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NED LUDD, THE MACHINE BREAKER

On March 11, 1811, a large demonstration of framework knitters gathered at the Nottingham marketplace. The knitters reclaimed higher wages and lamented the growing employment in the hosiery and lace trades of the region of new labor-saving machines known as wide frameworks. The demonstration was quickly dispersed by the military. On that same night, sixty wide stocking frames were destroyed in Arnold, a large village northeast of the city, "by rioters who took no precautions in disguising themselves and who were cheered on by the crowd."[1]

Historians identify the Arnold riots with the onset of Luddism, an insurrectionary movement that broke out in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars, threatening the very basis of social order in England. The movement peaked in 1811–12, a biennium of generalized social unrest marked by food riots, arms robberies, and other disorders in every corner of the country. Although machine breaking was by no means an invention of the Luddites and continued throughout the nineteenth century, the last episode associated with the Luddite movement dates to April 1817, when six Luddites were executed at Leicester Gaol for a raid against a Nottinghamshire lace factory.

The Luddites acquired their name only few weeks after the Arnold riots, as the destruction of knitting frameworks spread from Nottinghamshire to the neighboring counties of Leicestershire and Derbyshire in the Midlands. Apparently, the Luddites named themselves after a Ned Ludlam, an inexperienced apprentice stocking-frame knitter of Anstey, a village near Leicester. Having been criticized by his master for making his hose too loose and instructed to "square his needles"—namely, to adjust the mechanisms of his frame—Ludlam allegedly took the instruction literally and hammered the needles into a heap.[2]

If the story may be apocryphal, it is curious that the framework breakers of the Midlands borrowed their name from an individual whose gesture

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could hardly be considered heroic, according to their own proud and long-standing tradition of craft. Framework knitting was in fact sanctioned and regulated by the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters, a livery company that had been incorporated by Oliver Cromwell in 1657 and reissued a royal charter by King Charles II in 1663. Whatever the reasons for choosing this name may have been, they proved to be quite effective, if it is true that in early 1812 an abridged version of the eponym ("Ned Lud" or "Ned Ludd") surfaced in the West Riding of Yorkshire and in the Northwestern cotton districts surrounding Manchester (Lancashire, Cheshire, northern Derbyshire, and Flintshire) in conjunction with machine breaking. As we shall see, in each of these regions—the Midlands, Yorkshire, and the Northwest—the Luddites adopted a variety of tactics stemming from specific productive histories and responded to local political conditions.

Despite these regional differences, two recurrent features characterize the Luddite movement as a whole. First, contrary to popular identification of Luddism with technophobia, the Luddites targeted only the manufactories and the machines that downsized the workforce and drove down wages by facilitating the employment of untrained workers. Thus the framework knitters or "stockingers" of the Midlands wrecked only the new wide frameworks that produced cheap "cut-up" stockings, gloves, sandals, and socks, while leaving intact the traditional knitting machines, which stitched the articles with proper loop selvages and a lacy seam.[3] In the West Ring of Yorkshire, the clothworkers or shearmen of the woolen industry (also known as "croppers") opposed the introduction of shearing frames and gig mills, which reduced the number of work hours necessary to raise and sheer a woolen cloth—a process called "finishing."[4] And the cotton weavers of the Manchester area sought to eliminate the steam-powered looms that were believed to drive down the wages in the cotton trade.

The second common feature is that the Luddites conducted their attacks within what E. J. Hobsbawm has described as a strategy of "collective bargaining by riot."[5] Lacking legal means to redress their grievances, the Luddites often sent threatening letters to manufacturers to remove the new machines from their workshops—and frequently destroyed them when they did not comply. In this respect, the Luddite strategy had a pragmatic side and a rhetorical side. While the two complemented each other, they were also relatively independent from one another. In fact, Luddism proper

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is defined by machine breaking as much as by a significant body of texts authored by the Luddites themselves—including ballads, chalkings, declarations, manifestos, and the ubiquitous threatening letters. Not only did these texts target the manufacturers who introduced the new machines and the authorities who protected them but they also addressed a wider set of economic and political issues, including high food prices and food shortages, low wages, rising unemployment, ineffective labor acts and regulations, and the legitimacy of monarchic power.

As Adrian Randall notes, the strategy of sending threatening letters signed by the same person was particularly effective "because Ludd's imprimatur suggested the presence of a coordinated force whose ultimate strength could not be easily discerned."[6] The letters were alternatively signed Ned or Edward Ludd (or Lud), often preceded by aggrandizing appellations such as "General," "King," and "Captain," which were meant to enhance their performative force. Ludd's name appears also in poems and ballads celebrating the gestures of this new folk hero created by popular imagination. As we shall see, some of these ballads explicitly compared Ludd's exploits to those of another mythic hero of Nottinghamshire, Robin Hood. And some of the threatening letters claimed to be sent from the legendary Sherwood Forest. On one hand, this mythological stratification buttresses the argument of those scholars who claim that Luddism is part and parcel of a premodern web of communal relationships. On the other hand, the wild circulation of the pseudonym across regions with different productive histories suggests that Luddism was a hybrid movement that included both modern and premodern elements.

This chapter explores this tension between the original association of Ludd with machine breaking and the progressive detachment of the eponym from its originating context. It does so by examining the composition of labor in different regional contexts against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, by analyzing both the pragmatic side and rhetorical side of Luddism, it asks whether Ned Ludd was capable, as an improper name, of articulating the resistance of traditional wool workers to the new industrial machines with the economic requests of the industrial workers of the cotton industry and other demands of political reform. Although the wide circulation of the eponym in 1811–12 suggests that Ludd could have become a signifier for a generalized struggle against

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modern industrial capitalism, the social composition of these workers was fundamentally different. As we shall see, the Luddites of the Midlands and Yorkshire directed their rage against the new means of production—what Marx would later describe as "capital's material mode of existence."[7] On the contrary, the cotton workers of the Manchester region largely saw the new machines as a source of wealth and soon oriented their struggle toward other objectives.

In this respect, and anticipating part of my conclusion, the name Ned Ludd designates two asymmetrical forms of struggle. On one hand, Ludd expresses the resistance of the last guild masters and apprentices against industrial capitalism. On the other hand, as it enters the Northwest, it comes to designate the emergence—albeit still in embryonic form—of a modern form of class struggle all internal to the capitalist mode of production. The goal of this chapter is to understand whether the improper name enabled the articulation of social and productive forces that coexisted in time while de facto belonging to different temporalities or whether its symbolic power was appropriated locally without leading to the constitution of durable alliances. Drawing from a rich historiographical debate, the chapter also discusses whether Luddism contributed to the development of a modern working-class consciousness in England.

THE REGIONAL DYNAMIC OF LUDDISM

As previously noted, the multifaceted character of Luddism is rooted in preexisting productive histories and customary traditions (or lack thereof), which can be analyzed on a regional basis. In particular, whereas in the Midlands and Yorkshire, the advent of industrial production revolutionized the wool trade, which had existed since the Middle Ages, the cotton industry of the Manchester region did not graft itself to a preexisting trade and organization of labor. Before reviewing how historians have tackled the differential relationship the Luddites entertained with modern technologies, I shall quickly recapitulate the development of Luddism on a regional basis.

In the Midlands, the movement kicked off in March 1811, paused in the summer, and peaked in the winter with the destruction of several hundred frameworks. By summer 1812, it was ebbing a second time for at least four

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reasons: first, most of the hosiers had agreed on raising wages; second, several thousand troops were stationing in the region; third, Parliament had begun discussing a bill to make framework breaking a capital offence; and fourth, the United Committee of Framework Knitters of Nottingham was trying to introduce a bill into Parliament to limit the use of wide frames in the industry.[8] After the constitutional attempts to improve the knitters' condition failed, the destruction of machinery in the Midlands resurfaced in 1814 and 1816—albeit at a much slower pace than in 1811–12. Most of the Midlands Luddite documents refer to the 1663 charter of the Company of Framework Knitters. As we shall see, the stockingers considered the charter as the legal and moral foundation of their actions, recurred less than other Luddites to an insurrectionist rhetoric and Jacobin threats, and composed songs and ballads that celebrated General Ludd's military prowess and sense of justice.

In the West Riding of Yorkshire, the first attacks on gig mills and shearing frames begun in January 1812 and continued amid food riots, arms raids, and robberies until January 1813. Because the number of workshops that still employed gig mills and shearing frames quickly declined after the first riots, Luddite strikes became more predictable. In April 1812, an attack against the Rawfolds Mills of William Cartwright met armed resistance for the first time, and two Luddites were killed. This setback radicalized the movement. William Horsfall, a factory owner who had made himself known as an active pursuer of Luddites, was assassinated at the end of the month, while repeated food riots and arms robberies attracted a massive military presence to the region. In January 1813, after a few men were convicted and executed for the Horsfall murder and other riots, troops were withdrawn from the region. Writings of the Yorkshire Luddites are generally more violent than those of the Midlands Luddites, are less supportive of petitions and parliamentary initiatives, and frequently target local magistrates.

In Lancashire, and in particular in the booming cotton towns of Stockport, Oldham, Bolton, Middleton, Rochdale, and Wigan, around Manchester, Luddism took on peculiar and mixed features, crossing boundaries between machine breaking, widespread food riots, arms robberies, and support for political reform. The cotton weavers and spinners were the most active Luddites of the region. The attacks on power-looms began

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in Stockport in March 1812 with the assault on the factory of William Radcliffe (the inventor of the dressing machine) and continued in other towns of Lancashire and Cheshire until the summer. Like in Yorkshire, the bloodiest event of Lancashire Luddism occurred in April 1812, when at least ten people were killed in the riots following an attack on a power-loom mill in Middleton. Although the Luddite riots in the Manchester region are of an exceptional intensity, *machine breaking proper did not last more than four weeks.* All major disorders in the Manchester region came to an end in summer 1812.

