Allegory and Intoxication: Mapping Social Reproductive Separation and the Crises of Capitalism in 2010s Addiction Narratives

by

Ed Graham

M.A., University of Amsterdam, 2017

B.A., University of Warwick, 2015

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Declaration of Committee

Name: **Ed Graham**

Degree: **Doctor of Philosophy**

Title: **Allegory and Intoxication: Mapping Social Reproductive Separation and the Crises of Capitalism in 2010s Addiction Narratives**

Committee:

Chair: **Matthew Hussey**
Associate Professor, English

Carolyn Lesjak
Co-supervisor
Professor, English

Clint Burnham
Co-supervisor
Professor, English

Margaret Linley
Committee Member
Associate Professor, English

Samir Gandesha
Committee Member
Professor, Humanities

Alberto Toscano
Examiner
Term Research Associate Professor, Communication

Caren Irr
External Examiner
Professor, Humanities
Brandeis University

Abstract

Allegory and Intoxication argues that addiction crises in 2010s North America are symptomatic of the heightened ravages and crises of the capitalist value-form. This project reconstructs the critical mode of allegory and analyzes three addiction narratives—two films and one novel—to highlight the antagonistic relations between individual consumption, the social reproductive separation constitutive of the value-form, and capitalism's broader crises of accumulation and stagnation during the mid-to-late 2010s. *Allegory and Intoxication* reconstructs and brings together Theodor W. Adorno's insights into art's capacity to allegorize suffering, his commentary on the failure of capitalism to fulfil needs, and his ideological and utopian accounts of intoxicating consumption. In doing so, the dissertation develops a Marxist theory of allegory and intoxication to read how capital's gendered, racialized and colonial logics are intimately and viscerally registered within 2010s addiction narratives. Chapter 1 argues for an Adornian account of allegory and intoxication, whereby intoxicating consumption both narrativizes and halts the narrativization of value-form objectivity in a constellation, in relation to and distinct from the theories of allegory developed by Walter Benjamin and Fredric Jameson. Chapter 2 shows how the allegorical framings of intoxication in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in turn map a world-ecological conception of social reproductive separation and the persistence of unmet needs under capitalism. Chapter 3 concretizes such theoretical insights by showing how addiction films by the Safdie Brothers and Wayne Wapeemukwa combine narrative and non-narrative form to allegorize the separating logics of "wageless life" and colonial dispossession within the context of rapidly gentrifying urban centres. Chapter 4 examines the narrative and non-narrative role of intoxication in Jesmyn Ward's writings on semi-rural Mississippi. I argue that Ward's novel maps addiction crises, racial violence, the management of surplus populations and environmental catastrophe within the American South hinterlands, yet also foregrounds utopian glimmers of needs-fulfilment beyond the value-form's inherent separation of individuals from their own means of survival. I conclude by reiterating the global significance of addiction as social reproductive separation by reading the confluence of crises allegorized in Yeo Siew Hua's film *A Land Imagined*, crises that have intensified in the 2020s.

Keywords: contemporary culture; allegory; addiction; crisis; separation; value

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Introduction

In what sense do rising levels of addiction during the 2010s originate in the deeper structural crises and forms of separation inherent to capitalism? This dissertation attempts to answer this question by establishing how capitalism's crises are allegorically registered on the level of consumption habits and social reproductive crises in 2010s cultural forms. More specifically, in this dissertation I argue that revisiting the work of Marxist theorist Theodor W. Adorno allows for a more fundamental, allegorical and global sense of contemporary crises, and detail how three North American addiction narratives—two films and one novel—provide stark allegories of capitalism's crisis-forms in the 2010s. Bookending this project are short readings of two surrealist dramas—David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) and Yeo Siew Hua's *A Land Imagined* (2018)—each of which capture, through centring in part on a detective's failure to unravel the broader social implications surrounding an addict's disappearance, the representational challenges of figuring large-scale economic decline through intimately visceral addiction tropes. While Yeo's film is situated beyond the geographical contours of the U.S. and, as I contend in this dissertation's Conclusion, underlines the global significance of addiction under crisis capitalism, Lynch's television series arises from the context of the American opioid or overdose crisis, the topic of this Introduction's opening discussion.

In 2016 a then-record of over 42,000 people died from opioid overdose in the U.S. and the following year the nation's Department of Health and Human Services declared the overdose crisis a public health emergency (Ingraham n.p.). Commentators often pinpoint the origins of the overdose crisis in the 1990s. Indeed, even before the rapid increase following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, drug overdose deaths in the U.S. had quadrupled between 1999 and 2019, resulting in nearly 500,000 deaths involving any opioid, including prescription and illicit opioids (CDC n.p.). The overdose crisis was fueled in part by the over-prescribing of OxyContin as a form of pain management, a U.S Food and Drug Administration-approved prescription opioid (incorrectly branded non-addictive) produced and marketed by the Sackler family's Purdue Pharmaceuticals (Darian-Smith 68). OxyContin became ubiquitous following its first release in 1996, and addiction and overdose became particularly prevalent among working-class communities across the country. During the 1990s, rural Appalachian communities, who were already subjected to mass factory and coal-mine closures, were

hit particularly hard by the influx of prescription opioids. Yet by the early 2000s "the epidemic spread from rural enclaves to cities and suburbs" (Macy 151) and essentially any region unshielded from economic decline and stagnation became a target for the pushing of highly addictive pain medication by Purdue and underfunded, overworked doctors:

> The real perfect storm fueling the opioid epidemic had been the collapse of work, followed by the rise in disability and its parallel, pernicious twin: the flood of painkillers pushed by rapacious pharma companies and regulators who approved one opioid pill after another. Declining workforce participation wasn't just a rural problem anymore; it was everywhere, albeit to a lesser degree in areas with physicians who prescribed fewer opioids and higher rates of college graduates. (Macy 151)

But if there is a relationship between so-called "deaths of despair" and the punishing economic realities of deindustrialization, it is important to also address the underlying, decades long crisis tendencies of capitalism itself. While journalists writing on the overdose crisis are right to emphasize the role of predatory pharmaceutical companies such as Purdue, there is a risk of overlooking the deeper histories, interlocking oppressions and fundamental abstractions from human need that lie at the root of such crises.[1] In this dissertation I want to emphasize precisely these structural dimensions of capitalism, as opposed to corrupt political actors, for understanding addiction.

One of this dissertation's aims is to highlight that the precarity underlying the overdose crisis, and addiction crises during the 2010s more generally, structurally belongs to a system marked by economic decline and long-term falling rates of profit. As Aaron Benanav (2015), building on the work of Robert Brenner, has argued, the persistence of global overproduction and the long economic downturn since the early-to-mid 1970s has produced a "qualitative transformation in employment" (Benanav, "Precarity Rising" n.p.) marked by precarity.[2] Yet this broader economic context of rising

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[1] The overdose crisis, fueled by the overprescription of opioids, the introduction of extremely potent synthetic opiates like Fentanyl, as well as an overall increasingly toxic street supply of recreational drugs, is furthermore not limited to the U.S., with countries such as neighbouring Canada also deeply affected. Regarding overviews of specific areas like British Columbia and Vancouver (the subject of part of this dissertation's third Chapter), see Carrière, et al. (2021) on the socioeconomic contexts of the mid-2010s and Lupick (2018) on the history of harm reduction struggles from the 1990s to the late 2010s.

[2] Benanav argues that unemployment and job insecurity have steadily increased since 1973 and that, furthermore, economic recoveries following recessions have been increasingly slower at

un- and underemployment behind increases in drug dependency is not an irregularity of a faulty economic system, but instead a defining feature of the constitutive separation of the capitalist value-form, the abstract, socially-determining logic that separate a majority of the global population from their own means of subsistence and reproduction. Capitalist societies are those in which social reproduction is governed by the "needs of profit" (Bonefeld "Negative dialectics and the critique of economic objectivity" 70) and the "real abstractions" [3] of value, with thought and activity determined "behind the backs" of individuals given the universalization of commodified labour.[4] Under such societies, however, abstraction is experienced not only as some ghostly objective form, but equally as the class antagonism and violence inherent to being separated from access to one's own means of production and social reproduction. Fundamentally, claims Werner Bonefeld (2016), "[s]ociety as the automatic subject of some independent economic forces entails the dependent seller of labour power as the producer of surplus value" (71). In other words, the cold conceptuality of the law of value, whereby all forms of life are rendered equivalent for the purposes of accumulation, is constituted by the compulsive logic of one class selling their labour power to another to survive.

Certain important artworks from the 2010s, I argue in this dissertation, register the value-form's compulsions and dependencies on the level of consumption habits and

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restoring jobs. For instance, following the 2007 recession, a U.S. labour market recovery took a record 6.3 years (n.p.).

[3] Alfred Sohn-Rethel (2021) coined the term "real abstraction" in arguing that the thought abstraction is preceded by the commodity abstraction in exchange (and the realization of value through the money-form). Sohn-Rethel's conception of how individuals under capitalism are "blind to the socially synthetic character of their actions" (50) was influential for writers associated with the "New Reading" of Marx, *Wertkritik*, as well as Open Marxism, including Helmut Reichelt, Moishe Postone, Michael Heinrich, Christopher Arthur, Roswitha Scholz and Werner Bonefeld. Such writers have developed, in varying ways, theories of capitalism informed by the notion that the value-form is a binding social relation, with (abstract) labour denoting a historically specific mode of compulsion rather than a mystification of a transhistorical essence of labouring-activity, as found in certain orthodox, empirical and workerist readings of Marx. For more on the usefulness of the term "real abstraction" for analyzing contemporary culture see especially Bhandar and Toscano (2015) and De'Ath (2022).

[4] In addition to the violent class relations composing commodified labour are the historically devalued and dissociated gendered spheres of social reproductive activity, as argued by Marxist-feminists such as Maria Mies, Silvia Federici and Endnotes. This often "hidden", yet structurally necessary sphere (and thus *not* external to the logic of the value-form (see Best 2021)) has been further conceptualized by Jason W. Moore as containing the "cheap" human and extra-human natures (including energy, food, labour and land) "appropriated" through capital's historical world-making. See Chapter 2 for more on the allegorical relationship between consumption and this world-ecological dimension of social reproductive separation and crisis.

highlight how a longer history of gendered, colonial and racialized separation informs the addiction stories and spaces of North America's crisis-ridden 2010s. From the hollowed-out collective sites of social reproduction in New York City and Downtown Vancouver cinematically portrayed in the Safdie Brothers' *Heaven Knows What* (2014) and Wayne Wapeemukwa's *Luk'Luk'I* (2017) (Chapter 3), to the rural Mississippi hinterlands of racialized violence, incarceration and underemployment depicted in Jesmyn Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017) (Chapter 4), 2010s addiction narratives often betray a greater readiness to connect insular and intimate addiction tropes with broader histories and geographies. In turn, reading addiction narratives in the 2010s can render the relationship between crises of proletarian[5] consumption and those of capitalism more legible. As Endnotes (2010) note, "in and through cyclical crises, a secular crisis emerges, a crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labor relation itself" (Endnotes, "Misery and Debt" n.p.)—historical crises in the reproduction of capitalism are at once crises in the reproduction of the proletariat, with human needs, under a system primarily oriented around the accumulation of surplus value, left unmet to an ever-increasing extent. Yet, as I show across Chapters 1 and 2, Adorno's aesthetic conception of exchange society's fundamental bond between capitalism and need, whereby, for example, the compulsion to satisfy needs is a "fetter on productive forces" ("Theses on Need" 104), already paves the way for reading allegories of crisis consumption crises such as addiction under 2010s late capitalism.

What Year Is This?

In this dissertation I focus specifically on cultural forms from the mid-to-late 2010s, in part because it was arguably in 2016 that economic, social and ecological crises took centre stage in the cultural imaginary. This period of the 2010s was met by revelations that crises including record overdose deaths and authoritarian challenges to liberal democracy in the forms of Trump, Brexit and global, populist far-right

[5] My definition of proletarian refers not to stereotypes of an industrialized (and often masculine) working-class, but instead returns to the definition provided by Marx in Capital—those who possess no property besides their own labour power to be sold on the market for survival. Endnotes make this point when insisting that "the proletariat is not identical to the industrial working-class" (n.p.) but instead refers to the groups who sell their labour for capital's valorization processes and who are "thrown onto the street as soon as [they] become superfluous to the need for valorisation" (Marx, *Capital* 625, qtd. in Endnotes n.p.).

resurgences, may not be aberrations from what is considered “normal”, but instead express a deeper rot within capitalism. Such revelations further destabilized a hegemonic order in which “Fukuyama's thesis that history has climaxed with liberal capitalism . . . is accepted, even assumed, at the level of the cultural unconscious” (Fisher 10). Therefore, this period of the twenty-first century is additionally marked by a crisis in representation, in popular and artistic efforts to narrativize the complexities and ensuing catastrophes of the social.

The widespread notion that 2016 marked the dawning realization of the collapse of Francis Fukuyama’s post-1989 “end of history” narrative is encapsulated during the final moments of David Lynch’s sprawling 18-part television series, *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Following the realization of his failure to fulfil a mysterious mission and reunite Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) with her family, a bewildered Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) suddenly asks “What year is this?”. As the series grinds to an unresolved end, Agent Cooper, once a charmingly optimistic solver of cases and coffee enthusiast in the original *Twin Peaks* franchise of 1991-92, is faced with the realization that his efforts to navigate the perplexing 2010s landscape have failed.

Over the course of the series, *The Return* largely jettisons the camp, playful portrayals of consumption and excess characteristic of its predecessor, evident in one sense through *The Return*’s sparing use of the famous *Twin Peaks* theme music. Meanwhile, whereas Cooper’s investigation into the murder of high school student Laura Palmer once revealed an obscene underside of addiction to the nostalgic, idealized fictional logging town of Twin Peaks, Washington, in *The Return*, by contrast, addiction crises are an immediate defining feature of the American landscape. In Lynch’s 2017 universe, the drug habits of Twin Peaks’ younger residents are no longer a disturbing detail gradually uncovered as the narrative progresses. The first we see of young couple Becky (Amanda Seyfried) and Steven Burnett (Caleb Landry Jones), for example, is the impact their drug addiction has on Steven’s ability to find employment and the couple’s dependence on handouts from Becky’s mother for drugs. Notably, Becky and Steven reside in New Fat Trout Trailer Park, an area that, as Todd McGowan (n.d.) notes, belonged in the 1992 prequel film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* to the southwestern part of Washington state but now has been relocated, along with park manager Carl (Harry Dean Stanton), into the town of Twin Peaks. The trailer park, a bleak space of domestic violence and economic opportunities so minimal that drug trafficking, theft and

blood donation make up much of the residents' income, is no longer the impoverished Other of Twin Peaks, as conveyed in the 1990s, but instead completely integrated into the town's fabric.

Figure 1: Still from *Twin Peaks: The Return*

Throughout *The Return*, addiction forms part of a sprawling landscape of wageless life and collapse that exceeds the boundaries of the Twin Peaks area, with the town now also mysteriously connected to a vast network of rural and urban spaces, from South Dakota to New York City to the depopulated and impoverished fictional suburb of Rancho Rosa, Nevada. Of *The Return*'s portrayal of drugs, Nick Pinkerton remarks, "[d]rugs, always an essential part of local commerce in Twin Peaks, are bigger business than ever, rolling in over the Canadian border and inundating the entire country" (n.p.). Yet whereas addiction and drug use once played a key role in revealing Laura Palmer's tragic circumstances and fate in *Fire Walk with Me*, the central narrative significance of the ubiquity of drugs in *The Return* is unclear. In the third episode, for example, we are introduced to an unidentified woman cast as "drugged-out mother" (Hailey Gates), seated at a table surrounded by various drugs and repeatedly exclaiming "one one nine!" as a car bomb explodes just across the street in the Rancho Rosa housing development, "an environment sufficiently soul-sucking to drive anyone into the depths of addiction" (Pinkerton n.p.). The bomb incident, barely arousing the mother from her slumber, is one of several failed assassination attempts on key character Dougie Jones (also Kyle

MacLachlan), but it is unclear why Lynch frames this attempt in the context of a minor character such as the mother—who never features in the show again—nor why the mother's cryptic, hallucinatory words "one one nine!" are repeated across two different episodes.

Figure 2: Still from *Twin Peaks: The Return*

Figure 3: Still from *Twin Peaks: The Return*

The significance of the multi-locational and unresolved events occurring over the course of *The Return* is largely a mystery, with the viewer rewarded little clarity by the

end of the show's two-part finale. In these final episodes, Cooper is revealed to be part of an undercover plot to destroy a "supreme negative force" named Judy. He attempts to fulfil his mission by travelling back in time to the woodland scene directly preceding the tragic events of Laura's murder, as depicted in *Fire Walk with Me*. Cooper intervenes into the scene by leading Laura away from the site of her brutal killing at the hands of her abusive father, Leland Palmer (Ray Wise) (under possession of an entity named Bob (Frank Silva)). Driving through the desert with his lover Diane (Laura Dern), Cooper is then apparently transported into an alternate future under a different name (Richard) and assumes a more hostile, world-weary and coffee-averse disposition. Arriving in Odessa, Texas at the residence of the person he believes to be Laura Palmer, Cooper meets a jittery, disheveled waitress in her early forties, also portrayed by Sheryl Lee, named Carrie Page. While the Laura Palmer of the early 1990s concealed a life of addiction and sex work beneath the façade of a stereotypical, middle-class suburban life, the hardships afflicting this "new Laura", though unspecified, are immediately apparent. The shabby interior of Carrie's house reveals a dead man, shot in the head, seated in the living room, and Carrie claims she needs to "get out of Dodge". Puzzled by Cooper's appearance, though seemingly grateful for the presence of an FBI agent given her unspecified predicament, Carrie claims to have no memory or knowledge of Laura Palmer and her traumatic family history, nor of the town of Twin Peaks. Convincing Carrie to return with him to Twin Peaks, Cooper drives her across the country, but none of the landmarks evoke any further memory for Carrie. At the door of the Palmer family house, current resident Alice Tremond (Mary Reber) claims that the Palmers have never lived there. Cooper walks away perplexed, much like the viewer, and after a long silence, asks "what year is this?". Following a further pause, a breeze coupled with the faint sound of Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) calling Laura's name on the morning after her murder suddenly stirs something in Carrie. She unleashes a blood-curdling scream as all the lights in the neighbourhood go out and the scene fades to black.

While *The Return*'s ending has baffled fans and critics alike, what is clear is that Cooper's attempt to revise history, to eliminate the traumatic underside that the original show portrayed through its representations of abuse and addiction, has not made the ability to navigate 2010s America any easier, and if anything has rendered efforts to map the landscape of crisis even more fruitless. Throughout the original series, Cooper's investigation, frequently stimulated by rounds of fresh coffee, oscillated between a

symptomatically postmodern “historically original consumers' appetite” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 18) and “cultural form of image addiction” (46) marked by 1950s soap operatic pastiche and nostalgia, on the one hand, and something of a modernist, psychoanalytic concern with “the law of the father and its relation to an obscene, forbidden enjoyment” (Ellis & Theus 24), on the other hand. In other words, there is a sense in which the *Twin Peaks* of the 1990s, through its gradual uncovering of a sinister underworld marked by the Father figure of Bob and the other malevolent spirits that populate the supernatural sphere of the “Black Lodge”, attempts to map the small-town’s consumptions and addictions within a broader network of negativity. By contrast, *The Return*’s move away from the figure of the Father to that of the Mother (with Bob replaced by the mysterious “extreme negative force” of Judy or Jowday as the show’s main antagonist), signals a change in Cooper’s approach to investigating the negative energies haunting the world of Twin Peaks. Rather than a pseudo-Freudian uncovering of an Oedipal Father figure at the heart of the town’s morbid symptoms of addiction, *The Return* is characterized more by what Matthew Ellis and Tyler Theus (2019) identify as a Kleinian “paranoid-schizoid” world of pre-Oedipal partial objects (24-5). It is a world not of cause-and-effect but rather one of a multiplicity of surface effects and non-narrativizable content, whereby the show’s multiple plotlines frequently fail to intersect and arrive at a satisfying conclusion.

In the face of an apparent lack of narrative coherence and grounding, Cooper seemingly abandons hermeneutical investigation altogether, with his plan to time-travel and prevent Laura’s murder (and thus the show’s primordial mystery) ultimately revealed to have been preordained from the very first episode.[6] No longer wading into the hidden depths behind America’s symptoms of both “alienation . . . [and] a strange hallucinatory exhilaration” which Jameson once identified within 1990s postmodern hyperspace (*Postmodernism* 33), Cooper dispenses with the very frameworks of narrative and

[6] “Part 1” of *The Return* opens with Cooper sat in the White Lodge with the Fireman (Carl Struycken), who relays a series of cryptic messages to Cooper: “It is in our house now. It all cannot be said aloud now. Remember 430. Richard and Linda”. Cooper responds by simply saying “I understand”. By the end of the series, it is revealed that “430” refers to the number of miles Cooper and Diane (subsequently renamed Richard and Linda) are to drive through the desert following the rescue of Laura. Less clear is whether the Fireman’s claim “It is in our house now” refers to Judy occupying the Palmer household, and whether Judy in fact possesses Laura’s mother, Sarah Palmer. Many fans have speculated this to be the case, especially following the release of co-creator Mark Frost’s book *Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier* (2017), which outlines a number of clues implying the identity of Judy and Sarah.

critical negativity by attempting to eliminate the primal traumatic scene (Laura's murder) driving the original *Twin Peaks*' mapping of American social life. Yet *The Return*'s departing lesson is that such negativity cannot be removed. Todd McGowan argues that Cooper's act of preventing Laura's initial trauma has

> the effect of furthering the trauma of negativity rather than curtailing it . . . This negativity returns in a repetition that we cannot eliminate but must comport ourselves toward. The actual return in *The Return* occurs at the end, with Cooper's failure to save Laura from negativity as such. (n.p.)

What does it mean to persist with a furthered negativity, one which appears to increasingly escape narrativization, in contemporary mappings of the crisis-ridden 2010s? Substituting for McGowan's Lacanian ethical framework a Marxist conception of the negativity of the value-form, of the real abstractions that fundamentally separate individuals from their means of survival, I would argue that *The Return* forefronts not only the intensification of wageless life and addiction in America since the 1990s, but also the problem of mapping, via the figure of the detective, the more historically deep-rooted negativity shaping such an altered landscape.

The mid-to-late 2010s addiction narratives analyzed in this dissertation similarly highlight, through their departures from their primary mode of realism, the problem of navigating and representing the wider social and historical forces underpinning increasingly prevalent crises in consumption. Rather than surrender to a certain non-narrative resignation and quietism, however, the texts under examination in this project retain an irreconcilable tension between narrative and non-narrative forms in their efforts to register the social. In this dissertation, I argue that notable addiction narratives achieve something of what Dale Cooper fails to do, which is grapple with and interrupt the negativity of the 2010s through allegories of a longer history of separation on the level of proletarian social reproduction and consumption habits.

Before detailing, in Chapters 3 and 4, the ways in which *Heaven Knows What*, *Luk'Luk'I* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* register addiction and socio-economic crises as 2010s instantiations of capitalist separation, this dissertation sets out in Chapters 1 and 2 the theoretical stakes of focusing on addiction and its related term, intoxication,[7] as

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[7] In this regard I differ from Eugene Brennan and Russell Williams' (2015) resistance to the term addiction. Brennan & Williams argue that analysis of the politics of intoxication within literature should be decoupled from notions of "dependency and loss of control" (Brennan & Williams 15)

allegories of larger economic forces. For the works I analyze do not merely document addiction but emphasize sensorily vivid, at times frightening, experiences of intoxication as central to their narrative unfoldings. Whether in the form of a hallucinated firework display, recurring hauntings by a UFO, or visions of rural landscapes over-layered with multiple violent temporalities, I argue that certain addiction narratives of the 2010s foreground intoxication not as a celebration of excess but rather as a mode of navigating and allegorizing the negativity of the 2010s. These addiction narratives highlight crises in social reproduction as well as the discordance between everyday experience and the abstractions, seemingly beyond comprehension, governing social life in the 2010s. At times, these chosen texts will narrativize, via the "profane illumination" (Benjamin 2006) of intoxication, the relationship between addiction and capitalism, just like *The Return*'s framing of toxic consumption habits in the context of wagelessness and decline. At other times, the texts will underline a failure to narrativize addiction and capitalism, just like *The Return*'s inability to connect America's increased infiltration of addiction and toxic drug supply with "the quarter-century-old murder of coked-up homecoming queen Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) [which still] retains its position of primacy" (Pinkerton n.p.) in the 2017 series. In a sense, all the texts under discussion posit Cooper's question "what year is this?" by staging aporias that force us to ask how the crises of the 2010s are somehow both radically distinct from yet entirely continuous with capital's underlying crises, which stretch back across the twentieth century and, as conveyed in *Luk'Luk'I* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, even further into the past.

I consider these interrelationships of narrative and non-narrative forms within my chosen cultural objects to symptomize the centrality of allegory as a mode of navigating the ruins and abstractions of the 2010s. For Fredric Jameson (2019), allegory has "today become a social symptom" that surfaces as an attempted

> solution when beneath this or that seemingly stable or unified reality the tectonic plates of deeper contradictory levels of the Real shift and grate ominously against one another and demand a representation, or at least

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that often accompany addiction narratives. Without wanting to reduce the range of experiences associated with intoxication to the historically moralizing, pathologizing and stigmatizing medical associations that often accompany the term addiction (as argued by Eve Sedgwick (1993)), I still want to give addiction—coupled with the more expansive term intoxication—its due as allegorizing the real dependency that capitalism induces in its subjects for survival.

> an acknowledgement, they are unable to find in the *Schein* or illusory surfaces of existential or social life." (*Allegory and Ideology* 34)

However, I question Jameson's tendencies to downplay non-narrative stasis and an ethics of nonidentity in his overarching imperative to narrativize the mode of production. Although Jameson is appreciative of how non-narrative moments, for example metaphor's "fundamental effect as one of denarrativization, of breaking the horizontal line by way of a verticality or transcendence of the metaphorical comparison or identification" (*Allegory and Ideology* 148-9), contribute to the unfolding of allegory and narrativization, Jameson nevertheless cautions here, as he does elsewhere (most notably in *Late Marxism* (1990)), against reifying non-narrative framings. As I show in Chapter 1, Jameson's doubts over the suitability of Adorno's critical theory for the twenty-first century are reflected in his suspicion of an Adornian ethics of nonidentity, which he claims "is for all practical purposes an anti-Marxist one" (Jameson, "Afterword" 165).

By contrast, I argue throughout this dissertation for the ethical importance of the nonidentical, of how "objects do not go into concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 5), in allegories of contemporary capitalism and addiction. My use of the term non-narrative, as both critical category and aesthetic technique of reckoning with what appears to escape narrative, as well as the latter's arrest and pause, derives from Adorno's efforts to grasp nonidentity through non-narrative framings. Such framings include the allegory of natural beauty as "suspended history, a moment of becoming at a standstill" (*Aesthetic Theory* 71), which I explore and reconstruct in Chapter 1, and the caesura, which features more prominently in my analyses in Chapter 2.[8] I am also indebted to Steven Helmling's (2009) attention to what he regards in Adorno, particularly works like *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as a "poetics of critique" whereby narrative and non-narrative forms are staged in a negative, irreconcilable dialectic. Allegory, for Adorno, negatively illuminates, via narrative *and*

[8] For more on the significance of and dialogue between Adorno's and Benjamin's critical use of "caesura markings" through their philosophical readings of literary works such as Homer's *The Odyssey* and Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, see Marton Dornbach (2021). My project does not have the space to consider the critical role of the caesura in greater depth, and I largely treat the device as interchangeable with other non-narrative moments in Benjamin's and Adorno's understandings of allegory (as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2). Nevertheless, it is useful to retain a sense of both Benjamin's and Adorno's "focus on narrative caesuras as moments that register a fugitive but fundamental hope through interruptions of the continuous flow of narration" (Dornbach 14) to grasp their literary-informed philosophical commitments to non-narrative.

non-narrative, the voices of separated, repressed and mutilated nature. In contrast, the sufferings of capitalist domination cannot be meaningfully or ethically articulated through narrative alone. Accented in such a non-narrative manner, allegory, for Adorno, has as much ethical as representational import.[9]

I argue that the non-narrative dimensions inherent to allegory, dimensions that I identify in Benjamin and Adorno in Chapters 1 and 2 and that I situate within the cultural forms analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4, cut through to the separation and nonfulfillment that capitalism continually imposes on the level of needs and consumption in a variety of ways, not least of all through addiction. Adopting such an Adornian framework thus differs from Jameson's recent valorization of the contemporary productivity of allegory to, as Leigh Clare La Berge (2021) glosses, "coordinate these discrete scenes of un-representability, which appear to become more acute after the 1970s" (218). Rather than through the global complexity intensified under immensely abstract processes such as financialization and Big Data, I am more interested in how capitalist abstraction is allegorically registered on the intimate level of social reproductive separation via processes such as addiction (more on which below). Despite Jameson's longstanding aversion to ethics,[10] adopting allegory as a critical framework for mapping contemporary capitalism does involve some ethical critique and consideration of a good life distinctive from capitalism, as I conclude in Chapter 2.

Therefore, in Part 1 of this dissertation, I argue that foregrounding addiction narratives and their accompanying figures of intoxication within the context of capitalism's crises entails a theoretical reconfiguration of the role of allegory within contemporary culture. By drawing on the subterranean theme of intoxication in the writings of Adorno and placing the latter's work in dialogue with Walter Benjamin, Fredric Jameson, Paul B. Preciado, Silvia Federici and Jason W. Moore, I argue across

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[9] Such an emphasis on the critical capacity of non-narrative differs from Joshua Clover's (2011) assertion that the non-narrativity of contemporary poetry is a mode of representation more fitting for an era of financialization marked by "the ceaseless internalization of labor time as world space" and which cannot be grasped through narrative since "the diachronic and narrative "passages" of the mode of production are in fact synchronized by late capitalism" (48). Clover's foregrounding of poetry as non-narrative registration is still driven primarily by the desire for "a more adequate cognitive mode for our present situation" (49).

[10] Jameson's understanding of ethics as an ideology that individualizes matters of collective social life (which he seems to treat synonymously with the distinct category of morality) can be found, for example, in his *The Political Unconscious* (1981).

Chapters 1 and 2 for a Marxist allegorical theory of intoxication. In Adorno's work, I maintain that the figure of intoxication remains utopian—that is, prefigurative of a different society—insofar as this figure, in tandem with its dialectical counterpart of what I term detoxification, foregrounds consumption as a site of struggle in-and-against value-relations. Rather than lifestyle politics, however, the utopian dimensions of a critical theory of intoxication would foreground needs-fulfilment as a crucial component to any anti-capitalist politics. For it is not only redistribution and the ownership of the means of reproduction (as vital as these are) that should be addressed; it is also the quality of life on the level of consumption habits—for example which toxic ones should be rejected, which more fulfilling ones should be prioritized—that remain central to a critique of and a politics against capitalism's crisis-order.

My argument in Part 1 forms the basis for reading the various consumption crises of the 2010s, of which the American overdose crisis is one symptom. The cultural forms analyzed in Part 2 serve as case studies for the theoretical reconstructions outlined in my first two Chapters. By examining addiction stories in the forms of experimental cinema (Chapter 3) and African American magical realist fiction (Chapter 4), I argue for intoxication as an allegory of crisis through each texts' combination of narrative and non-narrative elements. Holding together both textual dimensions—what intoxication illuminates and what it fails to narrativize—highlights, I ultimately argue, the needs left unfulfilled by capitalism and hints, if only obliquely, at utopian traces of different kinds of needs-satisfaction. Finally, as I outline in my Conclusion, the latter utopian impulses can be found more readily, despite still being marred by separation, in the part addiction narrative, part neo-noir mystery *A Land Imagined*. Yeo's film foregrounds the significance of Global South migrant labour to the heightened crisis logic of capitalism moving into the 2020s, ultimately approaching the negativity underpinning capitalism and addiction in a more directly political manner compared to the tones of resignation found in *The Return*.

Allegory and Crisis in the 2010s

One of this dissertation's main objectives is to argue for addiction as registration, on the level of consumption habits, of capitalism's crises-forms in the period of the 2010s. As alluded to above, such an approach differs from typical accounts of the relationship between addiction and the socio-economic within contemporary mainstream

narratives and discourses. For example, cultural representations of the North American overdose crisis frequently gesture at the mass unemployment and job losses afflicting former vital industries. Various op-eds and Netflix documentaries will ground the bitter reality of "forgotten" or "left-behind" areas of white rural America, such as the Rust Belt,[11] pitting these gritty representations against the aestheticization of excess typical of the "junky" or drug narrative from counter-cultural moments like the Beat generation.

Yet, in emphasizing the collapse of "meaningful work" as a factor in America's addiction crises, and thus in focusing on those who are 'excluded' as particularly dominated by capitalism's ravages, such discourses elide attention to the real abstractions underpinning the rise in addiction and overdose. The tendency to view addiction as not only opposed to labour but as demarcating a state of moral decline external to a "healthy capitalism" of traditional, stable employment can be challenged by looking to Michael Denning's (2010) notion of "wageless life" as a generalized and structural condition of precarity. Denning invokes Karl Marx's "General Law" from Chapter 25 of *Capital* which explains how capital necessarily produces a surplus population, not only as a reserve army of labour, but as a portion of the global population that is always surplus to capital's requirements for valorization and thus perpetually under- or un-employed. If addiction is a state that intensifies out of increased unemployment, it is not social exclusion (often portrayed in terms of moral decline) per se, but rather the structures that maintain unemployment as central to accumulation that must be addressed.

