

Notes on the Non-Identical and Intellectual Production

I write this opening paragraph toward the end of my thoughts. I suppose these are fragmented mediations on identity, mimetics, reproduction, replica, the institution, disciplinarity, the (post)colonial condition, and the relation of these concepts to cognitive form and intellectual production. Such things boiling over cycle through myself. It is an unsuccessful experiment in attempting to settle what I find unsettled within my cognitive space or reach—an interrogation of intellectual production. These passages are not in the service of uncovering ‘a self’ but a way of navigating a constitution; in itself a narration, a friend remarked that the reflections below read as the ‘difficulty of late-stage intellectualism.’ It is an exercise pushed through “the prism of my Caribbean formation,” but it is not necessarily “about the Caribbean;” I take my lead from Stuart Hall in this sense.¹ I cannot hope to write “directly” of the Caribbean in this position, it comes to me in iridescent flakes as diaspora.² I begin with the difficulties of mimesis and whether this work and its language constitutes a pastiche of a certain theoretical period.

Is an awareness that you are committing an act of pastiche make one any less of a convict? In the world of exchange—where a naturalized equivalence professes its reified objectivity to thought—the element of thievery resides in the pastiche.³ This is despite Jameson’s

¹ Stuart Hall, “Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life,” in *Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 305.

² Stuart Hall, “Politics, Contingency, Strategy: An Interview with David Scott,” in *Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 241, 254.

³ Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014) 43; Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 118.

insistence on its blankness, as though picking washed out thematics from a floating discursive bubble. Thus, when complaining that I must become an essayist—as no room for dysregulation appears to exist in any other form—a certain, guilt-ridden knot comes about.⁴ Have I stolen from Walter Benjamin? Am I pretending to live the life of a *homme de lettres* in ‘blank parody?’ A *flaneur* without impact?⁵ Or am I instead attempting an awkward mimetic act? Of mimesis, Adorno remarks: “the human is indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings.”⁶ Thus, to relate to a certain kind of humanness by way of an appropriation of Western critique—there is a certain unavoidable, vulnerable entrapment I find myself in. In the construction of self and subsequently in producing knowledge, it strikes me that I may merely be a representation of the ‘Enlightened postcolonial.’

It is difficult not to inject a moment of autobiographical tension.⁷ I cannot hope to distance myself from the common disciplinary predicament were one finds oneself attempting to negotiate an intellectual production that serves and inhabits a simultaneity of positions sliding between West and non-West; it is a predicament which forces one—in the experience of the diasporized—to turn auto-critical of their projects, to judge their closeness to their perceived origin (the nation, the home, etc.). My obsession with fragments is only a result of my reading of Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, a work whose threads now seem to stitch every one of my thoughts in quilted fashion. I am mesmerized by the constellation—how else is one to find a way? To move through it is a valiant attempt to pull out an infinite thread without scissors to shorten the process. I cannot stop myself from drinking every detail in the written word, but the demand is

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form,” in *Notes to Literature* vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholse (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁵ Hannah Arendt “Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), xxx-xxxii, xxxvi-xxxvii.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2020), 164.

⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Finding Feminist Readings: Dante-Yeats,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 15.

the use of scissors whenever possible, which at this point in the grand institutional paper mill, is at every moment. One is trained on ‘how to gut a book,’ to extract ‘what is useful’ to the construction of your contribution. The academic today—particularly the specialized social scientist—is a *master thread cutter*, champion of isolation, guarantor of violence to things. Consequently, the most decorated scholar is the most efficient one, the one which can arrange cut threads to form the most threadbare appearance of a new theoretical horizon.⁸ I am compelled to torture myself against this—have I gone ‘deep enough’?; or to say, have I actually brought forth an interconnected contribution, not simply a mechanical reproduction and addition to past argumentations, a demonstration that we are caught-yet-effects-in a weave, and finally, in the formation of what was written, spoken, etc., have I really turned my back on the marginal? Or, have I hidden the marginal as I opaquely represent myself as them (intentionally or not) towards the institution? Indeed, the partial constitution of the postcolonial intellectual in the institution forms what they write into an inescapably institutional contribution of some kind. The response is: ‘surely you must move on, there is much to cover.’