According to E. P. Thompson, Northwestern Luddism was divided between a constitutionalist wing and a revolutionary wing and changed tactics at a faster pace than in other regions. Thompson contends that, on one hand, the presence of a strong Irish immigration colored the pre-existing Jacobin propaganda with revolutionary overtones. On the other hand, oath taking and republican agitation mixed with initiatives tied to political reform, such as the April 8 riots at the Manchester Exchange, which broke out after the Prince Regent chose to appoint a conservative cabinet.[9]

The language of Northwestern Luddism reflects this ambiguity. As Kevin Binfield points out, Lancashire Luddite writings support petitions, address economic issues of various nature, and frequently employ Jacobinic language. While in the Midlands and Yorkshire, Luddism was rooted in local traditions and mostly targeted local manufacturers and authorities, Northwestern Luddism "tended to look at the top, to those locations where power in a larger sense was more likely to reside. Threats to the Prince Regent, for instance, are more common from Manchester-area writers than Nottinghamshire writers."[10]

The difficulty encountered by historians in grasping the essence of Northwestern Luddism reflects a larger historical problem. Luddism has been so identified in popular imagination with a violent reaction against machinery as to become a common name for machine breaking.[11] At the same time, historians have shown how this practice was by no means an invention of the Luddites. For example, the Spitalfields silk weavers of the East End of London had already targeted and destroyed the looms that were being introduced into their manufactories in the 1760s. And as the Industrial Revolution accelerated the mechanization of multiple branches of the textile industry, attacks against looms and spinning jennies continued throughout the country. To be sure, the 1810s were the first decade in

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which machine breaking became widespread and systematic. But is it fair to identify Luddism *exclusively* with machine breaking? Did the Luddites play a role in other social movements of their time? And did they have a political agenda, or were their grievances and objectives strictly confined to industrial matters? To answer these questions, I first review the rich historiography on this fascinating subject.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHIC DEBATE

The study of Luddism has produced a significant body of literature. If historians generally agree on the facts associated with the appearance and rapid eclipse of the movement, contrasting interpretations have emerged, especially since the 1960s, over the historical significance of Luddism for the labor movement. These interpretations can be roughly grouped into three distinct strands.

First, a current of liberal and progressive historians, which includes John Lawrence and Barbara Hammond and Malcolm Thomis, among others, treat Luddism as an apolitical movement that relied on unsophisticated and ultimately ineffective tactics to further a lost cause. Second, unorthodox Marxist historians such as Eric J. Hobsbawm and Edward P. Thompson read Luddism as an original movement, capable of inventing new forms of collective bargaining and of contributing to the formation of a working-class culture and consciousness. Third, historians and sociologists such as Norman Simms and Craig Calhoun see Luddism as an exclusively regional phenomenon—an offspring of the tensions manifested in local contexts within particular social structures and traditions. Before addressing how these strands relate to one another, we shall first review those historical accounts that reflect on the phenomenon without a polemical intent.

Nineteenth-century histories of Luddism are either firsthand accounts or oral histories that limit themselves to a general reconstruction of the events or focus on specific regions.[12] The first history of Luddism based on documentary evidence is J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond's *The Skilled Labourer.* By making extensive use of the Home Office Papers—the largest single archive for the study of Luddism—this couple of progressive historians treats Luddism in a systematic manner, rooting it in different regional and productive histories. Arguably, the most important insight

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of this work is to link the rise of Luddism to the demise of customs and legal protections that had formerly guaranteed the livelihood of textile workers for at least a couple centuries.

For example, in looking at the causes of Luddism in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the Hammonds show how the Yorkshire croppers had long been established and enjoyed a high status within the woolen trade, primarily because their work was essential to adding value to woolen clothes. This high status had been legally codified through a series of statutory protections. A statute dating back to Edward VI's times had prohibited for more than two centuries the use of gig mills. A second one, included in the Elizabeth code (5 Eliz., c. 4), enforced a seven-year apprenticeship in the woolen trade. A third statute limited the number of looms a clothier could possess to one.[13] The Hammonds show how the advancing mechanization of the textile industry in Yorkshire and Gloucestershire rendered these legal measures increasingly ineffective, thus threatening the status of cloth dressers. By 1802, the regulation of apprenticeship had fallen into disuse, and as the Industrial Revolution kept advancing, the norms against concentration were simply ignored by manufacturers, while local magistrates no longer enforced them. Thus, in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the croppers built a coalition with other shearmen from the Southwest of England to petition Parliament and pass a bill that would have reintroduced serious checks on the labor-saving machines. These attempts failed, and in 1809, Parliament officially repealed some of the statutory protections. This progressive but seemingly inexorable disenfranchisement pushed the croppers toward a radicalization of their struggle and into adopting some of the Luddite tactics that had been initially successful in the Midlands.

If *The Skilled Labourer* does an excellent job in delineating the social context from which Luddism arose, the Hammonds' interpretational bias emerges in their tendency to downplay the revolutionary and conspiratorial character of the movement. As E. P. Thompson points out, by depicting the claims made by the authorities as exaggerated and maintaining that the riots were frequently instigated by agents provocateurs, the Hammonds implied that Luddism "was without ulterior aims, and was either a matter of spontaneous riot (Lancashire) or an action with strictly limited industrial objectives."[14]

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It is only in the late 1950s, and in particular with E. J. Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels,* that a different perspective begins to emerge.[15] By distancing himself from a rationalist (Marxist) historiography that tended to read rural and urban revolts against modern capitalism as backward looking phenomena, the British historian initiated a work of rehabilitation of popular movements and plebeian politics, banditry and spontaneous riots, that led him to publish three other volumes: *Labouring Men* (1964), *Bandits* (1969), and, along with his friend George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (1969). In the first chapter of *Labouring Men,* Hobsbawm attempts to bridge the gap between labor history à la Hammond and Hammond and the study of Luddism as an issue of public order by coining the often cited expression "collective bargaining by riot."[16] Hobsbawm argues that far from being an antimodern reaction against technological progress, selective machine breaking was a bargaining strategy whereby highly skilled workers tried to retain control over the labor market in the early phases of the Industrial Revolution.

In the same years, E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* sealed this new tendency in Marxist historiography to read into Luddism something more than a residual movement of resistance to modernization. According to Thompson, Luddism was an expression of an emerging "working-class consciousness" whereby the working classes began to see their struggles as related to one another. This process of unification, argues the British historian, was not linear and resulted from the combination of several, sometimes contradictory, ideologies, such as the popular Radicalism stemming from the Jacobin agitations of the 1790s, Irish nationalism, the writings of Thomas Paine and Thomas Spence, Methodism, and the ambiguous radicalism of William Cobbett.[17] In other words, Luddism acquired a political character when groups of English Jacobins, Painites, and Spenceans, who had been operating underground since the early 1790s, were brought into association with the illegal unions operating in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

The encounter between the Jacobins and this secret industrial tradition was prompted by the convergence of two elements. First, under the government of William Pitt the Younger, the British Parliament had passed a repressive antirepublican legislation, which included the suspension of the habeas corpus for eight years (1794–1801) and the Combination Acts

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(1799–1800), which banned all forms of collective bargaining and labor association. According to Thompson, these laws had the unintended effect of bolstering a secret tradition of union organizing that had been active in England since the late eighteenth century. Second, as we have seen, Parliament had dismantled the paternalist legislation that regulated the system of apprenticeship and the use of machinery in the textile sector. Like the Hammonds, Thompson notes that stockingers, croppers, and weavers repeatedly petitioned Parliament to prevent the repeal of such regulations. But the popularity of Adam Smith's economic theory of laissez-faire among Tories and Whigs alike condemned these attempts to failure.[18]

To sum up, Thompson argues that the combination of three elements—that is, the illegalization of unions, the dismantling of the paternalist legislation, and the extension of labor-saving machinery to a growing number of manufactures—created an explosive mixture. To initiate it were a series of bad harvests, which raised the price of provisions to famine level between 1809 and 1812. Finally, Napoleon's continental blockade on British trade, in effect between 1806 and 1814, also had negative effects on textile exports and on British imports of food.[19] In this context, it is no surprise if Luddism overlapped with food riots, arms robberies, and a period of generalized social unrest.