However, the figure of wageless life not only highlights the structural necessity of capitalism's surplus populations, but also, argues Denning, foregrounds the proletariat's structural, fundamental separation from their own means of reproduction. Such separation, as outlined above, operates through the antagonistic core of the value-form abstraction, of the violent relational process through which the individual is forced to

[11] Documentaries and docuseries such as *Heroin(e)* (2017) and *The Pharmacist* (2019), for example, detail heroic battles against the infiltration of pill mills and malicious overprescribing doctors into deindustrialized suburban and rural regions. Though often well-intentioned, the emphasis, in such representations, on (usually white) insecurity through the collapse of traditional and family values can falsely substitute cultural arguments for economic explanations. As Annie McClanahan argues in "Life Expectancies: Mortality, Exhaustion, and Economic Stagnation" (2019), such substitutions, in analyses of 2010s precarity, move attention away from the role of broader historical trends and power structures.

become dependent on the abstraction of “free labour”—a process which is both historically foundational to and constantly reproduced by capitalism. It is to this notion of the value-form’s constitutive separation that Denning alludes when he underscores the significance of Marx’s notion of the “virtual pauper”, whereby Marx claims the concept of the free labourer already contains that of the virtual pauper, since “If the capitalist has no use for his surplus labour then the worker may not perform his necessary labour” (Marx, *Capital* 604, qtd in Denning 97). The absolute indifference of the wage form to the individual’s “organic presence”, to their survival, is at the heart of both value-abstraction and the increased presence of wageless populations across the globe in the 2010s. The wage’s indifference, marked by the social objectification of abstract labour, to the individual’s survival renders concrete social actions and forms, such as the fulfilment of consumption needs and habits, entirely abstract, in the sense that individuals’ social reproduction is dictated by and through the “monstrous objectivity” (Bonefeld, *Critical Theory* 68) of the market, and in a particularly stark way during the 2010s.

For the 2010s laid bare the stagnation and decline upon which the financial and housing bubbles of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century always rested. The fallout from the 2007/2008 recession had been building from decades of industrial overcapacity and stagnating growth. As Endnotes (2010) remark:

> Over the last 40 years average GDP has grown more and more slowly on a cycle-by-cycle basis in the US and Europe, with only one exception in the US in the late 90s, while real wages have stagnated, and workers have increasingly relied on credit to maintain their living standards. (n.p.)

Such tendencies toward crises in accumulation, profitability, and the accompanying ability of the proletariat to reproduce itself were already addressed by Karl Marx over a hundred years earlier. In volume I of *Capital*, Marx argues that the generation of a surplus population, a reserve army of labour necessarily surplus to requirements for the valorization process, is inherent to a system in which businesses and firms inevitably shed workers as technological productivity increases. With the pressures of competition between firms, more and more workers are replaced by machines within the production process. In the nineteenth century, despite the rapid increase in industrial employment, the numbers of those employed fell in relation to capital investment, and so in Chapter 25 of *Capital* Marx famously outlined his “absolute general law of capitalist accumulation”:

> The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital also develop the labour power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour. The more extensive, finally, the pauperized sections of the working class and the industrial reserve army, the greater is official pauperism. This is the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation. (798)

The introduction of various labour-saving technologies leads to what Marx describes as a rising organic composition of capital where the worker becomes redundant. The cruel irony is that capital's absorption of more living labour leads to a rise in "dead labour", to a situation where the worker is no longer necessary, since production necessarily results in "an accelerated diminution of the capital's variable component, as compared with its constant one" (782). The deployment of more labour power leads to greater advancements in productivity, creating a higher proportion of constant capital (fixed inputs like machinery) to variable capital (labour). Subsequently, capital's demand for labour decreases, as Marx explains: "The working population therefore produces both the accumulation of capital and the means by which it is itself made relatively superfluous; and it does this to an extent which is always increasing" (783). The problem for capital, however, is that the exploitation of labour is the sole source of fresh surplus-value, leading to both secular and cyclical crises in the reproduction of capitalism. As Paul Mattick Jr. (2018) summarizes, lower profit rates will eventually spell longer-term crises for the system:

> The long-term prospect of capitalism . . . is one of increasing severity of crisis and increasing difficulty in overcoming it, as lower profit rates make it difficult to accumulate the increasingly larger sums of value necessary for expansion. (233)

Drawing additionally upon Marx's comments in the third, posthumously published volume of *Capital* on the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, writers such as Endnotes, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007), Joshua Clover (2016) and Mattick Jr. have recently underlined the connection between capitalism's inherent tendency to expel labour and the secular decline and stagnation afflicting the global economy since the 1970s. The significance of capitalism's various crises of overaccumulation (Clarke 2001), surplus (Gilmore 2007) and overall declining economic growth, lies not so much in deterministic speculation over the collapse of capitalism. Instead, what this

dissertation emphasizes is that such crises are at the same time crises in proletarian social reproduction.

As well as helpfully bringing capitalism's crisis tendencies to the fore, such accounts of precarity and broader, decades-spanning economic decline and stagnation challenge assumptions behind certain framings of everyday life, including the role of addiction, under so-called neoliberalism. A frequent theme in writing aiming to specify the forms of governance and power associated with the neoliberal period is the changing role of consumption. The story goes that under neoliberal globalization, the market further infiltrates social life and consumer sovereignty overtakes discipline as the central mode of power. Within such power-oriented frameworks, certain sociological and cultural studies readings of addiction ultimately elide, as with journalistic accounts of the overdose crisis, the social determinations of abstraction and value. Gerda Reith (2004), for example, argues that the static "addict identity", which she argues must refuse the demand to choose in order to achieve sobriety, marks a limit-point to the neoliberal propagation of consumer autonomy and flexibilized subjectivity.[12] The addict identity is even valorized by Reith as a small form of resistance against consumerism:

> At a time when the admonition to choose from a barrage of commodities and experiences is at its most insistent, the active adoption of the 'addict identity' may be interpreted as the embrace of a determined state that rejects the need for such choice. (296)

Reith's account, however, is grounded primarily in behaviour and identity-formation and does not consider the extent to which addiction registers material needs that have been displaced or distorted by capital's increasing inability to reproduce its populations sufficiently.

Reith's framing of addiction is indicative of a broader theoretical approach to consumption that privileges analyses of power relations over economic abstraction, an approach that this dissertation challenges. In accounts often shorn of a historical materialist conception of global capitalism's mutations in state and institutional power, neoliberalism is regularly defined through terms like governmentality, "immaterial" labour

[12] Reith argues: "The dynamic, self-expressing self has been replaced by its opposite: one for whom identity is static, and who out of necessity, must refuse the possibility of future choosing, since total abstinence is regarded as the only way of guaranteeing sobriety" (293).

and coercion-by-consent—by "soft" forms of domination that require subjects' active participation and consent. The later work of Michel Foucault on neoliberalism considerably shaped this reformulation of labour as a subject-oriented power operation, and in turn conceptions of consumption habits, like addiction, divorced from their imbrication in value-form abstraction. Foucault's (2008) notion that the neoliberal subject is an "entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings" (226) on one level symptomizes the growing heteronomy of the market within everyday life, as the state withdraws from shoring up collective social reproductive costs by, for example, disinvesting from welfare. The historical backdrop to his writings on neoliberalism is the restructuring of the capital-labour relation, through material processes like deindustrialization and the crushing of collective bargaining power following the collapse of the post-war "compromise" between capital and labour within Western nation-states. However, Foucault's framework for understanding neoliberalism also moves away from conceptions of economic constraint as historically specific value-abstraction and instead toward theories of human behaviour and rationality (Foucault 221). Against the background of capital's disciplining of labour in response to global overaccumulation crises of the 1970s, writers like Foucault would dispense with economic categories like class and exploitation altogether.

Annie McClanahan (2019b) makes a similar point in arguing that many critics of neoliberalism, including Wendy Brown and Michel Feher, wrongly lament, in a manner similar to Foucault, the historical disappearance of labour as class and site of material exploitation. For McClanahan, such writers emphasize the domain of neoliberal subjectivity and habit over determining economic logics to such an extent that they effectively claim that "discourse and consciousness are not just the effects of historical transitions but the causes of them as well" (110). Stressing the growing prevalence of "softer" forms of power like the imperative to maintain an active CV and earn human capital at every opportunity (usually regarding those within the professional sector) comes at the expense of analyzing the more direct logics of proletarianization and dispossession that effect most people, many of whom do not have the luxury to be so coerced by opportunity and anxiety-inducing individualism. Such framings of precarity can downplay the more characteristic negativity and violence of proletarian life under twenty-first century capitalism.

In my theoretical and cultural readings of addiction, I heed such calls to ground notions of power and domination within a larger historical framework of exploitation. As Chapter 4 sets out, the racialized oppression that unevenly frames addiction and the latter's stigmatization cannot be disentangled from persistent, structural exploitation and its particularly spatialized forms in the economic hinterlands of regions like rural Mississippi. In Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the experience of addiction is illustrated through one of the novel's main characters, Leonie, less as a fall from grace and more like a structural condition mediating her surrounding environment marred by incarceration, wageless life and ecological devastation, as well as her proto-utopian desires for the fulfilment of bodily needs (foregrounded through Ward's emphases on hunger and thirst throughout the novel). In highlighting the importance of how cultural forms and narratives reflect and refract the economic negativity of addiction among proletarian classes, this dissertation concurs with a key point made by McClanahan (2017) in her work on cultural representations of debt after the 2007/2008 global financial crash. In that text, McClanahan argues that cultural form trumps political philosophy (as most notably found in recent theorists of power such as Maurizio Lazzarato) in uniquely posing "unresolved and overdetermined responses" to unique social and economic contradictions (62). In this dissertation I want to further emphasize how art can illuminate contemporary economic conditions in tandem with a reconfigured conception of Marxist critical social theory germane for the twenty-first century.

Overall, for historicizing twenty-first century addiction crises, accounts of economic exclusion from a "golden age" of industrial capitalism, on the one hand, and accounts of domination by neoliberal affect and subjectivity, on the other hand, are in a sense the flipside of the same coin. Neither broad account satisfactorily grasps contemporary, precarious consumption as immanent to the material totality of capitalism. As Daniel Zamora (2013) argues, the reality of growing un- and underemployment has led certain theorists to valorize "the excluded" as a problem of morality rather than distribution and inequality, effectively turning a difference in intra-class status to a new class difference within the proletariat itself, between wageless "excluded" groups and those apparently more stably employed. What is instead called for, Zamora argues, is a return to unemployment as a fundamental feature of capitalism, rather than as a category of a separate social situation. Such a "return to the abstract" would underline how "[t]he double figures of the free worker and the pauper are the common and

contradictory product of a single social process (the accumulation of capital), and not two different states stemming from opposed social processes" (n.p.).

While those like Denning and Zamora are clearly sensitive to how abstraction is figured in Marx's own writings, my intervention focuses on the figure of addiction as an allegorical marker of a crisis in reproduction under capitalism. It is important that contemporary art serves as a reminder of how the material forces of capital have always impoverished a great deal of the population, with or without the apparently more immediate, affective dimensions of neoliberal subjectivity. Yet, it is surely not wrong to recognize that the violence of value-relations will often be registered (whether consciously or not) and dramatized in cultural forms grappling with contemporary consumption in all its toxic manifestations, whether in portrayals of addiction habits or nihilistic excess. For, to reiterate, the increasing failure of capitalism to fulfil proletarian needs is evident not only on the level of employment but also that of reproduction and consumption. As "Screamin' Alice" of the *SIC* journal (2011) demonstrates, the deferral of overaccumulation crises via means like financialization and debt since the early 1970s marks a decoupling of capital accumulation from "the circuit of reproduction of labour-power" (188). Proletarian consumption, in the economic context of a falling demand for labour, is further decoupled from both welfare provision and the sale of labour power and is increasingly dependent on debt. Both Endnotes and Screamin' Alice argue that while proletarian reproduction was once shored up (at least partly) by state investment and social infrastructure supports, the class restructuring that occurred in the 1970s has led to a "crisis of the reproduction of the capital-labour relation" (Endnotes, "Misery and Debt" n.p.). The crisis of the reproduction of this class relation is manifested through both the overproduction of commodities and the underconsumption of that which is produced by wageworkers (Endnotes n.p.). Despite the partial decoupling of capital accumulation from proletarian reproduction, however, there is an equal sense in which capital and the proletariat have become further integrated, even as capital increasingly abandons social reproduction through further cuts to welfare and social supports.[13] Greater reliance on consumer credit, for example, puts downward pressure on wages

[13] See Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care" (2016) for more on capital's abandoning of social reproduction during the twentieth century. Fraser argues that from the 1970s and 1980s onward capitalism increasingly "promotes state and corporate disinvestment from social welfare, while recruiting women into paid workforce—externalizing carework onto families and communities while diminishing their capacity to perform it" (112).

overall, alongside fictitious capital's heightened extraction of debt and rent (Screamin' Alice 189). The economic crisis of 2008 was therefore so costly for the proletariat in part because for decades this class had been "hyper-integrated" into capital's reproduction circuits via processes like consumer debt, which tied the fate of mortgage bubbles to the fate of proletarian reproduction.

The intensification of addiction following 2008 registers in part this crisis-induced restructuring of capital and labour in the 2010s, whereby labour is at once squeezed for as much value as possible yet increasingly rendered redundant. The addiction narratives that I analyze register both this historical economic context and the persistence of unmet needs at the heart of capital's global demand for accumulation. My analyses of these narratives in Chapters 3 and 4 highlight the entwinement of the crisis-ridden 2010s with a seeming perpetual recurrence of unfulfilled needs. I show how the latter recurrence is dramatized through historically and geographically specific representations of gendered abstractions, in *Heaven Knows What*; state-backed dispossession of urban Indigenous residents from their land, in *Luk'Luk'I'*; and the hunger and thirst marking the lives of African American people in the rural American south, in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. But in what sense can we speak of a recurrent, centuries-spanning separation of people from the fulfilment of their needs, of which addiction is both symptom and, as argued later through reference to intoxication as allegory, mediation?

Addiction and Separation

While I maintain, throughout this dissertation, that crises in consumption, as manifested through various representations of addiction, came to a head in the 2010s, it is crucial to retain a sense of how capitalism has always induced certain patterns and habits of consumption through the mystifying and separating processes of commodification. Doing so retains, in turn, the critical core of Marxian theory for understanding addiction, because Marx's key formulations still address what is fundamental about capitalist society even despite its twenty-first century mutations.

Drawing directly upon Marx's account of commodity fetishism, Jameson attempts, in his recent *An American Utopia* (2016) to theorize addiction "on the level with the concept of commodification itself" (90). *An American Utopia* addresses the Left's difficulties in imagining large-scale social transformation and transition by provocatively

forwarding the figure of the universal army as a vehicle for “dual power”. Mass conscription into a universal army, Jameson suggests, could serve as a revolutionary body to provide the essential services and means of survival that neoliberal governments are failing to deliver in the 2010s, given their abdication of many social reproductive infrastructures and duties. Regardless of the specific details about such a universal model would emerge, Jameson argues for the emergence of new collective social infrastructures to fulfil neglected needs and services and bring about long-term transition into a new socialist society. However, as Alberto Toscano (2016) helpfully glosses, Jameson additionally speaks to the problem of “*anthropological* transition” (239, italics in text) in his framings of dual power. Thus, alongside his calls for programmes of large-scale, rationalized infrastructure to provide universal basic provisions, Jameson speculates on the aspects of culture (the realm of the superstructure, in his utopian schema) and features inherited from capitalist ways of life that must be therapeutically worked through to “disintoxicate ourselves from the older system’s powerful addictions” (49). Jameson identifies the latter with the baleful passion of consumerism, which he reads as “a kind of universal addiction which can surely not be cured by abstention or criminalization, nor indeed by simple legalization either” (89). Reading the addictions of consumerism “on the level with the concept of commodification” (90) leads Jameson to make the somewhat intuitive but still underdiscussed point that under capitalism the commodity form, by abstracting from social need, operates structurally like an addiction. Jameson notes how everyday objects, endowed with exchange value, are both enchanting and in possession of a distorted relationship to bodily needs:

> the commodity is no longer a material thing but a kind of amphibious entity, partly corresponding to a need and partly exercising a signifying function . . . surely the object of a kind of ideal or aesthetic fascination, all the while retaining the appearance of a bodily need. (90-1)

There is a spiritualization process inherent in the commodity form itself, where qualitatively different use values become equivalent through their expression in social acts of exchange, and ultimately “a definite social relation between men . . . assumes the phantasmagoric form of a relation between things” (Marx 128). But Jameson also remarks that the “pure form” of money, which abstracts from “all physical determination, all relationship to a specific bodily need or function” (91) in making qualitatively different objects equivalent under the abstraction of money, ultimately empties objects of consumption of genuine fulfilment. Jameson does not elaborate on this point beyond his

utopian suggestion that the addictive "passion" of consumerism "can be expected to wither on the vine in a society in which money no longer plays a central role" (91). However, we can infer, from Jameson's above helpful speculations, that the abstract transformation of all objects under the universal equivalent of the money-form should be regarded as a structural condition of the repetitive, melancholic cycles found in addiction routines.

To Jameson's remarks I would add that an account of the intoxicating spell of the commodity, and its attendant money-form, should be supplemented by a notion of abstraction as a constitutive, recurring law of separation.[14] Capitalism does not merely entrance its subjects from a distance through a dizzying plethora of mystical and mystifying commodities. As Bonefeld argues, the "indispensable prerequisite of the commodity form", and so too of the latter's fetishizing logic, is "doubly free labour" (*Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy* 93) —the recurring separation under capitalism that frees the labourer of all bonds but the selling of their own "free" labour to survive. By separating the individual from their own means of reproduction and subsistence through the imposition of necessary labour on "formally free" labour, a logic that determines class antagonism "as a disunited relationship of social unity" (Bonefeld 92), capitalism necessarily distorts consumption and unsurprisingly induces dependency on and pathologies around certain commodities.

Marx himself noted these distortions and dependencies in his chapter on "The Working Day" from *Capital*. Detailing the grueling fifteen-hour workdays imposed upon England's factory workers, in which the latter's free labour was squeezed "in scattered shreds of time", Marx notes that this enforced commitment to the factory meant "the

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[14] In order to forward a form of utopian therapeutics that grapples with collectivity, Jameson supplements his own account of addiction and commodification by drawing upon Lacanian conceptions of addiction as an evasion of "every concrete existence of the Other" (92). Jameson's incorporation of Lacanian psychoanalysis into his utopian framework serves to highlight how socialist transition will inevitably be fraught with "the permanence of social antagonism on an individual level" (73), rather than generative of frictionless community as soon as the economic base has been changed. Jameson is thus addressing the problem of "anthropological transition" (Toscano 239). However, if separation from one's means of reproduction under capitalism is constitutive of toxic consumption habits, then we may question Jameson's framing of addiction as a matter of desire that properly belongs to the realm of culture and superstructure, separate from the sphere of material needs and their utopian fulfilment. In Chapter 4, I show how the Lacanian framing of addiction can be reconstructed as a narrativization of the separating logics of the law of surplus populations, through my analysis of the film *Heaven Knows What*.

hours of rest were turned into hours of enforced idleness, which drove young men to the taverns and young girls to the brothels" (403). For Marx the exhaustion of the factory worker's body is at one with the fragmentation of proletarian consumption habits, right down to the rituals of eating:

> Every new trick the capitalist hit upon from day to day for keeping his machinery going for 12 or 15 hours without increasing the number of the personnel meant that the worker had to gulp down his meals in a different fragment of time. (404)

Meanwhile, in his argument against one-dimensional, undialectical readings of Marx's famous "opium of the people" phrase as purely a metaphor for ideological deception, Andrew McKinnon (2005) shows how Marx recognized opium's popular use as a healing medicine among the nineteenth century proletariat. McKinnon highlights how Marx, in *Capital*, details the adulteration of opium within a broader survey of the poor dietary conditions of the working class. The ineffectiveness of opium-based medicines resulting from their adulteration parallels the hunger inflicted upon poor families from being sold "bread adulterated with alum, soap, pear-ash, chalk" (Marx 278). McKinnon additionally shows how both Marx and Engels were equally aware of the "infant-doping" that occurred as it became necessary for mothers to work in the factory. Opium was both something the English working-classes lacked safe access to—as a salve, for example, for the bodily pain induced by factory work—and an instrument of class domination:

> while Marx was concerned about the adulteration of opium for the sake of profit, he and Engels also argued that profit-driven pharmacists promoted the inappropriate use of opiates for children—once again for the sake of profit. (McKinnon 19)

Lacking access to their own means of subsistence and reproduction, the proletariat's consumption habits have always been under threat of fragmentation and toxification by the ruling classes.

Underpinning this idea of toxic consumption as an outgrowth of capitalist separation is primitive accumulation, which Marx detailed as illustrating the separation of peoples from their land and means of survival through historical acts such as enclosures. Bonefeld argues that foregrounding primitive accumulation not as origin of capitalism, but rather as recurring separation provides a corrective to accounts of

capitalist abstraction that underplay class antagonism and which tend to divorce abstraction from actual social life:

> In distinction to the new reading [of Marx, as found in the work of Reichelt and Backhaus], which holds that Marx's critique entails a purely logical exposition of the categories of political economy, these categories express historically stamped relations. The law of value contains the force of law-making violence within its concept—in its civilized form, it appears as the freedom of economic compulsion. (80)

In Chapter 2, I follow Bonefeld in emphasizing the influence on Adorno's thought of this Marxian account of "law-making violence" stamped within civilized forms; for Bonefeld, "Adorno's negative dialectics presents the social constitution of the law of value with reference to Marx's concept of socially necessary labour time" ("Negative dialectics and the critique of economic objectivity" 67). Rather than retrace and reiterate the connections and tensions between Adorno and Marx, however, I am more interested in how the influence of this Marxian theme of separation intersects with Adorno's various commentaries on aesthetic intoxication, for example the notion of aesthetic "shudder", as well as the intoxications "by which subordinate classes have been made capable of enduring the unendurable in ossified social orders" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 49). Moreover, my rationale for grounding allegories of intoxication and addiction, in both theoretical and artistic terms, in more far-reaching spatial contexts, for example through Chapter 2's invocation of Jason W. Moore's conception of global "cheap nature" and Chapter 4's adoption of Phil Neel's (2018) account of the near and far hinterlands, is to emphasize the imbrication of addiction within global relations of primitive accumulation.

A systematic study of the connections between the history of drug production, changes in proletarian consumption habits and medical accounts of addiction, and the rise of capitalism, particularly the industrialized developments of the nineteenth century, lie beyond the scope of the present work.[15] Nevertheless, it is still important to reaffirm the notion that drug habits have been fundamentally shaped by the historical forces of capitalism. As such, foregrounding abstraction in contemporary readings of addiction, as this dissertation seeks to do, requires identifying features of capitalism that are both continuous with and distinct from the historical moment described by Marx. I am not so much interested in providing an alternative sociological explanation of addiction under

[15] For more on a general history of drug consumption under modernity see Courtwright (2002) and for the centrality of racialized prohibition to this history see Koram (2019).

capitalism, but rather in showing how narratives and cultural forms *figure* or *allegorize* capitalism's crises. I argue in this dissertation that reading addiction allegorically reveals both the structural persistence of value-form separation from bodily need and capitalism's more recent crisis mutations against which, as those like Silvia Federici (2018) have highlighted, new rounds of violent primitive accumulation have been responding.[16] As such, I caution against the framing of addiction as symptomatic of a new, unprecedented or higher stage of capitalism.[17] As Jodi Dean (2016) argues, it is a mistake to recognize various ailments like depression and anxiety as mere by-products of the "saturated, intensified, and unbearably competitive circuits of communicative capitalism" (57)[18], emblematized in domains such as social media. Instead, argues Dean, these "pathologies" reveal a crisis in the "real pathology" which is the individual form, a "form that has always itself been a problem, a mobilization of processes of individuation and interiorization in a reflexive inward turn that breaks connections and weakens collective strength" (57). In other words, the causes of consumption crises lie not in the system's infliction of external logics of power onto the individual, but rather within capitalism's very forms (such as, for Dean, the individual form). In the 2010s,

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[16] Federici (2018) maintains that the causes of the globally escalating violence against various marginalized groups are "the new forms of capital accumulation, which involve land dispossession, the destruction of communitarian relations, and an intensification in the exploitation of women's bodies and labor" (47).

[17] See for example Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2013), which outlines a new era of "pharmacopornographic" capitalism. For Preciado, the economy is driven by a regime of excitement and intoxication that allows multinational capitalism to extract surplus value from molecular technologies like antidepressants, hormone regulation and pornography, all of which control and produce subjectivity through "the biomolecular and organic structure of the body" (79). This account not only overlooks how the world economy is actually in decline, but also maps a one-to-one, identical, rather than allegorical and mediating, relationship between consumption and capitalism, describing, for example: "the techno-organic circuits that are codified in terms of gender, sex, race and sexuality through which pharmacopornographic capital circulates" (110). Benjamin Noys (2015) highlights this lack of attention to mediation in *Testo Junkie*, describing the auto-theory text's short-circuiting of Preciado's own narrative of black-market testosterone addiction with an account of "pharmacopornographic" capitalism as an "ecstasy of dissolution in Real forces" (Noys 198).

[18] My project largely leaves aside explorations of digital culture and the latter's apparent capacity to induce addiction (see, for example, Terranova 2011; Seymour 2020). However, in my Conclusion I briefly consider the role of digital addiction in Yeo Siew Hua's *A Land Imagined* (2018). In this film outside of the North American context, digital consumption patterns and habits among migrant workers allegorize the global exhaustion of proletarian social reproduction, on a multi-spatial and multi-national level, which in turn signals a crisis in the reproduction of capitalism itself.

capitalism's forms are in crisis. In contrast to Dean's more psychoanalytically-informed account, I reiterate that it is the value-form—the objectification of "free" social labour and the motor behind capitalism's capacity to generate surplus and therefore profit—that is in crisis.

Allegory and Intoxication

Having outlined the relationship between addiction, value-form separation and crisis in the 2010s, I will now address in more detail the relevance of intoxication for allegory and for reading 2010s culture. On a rudimentary level, allegory refers to how a narrative or story indirectly narrates a layer of meaning other than or surplus to its immediate form. Marxism is deeply allegorical in the sense that one of its main objects of inquiry—namely, the vast, global network of abstractions and apparently hidden relations of exploitation—appears only indirectly and as distorted by ideology. The capitalist totality allegorically assumes a series of intoxicating or hallucinatory forms, whether money as "the sensuous, self-objectified existence of this externalization [of private property]" (Marx, "From Excerpt-Notes of 1844" 276) or the "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (*Capital* 163) of the commodity form. If, as Georg Lukács (1971) once argued, the totality of social relations is reified in the "objective forms" of class society (*History and Class Consciousness* 83), then the capacity to grasp or narrativize the totality becomes fundamentally fragmented. However, it is naïve to think that a more accurate narrative or map can dispel and demystify capitalism's hallucinatory forms. Commenting on Fredric Jameson's sensorily vivid accounts of the allegorical process as a problem of navigating the social totality, Alberto Toscano (2021) suggests that we recognize the "hallucinatory moment of allegory as interlinked with allegory's oblique totalising powers" ("The *Faust* Variations" 170). As I argue in Chapters 1 and 2, for both Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno the hallucinatory or intoxicating moment of allegory becomes a homeopathic way of navigating capitalism's ruling abstractions.

In the first part of this dissertation, I argue that foregrounding the allegorical significance of intoxication under capitalism is pertinent for addressing not only the addiction crises of the 2010s but also what Jameson and, more recently, Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle (2015) outline as the problem of cognitive mapping, of allegorizing capitalism's manifold complexities and crises. Jameson's account of cognitive mapping, first articulated in his 1980s and 1990s writings on postmodernism, is

centrally concerned with a political aesthetic that can locate lived experience within the larger structures that determine it. In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) Jameson frequently invokes the language of intoxication to illustrate a widespread colonization of the present as a meaningful space of potential praxis and political activity, for example detailing the "intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" of postmodern spatial experience as breaking down temporality to "suddenly release this present of time from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis" (28). The quasi-hallucinatory and politically disorienting experience of the cultural dominant of postmodernism calls for a politics of cognitive mapping to reorient one's place in the social totality. For Jameson, a renewed emphasis on the economic totality underpinning everyday experience can "endow the immediate local occasion for struggle with an allegorical value, namely that of representing the overall struggle itself and incarnating it in a here-and-now thereby transfigured" (320). I take Jameson's framing of cognitive mapping through the language of addiction, consumption and intoxication—an aspect of Jameson's work notably under-addressed in the secondary literature on the American theorist[19]—as an entry point into reading consumption crises as political allegories of capitalist crises within 2010s addiction narratives.

However, such an allegorical relationship between intoxication and capitalism has clearly changed since the 1990s, with the overdose crisis especially underlining the negativity and crisis-ridden nature of contemporary consumption. If Jameson once spoke of cognitive mapping as figuring "an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions" (*Postmodernism 39*), it is now doubtful whether allegorical readings of intoxicating experiences hint at the emergence of positive new subjectivities and exhilarating alternative worlds to come. Indeed, Carolyn Lesjak (2021) comments that in Jameson's recent *Allegory and Ideology* there is "an affective or tonal shift consonant with the particularly daunting challenges of our crisis-ridden contemporary moment" (126-7). While in previous works Jameson's "own affect" (Lesjak, "Difference Relates"

[19] See, however, Clint Burnham's *Fredric Jameson and The Wolf of Wall Street* (2016) which, through an analysis of Martin Scorsese's film together with a reconstruction of Jameson's film theory, explores the toxic and utopian dimensions of consumption under financialized capitalism.

126) was identifiable in his pursuit of the utopian impulse within all aspects of culture,[20] there is certainly a sense in which such related affects, for example the "hallucinatory exhilaration" or combined "revulsion and euphoria" (Jameson, "Future City" 570) that Jameson once identified within otherwise degraded urban landscapes, feature less prominently.

The problem of cognitive mapping persists within a system, following the 2008 financial crisis, that presents "even greater challenges, or full-blown *blockages*, for representation and orientation" (Toscano & Kinkle 11, emphasis in text). For Toscano & Kinkle, the increasing sense of political disorientation post-2008 is symptomized through a range of artists deploying cartographic practices, with some of the strongest artists, including Allan Sekula and Trevor Paglen, addressing "the question of cartography in a formally reflexive way, thwarting fantasies of locational transparency while strategically deploying the visual repertoires of geographic representation" (24-5). However, cultural production within the latter part of the 2010s can also appear "less concerned with mapping the vicissitudes of multinational capitalism" (Sweedler 9) and more prefigurative of the latter's breakdown. Milo Sweedler (2020) identifies not the financial crisis of 2008 but rather the global revolts of 2011 as a pivot point for reading allegories of capitalism in the 2010s, arguing that key films imagine the system's "violent demise" rather than figure the opaque networks of global capitalism (9).

My intervention into such debates over the representation of crisis capitalism in 2010s culture addresses not the aesthetics of cartography but instead cultural forms that combine, on an intimate yet visceral level, social realism with the latter's partial disintegration, with non-narrative moments and even a certain surrealist logic.[21] However, I do not go as far as Sweedler in arguing that the 2010s prefigure the end or

[20] Jameson's account of the utopian is most vividly described in the essay "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (1979) as the "ineradicable drive towards collectivity that can be detected, no matter how faintly and feebly, in the most degraded works of mass culture" (148). See also Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) and *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009) for more recent accounts of the critical efficacy of utopia.

[21] In Chapters 3 and 4 I borrow from the Warwick Research Collective's (2015) use of the term "irrealism" that denotes not a "depreciation" (70) of realism, per se, but rather an aesthetic mode that maps larger capitalist abstractions (which WREC designate in terms of "combined and uneven development") from peripheral spaces. In my use of irrealism, I emphasize how such aesthetic modes are marked by non-narrative forms and moments to illustrate my broader point about the persistence of unmet needs and separated social reproduction among proletarian groups.

breakdown of capitalism. In the texts that I analyze, crises of addiction at once narrativize and foreground what cannot be narrativized under contemporary capitalism. I argue that the films *Heaven Knows What* and *Luk'Luk'I* and the novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* all foreground a seemingly unreconcilable dialectical tension between narrative and non-narrative forms—with neither narrative resolution nor non-narrative refusal ultimately privileged. Yet these aesthetic impulses of non-narrative foreground not a breakdown in "capitalist realism"[22] but rather the persistent separation of the individual from their own means of reproduction, from the fulfilment of their human needs, during the crisis-ridden 2010s.[23]

In Chapters 1 and 2, I establish the undertheorized role of intoxication within twentieth-century Marxist cultural theory. In these theory Chapters, I reconstruct Adorno's commentaries on toxic consumption, aesthetic intoxication, and utopian detoxification, all of which concern how capitalist reproduction shapes human needs and the domination of nature on the minutest levels of habit and consumption. I argue that situating the negative dialectic between narrative and non-narrative within 2010s addiction stories requires looking to Adorno's rather than Jameson's understanding of allegory. Despite the above noted affective shift in Jameson's recent work, we still fundamentally see in *Allegory and Ideology* a valorization of the allegorical process as the coordination of levels, characterized as a "vessel of excess", and enabling one to differentiate "new specializations, new mental faculties . . . new zones of reality . . . new productive activities, subjectivities, and varieties of human flora and fauna [and to] find identities among the differences" (347). Jameson's investigations into figures that mediate the capitalist mode of production have always been characterized by a commitment to allegory as an affirmative generation of "a range of distinct meanings or

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[22] This utopian gesture at the breakdown of capitalism's stultifying ideologies ("capitalist realism") is what Benjamin Noys (2020) identifies as a key pedagogical component of Mark Fisher's investigations into surreal cultural forms in *The Weird and the Eerie* (2017). Noys argues that for Fisher, "The breakdown of capitalist realism is not only a breakdown of capitalism but also a breakdown of realism" (161).

