-constitutes these beings (this flesh, to borrow from Hortense Spillers, 1987) for its own purposes. As entity, non-entity, iPad, auto-part, rare-earth metal, securitized population or void, the now doubly dispossessed are materially and symbolically disappeared for politico-economic ends. In other words, not only global commodity-chain production (which relies on disappeared labor 1.0) but planetary semiosis and affect-formation (which relies on disappeared labor 2.0) are rooted in the biomass of a planet of persons excluded not just from meaningful dialogue, but from dialogue. It should be underscored that the movement from 1.0 to 2.0 is a movement that took place over a matter of centuries of racialization and gendered violence but is today ‘noticeable’ which is to say ‘theoriseable’ because the chickens are coming home to roost. As Césaire remarked, what was unforgiveable about the Holocaust, was not the brutality, torture and murder, what was unforgiveable was that the techniques of colonization were applied to white people.[[17]](#footnote-17) Peoples of the Global South were the first ‘content providers.’ Now the situation is generalized.

Understood in this way, it would appear that the result of not just history, but also of the history of representation – representation now ‘fully’ captured by capital, and shunted into an informatics matrix in which capital structures images and images structure sign function, and sign function is endemic to social production and reproduction – has been to make democracy structurally impossible. Such is the ‘reality’ for which the recession of the Real stands as symptom. The material foreclosure of the logic endemic to the conceit of human being is the technical achievement that provides the historical explanation for ‘being’ being placed under erasure in the realm of the sign. Understanding philosophically, as it were, that with the expiration of Western metaphysics one also confronts the expiration of humanism and the conceits pertaining to ‘the human’ follows logically; however understanding mediologically that this emptying out of tradition called post-structuralism is consequent upon the historico-material conversion and therefore demotion of ‘natural language’ into one medium among media requires a materialist approach to the totality of informatic networks that avowedly post-dialectical and post-historical thought cannot easily accommodate. Admittedly, it might take a book-length study to properly historicize Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* and to methodologically ‘comprehend’ the moment in intellectual history known as ‘deconstruction’ as a specific symptom of and in the long historical process of uprooting and eviscerating language. Nonetheless, one might speculate that the ‘being’ under erasure there was formerly assumed to be part of the commons. As Kwame Anthony Appiah question indicated in ‘Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?’ there is an intimate connection between the erosion of the birthrights of colonized peoples and the erosion of the Western birthright purportedly guaranteed by Western metaphysics. For our purposes here we may grasp that in both the material and philosophical domains the basis and the rationale for democracy have been steadily eroded. This somewhat controversial hypothesis affirms what has been discernible at least since the onset of post- modernity: because of shifts in the matrix of representation and its material underpinnings, under advanced capitalism neither reality nor being can be adequately mounted and sustained and thus neither democratic representation nor perhaps democracy is possible. From a technical perspective this is an advance. Dialectically speaking, from this historically achieved and instrumental condition of generalized simulation there is no return.

Put another way, having reached historically the general fulfillment of what Marx saw clearly as the specific experience of the wage-laborer, namely "the loss of reality," the real is gone and thus the aestheticization of politics is complete. It would seem that Communism must respond by politicizing simulation, which is to say, the universe of appearances mediated by abstraction, which is to say, in short, everything, however we must leave the very question of “the political” along with the transformed ontology of “politics” itself for another time.

### Reference List

Althusser, L. ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,*’ Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster, Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Beller, J. *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2006.

Beller, J. ‘Paying Attention’, *Cabinet* 24, 2008, http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/24/beller.php

Beller, J. ‘Camera Obscura After All: The Racist Writing With Light’, in Jonathan Beller(ed.) *The Scholar and Feminist Online, Special Issue: Feminist Media Theory, Iterations of Social Difference*, 2012.

Black, E. *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance Between Nazi Germany and America’s Most Powerful Corporation*, Washington, D.C.: Dialog Press, 2012.

Césaire, A. *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972.

Cixous, H. *The Helene Cixous Reader*, New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

Cubitt, S. ‘The Political Economy of Cosmopolis’ in T. Scholz(ed.) *Digital Labor*, New York and London: Routledge, 2012.

Debray, R. *Media Manifestos*, London: Verso, 1996.

Fanon, F. *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 2008.

Fortunati, L. ‘Immaterial Labor and Its Mechanisation’ in *ephemera* 7(1, 2007): 139-157.

Flusser, V. *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. A. Matthews, London: Reaktion Books, 2000.

Gao, C. ‘Virtuosic Virtuality of Asian American Youtube Stars,’ in Jonathan Beller (ed.) *The Scholar and Feminist Online, Special Issue: Feminist Media Theory, Iterations of Social Difference*, 2012.

Haraway, D. ‘A Cyborg Manifesto,’ in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

Hoffman, D. ‘Violent Virtuosity: Visual Labor in West Africa’s Mano River War,’ *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 84, no. 4 (Fall, 2011): 949-976.

Jay, M. ‘Scopic Regimes of Modernity’, in *Vision and Visuality*, New York: The New Press, 1988.

Kristeva, J. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Lazzarato, M. ‘Immaterial Labour’ in M. Hardt. & P. Virno (eds), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 133-147.

Marazzi, C. *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2010.

Mies, M. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, London: Zed Books, 1999.

Spillers, H. ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,’ *diacritics* 17: 2 (Summer, 1987): 65-81.

Spivak, G. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Terranova, T. ‘Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy’, 2003, http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/voluntary.

Virno, P. *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

Zizek, S. ‘The Revolt of the Salaried Bourgeoisie’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34 No. 2, (26 January, 2012): 9-10.

1. J. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. V. Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. A. Matthews. London: Reaktion Books, 2000, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. L. Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,*’ Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. B. Brewster, Monthly Review Press, 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. P. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. S. Zizek, ‘The Revolt of the Salaried Bourgeoisie’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34 No. 2, (26 January, 2012): 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. D. Hoffman, ‘Violent Virtuosity: Visual Labor in West Africa’s Mano River War,’ *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 84, no. 4 (Fall, 2011): 949-976. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. D. Hoffman, ‘Violent Virtuosity: Visual Labor in West Africa’s Mano River War,’ *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 84, no. 4 (Fall, 2011), p. 952 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. First source: M. Jay, ‘Scopic Regimes of Modernity,’ In *Vision and Visuality*, New York: The New Press, 1988.

   Second source: Debray, R. *Media Manifestos*. London: Verso, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. J. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. J. Beller, ‘Camera Obscura After All: The Racist Writing With Light,’ In Jonathan Beller (ed.) *The Scholar and Feminist Online, Special Issue: Feminist Media Theory, Iterations of Social Difference*, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. E. Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance Between Nazi Germany and America’s Most Powerful Corporation*, Washington, D.C.: Dialog Press, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. R. Debray, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. T. Terranova, ‘Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy’, 2003, http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/voluntary. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. C. Gao, ‘Virtuosic Virtuality of Asian American Youtube Stars,’ In Jonathan Beller (ed.) *The Scholar and Feminist Online, Special Issue: Feminist Media Theory, Iterations of Social Difference*, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. S. Cubitt, ‘The Political Economy of Cosmopolis’ in T. Scholz. (ed.) *Digital Labor*, New York and London: Routledge, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. J. Beller, ‘Paying Attention’, *Cabinet 24* (2008), http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/24/beller.php [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. A. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)