Thompson and other historians agree that the distinctive cultural trait of Luddism was the moral outcry for the twilight of customs and legal protections, which had guaranteed a livelihood even to the lower ranks of textile workers for centuries. Yet although, until the publication of *The Making of the English Working Class,* historians saw Luddism as a traditionalist and antimodern movement, Thompson was the first to argue that the Luddites' defense of a traditional moral economy had a progressive and positive function:

> On the one hand [Luddism] looked back to old customs and paternalist legislation which could never be revived; on the other hand, it tried to revive ancient rights in order to establish new precedents (including) the control of the "sweating" of women or juveniles; arbitration; the engagement by the masters to find work for skilled men made redundant by machinery; the prohibition of shoddy work;

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> the right to open trade union combination. All these demands looked forward, as much as backwards; and they contained in themselves a shadowy image, not so much of a paternalist, but of a democratic community, in which industrial growth should be regulated according to ethical priorities and the pursuit of profit be subordinated to human need. . . . The Luddites were some of the last Guildsmen, and at the same time some of the first to launch the agitations that led to the 10 Hour Movement. In both directions lay an alternative political economy and morality to that of the *laissez-faire.*[20]

Thus Thompson reads Luddism as a Janus-faced movement that lays the ground, on one hand, for the foundation of the modern trade unions (with their constitutive struggle for the shortening of the workday) and Chartism. On the other hand, he contends that

> while finding its origin in particular industrial grievances, Luddism was *a quasi-insurrectionary movement,* which continually trembled on the edge of ulterior revolutionary objectives. This is not to say that it was a wholly conscious revolutionary movement; on the other hand, it had a tendency towards becoming such a movement, and it is this tendency which is most often understated.[21]

Thompson's bold reading had the effect of illuminating the debate over the actual nature of the movement. The first response came from progressive Australian historian Malcolm Thomis. In *The Luddites,* Thomis argues that collective bargaining by riot and resistance to technological change contributed little to the formation of a working-class culture and to the powerful trade unions that were to secure new labor rights in the following decades. By contesting the reliability of Thompson's sources (mostly oral history accounts), Thomis contends that the connections between the Luddites and the political agitators both of their times and of the following decades are undemonstrated. If they ever occurred, they were more an expression of personal support by individual Luddites to specific campaigns than the result of an organic relationship.[22]

Second, Thomis maintains that Luddism was a highly diversified movement that should be studied on a regional basis and from a strictly industrial perspective. Besides resisting the introduction of labor-saving machinery

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and the decline of wages, it pursued neither reformist nor revolutionary political objectives, nor it was able to achieve any substantial, tangible improvement of the workers' condition. Thomis concedes that the Luddites were well organized and enjoyed a vast support among the populace. But their moral appeals to customs would show that they were "a voice of the residual crafts and not that of groups more central and vital to the carrying-forward of the Industrial Revolution."[23] Moreover, the notions of working-class culture and consciousness are for the Australian historian vague and difficult to assess from an historic standpoint.

Thomis has been in turn criticized for his "compartimentalist approach," that is, for drawing a sharp line between industrial action and political agitation, and between the legalistic side of the movement and its violent fringes. In a regional study on "Luddism and Politics in the Northern Counties," J. L. Dinwiddy argues that there is enough evidence to demonstrate that among the northern working classes were men with revolutionary aims, that those men were "loosely" in contact with the underground republican network Thompson described, and that "the crisis of 1812 was of some importance in the process whereby discontent in the northern counties acquired a major political dimension."[24] In another study on the socioeconomic structure and mentality of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Adrian Randall shows how the Jacobin ideology "against kingcraft, lordcraft and priestcraft," and the republican "Painite ideal of petty-producer independence," found a conducive home in a region in which the small master clothiers were proud of their capacity for self-government and identified taxes and tithes as the causes of their poverty.[25] By noting how, in Yorkshire, the combinations were powerful and well equipped to undertake strike action, Randall rebuffs Thomis's claim that "where trade unionism was strong enough it could effectively achieve its aims without resort to violence"[26] and contends that violence was part and parcel of late-eighteenth-century trade unionism:

> We must firmly resist a simplistic imposition of nineteenth- or twentieth-century models of "appropriate" trade union behaviour upon the actions and activities of eighteenth-century combinations regardless of their very different context and culture. Machine wrecking, arson, violence, or threats of such, represented some of the

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> most easily and most frequently implemented industrial sanctions available to an eighteenth-century trade union. Violence was in no way alternative to Thomis' "labour approach" but a major weapon of the trade unions, reflecting the organization, culture and community from which they developed.[27]

If the compartimentalist approach may not stand up to scrutiny—at least in Yorkshire and the Northwest—*The Making of the English Working Class* has been criticized not only by labor historians such as Thomis but also by sociologists such as Craig Calhoun. In *The Question of Class Struggle,* Calhoun argues that the roots of Luddism lay in a local web of communal relations and traditions and that radical movements of the time acted on this basis, and not on the modern, rationalistic notion of class. "The people they mobilized," writes Calhoun, "were knit together through personal bonds within these communities much more than they were unified as a class. As such movements attempted to go beyond local communities in their mobilization or objects, they foundered."[28] Calhoun's contention is that one has to wait until the 1830s to see a "discontinuous shift from communally based mobilizations toward more rationalistic mobilizations founded on formal organizations."[29]

Even if Calhoun's book lends itself to criticism for being a polemicist attack on *The Making of the English Working Class* largely based on social theory rather than on a thorough evaluation of historical sources, it had the merit of stimulating a trend toward the study of Luddism as a community phenomenon. For example, historian and sociolinguist Norman Simms situates the Luddite uprisings within archaic forms of English communal justice dating back to the times of Robin Hood and Jack Straw.[30] Simms argues that Ludd was the mythic figure through which the villagers asserted and renewed their "juridic right to violence" against external forces, embodied in the past by feudal landlords, ecclesiastic functionaries, and magistrates and now by the new labor-saving machines that threatened the independence of the leading craftsmen and the integrity of the craft communities. Simms contends that by facilitating the employment of unskilled workers—including women and children—the new machines undermined the traditional gender division of labor and the patriarchal family. Thus the possible bastardization of gender roles called for an act

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of purification, which was performed in a ceremonial, ritualistic form. By relying on Frank Peel's description of a major Luddite attack on the Rawfolds Mills in Yorkshire, Simms notes that the rebels disguised themselves by blackening their faces, wearing masks, and in some cases dressing up as women. This carnivalesque inversion has for Simms a double function. On one hand, it demonstrates that the men "are made women by the introduction of the new frames (their skilled jobs can be performed by untrained women, they are now out of work and depend on the womenfolk to earn their bread)."[31] On the other hand, it allows men to identify precisely "with the women most affected by the breakdown of the village economy (the women, also, who were so much in evidence in the bread riots associated with the Luddite outbreak)."[32]

There is indeed scattered evidence that gender play was not foreign to Luddism. In the same days of the attacks on the Rawfold Mills, two men claiming to be "General Ludd's wives," and dressed in women's clothes, led a crowd in Stockport, Lancashire, to assault a large powered-loom manufactory. In August and September 1812, the food riots that broke out in Leeds and Nottingham, respectively, were apparently led by a woman who was carried on a chair and given the name "Lady Ludd." Finally, as we shall see, one threatening letter sent from Manchester to a manufacturer was signed by the female eponym "Eliza Ludd." Nonetheless, this circumstantial evidence may not be sufficient to prove that cross-dressing was a systematic Luddite practice nor that it had the symbolic function described by Simms. Although Simms's folkloric reading is undoubtedly suggestive, it may be more pertinent to rural revolts, such as the Swing riots of 1830, which frequently broke out, as Hobsbawn and Rudé have shown, during the preparation of communal ceremonial functions held in occasion of annual and seasonal festivities.[33]

Luddism, on the contrary, had an unmistakably urban character. To be sure, in the small centers of the Midlands and Yorkshire, knitting, cropping, and shearing were handed down according to long-established and relatively sheltered traditions. Yet the massive migrations set in motion by the Industrial Revolution disrupted the insularity and *longue durée* of folk culture. Beginning in the 1760s, urban centers such as Nottingham and Manchester, and their satellite towns, knew a demographic boom that undermined the survival and renewal of archaic forms of communal

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justice. Furthermore, stockingers, weavers, and croppers petitioned Parliament to redress their grievances, showing an awareness of the national implications of their actions. This does not mean that local traditions could not be reinvented, as shown by several Nottinghamshire writings that praised Ned Ludd as the honorable heir of Robin Hood. Yet if the roots of Ludd's mythic persona undoubtedly lie in folk culture, the eponym did not *function* along the lines of a rural folk hero. In particular, what seems doubtful is the existence of a ritualistic basis for the set of narratives that constructed Ludd's myth.

I shall return to this point. For now, I limit myself to observing that subsequent studies by John Bohstedt, Adrian Randall, Alan Brooke, and Lesley Kipling have continued to analyze Luddism as a community phenomenon by focusing on specific regions.[34] These works cannot be easily compared, either because they focus on different time frames, they rely on different types of sources, or they are inserted within research projects that exceed the study of Luddism. It was only in the mid- to late 1990s that Kirkpatrick Sale and Brian Bailey published two new comprehensive studies.[35] Whereas the latter is more a chronology than a history, the former has the limit of reducing Luddism to a rebellion against machinery, thereby contributing to the narrow perception of the Luddites as technophobes.

To sum up, as with any historiographical dispute, the debate on the significance of Luddism is a litmus tests that tells us as much about the subject of study as it does about the political positions of the observers. As we have seen, liberal historians such as Hammond and Hammond, Thomis, and others read Luddism as a residual kind of struggle and an aberration of modern industrial relations—residual as it did not affect "the nature of working-class participation in industrial or political affairs in the future,"[36] aberrant as it was an exasperated reaction to a repressive regime that operated under exceptional historic circumstances (the Napoleonic war, rapid industrialization, bad harvests, and so forth).

On the latter point, liberal historians find themselves in agreement with E. P. Thompson, who reads the 1811–12 unrest as a symptom of the increasingly antagonistic character of class relationships in England. Thompson, however, assigns to Luddism a positive function for the development of the working-class movement by noting how the convergence of political and economic demands resurfaces in the formation of the

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Chartist movement in the 1830s and 1840s and of the general trade unions in the following decades. Thus, whereas Thompson considers Luddism as a significant moment in the *constitution from within* of a working-class consciousness, the liberals downplay or deny this aspect while agreeing with him on the *constitution from without* of the movement, that is, on its essentially reactive nature. Finally, the sociological strand tends to agree with the liberals either by denying any significant continuity between Luddism and the modern working class (Calhoun) or by highlighting the folkloric origins of the movement (Simms).