[23] Although I argue that narratives of addiction crises figure crises in the broader operations of capitalism and thus underline the latter's fundamental limitations for the reproduction of its global subjects, I nevertheless maintain that capitalism has and will continue to "successfully" reproduce itself despite and in fact because of its crisis tendencies. For it seems apparent that capitalism will always use crises to solve (at least temporarily) "the underlying problem of insufficient profitability" (Mattick Jr. 226) through short-term consolidations of profit and class-power in forms such as the shedding of workers, capital devaluation, land-grabs, debt-financing, and the commodification of essential needs like housing.

messages, simultaneously" (*Allegory and Ideology* 171). This productive use of allegory contrasts with the more straightforward or traditional idea of allegory, which dictates that "an elaborate set of figures and personifications . . . be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences" (170). Both Adorno and Jameson are heavily indebted to Benjamin's conception of allegory as not merely a mode of signification but rather an expression of history as a constellation of apparently only indirectly related phenomena, illuminating reified social relations that have faded into habit and decay. Adorno's own adoption of Benjamin's allegorical, constellatory approach to social and cultural analysis, however, seeks not to narrativize "identities among the differences" (Jameson 347) but to communicate that which resists narrativization within both conceptual thought and reified society. As Helmling argues, Adorno's critical writing is characterized by a kinetic energy that stages a drama of both repetition and reliquification in a dialectic of non-narrative and narrative. On the one hand, toxic features of culture are posed in their historical repetition, as frozen images at a stand-still (non-narrative); on the other hand, such features are situated as historical processes, and so they "reliquify" (i.e., they are given narrative) rather than "repeat" (Helmling 119) as static, ahistorical phenomena. Adorno's critical theory, inseparable from his unique writing style, stages various constellations, in which concepts and objects are shown to be nonidentical with one another, to think through the catastrophes of enlightenment progress and disentangle the genuinely progressive elements of modernity from capitalism. Within this method of theorizing, Adorno's wielding of nonidentity is marked by its "relation to that which is not, and which its managed, frozen self-identity withholds from it" (Adorno *Negative Dialectics* 163).

In Adorno, mediation, a central term in Marxist cultural analysis and helpfully clarified by Anna Kornbluh (2019) as "the work of forms"—the way in which "the commodity form, the money form, the novel form, the state form, etc., are all mediations of the underlying class relations of the capitalist mode of production" (57)—meets a dialectical limit in the form of not only society's frozen repetitions (Helmling), but also suffering nature. Articulations of non-narrative stasis or pause (caesura) are nonidentical moments in which Adorno frames not the ontological, ahistorical nature of human suffering, but rather the needs that capitalism leaves unmet and unfulfilled in the system's relentless pursuit of accumulation. As Miriam Hansen (2011) notes, Adorno's ecological consideration of natural beauty in *Aesthetic Theory* (1997) is allegorical

because “it refers, despite its social mediation, to a dimension beyond that mediation” (232). Allegory, I argue, must do the negative work of refusing to rest within the realm of social and historical mediation, even if a richer account of capitalism’s social and historical process remains a central goal for the Marxist cultural critic.

Drawing from texts such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002), *Aesthetic Theory*, and the essay “Theses on Need” (2017), I show how Adorno’s allegorical framings of individual consumption within the broader social totality reiterate the central truth that “[t]he purpose of capitalist production is not consumption, but the expansion of value through the production and realization of surplus-value” (Clarke, “The Marxist Theory of Overaccumulation and Crisis” 454). While Chapter 1 primarily engages in a theoretical reconstruction of Adorno, in Chapter 2 I argue for the contemporary relevance of Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, situating the ecological dimensions of that text’s allegorical account of intoxication and the domination of nature, as dramatized through the authors’ readings of *The Odyssey*, within the specific ecological crises of the 2010s. I ultimately argue that Adorno’s negative conception of allegory, which, developed from my reading in Chapter 1, highlights what is nonidentical to capitalism’s reproduction of the proletariat and what therefore connotes crisis and unfulfilled needs, provides a pertinent framework for reading capitalism’s crisis-logic within contemporary cultural production.

Critics such as Bonefeld (2014; 2016) and Chris O’Kane (2017; 2018) have made crucial inroads into connecting Adorno’s work with the broad field of value-form theory. One of the key insights developed in Bonefeld’s and O’Kane’s recent work is that Marx’s account of objective economic forms, as rigorously detailed in the value-form theory of those such as Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt, must be supplemented through reference to Adorno’s attention to the class antagonisms inherent in the “deranged forms” of economic objectivity. Meanwhile, Bonefeld and O’Kane also maintain that Adorno’s writing gains its critical force through its references to Marx’s critique of political economy. I agree with Bonefeld’s and O’Kane’s point that the notion of capitalist value as a binding social relation and economic logic fundamentally shapes Adorno’s critical theory. However, I highlight a critical gap here by connecting the latter insights, especially regarding the logic of separation and primitive accumulation, with Adorno’s aesthetic theory and attention to the figurative and allegorical, dimensions of Adorno’s work that Bonefeld and O’Kane do not address. Specifically, I intervene into

such discussions over the productive intersections of Marx and Adorno by outlining how Adorno's aesthetic theory is grounded in a social theory of needs, and vice versa (Chapter 1), and how Adorno's aesthetics tie to the ecological, gendered and colonial dimensions of primitive accumulation, as in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Chapter 2).

Through these interventions, I contend, overall, that Adorno deploys the critical, utopian form of allegory to illuminate the real infiltration of capitalism's objective crisis tendencies into the most sensuous needs and consumption habits of the proletariat. Adorno's understanding of allegory and needs might seem anachronistic in the 2010s, given that Adorno was writing at a time when, following World War II, capital's crisis tendencies, including the increased generation of surplus populations and falling rate of profit, were more easily shored up by Keynesian-style state intervention, including "the immense increase of the technical potential of society and therein also the consumer goods available to the members of the highly industrialized countries" (Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" n.p.). However, not only was Adorno aware of capital's underlying crisis tendencies, as evident in the latter essay and as emphasized recently by O'Kane (2018), he was also deeply attuned to the dependence of human consumption and needs on the law of exchange, a deep bond that ultimately comes "at the cost of the objective needs of the consumers," including housing, hunger and education about "the processes which most affect them" (Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" n.p.). Again, it is this central way that crisis capitalism shapes human needs and consumptions that my investigation into allegories of addiction and intoxication aims to illuminate.

Yet despite what may appear a fatalistic conception of consumption under capitalism, Adorno does not completely abandon the utopian dimensions of consumption, of what Jameson glosses in Benjamin as "intoxication itself . . . the very promise of culture and its consumptions (*promesse de bonheur*, the Frankfurt School like to say, following Stendhal)" (Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* 225). On one level, Adorno's various commentaries on the culture industry might suggest a wholesale rejection of the consumption habits generated by capitalism. For Adorno, the mass standardization of everyday life through the integration of culture, entertainment and leisure into exchange is said to deliver a "baby-food" of "permanent self-reflection based upon the infantile compulsion towards the repetition of needs which it creates in the first place" ("The Schema of Mass Culture" 67). In "Theses on Need", based on a 1942

seminar, Adorno further claims that human needs are fundamentally shaped and always in danger of being monopolized by “class society” (103). Yet, within the same essay, Adorno also affirms the urgency of satisfying the most immediate needs within the present—a present, in the midst of World War II, marred by catastrophe and suffering and which no longer appears so distinct from the manifold crises of the twenty-first century. Adorno maintains that a proper theory of needs satisfaction would not pit a static, ahistorical conception of “genuine” needs against historically relative needs, and that due attention to such historically generated habits would be utopian:

> If production were immediately, unconditionally and unrestrictedly reorganized according to the satisfaction of needs—even and especially those produced by capitalism—then the needs themselves would be decisively transformed. (103)

By putting Adorno in dialogue with writers such as Glen Coulthard, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Kate Soper as well as radical harm reduction politics, I conclude in Chapter 2 by showing how utopian possibility persists in the 2010s and into the present through the working in-and-through of capitalism’s consumptions, rather than the wholesale denouncement of the latter as false needs. The utopian quality latent within “the very promise of culture and its consumptions” is ultimately framed, by Horkheimer and Adorno, not through social theory alone but through a range of archaic and modern allegorical figures. When read in a constellation with contemporary social theory, I argue that *Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s figures of dominated consumption and nature reiterate the incompatibility of capitalism with (human and non-human) needs, and thus negatively illuminate what Horkheimer and Adorno read as latent within Homer’s tale of the men intoxicated by the Lotus flower— “a state in which the reproduction of life is independent of conscious self-preservation” (50).

Chapter Summary

I begin Chapter 1 by addressing Jameson’s (2020) recent analysis of how, through their dispute over the relationship between intoxication and its economic context in Charles Baudelaire’s wine poetry, Adorno and Benjamin foreground “the base-and-superstructure distinction itself and the disagreement on the role it should play in cultural analysis” (Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* 224). According to Jameson, Adorno is primarily interested in how Baudelaire’s staging of the nineteenth century Parisian wine

tax stands in for the totality of the capitalist mode of production itself. In contrast, Benjamin is said to hold together the economic detail and intoxication's utopian appeal within a monadological, synchronous dialectical image, "in which each of these monads floats free of the others, like the constellations, and yet demands a relationship to the present without which we cannot gain access to it" (Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* 228). Jameson's language here evokes his own comments on the contemporary productivity of multi-levelled allegory, as outlined above, against crude economistic reductions of cultural phenomena to a one-to-one correspondence with the capitalist totality. In Jameson's commentary, Adorno can therefore be read as a placeholder for a one-to-one, "bad allegory" position on culture. Yet I will argue, through attention to Adorno's own invocations of Benjaminian allegory and non-human nature, that Adorno cannot be reduced to this mode of theorizing, and that Jameson's broader comments on the unsuitability of Adorno's negativity for the politics of the twenty-first century (Jameson 2009; 2019) overlook Adorno's conception of nonidentity as a critical mode of allegorizing value-form objectivity and separation. I thereafter establish the key relationship between narrative, non-narrative, allegory and intoxication in Adorno, and show how these Adornian concepts develop and depart from Benjamin's own writings on allegory and intoxication. I argue, overall, that through revisiting Adorno's writings on intoxication and consumption, in which he distinguishes between the intoxicating, addictive consumptions of the culture industry and the at once intoxicating and detoxifying aesthetic experiences of art, we can map the intensified crises of unmet needs in the 2010s. The distinctive forms of intoxication that Adorno ascribes to the culture industry and to that of art, respectively, should not be read as assertions of a mandarin disdain for certain forms of culture and entertainment. Rather, these distinctive modes of intoxication must be read in the context of the different kinds of needs satisfaction he outlines in "Theses on Need", whereby the former intoxication serves the reproduction of capital, and the latter provides a utopian afterimage of the fulfilment of human and non-human needs.

In Chapter 2, I explore in further detail the subterranean role of intoxication in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. I pay close attention to the authors' readings of the figures of intoxication, primarily in their Excursus on *The Odyssey*. Despite the growing body of work arguing for the contemporary ecological importance of Adorno's work, especially *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Cook 2011; Cassegård 2021),

much less attention has been paid to how Adorno addresses ecological questions through his allegorical framings of intoxication and consumption. This Chapter shows how Horkheimer and Adorno narratively and non-narratively frame, through figures such as the Sirens, Circe, the Oarsmen and the Lotus-eaters, the relationship between intimate, intoxicating consumption habits and capitalism's domination and extraction of nature. I argue that these archaic figures of intoxication in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be resituated in dialogue with Marxist-feminist social reproduction theory and Moore's theory of world-ecology to highlight capitalism's consumption crises in the face of environmental exhaustion and dependence on "cheap nature" in the 2010s. I conclude by reading Adorno in productive tension with the contemporary Indigenous critical theory of writers such as Simpson and Coulthard, all of whom stress the imperative to disentangle consumption and the fulfilment of needs from value-relations and capitalist growth. In foregrounding the productivity of reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment* alongside world-ecology and Indigenous thought and politics, my aim in this Chapter is to highlight both the global and utopian contexts of the North American addiction crises that have intensified throughout the 2010s.

In Chapter 3, I explore how the addiction narratives of two films—the Safdie Brothers' *Heaven Knows What* and Wayne Wapeemukwa's *Luk'Luk'I*—allegorize the separating logics of wageless life and colonial dispossession within the context of rapidly gentrifying urban centres (New York City and Vancouver, Canada, respectively). This Chapter examines how documentary-hybrid filmmaking, with its incorporation of "irreal", anti-narrative elements into low fidelity portrayals of everyday grit, can go beyond just capturing the experiences of addiction to map a broader historical relationship between intoxicating consumption and capitalism's all-encompassing crisis-forms. In the Safdies' *Heaven Knows What*, the separations from needs and social community, visible within the daily lives of characters such as Harley, Ilya and Mike, are further highlighted as unsurpassable through the escapes offered by drug use. Meanwhile, Wapeemukwa's film stages a recurring interaction, during Vancouver's 2010 Olympic Games, between a heroin addict and the appearance of an invading UFO on unceded Indigenous land. In doing so, *Luk'Luk'I* underscores the colonial separation of Indigenous subjects from their land as a non-narrative limit to addiction narratives within the disinvested and gentrifying urban space of Vancouver.

While the cultural objects studied in Chapter 3 address the North American city, Chapter 4 turns to what Phil Neel theorizes as the near and far economic hinterlands. Specifically, I focus on the semi-rural space of Mississippi to explore how Neel's account of economic exclusion and decline can be read in Jesmyn Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. In this chapter, I examine the role of capitalism's management of surplus populations and ecological resources and barriers. I show that Ward's narrative of centuries-long environmental and racial domination is a fitting allegory for the accumulation of crises afflicting near- and far-hinterland regions of the American South in the 2010s. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* foregrounds a long history of African American suffering in the U.S., and the novel paints a bleak picture of the possibility of resistance through the figure of intoxication within a poor family throughout the span of a road trip to Parchman prison. The parents of the family are depicted as marred by methamphetamine addiction, and furthermore the spiritual healing practices and alternative intoxications embodied in the grandparents' generation are portrayed as largely insufficient for the contemporary era's manifold crises. However, Ward also persistently grounds utopian longing throughout her novel, evident, I show, through images of intoxicating consumption and of bodily needs of thirst and hunger. I show how these utopian traces, which are grounded in consumption and social reproduction, are conveyed through Ward's deployment of both historically informed narratives as well as non-narrative inflections (in the form of caesuras and polyphonic diegesis), in a manner strangely similar to Horkheimer and Adorno's readings of figures of intoxication, such as the Lotus-eaters episode, in *The Odyssey*. I conclude this Chapter by arguing that reading the infiltration of crisis into acts and habits of intoxication and addiction, in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, is inseparable from reading Ward's supplementary figure of detoxification. Through Ward's persistent images of water as well as figurations of musicality, I show that utopian stirrings of detoxification from the ravages of value-relations linger at the novel's close.

This study concludes by briefly arguing for the role of digital consumption and addiction in Yeo Siew Hua's *A Land Imagined* as allegories of capitalism's crises beyond the North American geographical context. *A Land Imagined* details the mysterious disappearance of a Chinese migrant worker, Wang, and his absorption in a video game at a 24-hour cybercafé. The film combines social realist and irrealist techniques to underscore the discrepancy between needs-fulfilment and capital's attempt to use crises

to shore up issues of profitability and accumulation. But *A Land Imagined* also depicts addiction amongst migrant labour and in the context of global interrelations between Singapore and nations of the Global South such as Indonesia, Malaysia, China and Bangladesh. The film provides a more global sense of how intoxicating and compulsive forms of consumption allegorize the totalizing nature of value-relations. Although *A Land Imagined* somberly ends by reiterating proletarian separation both from the means of reproduction and from a community of other proletarian subjects, there are glimmers of utopian hope in Yeo's film. These utopian instances move beyond just underlining the toxic entanglement of consumption and value while gesturing at the latter's abolition through figures of detoxification, as apparent within the other narratives studied in this project. As well, in key moments, *A Land Imagined* prismatically illuminates some of the emerging struggles centred around the fulfillment of essential human and non-human needs and the disentangling of social reproduction from the needs of the value-form. As I already show in my conclusion to Chapter 2, such social reproductive struggles, most readily apparent in the resurgence of mutual aid networks, trade unions and climate justice, though hardly new, have gained heightened significance in a world of intensified crises. This dissertation's Conclusion thus reiterates that even the most intimately personal narratives of individual consumption and addiction must be read as allegories of crisis-capitalism, of not only the latter's separating logics but also the political responses, inevitably arising from value's antagonistic core, that we see increasing in the 2020s.

Chapter 1.

Allegory and Intoxication in Benjamin and Adorno

In this Chapter I argue for the allegorical significance of intoxication in the critical theory of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. Specifically, I chart how intoxication, as articulated not only through each writer's own work but also through written correspondences between Benjamin and Adorno, foregrounds the allegorical relationship between consumption (as site of crisis and repressed utopian longing) and the capitalist mode of production. I consider Adorno's adoption of but also break with key Benjaminian formulations such as the constellation, the dialectical image and the utopian figure of non-human nature. Through doing so, I argue that Adorno provides a model for reading intoxication and addiction allegorically that complements yet also problematizes Fredric Jameson's expansive conception of allegory as outlined in the Introduction. Throughout the rest of the dissertation, I draw upon what I argue for here as Adorno's narrative and non-narrative framings of intoxicating consumption and addiction habits under the value-form. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, I forge constellations between representations of intoxication and capitalism's crises forms, but also retain glimmers of utopian hope through the persistence of what I argue for here, through readings of Adorno, as the subterranean impulse of *detoxification*. In this Chapter, I reconstruct Adorno's aesthetic and allegorical framing of needs under capitalism. I ultimately argue that such a framing of needs amounts to a rejection of the capitalist value-form on the level of intimate, bodily habits, which underlines in turn the utopian promise of alternative needs-fulfilment against the toxic perpetuation of value-relations for survival.

Along with Chapter 2's reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this Chapter establishes how early Frankfurt School critical theory can be reconstructed to read addiction narratives, as well as other narratives of consumption crises, as allegories of capitalism's broader, centuries-spanning crisis-tendencies. These tendencies, characterized by falling rates of profit, economic stagnation, and, most importantly, the separation of propertyless individuals from their own social reproduction, were already acknowledged in many of Adorno's writings, as emphasized recently by Bonefeld and O'Kane (2022). Yet while this latter work has helpfully solidified the relationship between Adorno's critical theory and Marxist theories of value and crisis, little scholarship has

considered how such issues of crisis and separation are also registered through Adorno's commentaries on artistic works and his aesthetic theory more broadly. I argue that through paying attention to how Adorno and Benjamin allegorically frame intoxicating consumption and dependency in relation to the capitalist mode of production, we can in turn read contemporary representations of intimate social reproductive crises as stark allegories of capitalism's larger crisis-forms, including the latter's intersection with colonial, racialized, gendered and world-ecological logics.

This Chapter proceeds by charting how Adorno borrows from but also modifies Benjamin's use of the constellation to frame intoxication as both mutilated by and in antagonistic relationship with the capitalist law of exchange. The constellation, as an allegorical mode of theorizing, is an important critical tool for both Benjamin and Adorno. The constellation brings together an array of disparate, juxtaposing concepts and images for the purposes of illuminating an object. In contrast to philosophy driven by identity thinking, to thought which tries to determine and define its object according to conceptual intention, the constellation avoids the affirmation of identity between the object and the concepts or images brought to bear on that object. Benjamin (*Origin of the German Trauerspiel* 8-15) and Adorno (*Negative Dialectics* 162-66) share a similar fundamental understanding of the constellation, but their respective writings on culture and art betray important differences and emphases. For example, Benjamin emphasizes the defamiliarizing power of the dialectical image to bring disparate fragments together, while Adorno more prominently dramatizes the relationship between the dialectical image's anti- or non-narrative stasis and the loosening, temporal energy of narrative.

As Steven Helmling argues, the modernist stasis and discontinuity characterizing the constellation can be read in terms of non-narrative form (11-13); on the surface, the constellation is seemingly at odds with the fluid, continuous process of narrative. Yet, as Helmling also highlights, Adorno does not abandon the utopian potential of narrative to write a different story out of the present catastrophe (Helmling 160-79). Through his stylistic renditions of a dialectical drama between narrative and non-narrative forms, Adorno—particularly in his and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—critically "'repeat and reliquify' the reifications of our 'damaged life'" (Helmling 119) and the frozen ideologies solidified through Western enlightenment. My intervention develops Helmling's narrative/non-narrative interpretation of Adorno in two important ways. Firstly, I emphasize how Adorno adopts this "poetics of critique" against

the economic totality, specifically the social objectivity of value whereby “people are organized by the reproduction of labor power” (“Theses on Need” 103). Secondly, I emphasize how Adorno infiltrates and critiques the preponderance of the economic through his narrative and non-narrative staging of intoxicating consumption. The figure of intoxication, in works such as *Aesthetic Theory*, allegorically stages the intimate, entangled and socially reproduced relationship between value and need detailed in Adorno’s “Theses on Need”. In turn, Adorno’s narrative and non-narrative framing of capitalism and intoxication critically illuminates the needs that the system cannot fulfil. By bringing Adorno’s comments on the aesthetic shudder in dialogue with his remarks on a non-dominating relationship between needs and nature, I underscore how Adorno’s ethics are situated against not just the domination of enlightenment reason but against value-form separation. This is an ethics that would, in a utopian register, find its fulfilment through a non-capitalist system centred around the detoxifying satisfaction of immediate needs.

Throughout this Chapter, I show how both Benjamin and Adorno frame intoxication according to the constellation, or through allegory, to illuminate the entanglement of reified social relations and non-human nature. Yet whereas Benjamin is interested in the utopian impulses arising from the intoxicating phantasmagoria of daily life under capitalism,[24] Adorno is suspicious of these supposedly emancipatory potentials. Adorno questions Benjamin’s inattentiveness to the social mediations, the processes of commodification, underpinning capitalism’s phantasmagoric dreamworlds. Adorno instead situates allegory and the utopian impulse of detoxified human and non-human relations within the aesthetic experience of autonomous art and the latter’s capacity to critique commodification by performatively identifying with that process. Through reference to “Theses on Need”’s imperative to disentangle needs-fulfilment from capital’s logic of valorization, I further argue that Adorno’s allegorical framings of intoxication and detoxification need not be limited to the sphere of autonomous art.

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[24] Benjamin reads into the Parisian arcades the mass appearances of “phantasmagoria”, which are composed of quasi-magical, distracting and ideologically distorting urban dream-landscapes and modes of entertainment. Benjamin locates the commodity fetish, as characterized by Marx, within such phantasmagoric displays, for example the plethora of world exhibitions during nineteenth century Paris. See Benjamin’s “Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (2006).

Adorno grounds the damaging effects of capitalist social relations on the body and on the level of needs, providing insight into how habits are maintained through various operations of power, while also negatively illuminating the detoxification of consumption and need from value-relations. However, I maintain that if divorced from a conception of value-form abstraction and totality, Adorno's allegorical framing of detoxification could be charged with merely proposing ethical resistance against instances of domination and power relations, rather than critiquing the objectivity of capitalist social relations. My reading of Adorno therefore does not argue for a notion of resistance lying solely in the concrete against the abstract, in the body against the system, and seeks to avoid overstressing Adorno's writings on aesthetic absorption and "identify[ing] uncritically with damaged life" (Cook, "Review: Adorno's Positive Dialectic" n.p.). In my reading, Adorno's utopian impulse of detoxification is pitted against value-relations in their totality, not merely against power relations.

As such, my interpretation of Adorno is strongly influenced by Jameson's firmly Marxist reading of the Frankfurt School thinker, yet, as I will argue later in the Chapter and in Chapter 2, I question Jameson's suspicion of non-narrative form and his dismissal of ethical mimesis and the nonidentical in Adorno. Jameson's *Late Marxism* correctly reemphasizes, during a historical period dominated by poststructuralist theory and "end of history" narratives, Adorno as a Marxist thinker of totality. For example, Jameson situates Adorno's grappling with identity thinking in the context of the preponderance of exchange value as totality. Rather than resistance to random acts of domination, reckoning with the violence of identity thinking is akin to reckoning with the violence of exchange society as a whole:

> The exchange relationship, the abstract value form in which identity is primordially conceived, cannot exist as a punctual event as an occasional matter or an isolated, optional or random act; it is at one with the exchange system itself, so that it is at this point that the philosophical term 'system' modulates into the essentially social or socioeconomic concept of totality . . . (Jameson 28-9)

Less convincing, however, is Jameson's aversion to the philosophical significance of nonidentity in Adorno. As I will show, Jameson warns against readings that stress Adorno as a theorist of nonidentity, since to do so, according to Jameson, downplays Adorno's ability to underscore the predominance of exchange through the critique of identity. The valorization of nonidentity, for Jameson, leads to unwarranted readings of

Adorno as a post-Marxist philosopher of difference (*Late Marxism* 22). More recently, Jameson claims that, alongside his displeasure at Adorno's "knee-jerk evocation of universal suffering", he believes it mistaken to "reduce Adorno to a thinker of "non-identity," a theme in any case that is for all practical purposes an anti-Marxist one" ("Afterword" 165). By contrast, I stress the parts of Adorno's work that reveal how the philosophy of nonidentity offers a critical view of the totality, illuminating aspects of the false whole, on the level of consumption and needs, that purely economistic accounts cannot account for, including the utopian impulses that point at social reproduction beyond value abstraction. Ultimately, Jameson's disregard of nonidentity leaves unaddressed, within his own renewed project of Marxist allegory and ideology critique, the problem of the fundamental nonfulfillment of needs and possible ethical alternatives under crisis-capitalism.

To foreground the overlooked significance of intoxication in Adorno's work and to establish the appropriateness of Adorno's allegorical framework for reading addiction narratives in the 2010s, which will be further developed in Chapter 2, I begin this Chapter by reading an important 1938 exchange between Benjamin and Adorno (2006). I establish how this debate over the aesthetic importance of intoxication underlines some key differences between Benjamin and Adorno, in line with Jameson's (2020) recent commentary on the exchange in question. However, I ultimately argue against the opposition that Jameson establishes between Benjamin's non-narrative constellations and Adorno's apparently more narrative focus on the economic totality. I argue instead that Adorno's allegorical framing of intoxication is informed by Benjamin's non-narrative constellations of intoxication, which can be found in Benjamin's writings on, for example aura, hashish consumption and Baudelaire. Benjaminian allegory, in my view, is important for helping us map 2010s crises not because Benjamin's method is better suited than Adorno's for explicating the multiple "levels of reading within the textual host [of capitalism]" (Jameson, *Allegory* 1). Rather, I argue that Benjaminian constellations, and their capacity to both narrativize and cease the narrativization of reified second nature, inform Adorno's allegorical conception of needs. Following this Chapter's elucidations of the relationship between allegory and needs in Adorno's work, my readings of contemporary culture in this project's subsequent Chapters underscore the negativity of capitalist crises as mediated through representations of consumption crises.

The Intoxication Dispute

In their back-and-forth correspondence over Benjamin's draft essay on "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire", Adorno and Benjamin argue over the role of intoxication in Baudelaire's wine poetry. As Jameson argues, the significance of Adorno and Benjamin's dispute over the relationship between intoxication and its broader economic context lies in "the base-and-superstructure distinction itself and the disagreement on the role it should play in cultural analysis" (*The Benjamin Files* 224). Jameson argues that while Adorno wants to invoke the base—the capitalist mode of production—in the most general way, and to read empirical details like the wine tax as ultimately mediated through the commodification process, Benjamin conversely regards the detail and symptom within the social process as both superstructural *and* economic (Jameson 226). The wine tax, for Benjamin, constellates both the utopian energies of intoxication and the latter's economic context within a single image. Jameson shows how Benjamin and Adorno's disagreements over the Baudelaire poetry underscore the centrality that Benjamin ascribes to the dialectical image. The dialectical image, broadly, is a concept that aims to formally and stylistically replicate the stasis of petrified social relations to shatter the latter's illusions. Adorno, on the other hand, is skeptical of whether Benjamin's performative repetition of petrified phantasmagoria can truly undercut reified social relations. While, as I will show, Adorno is himself greatly indebted to Benjamin's formulations of the dialectical image, Adorno argues that the dialectical freeze frame Benjamin reads through Baudelaire lacks critical negativity because this constellation, in sidestepping the mediating role of the total commodification process, "ascribes to phenomena the very spontaneity, tangibility, and density that capitalism has stripped from them" (Adorno, "Exchange with Adorno on "Paris of Second Empire" 101).

Benjamin's draft piece on Baudelaire was set to form the second part of a never-completed three-part study titled *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Near the beginning of the draft in question, Benjamin constructs out of Baudelaire's poem "The Ragpickers' Wine" a constellation of the poetic, social and economic history of Baudelaire's writing in nineteenth century Paris. Benjamin here establishes connections between, for example, wine taxes and the utopian energies attributable to intoxication. The wine tax in question forced urban dwellers to seek cheap wine in the taverns outside of the Parisian borders, thereby creating, as Jameson notes,

“a specific sociality” (*Benjamin Files* 225) where “[t]he wine gave the disinherited access to dreams of future revenge and future glory” (Benjamin, “Paris of the Second Empire” 8). Benjamin paints a picture of Paris in which the prohibitive economic measure of the wine tax stands in productive opposition to the states of intoxication among “the disinherited” that are figured in Baudelaire’s rich poetry. Moreover, Benjamin identifies a proto-revolutionary impulse in the “ragpicker” who participated in the wider dreamwork of Parisian society around the time of the 1848 revolution:

> When the new industrial processes gave refuse a certain value, ragpickers appeared in the cities in larger numbers . . . A ragpicker cannot, of course, be considered a member of the *bohème*. But from the *littérateur* to the professional conspirator, everyone who belonged to the *bohème* could recognize a bit of himself in the ragpicker. Each person was in a more or less blunted state of revolt against society and faced a more or less precarious future. At the proper time, he was able to sympathize with those who were shaking the foundations of this society. The ragpicker was not alone in his dream. He was accompanied by comrades; they, too, reeked of wine casks, and they, too, had turned gray in battles. (Benjamin 8-9)

Benjamin here ascribes as much significance to the allure and wish-fulfilments of intoxication as he does to as the wider economic and historical context. Jameson claims that Benjamin is accounting for not only the intoxications embodied in Baudelaire’s poetry, but more broadly “intoxication itself . . . the very promise of culture and its consumptions (*promesse de bonheur*, the Frankfurt School like to say, following Stendhal)” (225). As will be shown later, this “promise of culture and its consumptions” is equally evident, even though deferred, in Adorno’s theory.

Adorno points to the above passage from the Baudelaire piece as evidence of Benjamin’s romanticism and insufficient account of dialectical mediation. Adorno argues that Benjamin’s writing “lacks mediation” because “there is a persistent tendency to relate the pragmatic content of Baudelaire’s work directly to adjacent features of the social history of his time, especially economic ones” (101). For Adorno, Benjamin crudely connects details such as the wine tax to literary and cultural motifs of intoxication, and this forging of connections is insufficiently historical because it lacks a theory of the total commodification process. Furthermore, Adorno argues that Benjamin’s unwillingness to prioritize the predominance of exchange value in nineteenth century Parisian society risks falsely attributing a utopian energy to the surface appearances of that society:

> Regardless of the extent to which Baudelaire's wine poems may have been inspired by the wine tax and the *barrieres,* the recurrence of these motifs in his oeuvre can be determined only by the general social and economic tendency of his age, *sensu strictissimo* through an analysis of the commodity form in Baudelaire's epoch. That is the question posed by your [Benjamin's] work . . . The direct connection drawn between the wine tax and "L'Ame du vin" ascribes to phenomena the very spontaneity, tangibility, and density that capitalism has stripped from them. (Adorno, "Exchange with Adorno on "Paris of Second Empire" 101)

These remarks resemble Adorno's later criticisms of the account of commodity society given in Benjamin's writings on the Parisian arcades. In those correspondences, Adorno claims that Benjamin's descriptions of the metropolitan dreamworld require a more complete historical account of the colonial and world trade context.[25] Through Adorno's reading of Benjamin's writing, we can detect a tension between historicizing the colonial economic background of intoxication and accounting for the appeal and utopian impulses typically associated with the latter.

Adorno argues that Benjamin's constellated utopian impulses are deprived "of their true historico-philosophical weight" (102) because they are not sufficiently grounded in a Marxist account of commodity society. Adorno claims that Benjamin's historical investigations are thereby situated "at the crossroads of magic and positivism" because "[o]nly theory could break the spell" (102) of such ideologically mystified historical phenomena. Benjamin responds by arguing that while theory must indeed dispel or re-liquefy the "non-differentiation between magic and positivism", the sheer textual gravity of the "magical element" in intoxication must nevertheless be respected (108). Benjamin's remarks on intoxication tie to his broader understanding of philology. The reader must, according to Benjamin philologically examine a text detail by detail and through doing so respect the "amazement" of the magical textual element. The magical textual element is akin to a utopian shock experienced by the reader; this element must

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[25] See Caitlin Vandertop (2016) for a reading that connects Benjamin's analyses of urban consumer culture in the *The Arcades Project* with the structures of colonial conquest and exchange. Vandertop argues that in Benjamin's text it is possible to trace the mediation of colonial spaces within the European metropolis, and thus that there is a way of reading the *Arcades* as addressing what is implicit within Adorno's critique, which is "the idea that the transformation of Parisian consumer experience in the nineteenth century should be understood within the context of the wider circuits of the French Empire to which the city was connected" (Vandertop 710-11).

remain the "*primary* object" of historical, dialectical investigation,[26] even as the magic is ultimately dispelled by such investigation (108).