In this then, it is difficult to distinguish between what is mimetic and what is a mere replica; it is possible that the distinction of the concepts is not so dichotomous. We may turn towards the question of the possibility of mimetic acts in this totalizing weave, in other words, if such acts toward ‘humanity’ do not just *become* reproduction, or so to say the mere growth of replicas of another mode of cognition which holds imperial primacy; what is it to be *intentionally* imitative as opposed to a *forced* identification? “If one reverses the direction of this binary opposition, the Western intellectual’s longing for all that is not West, our turn towards the West is

⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). 46-47, 48, 51-53.

a *command*.”⁹ The Enlightenment has therefore determined, to a sliding extent, our (the marginal’s) constitution and the limits of what is needed to constitute ourselves in the moment.¹⁰ This brings to mind David Scott’s assertion that the postcolonial subject is conscripted to the modern project, that Toussaint, subject[ed] to the power mechanisms of the plantation—the Caribbean here surfaces as the object of modernity—functioned actionably in the horizons of a modern cognitive space, in its conceptual, institutional, and epistemological conventions by necessity.¹¹ It is as though a tortured Enlightened seeks to snuff out a blinding, polluting light to see the constellations; Enlightenment must be held at a certain distance to navigate it with contingency. This extent of the Enlightenment’s cognitive determinacy dashes the notion of a pure making of indigenous thought; “to construct indigenous theories one must ignore the last few centuries of historical involvement. I would rather use *what history has written for me*.”¹² To inhabit the modern, is “a way of thinking and feeling; a way too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of being and presents itself as *a task*.”¹³ In this respect, the postcolonial subject is met with the necessity to identify with the general course of things; as a particular, to be squeezed into it such that one becomes its marginal co-constituent, a production of an identity with the materials of the irreducibly non-identical. Thus, the *appearance* of a natural, rational course of a world in which everything is identified with it, but primacy actually belongs to non-identity. “Put in general terms, the consciousness of discontinuity is simply that of the prevailing non-identity. This non-identity is the opposition

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution,” in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 312.

¹¹ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹² Spivak, “The Post-Colonial Critic,” in *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 69. Emphasis mine.

¹³ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” 309. Emphasis mine.

between whatever is held down and the universal domination that is condemned to identity.

... We must say instead that history is highly continuous *in* discontinuity, in what I once referred to as the permanence of catastrophe.”¹⁴ It is the non-identical—what is subjected to the catastrophic, the weight of constant repulsions and disruptions, revelations of the non-identical’s prevalence—that defines the whole relationship; here I find myself sympathetic to that theory of negative history outlined by Adorno. That “the very things that subjugate and submit, these very acts of subjugation and submission in which identity is torn apart, forge the identity of history of which we speak and which we must describe as negative identity.”¹⁵

It may be said that our condition in the *postmodern* is to be as shrapnel, exploded and fragmented in the forced-attempt of mimesis oriented towards the modern, whose established end was to become as ‘man’ as Western man, but consistently turns out growing non-identical replicas of this nonexistent ‘referent’ man. The Trinbagonian prime minister Patrick Manning’s flashy and incoherent replica of a Miami coastline and Sydney Opera House manifest the extent of these ‘failed’ mimetics as spectacle; “in the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.”¹⁶ Mirages, simulacra, the multiplicity of metropolitan images aiming to discover themselves as worthily ‘human,’ or liberated, or a part of general history. The Caribbean critic (myself) adopts Adorno to say something about identity implicitly identifying with Western critical social theory, thus ‘cognitively and intellectually liberated’ by Western critical conventions! The feeling of replication appears unavoidable, the feeling of being a reproduction

¹⁴ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 92-93.

¹⁵ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 92-93.