Although it is true that the very notion of class consciousness is difficult to assess from a historical standpoint, it is also true that historians can now rely on a significant body of primary and secondary sources that allow them to make increasingly systematic assessments of Luddite language and rhetoric. Hence we shall now pause on an emerging strand of historiography that, by analyzing Luddism as a form of discourse, will allow us to advance in our inquiry on the alias's ability, or lack thereof, to link different demands and forms of struggle.

LUDDISM AS A RHETORICAL STRATEGY

Until recently, historians based their interpretations of Luddism on primary sources, such as the anonymous threatening letters archived in the Home Office Papers and the Radcliffe Papers, the reports of local newspapers such as the *Nottingham Review* and the *Leeds Mercury,* and oral history accounts collected by nineteenth-century historians. By doing so, they necessarily emphasized certain sources over others, leaving the reader with the difficult task of assessing their interpretational biases.

From this point of view, the recent publication of *Writings of the Luddites,* a collection of texts edited by Kevin Binfield, is an important contribution to the study of Luddism in that it allows the lay reader to access a comprehensive body of Luddite literature without having to pay lengthy visits to the archives. To be sure, verbatim reproduction of documents that are sometimes unclear or illegible still implies interpretation. Yet Binfield has done a meticulous job in transcribing the originals as faithfully as possible, including struck words and intercalations, footnoting unclear terms, reproducing different versions of the same document, and introducing

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each writing with headnotes that provide precious contextual information on lettering, postmarks, and related historical facts.

Even though the writings are organized on a regional basis, and encompass a wide range of rhetorical styles, Binfield maintains that Luddite discourse presents "a small number of centralizing features," such as anonymity, threatening language, and its recurrent association with resistance to oppressive industrial practices.[37] Whereas, as Thompson has shown, before the advent of Luddism, threatening letters containing social grievances were by and large anonymous, the introduction of Ned Ludd had the effect of linking and amplifying the force of each threat.[38] Thus, as Binfield points out, "despite the variety, Luddite discourse can be understood as a more or less continuous practice deriving from *one* forceful exercise of naming—the creation of the eponym 'Ned Ludd.'"[39]

But from where is this exercise of naming deriving its force? Should the performative force of Luddite threats be seen as a mere linguistic extension of the organized practice of machine breaking? Or can Luddite discourse be considered a practice in its own right—something that is at least partially independent from machine breaking? And if that is the case, what are the authorizing contexts from which such a practice draws its legitimacy?

To answer these questions, we have to consider that resistance to labor-saving machinery preexisted and continued to exist independently of Luddism even in the 1810s. Not all attacks on machinery made claims on Ludd's name. Conversely, Ludd's signature was appended to documents denouncing unfair hiring practices, declining wages, high food prices, and the corruption of monarchic power. But if Luddite discourse is not entirely coextensive with machine breaking, this is because the eponym acquired a life of its own as it migrated from Nottinghamshire to Yorkshire and the Northwest. In each of these regions, Binfield notes, the eponym fulfills different functions:

> In Nottinghamshire, Ned Ludd was a force generated wholly from within the framework knitting trade that perceived itself as constituted and sanctioned, although threatened. In Manchester, Ludd was a fairly unified set of resistances that could provide a focus for constituting new laboring populations in the cotton trades into a cohesive body capable of expressing its will to industrialists and a magistracy

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> that sought to keep it unconstituted and weak. In Yorkshire's West Riding, General Ludd was a combination of law and local power that could be mapped onto a trade that had recently lost its statutory protections but that had not yet become impotent.[40]

Through a close reading of the Luddite texts, we shall now situate Luddite discourse in each of the three regions, focusing on the relationship between each authorizing context and the rhetorical function of the eponym.

THE GRAND EXECUTIONER OF THE MIDLANDS

The most striking aspect of Luddite writings from the Midlands is that they share so many rhetorical features with the official documents produced by the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters that the very distinction between lawful and illegal writings appears here problematic. Both Luddite letters and lawful addresses to hosiers and manufacturers often refer to "the Trade" as the ultimate legitimating authority of the knitters' actions—thereby signaling the existence of a trade consciousness that transcended local and communal issues to encompass all knitters across the nation.

As we have seen, the charter that had instituted the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters had been dispensed by King Charles II to prevent the migration of textile production overseas. As in the mid-eighteenth century, the center of stocking manufacture began moving from London to Nottingham and the Midlands, the document remained a fundamental reference for the profession. "Migration from one community to another was one method by which the knitters participated in the new industrial economy, but the charter moved with them from one community to others and was invoked periodically as the binding force of the trade," writes Binfield.[41] This binding force stemmed from the constituent character of the charter, which provided a legal foundation and allowed the trade to add texts such as wage agreements and the Company Rule Books. Such a body of documents was constantly updated according to custom and trade usage to regulate the knitting techniques, the procedures for wage negotiations, and the determination of frame rents, as well as the mechanisms "for prosecuting those selling substandard goods or undercutting prices."[42]

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But as the advancing mechanization and laissez-faire threatened this customary legality, the knitters blended violent tactics and legal initiatives to defend it. As previously noted, this ambiguity can be evinced from the Luddite texts, which often borrow figures of speech from the official Company documents and sometimes even appropriate the rhetorical style of government documents. To make an example, "By the Framework Knitters, a Declaration," a text dated January 1, 1812, and signed "Ned Lud's Office, Sherwood Forest," appealed to the authority of King Charles II to justify frame wrecking:

> Whereas by the Charter granted by our late Sovereign Lord Charles the Seacond by the Grace of God of Great Britain France and Ireland the Frame Worck Knitters are Impowre'd to breake and Distroy all Frames and Engines that fabricate Articles in a fraudilent and Deceitfull manner and to destroy all Frameworck Knitters Goods Whatsoever that are so made—And Whereas a number of Deceitfull Unprincipled and Intriguing Persons did Attain An Act to be passed in the twenty Eighth Year of our preasent Sovereign Lord George the third Whereby it was enacted that Persons, Entring by Force into any house Shop or Place to Breake or Distroy frames should be Adjudged Guilty of Feloney, and as we are fully Convinced that such Act was Obtain'd in the most Fraudilent Manner Interesting and Electioneering manner and that the Honorable Parliment of Great Britain was deceived the Motives and Intentions of the Persons Obtained such Act we therefore the frame worck knitters do hereby declare the aforesaid Act to be Null and Void to all Intents and Purposes, Whatsoever, as by the passing of this Act Vilinous and Impassing persons are Enable to make Fraudilent and Deceitfull Manifactory's to the discredit and utter ruin of Our-Trade.[43]

The use of adverbs such as "whereas" and "hereby" signals that the declaration is meant to function as a paralegal text having the force of action.[44] As Binfield points out, the declaration aims at demonstrating that the constituent power emanating from the charter is so great that it can even nullify an act of Parliament—namely, the law that had made frame breaking a capital felony. Since this self-regulatory power was under threat, the framework knitters claim the legality of frame breaking and offer in the end a compensation of one thousand pounds to anyone who will provide

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information about the "Gangs of Banditty's" who have committed various robberies in the region under the pretense of acting as frame breakers.[45]

Thus Ludd appears here as a modern Robin Hood who defends the community from both the social injustices coming from without (the "fraudulent and deceitful" legislation) and the threats to peaceful coexistence coming from within (the robberies). Yet, unlike Robin Hood, Ludd does not only protect the community—that is, he is not only a paternalist figure. Rather Ludd is invested here with *executive power by a community that sees the Charter as its constitutional foundation, the Company as its deliberative branch, and the Company Rule Books and other regulations as its body of laws.*[46] This modern political structure, which marks a departure from the paternalist tradition, is clearly articulated in "General Ludd's Triumph," a text cited by several historians and sometimes referred to as the "Luddite anthem." Divided into six stanzas, the ballad is a eulogy of sorts, which begins with a comparison between Ludd and Robin Hood:

> Chant no more your old rhymes about bold Robin Hood,
> His feats I but little admire
> I will sing the Atchievements of General Ludd
> Now the Hero of Nottinghamshire
> Brave Ludd was to measures of violence unused
> Till his sufferings became so severe
> That at last to defend his own Interest he rous'd
> And for the great work did prepare.

After eulogizing the general's military prowess, the ballad praises Ludd's sense of justice and grounds his authority in a vote of the Trade:

> The guilty may fear, but no vengeance he aims
> At [the] honest man's life or Estate
> His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames
> And to those that old prices abate
> These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die
> By unanimous vote of the Trade
> And Ludd who can all opposition defy
> Was the grand Executioner made.[47]

Ludd's role as "grand Executioner" surfaces in another renowned Midlands document, "Declaration; Extraordinary," dated November 1811 and

addressed "To our well-beloved Brother, and Captain in Chief, Edward Ludd." Having determined the guilt of master Charles Lacy, responsible for accumulating wealth through the production of "fraudulent Cotton Point Nett," the assembled "General Agitators" determine a penalty and put Ludd in charge of executing it:

> In default whereof, we do command that you inflict the Punishment of Death on the said Charles Lacy, and we do authorize you to distribute among [the party] you may employ for that purpose the Sum of Fifty Pounds, we enjoin you to cause this our Order to be presented to the said Charles Lacy without Delay.
>
> November 1811—By Order Thos Death.[48]

By adopting legalistic expressions such as "whereas, it hath been represented to us," "it appeareth to us," and "in default whereof," the text mimics the language and even the lettering of legal writs and governmental proclamations.[49] Above all, the declaration reveals the determination of the community to enforce the customary legislation through which the knitters had traditionally levied fines or forfeitures against those trade members, usually masters, who violated the trade's rules. Because the manufacturers were now ignoring trade customs and usages—with the tacit consent of national and local authorities—the knitters assess matters of jurisdiction, judgment, forfeiture, and punishment to invest Ludd with the mandate of enforcing their decisions as well as bringing renewed attention to a charter that was falling into obscurity. My wager is that such an investiture was nothing less than a *transfer of symbolic power* from the community to a leader effected by means of a set of performative utterances.