For Benjamin, proper textual investigation utilizes the constellation, rather than the philological method alone.[27] Benjamin's insistence on persisting with the amazement, magic, or textual gravity of intoxication in Baudelaire relates to his writing on the dialectical image as a method of cultural analysis. Rather than situating cultural objects within temporal frames (i.e., as caused by such and such past event), Benjamin frames such objects and phenomena as monads, in which "the textual detail which was frozen in a mythical rigidity comes alive" (108). According to Benjamin, the reification and ideological mythologization of historical objects can only be broken by allowing such frozen phenomena to speak through their petrified "Medusa face" ("The Paris of the Second Empire" 12). The dialectical image is faithful to its object of investigation not through a re-liquefication of the present into the sea of the past, but instead through a performative repetition of reified forms such that "what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation" (*Arcades Project* 463). Only within such constellations, whereby past proto-revolutionary events are jarringly brought together with present concerns in a dialectical image—or "dialectics at a standstill"—can the present be grasped in a genuinely political way. For Benjamin only such dialectical images are "genuinely historical" (*Arcades Project* 463), despite their arresting of temporality through non-chronological force-fields.

These discussions over Baudelaire and the wine tax therefore show something important about how Benjamin approaches cultural analysis from a Marxist perspective. For Jameson, Benjamin's commentary on the wine tax and poetic intoxication is not a re-affirmation of the superstructure's centrality against crude reductions of the superstructure to the base. Rather, Benjamin wants to theoretically situate both base and superstructure within a single, contradictory, irreconciled image (*Benjamin Files* 225). Jameson argues that Benjamin aims to "reduce the narrative element in the

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[26] Benjamin is here referring to Adorno's work on Soren Kierkegaard, where Adorno describes "amazement" as reflecting "the deepest [but not the primary, as Benjamin is keen to note] insight into the relation between dialectic, myth, and image" (Adorno qtd. in Benjamin 108).

[27] As Susan Buck-Morss (1977) notes in her gloss on the reply to Adorno, for Benjamin "Dialectical, materialist revelation did not arise from the philological moment alone . . . but out of the construction of the details as they made a constellation with the present" (158).

process” of reconstructing intoxication by constructing a synchronic, “nonchronological “constellation” of concrete factors and interrelated phenomena” (Jameson 224). Thus, Jameson argues that Benjamin privileges a synchronous mode of periodization, but this is a mode that is not opposed to historicization, per se; rather, Benjamin’s periodization “minimizes the temporal dimension of its material but not its historical “index”” (Jameson 224).

Benjamin’s monadic framing of Baudelaire’s world of intoxication seeks to restore “the background of an entire world and way of life” (Jameson 225). Such a restoration is achieved through a “monadic unity, the complex interrelationships of what remains a kind of organic whole—with outer limits, perhaps rather than with boundaries” (Jameson 226). Jameson’s interpretation of Benjamin here points at how contemporary cognitive maps of intoxication might also restore lifeworlds, at the level of consumption, through synchronic reconstructions of capitalism’s sheer social complexity. Jameson suggestively notes an affinity between Benjamin’s monadic framing of intoxication and the Deleuzian rhizome (226). Rhizomatic approaches to cultural studies tend to reject notions of system, narrative, the diachronic and totality, and instead valorize the productive generation of new meanings and connections between a range of multiple phenomena.[28] It is worth quoting in full the passage where Jameson lays out most explicitly the parallels between Benjamin’s reconstruction of Baudelaire’s wine poetry and the rhizomatic approach:

> The history of the customs barriers on alcohol would be fully as much a rhizomatic strand growing out of the monad as any contemporaneous medical theories on intoxication or any journalistic accounts of social disorder around the outer fringes of Paris, where, indeed, Baudelaire’s rag

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[28] Ian Buchannan (2007), referencing Deleuze and Guattari, lists the basic criteria of the rhizome as follows:

1. The rhizome connects any point to any other point (connections do not have to be between same and same, or like and like).
2. The rhizome cannot be reduced to either the One or the multiple because it is composed of dimensions (directions in motion) not units. Consequently no point in the rhizome can be altered without altering the whole.
3. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture and offshoots (not reproduction).
4. The rhizome pertains to an infinitely modifiable map with multiple entrances and exits that must be produced.
5. The rhizome is acentred, nonsignifying, and acephalous.
6. The rhizome isn't amenable to any structural or generative model. (Buchannan 9-10)

> pickers and other inhabitants of his urban mythology also gather and find their family relationship. (226)

Jameson does not suggest, however, that Benjamin sidesteps Marxist questions of relating the base to the superstructure. In Benjamin, Jameson argues, base and superstructure are irreconciled in an image that crystallizes—rather than shatters or deconstructs—multiple historical phenomena and generates the possibility of potentially productive new meanings. In contrast, Adorno's reading of Baudelaire, argues Jameson, wants to read all empirical details through the mediation of the commodity form and of commodification in general (Jameson 224-5). What this invocation of the rhizome says about Jameson's own perception of the critical applicability of Adorno in the contemporary moment will be explored later in the chapter.

It would initially seem that Benjamin provides better tools for reading intoxicating consumption allegorically, tools that enable, as Jameson suggests, the reader to hold together economic realities with medical theories and accounts of social unrest through a productive cognitive map or constellation of antagonistic forces. Where does this leave Adorno? I do not think Adorno can be reduced to this crudely Marxist rendition of cultural analysis, nor that Benjamin's methodology is so different from Adorno's. Adorno shares Benjamin's insistence that the critic must performatively and critically "repeat" elements of capitalist society. Benjamin's dialectical images are described by Adorno as "the historically-objective archetypes of that antagonistic unity of standstill and movement that defines the most universal bourgeois concept of progress" (Adorno, "Progress" 160) and the posing of these images is necessary, argues Adorno, to elevate to philosophical consciousness the truly catastrophic nature of progress as valorized by the bourgeoisie. Moreover, as Helmling shows, Adorno's method of immanent critique—showing how objects or phenomena fail or are contradictory on their own terms rather than through the imposition of an external standard—borrows heavily from Benjamin's efforts to dismantle reification from within, whereby "critique must *suffer* the ruse of ideology, and even in a sense reproduce it from within, in the very course of the attempt to unmask it and neutralize its power" (Helmling 103). However, as Helmling is equally keen to underline, Adorno differs through his stronger emphasis on "reliquifying" those static, reified ideological processes and phenomena that Benjamin critically "repeats". Adorno deploys the "kinesis of narrative" (Helmling 113) and consistently seeks to demystify historical and ideological stasis. Before I establish the similarities between Benjamin's

and Adorno's various accounts of intoxication, I will briefly consider in further detail Adorno's criticisms of Benjamin. In reiterating Adorno's criticisms, I ultimately aim to underscore the specific ethical negativity of Adorno's readings of intoxication, through which he rejects, more firmly than Benjamin, toxic consumption as an instantiation of exchange society.

Adorno's above comments on mediation highlight his impatience with remaining at the level of reified image, as well as his warning to Benjamin that the repetition of constellations might lapse into mere replication of the false reconciliations offered through bourgeois values such as progress. Benjamin's performative repetition of petrified social reality attempts to homeopathically dispel capitalism's intoxications, under which all objects are imbued with exchange value, and to capture revolutionary energies within the present. The latter attempt can be seen in Benjamin's earlier writings on the intellectual current of Surrealism, where he addresses the movement's project "to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" ("Surrealism" 55). Benjamin praises Surrealist artists like Andre Breton for implicitly showing how the phantasmic and ecstatic experiences typically confined to drug use and religious experiences are in fact constitutive of commodity society. As Sami Khatib (2014) notes, while the commodification of society is typically regarded in terms of disenchantment, in terms of the stripping away of spontaneous social relations, the capitalist process driving daily sensuous activity (e.g., the consumption of commodities) is equally composed of seemingly mystical and supra-sensuous forces. As its name would suggest, the Surrealist movement drew attention to the dream-like, surreal quality of everyday life under commodity society.

For Benjamin, the account of capitalist phenomenology forwarded by the Surrealists calls for a "profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory lesson" ("Surrealism" 49). Rather than naively affirming the intoxications of commodity society or rigidly rejecting them out of hand, for Benjamin politics requires a sober materialist investigation of intoxication's everyday manifestation and revolutionary potential:

> Any serious exploration of occult, surrealistic, phantasmagoric gifts and phenomena presupposes a dialectical intertwinement to which a romantic turn of mind is impervious. For histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the

> mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday. (55)

Tying Benjamin's understanding of intoxication to Immanuel Kant's notion of enthusiasm ("delusion of sense)", Khatib argues that the introductory lesson offered through intoxicated experience amounts to a materialist enthusiasm for the concrete, non-representational "image-space" of politics, "whereby collective acting is freed from all representational tasks immediately presenting themselves as revolutionary action" (Khatib 4). Whether or not we agree with this reading of Benjamin as foregrounding a utopian space of concrete, non-representational political community, Khatib's emphasis on non-representation points at the convergence between intoxication and non-narrative form in Benjamin's writing. Benjamin's praising of Breton for being "the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'" (50), in extinct fashions and objects, is congruent with Benjamin's later forays into the dialectical image, where the past and present are brought together in a non-chronological, synchronous constellation.

Adorno rejects any such deployment of the constellation that accepts and affirms too much of capitalist social relations. In emphasizing mediation, Adorno demands the continual undertaking of immanent critique and the stressing of nonidentity between concept and object. For Adorno, the repetition of petrified reality always risks debarring critical thought. For example, in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (for whom the Dionysian desire for obliterating intoxication never completely goes away) Adorno identifies an intoxicating affirmation of the present, despite Nietzsche's simultaneous critical dismantling of objective truths. In *Minima Moralia* (2005), Adorno argues that the doctrine of *amor fati* (Nietzsche's maxim to "love fate") amounts to "the glorification of the absurdist things" and is furthermore symptomatic of a flawed, philosophical tendency, shared by many neo-existentialists contemporaneous with Adorno, that is epitomized by "the same ignominious adaptation which, in order to endure the world's horror, attributes reality to wishes and meaning to senseless compulsion" (*Minima Moralia* 98). While Adorno did not align Benjamin with such existentialist tendencies, a crucial component of both Adorno's immanent critique and his ethics is a refusal to affirm intoxication in its immediacy—apparent, as explored in the next Chapter, through his and Horkheimer's claim that Odysseus was correct to refuse life among the intoxicating bliss of Lotus-eating. Adorno claims that Benjamin's thought "is so saturated with culture as its natural object that it swears loyalty to reification instead of flatly rejecting it" (*Prisms*

233), and it is overall not enough, argues Adorno, to try and undo the spell of reification by merely repeating the latter's enchantment.

Excursus: The Role of Narrative and Non-Narrative in Adorno

I have already shown how Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image conveys a non-narrative impulse through concerns with repetitive stasis, non-chronological and synchronous monads, and persistence with the "magical element" of reified reality. In Adorno, conversely, there is seemingly a greater privileging of narrative, not least of all in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which seeks to narrate the origins and persistence of the domination of nature through recourse to a range of literary allegories and historical narratives.

Yet the framing of Adorno as primarily a thinker of narrative contradicts his status as a theorist of negativity. Adorno is surely equally as well-known for his valorization of the formal dissonance and negativity of modern art—such as the music of Schönberg and the theatre of Beckett—his criticisms of Georg Lukacs' dismissal of non-narrative modernist literature, and his overall rejection of the false syntheses and identities of vulgar dialectical materialism. Indeed, one of Adorno's principal targets throughout his work is identity thinking—those forms of thought that saturate culture and society and which falsely presuppose that a denoted object instantiates its concept when it does not (Rose 198). Against identity thinking, Adorno wants to retain the nonidentity between concept and object and avoid replicating the false unities of exchange society, while also allowing the particular to speak on its own terms rather than as subsumed under the universal concept. As Adorno argues in *Negative Dialectics*, genuinely dialectical thought "says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy" (5). This resistance to identification on the conceptual level is what Adorno terms the subjective side of negative dialectics, while the latter's objective side, as Deborah Cook (2018) highlights, lies in the nonidentity between the individual and the economic totality, in the drama between the universal principle of exchange weighing on individual consciousness (*Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* 23).

It is crucial to hold fast to the critical force of negative dialectics, not to affirm nonidentity in isolation from the social process, but to recognize how Adorno poses a dialectic between narrative and non-narrative forms to critically illuminate the capitalist mode of production. Helmling ultimately argues that Adorno's writing, particularly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is marked by a performative interplay between narrative and non-narrative, where the non-narrative repetition of reified identities is also a homeopathic and therapeutic dispelling of capitalism's toxic stranglehold over its subjects. According to Helmling, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides a "non-narrative narrativity" (17) of enlightenment and exchange society. By narratively tracing the roots of domination to its mythological foundations in primal history ("Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 11)), Horkheimer and Adorno, argues Helmling, "enact" "Enlightenment's fatal ideological false consciousness, its sacrifice of qualitative to quantitative thinking . . . [enacting it] 'immanently', taking upon itself the full ideological burden of what it protests and would redeem" (Helmling 135). Helmling underscores how through the text's shifting, non-static framing of narrative and non-narrative, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* poses bourgeois enlightenment as a process one can only deal with by both "suffer[ing] ('repeat') the bewitchment *and* break[ing] ('reliquify') the spell" (136).

Adorno frequently adopts stylistic techniques that retain the tension between nonidentity and identity. The literary device of chiasmus, for example, is one technique Adorno uses to keep the object's nonidentity open and figure the social totality. The use of chiasmus in formulations like "Just as myth already entails enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology" (Horkheimer and Adorno 8) emphasizes what Gillian Rose (1978) describes as the fundamental theme of Adorno's work, "the transmutation of processes into entities" (Rose 18). Rose argues that Adorno's style, through devices like chiasmus, exaggeration, and the fragmentary use of the essay form, allows him to grasp his object more faithfully and adequately than traditional modes of philosophizing. Even Nietzsche's critique of the epistemological normativity of those like Kant, which similarly gained its force by deploying a certain destructive style, failed to grasp subject and object "as social processes and not as the presuppositions of pure epistemology" (Rose 56). Despite their inclusion of Nietzschean and Weberian themes of domination, Horkheimer and Adorno sought to avoid identity thinking by alternating between such domination narratives and those of a Marxist nature

such as their class allegory of the Sirens episode in *The Odyssey*. As addressed in the next Chapter, the confrontation between Marxist and non-Marxist elements provides Horkheimer and Adorno with richer, more fluid insights into the social process.[29] For now, we can recognize how Adorno both deploys the critical force of narrative alongside his frequent posing of the limitations of and tensions within the act of narrativization.

Non-narrative form, critically performed through the dialectical image or the limit-point or pause ("emergency brake") to smooth ideological narratives of history and social life, plays a key role in the thought of both Benjamin and Adorno. Though we have not yet considered in full detail the relationship between intoxication and non-narrative form, we can already cast doubt on the opposition established by Jameson whereby "Adorno would like to see the wine tax as the allegory of capitalism as a whole, and . . . would like to replace this positivistic detail or fact altogether with the totality of which it is a characteristic mechanism" (225). In contrast, Jameson argues that "Benjamin wants the ontological richness of the fact itself" to generate a dialectical image of the brute economics of the wine tax irreconciled with the spirit, the "amazement" of intoxication (225). I argue instead that for both Benjamin and Adorno the figure of intoxication is a means for narrativizing but which cannot be wholly reduced to the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, for Adorno such irreducibility only goes to illuminate more strikingly the needs that capitalism cannot fulfil. First, however, I will consider why Jameson frames this opposition between Benjamin and Adorno in the first place.

Jameson's Adorno in the 2010s

Though he does not say so explicitly, Jameson's elucidation of the disagreements between Benjamin and Adorno over the wine poetry, and in turn the role of the base-and-superstructure distinction within cultural analysis, underlines Jameson's own skepticism toward the suitability of Adorno's negativity for theorizing globalized capitalism in the twenty-first century. In this dissertation's Introduction, I highlighted Jameson's commitment to a Marxist literary and cultural theory that is as restorative, expansive and non-reductive as it is critical (Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* xvi). As

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[29] For Rose, such a critical confrontation reflects how Adorno's thought, more broadly, frequently takes the form of images and metaphors, and intrudes on conceptual thought and other disciplines (Rose 64-5).

through his whole body of work, Jameson stresses the need for a Marxism that can grasp abstract economic processes in new and productive ways and in relation to concrete experience. To ultimately argue for the contemporary importance of Adorno's own subterranean commentary on intoxication, I will first herein address Jameson's comments on the unsuitability of Adorno to the contemporary historical moment—notwithstanding his equal praise of Adorno as an unparalleled "negative, critical, destructive figure" (Jameson, "Afterword" 165).

As already shown, Jameson's commentary on the intoxication dispute between Benjamin and Adorno pits the latter's apparent insistence that "the base should be invoked only in the most general way as "capitalist production"" (*Benjamin Files* 224) against Benjamin's freezing of the economic and the superstructural to restore "the background of an entire world and way of life" (*Benjamin Files* 225). Jameson's remarks on Benjamin here resonate with the American theorist's own commitment to the dialectical valences of allegory and its accompanying critical mode, ideology critique. As mentioned earlier, in his discussion of Benjamin's dialectical image, Jameson suggestively posits the rhizome as the latter's contemporary equivalent (Jameson 226). If we are to read *The Benjamin Files* as establishing the pedagogical potential of Benjamin for twenty-first century cognitive maps of the capitalist totality, why then does Jameson invoke the anti-systematic figure of the rhizome? In *Allegory and Ideology* Jameson borrows Felix Guattari's related anti-dialectical theory of "transversality" to underscore allegory as a reading practice capable of holding together distinctive and multiple levels simultaneously, to name "the sweeping shifts back and forth across the levels, in which the purety of the *isotopie* . . . is rudely interrupted by cross-currents of attention and of discursive semiosis" (Jameson 43), a practice akin to a mode of representing the complex, multiple levels of experience under globalized capitalism.[30] Jameson therefore has a notable interest in reconciling the representation of capital with the anti-dialectical thought of those like Deleuze and Guattari, thinkers who, through their valorizations of multiplicity and flux, outlined "program[s] for a multiple set of parallel histories without any "ultimately determining instance"" (Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* xviii). Benjamin's construction of monadological constellations in the intoxication dispute,

[30] Jameson further charts "the gradual replacement of personification by a language of affective sequences, a substitution of the substantialism of names and nouns by the relationality of qualitative states" (44)

which grasp the significance of the economic without privileging the latter, thus becomes for Jameson a possible allegorical model for reconciling figurations of multiple, different levels with figurations of capital's unified totality ("difference and identity").

Jameson's contrasting framing of Adorno's cultural analysis as demanding persistent attention to the whole commodification process effectively caricatures Adorno, in *The Benjamin Files*, as a one-to-one correspondence, "bad allegory" reader of capitalism ("wine tax = capitalism"). Jameson's numerous considered and in-depth readings of Adorno clearly attest to the fact that Jameson does not view Adorno as the vulgar Marxist he is painted as in the intoxication dispute example. However, arguably for Jameson the most pertinent aspects of Adorno are his capacity to ground totality and the economic logic of equivalence and exchange within the narrow contours of identity (Jameson, *Late Marxism* 28-9), as opposed to in any ethics or politics of nonidentity. In *Late Marxism* (1990), Jameson justified his renewed interest in Adorno by appealing to the German thinker's frequent insistence on holding fast to the notion of totality in a resolutely positivistic sociological and cultural atmosphere. In *Late Marxism*, Jameson claims that while Adorno was a "doubtful ally" among the emergent and coherent alternatives that formed during the 1960s and 1970s, in the context of the 1990s, by contrast, which saw the fulfilment of positivism in the form of global postmodernism, Adorno's "bile is a joyous counter-poison and a corrosive solvent to apply to the surface of 'what is'" (249).[31]

In later work, however, Jameson is more doubtful as to the suitability of Adorno's grounding of the everyday within the overarching abstractions of exchange. In *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009), Jameson's criticisms of Adorno are framed in the context of ideology critique:

> Adorno's desperate attempt to avoid positivities, which he instinctively felt always to be ideological, by embracing a resolutely negative equipollence, is a prophetic but unsatisfying response to our historical situation, which might better be characterized by varying Žižek's famous title to "they know what they are doing (but they do it anyway)." (Jameson 60)

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[31] Phillip Wegner (2014) argues that *Late Marxism* "should be understood to serve, among its diverse other projects, as an "epistemo-critical" prologue to *Postmodernism*" (62) and Jameson's accompanying call for cognitive mapping.

There are indeed many moments where Adorno seems to depart from classical Marxist understandings of ideology as false consciousness. Such departures can be seen in Horkheimer and Adorno's descriptions of ideology under the culture industry as "a lie which is not articulated directly but drummed in by suggestion" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 118) and as wielder of social power through "the technically enforced ubiquity of stereotypes" (108). Similarly, in *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno characterizes the diffuse effects of the culture industry as an "an empty time filled with emptiness [which] does not even produce false consciousness but is an exertion that leaves things just as they are" (246). As Jameson alludes to above, for Slavoj Žižek (1989) Adorno comes dangerously close to a post-ideological view in which ideology no longer proves necessary to the functioning of the social order, given individuals' investment in "cynical reason" whereby it is possible to act according to the system's logic while also remaining cynically detached from the system's content (Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 27). Adorno's doubts over the critical efficacy of conventional ideology critique—whereby such and such a view is revealed as a distortion of such and such a material reality—is shared by both Jameson and Žižek but the latter thinkers each update ideology critique for the historical moment of postmodernity. Leaving aside Žižek's psychoanalytic solution to the problem of cynical reason, we can see that Jameson proceeds from a negative uncovering of ideological pervasiveness and perniciousness beyond the sphere of belief to a positive affirmation of the utopian impulse. In his "Future City" (2008) essay, for example, Jameson claims that the repulsive yet strangely exhilarating postmodern urban "junkspace" described by Rem Koolhaas symptomatizes a phase of capitalism that is "less a matter of false consciousness than of a whole new lifestyle, which . . . is comparable rather to an addiction than a philosophical error" (575). As addressed in the Introduction, Jameson nevertheless affirms the "extraordinary expansion of desire" (575) entailed by such an acceleration of commodification into daily life. Ideology, as Jameson wrote decades ago, is irreducible to manipulation and is always dialectically entwined with the faint stirrings of the utopian impulse (*The Political Unconscious*, 271-90). Jameson expands ideology critique to foreground the utopian, departing, in turn, and in an Althusserian vein, from conceptions of ideology as false consciousness.

For Jameson, Adorno was unable to arrive at such an insight into the dialectics of ideology and utopia because the latter did not possess a theory of culture that could account for the total commodification of everyday life characterizing postmodernity.

Given their historical situation preceding such a total suffusion of the economic into the cultural (and vice versa), Horkheimer and Adorno, argues Jameson, were unable to conceive of how both the ideological and utopian could be detected in all realms of life. According to Jameson, in Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the culture industry, "'ideology' is still here the central concept and has not yet been modified by the demands of a postmodern social order (as, for example, in Althusser's revision)" (Jameson 144). Despite their skepticism over the efficacy of ideology critique under the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno did not have the critical tools to update ideology and therefore did not convincingly go beyond the critical framework of ideology-as-deception, argues Jameson. By contrast, Jameson maintains that as everyday life increasingly takes on an aesthetic dimension the old conception of the aesthetic as an enclave of negation and resistance, ironically, no longer seems viable, and the utopian impulse that Adorno apparently limits to the sphere of art can instead be found throughout all postmodern culture.

Yet Adorno cannot be reduced to a thinker who merely emphasizes totality and who downplays the intoxicating "gravity" of culture and its consumptions. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I show that Adorno does connect utopia with intoxication but in such a way that critiques capitalism's structuring of needs and which foregrounds a prismatic aesthetics of detoxified needs beyond the reproduction of value. Furthermore, by anchoring Adorno's aesthetics in his social theory of needs, we can critically retain the allegorical role of Adorno's thought without succumbing to resignation or refuge in aesthetic absorption.

It is worth pausing to briefly consider the concept of mimesis, which in Adorno does similar work to that of allegory and which furthermore highlights some of the non-narrative components of Adorno's writing, of Adorno's thematizations of nonidentity, that Jameson disregards or underplays. In *Late Marxism*, Jameson insists that the slippery concept of mimesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* should be jettisoned in favour of the language of narrative. Jameson shows how Adorno's miming of the abstract content of philosophical concepts at the level of sentence-structure performs a narrative undermining of the thought abstractions that originate in exchange abstractions.[32] The

[32] "It is therefore the mimetic component of the individual philosophical sentence—its tendency to narrativize the conceptual—that finally springs the isolated abstract concept out of its bad identity and allows it, as it were, to be thought from the inside and from the outside all at once: an

shedding, or, for Peter Osborne (1992), willful misappropriating, of the philosophical status of Adorno's concept of mimesis is part of Jameson's effort to revitalize Marxism and cognitive mapping in-and-against the postmodern capitalism of the 1990s. As conveyed in other works such as *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson is suspicious of philosophy's claims to solve aporias, and positions, against philosophy, theory's capacity to productively generate multiple temporalities and potentially reignite utopian thought (Lesjak, "Reading Dialectically" 238). Yet just because mimesis is a notoriously difficult, hard-to-define concept in Adorno, this does not mean that the philosophical force of Adorno's usage of the term is unhelpful for allegorical readings of contemporary crisis. Despite Jameson's claim to the contrary (*Late Marxism* 64), Adorno does provide a definition of mimesis, in *Aesthetic Theory* as "the non-conceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other" (54). Mimesis, in Adorno, denotes an ethical relationship with the Other, frequently taking the form of nature or natural beauty, forms and relationships that resist narrativization under theories of human social relations.[33]

Despite their different emphases, both Benjamin and Adorno capture the infiltration of reified logics into the body through their respective understandings of mimesis. It is beyond the scope of this project to argue for a theory and history of mimesis in relation to allegory. But through the concept's long history as an Aristotelian concept signifying primal artistic imitation, as well as what Michael Taussig (1993) describes as "a sensuous knowledge" against the abstract impositions of enlightenment rationality (44), we can nevertheless grasp the relevance of mimesis for how Benjamin and Adorno allegorically frame intoxication under capitalism. For example, for Benjamin, the mimetic faculty uncovers the (non-conceptual) similitudes unconsciously permeating everyday life. Dušan I Bjelić (2016) reads in Benjamin's hashish experiments the posing of a "mimetic antidote to the industrial simulation of nature's mimetic genius" (78)—

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ideational content transformed mimetically into a quasi-narrative representation. This micro-work of the sentence on the isolated concept is, then, what undermines its apparent rational autonomy and pre-forms it . . . for its multiple positions in the larger movement of the constellation or the 'model'. The mimetic or the narrative may be thought to be a kind of homeopathic strategy in which, by revealing the primal movement of domination hidden away within abstract thought, the venom of abstraction is neutralized, allowing some potential or utopian-truth content to come into its own" (Jameson 68).

[33] In its general usage, mimesis also has anthropological origins denoting how (human and non-human) animals adapt to their natural environment through imitating acts. The study of mimesis often draws on "archaic divinatory and magic practices" (Hansen 228).

through the tracing of connections and similarities within the hallucinatory experience of hashish, Benjamin, argues Bjelić, enacts a practice of mimesis against capitalism's dominating logic of equivalence.

Meanwhile, Adorno locates a similar utopian possibility of homeopathically undermining capitalism's ruling mimesis from within, except he identifies this mimetic impulse within the realm of autonomous art. Art, Adorno claims, imitates natural beauty and allegorically reveals the entanglement of capitalist alienation and the "natural" world, as well as a utopian impulse beyond this entanglement. Jameson argues that Horkheimer and Adorno's "more metaphysical propositions about the mimetic impulse" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are a hindrance that explain spectacle society "too easily and naturalistically" (*Late Marxism* 150), but this claim ignores the other critical roles that Adornian mimesis can perform beyond the narrative mapping of image-based society. Adorno's mimetically informed conception of allegory does not, like Jamesonian allegory, valorize the production of multiple meanings in service of narrativizing capitalist complexity.

Like allegory, Adornian mimesis is both narrative and non-narrative, marked by both representational capacity and a utopian relationship with the Other (whether the human subject or non-human nature) (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 54) that evades or halts social and historical narrativization. How Benjamin and Adorno arrive at such mimetically and non-narratively informed allegories of intoxication is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Allegory and Intoxication in Benjamin

For all their emphases on the significance of narrative and non-narrative in Benjamin and Adorno, Jameson and Helmling do not pay enough attention to the dialectical tensions between narrative and non-narrative moments within *both* Benjamin's and Adorno's respective allegorical frameworks. Such tensions unfold in both Benjamin's and Adorno's portrayals of intoxication, but it is the latter's account that illuminates the negativity of intoxication, not as a form of false consciousness, but in terms of the neglected sufferings and unfulfilled needs produced by exchange society. Rather than productively generative of multiple meanings, Adorno's allegorical framing of intoxication foregrounds crisis at the level of social reproduction and consumption,

themes which will be explored in greater detail in the rest of this dissertation. The allegorical situating of crisis on the intimate levels of reproduction and consumption imbues contemporary mappings of capitalism and intoxication with a sense of the value-form's negativity.

On the surface, Benjamin is more attentive to the emancipatory dimensions of intoxication. Benjamin claims in his "Surrealism" essay that voluntary practices of intoxication, whether through drugs, art or philosophy, can provide experimental lessons in distancing oneself from the intoxications of capitalist phantasmagoria:

> In the world's structure dream loosens individuality like a bad tooth. This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication. (48)

Here, Benjamin invokes relationship beyond the confines of individuality without affirming a politics of spontaneity divorced from the social. Just as with his dialectical image, Benjamin's deployment of the constellation in the Surrealism essay seeks to bring forth aspects of reality distorted by the exchange relationship. The synchronic constellation of past utopian traces with present reality is less an attempt to spark revolutionary joy as it is to grasp the contradiction between the economic and the superstructural, and to in turn challenge deterministic conceptions of culture in which the superstructure stands merely as epiphenomena for the ultimately determining economic base. When praising Breton for being "the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'" (50), in extinct fashions and objects, Benjamin is not calling for a nostalgic return to the past. Rather, for Benjamin identifying intoxication within the objects "left-behind" by commodification opens new allegorical modes of critical inquiry. To understand this properly it is necessary to return to how Benjamin frequently deploys non-narrative form in his writing.

Like Adorno, Benjamin is suspicious of any theory that claims to systematically explain all cultural and social phenomena. Specifically, this suspicion is directed by both thinkers at not only traditional Western philosophy, but also the unifying conceptualities found within much Marxist social theory. Thijs Lijster (2017) highlights how both Benjamin and Adorno, while highly indebted to Georg Lukacs' theory, were critical of how the theory of reification implies the reduction of all phenomena to social relations:

> While the critique of reification rightfully exposes the thing-like object as part of the total social process, this critique thereby also tends to reduce the entire meaning of the object to the meaning-giving social subject, not allowing anything alien above and beyond the subject's reach. (Lijster 55)

While Adorno is more explicitly critical of reification theory in this regard, Lijster argues that Benjamin is equally concerned with giving due affordance to that which is irreducible or "alien" to subjectively construed social relations. Lijster draws primarily on Benjamin's remarks on the utopian figure of the collector, a figure who constellates the discarded use value of objects in a way that exceeds their productive usage within exchange society. I want to focus instead, however, on the non-narrative impulse behind Benjamin's concept of aura, since the latter concept draws attention to intoxication as a key theme in Benjamin's writing.

Benjamin defines aura in several different ways across his writing, but the most well-known definition is provided in Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" (2010). Here, aura is described as a "unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be" (15). In the "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin charts the decay, under conditions of mass commodity production, of the aura, of the quasi-mystical value embodied in the unique individual work of art before mass image reproduction. Unfortunately, as Miriam Hansen (2011) shows, the tendency to identify aura narrowly with its role in the artwork essay, specifically that essay's third (and most familiar) version, has resulted in surface level understandings of aura as a mystical, archaic aesthetic starkly opposed to the modern technological reproduction of the image. The result, as Hansen underscores, is a deeply undialectical account of Benjamin's artwork essay. By creating a stark opposition between aura and the masses' close proximity to the reproduced image, the third version and accompanying readings of the artwork essay present two static options: a culturally conservative aesthetics and nostalgic reverie for the privileged auratic object, on the one hand; and a Brechtian, "liquidationist" politics in which the opticality of the auratic object withers into the tactility of the image (and allows a much closer relationship between the masses and reproducible artworks like film), on the other hand. More importantly for our present purposes, this framing of aura ignores the different meanings the concept acquires within Benjamin's other writings. As Hansen argues, Benjamin was keen to show elsewhere how the exploration of new modes of experience within modernity's technologically changing environment also included the reactivation of "older potentials

of perception and imagination" as a means of coping with modern alienation (Hansen 105). Against the reductive reading of aura as primarily denoting a privileged aesthetic experience in decline and in opposition to modernity's technological reproducibility, Hansen underlines how for Benjamin the aura opens-up alternative modes of experience and play [*Spiel-Raum*] (Hansen 104-5). I would reframe such new modes in Benjamin's concept of aura as new kinds of *narrative*, as new ways of mapping and forging connections in the capitalist mode of production.