¹⁶ Ryan Cecil Jobson, *The Petro-State Masquerade: Oil, Sovereignty, and Power in Trinidad and Tobago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024), 117; Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), Thesis 14.

among others; a *command* to gaze westward. It is the failure of that *grand récit* of modernity particular to the postcolonial, its form.¹⁷ (I have some contention with my own use of ‘failure’ here, and its relationship with ‘forced’ identification. It is contradictory to say that on the one hand, one was forced to identify in the prevalence of non-identity, and on the other hand, to say that one has *failed* at it when one is *condemned* to identify. I leave this tangential point here).

Replica, and by extension, reproduction perhaps entails a certain strictness—to convey information such that there is no possible interpretation other than of what is most immediate; a rendering which completely omits all mediations between conceptual points which then constitutes the reflective, shiny simplicity of the reproduction. Reproduction then must be a cheapening, a flatness and loss of depth, to construct as a line or a paint-by-numbers; as with the mass of commodities which similarly are bereft of depth by way of exchange value.¹⁸ It is to banish *experience* to a separate emotional realm whose boundaries it must not cross; there should be no tear stains on the objective, and in fact reproduction insists that intellectual prowess comes as a result of a “decay of emotions.”¹⁹ Thus the colonial and postcolonial intellectual so invested in political-economy, economism—economy here being the supposed objective foundational mover of society—tries to *replicate* the success of the metropolis on their own unique terms. Stuart Hall recalls his “young friends” at Oxford: “economics was supposed to be the answer to the poverty which countries like Jamaica experienced, as a consequence of imperialism and colonialism,” and further, “[West Indian students] were the first-generation, black anticolonial, or postcolonial intelligentsia, who studied in England, did graduate work, trained to be economists.

¹⁷ Spivak, “The Post-modern Condition,” in *The Post-Colonial Critic*, 19-20.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 172-173; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 12-13.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 130.

A lot of them were sent by their governments and went back to become the leading cadre of the postindependence period.”²⁰ The question of the apparent necessity for the ‘independent’ commodity—that there is an intention towards or a desire for an independent, industrial self-sufficiency; that there is a certain postcolonial penchant for attempting to master development and therefore the tools of sovereignty, of infinite statistical technocracy and state centrality—could at this point be assessed. The answer that it is due to the pressure of capital, or that it is entirely the work of the ‘thumb of economy,’ does not seem satisfactory—it is to answer postcolonial economism with a general economic frame; or to say the orientation towards commodity production is but a reflex or mirror of a generally conquered mind. Where does this cognitive space emerge in connection to universal reason, Enlightenment, the hope (fetish) in commodity, and narratives of development, of liberation? “[People] know something about who they are. If they engage another project, it is because it has interpellated them, hailed them, and established some point of identification with them.”²¹ It is difficult to not implicitly assert Europe as the origin or the ‘original’ when posing this question; I fear the affirmation of the totality as I pose it. Problematically, it also stakes a claim towards the possibility of knowing a certain consciousness and collectivity—such a problematic takes us back to the discussion had in Spivak’s “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography.”²² This calls for an enormous detour. However, I shall cut this spoke short here to return to this work’s fleeting axel on replica, the mimetic, and the institution.

²⁰ Stuart Hall, “The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual: An Interview with Stuart Hall by Kuan-Hsing Chen,” in *Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 189, 194-195.

²¹ Stuart Hall, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,” in *Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 80.

²² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

To even write in ‘*this prose*’—reminisce on the stature of 20th century theoreticians—is considered an unnecessary archaic blitz; *a pastiche*, “the imitation of a particular or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language.”²³ I befell to the postmodern trap. Yet, the institution feels a certain frustration with this kind of mimicry when met with it, in that one notices that there is no diligence for the encumbered sentence in the institution; slashing its laborious burdens to grasp its fruit is the exercise of the editor, cutting away its nurturing stalks. The reading social scientist engages in the same exercise for the revelation of the most pertinent *information* in texts—“information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability”—that is, not to grasp the coming into what it is, and turning off that along its own becoming, but to grasp *immediately* what it is, the core-thesis itself; the reader removes it from its place, disarms it, and renders it as a blocked citation for the force of their own contention, sharpened anew; these are not pearls but spears.²⁴ There is no internalization of reading the theoretical, or to say, it is rendered a practical descriptive tool in the practical act of reading. It is a kind of armament in the competition to escape the throws of junior scholarship, weapons put to the task of achieving a certain scholarly success. Yet even this decapitating exercise against theory is now being deemed unnecessary with technologies which violently decapitate *the reader*; you may prompt ChatGPT to explain Hegel or Marx to you, their most relevant conceptual labors now wash over the reader as bulleted extractions. This is not a nostalgic proposition, or in other words, a call for a return to a certain past form, rather the intent is to call attention to a certain loss. Engaging in the labor of the conceptual is now more than ever a dispensable faculty of mind; we are becoming witness to a rearrangement of cognitive