As we have seen, Pierre Bordieu argues that symbolic power ultimately rests with a ministry who is authorized by the community to act on the social words through words and magic gestures. In our case, the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters transfers its institutional power to a representative (Ludd) who in turn mediates between the group and the social world at large.[50] If the *constituent movement* from the institution to the ministry is well evident in the texts analyzed here, the second movement of *mediation* between the workers and the social world transpires from the Luddite texts of the other regions.

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THE GENERAL OF THE ARMY OF REDRESSERS

The situation in Yorkshire presented similarities and differences with the Midlands. The West Riding cloth dressers or croppers enjoyed a great deal of power within the wool trades, which had been sanctioned by three statutory protections regulating apprenticeship and limiting the use of gig mills and other finishing machines. Unlike their Midlands counterparts, however, croppers and shearmen could not rely on a constituent document such as the charter. Thus, in the two decades leading up to Luddism, they had explored both legal and illegal avenues to contrast the progressive erosion of their statutes, which were eventually repealed by Parliament in 1809.

In 1796, the clothworkers had founded the Brief Institution, an organization that built on their local societies with the purpose of preventing the hiring of "illegal" workers. As Adriall Randall notes, the Brief Institution

> provided the means, far better than before, of scrutinising recruitment to the trade by issuing membership cards, of enforcing closed shops, and of regulating the tramp system. It enabled information on disputes to be diffused more completely than before and, most important, it ensured that any employer standing out against his workmen's demands faced the weight and financial resources not only of the local cloth dressers but of all the region.[51]

In other words, the Brief Institution provided a basic organizational structure that allowed croppers to share information and enforce their statutes when manufacturers tried to raise above them. Between 1799 and 1804, cloth dressers destroyed two gig mills in Holbeck and Huddersfield and forced a manufacturer to take down a third one in Leeds. Until 1809, this combination of legal and violent tactics proved quite successful in limiting the introduction of new labor-saving machines. Moreover, although the Brief Institution was unsanctioned by the Crown, it brought the West Riding cloth dressers into closer cooperation with their peers in the West of England, teaching them that "neither their problems nor their solutions were entirely local."[52] But when the national petitions to introduce serious checks on gig mills and shearing frames failed, and Parliament repealed their statutes, the croppers lost faith in the possibility of improving their

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condition by legal means and reverted to the violent methods that had yielded some results at the turn of the century.

The recognition of the complicity between the industrial capitalists who sought to control the labor market and the government is apparent in the Luddite writings of Yorkshire. Such documents are generally more political than the Midlands' counterparts at least in three respects. First, they tend to target not only manufacturers but also local authorities and magistrates, who were held responsible for carrying out the government repression against the machine breakers. Second, they have an expansive character in that they try to establish links with other workers both inside and outside the wool trade and to wield these relationships into a national struggle against the government (usually identified with the "corrupt" figure of the Prince Regent). Third, they frequently employ Jacobin discourse and Paineite motifs, occasionally advocating a kingdomwide revolution.

In regard to the latter point, Adrian Randall notes that the West Riding's decentralized productive structure—also known as the Domestic System—was particularly conducive to the Painite ideals of a democratic community of small, independent producers. "The ethos of the Domestic System," writes Randall, "reflected a society of small capitalists, conscious of personal rights and liberties and jealous of any encroachment by the large merchant capitalists whose role, they believed, should be confined solely to selling and not manufacturing cloth."[53]

The Yorkshire document that best exemplifies this expansive movement from the local to the national, the interdependence of economic and political issues, and the rejection of undemocratic political systems is a letter addressed "To Mr Smith Searing Frame Holder at Hill End Yorkshire" on March 9 or 10, 1812. Signed by the "General of the Army of Redressers Ned Ludd Clerk," it begins with the usual warning: "Information has just been given in that you are a holder of those detestable Shearing Frames, and I was desired by my Men to write to you and give you a fair Warning to pull them down."[54] After threatening to burn Smith's manufactory to ashes, the writer mentions the existence of a local popular force, "the Army of Huddersfields," composed of "2782 Sworn Heroes," ready to "perish" in the act of redressing their grievances.[55] The uprising, the General ensures, will not be an isolated initiative:

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> By the latest Letters from our Correspondents we learn that the Manufacturers in the following Places are going to rise and join us in redressing their Wrongs Viz. Wakefield, Halifax, Bradford, Sheffield, Oldham, Rochdale and all the Cotton Country where the brave Mr Hanson will lead them on to Victory. the weawers in Glasgow and many parts of Scotland will join us the Papists in Ireland are rising. . . . But we hope for assistance from the French Emperor in shaking off the Yoke of the Rottenest, Wickedest and most Tyranious Government that ever existed; then down come the Hanover Tyrants, all our Tyrants from the greatest to the smallest. and we will be governed by a just Republic, and may the Almighty hasten those happy Times is the Wish and Prayer of Millions in this Land, but we won't only pray but we will fight, the Redcoats shall know that when the proper time comes We will never lay down our Arms. The House of Commons passes an Act to put down all Machinery hurtful to Commonality, and repeal that to hang Frame Breakers. But we. We Petition no more that won't do fighting must.[56]

In a few sentences, the letter unveils the existence of an underground network linking the West Riding Luddites to the Northwestern cotton districts, invokes the demise of a corrupted monarchic line and the advent of the republic, and declares the end of petitioning as a viable instrument for the redressing of grievances. In other words, the emphasis shifts here from *constitution* to *mediation,* which enables the General to coordinate different Luddite initiatives across the country. Furthermore, the source of Ludd's power seems to stem from the numeric force of his army rather than from a legal document such as the charter. Such a shift can be explained partly with the fact that Yorkshire Luddism was more violent than in the Midlands and partly with the fact that Ludd had already been constituted in Nottinghamshire. By the time it reached Yorkshire, the eponym was already "charged" with a certain symbolic power, which was appropriated by the croppers without having the need to ground it in a formal authorizing context such as the charter.

This argument needs to be qualified in two respects, first, by noting the existence of songs that celebrate machine breaking (along with the unruly attitude of the croppers), that is, the existence of a specific, self-referential subculture that was autonomous and self-sufficient.[57] Second, I examine a curious letter, archived in the Radcliffe Papers, sent from

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"Peter Plush, Secretery to General Ludd" to "Mr Edward Ludd Market Place Huddersfield."[58]

The letter, the only known document sent from a Ludd to a Ludd, is dated May 1, 1812, three days after the assassination of William Horsfall in Yorkshire. Since the text does not mention this topical event, E. P. Thompson speculates that the letter was written by a "freelance Nottinghamshire Luddite" who may not have heard of the murder yet.[59] This hypothesis is validated by the fact that the only concrete information conveyed by the writer is a report on the status of Luddite activism in Nottinghamshire. After professing Luddite potency and expressing regret for the death of two Luddites in the attack on Rawfolds Mills, Plush, writing on behalf of General Ludd, states that although his troops are currently idle, they are "devising the best means for a grand attack" and "dispatching a few individuals by pistel shot."[60] The letter has no postmark, and Thompson argues that it was "more intended to alarm the authorities than to communicate with Yorkshire Luddites."[61]

In his analysis of the letter, Binfield seems to agree with Thompson. However, he does not exclude "the possibility that the letter was intended for an internal audience . . . of machine breakers."[62] If this is true, then the document would support Thompson's general classification of the anonymous threatening letters published in *The London Gazette* between 1750 and 1820 on the basis of two distinct types of recipients: an audience of employers and rich superiors; and an audience of fellow workers and social equals. While until the 1790s the letters largely fall in the first group, after 1790 the second group, consisting mostly of handwritten placards and handbills, enlarges.[63] Plush's letter clearly belongs to this second group, thus revealing the possibility that the Luddites might have employed the improper name not only to threaten manufacturers and authorities, but also to communicate internally across the country.

Contacts among Luddite delegates from different regions are indeed reported by the authorities and are documented in the Home Office Papers. For instance, in April 1812, a handbill addressed "To Whitefield Luddites" appears in Prestwich, Lancashire, requiring them "to be ready on the shortest notice to join our army."[64] There is only scattered evidence, however, that the name Ned Ludd was consistently used for organizational purposes. More likely, when intended for an internal audience, the eponym

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had a concentrating and mythmaking function, that is, of offering a focal point to a disparate set of narratives of resistance.