In writing about his experimentations smoking hashish (2006), Benjamin invokes the concept of aura to narrativize the socio-economic standardizations accompanying capitalist modernity, but in such a way that the non-narrative, alien object also reveals itself. In one drug "protocol" during which he consumes hashish with his friends Egon and Gert Wissing, Benjamin's reflections on the experiment are explicitly linked to musings on the nature of aura. Against mystical accounts of aura provided by the theosophists, Benjamin argues:

> First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine. Second, the aura undergoes changes, which can be quite fundamental, with every movement the aura-wreathed object makes. Third, genuine aura can in no sense be thought of as a spruced-up version of the magic rays beloved of spiritualists and described in vulgar works of mysticism. On the contrary, the characteristic feature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*Umzirtkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case. (58)

Benjamin here frames aura as ever-present and as betraying a genuine sameness within all objects and phenomena. Against "the historical hallucination of sameness, which takes root along with the commodity economy" (*On Hashish* 146), Benjamin used his hashish experiments to rethink the category of sameness in a new way, to cut through to the genuine aura that "appears in all things." (58) Yet this sameness is defined not in terms of "perfect resemblance between one thing and another, but with the possibility that a single thing could be in different places at the same time" (*On Hashish* 148).

Benjamin also details his experience of recurring auratic sameness in an earlier hashish experiment in the city of Marseilles, situating such sameness within experiences of modern urban life. Here, Benjamin claims that the nuanced details found within the sidewalk are not counterposed to a rationalizing sense of sameness, but rather betray a

genuine sameness that mirrors the stones of Parisian boulevards, stones which "were the bread of [his] imagination, which was suddenly seized by a ravenous hunger to taste what is the same in all places and countries" (*On Hashish* 54). Furthermore, the entwining here of sensuousness with philosophical speculation reflects the sense of profane illumination outlined earlier. The dialectical framing of the everyday and the impenetrable, outlined in the "Surrealism" essay, is re-captured by Benjamin in the "characteristic feature" of genuine aura in the form of the ornament. The ornament, a recurring figure in many of Benjamin's hashish experiments, is described as at once banal, perseverant and undecipherable (in terms of expressing a "true" meaning), belonging to the "most hidden, generally most inaccessible world of surfaces" (*On Hashish* 81). For Hansen, the ornament in Benjamin is reminiscent of the allegorical emblem because the ornament conveys a multiplicity of meanings (Hansen 120). This idea of multiplicity takes us back to Jameson's claim that Benjamin's commentary on Baudelaire's wine poems avoids the deterministic subsumption of superstructural intoxications under economic structures and logics. As mentioned earlier, for Jameson this avoidance of economic determinism underscores the non-narrative dimensions of Benjamin's thought. This non-narrativity also manifests through Benjamin's intoxicating figure of the ornament. Though embedded in the hallucinatory world of commodities, the ornament, qua profane illumination and aura, points to a narrative beyond the immediate experience [*Erlebnis*] of the commodity to an experience of non-human nature:

> In the night, the trance sets itself off from everyday experience [*Erfahrung*] with fine prismatic edges. It forms a kind of figure, and is more than usually memorable. I would say: it shrinks and thereby takes on the form of a flower. (Benjamin, *On Hashish* 53)

The narrativization of intoxication here reaches a non-narrative limit in the "shrink" that mutates into a form of non-human nature.

Lijster argues that Adorno's insistence on nonidentity thinking, whether manifested through the conception of negative dialectics, the absolute commodity of the modern artwork, or the concept of natural beauty (more on which below), is markedly similar to Benjamin's understanding of the persistence of the non-human object within human experience. Lijster points to Benjamin's (1999) response to Adorno's claim that Benjamin needed to incorporate a stronger theory of reification (as forgotten human labour) into his theory of aura. Benjamin's response, argues Lijster, articulates a

conception of preponderant, irreconciled objectivity. The correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin in question highlights the former's skepticism toward the adequacy of Benjamin's conception of aura. Adorno is not convinced that Benjamin's definition of aura—as an experience allowing phenomena to return the gaze (*Complete Correspondence* 321)—is dialectical enough. Merely affirming the nonidentical, non-human moment in the experience of aura overlooks, Adorno argues, the degree to which aura is marked by forgotten human labour. In his own response, Benjamin doubles down by reiterating the dimensions of auratic experience that are irreducible to human labour. Benjamin here posits, almost, an ecological limit-point to human experience:

> But even if the question of the aura does in fact involve a 'forgotten human moment', this is still not necessarily the moment of human labour. The tree and the shrub which offer themselves to us are not made by human hands. There must therefore be something human in the things themselves, something that is *not* originated by labour. (Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence* 327)

Rather than a valorization of the object in-itself, Benjamin stresses the tension between subject and object, the element of the latter that resists conceptualization, which is markedly similar to Adorno's own concerns, as will be shown in more detail below. Neither Benjamin nor Adorno valorize sublime non-human nature,[34] but neither do they privilege the social process, a tendency each thinker perceived in Lukacs' theory of reification. Yet rather than how Adorno and Benjamin articulate distinctive ontologies from those found within the idealist and realist philosophical traditions, what interests me is the role of allegory in both writers' work.

The intoxicatory experience of aura is for Benjamin deeply allegorical. As detailed through his writings on hashish and the ornamental halo, Benjamin's aura illuminates connections and "sameness" between a range of objects and phenomena. Rather than an autobiographical oddity, Benjamin's writings on hashish affirm a clear

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[34] Benjamin and Adorno provide a materialist account of the persistence of objecthood beyond subjectivity rather than an idealist notion of the sublime similar to that found in Immanuel Kant. In his account of the origins of Benjamin's notion aura in the "Little History of Photography" essay, Clint Burnham (2017) highlights the social and historical dimensions of Benjamin's aura. Burnham shows how the auratic residue Benjamin locates in the photograph—which Burnham glosses as "the Real of desire" (461) with reference to Lacan and Žižek, and which Burnham later in the essay juxtaposes with the Kantian "Petrochemical Sublime" of photographer Edward Burtynsky—is not strictly situated in the medium itself. Aura is rather also located in the encounter between a technician and member of a rising class, and Benjamin's concept is therefore "rooted in the dialectics of class relations" (Burnham 462).

relationship between intoxication and the allegorical constellation, a relationship similar to the one sketched by Jameson in his tying of the intoxication dispute with the productive synchronicity of the monadological (even rhizomatic) constellation. This allegorical understanding of intoxication furthermore has truck with the utopian figure of the collector, the figure Benjamin details in his *Arcades Project*, and which Lijster summarizes, in connection to allegory and the constellation, thus:

> This relationship between different objects within a collection, which is no longer functional but aesthetic, is what Benjamin calls a 'constellation'. In constructing constellations, the collector seems quite similar to the allegorist: he strips the object of its original context (devaluation), but also grants it a new meaning (sanctification) by turning the object into a 'souvenir'. (Lijster 60)

Through figures such as the collector, Benjamin seeks to allegorically restore meaning to objects stripped from their lifeworlds and counter capitalism's drive to reduce all use values to the exchange logic. The collector will create new constellations out of old use values by forging new connections between discarded, ruinous objects.[35]

However, the certain euphoria attached to the above conception of the constellation via auratic sameness, ornament and the collector cannot be completely separated from Benjamin's earlier conception of allegory proposed in the *Origins of the German Trauerspiel* (2019). In his fragmentary "Central Park" (2006) piece, Benjamin describes, through his meditations on Baudelaire, how auratic decay reveals not a utopian liberation from tradition (as certain readings of Benjamin's artwork essay imply) but allegory as an essential mediation between the subject and ruined non-human nature. In aphorism 19 (172-3), Benjamin immediately follows his description of Baudelaire's "wrenching of things from their familiar contexts" and "destruction of organic contexts in the allegorical intention" with a brief account of aura: "Derivation of the aura as the projection of a human social experience onto nature: the gaze is returned" (173). While the auratic experience of the ornamental halo reaches a non-human limit in the figure of the flower, here "the gaze is returned" as the allegorist (via Baudelaire) seeks to project human social experience onto the organic. In other words, the imposition of new

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[35] Nevertheless, Lijster emphasizes that "it is important to keep in mind the specific kind of collector Benjamin has in mind, namely the nineteenth-century-type collector of curiosities, who collects obsolete objects that others consider to be junk, and not the kind of art collector we see today, for whom a collection functions as a display of wealth, or a way to either speculate with or store money capital" (61).

meanings and connections returns not only, as Benjamin states elsewhere in "Central Park", "as commodities" (183) but also as ruined nature. These returning images, sundered from life's organic contexts, are "at once shattered and preserved" and "[a]llegory holds fast to the ruins" (169). Jameson notes that this melancholy figure of the allegorist—the *Grübler*—is one of Benjamin's key "physiognomies", along with others like the collector, the gambler and the *flaneur* (*Benjamin Files* 69). Characterizing the melancholy *Grübler* as but one physiognomy rather than as typifying the whole of Benjamin's thought is important, argues Jameson, because it rectifies the image of Benjamin as merely a melancholic thinker stuck in nostalgia and unable to productively map utopian possibilities (Jameson 69).

Jameson is surely right that Benjamin does not lament an auratic past. However, retaining Benjamin's conception of melancholic ruined nature is important for grasping Adorno's own sense of allegory. For both Benjamin and Adorno, such melancholic allegory has truck with the figure of intoxication. Benjamin claims that one of the keys to unlocking the significance of allegorical images in Baudelaire's poetry is through recognition of "the importance of heroic melancholy for intoxication [*Rausch*]" (184). The heroic melancholy of the intoxicated allegorist wades through images of decay and hallucinatory commodities, but these images are not reconciled. Through the figure of Baudelaire, Benjamin's narrativization of the hallucinatory-like nature of the commodity universe collides with that which is non-narrativizable in the form of non-human nature. Persisting with the ruined landscape remains the only option. For Jameson, ultimately, the non-narrative significance of Benjamin lies in the latter's construction of monadological, proto-rhizomatic constellations, providing models for renewed contemporary allegories. However, I want to emphasize that understanding Benjaminian melancholy provides important theoretical context for grasping Adorno's allegorical conception of intoxication.

Allegory and Intoxication in Adorno

Adorno was strongly influenced by Benjamin's conception of allegory but nevertheless objected to the latter's over-identification with the petrifications of reified culture. As influenced as he was by Benjamin's notion that the auratic object resists subjective rationalization and "returns the gaze", often through the form of nature, Adorno limited this dialectical unfolding of non-human nature to the realms of aesthetic

experience and autonomous art. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno claims: “Art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural beauty, but natural beauty as such” (72). Crucial to Adorno’s conception of natural beauty is recognition of nature as at once completely socially mediated, bearing the imprint of commodification, ideology and domination, yet always evading subjective categorization and glimpsing life beyond “bourgeois society, its labor, and its commodities” (69). The modern artwork, which subjects the image of nature to “monadological confinement”, suspends natural beauty by both negating the event of its actuality and preserving a prismatic image of its liberation (69).

On one level, the appearance of natural beauty through the artwork cannot be separated from the social process. Adorno argues that “in every particular aesthetic experience of nature the social whole is lodged” (68), and that within societies that increasingly deform the non-human world according to the will of human beings, “in particular” through “the total expansion of the exchange principle, natural beauty increasingly fulfils a contrasting function and is thus integrated into the reified world it opposes” (68). Natural beauty therefore frequently adopts an ideological function in falsely presenting a pure, unmediated world as capitalist rationality’s Other, distorting the real all-encompassing nature of capitalist abstraction. Through pristine images of, for instance, mountain-ranges and treetops, natural beauty can become ideological by serving “to disguise mediateness as immediacy” (68).

On another level, however, Adorno argues that the experience of natural beauty, which successful works of art allegorize, points to the preponderance of that which escapes subjective conceptualization and narrativization. Congruent with his articulation, in *Negative Dialectics*, of how the critique of identity thinking amounts to “a groping for the preponderance of the object” (181), Adorno argues that art’s imitation of natural beauty involves giving oneself “to more than what is literally there” and recognizing “the primacy of the object in subjective experience” (*Aesthetic Theory* 71). Art’s imitation of natural beauty develops alongside “the allegorical intention” and “in tandem with meanings that are not objectified as in significative language” (71). The complex, sedimented interrelationship between nature and history,[36] as well as the fleeting,

[36] In his earlier lecture on “The Idea of Natural History” (1984), Adorno similarly claims that thinking the entanglement of nature and history dialectically requires one “to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural

ephemeral dimension of experiences of natural beauty, underscores the centrality of allegory to art here, because, as with Benjamin and Jameson, Adorno argues that the experience of reified social history cannot be recaptured through a reified language of equivalence. Instead of giving the lie that nature is reconciled to human history, under a positivistic "jargon of authenticity" which Adorno saw in contemporaneous advertisements of natural beauty, Adorno's allegorical framing of natural beauty proceeds thus:

> In natural beauty, natural and historical elements interact in a musical and kaleidoscopically changing fashion. Each can step in for the other, and it is in this constant fluctuation, not in any unequivocal order of relationships, that natural beauty lives . . . Natural beauty is suspended history, a moment of becoming at a standstill. (71)

Adorno's constellation of nature and history is both a narrative unravelling of reified understandings of nature as statically opposed to social history, as well as a non-narrative "suspension" or "standstill" of various fluctuating (and fleeting) natural and historical elements.

Just as with Benjamin, the intoxicating "amazement" of aesthetic experience, qua natural beauty, is constellated by Adorno with historical elements, with the real abstractions,[37] of exchange society. Crucially, through their allegorical reconstruction nature and history remain unreconciled, even if something of art's utopian promise, of what Adorno speaks of as "the trace of the nonidentical in things under the spell of universal identity" (*Aesthetic Theory* 73), lingers on. With different emphases, but with both stressing Benjamin's influence, Hansen and Lijster rightly underscore the non-narrative dimension of Adorno's allegorical framing of nature, his broader aesthetic theory and his notion of preponderant objectivity. Both Hansen and Lijster draw parallels between Adorno's allegorical conception of art and natural beauty and Benjamin's theory of aura, in how both concepts invoke the archaic and that which is irreducible to human

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being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature" (117). On the one hand, it is vital to recognize how the socio-historical world becomes naturalized, through convention or ideology, as "second nature" (118). On the other hand, nature must be read as something that is and has always been historically mediated.

[37] For more on the relationship between Benjaminian allegory and real abstraction, see Sami Khatib, ""Sensuous Supra-Sensuous": The Aesthetics of Real Abstraction" (2017), which, read through Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, pays attention to the linguistic and unconscious (in a Lacanian sense) dimensions of real abstraction.

social relations. For Lijster, tracing such similarities between both thinkers means not to prioritize social mediation "but rather to acknowledge and emphasize the very alien and 'inhuman' character of nature, an inhuman moment that is also part of humanity itself" (64). In highlighting the Benjaminian roots of Adorno's notion of allegory as non-narrative, "inhuman" and congruent with the preponderant object, however, I do not want to overlook the distinct way that Adorno's writings on the intoxicating nature of aesthetic experience illuminate the toxic needs generated by and imposed upon subjects under capitalist society. "[T]he alienation of the world can be clearly reproduced only in the work of art" (Adorno, *Aesthetics 78)*; it is only through defamiliarizing aesthetic experience, argues Adorno, that "the actually existing alienation between the subject and the object" (79), the separation constitutive of the value-from, can be comprehended.

For Adorno, Benjamin too readily seeks the allegorical emblem and impulse within the everyday immediacy of reified culture. Benjamin situates utopian impulses within the discarded, collected paraphernalia of nineteenth century Paris, as well as the potential of new mediums such as silent cinema to demystify technological fetishism. By contrast, Adorno defers the "amazing" moment of non-human nature to the sphere of autonomous art where, as we have seen, natural beauty allegorically and momentarily flashes up within subjective aesthetic experience but is nonetheless not exhausted by the subject, instead assuming the status of an object irreducible to representation. In contrast, under the culture industry Horkheimer and Adorno witness the mechanization and administration of pleasure, where the "the general overflowing" of pleasure is reduced to the monotonous repetition of standardized entertainment and resembles "the collective fake intoxication, concocted from radio, headlines, and Benzedrine" characteristic of fascism (*Dialectic of Enlightenment* 83). The consumption of mass entertainment and leisure replicates the standardized temporal rhythms of the work routine. Consumption increasingly amounts to an "incurable sickness" that "moves strictly along the well-worn grooves of association" (109). Against the addictions of the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the genuine artwork, which resists one-to-one signification, remains true to happiness and pleasure by representing them through "a broken promise" (125). Horkheimer and Adorno's crucial distinction between two aesthetic conceptions of happiness is captured by Jameson thus:

> What is inauthentic in the offerings of the Culture Industry, then, is not the remnants of experience within them, but rather the ideology of happiness

> they simultaneously embody: the notion that pleasure or happiness . . . already exists, and is available for consumption. This is, then, one crucial thematic differentiation between 'genuine art' and that offered by the Culture Industry: both raise the issue of the possibility of happiness in their very being, as it were, and neither provides it; but where the one keeps faith with it by negation and suffering through the enactment of its impossibility, the other assures us it is taking place. (Jameson, *Late Marxism* 147)

Critics have often taken this apparent elevation of autonomous art as evidence of Adorno's mandarin disdain for the impoverished forms of entertainment within the culture industry, as Jameson's language over genuineness and inauthenticity indeed suggests. There is no doubt some truth to this, but rather than aesthetic distinction, I am more interested in the distinction Adorno proposes between levels of needs-satisfaction, a distinction hinted at in Jameson's above summary. Indeed, as Jameson argues, the account of the culture industry should be read less as a denouncement of certain forms of art and more as an account of the increasing infiltration of exchange into everyday life (*Late Marxism* 144). Jameson's point here could be expanded, however, through discussion less focused on the rehabilitation of Adorno for the postmodern "newer structures of an image or spectacle society" (*Late Marxism* 150) that defined the 1990s, and more centred on the needs both generated and left unfulfilled under the logic of the value-form.

The value-form is marked by the separation of individuals from their means of subsistence and reproduction. The fundamental class antagonism between capital and labour, between the owners who profiteer off labour power and those who produce surplus value, composes the law of value. Only by reproducing this constitutive separation, this primitive accumulation, does capitalism maintain itself. The inherence of these antagonistic social relations of production within the abstract, seemingly timeless economic laws of capitalist wealth reveals what is constitutive of the reproduction of capitalism—"the compulsion to sell labour power as the condition of making a living" (Bonefeld 82). The needs of those who sell their labour power are therefore entirely mediated through the class structure of capitalist society and the fulfilment of such needs will reflect that which "compels [individuals], outside of work, to limit themselves to reproducing the commodity of labor power" (Adorno "Theses on Need" 102). Adorno argues that the needs generated by the culture industry are not damaging because superficial, rather they "are bad insofar as they are directed towards a fulfilment that

cheats us out of this very fulfilment” (102). In other words, the needs created by capitalism are distorting and lack-inducing because they are centred around the reproduction of capital, rather than human life. Capitalism entails crises in social reproduction and the fulfilment of needs, and Adorno draws attention to these constitutive crises and separations by not only demystifying the “personifications of the economic categories” (Bonefeld, “Cracking Economic Abstractions”, 18) in works such as *Negative Dialectics*, but also by showing how art’s allegorical impulse illuminates society’s real “suffering and negativity” (Adorno, *Aesthetics* 78).[38]

Meanwhile, ideology operates by distorting the lack, the cheated fulfilment of a society centred around the production of value rather than the satisfaction of need. Adorno describes in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (2003) how capitalism tries to reproduce itself through language that affirms immediate fulfilment within everyday life. Capitalism’s pseudo-spiritual affirmation of life “supplies men with patterns for being human, patterns which have been driven out of them by unfree labor” (12) and these patterns manifest through “addictions” to authoritarianism and unfree life (5, 11, 134). Rather than ideologically ascribing “to phenomena the very spontaneity, tangibility, and density that capitalism has stripped from them” (“Exchange” 101), as Adorno once charged of Benjamin, art, argues Adorno, offers a model for undermining capital’s fetishes of fulfilment. By presenting fulfilment through a broken promise, the artwork negatively illuminates the real suffering of humanity and nature under capitalism. The allegorical entwinement of nature and human history that Adorno witnesses in radical artworks defamiliarizes the immediate intoxications of the culture industry by faithfully representing, rather than repressing, the social objectivity of exchange and its constitutive separation. In his 1958-9 *Aesthetics* (2018) lecture series, Adorno argues that Samuel Beckett achieves such successful defamiliarization by illuminating the lack

[38] In a helpful corrective to how those like Reichelt and Backhaus of the New Reading of Marx overstress the logical and systematic nature of value, Charlotte Baumann (2022) emphasizes Adorno’s ethical critique of capitalism. She states: “Capitalism exists and shapes our lives as a matter of fact, but what matters or ought to matter are human beings in flesh and blood, their needs, bodies and well-being” (68). Although she does not explicitly mention Adorno’s aesthetic theory, Baumann juxtaposes the tendencies of value-form theorists to read humans as mere “personifications” of real abstraction with the Adornian insight that “[h]uman stories, lives and bodies should feature in a critique of capitalism, and they should do so not merely as an element or datum for explaining the workings of the system” (69).

of needs-satisfaction under mid-twentieth century capitalism. In Beckett's austere, apparently "unrealistic" works, the playwright evokes

> natural conditions, eating, drinking, sleeping, illness, physical harm . . . a kind of naked nature remains in these works, but this naked nature is precisely not mythicized, idealized, eternal, so-called all-nature, but rather that to which humans—in keeping, one could almost say, with the process of historical mutilation to which they are subjected—are ultimately reduced. (Adorno, *Aesthetics* 79)

In giving voice to alienated nature and demonstrating the impossible fulfilment of human and non-human needs under the dictates of value, art illuminates, by way of allegory rather than logical denomination, the crises of needs and consumption inherent to capitalism.

Yet art does not only critique; it also paints a prismatic image of astonishing natural beauty, of the good life, of utopia. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues that the culture industry, as feeder of nonfulfilling needs in the interest of the reproduction of value, blocks the delirious, intoxicating "disappearance of the I in the moment of the shudder" (254). The utopian promise latent within art is the "primordial shudder" (79) which hints at the possibility of the collapse of self-preservation that has always haunted civilization. The shudder is objectified within the artwork as "the historical voice of repressed nature"; meanwhile, the culture industry cannot promise any liberation of the subject and object (or humanity and nature) because it is an "empty time filled with emptiness . . . an exertion that leaves things just as they are" (246). Within and against the frozen objectivity of value-relations and abstractions, the shudder persists through the ghostly remembrance of historical and future visions of emancipation, pointing at true reconciliation between subject and object:

> Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder, as if goose bumps were the first aesthetic image. What later came to be called subjectivity, freeing itself from the blind anxiety of the shudder, is at the same time the shudder's own development; life in the subject is nothing but what shudders, the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell. Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness. That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other. Aesthetic comportment assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it. Such a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins eros and knowledge. (*Aesthetic Theory* 331)

This utopian rendering of a non-dominating relationship between the subject and the Other places the intoxicating impulse embodied in the shudder as central to any liberating ethics and knowledge. Aesthetic experience, for Adorno, facilitates the re-narrativization of the sedimented history of subjectivity, exposing suffering under capitalism, while also, in foregrounding the non-narrative amazement of entwining eros and knowledge, positing utopian speculation beyond the value-form.

Crucially, Adorno's vivid account of aesthetic experience is inextricably linked to his social theory of needs under capitalism. For the shudder's peculiar detoxifying intoxication also appears within Adorno's description, at the end of "Theses on Need", of needs under a classless society. Adorno here contrasts a society in which individuals are controlled through "the compulsion to produce in view of needs that are mediated and fixed by the market" with a classless society that would produce "that which *all* humans now most urgently need" ("Theses on Need" 104). The latter, however, is a not a utopian demand that simply projects future fulfilment once the means of production have been seized by the proletariat. Adorno's utopian impulse in the "Needs" essay allegorizes natural beauty, dramatizing the rejection of value-generating need alongside a genuinely purifying, aesthetic experience which, similar to the shudder, poses reconciliation with a nature deformed and othered by capitalism. Adorno's utopian demand to fulfil human needs immediately at the same time articulates how such needs-fulfilment would herald a new society detoxified from the value-form:

> The classless society, which will abolish the irrationality of the entanglement of production and profit, will satisfy needs and likewise abolish the practical spirit that still asserts itself in the aimlessness [*Zweckferne*] of the bourgeois notion of *l'art pour l'art* [art for art's sake]. It will sublate [*aufheben*] not only the bourgeois antagonism between production and consumption, but also their bourgeois unity. To be useless [*unnütz*] will then no longer be shameful. Conformity will lose its sense. Productivity in its genuine, undisfigured sense will, for the first time, have a real effect on need: not by assuaging unsatisfied need with useless things, but rather because satisfied need will make it possible to relate to the world without knocking it into shape through universal usefulness [*Nützlichkeit*]. If classless society promises the end of art by sublating the tension between the actual and the possible, then at the same time it also promises the beginning of art, the useless [*das Unnütze*], whose intuition tends towards reconciliation with nature because it is no longer in the service of usefulness [*Nutzen*] to the exploiters. ("Theses on Needs" 104)

Here, Adorno undercuts the necessity through which consumption is chained to production within class society. Pleasure and work will come together in a state of genuine reconciliation with nature, just as eros and knowledge combine in the shudder. The immediate fulfilment of human needs, especially those—as Adorno earlier states—generated through life under capitalism, will transform the very meaning of needs-fulfilment. The transcendence of needs through the very fulfilment of needs is a “reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell” (*Aesthetic Theory* 331) and parallels the shudder’s utopian, detoxifying ethical assimilation to the Other. Rejecting needs that serve only to reproduce abstract labour, and instead fulfilling capitalist-induced lack by allowing consumption and production to flourish unchained by the value-form, is akin to an aesthetic of detoxification.

Without outlining a competing list of genuine, true needs, Adorno negatively illuminates a world free from the toxicity of value-relations by tracing different levels and renditions of intoxication within the consumptions of the culture industry and the mimetic shudder of art. Adorno demarcates between negative aesthetic sublimation through allegories of natural beauty, and the immediacy of the culture industry which “simply identifies with the curse of predetermination and joyfully fulfils it” (“The Schema of Mass Culture” 72). By critically reading both dimensions of intoxication we gain insight into the real separation from need within everyday consumption and social reproduction, but attention to art’s allegorical impulse viscerally cracks open real abstraction and underscores the ethical stakes of moving beyond value. By relating Adorno’s aesthetic distinction more concretely to his “Theses on Need” piece, I have argued that allegorical investigation can address both the toxic non-satisfaction of needs under capitalism, as found in afflictions like addiction, as well as the utopian satisfaction of immediate needs in the transition toward and under a non-capitalist society. In the following Chapter, I will show how Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* similarly allegorizes crises in consumption and needs-fulfilment. But by reading the text in conjunction with Jason W. Moore’s world-ecology, I will also argue that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* maps deeper structural crisis tendencies within capitalism and which bear on us with increased urgency in the 2010s.

Chapter 2.

World-Ecological Intoxication in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

This Chapter reconstructs Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to foreground allegory and intoxication as key components for reading 2010s addiction narratives as registrations of capitalism's crises. Specifically, I reconstruct *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* various figures of intoxication, primarily in the text's Excursus on *The Odyssey*, alongside the eco-Marxism of Jason W. Moore. I offer a contemporary reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* interconnected dimensions of narrative—the text's attempts to render intelligible the capitalist mode of production—and non-narrative—the text's foregrounding of what capitalism's irrational rationality cannot provide and in turn the ethical stakes of pausing and critically freezing capitalist progress and growth. In turn, such a reading allows us to further grasp the relevance of Frankfurt School Critical Theory for thinking through the consumption crises of the 2010s.

This Chapter does not intend to distill a set of theoretical principles from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and subsequently apply them to the cultural objects under discussion in Chapters 3 and 4 of the dissertation. Instead, I read *Dialectic of Enlightenment* against the grain through a world-ecological and social reproductive lens to articulate a contemporary Marxist allegorical reading of consumption crises, which will be undertaken more concretely in Chapters 3's and 4's readings of contemporary addiction narratives. This second Chapter develops my commentary on the interplay between narrative and non-narrative forms in Adorno, as outlined in Chapter 1. While the contemporary artworks and North American settings that are the subjects of Chapters 3 and 4 foreground a relationship between narrative and non-narrative similar to that argued for here in the aesthetically rich *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I nevertheless do not regard *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a primarily literary or poetic, rather than philosophical, text. Rather, I contend that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* performs what Steven Helmling argues is a "poetics of critique", whereby concepts are pushed to their limits, their contradictions and imbrication in domination exposed, so that the affect and horror ideologically suppressed by capitalism might resurface to critical consciousness.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, philosophy and the artistic are not separate; instead, the two spheres are "forced once again into productive if conflicted— productive *because* conflicted—collision with each other", and "the writing, word-by-word, is meaning-making, and form forges for itself a power, an 'agency of form' . . . very much in the way of the great modernist literary masters" (Helmling 7). This chapter considers how *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s formal collisions generate new lines of inquiry regarding the contemporary reproductive and ecological crises that Horkheimer and Adorno's text in many ways foreshadows.

My discussion of such issues regarding the global, crisis-inducing appropriation of "cheap natures", including the ongoing predations of Indigenous land in 2010s North America, concludes with some utopian speculation grounded in Horkheimer and Adorno's own utopian framing of intoxication. My concluding speculations primarily reaffirm the need, as argued by theorists such as Coulthard, Leanne Simpson and Kate Soper, to disentangle consumption and the fulfilment of needs from value-relations and capitalist growth. I conclude that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* allegorically grounds the imperative for a politics based around (human and non-human) needs and consumption, yet which still centres antagonism against the capitalist totality.

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In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno comment on the ambiguity of intoxication as a mode of survival within class society. Through retelling the Sirens episode from *The Odyssey*, Horkheimer and Adorno describe how Odysseus overcomes the temptation of the alluring Siren song by tying himself to the mast while his crew row with their ears plugged. The overwhelmingly beautiful song represents, in one sense, a repressed longing for nature. Signifying both self-preservation and the threat of self-annihilation, the song, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, has throughout human history endured "terrible injuries" at the hands of hardened rational subjectivity— "the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings" (26). While the rowers—representing the proletarian classes, in Horkheimer and Adorno's reading—know the danger of the intoxicating song but cannot even hear it, Odysseus, the bourgeois figure, senses true happiness and freedom, yet, given his dependence on the toil of the rowers, can never truly experience such fulfilment.

Analogously, beauty becomes fixed in art as an object of consumption for the bourgeoisie, but just as for Walter Benjamin there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism, for Horkheimer and Adorno culture is dialectically imbricated in the domination of nature: "Between the cultural heritage and enforced work there is a precise correlation, and both are founded on the inescapable compulsion toward the social control of nature" (27). The intoxicating impulse of nature, described as something that dissolves subjectivity and memory, must be continually controlled and kept at a distance by enlightenment rationality. Horkheimer and Adorno therefore also link intoxication and survival with the domination of nature. In this chapter, I address the allegorical and ecological significance of this relationship between intoxication and questions of economic and emancipatory survival within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and how this allegorical relationship in turn addresses 2010s discussions about capitalism's exhaustion of the very value-relations on which it depends.

Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the Sirens does not, however, amount to a romantic critique of the domination of nature, one seeking to recover the lost intoxications of Nature and dispensing with rationality. While the Sirens evade in eluding identity and "threaten the patriarchal", the authors warn that to succumb to the mesmerizing Siren song would be to surrender the future and lapse into barbarism (26). Horkheimer and Adorno then remark on the ambiguous role intoxication plays regarding how subjectivity—and in turn, the culture of enlightenment—preserves itself:

> Narcotic intoxication, in which the euphoric suspension of the self is expiated by deathlike sleep, is one of the oldest social transactions mediating between self-preservation and self-annihilation, an attempt by the self to survive itself. The fear of losing the self, and suspending with it the boundary between oneself and other life, the aversion to death and destruction, is twinned with a promise of joy which has threatened civilization at every moment. (26)

Survival, in other words, is dependent not only on the suppression of intoxication and the domination of nature, but also the very mediation between self-preservation and self-annihilation. The threat of intoxicating, potentially destructive, joy permits the ego to preserve itself, just like how Odysseus' endurance of the Sirens is an inextricable component of his narrative of cunning and self-preserving rationality. Odysseus' rationalizing logic, which *Dialectic of Enlightenment* narrativizes as a precursor to fully-administered capitalist society in the twentieth century, depends in part on a mimetic

relationship with non-human “other life”, or nature, in which the latter’s intoxications are registered by rationalizing forces—as with Odysseus’ registration of the Siren song—only so they can ultimately be subordinated. The way Odysseus gives himself over only to further subjugate nature marks a mimetic relationship to both nature and humanity defined by death (44), which Horkheimer and Adorno characterize as in line with the property-acquisitive logic of the bourgeoisie.