²³ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 17.

²⁴ Arendt, “Introduction” lvii-lviii; Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 33.

form by immediate data aggregation systems which predictively formulate impersonal synthesized sentences torn from thousands of accumulated texts. The resultant written structure is delt out to us—the capacity and possibility for stitching worlds is increasingly left to the technocratic.²⁵ Meanwhile, the institutional citation acts as a window-glimpse for elaboration with the character of having to fulfill the role which it has been assigned: you must help me defend my dissertation or defend my case for your ‘theoretical usefulness’ today.

What is your relevance for *us* (here in the Western institution), Fanon? Can you still help *us* (the roundtable of analytic philosophers) understand race at the current historical conjuncture? What is your *application*, such that we might *help you*?²⁶ The practical swallows the theoretical. Spivak: “In spite of their occasional interest in touching the *other* of the West, of metaphysics, of capitalism, their repeated question is obsessively self-centered: if we are not what official history and philosophy say we are, who then are we (not), how are we (not)?”²⁷ For the “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” to be applied, the experience must already be necessarily made marginal; the center, a series of derived social mechanisms intelligible for the consumption of the First World analytic philosopher; the implicit intention is such that experience is forgotten or forgone, as to make it no longer directly traceable.²⁸ A sycophantic replication has occurred in the form of a descriptive process, in other words, the experience is replicated in a descriptive, bulleted form for application. The scholar, for what it’s worth, makes his tenure possible. It is them—the First World analytic philosopher—who constitute themselves as transcendent above

²⁵ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 44.

²⁶ Here, I reference a book chapter that was presented at a workshop at the University of Chicago by a celebrated contemporary scholar. While it is against institutional etiquette to cite ‘works in progress’ in this way (thus I will not refer to it directly), the premise of its presentation, essentially the *who* this kind of project is for, is worth investigation.

²⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “French Feminism in an International Frame,” in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 137. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 89.

“the cosmic effluvia,” a knowing subject positioned above earthly enmeshing.²⁹ To have reason essentially, a flit in the eye pointed towards an ‘earthly man,’ “raw man,” and as such, what is implicitly available to them is the possibility of an inner-outer distinction—the object of investigation is an experience which is then directly objectified and isolated into mechanisms.³⁰ Fanon: “I am black, in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth,” a figure who is “able to capture all the cosmic effluvia.”³¹

Mimetic desire must be the attempt to become the ‘human’ of the *particular moment*—we might evoke Sylvia Wynter’s elaboration of *homo economicus*—that concept with encapsulated time, without empirical existence; such desire marks replication and reproduction as the only possibility within this social form.³² The reproduction of an infinite number of replicas. *A peculiar form of coercion towards replica by a number of effects*; certainly, this is couched in commodity relations. Perhaps within this pastiche, this mimicry, I have made a point to emphasize difference in my inability to be a replica of Adorno, of Spivak, of Jameson, of James, of Foucault, of Fanon, of etc.; irreducibly non-identical within a social form which cannot help but build itself off cascading, expansive (re)production of replicas.

²⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 27.

³⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 34.

³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 27.

³² Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations,” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. by Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

Four Aphorisms: Contemplations of an Academically Unrigorous Nature, or ‘In My So-Called Experience.’