NORTHWESTERN WRITINGS

This concentrating function is particularly evident in the Northwest, where Luddism blends disparate discourses—including wage complaints, opposition to labor-saving machinery, distress caused by high food prices, and frustration at the government. According to Binfield, the spurious character of Northwestern Luddism is due to the lack, among the laboring populations of the cotton districts, of "long-standing traditions of collective activity, organic identity, and social practice that would have been imparted by an ancient and communitarian trade."[65] In fact, the nineteenth-century cotton trade did not stem from craftsmanship and was largely a by-product of the Industrial Revolution. Until the 1760s, cotton was essentially carded and spun by hand in the spinners' own houses and woven at hand looms by the weavers. But the automation of weaving ignited by the invention of the flying shuttle (1733) and the opening of new markets in Europe and the Americas spurred a considerable growth in the demand for yarn, leaving the weavers wanting more than the spinners could supply. This growing demand stimulated in turn the invention of new machines that automated the spinning process. These included the spinning jenny (1764), the water frame (1769), the spinning mule (1779), the power-loom (1884), and the dressing frame (1803). As a result, "by 1830 hand-spinning was dead and all the processes previous to weaving were carried on by complicated machinery in factories, whilst weaving was partly done in factories, by power-looms worked by girls, but partly still by hand-loom weavers in their own houses."[66]

The opening of new markets and the output increase of suitable cotton yarn attracted to the Manchester region a soaring population of weavers and spinners, affecting dramatically labor (and power) relationships within the trade. Until the 1760s, the Manchester small-ware and check-weavers had tried to resist the uncontrolled influx of untrained labor by securing legal enforcement of apprenticeship. But lacking a well-established trade, their attempts were quickly defeated. Meanwhile, the exponential growth in productivity due to technological change made the British exports so

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competitive that new jobs were constantly created. Thus, between 1788 and 1803, a period described by William Radcliffe as the "great golden age of this trade," the booming cotton industry afforded prosperity even for the lowest ranks of the profession—the journeymen weavers.[67]

Nonetheless, the soaring output of machine yarn disguised a more essential loss of status for the category. Within a completely deregulated labor market, the old artisans were quickly assimilated into the scores of new workers—displaced farmers, former soldiers, and Irish immigrants—who entered the lower ranks of the profession with little, if any, training. Thus as soon as the Napoleonic Wars set off a gradual but steady decline in the exports wages also decreased, as manufacturers were able to keep them at recession level.[68] Furthermore, as wages were beaten down, the number of weavers continued to grow, supplying a considerable reservoir of workforce. Moreover, the Combination Acts curbed the weavers' bargaining power, making their position even more defenseless.

In March 1800, the journeymen weavers of Chester, York, Lancashire, and Derby petitioned Parliament demanding a regulation of their wages. The weavers did not call for the fixation of a standard price but for the possibility of opening up a bargaining process directly with the manufacturers.[69] In response, the Pitt government gave them the Cotton Arbitration Act (1803), a piece of legislation that instituted a complicated arbitration process for the settling of disputes over wages. The law provided that each party could appoint an arbitrator. If the arbitrators could not reach an agreement, either of them had the power to require the intervention of a Justice of the Peace, whose decision would be final. But although the act empowered the arbitrator, it did not *compel* him to act. As soon as the manufacturers discovered this flaw, they "amused themselves by appointing an arbitrator living in London or some other distant place who had no intention of acting, with the result that the arbitration went no further."[70]

Having verified the failure of the Arbitration Acts to protect their interests, the weavers began organizing along different lines from stockingers and croppers. Whereas the latter relied on charters and statutes, the weavers had to earn their legal protections from scratch. Thus, in 1807 and 1811, the Lancashire and Cheshire weavers petitioned Parliament, demanding the introduction of a minimum wage bill. In 1808, despite the Combination Acts, they organized a large strike in the Manchester

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area. But both minimum wage petitions were rejected, and the strike had a limited effect. Shortly thereafter, the bad harvests of 1809–11 made the price of provisions soar. Increasingly desperate, the weavers begun adopting Luddite tactics, which quickly blended with food riots and other forms of political agitation.

Even though it does not make explicit use of the eponym, this anonymous letter addressed to the factory owner of the Holywell Twist Company, a large cotton works located in Holywell, Flintshire, in May 1812, draws an explicit link between the low salaries and the high costs of food:

> Sr. If you do not advance the wages of all your workmen at Holywell, you shall have all your mills burnt to the ground immediately. it is harder upon many of us here than upon those who receive parish relief. we are starving by inches by reason of our small wages & provisions so high. You had better be content with a moderate profit, than have your mills destroyed. You know how it is with Burton & Goodier & many others. It will be the same with you in a few days, if you do not advance all hands. All the Miners and Colliers are ready to join us. 3000 men can be collected in a few hours
>
> The poor cry aloud for bread
> Prince Regent shall lose his head
> And all the rich who oppress the poor
> In a little time shall be no more
>
> Take care you be not in the number of the oppressors. we cannot wait but a very few days, we are ready for blood or bread, anything is better than starving by inches.[71]

Besides providing a rare example of an anonymous letter containing lines of verse, the text explicitly threatens the mills' destruction as a response to the low wages and high food prices, questions unbounded profit making, foreshadows the gathering of an army, and links these economic demands and the possible show of force to the Jacobin celebration of the sovereign's beheading. According to E. P. Thompson, this mix of industrial demands and political claims reflects the peculiar composition of Northwestern Luddism. As previously noted, Thompson's argument is that the Combination Acts had unwittingly brought into association the weavers agitating for a

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minimum wage with small groups of republicans and radicals operating in Lancashire since the 1790s. "Thus when Luddism came to Lancashire it did not move into a vacuum," writes Thompson. "There were already, in Manchester and the larger centers, artisan unions, secret committees of weavers, and some old and new groups of Painite Radicals, with an ebullient Irish fringe."[72]

Even if Thompson's analysis has been questioned by those historians who tend to emphasize the local and apolitical nature of the movement, his reading of Northwestern Luddism as a hotbed of political radicalism is sound and can be verified through a rhetorical analysis of Manchester-area documents. As Binfield points out,

> three types of discourse surround Manchester Luddism. The first is petition. The second is a language of economic analysis that, although not macroeconomic in any real sense, does consider economic issues that extend beyond the rather confined purview of any particular trade. The third is Jacobin language. Luddite rhetoric blended with each of these discourses, but all of them have in common a hierarchical perspective . . . in other words they tended to look to the top, to those locations where power in a larger sense tended to reside.[73]

In regard to the first discourse, Binfield notes how, in the years leading up to Luddism, different petitions were sent to Parliament from Manchester and other cotton towns but very few, if any, from the weaving cotton trade as a whole. The lack of a trade history and trade institutions in charge of setting professional standards and bargaining protocols was not conducive to the development of a trade awareness. Furthermore, as John Bohstedt has shown, the Manchester authorities were conservative, unable to cope with the rapid growth of the cotton industry, and unwilling to include working-class Mancunians in negotiations.[74] Given such a gap between the elites and the working classes, it is no surprise that the weavers preferred to look outside of their communities for relief rather than to their employers.

In some circumstances, Luddite writers express an awareness of the larger political implications of their actions by denouncing the autocratic nature of the British government and engaging in curious exercises of comparative political science. Such is the case of the only known Luddite

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letter signed by a woman, Eliza Ludd, and addressed to a Manchester factory owner named Mr. Simpson:

> Sir,
>
> Doubtless you are well acquainted with the Political History of America, if so you must confess that, it was ministerial tyranny that gave rise to that glorious spirit in which the British Colonies obtain'd their independence by force of arms, at a period, when we was ten times as strong as now!—if bands of husbandmen could do this, in spite of all the force our government was then able to employ—cannot such an action be accomplish'd here, now the military strength of the country is so reduced—Consider Sir, what a few troops there is at present in England,—remember that none can be call'd home; because that would relinquishing the little we have gain'd to the fury of the enemy—little indeed to have coss'd so much money and such torrents of blood, yes British blood!————————let me persuad you to quit your present post, lay by your sword, and become a friend of the oppress'd—for curs'd his the man that even lifts a straw against the sacred cause of Liberty.[75]

It is unclear why the writer chose a female pseudonym, but, as we have seen, there are a few documented episodes in which the Luddites staged inversions of gender roles. For sure, the letter is quite sophisticated both stylistically and in its ability to link opposition to the wars (a theme shared by many Northwestern writers) to sincere patriotism, or in decoupling "ministerial tyranny" from true British nationalism. The meaning of this distinction can be better grasped against the backdrop of the new political climate created by the April 8 riots at the Manchester Exchange.

Although, until early 1812, the Prince Regent was generally considered a supporter of the Whigs and of political reform, his choice of confirming Spencer Perceval (a conservative and a former prosecutor of Thomas Paine) as prime minister in a moment of social unrest made him suddenly unpopular. The riots at the stock exchange—which saw a high participation of young weavers—marked a turn in the public feelings toward the Crown and a revamping of Jacobin initiative. Previously to April 8, "Church-and-King was the favourite cry and hunting 'Jacobins' a safe sport," one old reformer later recalled. "But we had no Church-and-King mobs after that!"[76]

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Two weeks later, the city of Middleton became the theater of the bloodiest events associated with Luddism. On April 20, 1812, a crowd of several thousand people attacked Daniel Burton's power mill. Like William Cartwright's mill in Yorkshire, the power mill was defended by armed guards, who killed three people during the attack. The following morning, a larger crowd gathered and burned down Burton's house. Here, writes Thompson, it was met by the military, "at whose hands at least seven were killed and many more wounded."[77] After this episode, the attacks on machinery in the Manchester region declined, but several informants report an increase in oath taking, arms raids, and other insurrectionary preparations in the following months. In other words, throughout spring and summer 1812, Jacobin and Luddite agitations seemed to overlap in the Manchester region, as illustrated by the recurring presence of Jacobin and Painite motifs in the Luddite writings of the period.

The convergence of industrial, economic, and political protest is also quite visible in the wide range of pseudonyms adopted by Northwestern Luddites. While in Yorkshire and the Midlands the name Ned Ludd is frequently preceded by aggrandizing appellations such as "General," "Captain," and "King," which bestow on him executive and military power, in the Northwest the eponym is interspersed with eccentric variations, such as Eliza Ludd, alternative pseudonyms, such as "General Justice," "Falstaff," and "Thomas Paine," or curious Latin denominations, such as "L . . . Teoxperorator," "Iulius—Lt. de Luddites," and "Ludd finis est."