Yet, in another moment taken from *The Odyssey*, Horkheimer and Adorno bring this logic of rational self-preservation, embodied in Odysseus, into firmer relationship with economic survival among the dominated. Similar to their account of how Odysseus must suppress the allure of the Siren song to preserve his ego and survive, Horkheimer and Adorno refer to the story of the Lotus-eaters, whereby Odysseus’ men briefly succumb to the narcotic bliss of a Lotus food. Odysseus, though tempted by the “illusion of bliss, a full aimless vegetating, as impoverished as the life of animals” (49), forces his crew away from the spell, because “self-preserving reason cannot permit such an idyll—reminiscent of the bliss induced by narcotics, by which subordinate classes have been made capable of enduring the unendurable in ossified social orders—among its own people” (49). In what appears initially as an anti-romantic critique of enlightenment rationality, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that Odysseus is correct not to endure life among the Lotus-eaters, because such a state would only be “an absence of the awareness of unhappiness” (49). Instead, Horkheimer and Adorno claim that fulfilling the utopian impulse of happiness (latent within acts of intoxication) requires some endurance of suffering—“the realization of utopia through historical work” rather than “abiding within an image of bliss” (49). In other words, working towards happiness and freedom cannot amount to fleeing into the formless and the irrational but must be premised on a different mimetic relationship with nature, one which Horkheimer and Adorno provide suggestions of in other parts of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

However, in their concluding remarks on the Lotus-eaters, Horkheimer and Adorno also reassert that Odysseus’ actions of removing his crew from Lotus’ narcotic bliss is an act of domination, one that highlights self-preserving, bourgeois reason’s destructive relationship with the intoxications of the “subordinate classes”, as well as those found “near the rim of the world” (49). Rationalizing thought, just like Odysseus’ suppression of the overwhelming Siren song, is a constant battle with the euphoric, yet potentially destructive, Dionysian gratifications offered within civilization through forms

such as art, natural beauty and drugs. The Lotus, Horkheimer and Adorno continue, is "an oriental food" (50) whose temptation points to life before any form or mode of production. Yet, equally, the primordial image attached to the Lotus betrays a utopian impulse beyond the capitalist reduction of quality to quantity, of everyday life to the logic of exchange:

> Perhaps the temptation ascribed to [Lotus] is no other than that of regression to the stage of gathering the fruits of the earth and the sea, older than agriculture, cattle-rearing, or even hunting—older, in short, than any production. It is hardly an accident that the epic connects the idea of the life of idleness with the eating of flowers, whereas no such use is associated with them today. The eating of flowers, as is still customary during dessert in the East and is known to European children from baking with rosewater and from candied violets, bears the promise of a state in which the reproduction of life is independent of conscious self-preservation, the bliss of satiety uncoupled from the utility of planned nutrition. (50)

This primordial image conjoins survival not with rational self-preservation, as with Odysseus in the Sirens episode, but rather with spaces of intimate social reproduction antagonistic toward the hyper-administered "planned nutrition" of the capitalist mode of production. Horkheimer and Adorno are not romanticizing past and Eastern culinary customs but are rather foregrounding the possibility that intoxication is a *registration* of the violent impositions of and mutations in capitalist reproduction.

The literary examples from Homer obviously concern modes of production far before any kind of transition to capitalism. However, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s framing of intoxication as in an antagonistic relationship with various forms of rationalization across history can be re-read to narrativize the appearance and re-occurrence (see Endnotes 2010; Coulthard 2014) of what Karl Marx in *Capital* describes as the violent historical processes of primitive accumulation, of coercive acts like land enclosure and colonial plunder that separate individuals from their means of reproduction and subsistence (874-6). This chapter reads the recurring figures of intoxication in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which span and tie together Horkheimer and Adorno's commentary on both the archaic *Odyssey* and the modern culture industry, as allegorical registrations of how capitalism *continually* feeds off all forms of life—from commodified labour to non-human nature to domestic social reproductive work—to sustain itself. As in Chapter 1, I stress the significance of Adorno's articulation of non-narrative and its dialectical relationship with and posing of a limit-point to what can be narrativized. In this chapter, I

show that the non-narrative moments in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* move allegory and intoxication beyond the sphere of commodification into what world-ecology and social reproduction theory broadly designate as the "hidden" (that is, according to analyses that approach the world through a strictly economic framework) zones of natural resources, colonial and ecological plunder and unpaid social reproductive work such as care and housework.

The significance of intoxication as a registration of capitalist modernity necessitates examining the latter's ecological, colonial and patriarchal history. Drawing on Silvia Federici's account of the coexistence of land enclosure and colonial plunder alongside the destruction of women's reproductive lifeforce during the witch hunts of the Middle Ages, Paul B. Preciado (2013) shows how such processes of primitive accumulation entailed the destruction of lifeworlds marked by practices of "voluntary intoxication", local pharmacological knowledge and a range of distinctive psychoactive relations to the world. Ingestion of and experimentation with herbs and plants containing psychoactive ingredients formed traditional social habits and rituals among lower classes, colonized peoples and women. The Inquisitions were means of land enclosure, colonial expansion and suppressing different modes of knowledge, "non-productive" ways of living and subaltern power. Often, the very ecosystems destroyed through enclosures were the places that grew the plants and substances central to practices of alternative, pre-capitalist subsistence, practices often subsequently stigmatized as savage or as "witchcraft" (Preciado 151).

For Preciado the history of struggles over the means of reproduction and consumption forms the basis of contemporary regimes of pharmaceutical, sexual and audio-visual control:

> The process of enclosing land, expropriating folk wisdom, criminalizing practices of "voluntary intoxication", and privatizing plant germ plasm was only beginning. It reached its apex in the modern period with the colonial expropriation of plants, animals, human bodies, and knowledges; the persecution of the producers, consumers, and traffickers of "drugs"; the gradual transformation of natural resources into pharmaceutical patents; and the confiscation by juridical-medical institutions of all experiments that involved self-administration. (146)

As broad and schematic as this account is, Preciado's analysis helpfully connects the primitive accumulation of land, resources and social reproduction with contemporary

forms of pharmaceutical, audiovisual and pornographic forms of control, or what he terms the "pharmacopornographic" era. Though we may take issue with his distrust of concepts like value abstraction and totality, Preciado's account of intoxicating consumption as registration of primitive accumulation helpfully frames narratives of intoxication in a world-ecological perspective.

By world-ecological I am referring primarily to Moore's work, which argues against tendencies within environmental theory that separate the sphere of nature from that of the social and thus fail to account sufficiently for the dialectical inter-relationship of those two spheres. Against what he regards as the dualistic framing of Nature/Society, Moore proposes a world-ecological perspective that prioritizes capitalism's role in "bundling" human and extra-human natures in the "oikeois" or "web of life" (45). For Moore, capitalism fuels climate crisis by working *in and through*, as opposed to acting *upon*, extra-human nature: "Capitalism does not develop upon global nature so much as it emerges through the messy and contingent relations of humans with the rest of nature" (44). A world-ecological perspective, argues Moore, requires "a transition from seeing capitalism as a social system to seeing capitalism as *world-ecology*, joining capital, power and nature in a "rich totality of many determinations"" (45). This more holistic approach allows for an understanding of capitalism's dependence on cheap (human and extra-human) nature, a dependency imbricated in the commodification of labour power, to sustain accumulation. For Moore, capitalism's oikeois historically depends on a zone of "appropriation", covering not only natural resources but also a range of histories that include the gendered domains of social reproductive work and the transatlantic slave-trade. Such realms are not incidental but historically necessary preconditions for the creation of value under capitalism; higher labour productivity, for example, relies on the appropriation of certain natural resources to keep food cheap and thus to sustain a healthy workforce. The law of value is at once a law of "cheap nature"; accumulation turns on the cyclical reproduction of what Moore identifies as the "Four Cheaps" of food, labour power, energy and raw materials (53). The continual appropriation of such unpaid work/energy rests on strategies irreducible to solely economic relations, instead enabled by a combination of science, power and culture (54). Similar to feminist value-theorists like Roswitha Scholz (2014), Moore argues that "value does not work unless most *work* is not valued" (54). Moore's conception of capitalism is more expansive, as well as more adept at explaining

capitalism's ecological crises through for example its increasing inability to appropriate cheap natures such as food, than many contemporary Marxist theories.

This Chapter grounds an Adornian allegorical conception of intoxication within what Moore outlines as a capitalist totality of multiple determinations, and thus of interconnected proletarian struggle. While the work of Adorno has been brought into dialogue with eco-criticism in much recent scholarship,[39] few authors have considered works such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in relation to world-ecology and the related feminist field of social reproduction theory. Furthermore, little scholarship has paid close attention to the *narrative* and *allegorical* significance of intoxication in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[40] I argue that *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s prominent figures of intoxication, which dovetail with those figures of both capitalist rationality and of mutilated nature, can be framed in light of Moore's expanded, world-ecological account of value. Beginning from the figure of intoxication outlined in the Sirens episode and through arguing that *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s various interconnected figures illuminate contemporary themes of *dependency*, *exhaustion* and *detoxification* under global capitalism, I show how *Dialectic of Enlightenment* allegorically maps capital's present accumulation crises regarding the appropriation of cheap human and extra-human natures. The hope is that doing so provides a more global, far-reaching context of value-relations in which to situate addiction narratives.

Mimesis and Mutilated Nature

Before assessing Moore's contribution to Marxism and his relevance to Frankfurt School critical theory, I will briefly underscore the significant deployment of both narrative and non-narrative forms in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Discussion of the non-narrative moments of Horkheimer and Adorno's text also involves some discussion of mimesis, including the concept's utopian qualities and role within Adorno's later aesthetic theory. Building from Chapter 1, I here reassert the importance of retaining

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[39] See for example Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature* (2011) and Carl Cassegård, *Toward a Critical Theory of Nature* (2021).

[40] However, for an exploration of intoxication in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in relation to critical distance, see Thijs Lijster, "From the Opium of the People to Acid Communism: On the dialectics of critique and intoxication" (2020).

both narrative and non-narrative forms for reading intoxication as allegory of 2010s manifold crises, which can be found from within the consumptive crises of addiction to the global exhaustion of value-relations.

In *Late Marxism* Fredric Jameson argues that Horkheimer and Adorno's dissonant deployment of Marxist and non-Marxist elements highlights the centrality of stylistic, formal and narrative elements, compared with philosophical propositions or statements, for reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Jameson notes how Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the domination of both internal and external nature yields "a rich narrative schema, with actants and motives and violent and dramatic events" (*Late Marxism* 67). Jameson argues that when Horkheimer and Adorno move from a classically Marxist socioeconomic explanation to an anthropological perspective, the shift implies "a different code or vocabulary from the socioeconomic, and tends to stress domination rather than production" (109). Jameson reads *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s use of the anthropological not as the socioeconomic's replacement, but rather as an intervention, a rewriting strategy for when the social perspective fails to explain something, at moments of methodological contradiction (109). While many scholars have tried to systematically bring together Adorno's Marxism with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s Nietzschean and Weberian elements, Jameson views the latter as ultimately subservient to a Marxist project of narrativizing the social (Jameson 108). What may appear to be ontological statements on the primacy of human fear and domination are in fact manifestations of the desire to map the predominance of the exchange relationship, argues Jameson.

Despite Jameson's important emphasis on how *Dialectic of Enlightenment* narrativizes the preponderance of the exchange relation, he, again, downplays the philosophical importance of nonidentity and mimesis in Adorno. Mimesis, similar to the allegory of natural beauty in art, betrays a utopian promise of happiness ("promesse de bonheur") but also resists unification under categories of identity. Only with some conception of what resists narrativization can we grasp intoxication both as a mediator of wider social crises, including those of social reproduction and world-ecology, and as portending the fulfilment of needs detoxified from the value-form.

In the previous Chapter, I emphasized the non-narrative aspect of Adorno's allegorical framing of natural beauty as evading subjective ideals of social mediation, as

well as the relationship of this eco-aesthetic dimension of Adorno with his "Theses on Need" essay. The relationship between non-narrative and the ecological is similarly present within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and in a 1958 lecture Adorno himself stresses the continuity of his work with Horkheimer with his later aesthetic theory. Adorno's description of the return of nature in art, "the restoration of nature in a certain sense" (*Aesthetics* 41), has a utopian register in relation to his accompanying description of mimesis. Adorno argues that the persistence of nature within art, in however distorted a form, owes to the persistence of mimetic behaviour: "Art is a mimetic behaviour that is captured, preserved in an age of rationality" (41). While Enlightenment believes it has overcome the straightforward imitation of nature characteristic of primordial mimetic behaviour, the demythologization of the natural world (Gods, deities, etc.) through scientific progress cannot rid itself of mimesis, which lives on in artworks. Invoking the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno argues that while Enlightenment reduces nature to inert objectivity, art retains the genuinely utopian undercurrent of mimesis:

> And art, by clinging in a certain sense to the mimetic process, to this archaic, older phenomenon rather than the rational one—and, in this, I would almost say that all art is childlike, infantile, because it truly still has the notion that it can take full control of reality through the image, not by intervening in reality with thought and action—by clinging to this aspect, art always tries at the same time to do justice to that element of suppressed nature. (*Aesthetics* 41)

Yet this utopian framing of mimesis does not mean that nature appears or "speaks" unmediated in the artwork. Later in the aesthetics lecture series, Adorno clarifies his stance by arguing that non-socially mediated, or "unmutilated nature, a pure nature" does not exist (77). Instead, genuine art expresses the damaged life of the natural world at the hands of social mediation. Adorno claims "it is the task of art to give a voice to mutilated nature, meaning nature in the respective form in which it exists through its historical mediations at a particular stage of history" (77). To the extent that nature does return in modern artworks in a stark, seemingly rudimentary form, this is down to the "mutually mediated" relationship of nature and alienation, whereby a state of primitive nature bears the imprint of social alienation and mutilation, and vice versa (78-9).

Adorno does not want society to regress to an idealized mimetic relationship to nature, which would amount to barbarism. He instead wants the primal, magical image

of a non-dominating relationship with nature to be retained within a critical theory that keeps non-human nature in unreconciled dialectical tension with human subjectivity. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* he and Horkheimer briefly define this mimetic impulse as part of a different kind of rationality, a

> remembrance of nature within the subject [which] contains the unrecognized truth of all culture, enlightenment is opposed in principle to power. (32)

Remembering the non-human element within the human subject projects an image of reconciled nature without succumbing to such a myth. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* charts a perpetual, dialectical confrontation between enlightenment and myth throughout history, whereby the demythologizing practices of enlightenment rationality revert to new forms of myth, while myth itself, as with the utopian promise of reconciled nature, ends up projecting an image of genuine enlightenment. Yet Horkheimer and Adorno must stage this dialectic of enlightenment without a false promise of reconciliation, precisely to avoid replicating the false unities of exchange society and to immanently critique enlightenment's very dialectic. The non-narrative limit to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s narrative of the origins of capitalist domination frequently takes the form of an unreconciled mimetic relationship between subject and nature, and therefore is central to the text's critical unfolding.

Camilla Flodin (2012) convincingly argues that Adorno's concern with how art mediates mutilated nature through the indirect representation of suffering is not limited to the account of the artwork found in Adorno's later writings on aesthetics. In her reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Flodin shows how Horkheimer and Adorno similarly draw attention to figurations of mutilated nature in *The Odyssey*. Flodin argues that in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* the domination of external and internal nature is captured through Horkheimer and Adorno's reading of the Sirens episode, but that so is the utopian, imageless longing for reconciliation with nature, for an end to suffering, that Adorno argues is prismatically expressed in all genuine art.

I similarly emphasize how *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s concerns with mutilated nature and unreconciled mimesis relate to Adorno's later work.[41] However, I want to

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[41] Flodin notes: "What connects an early work such as *The Odyssey* with an autonomous artwork such as Mahler's Third Symphony is that both works manage to register and reflect on the

reframe somewhat *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s dramatizing of the relationship between mutilated nature and the utopian by considering the role of intoxication. An unreconciled image of reconciled nature is frequently dramatized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* through framings of intoxication. For example, this unreconciled image can be found when the intoxicating allure of the Sirens is described as akin to the threat of annihilated selfhood that haunts all acts of narcotic intoxication, and that, in essence, survival is bound up not only with the satisfaction of "basic" needs but those sensual gratifications and utopian promises that allow the self to survive the very traumas accompanying self-preservation (26).

A distorted image of the mimetic impulse is also at play in the remarks, mentioned earlier, about Lotus representing a form of self-reproduction independent of rationalizing forces, an image that is invoked by Horkheimer and Adorno as the non-narrative limit to the narrative of Odysseus wrenching his crew away from their dull, vegetating bliss. Meanwhile, in the similar discussion of the seduction of Odysseus' men at the hands of Circe's magic, the reduction of the crew to "squalid domestic animals" brings about "a semblance of reconciliation by recalling an "idealized prehistory" of liberated nature (55). While the image of the swine serves the ideological function of debasing nature and feminine, the latter framed as subjects deprived of their own sensual joy, intoxication keeps open an image of the senses liberated from the pleasures sanctioned by society:

> Magic and countermagic in the metamorphoses of Odysseus' companions are linked to herbs and wine, as intoxication and waking are to the sense of smell, which is increasingly suppressed and repressed and is closest not only to sex but to the remembrance of prehistory. (56)

Finally, in detailing the delusory promises of instant gratification and happiness offered by the culture industry and the "genuine" joy and pleasure that its standardized products suppress, Horkheimer and Adorno paint a prismatic image[42] of such a truly reconciled

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process of enlightenment outside art by reflecting on their own inner process of enlightenment. What Adorno calls authentic artworks (*authentische Kunstwerke*) are artworks that express what enlightenment otherwise hides: the suffering caused by the domination of nature" (3). I similarly argue, throughout this dissertation, that an artwork's ability to allegorize the violence of value abstraction and crises is not limited to Adorno's narrow definition of modernist autonomous art and that we can detect this allegorical impulse in several works of the mid-to-late 2010s.

[42] "Prismatic" is the operative word here, since Adorno's conception of utopia is marked, elsewhere, by *Bilderverbot*—a ban on graven images—forbidding images that pre-determine a

state. Describing the secret of aesthetic sublimation as the presentation of "fulfilment in its brokenness" (111), the negative image of joy given here is expanded in *Aesthetic Theory*, where the artwork is claimed to offer "the plenipotentiary" of reconciled nature free from domination (62) and to express suffering by allegorizing "natural beauty as such" (72).

The domination of nature is itself described by Horkheimer and Adorno in precisely this dialectical way—it is not as if non-human nature is fully subsumed under rationalizing modes; rather, a nonidentical relationship between the two is always apparent because modes of domination can never fully incorporate repressed non-human elements. Thus, Odysseus "throws himself away, so to speak, in order to win himself; he achieves his estrangement of nature by abandoning himself to nature, trying his strength against it in all his adventures" (38); Odysseus enacts a kind of intoxication so as to distance himself more completely from nature's intoxication, but a "semblance of reconciliation" (55), just as with the Lotus-eaters and the victims of Circe's magic, always remains, unreconciled. In fact, this persistence explains, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the fear the dominators have of subversive or "unruly" nature, their "blind fury" (88) at the possibility that they might succumb to "the hated but overwhelming temptation to lapse back into nature" (87). The persistence of domination ensures a "strained remoteness from nature" (87), yet nature's very persistence nevertheless reflects its utopian lure, albeit often in a grossly distorted way.

Equally, this dialectic is at work under fascism, specifically anti-Semitism, where under the "intoxication of the communal ecstasy . . . blindness becomes a relationship and the paranoid mechanism is made controllable" (162). According to Jameson's reading of this section, the intoxications of fascist politics work by appealing to the anti-Semite's cultural envy, to their negative relationship to the perceived collective happiness of Jewish people and thus a repressed utopian impulse manifested as the hatred of happiness itself (Jameson 152-3).

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future free from social antagonism. In *Negative Dialectics*, for example, Adorno describes an imageless materialism:

> It is only in that absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism secularises it by not permitting utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. (207)

In all these figurations of intoxication, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* narrativizes the domination of nature but keeps the possibility of its liberation open by retaining the critical and ethical force of mimesis. The possibility of liberated nature denotes a non-narrative limit continually posed by *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. While Jameson rightly underscores the critical force of Adorno's use of narrative forms, as means of staging and undermining Enlightenment forms of abstraction, Jameson does not extend his analysis enough to Adorno's use of non-narrative and nonidentical mimesis. Had Jameson done so, crucial questions around need, reproduction, and ecology could have been explored more comprehensively along Marxist lines.

Critical Theory and the Web of Life

Before unpacking the world-ecological significance of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s prominent figures of intoxication, gaining some understanding of Moore's theory in relation to a broader tradition of eco-Marxism will be useful. While there is undoubtedly tension between certain parts of Moore's thought and Adorno's poetics, Moore's expansive account of capitalism nevertheless speaks to a number of subterranean ecological and feminist themes within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Moore is highly critical of the forms of eco-Marxism that rigidly separate non-human nature from human society. Moore is keen to distance himself from a conception of climate crisis that frames environmental destruction as arising out of humanity dominating a passive, inert non-human sphere. There are two key reasons why Moore argues against the Nature/Society framing. Firstly, Moore argues that by sharply demarcating the boundaries between "Nature" and "Society" we risk ignoring the degree to which non-human natures themselves have historically played a crucial role in shaping capitalist accumulation. For Moore, value operates through a dialectic of exploitation and appropriation—on the one hand, the exploitation of labour power through the broad category of wage-labour (the commodification of labour); on the other hand, the appropriation of unpaid work and resources, whose "cheapness" ensures not only the revitalization but also the continual exploitation of wage-workers (keeping food costs low, for example, means capital only has to pay a bare minimum to retain a healthy workforce and so can extract greater surplus value). Appropriation is defined by Moore as "those extra-economic processes that identify, secure and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of capital" (17); these extra-economic

processes, while not directly constituting value,[43] provide the conditions for value-creation. Moore argues that downplaying the role of non-human nature means downplaying how appropriative processes crucially shape value-creation in the web of life. Nature is not so much (or not only) dominated by capital as it is co-constitutive of capital through a dialectic of exploitation and appropriation. Thus:

> Instead of asking what capitalism *does* to nature, we may begin to ask how nature *works for* capitalism? If the former question implies separation, the latter implicates unification: capitalism-in-nature/nature-in-capitalism. It allows us to grapple with a new set of relations, hitherto obscured by the dualism of Nature/Society. (13)

Dualist ecological approaches, which Moore attributes to thinkers like his former teacher John Bellamy Foster, cannot sufficiently grasp this sense of "value-in-motion" because they remain beholden to a Cartesian framework of abstract separation between human and non-human. This characterization of Cartesian separation brings us to Moore's second key point of contention.

Cartesian dualism is for Moore not only a theoretical misrecognition of how capitalism works through the web of life. In addition, the Cartesian distinction between a supposedly vital human sphere and a passive non-human sphere is a "real abstraction" that has historically justified the Othering and exploitation of "women, nature and colonies" (as Maria Mies (2014) puts it). The Nature/Society dualism is an integral framework for the ever-expanding appropriation of cheap nature. Moore argues that the Cartesian framework belongs to a process of "abstract social nature" which legitimizes

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[43] Mies, along with Federici, emphasizes the inherent violence of these conditions of possibility for the separations of "free labour":

> This violent subordination of women under men and the process of capital accumulation was first acted out on a mass scale during the witch hunt in Europe. But it has ever since constituted the infrastructure upon which so-called capitalist production relations could be established, namely the contractual relationship between owners of labour power and owners of means of production. Without this infrastructure of non-free, coerced female or colonial labour in the broadest sense, the non-coerced, contractual labour relations of the free proletarians would not be possible. Women and colonial peoples were defined as property, as nature, not as free subjects, who could enter a contract. Both had to be subordinated by force and direct violence. (170)

However, this characterization of "free labour" as "non-coerced" downplays the violent separation inherent to capitalist society's generation of value through objectified abstract labour, as well as how women and colonial subjects have themselves historically been coerced into such "non-coerced, contractual labour". In this respect, the demarcation of appropriation as not directly constitutive of value requires careful framing so as not to elide a conception of value's reach into all forms of life. See footnote 44.

the appropriation of human and extra-human natures through rationalization and abstraction and as realized in practices like cartography and mathematics (206-7). Abstract social nature facilitates the reproduction of the expansive field of appropriation that is nonidentical with but nonetheless necessary for the expansion of value. For Moore, the historical reality of the exploitation/appropriation dialectic necessitates reading value and power relations together. As the law of value mobilizes unpaid work/energy in the service of greater labour productivity, symbolic power is deployed "to represent the arbitrary character of value relations *as* objective" (203). Institutions like the state, as well as scientific discourse, are wielded by capital in an ever-mutating ideological project to legitimize further appropriation. For Moore, the theoretical tendency to treat nature and society separately, even within much Marxist theory, replicates and reinforces a symbolic, cultural and ideological project of legitimization. Furthermore, eliding capitalism's real abstractions via the replication of Cartesian separation ignores not only the entanglement of capital and nature but also capital's connections with forces such as the state and science, which become treated as mere "external factors" of accumulation. Moore argues that instead

> State, science and capital constitute a singular process, shaped by a double imperative: to simplify natures, and to extend the domain of appropriation faster than the zone of exploitation. (217)

This notion of a "singular process" shows that Moore is not merely trying to synthesize Marxist value theory with ecological considerations; rather, he is expanding the very conception of value itself.

While drawing extensively from world-systems theory, Moore's expansive conception of value is also heavily indebted to Marxist-feminist scholars such as Lise Vogel, Maria Mies, Silvia Federici and other theorists of social reproduction.[44] The

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[44] The question of the relationship of social reproduction to commodification is a thorny one that is addressed differently amongst a range of theorists. In analytically separating the sphere of the waged "productive" labour of commodities from the sphere of (largely) unwaged reproductive work, most Marxist-feminists do not argue that reproductive work inherently resists becoming commodified itself. As Nancy Fraser (2016) shows, neoliberalism increasingly strives to commodify various forms of reproductive labour like care-work, cleaning and cooking. However, the question remains of whether the gendered, racialized and colonial spheres of appropriation and reproduction are extrinsic to value-relations. A common thread unifying a range of Marxist-feminist thinkers is the idea that a portion of social relations—namely, the aforementioned spheres of social reproduction—must be "dissociated" (Scholz) or rendered "non-labour" (Endnotes) for the continuation of value-creation. This shared point of agreement among Marxist-feminisms is deftly identified by Beverley Best (2021), who herself ultimately departs from such

unwaged sphere of reproductive work that sustains labour productivity has historically been overwhelmingly performed by women, and Marxist-feminists have offered a range of accounts of how such processes unfold and gain ideological legitimacy. Indeed, Moore would have done well to consider more carefully how many social reproduction theorists already detailed the "intersection" of environmental, colonial and gendered forms of primitive accumulation across history. For example, Federici, for whom primitive accumulation is grounded in "the appropriation and concealment of women's labor" (97), argues in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004) that the expropriation of communal land through enclosure occurred at the same time as "the witch-hunts expropriated women from their bodies, which were thus "liberated" from any impediment preventing them to function as machines for the production of labor" (184). The undermining of women's control over their own social reproduction served capital's imperative to reproduce a productive labour force, but this reproductive war was also congruent with other ideological projects to "Other" and render more appropriable natural resources, Indigenous lands and peoples, and enslaved African peoples (152). Overall, Federici's path-breaking account of the primitive accumulation of female bodies is consistently framed, throughout her work, as essentially world-ecological.[45]

Despite this lack of sustained engagement with Marxist-feminism, Moore's work is useful for the present study because of the sheer scope of his constellations of multiple theoretical, historical and geographical perspectives, which provide a rich framework to map on the imbrication of consumption-based and social reproductive separation within a global, crisis-ridden totality. Following Carl Cassegård (2021), I argue

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an idea that capital must "cast some indeterminate portion of social reproductive activity outside of the value-form" (905). Best instead maintains that capital would in fact, if it could coordinate its class interests with all individual capitalists on a grand scale, subsume (commodify) all spheres of life. While such value theory debates are outside the scope of this discussion, it does not seem to me that Moore's conception of the appropriation process necessitates casting "cheap nature" outside or as "dissociated" from the value-form. In fact, as we will see later in this chapter, the inevitable end of cheap natures means the latter are ultimately recast firmly within the realm of commodification and exploitation—capital, in other words, starts paying for cheap natures—which, in another turn of the screw, has long-term negative consequences for profitability.

[45] "It should also have seemed significant that the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the colonization and extermination of the populations of the New World, the English enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade, enactment of "bloody laws" against vagabonds and beggars, and it climaxed in that interregnum between the end of feudalism and the capitalist "take off" when the peasantry in Europe reached the peak of its power but, in time, also consummated its historic defeat" (Federici 164-5).

that despite some evident tensions with Adorno, Moore's valuable insights into the appropriative process accompanying commodification can be retained for affirming the contemporary significance of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The tensions between Moore and Adorno largely amount to Moore's elevation of a monistic conception of capitalism and his over-hostility to *all* accounts of dualism.[46] For while Moore's understanding of the oppressive abstractions of Cartesian dualism certainly resonates with Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of subjectivity's imbrication in the domination of nature, it is important to understand that the latter thinkers were not interested in reconciling such real abstractions within a monistic framework. It is true that for Horkheimer and Adorno oppressed groups such as women, under enlightenment rationality and the various institutions that sediment exchange society, ideologically "stand for nature, the substrate of never-ending subsumption on the plane of ideas and of never-ending subjection of that of reality" (87). Yet collapsing the opposition of Nature/Society, would amount, for Horkheimer and Adorno, to an elision of the antagonisms that inhere within Cartesian real abstractions. Stressing the unity of capitalism and nature risks lapsing into idealism and dispensing with critical negativity. This is the risk of taking Moore at face-value when he arguably unnecessarily shifts from a critique of real abstraction to the positing of a Latourian, almost post-humanist ontology.

Although he does not address the Frankfurt School, Moore would likely take issue with Horkheimer and Adorno's commentary on the domination of nature for implying a separation between nature and society. Yet, as Cassegård argues, the extent to which dualism does play a role in Adorno's work is not as an ontological Cartesianism but as a way of providing a starting methodological framework. Beginning from the real abstractions of Nature/Society perpetuated by capitalism (as Moore himself ironically does) is not an identification with the dualism but an attempt to dismantle it immanently (Cassegård 165). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, such immanent criticisms of dualist abstraction frequently take the form of narrative and non-narrative interplay.

Nevertheless, in the same way that Moore's account of capital's appropriative processes and cheap nature fixes address theoretical blind spots within many forms of

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[46] For a scathing critique of Moore's allergy to any degree of dualism see Andreas Malm's *The Progress of this Storm* (2017), (177–83; 190–6).

Marxism, Horkheimer and Adorno were similarly addressing the teleological, deterministic and labour-fixating tendencies of much Marxist theory of the time. As noted in the previous chapter, Adorno was critical of Lukács' reification theory for attempting to subsume all phenomena under social processes and relations. In tending to identify the rationalization and fragmentation of society as an alien process to be overcome, in which the proletariat is the subject and object of history, Lukács becomes, for Adorno, guilty of identity thinking. Lukács wants to banish the alien object which could open further social and utopian inquiry beyond the mere given.

Horkheimer's own work similarly punctures the optimism associated with Lukács' valorization of the proletarian standpoint, in which immediate experiences of exploitation within the workplace are reconciled with rational knowledge of the social totality and thus initiate class consciousness. In his essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1972), Horkheimer cautions the theorist from identifying with the immediate experience of the proletariat, since doing so potentially underestimates other techniques of domination (214). It would seem that for Horkheimer and Adorno Lukács' classical account of reification also underestimates the appropriative processes necessary for the expansion of value-relations,[47] especially given the authors' frequent concern, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* with the domination of nature. In this respect, I disagree with John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark's (2016) remark that Horkheimer and Adorno's "pessimistic" critique of natural science as positivistic resigns the Frankfurt School thinkers to fatalism. In Foster and Clark's reading, the Frankfurt School thinkers' apparent over-hostility to science results in an annexation of the dialectic "to the reflexive realm of society and human history" (n.p.) and marks a supposed inability to properly conceptualize the interrelationship between socioeconomic and ecological systems. Foster and Clark, however, fatally overlook the role of nonidentity within Adorno's framing of the domination of nature. As argued in Chapter 1, Adorno's account of nonidentity seeks to undercut social and theoretical reductions of reified phenomena and value-form objectivity to identarian categories of human and social relations.[48]

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[47] Interestingly, Marx himself was at times also criticized by Adorno for overemphasizing the commodification of labour, or at least an apparent ontological centrality of labour (as outlined in Marx's 1844 "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts"). For example, Adorno once told Martin Jay (1973) that Marx wanted to turn the whole world into a giant workhouse (Jay 57).

[48] See Cook 2011, pp. 25-6, for a longer discussion of Adorno's nonidentical approach to nature in relation to Foster's defence of Marx's conception of metabolism.

Moore’s theory therefore implores Marxism to speak more strongly to issues of appropriation in the context of impending climate crisis and what he argues is the exhaustion and potential end of “cheap nature, factors which are resulting in a crisis in capitalism itself. Yet though Moore does spend some time exploring the function of the “cultural fix” (a term he borrows from Stephen Shapiro)—the hegemonic and ideological processes that solidify and legitimate the appropriation of nature in an everyday, cultural sense (198)—he does not address *how* such ideological legitimizations of domination are registered allegorically. With her interest in the figure of the witch, Federici’s work goes some way to highlighting the relationship between allegory and world-ecology, especially in terms of resistance. For example, in a striking passage, Federici comments on how surprising it is that Latin American revolutionaries, in struggles against colonization, invoke the figure of Caliban and not of his mother, Sycorax. Commenting on how such historical occurrences of anti-colonial resistance were frequently led by women, Federici claims that the figure of Sycorax, a witch “so strong that she could control the moon, make flows and ebbs” (*The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1) invokes “those communal ties that, over centuries of suffering, have continued to nourish the liberation struggle to this day” (Federici 232). In contrast to this affinity with nature, Caliban, Federici claims, “could only fight his master by cursing him in the language he had learned from him”—thus forgoing the broader range of non-human spheres that inform and support anti-colonial resistance (232). However, Federici is endorsing a rather romantic image of reconciled nature, one that corresponds with her problematic tendency to affirm a pre-subjugated “female nature” in her valorization of the “reproductive commons”, as critics like Zoe Sutherland and Marina Vishmidt (2015) have noted. Federici’s nostalgic framing of world-ecology within pre-capitalist figures of unmediated nature is undialectical, identifying with and affirming an image of reconciled nature. In a manner similar to Moore’s monistic tendencies, Federici is too quick to dispense with the abstract antagonisms inherent in Cartesian separation, insufficiently working through their narrative contradictions. By contrast, Horkheimer and Adorno immanently critique and work-through the dramas of such real abstractions and contradictions, as we will see shortly.