I

It may be observed that in the declaration of ‘closeness’ is the senselessness of separation. Within same acts of ‘for the sake of’ are those to the ‘detriment of.’ Subsurfacedly entangled along their edges do such inward polaric elements interact, thus turning one into the other when the moment occasions it. That intentions towards closeness regularly flip inside out in the wide interweaving of maladies is to be expected when—above all else—it is the appearance of things which holds a vast primacy in thought. The apparent gesture to retain a relation in fixity and good health is reminded of its relative weakness when confronted with a worldly discontinuity.

Two notable examples present themselves on friendly grounds. For the sake of us, we shall speak less, move quietly. To the detriment of—this motion brings bouts of anxiety and the pang of doubt. For the sake of us, it is best if we slide along our mutual borders. To the detriment of—we refuse to witness as our frames turn solid and an opaque plane is laid overtop; the sliding causes a flaying of the skin—the body is shaved to bone, shaved further. The remnants of a relation only manifest as a dust that causes a haggard cough. Recall that they asserted that it was for the sake of closeness, for retention, yet it has all been arrested to breakage and dispersal.

There is a certain a danger in assessing closeness as a mere state of not-separation, an immediate end forms itself only too easily; the weave enacts a destitution, the abandoned singularity of the individual. Steadfast, Adorno remarks that love manifests in the intensity of difference—that the particular, in a sudden flash, composes itself and decries the general. Love’s

emergence demands then, a “voluntary” force not-yet-known-known, a flash hiding in the edges of things.¹

II

One should refuse to just be motion, or motion such that it carries itself without being entangled with a veneration for its possibility—every articulation should not be one disemboweled. It is cruel to move just as body, and thus, in our constant shredding, there is a certain glinting force of refusal, a refusal of a separation between one as body and one as oneself.

Body as body is a twitching corpse-like thing, frantic to serve under biopsies, statistical coding, and the machine on the manufacturing floor; it merely responds to stimuli, it is not asked to do so. The white lab coat is full throated about this situation. They argue: why insist on anything that is not the brains’ neurochemical destiny? Neurochemical man is happy to oblige by necessity. This ‘hard wiring’ was surely done by the monocle.

My assertion is not a demand for movement to have a specified, necessarily determined end. Rather it is an assertion where the body’s articulation in itself exhibits intentions of relating continuously. In the administration of life, we experience a dismemberment into mere biology; expressions and gestures rendered mechanisms of genitalia. Admiration of flesh, the *bios*, its shapes and contours, presides over experience; with experience so overtly cast out, it is difficult to know if it is still a possibility. Debord puts forth the thesis of the pseudo-event, Adorno suggests we all wander with cavities where hearts propt to be.²

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2020), 174-175, 182-183.

² Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006), aphorism 200; Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 62-64.

Closeness under such purview only means closeness as such. We are close because our bodies are. At times, we lock legs, your hands graze mine, your knees tilt into mine, but your back is turned away. It is but a motion as body, immediate and without much expense. With the verticality of a man, stiff, trotting awkwardly on three digits! Don't stumble, I pseudo-love you to death!

III

A “spectacular” oddity occurs over the phone, within its media platforms of connectivity.³ Conjured by magical technological forces is the image of seamless time in shattered senses; the splitting and folding of place occurs in a manner which does not suggest any such splitting or folding. It is as though one has forced two unfitting puzzle pieces together and stepped back enough to say: ‘there is nothing irregular about this.’ Here one attempts to read the sentiments of another through measures of interaction presented as ‘views,’ ‘likes,’ or ‘read receipts’; they *must* feel this or that way since they send me a message every day, since they have eyes on every upload.

Due to the nature of this arrangement, a complete compulsion is forced which is simultaneously as self-circular as it is web-like. One feeds unto themselves their unreachable desires and sends these deluded interactions across an enormous statistical field; a sentiment compiled into a data point, a sentiment whose core is torn out, shamelessly equalized, and rendered as information without time or thought. Made a nondescript piece of a network, you—equalized amongst other consumers, raised from hellish depths to the law-like heavenly sphere of circulation—are determined most likely to buy this or that trashy fantasy romance novel.

³ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.

Comportment across a platform is made a reified object of scientific study. Taunted yet seduced by the “after-images of the work process.”⁴ Perhaps I am only reproducing what we already know.

Marx once remarked that logistical technologies, such as the railroad, enabled a peculiar flattening of time and space.⁵ One thousand miles is falsely condensed in the iMessage speech bubble. Such intense distortion in turn distorts the intentions of either end of the connection; indeed, it becomes an investigative task among friends to figure out what he ‘really meant’ by that. A mass, miasmatic confusion projects across every field.

Here, in this spacial oddity, one acquires a certain neurotic dedication to their not-own-made image.

IV

All individuals are catastrophically unable to know what is ‘good for them,’ yet there is a peculiar confidence that insists they know—or at least ought to know after a series of previous injuries in the delirium of navigation within the stillness of totality. There is an insistence on a faculty of mind that proports to know good despite all evidence to the contrary. Good decisions redirect into the primacy of the good of *oneself*, to say, ‘what do *I* take from this?’ Does one not feel an unconscious inner lift when handing over a portion of that dead-power—that functional form which necessarily mutates into the grotesque—which lies quietly in their pocket?⁶ This movement only conjurers the appearance of a mutual benefit.

⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 109.

⁵ Søren Mau, *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital* (London: Verso 2023), 275-277.

⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 157.

In the drama of decisions for the good of oneself, the impact of relations has been numbed; they are sensed as ultimately of no consequence due to the effervescent powers of the so-called will, free to engage and disengage. This separation, this detachment, this disjuncture in relation, is of no consequence because in *my* (I, me, subject[ed]) self-preservation, I have saved myself; there are many who would do just the same because all have will, all have an individuated inner space conceptualized as '*my life*.' Such engagements of the '*my*' are in its own space of real-delusion. It is, in fact, not possible to engage directly with decision, or to have an act of will such that itself and that act and its object are coterminous in seamless rationality because of the coercions which jolt us "from without."⁷ Yet, it is all of no consequence because will engages in blindness towards everything—how would a consciousness know of consequence in blind movement? It outlines shapes in the darkness, incapable of piercing such shapes through to the unseen consequence; consequence is imperceptible in a permanent, schizophrenic present. More so when facing a bombardment of shapes, whose contours we recognize as the commodity, whose image is inescapable without dooming yourself; the money-form perhaps the quintessential element to a mass social cataract necessary for a society entrapped by value-in-process.

Thus, causal thought, or the narration of a real and true *end*, must be jettisoned—an absolutely sequential process of things cannot be assured if we are to take the discontinuity of moments seriously. It is perhaps possible to remark here that such narrations of assured sequences are the confidence of a consciousness which sees itself as scientific; assured by its ability to reason and reflect on its own ability to reason.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge; Polity Press, 2006), 220.

To have our eyes skate around object contours turns the world into a dark labyrinthian affair; things are bypassed, groped, turned against, and revolved around. Here progression consists in an aimless, reactive movement against-with the labyrinth; I have collided into a thing and now I must redirect with a certain measure of austerity lest the additional expense cause one to falter into catatonia. The labyrinth, in renewed vigor, erects additional pathways of enclosure. One can only hope for a light which illuminates the nature of walls.

Commodities are as much walls as they are immense rooms.

Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor W. *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. London: Verso, 2020.
- Adorno, Theodor W. "The Essay as Form." In *Notes to Literature* vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. Boston: Mariner Books, 2019.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2006.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rainbow. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- Hall, Stuart. *Essential Essays Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*. Edited by David Morley. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Jobson, Ryan Cecil. *The Petro-State Masquerade: Oil, Sovereignty, and Power in Trinidad and Tobago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Mau, Søren. *Mute Compulsion: A Marxist Theory of the Economic Power of Capital*. London: Verso, 2023.
- Rehmann, Jan. *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Edited by Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Wynter, Sylvia and Katherine McKittrick. "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations." In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.