This wide gamut of signatures and writing styles, and the frequent use of Latin expressions and literary references, raises questions about the education of Northwestern writers.[78] "Perhaps," writes Binfield, "the figure of General Ludd is a 'transclass bridge' (effective because imported from another region) between a systemic awareness and the expression of basic human suffering."[79] Here Binfield seems to follow Thompson's contention that in the Northwest, industrial grievances, economic struggles, and political campaigns entered, if only for a short time, a relationship of contiguity and mutual exchange. According to Binfield, Ludd was the name of this relationship, functioning here as a metonym rather than as an eponym organically growing out of its own subculture.

To assess the cogency of Binfield's distinction between Ludd as eponym (in Yorkshire and Notthinghamshire) and Ludd as metonymy (in the

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Northwest) that links different struggles, I first draw a distinction between the reductionist properties of metonymy and the expansive properties of synecdoche. Then I rely on a rhetorical analysis of Luddite discourse to advance a new political reading of Luddism.

SYNECDOCHE, HEGEMONY, NED LUDD

Russian linguist Roman Jakobson was the first to describe metaphor and metonymy as the fundamental "poles" of language, operating respectively along the axes of similarity (in absentia) and contiguity (in presentia). While the former allows one to apprehend a phenomenon figuratively by replacing a term or expression with another term drawn from a different semantic field (in Greek, *metaphor* means "to transfer, to carry over"), the latter replaces a term with another to which it is closely associated (in Greek, *metonymy* means "name change").[80] Drawing from Jakobson's original insight, linguists have classified a whole range of metonymic substitutions, including the cause for the effect, the material for the thing, the agent for the act, or the container for the content. When a term denoting a part of something is used to denote the whole thing, we encounter a synecdoche, a trope usually defined as a specific typology or class of metonymy.

Hayden White has advanced an alternative and suggestive analysis of the relationship between synecdoche and metonymy. Metonymic substitutions, argues White, remain confined within the same semantic field. For instance, if the expression "fifty sails" is used to denote "fifty ships," "it is suggested that 'ships' are in some sense identifiable with that *part* of themselves without which they cannot operate."[81] But if we use the expression "he is all heart," writes White, "the term 'heart' is to be understood figuratively as designating, not a part of the body, but the *quality* of character conventionally *symbolized* by the term 'heart' in Western culture."[82] White contends that the movement from part to whole characteristic of metonymy gives way in this case to a movement from microcosm to macrocosm, in which the former undergoes *a qualitative transformation*. It follows that synecdoche is not just a type of metonymy but a *hybrid trope* that combines metonymic reductions with the figurative aspects of metaphor.

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My wager is that when the eponym Ned Ludd migrated to the Northwest, it underwent a qualitative transformation, which, from a rhetorical standpoint, is akin to the hybrid properties of synecdoche outlined by White. On one hand, especially in the Midlands and Yorkshire, Ned Ludd is strictly associated with machine breaking, thereby functioning as a metonymical substitution of the agent for the act or as someone who destroys the obnoxious machines on behalf of the community. On the other hand, especially in the Northeast, the name functions synecdochically by integrating economic and political demands into a wider struggle for social justice and political reform. If this is true, then the question is whether Ludd articulates each demand into a whole that is more than the sum of its parts or whether the improper name resurfaces within different discursive practices (the agitation for higher wages, for the republic, against unregulated apprenticeship, and so forth) without articulating them into a new whole, and therefore without constituting the social groups behind these demands into a unified subject of enunciation.

In the latter case, Ned Ludd would be an ambiguous signifier, floating between different signifieds without affecting or transforming their substance. In the former case, the improper name would function as what Ernesto Laclau calls an "empty signifier," a sign that empties itself out of its attachment to a particular signified (in our case, machine breaking) to represent a signifying system in its totality.[83]

Drawing on Marx, Laclau argues that the empty signifier is a general equivalent of sorts that encompasses differential identities that are not "strong enough" to have a signifier of their own. In the social field, it functions as a semantic conveyor belt by enabling a group or a class "to present itself as realizing the broader aims either of emancipating or ensuring order for wider masses of the population."[84] In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* Laclau and Mouffe call "this relation, by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it . . . a *hegemonic relation.*"[85] Subsequently, Laclau has added the important proviso that "the presence of empty signifiers . . . is the very condition of hegemony."[86]

In Marxian terms, the empty signifier can be compared to the money form in that it establishes a relation of equivalence among different terms (exchange value) by overriding and subverting their differential characters

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(use value). Laclau argues that this principle of equivalence is not predicated on a positive foundation, an ultimate ground that would be the source of all societal differences. Rather, following de Saussure, he maintains that "1) each identity is what it is only through its difference from the other ones; 2) that the context has to be a closed one—if all identities depend on the differential *system,* unless the latter defines its own limits, no identity would be finally constituted."[87] It follows that the differences internal to the context are not constitutive but receive their meaning and identity from something that by standing *outside* of the system traces its boundaries. In other words, the system has no essence of its own, as it is defined by a "radical otherness" that both constitutes and threatens it from without.[88] Yet, because the system needs to manifest in the symbolic field, argues Laclau, it will do so through particular signifiers, which contingently assume the function of representation. An empty signifier is thus a signifier that makes "its own particularity the signifying body of a universal representation," in the same way as gold has both a use value and an exchange value or Jesus is both a human being and the incarnation of divine essence. In the political field, the empty signifier hegemonizes the differential identities internal to a system by setting itself in opposition to the Other that defines the boundaries of the system and threatens its existence.[89]

Now, to understand whether Ludd was an empty signifier articulating multiple demands and social groups in a hegemonic relation or an ambiguous signifier floating among different signifieds without integrating them into a new whole, I shall first return to E. P. Thompson's definition of class consciousness. Then I compare and contrast his position to other interpretations of Luddism and reach my conclusion.

THE LUDDITE ASSEMBLAGE AND THE QUESTION OF CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Thompson's definition of class consciousness revolves around three key elements. First, he broadly defines class consciousness as the way in which the class experience is handled in cultural terms: "If the experience appears as [economically] determined, class-consciousness does not."[90] Second, as we have seen, Thompson claims that class consciousness is not a given but

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the result of a long, tortuous *process of unification* whereby different sectors of the working class begin to understand their interests as common. Third, because "class is a relationship, and not a thing," this process is of an *antagonistic nature*; that is, the working people feel the identity of their own interests inasmuch as they have to confront employers and rulers, who also behave as a class.[91]

As we have seen, Luddism was not only an antagonistic movement of direct action against machines, the manufacturers, and the magistrates who withdrew from a web of communal relations but also a distinctive subculture within the popular Radicalism of the early nineteenth century. Its unifying force is apparent from the fact that the eponym spread across regions marked by different productive histories and demographics. If Luddism was exclusively, as Calhoun and others have suggested, a phenomenon growing out of community roots, it would have remained confined within a craft community or a trade. In this sense, the reading of Luddism as a community phenomenon is limited and needs to be supplemented with an analysis that situates Luddism at least within a national framework.

A first approach, shared by liberal and Marxist historians, is that Luddism was a popular response to an authoritarian regime, which had dismantled the old paternalist legislation, forestalled unionization, and stifled political liberties at a time in which the Napoleonic Empire threatened the very basis of monarchic power in Europe. In this repressive climate, collective bargaining by riot immediately acquired a political significance. Because every attack on machinery was in a sense an act of defiance against the constituted order, it is plausible (if difficult to prove) that Lancashire and Yorkshire Luddites sided with the Radicals who were conspiring against the monarchy. Simply put, Thompson's political reading of Luddism is a compelling hypothesis because textile workers and republicans shared the opposition to a common enemy.

In a way, this reading of Luddism resembles Rosa Luxemburg's analysis of the Russian Revolution of 1905.[92] Commenting on Luxemburg's text, Laclau notes that if the mass strike had become the most popular form of struggle of the time, it is because it was able to connect partial struggles, economic and political demands, in their opposition to the tsarist autocracy.[93] Thus these partial demands form a chain of equivalence not because they share something positive but because an external, negative

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force (the tsarist regime, in this case) flattens their differences by frustrating them all. It follows that when this force is lifted or absent—as in the case of democratic regimes that allow for a "healthy" development of class conflict and the exercise of political liberties—the differential identity of each demand should resurface.

This is precisely what happened in England after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the Luddite riots. As previously noted, the repeal of the Combination Acts (1824–25) paved the way both to the eight-hour working day movement and Chartism. Whereas the former signaled a shift from the attacks on machinery to an intensification of the struggle over wages, the latter created the conditions for the integration of the working class in the democratic political system. This possible "return" of economic and political struggles to their differential identity allows us also to shed a fresh light on the aforementioned ideological battle underlying Luddite historiography.

As we have seen, liberals, sociologists, and Marxists agree on the fact that Luddism expressed a popular and exasperated reaction against a repressive regime that crushed every form of dissent. Yet while the liberals and the sociologists would probably describe Ludd as an ambiguous signifier that shifted among different grievances and demands without establishing a durable and transformative relationship among them, Thompson would argue that the movement had at least the potential of becoming an empty signifier capable of articulating a hegemonic relation between a particular practice (machine breaking) and a general struggle for social justice. According to Thompson, if this relationship did not solidify a hegemonic bloc, it is not because the British political system suddenly became more democratic but because machine breaking did not prove to be a viable tactic, especially in the Northwest, where the attacks on power-looms lasted only few weeks.