Toward a World-Ecological Reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s Figures of Intoxication

The dramatization of the domination of nature in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* cannot be read separately from the text's critique of capitalism's colonization of all forms of life. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno provide, through archaic yet reoccurring figures, allegories of capital's need to appropriate nature, land and social reproduction. Read retroactively through Moore's account of the "four cheaps" (cheap labour, land, energy and food) central to capital's accumulative processes, the various figures of intoxication that populate *Dialectic of Enlightenment* frame the 2010s crisis—a crisis of the climate and of capitalism itself.

The first of Moore's "cheap natures" I will address is that of cheap labour, concerning the devalued reproductive work that has historically largely burdened women and gender-nonconforming people. As Federici details, the origins of modern capitalism entailed the violent suppression of alternative modes of survival for the purposes of rationalizing social reproduction and sustaining a proletarian class. For Federici and Preciado, capitalism's war on proletarian reproduction often saw the eclipse of reproductive activity based around the ingestion of and intoxication through psychoactive herbs and other substances. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, some of these issues are dramatized through the figure of Circe from *The Odyssey*, who intoxicates Odysseus' crew into animal-like states. On the one hand, Circe embodies those cultural and ideological relations that enable appropriation, that "are directly implicated in making the world legible for capital accumulation" (Moore 199). For Circe assumes an ambiguous and indeterminate form, one "which constitutes the essence of promiscuity and of the courtesan" (Horkheimer and Adorno 55). For Horkheimer and Adorno, the image of the pig, with its nose to the ground and distortion of scent, conjoined to Circe, mirrors the subjugated state of women under patriarchy. Under bourgeois society, patriarchal subjugation mutates into an ideological abstraction that "quilts" (to borrow a term from Slavoj Žižek) images of powerful seduction with those of vulnerability: 'As a representative of nature, woman in bourgeois society has become an enigma of irresistibility and powerlessness" (56).

On the other hand, the drugged victims (Odysseus' crew) of Circe's magic glimpse a distorted reconciliation with nature, and thus with the lifeworlds that are

violently uprooted by domination. While the crew ultimately cannot but assume the form of “domestic animals, swine”, the suppression of deathly, rational survival instincts—like the deathly mimetic preservation that Odysseus enacts—is momentarily overcome in the crew’s intoxication: “The mythical command to which they have been subjected at the same time liberates the very nature which is suppressed in them” (55). Though for Horkheimer and Adorno this image of liberated nature should not be valorized because the suppression of instinct integral to rational subjectivity is an “introverted form” of the “hopelessly closed cycle of nature” (55), nevertheless the semblance of reconciled nature briefly “liberates” the oarsmen from their separation from the reproductive sphere of Circe. At the very least, Circe’s reproductive magic “reflects back the vain lie of power” (56) that appropriates human and extra-human natures.

The identity of the subordination of women and animals propagated by capitalist power and which Horkheimer and Adorno allegorize through the Circe episode appears just moments later in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. At the end of their Excursus on *The Odyssey*, Horkheimer and Adorno describe an incident where the “faithless maidservants who have sunk into harlotry” are hung as punishment, noting how in Homer’s writing the subjugated women are “described and expressionably compared to the death of birds in a trap” (61). But there is then a dialectical counterpoint to Homer’s documentation of barbarism, beckoned by a caesura that arrests the narrative and “allows the events narrated to be transformed into something long past, and causes to flash up a semblance of freedom that civilization has been unable wholly to extinguish ever since” (61). For Horkheimer and Adorno this non-narrative accent allows the reader to pause and reflect on domination, bringing the report to a “standstill” in the final caesura following Homer’s statement that the maidservants’ suffering occurred “not for very long” (62). Yet what is significant about this utopian “soothing hand of remembrance” (62) is its relationship, established earlier in the Excursus’ long concluding paragraph, to questions of land and homeland.

Horkheimer and Adorno capture, in the closing section of the Excursus, the dialectical complexity of “homeland” by arguing that homeland is not merely a nostalgic tool utilized by capitalism and fascism to reinforce the status quo. Rather, I read the authors’ deployment of the intoxicating figure of homeland as a continual, material site of contestation. The intoxicatory phantasm of a “lost original state” mobilized by fascism is deceptive because homeland “had first to be wrested from myth” (61). Horkheimer and

Adorno argue that homeland is opposed to myth because the precondition of the former lies in an escape *toward* fixed settlement, originating in nomadic displacement. In other words, the concept of homeland is the motor of the drive to accumulate through further settlement, along with all the dispossession this entails; the concept "sets in motion" Odysseus' adventures (60), thus underlining the imbrication of Western rationality with the appropriation of land, or raw materials—Moore's second "cheap nature". Odysseus is the prototypical Greek hero who hardens his ego in the face of nature's unknowns, secularizing the "primeval world" according to how much space is measured or mapped by the adventurer and navigator (38). Horkheimer and Adorno write that Odysseus' cunning acts of self-preservation, his outwitting of magical deities, are replicated by the "civilized traveler" that would later "swindle savages, offering them colored beads for ivory" (39). The authors' undertheorized connections between Odysseus' rational navigation of space and the logic of settler colonialism can be expanded with reference to the figure of cartographic "planetarity" articulated by Jodi Byrd (2011):

> The imperial planetarity that sparked scientific rationalism and inspired humanist articulations of freedom, sovereignty, and equality touched four continents and a sea of islands in order to cohere itself. At its center were discourses of savagery, Indianness, discovery, and mapping that served to survey a world into European possession by transforming indigenous peoples into the *homo nullius* inhabitants of lands emptied and awaiting arrival. (xxi)

This constellation of abstract knowledge, visual regimes of representation and domination belongs to a systemic logic of separation solidified within the value-form's constitutive primitive accumulation. Horkheimer and Adorno clearly allude to this fundamental logic of primitive accumulation, to how separation is essential to capitalism's forms and ideologies in the following:

> The distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstraction, is `founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled. The songs of Homer and the hymns of the *Rig Veda* date from the time of territorial dominion and its strongholds, when a warlike race of overlords imposed itself on the defeated indigenous population. (9)

Drawing on Werner Bonefeld's remarks, I would argue that Horkheimer and Adorno do not regard the capitalist domination of the twentieth century as the "innate necessity" (Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy* 97) of the dominion characterizing Homer's time. Criticisms of Horkheimer and Adorno's supposedly

ahistorical deployment of archaic narratives to read the present forget that history has already been flattened by capitalism's universalizing tendencies. As such, it becomes necessary to grasp existing social relations by reading history against the grain, wielding new narratives "out of history" to betray "a history made universal as one of violence and destruction" and "to comprehend what has not been" (Bonefeld 97). Capitalism's universalization of history, which Horkheimer and Adorno are performatively unravelling and undermining, is therefore narrativized through *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s allegorical rendering of the value-form's constitutive separation within the present.

Allegory, as refusal of positivistic identity thinking, again not only cuts through reified historicism but also enacts the opening of an escape from necessity. The idea that the colonial logic of domination is never total can be underscored through Horkheimer and Adorno's description of homeland precisely as having to be constantly "wrested from myth". The colonial myth can never achieve full identity over its object, that is, the concrete social relations of Indigenous peoples. Homeland is not an intoxicatory phantasm identical with myth, whether such identity-thinking is manifested through more "overt" ideologies of settler-superiority, or through more contemporary state-based reconciliation projects that occur alongside continued occupation of Indigenous land. Homeland, with its paradoxes of stasis and escape, is always in tension with myth. Horkheimer and Adorno identify a semblance of freedom in the aforementioned non-narrative pause, following Homer's cold narrative documentation of barbarism, —the "vengeance wreaked by civilization on the primeval world" (61)—a pause that causes memory, specifically the remembrance of suffering, to flash-up as an image of genuine reconciliation with nature. But more significantly, the narrative grappling with myth that Horkheimer and Adorno read as a primary feature of artworks exposes the "abyss which separates [myth] from homeland and reconciliation" (61). To recognize this abyss in the context of 2010s North American Indigenous politics is to recognize the discrepancy between Liberal ideologies of progress concerning the relationship between settlers and Indigenous communities, on the one hand, and the continual separation from land experienced by those communities, on the other hand. In the Canadian context, colonial capitalism's abyssal separations are mystified and reinforced through a politics of recognition, a politics that Coulthard dismantles in his argument about how

> colonial relations of power are no longer reproduced primarily through overtly coercive means, but rather through the asymmetrical exchange of mediated forms of state recognition and accommodation. (*Red Skin, White Masks* 13)

In the final section of this Chapter, I show how Indigenous accounts of resistance against capital's contemporary crisis management (the Canadian state management of ongoing colonial separation being but one instantiation) are congruent with Adorno's broader anti-capitalist politics and ethics.

Returning to *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* a similar allegory of the appropriation of, but also contestation over, land and raw materials can be read in the Sirens episode. The fascist mobilization of homeland as myth is akin to the valorization of the self's dissolution within the intoxicating Siren song. For Horkheimer and Adorno the Siren song, confronted in isolation, can be a deceptive "happy homecoming . . . by which the past entraps a humanity filled with longing" and colonizes the future (26). The separation of land as nostalgic intoxication is one method of legitimizing the appropriation of raw materials within or in service of the ideological "happy homecoming" provoked by the song. Fascism has always worked to mobilize and solidify populations during new rounds of intensified primitive accumulation. But what has also historically mediated the extraction of cheap raw materials is both labour and energy, identified by Moore as crucial nodes within capitalism's nexus of cheap natures. Moore argues that capitalism's energy systems have historically worked in conjuncture with the cheapening of raw materials and labour power to keep costs down and increase labour productivity (131). The increase in coal production during eighteenth century England, for example, was conjoined with the cheapening of fixed capital as a result of the utilization of the coal derivative coke (132-3). Meanwhile, this expansion of cheap energy equally depended on the radical cheapening of labour power to produce more coal, and a cheapening that became possible because of the proletarianization entailed through Parliamentary Enclosures (133). In the 2010s, the destruction of communities in the Global South for intensive resource extraction (such as copper mining) often mobilizes resurgent fascist politics to help cheapen energy and labour. Samir Gandesha (2020) highlights this in the context of India where, through appeals to a purified homeland for certain ethnicities, "[t]here is no *new* order to speak of, simply a tightening of the existing one ever more rooted in the extraction of resources from the earth and extraction of rent or interest from

assets" (n.p. emphasis in text). Such reactionary regimes can never offer a genuine new world to come; colonization of the future indeed.

Horkheimer and Adorno's framing of the Sirens episode can thus be read as a contemporary allegory of the manifold, global appropriative spheres that grimly intersect with the rise of toxic fascist politics in the 2010s. The "happy homecoming" embodied by the Sirens is, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the motor driving Odysseus' escape from the primeval world into "modern" subjectivity, yet Odysseus' "cunning" means he can never become identical with the boundless, destructive joy glimpsed at by the song. Instead, Odysseus is forever dependent, in a manner recalling Hegel's master-slave dialectic, upon the toil of his labouring crew; but the crew must also expend vast amounts of energy to row quickly past the Sirens in order that the latter become fixed as an object of consumption and property of the proto-bourgeois Odysseus. The deathly mimesis of Odysseus' survival mechanism is inseparable from not only the productivity of the labouring classes, but also the intertwined primitive accumulation of resources and energy. Similarly, the intoxicatory group formations offered by fascism can never provide genuine fulfilment through an actual addressing of needs. Instead, fascist agitations and collectivities feed off economic impoverishment through forms of deathly mimesis, of "identification through idealization, the[ir] [collective] caricature of true, conscious solidarity" (Adorno, "Freudian Theory and Fascist Propaganda" 126). Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic re-construction of leader and primal father imagery, Adorno details how collective narcissism is reinforced through the at once "superman" and everyday figure of the fascist dictator. The result of such heightened narcissism, under a corporatist regime of value reproduction, can only be intensifications of racial hatred toward the Other, the perpetuation of authoritarian personalities and all-round resentment.

I also want to stretch the allegory of the Sirens to encompass the issues of cheap energy and food consumption. Here I borrow Jameson's claim in *Late Marxism* that the non-hearing oarsmen accompanying Odysseus reappear in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s chapter on the culture industry. In an intriguing passage, Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that those who would suffer most from the collapse of the culture industry would be the marginalized figures, such as the housewife, who find comfort in the industry's spatial by-products, because spaces like the "dark of the cinema" grant

> a refuge in which she can spend a few unsupervised hours, just as once, when there were still dwellings and evening repose, she could sit gazing out of the window. The unemployed of the great centers find freshness in summer and warmth in winter in these places of regulated temperature. (111)

In Jameson's reading of this passage the figure of the unhearing oarsmen is bound up with the "'marginals' of contemporary radical rhetoric . . . in the persons of women and the unemployed" (137) who reside in the spaces of air-conditioned theatres and shopping malls. Just as the labouring oarsmen cannot hear the intoxicating Sirens' song, they also "pay no more attention to the mesmerizing images on the screen" (Jameson 137). Instead, such spaces of the culture industry become areas where marginalized populations survive on cheap energy. They are as dependent on the system's extracting of cheap energy as the system is dependent on their cheap, disposable labour power (a dependency characterizing capital's law of surplus populations).

While the culture industry generates spaces of survival, with marginalized groups becoming dependent on "these places of regulated temperatures", the culture industry nevertheless fails to satisfy other needs like the fulfilment of hunger. Horkheimer and Adorno describe a situation where the utilization of technology for mass consumption "is part of an economic system which refuses to utilize capacities when it is a question of abolishing hunger" (111). Food is for Moore one of the core four "cheap natures" that capital has historically depended upon because the ability to keep food prices (value composition) low served a "civilizational strategy" while colonies were plundered and symbolic regimes of abstract social nature (e.g., through forms of botanical knowledge) were introduced (72-3). Keeping food costs low means a more productive labour-force and thus a higher rate of exploitation. The sheer extent to which consumption habits have been historically transformed by capitalism cannot be overstated, as with the "cerealization" of peasant diets and the "meatification" of aristocratic and bourgeois diets within Europe after 1550 (Moore 186). The problem of course, as Horkheimer and Adorno allude to in underlining the system's inability to abolish hunger despite its technological advancements, is that the systematic appropriation of cheap food is not in the service of fulfilling needs but of furthering capital accumulation. When capitalism runs into over-accumulation problems commodities like food do not stay cheap for very long, as evident from the rapid rise in food prices since 2003 (Moore 264-5). Moore notes that the result of the decline in availability of cheap natures means that capital

must increasingly commodify and monetize “the relations of reproduction, which were once outside the cash nexus” (226), just as for Horkheimer and Adorno the reproduction of such bodily needs is increasingly integrated into the commodity circuit (though, of course, they could have not anticipated the mutated, neoliberal form that the present commodification of food has taken).[49]

As I show in the next section of the Chapter, the decline of cheap natures such as food results from how capital exhausts, as well as induces dependency on, the dialectic of exploitation and appropriation at the core of value-relations. Though writing at a time where capitalism’s crisis tendencies were shored up by stronger social-democratic state intervention, Horkheimer and Adorno presciently identified some of the underlying crisis tendencies at the heart exchange society, whose ripple effects are felt much more strongly after the 2008 financial crash.[50] I hold that focusing on the examples of cheap energy and food, in particular, shows how *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, beyond just foreshadowing Moore’s world-ecological concerns, provides a contemporary allegory of toxic consumption under 2010s capitalism.

Dependency and Exhaustion[51]

It goes without saying that we are all dependent upon capitalism’s toxic, environmentally devasting regimes of social reproduction for survival. Yet the

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[49] In the “Notes and Sketches” section of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno further mirror Moore’s point about how capital rationalizes consumption habits through regimes of abstract social nature. The fascist “extolling of the body”, characteristic of Nazi Germany but also, for Horkheimer and Adorno, alarmingly convergent with tendencies within American society, performs an Odysseus-esque deathly mimesis that legitimizes reified consumption habits:

> They are interested in illness, anticipating their fellow diner's death in what he eats, their interest being only thinly rationalized by concern for his health. Language keeps in step with them. It has converted the stroll into exercise and food into calories, just as in English and French the name for a throng of living trees is synonymous with "timber." Along with the mortality rate, society is reducing life to a chemical process. (195-6)

The fact that language seemingly plays such a crucial role here shows the centrality of extra-economic processes in the legitimation of capitalist consumption habits.

[50] For a reading that shows how Adorno’s theory of society and under-addressed commentary on the law of value corresponds with and foreshadows capitalism’s post-2008 crisis modes, see Chris O’Kane, ““Society maintains itself despite all the catastrophes that may eventuate”: Critical theory, negative totality, and crisis” (2018).

[51] For a more substantial account of “exhaustion” as it pertains to recent attempts to frame the environmental crisis and agency within it, as well as the term’s role in a range of thinkers

counterpart to capitalism's transindividual, really abstract states of dependency, in which everyone relies on the appropriation of cheap energy and food, despite the system's uneven distribution and dire consequences for a warming planet, is the exhaustion of the very value-relations necessary for capitalism's own continuation and expansion. This conception of exhaustion forms part of Moore's ecological understanding of capitalism's crisis tendencies. The idea that capitalism is inherently crisis-prone, already addressed in the Introduction, can be understood through capital's contradictory need to increase productivity through the deployment of more efficient technologies and thus the shedding of labour, at the same time that such heightened productivity increasingly dispenses with the very source of fresh surplus value: living labour. The rising organic composition of capital—the rise of "dead" labour over living labour (or constant over variable capital), exacerbated by overproduction (i.e., too many commodities produced for too few consumers) and competition (e.g., the need for more efficient technologies against competing firms)—contributes to falling rates of profit in the long-term. Under twenty-first century capitalism the acceleration of such systemic problems is evident through such morbid symptoms as rising unemployment, growing surplus populations, rising commodity prices, stagnating wages and greater reliance on financial speculation, among many others.

Moore's contribution draws attention to the role that appropriation plays in cyclically resolving and ultimately exacerbating capitalism's crisis tendencies. The appropriation of "cheaps" such as oil, labour and metals make possible further capitalist expansion, historically contributing to waves of further industrialization that help resolve overaccumulation crises. The resolution of these "crises defined by a rising mass of "surplus" capital that cannot be reinvested profitably" has therefore "depended upon the cyclical restoration of the Four Cheaps" (226). The issue is that when cheap nature no longer remains cheap ("the falling ecological surplus") it becomes much harder for capital to deal with its inherent overaccumulation problems, leaving "a growing mass of surplus capital with no place to go" (227).

Capitalism's crises correspond with what Moore outlines as the exhaustion of socio-ecological relations within specific cyclical transitions between phases of accumulation (162). The exhaustion of value-relations, of the dialectic of exploitation and

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including, Marx, Sartre and Moore, see Alberto Toscano, "Antiphysis/Antipraxis: Universal Exhaustion and the Tragedy of Materiality" (2019).

appropriation, has recently come to a head, resulting in the possible complete exhaustion and even end of cheap natures. Because of many factors such as more costly agricultural strategies for mass production through radical simplification (for example monoculture) (228), the ecological surplus falls and the organic composition of capital rises. This "declining relative contribution of unpaid work to capital accumulation" (227) is a potentially terminal exhaustion for value-relations because capital has exhausted the number of unpaid realms that it can appropriate. Moore identifies the increasing cost of food since the early 2000s as a clear indicator of capitalism's exhaustion. As mentioned before, food increasingly moves from the realm of appropriation into that of commodification, because particular capitalists need short-term gains to keep up with competing capitalists, even though this "capitalization of reproduction" (228) leads to a falling rate of profit in the long-term, due to capital's rising organic composition.

In addition to this exhaustion of value-relations on the level of consumptive habits is of course the rapid depletion and toxification of the biosphere. Moore argues that increased toxification from more intensive capitalist agricultural methods signals the system's attempt to further put nature to work, but at an alarming cost. The exhaustion of natural resources leads to more intensified, costly, and dangerous attempts to tame "unruly" extra-human nature further. This has the combined result of greater costs, declining profitability and sheer environmental devastation—crisis all-round.[52]

What Moore terms the co-production of capital's internal crises signals a rise in "negative-value"; as it becomes increasingly difficult to expand surplus value through the restoration of cheap nature, the limits of capital are laid bare. Significantly, Moore argues that radical politics is beginning to and must continue to centre itself around the immanent limits signified by the accumulation of "negative-value":

> Negative-value, then is a means to situate three problems in a unified frame: 1) the ongoing, and impending, non-linear shifts of the biosphere and its biological systems; 2) the rising costs of production; and 3) the ongoing accumulation of capital. These three moments represent a bundle

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[52] "For centuries, the possibility of moving to new frontiers created the mirage of suspending the most problematic aspects of the taming cycle. But as frontiers of appropriation close, the very dynamism of the system—based on capitalization and innovating control strategies through it—intensifies the evolutionary response. Now extra-human natures are evolving faster than the controls imposed upon them" (Moore 274).

> of contradictions within capital that provide fertile ground for a new radical politics that challenges capitalism on ontological grounds: questioning the practical viability, yes of capitalist markets and production, but more fundamentally, the ontology of value and nature in the modern world-system. (278)

Moore's predictions of a terminal crisis and even collapse of capitalism, which underpin his conception of "negative-value", are perhaps overly optimistic but I leave such debates to one side here. My focus is instead on how *Dialectic of Enlightenment* underlines the allegorical dimensions of a renewed form of crisis politics and begins speculation on concerns over the "ontology of value and nature in the modern world-system", hitherto unexplored dimensions of Horkheimer and Adorno's text which in turn provide a framework for reading addiction in a broader, systematic context of unmet needs and social reproductive separation. In the final pages of this Chapter, I reiterate that *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s allegories of intoxication illuminate the system's ecological crises in the 2010s. But I also explore how the utopian might be reconsidered. In a post-2008 capitalist society, defined by systemic crises and a hitherto unseen commodification of the most intimate parts of everyday life, romanticist or even modernist conceptions of intoxication as a hallucinatory, phantasmic escape from the dull repetitions of the present no longer hold much sway. Nevertheless, such utopian impulses often associated with intoxication can still be framed through the categories of dependency and exhaustion, which point at the internal limits of the capitalist totality. Rather than appeal to historical agents of change who could somehow be outside capitalist social relations, it is within these very exhausted, dependent relations where the possibility of resistance resides.

In the intoxicating episode of the Lotus-eaters, which this chapter opened with, Horkheimer and Adorno connect Odysseus' reassertion of domination over his crew with the West's suppression of alternative ways of relating to the world (as found in non-Western customs and cultures, for example). Yet the comments on the associations of Lotus do not amount to a valorization of an ideological "non-rational" "East" because Horkheimer and Adorno also argue that the true "cause" of the bliss sought by the crew is "the realization of utopia through historical work", rather than languishment in the bliss of "forgetfulness and loss of will" (49). The utopian kernel of happiness is distorted by the fact that happiness is "exerted by rationality, by Odysseus" (49)—that is, under the logic of deathly mimesis and survival-through-hardened-self-preservation. The crew's survival

is therefore shown to be dependent upon Odysseus' distorted, death-like mode of survival. Furthermore, if the crew reappear in the "regulated temperatures" provided by the spaces of the culture industry, as argued by Jameson, this only underscores how the oarsmen are equally dependent on the needs-depriving apparatuses of late capitalism.

Yet, in a Hegelian twist, Odysseus is shown to be equally dependent on the work and energy of the oarsmen to preserve himself, as evident from the Sirens episode. He is paradoxically dependent on the exhaustion of value-relations, as allegorized through the Lotus episode's intertwining images of labour, land, and resources. The intoxicating image of happiness evoked by the crew's encounter with Lotus can be read as a limit-point to Odysseus' expropriation of unpaid work and energy. A prismatic image of reconciled needs, or of needs that cannot be properly fulfilled under the reproduction of value-relations, is evoked when Horkheimer and Adorno claim the subordinate classes would be deprived of access to sheltered spaces if the culture industry shut down. Similarly, the Lotus episode, read against the grain here, hints at the limit-points of capitalism's ability to satisfy needs and reproduction, thus prompting re-evaluation of the ontology of value. The intoxications of Lotus "bears the promise of a state in which the reproduction of life is independent of conscious self-preservation, the bliss of satiety uncoupled from the utility of planned nutrition" (50)—independent of the economic irrationality of a system that, mired in self-preservation for greater accumulation and feeding off evermore forms of life even as this propels itself into further crises, cannot fulfil society's most pressing needs.

Within such allegories of the limit-points of consumption needs-fulfilment under capitalism there is an echo of Adorno's claim in *Minima Moralia* that the only legitimate demand for a utopian society is "that no-one shall go hungry anymore" (156). It is, moreover, a mistake, Adorno argues, to fear "man's lapse into luxurious indolence" (156) once society fulfils such needs as hunger, further suggesting that the intoxicating bliss enjoyed by the Lotus-eaters betrays a utopian impulse, even if affirmation of that bliss in the present remains unimaginable. The mad, barbarous reproduction of new desires and lack under capitalism that Adorno pits his minimal utopian demand against, is spiritually as well as materially impoverishing. It is crucial to remember that Adorno's minimal demand regarding the abolition of hunger leads into, within the same aphorism, an immensely sensual, utopian description of "aimless" pleasure beyond capitalism—"Lying

on water and looking peacefully at the sky, 'being, nothing else, without any further definition and fulfilment'. . ." (*Minima Moralia* 157).

In the 2010s, capitalism's regimes of planned nutrition are in crisis given the potential end of cheap food. Just as the Lotus episode, with its exhaustion of the crew, prompts reconsideration of the role of consumption in relation to human needs and happiness, the contemporary exhaustion of cheap food, through the accrual of what Moore terms negative value, leads to a reconsideration of what is valuable. The rising price and commodification of food since 2003 has seen a concomitant rise in social movements articulating food sovereignty, which prioritize sustainable and local agricultural systems against capitalist productivism. For Moore, groups such as La Via Campesina[53] are demonstrating in nascent ways the centrality of food to class struggle under neoliberalism. Furthermore, the way such kinds of class struggle imagine eco-agricultural alternatives is for Moore suggestive of what a socialist world-ecology might look like, centring democratic and egalitarian control over everyday consumption habits: "Food sovereignty, at its best, asserts a revolutionary ontology of food—food as biospheric, as democratic, as culture . . . *all at the same time*" (289).

It is not only in food sovereignty that we are witnessing a convergence of class and consumption-based politics. Some of the more radical "harm reduction" politics—driven by a philosophy that prioritizes the needs and well-being of drug users through programmes like safe-injection sites and needle exchanges—ground their demands for access to life-saving supports within a materialist frame of systemic social inequality.[54] There is growing critical awareness that access and control over one's euphoria and pleasure is at once a biopolitical matter of contestation and inseparable from ongoing forms of primitive accumulation.[55] Jason Pine (2019) similarly articulates the toxic entwinement of euphoria with capitalist reproduction in his vivid account of how individuals from the U.S. South turn to methamphetamine production due to lack of employment, ultimately becoming hooked on both fast money and the high of the drug

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[53] See for example the group's "Food Sovereignty, a Manifesto for the Future of Our Planet" (2021).

[54] See the collectively authored "VANDU Mission Statement" (n.d.).

[55] See for example Estevez, "Necropolitical Wars" from *The War on Drugs and the Global Colour Line* (2019), edited by Kojo Koram.

itself (156-7). In Chapter 4, I show how euphoria, addiction and reproduction figure capitalist and environmental crises in the 2010s U.S. South. Furthermore, as this Chapter has established and as my Conclusion reiterates, understanding intoxication and addiction as registrations of capitalism's crises and social reproductive separation entails recognition of the global scope of value-relations. A similar account of Pine's mapping of the imbrication of individual drug consumption, euphoria and addiction within broader planetary networks, but situated in the Global South, can be found in Jessica Beshir's remarkable hybrid docudrama film, *Faya Dayi* (2021), which details the production of the addictive and highly lucrative cash crop, khat, in Harrar, Ethiopia.

Yet, again, out of contemporary landscapes of toxic consumption, which are ultimately landscapes of value toxicity, there is also a growing sense of fundamentally revaluating what kind of life, what forms of flourishing we want to engage with in a landscape of exhausted social relations, spanning the climate crisis to the mental health epidemic. This points in the direction of not just capital's limit-points but also to an impulse of detoxification latent within 2010s culture.

Allegories of Detoxification

Much has been written about the therapeutic dimensions of Adorno's writing, on Adorno's insistence on working through, rather than shying away from or offering false consolations for, the sufferings of the twentieth century, which for him were epitomized in the horrors of Auschwitz.[56] It strikes me, however, that there has not been much commentary on this significant ethical component of Adorno in relation to the value-form's consumption-based and social reproductive crises, especially given that much of Adorno's writing, including works such as the "Theses on Need" but also his opening address to the 16th German Sociological Congress in 1968 ("Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?") speak directly to the issues of need and crisis under capitalism. Over the course of Chapters 1 and 2, I have argued that Adorno's allegorical reconstructions of mutilated consumption and nature, and his related nonidentical framings of need and the non-human—through which images of the afflictions of and liberations from damaged life

[56] See for example Kate Schick "'To Lend a Voice to Suffering is a Condition for All Truth': Adorno and International Political Thought" (2009) and Helmling's *Adorno's Poetics of Critique*, especially pp. 124-37.

collide in a constellation—can be situated more firmly within a theoretical and contextual framework of social reproductive separation and capitalism's crises. What such allegories amount to in terms of ethics and concrete political action surely belongs to a further, larger study. However, I want to end by briefly putting Adorno's allegories of detoxification into further dialogue with some of the pressing political concerns defining the 2010s.

The fundamental idea of capitalism's toxicity and unsustainability to both the human body and the larger non-human world, is central to a number of Indigenous, land-based practices and ethics. Indigenous communities frequently retain unique, deep insight into capitalist toxicity as a result not only of the aforementioned land-based knowledge, but also from how settler-colonialism has continually ravaged their communities. Those like Nick Estes (2019) have drawn attention to how uranium mining and the construction of gas and oil pipelines continue to operate through Indigenous lands deemed disposable by governments across the globe. Drawing on Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence", Estes argues that such forms of environmental racism are not just experienced in punctuated individual instances but are slowly accumulated over generations. Whether through lead poisoning or increased rates of cancer and respiratory diseases, Indigenous communities from Flint to Houston are toxified by capitalism's continual primitive accumulation across generations.[57]

Meanwhile, those like Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard and Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016) have argued for the significance of grounded normativity. The term refers to the ethical systems, the care for the land and grounded relationships with both humans and non-humans, that arise out of relationships centred around place. This framework stands in contrast to the typically temporal, property-acquisitive, Cartesian dualist framework governing capitalist modes of knowing and relating. While much writing on contemporary toxic consumption has lamented the apparent unthinkability of "non-monadic or communal life" (Crary 114) given the atomization of capitalism's global and digital hegemony, Coulthard and Simpson remind us that actually existing alternatives do exist:

[57] The additional toxic disproportionate impact of addiction upon Indigenous communities will be addressed in my reading of the 2010s film *Luk'Luk'I* (2017) in Chapter 3.

> What we are calling "grounded normativity" refers to the ethical frameworks provided by these Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge. Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests. Our relationship to the land itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which we practice solidarity. (254)

Just as Horkheimer and Adorno identified a utopian mimetic impulse toward genuine enlightenment through "a remembrance of nature in the subject" (32), for Coulthard and Simpson truth and justice might be disentangled from capital and fulfilled differently through a regeneration of systems that emphasize dependency on reciprocal land-based relations (Simpson, "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-resistance" 21). Many Indigenous scholars therefore call for the resurgence of sustainable Indigenous-based networks of sustainability, exchange and work, as immediate alternatives to capitalism. Coulthard (2013) for instance has argued that "cultivating self-sufficiency through the localized and sustainable production of core foods and life materials" which are already distributed and consumed within communities can "over time help break our dependence on the capitalist market" ("For our nations to live, capitalism must die", n.p.).

Such Indigenous-based politics have also been echoed recently among theorists articulating a cultural politics against capitalist growth. These consumption-oriented frameworks argue for the rethinking of habits and lifestyles that are currently saturated with ecologically unsustainable values based on growth. For example, Kate Soper's (2020) call to "develop a more seductive vision of the very different forms of consumption and collective life we will need to adopt if we are serious about ecological sustainability" (13) amounts to a utopian critique of the saturation of value-relations within everyday life, salvaging understandings of prosperity based on "engagement in intrinsically valuable activities that have no economic purpose, measure or outcome" (87). Soper ultimately argues for a cultural revolution or alternative imaginary centred around the consumption of fewer things, for example fewer cars, electronic devices and overall wasteful forms of consumption—a different relationship to the objects that inhabit our lifeworlds.

These various anti-growth commitments are congruent with Adorno's ethical-political insight into the primacy of preponderant objectivity within aesthetic experience. The notion of the preponderant object not only underscores the subject's total mediation within the social objectivity of capitalist society, but also glimpse a utopian image of a world in which humans relate to the world "without knocking it into shape through universal usefulness" ("Theses on Need" 104). Deborah Cook (2011) has argued that Adorno's constellations gesture at "the possibilities in non-human nature in order to ascertain what things might become if the conditions that now damage them were ameliorated in such a way as to enable them to flourish" (*Adorno on Nature* 86). In other words, Adorno's articulation of the preponderant object as irreducible to subjective relationality has a liberating ecological valence as an alternative to the lifestyles of growth and possession generated out of the exhaustion and toxification of the biosphere. Yet it should also be restated that Adorno strives to avoid falsely reconciling the primacy of the object within a politics of identity, a false politics of recognition—the state politics that Coulthard identifies in multicultural Canada, for instance—which only replicates and reinforces exchange society. This means that the "objective side" of Adorno's ethics against the value-form, sketched here, also requires a "subjective side", too, so as to reiterate the nonidentity of subject and object.