Thompson notes that in comparison to the stocking and shearing frames, "the power-loom was a costly machine, only recently introduced, employed only in a very few steam-powered mills, and not to be found scattered in small workshops over the countryside."[94] Thus the attacks on this kind of machine became extremely predictable, and more likely to meet an armed resistance, as demonstrated by the tragic events of Middleton. Furthermore, whereas in the Midlands and Yorkshire the new

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labor-saving machines supplanted traditional machinery, the power-loom had been introduced at a time in which the cotton industry was booming, making it appear as a source of wealth rather than a threatening, obnoxious technology. Thus "there must have been very many (and probably a majority) of weavers who doubted of the efficacy of resistance to the new machines as such."[95]

Thus if machine breaking quickly declined in the Northwest, it is because the workers chose to prioritize other forms of conflict, namely, the struggle over wages. This is precisely Marx's argument in *Capital,* where he claims that in its early stages, the workers' struggle against capital takes the form of a struggle against machinery. After briefly mentioning the Luddite riots in the context of the repressive measures adopted by the British government, Marx writes,

> It took both time and experience before the workers learnt to distinguish between machinery and its employment by capital, and therefore to transfer their attacks from the material instruments of production to the form of society which utilizes those instruments. The struggles over wages within the manufacturing system presuppose manufacture, and are in no sense directed against its existence. The opposition to the establishment of manufactures proceeds from the guild-masters and the privileged towns, not from the wage-labourers.[96]

On one hand, Marx's reading of Luddism seems to support the progressives' argument on the regressive character of Luddism. But on the other hand, the reference to machine breaking as an early manifestation of the struggle between labor and capital is not incompatible with Thompson's reading of the movement as a primeval form of class consciousness. What is more relevant to our analysis, the antagonism set by Marx between the guilds and the manufacturing system is neither equivalent nor symmetrical with the struggle between waged labor and capital. Whereas the former is a manifestation of a systemic antagonism between the feudal and the capitalist modes of production, the latter points to a conflict that takes place *within* the capitalist mode of production.

As previously noted, the three strands of scholarship share the vision that Luddism was a popular reaction to an authoritarian government

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that did not allow collective bargaining and other forms of democratic participation. Yet this superficial agreement conceals a more fundamental disagreement. If the liberals see Luddism as a manifestation of a *systemic opposition* between capitalism and the remnants of the feudal order, the Marxists see it as something that, although originating from such an antagonism, can prepare the ground for a class struggle *internal to the capitalist system*. In fact, for Thompson and Hobsbawm, the continuity between these two kinds of antagonisms lies in the continuity of laboring practices.

This shifting of antagonism from the outside to the inside of the capitalist system is reflected by the aforementioned shift in Luddite discourse. If in the Midlands and Yorkshire, Ludd is metonymically anchored to a specific signified—namely, the destruction of machinery on behalf of the community—in the Northwest, Ludd loses this material reference and floats among different signifieds. In a context in which labor has already been subsumed by capital, Ludd is no longer confronting the capitalist system as Other but has to engage with a complex set of demands and positions that do not stand in a relation of absolute exteriority to industrial capitalism. To be sure, even in the Northwest, the eponym personifies the strife of the poor, opposition to the monarchy, and the manufacturers' greed. But it cannot articulate these differential identities hegemonically—that is, it cannot articulate them in a relation of equivalence—insofar as the limits of the system are set here not by capitalism but by an authoritarian regime that bars the unfolding of a truly democratic (capitalist) dialectic. In Yorkshire, conversely, opposition to the government conceals a more fundamental antagonism between the highly regulated Domestic System inherited from the Middle Ages and capitalism. Finally, the systemic antagonism between the two modes of production emerges in its "pure form" in Nottinghamshire and the Midlands, where Ludd is least politicized.

In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* Laclau and Mouffe argue that hegemony presupposes the existence of an open social field in which antagonistic forces struggle for the articulation of floating identities in a plurality of political spaces (local and national elections, industrial relations, rural and urban economies, etc.). These complex formations are typical of advanced capitalist societies. Conversely, a social formation whose boundaries are rigidly determined and in which identities are assigned a fixed position does not allow for the articulation of a hegemonic practice: "We will therefore

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speak of *democratic* struggles, where these imply a plurality of political spaces, and of *popular* struggles where certain discourses *tendentially* construct the division of a single political space in two opposed fields."[97]

In this light, Luddism can be seen as a mixed movement that embeds elements of both a popular struggle and, especially in the Northwest, a democratic struggle. This ambiguity can also be grasped in rhetorical terms. In the Midlands and Yorkshire, the name Ned Ludd is assigned a fairly stable symbolic function by means of a metonymic exchange between agent and act. In the Northwest, Ludd moves toward abstraction by establishing, if only for a short time, a synecdochic link between a material microcosm (machine breaking) and an immaterial macrocosm (the demand for social justice, as envisioned by a plurality of subjects). But ultimately Luddism *fails* to constitute a durable hegemonic link among different social forces—or in Gramscian terms, to constitute a hegemonic bloc—insofar as machine breaking was inadequate to bring together subjects that were unified by their common opposition to an authoritarian government but not necessarily to the capitalist system per se. Or, to put in positive terms, whereas some Luddites rejected industrial capitalism en bloc, other Luddites were ready to overthrow the government and negotiate higher wages.

It is worth remarking that in the Northwest, the improper name circulated in a number of instances detached from the original practice or signified for which it stood. We have seen how this movement toward abstraction is already under way in Yorkshire, where the collective appointment of Ludd as the agent–spokesperson for the community (originally performed in Nottinghamshire) is taken for granted and does not need to be formally repeated. But it becomes fully manifest only in the Northwest, where, by entering an open social field, the eponym takes a life of its own. One wonders, however, whether to acquire a new meaning within an open social field such as the Northwest, the initial baptism of the eponym did not have to be renewed or reformulated on a new basis.

Such a dilemma informs the entire problematic of the improper names discussed in this book. If the initial baptism of a collective pseudonym is always a constituent act, the circulation of the alias inevitably subjects the name to unforeseen appropriations, thereby weakening its original performative force. At the same time, the distinctive feature of the improper

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name is precisely to eschew fixation by incorporating a plurality of usages that cannot easily be reduced to one. From this angle in migrating from Nottinghamshire to Yorkshire to the Northwestern cotton districts, Ludd changed in nature and became a "multiple-use name"—a term that emphasizes a more decentralized use of a pseudonym. This shift signals that, while in the Midlands and Yorkshire, Ludd was endowed with a symbolic power that expressed the internal unity of knitters and croppers, once it entered the Northwest, the eponym catalyzed a set of demands that were too heterogeneous to be articulated as one.

Thus, drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, we can say that as it enters the Northwest, Luddism functions as an *assemblage of enunciation,* that is, a network of pragmatic actions and semiotic expressions that are connected but also enjoy a relative autonomy from one another.[98] These actions (machine breaking, strikes, riots) and texts (letters, declarations, manifestos) are linked to one another, presuppose each other (e.g., the request for higher wages cannot really be advanced in the context of an autocratic state), but are also clearly distinct from one another, as became clear in the ensuing decades with the parallel development of Chartism and the eight-hour movement. (As we have seen, political and economic demands enjoy a relative autonomy within a democratic political space.) Deleuze and Guattari maintain that assemblages are dynamic formations that are caught up in a double movement of territorialization and deterritorialization, or, as Nicholas Thoburn puts it, "are determined as much by what escapes them as by what they fix."[99] In this respect, Northwestern Luddism functions as the line of flight that, by attaching itself to the deterritorializations brought about by the Industrial Revolution, opens up the Luddite assemblage to modern, democratic forms of class struggle.

Thus the question of whether Luddism contributed to the development of a modern working-class consciousness can be answered positively by adding the important proviso that it could do so *only by becoming something other than itself.* If we follow Thompson's definition of class consciousness as a nonlinear process of unification, then Luddism was certainly a significant stage in this process. Its heterogeneous character suggests that such consciousness was internally divided into multiple consciousnesses, some of which looked backward, at the defense of traditional political economies, and some of which looked forward, at forms of class struggle

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that existed only in an embryonic form in the 1810s.[100] From this angle, Ned Ludd is the improper name of the fault line where the customary laws regulating the traditional world of craft are about to be swallowed and the new world of modern industrial relations has not yet emerged. And this is not only because the eponym was adopted by workers who happened to be contemporaries while de facto belonging to different temporalities. If the Luddite assemblage linked singular and incongruent processes of subjectivation, it is also because each appropriation of the name *could not be integrated into the assemblage without transforming it from within*. In this sense, the circulation of the eponym across different regions opened it up to molecular and idiosyncratic usages that ultimately undermined its ability to function as an empty signifier representing a system in its totality. (This does not mean, however, that the pseudonym lacked such potentiality. I will return to the tension between multiplicity and identity, constitution from within and constitution from without, potentiality and actualization, in the conclusion.)

Finally, in retrospect, we can say that Ned Ludd exceeds *by far* the historic conditions of Luddism and acquires a whole new significance with the emergence of the modern culture industry. The next chapter discusses in fact the introduction of a new collective pseudonym for bargaining purposes. But rather than being associated with illegal practices and social unrest, Allen Smithee materializes within the hyperregulated world of Hollywood labor relations at a critical historic juncture for the film industry. Perhaps, in lieu of the analysis of Luddism advanced in this chapter, it is not surprising if the authorizing context of this pseudonym was an organization, the Directors Guild of America, whose name and mission evoke the self-regulation of a qualified craft. Yet, as we shall see, the accumulation of negative reputation in a shared pseudonym had unpredictable effects for its parent organization.

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