I conclude by speculating on this "subjective side" of anti-capitalist politics and ethics and through returning to the thorny question of needs and their satisfaction. Adorno demonstrates in both his "Needs" essay and his commentary on the utopian bliss of Lotus as going beyond planned nutrition that a society organized around the immediate addressing of needs would transform the very relation between need and satisfaction. Horkheimer and Adorno's image of Lotus-induced bliss, which connects hunger with intoxicating joy, is utopian because "the bliss of satiety [is] uncoupled from the utility of planned nutrition" (50). The fulfilment of hunger and that of intoxicating joy can be disentangled so that their pleasures are no longer hierarchized according to true or "higher" needs or pleasures. The "Needs" essay maintains that politics organized around the fulfilment of immediate human needs rather than those of capitalism could reconfigure notions of flourishing and of the good life and in relation to the natural world. The ethical inferences that can be drawn from this imperative are also prefigured by political forms and movements that do not moralize against consumption habits but rather allow capitalism's consumption-based habits to therapeutically unravel in the

present by addressing them directly—though not, it should be stressed, uncritically affirmed.[58] Such forms can be detected through grassroots mutual aid networks,[59] calls for mass distribution and access to hormones for gender nonconforming peoples—as in Preciado's call for "a collective reappropriation of "common" biocodes (discursive, endocrinological, chemical, visual, etc.) for the production of subjectivity" (380) —or through radical harm reduction politics based around access to safe, non-toxic drug supply.[60] These satisfactions are at once necessary and therapeutic, arising out of capitalism's manic inducements of lack and internal repression, but also amounting to a re-orientation of immediate needs-fulfilment toward human beings rather than the reproduction of value. Such a mimetic embrace of toxicity contains a utopian impulse of detoxification—against the value-form itself.

Such consumption-oriented political movements and ethical frameworks, however, would undoubtedly have to forge constellations with other social justice movements (Simpson 31) and be directed against the value-form in its totality to survive and outmanoeuvre the baleful crisis managements of the twenty-first century. In the following accounts of 2010s addiction narratives in Chapters 3 and 4 and the Conclusion, I detect at once the faint stirrings of these above outlined utopian impulses and their sheer distance from being actualized within a separated society.

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[58] As the above invocation of grounded normativity and ethical consumption suggests, the addressing of toxic consumption should not amount to the uncritical affirmation of all present desires and needs in the manner of theorists like Deleuze and Guattari.

[59]Here I am thinking specifically of Jameson's (2016) provocative outline of a project of dual power in the 2010s, where a universal army "finds its first tasks and indeed its vocation in the fulfilment of neglected social services and in coexistence with the population of a wholly different type" (22). Alberto Toscano's essay accompanying Jameson's recent text furthermore stresses that the ""biopolitical" element provides much of the substance of dual power"—in the context of neoliberalism's hollowing out of essential services, contemporary instantiations of dual power gain their force simply from being able to fulfil those survival needs: "dual power is biopower, and daily garbage collection, large-scale health service delivery, and emergency water delivery are weapons of the first order" ("After October, Before February: Figures of Dual Power" 227).

[60] For more on this organizing work and policy recommendations see "A Strategic Framework for Preventing Overdose Deaths due to the Unpredictable Illicit Drug Supply" (2022), co-authored by VANDU and the Drug User Liberation Front (DULF) of BC.

Chapter 3.

Urban Spaces of Addiction and Crisis in *Heaven Knows What* and *Luk'Luk'I*

Towards the climax of Joshua and Ben Safdie's *Heaven Knows What*, there is a brief, fantastical moment that undercuts the film's overall gritty realism. During an otherwise grim scene portraying the lives of drug users in New York City's Upper West Side, Ilya (Caleb Landry-Jones) throws his girlfriend Harley's (Arielle Holmes) phone into the night sky, which explodes into a short firework display. Meanwhile, in Wayne Wapeemukwa's *Luk'Luk'I*, a hybrid docudrama film depicting five people living in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside on the final night of the city's 2010 Winter Olympic games, Mark's (Joe Buffalo) drug use is frequently punctuated by the appearance of a UFO illuminating the dark skies. The directors of both films have highlighted their commitment to a certain realism, in particular through their decisions to use primarily nonprofessional and first-time actors. But such irreal moments are better read not as departures from but rather refinements of these two films' realist impulses, as attempts to capture something that perhaps escapes or resists the one-to-one correspondence logics of ideal-type realisms.

What exactly is this "something"? The formally similar irrealist moments in the two films appear to invert the god's-eye-view shot and illusion of mastery typical of the cartographic aesthetic that Fredric Jameson (1992) and, more recently, Alberto Toscano & Jeff Kinkle, have read symptomatically in various artistic impulses to map the vast, opaque totality of social space and relations under late capitalism. From within the sobering, on the ground depictions of street life, both *Heaven Knows What* and *Luk'Luk'I* briefly turn away from the subject's insular world and into the intoxicating stratosphere, before reality—the daily hardships of addiction, wageless life and dispossession—comes crashing down again. Such portrayals of the separations characterizing contemporary city life pose the allegorical problem of cognitive mapping somewhat differently than posed by Jameson and Toscano & Kinkle, instead corresponding more closely with the aesthetics of "peripheral irrealism" outlined by the Warwick Research Collective

(WREC).[61] I take, as my starting point, the general framework forwarded by the WREC, whereby irrealist techniques deployed by artists writing (or in this case, filming) from peripheral spaces of the capitalist world-system[62] do so in order to register the inherent unevenness of capitalist development:

> Even the narratives of (semi-)peripheral authors who hew quite closely to the line of the dominant realist traditions display irrealist or catachrestic features when registering the temporal and spatial dislocations and the abrupt juxtapositions of different modes of life engendered by imperial conquest, or the violent reorganisation of social relations engendered by cyclical crisis. (72)

Realism and irrealism work in tandem to register capitalism's uneven development, and the WREC argue that registrations of the latter in its most disorientating, crisis-ridden state will often be marked by a breakdown in realism. I depart from WREC's framework, however, by focusing on films that explore capitalist crisis as a *continuous*, rather than merely "cyclical", phenomenon through the specific geographical regions of New York City and Vancouver in the 2010s. My focus is on how the texts register particular geographical instantiations of capitalism's *chronic* crisis in the 2010s mentioned above, rather than the temporal and spatial unevenness of modernity more broadly.

This Chapter focuses on how capitalism's crisis-forms in 2010s North America are allegorized through filmic portrayals of addiction, of crises on the levels of consumption and needs-satisfaction. Specifically, I argue that, through the unfolding narrative and non-narrative dimensions of intoxication as portrayed in both films, *Heaven Knows What* and *Luk'Luk'I* further allegorize capitalism's crises in labour and land. The former film maps what Michael Denning outlines as "wageless life", a generalized structural condition spanning centuries, as per the law of the surplus population, but also

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[61] This is not to say that peripheral irrealism is radically distinct from the accounts of cognitive mapping formulated in the so-called "core" capitalist regions. Toscano & Kinkle suggest it is better not to view cultural production at the periphery as somehow more authentic or political than the cognitive mapping of the West or "centre", but instead to consider "the disjunction between perception and abstraction" as an aesthetic problem "that is inflected by the unevenness of capitalism and its geographically-differentiated formations, giving rise to differential instantiations and partial resolutions of a common problem of cognitive mapping" (20).

[62] While this chapter is concerned with locations typically viewed as "core" regions of capitalism, in the form of downtown spaces, it is worth remembering, as WREC note, that unevenness is endemic to the world-system, and that therefore (semi)-peripheries exist within "core" regions as well.

rising and increasingly less capable of being reintegrated into the circuits of capital-labour reproduction in the 2010s. However, as outlined in the Introduction, despite such reintegration problems, the proletariat remains "hyper-integrated" (Screamin' Alice 189) into capital's reproductive circuits through forms like debt-consumption. My reading of *Luk'Luk'I*, meanwhile, centres on how capitalism increasingly dispossesses Indigenous communities from their land during 2010s Canada. Despite ideologies of reconciliation, the colonial Canadian state, in tandem with financialized, real estate capitalism's efforts to shore up accumulation problems and stagnating growth, continues to facilitate the separation of Indigenous groups from their land and resources.

In the Introduction, I argued that there has been a tendency for writers to situate rising levels of addiction within the context of neoliberal power relations. The result of such Foucauldian-inspired analyses has been a privileging of power over economic abstraction, as well as undialectical readings of addiction as somehow heroically resistant to or in excess of capitalism's objective forms. Yet, while I do not wish to enter theoretical debates over the role of power analyses within Marxist accounts of economic abstraction, in this Chapter I nevertheless foreground the key role of state power for framing addiction as a figure for capitalist abstraction. In my argument on how *Heaven Knows What* and *Luk'Luk'I* figure capitalist crises through the addiction narrative, I constellate the separating abstractions characterizing the latter with the interconnected and historically and geographically specific roles of state power in North America.

My reading of *Heaven Knows What* pays close attention to the film's formal mapping of addiction as an abject[63] social relation and mode of survival, separated from collective infrastructures of support within a gentrified and disinvested New York City. I argue that notable scenes in *Heaven Knows What* highlight how communities of wageless addiction are both separated from and unified with the social Other of "normal" waged existence. My analysis therefore entails consideration of how the New York City government has drastically reshaped the urban landscape in accordance with the

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[63] I draw upon Endnotes' (2014) use of "abjection" to name "a particular kind of abstract structure in which something is cast off, marked as contingent or lowly, without actually being exteriorised" ("An Identical Abject-Subject?" n.p.). Surplus populations are both separated through precarious un- and underemployment, and unified under exchange society (entirely dependent on the market for survival). As Endnotes highlight, however, the characterization of the 2010s surplus population as abject in no way indicates the potential emergence of a new revolutionary subject. Abjection rather addresses the increasing fragmentation and differentiation among the various strata of the proletariat.

interests of what Samuel Stein (2019) has termed the "real estate state" since the mid-1970s.

Furthermore, the role of the state is crucial to analyses of contemporary Indigenous cultural forms in-and-against capitalism. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) reminds us that capital's unending drive to further accumulation and manage crises means that the state, despite official policies of multiculturalism and reconciliation within Western liberal democracies like Canada, will ultimately always be driven to pursue what capital needs foremost—land, labour and resources (40). Increased competition and downward pressures on profits since the early 1970s mean the state will afflict the urban fabric with lower wages, precarious employment (through, for example, austerity) and the continual dispossession of Indigenous land. Regarding the latter, which often takes the form of, for example, the construction of oil pipelines through unceded territories, Indigenous dispossession is sometimes framed as an extra-urban matter. But as Coulthard emphasizes, the processes of urban gentrification are equally informed by such dispossession, with the clearing of Indigenous presence in urban space becoming another frontier on capital's path to more accumulation (Coulthard 175-6). The settler-colonial relation is ongoing and informs the crises-reactive structures of financialization and debt that attempt to shore up profitability crises and which mark 2010s North America cities. Coulthard primarily addresses, however, the more subtle forms of coercion and violence that are maintained through state politics of inclusion and diversity, rather the overt destruction characteristic of, say, pipeline projects. The displacement of Indigenous groups from the inner city occurs through discourses of regeneration and revitalization that "sugarcoat" gentrification (Smith & Derksen 83). The ideologies of improving impoverished downtown cores work to conceal the fundamental colonial relation. The "soft" violence of gentrification masks and facilitates the continuation of what Coulthard identifies as the treatment of Native spaces in the city as "urbs nullius—urban space void of Indigenous sovereign presence" (176). Gentrification is therefore partly an ideological attempt to conceal the separating logic that began with the first waves of colonization and has continued to separate individuals

from their means of reproduction and subsistence through the re-establishment of the class relation at every point, since.[64]

In the context of this ideology of gentrification outlined by Coulthard, the second part of my Chapter begins by examining *Luk'Luk'I*'s portrayal of the waves of gentrification accompanying Vancouver's hosting of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. This part of the Chapter then moves from what appears initially as a focus on spatial unevenness to how the film maps the broader crises of land, in particular unceded Indigenous land, underpinning gentrification. I show how these issues of land are illuminated through the film's portrayal of an Indigenous man, Mark, and his continual witnessing of a UFO following his drug use. I argue that the film's figure of the UFO, which frequently disrupts the film's documentary-style narrative, allegorizes both the colonial relation and the deprivation of needs fulfilment under 2010s capitalism. Mediated through the UFO figure, Mark's addiction crises become an allegory of the broader disproportionate impacts of crises-capitalism on Indigenous populations in 2010s Canada.

Overall, both *Heaven Knows What* and *Luk'Luk'I* portray the lives of addicted individuals who, following a long history of deindustrialization, are forced to seek reproduction through informal economies such as panhandling, petty crime and sex work. I situate the films' representations of addiction within the historically specific situation of both integration and expulsion from reproduction and needs-satisfaction via the market—a situation which nevertheless belongs to systemic forms that reach much further back in time. The extent to which these films contain utopian impulses lies in their non-narrative moments that figure a rejection of such consumption crises, of such enforced dependency on the toxic reproductions of the value-form.

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[64] While Coulthard and Byrd criticize Marx's "stagist" account of primitive accumulation, such arguments can be countered through a reading of Marx that understands the continued separation of individuals from their means of subsistence and reproduction (i.e. their labour and land) as constitutive of the ongoing re-establishing of the class relation. This chapter follows theorists like Bonefeld and Endnotes in arguing for the primacy of this perpetually constituting relation.

Spaces of Crisis and Decline: *Heaven Knows What*'s New York City

Heaven Knows What is the fourth feature film from brothers Josh and Benny Safdie, arriving just before their breakout release, *Good Time* (2017). As such, *Heaven Knows What* includes elements from both the lo-fi, documentarian style of the brothers' earlier work and the lurid eeriness of *Good Time* and the Adam Sandler-starring *Uncut Gems* (2019). Indeed, the Safdies were starting work on the latter film, in New York City's Upper West Side, when they met Arielle Holmes and eventually convinced her to write a memoir about her experiences of street life which would form the basis of *Heaven Knows What*.

Holmes portrays Harley, an exaggerated version of herself, and with the exception of Harley's partner, Ilya (Caleb Landry Jones), the film is entirely cast with first-time, nonprofessional actors. In their films, the Safdies resist notions of heroic character development and moral resolution or growth, often casting people "who seem incapable of being anything other than themselves" (Sanneh, "The Safdie Brothers' Full-immersion Filmmaking" n.p.). The influence of filmmaker John Cassavetes can be seen throughout the Safdies' work. Cassavetes adopted a form of realism that worked "not by concealing one's art but by revealing the similarity between the act of creating art and the act of living" (Berliner 10). The indie director Cassavetes' films would, for example, use dialogue that sought the effect of improvisation without actually adopting said technique. Cassavetes' realism operated not by capturing "ordinary" life against Hollywood artifice, but rather by deploying artifice to better express the ordinary. As Todd Berliner (1999) notes, in works like *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974) this improvisation-effect creates the sense that Cassavetes seeks to "represent people in the act of representing themselves" (10). In *Heaven Knows What*, there is a similar entanglement of performativity and "gritty realism", and the effect of such blurring between fiction and reality, actor and role, is not necessarily to provide a more "authentic" depiction of drug use in New York City, but rather to capture elements of that everyday life which cannot always be expressed.

In other ways, however, *Heaven Knows What* remains true to classic "junky" narratives, depicting the everyday, often tragicomic, hustle of securing the next fix, harrowing scenes of shooting-up and overdosing, with a pervasive sense of cyclicality

and futility underlying everything. Harley and her friend circle's addictions occupy an apparent a- or non-temporal space, and, coupled with the prominent close-ups and claustrophobic shots, the film often conveys the sense that this addiction narrative could have taken place at any point over the past twenty years. The camerawork alternates between said close-ups and long, safari-lens shots that, as reviewer Jordan Hoffman (2015) notes, blur the subjects' surroundings and hardly render the city distinguishable to out-of-towners.

Josh Safdie himself has highlighted *Heaven Knows What*'s affinity with Jerry Schatzberg's *The Panic in Needle Park* (1971), a film that similarly centres the female viewpoint in a tale of addiction and a toxic relationship (Lattanzio 2015). Both films, set in the same zip code of the Upper West Side, portray the shared spaces of drug users as sources both of community and of hostility or backstabbing. Yet whereas Schatzberg's film emphasizes the rifts and ratting between friends that intensify following a "panic" from a low supply of heroin, in *Heaven Knows What* the toxic inner strife within the loose community of users is all-pervasive from the film's opening moments. Despite the film's purported realism, *Heaven Knows What* opens curiously to Isao Tomita's otherworldly rendition of Claude Debussy's "Snowflakes are Dancing", and the icy romance of Tomita's synths effectively forces the viewer out of the film by failing to provide any emotional cues or commentary on the opening scenes. The use of music here is remarkably disconnected from the sudden transition from close-up shots of Harley and Ilya embracing to a scene where Ilya provokes Harley to attempt suicide in a public library. In the latter scene, Ilya cajoles Harley into cutting her wrist in broad daylight by tauntingly encouraging her pleas of forgiveness for apparent infidelity, prompting her to ask Ilya "would you forgive me if I died?". It is significant that these intense scenes prior to the opening credits are staged within public institutions and spaces—both the library and the Bellevue Hospital, in which Harley is briefly admitted to a psychiatric ward. In the hospital, Harley endures abuse from and bust-ups with other patients. Like the opening scenes, the use of music in this sequence of the film removes the viewer from the docudrama-style of the images on-screen. In the long take of the chaotic events unravelling in the ward, the dialogue is completely muted under Paul Grimstad's pulsating synth stabs; the effect for the viewer is that of peering through an outside window, unable to decipher the content of the agitation within.

While in *The Panic in Needle Park* public space and collective sites of social reproduction provide some element of support for the characters, *Heaven Knows What* portrays such spaces as at best indifferent and at worst hollowed out. During one scene in Schatzberg's film, for example, protagonist Helen (Kitty Winn) convinces a somewhat sympathetic doctor to prescribe her painkillers, despite the doctor's awareness of Helen's habit. In contrast to this concrete interaction, the Safdies' film's most significant portrayal of public health is a scene, devoid of diegetic sound, of burnt out hospital staff nonchalantly distributing medicine to and breaking up the fights of distressed patients. Meanwhile, the ability of Helen and her boyfriend Bobby (Al Pacino) to integrate into their neighbourhood, beyond their circle of fellow addicts, as in one scene showing Bobby playing softball with a group of children in the street, contrasts with the clear separation the Safdies demarcate between Harley, Ilya and co. and the crowds of disinterested onlookers in the street. As I will show shortly, however, the separation of social space within *Heaven Knows What* is not so rigid upon closer inspection.

Heaven Knows What's contrasting representations of inner-city addiction point at some crucial post-1970s capitalist mutations regarding social reproduction and social space. The dismantling of social welfare and security, highlighted in *Heaven Knows What* through its sheer absence, has been compounded in cities like New York City by the predominance of real estate capital. In cities where elite class interests are protected by what Samuel Stein calls the "real estate state", public services like libraries are funded through property taxes and their fate is thereby inextricably linked to property value and its rate of taxation (37). Faced with the two options of gentrifying or disinvesting, the real estate city is incentivized to "drive out anything that is understood to reduce property values, types of buildings, businesses, land uses or even people" (37). The library and hospital do not feature again in *Heaven Knows What*; for the rest of the film's duration, when not left to the menace of the open streets, the characters reside and shoot-up in dilapidated dwellings including apartments without running water and McDonald's restrooms. In one scene, Harley attends to her friend Mike's (Buddy Durress) stab wounds in the afterhours ATM space of a CitiBank.

However, throughout the Safdies' film, the separating and exclusionary logic of the class relation, which renders the characters' reproduction and access to their means

of subsistence entirely dependent on the market,[65] is often detectable indirectly. Accounts such as Stein's draw attention to how the real estate state enforces exclusion through such means as surveillance and armed police, protecting property and clearing the way for future gentrification, yet these are largely absent in *Heaven Knows What*. In fact, in the film we rarely see evidence of, say, New York City class restructurings through re-zonings, for example the high-rise constructions and redevelopments, between 2002 and 2013, initiated by a (failed) Olympic bid and coinciding with increased financialization (Stein 85-6). As Stein notes, these changes affected parts of the city differently in the sense that not every area was developed ("upzoned"); in order to keep the political support of wealthier residents, rich white neighbourhoods were far less likely to be "overshadowed by construction cranes and glimmering skyscrapers" (88). The Upper West Side is a mostly affluent area, and therefore unlikely to have been struck by rezoning as in poorer parts of the city. In *Heaven Knows What* gentrification operates almost like an absent presence, and that real estate infiltration, providing a solution to overaccumulated capital and an accompanying restructuring of class power, indirectly infiltrates intimate moments and spaces of the characters. For example, in one of the few but significant points of *Heaven Knows What* that does not privilege psychological character dynamics through narrow and close-up shots, there is a brief, skyline shot of faraway buildings. The potential meaning attached to the washed-out colour of the shot is ambiguous, suggesting either a nostalgic image of New York City in the post-war boom, or alternatively a city in decline. In any case, the appearance of a few slick skyscrapers toward the shot's end highlights the uneven, real estate driven development rippling through the city. We can read the film as showing how the changes to New York City are at once hidden from view, and yet entangled with how the characters survive without a wage. Indeed, the panoramic shot is lodged between a scene with Mike complaining about someone trying to cheat him during a deal, and a scene showing Harley and Mike looting a mail cart—a typical day of abject social reproduction where every "entrepreneur" is out for themselves.

Overall, the notable differences between 1971's *The Panic in Needle Park* and 2014's *Heaven Knows What* regarding the portrayal of proletarian social reproduction

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[65] Just as the reproduction of the proletariat proceeds from the continual reproduction of the class relation, as already outlined by Marx (*Capital* 716).

highlight some historical shifts in New York City capitalism. As David Harvey (2011) remarks, in the mid-1970s, the American city's social democratic tendencies were finally transformed into the heavily disinvested, real estate-dominated programme that fuelled the crisis of 2008-9:

> It was the New York City fiscal crisis of 1975 that centred the storm. With one of the largest public budgets at that time in the capitalist world, New York City, surrounded by sprawling affluent suburbs, went broke. The local solution, orchestrated by an uneasy alliance between state powers and financial institutions, pioneered the neoliberal ideological and practical political turn that was to be deployed worldwide in the struggle to perpetuate and consolidate capitalist class power. The recipe devised was simple enough: crush the power of labour, initiate wage repression, let the market do its work, all the while putting the power of the state at the service of capital in general and of investment finance in particular. This was the solution of the 1970s that lies at the root of the crisis of 2008-9. (*The Enigma of Capital* 172)

What is absent from Harvey's account, however, is the increased precarity structuring the daily lives of millions, including wage-labourers but also those frequently unemployed, for whom "the only thing worse than being exploited is not being exploited" (Denning 79).

Mapping Wageless Life

Michael Denning argues that wageless life is at once a recent, rising development and a phenomenon closer, compared to large portions of the twentieth century, to Marx's analyses of surplus populations and pauperism in the nineteenth century. Rather than viewing exclusion from the wage as somehow outside the logic of capital, Denning stresses that it is precisely the imperative to earn a living, rather than the offer of work, that is fundamental to capitalism. Denning here draws on Frantz Fanon's rehabilitation of Marx's notion of the lumpenproletariat, described as that mobile, informal layer of the proletariat that is susceptible to being manipulated for reactionary ends. Denning emphasizes that, rather than a wage-labourer, the proletarian subject more precisely refers to someone dispossessed, expropriated and radically dependent on the market.

For Denning, the tendency to apocalyptically frame wageless life and align those without a wage with images of garbage and waste is deceptively concrete and unhelpful.

Not only do such framings invoke old, tired tropes, they also wrongly figure wageless life as outside of, rather than structurally embedded in, capitalism's totality. Denning instead argues that the structural necessity of wageless life under capitalism can already be seen in two interrelated concepts or "figures" forwarded by Marx: 1) the surplus population; and 2) the virtual pauper. The concept of the relative surplus population refers to how capitalism necessarily produces a population surplus to its requirements for valorization. The concept has resurfaced within contemporary Marxist theory to describe how fictitious and stagnating capitalism depends on flexible, precarious populations that are at once readily employable and disposable. The virtual pauper, on the other hand, refers to how the individual's means of reproduction and survival is fundamentally dependent on the selling of their labour power. Following decades of the abandoning of various social safety nets, virtual pauperization emerges more starkly among the proletariat in the 2010s.

I read in *Heaven Knows What* contemporary figurations of capitalism's imposition of separation and abstraction from one's means of reproduction, figurations which correspond to Denning's two central concepts outlined above. In this section, I argue that *Heaven Knows What* allegorizes, on the level of addiction habits and routines, the value-abstractions (which must, as argued in the Introduction, be understood in terms of social reproductive separation rather than as disembodied spectre) underpinning U.S. inner-city social decline and disinvestment. By focusing on the formal depictions of addiction in *Heaven Knows What* as atomized and repetitious cycles of consumption, I foreground the abstractions of wageless life within a 2010s urban setting and show how this addiction film provides contemporary representations of the surplus population and the virtual pauper. I argue for this film's figurations of the latter Marxian concepts by unpacking two oppositions within *Heaven Knows What*'s dramatization of addiction: firstly, regarding the loose community of drug users in apparent opposition to the mass population of bystanders in the New York City streets; secondly, concerning the opposition between the characters' pursuit of intoxication, of what the character Harley calls "the rush", and images of abjection and disposability.

Surplus Populations and Unity-in-Separation

The crew of drug users portrayed in *Heaven Knows What* embody a state of unity-in-separation—grifting and undermining one another yet also united in their exclusion from the wage, as well as often looking out for one another. The addicts' access to safe and secure social space is frequently shown to be at threat within a declining city. In addition to the role (and absence) of uneven spatial logics surrounding the users' routines, I want to also foreground the presence of New York City within the film in terms of what Hoffman describes as "a clever use of the city's enormous population as a ubiquitous, disinterested supporting player" (n.p.). Rather than looming landmarks or skyscrapers, it is the sheer volume of passersby that frequently remind the viewer of where Harley, Ilya, Mike and co. are situated spatially and socioeconomically. The detached, puzzled glances of the "supporting player" intensifies the affective charge of the various confrontations between characters like Harley and Ilya, interactions which occur at daytime among masses of people unaware of the nature of the conflicts, and also, presumably, that they are part of the Safdies' film.

The use of the real-life passersby as a "supporting player" is both defamiliarizing, in terms of highlighting the presence of precarious worlds that viewers might typically ignore, as well as suggestive of how addiction itself marks a certain socially mediated relationship. While the mass of people frequenting the outside shots in *Heaven Knows What* demarcates the separateness of the drug users, it is equally important to underscore the dialectical inseparability of the bystanders from the crew of users. In what follows I argue that, alongside the removal of collective spaces of social reproduction, the film also draws attention to the separating processes of capitalist reproduction[66] by posing the concrete existence of Otherness via the intrusion of passive onlookers into several shots.

Drawing upon psychoanalytic insights into addiction as a "solution" to the dilemmas of the concrete existence of the Other, Fredric Jameson argues that addiction phenomena register the predominance of the money-form, but also that they highlight "a world in which isolation from the Other has somehow become an urgent need" (*An*

[66] Separate, that is, both in terms of the increased dependence on the market for survival and separate from other surrounding proletarians.

American Utopia 92). The key word here is "solution," which Jesse Proudfoot (2017) similarly invokes when arguing for addiction as a symptom, "an imperfect, often painful, answer to the question of how to live with oneself and others" ("Drugs, Addiction, and the Social Bond" 9). Refusing the double-bind of viewing addiction as either a "turning-away" (a retreat into asociality) or a "turning-towards" (a formation of community through shared addiction habits), Proudfoot synthesizes both these perspectives into an account of addiction as a mediation between the subject and the Other.[67] Rather than a mere severing of the social bond, addiction is, for Proudfoot, a messy yet nonetheless meaningful way of addressing the Other under capitalism.[68] Bracketing the representation of value-abstraction momentarily, we can see that *Heaven Knows What* defines the space of the drug users not merely as coexisting with the indifferent mass of Others, but as imbricated in the latter's presence. While the "supporting cast" are certainly disinterested (there is practically no moment, besides a scene where Harley demands to be taken off a bus, that any of the main characters' fighting prompts any reaction from the bystanders), the framing of the shots formally maps a relationship between the apparently separate spaces. At moments of high intensity, such as when Ilya plots to attack Harley's friend Mike, or when Mike learns about said plot from Harley, the random onlookers redirect their trajectory to avoid colliding with the characters, practically intruding into several shots. The film's narrative device of the "supporting cast" functions like an aesthetic rendering of the psychoanalytic theory of addiction, mediating between the individual and the broader social field.

But what is the significance of this psychoanalytic connection between addiction and film aesthetics in terms of value and labour? The reminder, in these short moments of *Heaven Knows What*, of the relationship (however indirect or distorted) between wageless addicts and crowds of "normal" people reinforces wageless life's complete

[67] Proudfoot writes, "Addiction is understood as a retreat from the complexities of life and desire; it is a force that simplifies the messiness of social obligations and decisions about the future by orienting everything in the addict's life towards the pursuit of the drug. At the same time, addiction provides *purpose*: the addict knows exactly what they have to do each day, and this structures their participation in the world and engagements with others" ("Drugs, Addiction, and the Social Bond" 8).

[68] In Jameson's formulation in *An American Utopia*, this account of addiction and the Other refers, in a Sartrean vein, to "every concrete existence of the Other" (92). However, the Other may also refer in a larger sense to the Lacanian idea of the big Other; the New York City population could then stand-in for the big Other of society, the "straight world" that monitors and spatially separates the existence of the drug user community.

dependency on the reproduction of the capitalist market. The space of New York City is ultimately shown to be occupied by both groups of people, even as there are also degrees of separation between the addicts and the Others. The film's representation of the Other's overwhelming presence through intruding crowds, narrativizing addiction as subject-Other social relationship, in turn allegorizes the horizon of the surplus population itself. The "General Law" of the surplus population is described by Marx as a process where "the greater attraction of workers by capital is accompanied by their greater repulsion" (781) and "the workers are sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted again in greater masses" (794). The recent explosion of surplus populations in spaces like 2010s New York City at once throws the routines and dramas of wageless drug users out into the open and renders the indifference to Otherness, on behalf of the "normies", more habitually necessary in a separated society. Such indifference is more prevalent even as the risks of homelessness and addiction have increased more broadly among the proletariat.

Figure 4: Still from *Heaven Knows What*

In what other ways can we read in the Safdies' film a historically and geographically specific aesthetic representation of the law of surplus populations? Here another comparison between the two addiction narratives *Heaven Knows What* and *The Panic in Needle Park* is helpful. There is a short scene in the latter film where Helen briefly works as a server in a restaurant. Overwhelmed by multiple customer orders,

demands and complaints, it is not long before Helen abruptly walks out, and for the remainder of the film she turns to sex work to maintain her drug habit. The demands of Other people are quickly rejected by Helen as she decides formal employment is not desirable for her at this time. In contrast to Helen's comparative ability to move in-and-out of employment, there is a restaurant scene from *Heaven Knows What* that highlights Harley's separation from those around her. Having not earned enough money panhandling to afford food or a wakeup hit the next morning, Harley resolves to "work harder" the following day, while Mike lambasts her by asserting that

> no offence, but what you do is nothing compared to me; you're sitting on the corner with a sign and people hand you money. I'm putting my ass on the line risking my freedom! You need to come up with some money, Harley . . . Tomorrow, you need to get up early.

The competitive, entrepreneurial rhetoric espoused by Mike, who regularly dons a jacket with "Success Through Partnership" embroidered on the back, tempers the refuge from addiction-induced isolation that the communal eating space potentially offers groups of users. Meanwhile, the White Castle employee's threat to call his manager on the users for shooting-up in the bathroom further reinforces a paradoxical sense of unity-in-separation. Responding to the employee's complaints, the drug user crew are momentarily united with other strata of the proletariat as Mike throws his money around to other hungry customers, but the employee's warnings escalate to him threatening to call the police. This scene is notably one of the few moments that a black character speaks, suggesting the highly stratified forms that proletarian life can take under a generalized precarity that is in some sense less racialized,[69] but also pointing at the limitations of the Safdies' representation of addiction and wageless life. For in many ways the Brothers' addiction film does not depart from recent addiction narratives that emphasize and lament "white impoverishment". In its minimal portrayal of the role of addiction among racialized populations, *Heaven Knows What* elides attention to the unevenly shared experience of addiction among the broader proletariat.

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[69] Not in the sense that racialized populations no longer suffer precarity or that suffering among minority groups has been overtaken by white impoverishment, but rather that, as McClanahan argues, precarity is increasingly visible as an instantiation of capitalism's generation of surplus populations across all demographics (even though still disproportionately racially coded). See McClanahan, "Life Expectancies: Mortality, Exhaustion, and Economic Stagnation" (369-70).

Nevertheless, despite the sedimentations and hierarchies depicted between various strata of the proletariat, *Heaven Knows What*'s addiction narrative still ultimately debunks the myth that wageless life exists exceptionally from and in opposition to waged life. In a manner similar to the White Castle employee's diligence (presumably prompted by potential repercussions from his manager), the drug users themselves "exist in a state of constant readiness" (Southwood 15), labouring to survive within an economic system that increasingly abandons proletarian reproduction through low wages and hollowed-out social support. The figure of addiction in the film grounds flexibilized, entrepreneurial subjectivity, outlined by many theorists of neoliberalism, within a broader yet historically specific law of surplus populations. Rather than overwhelmed by a neoliberal anxiety of choice, the film's drug users assume the role of their own capital, producer, and source of earnings to survive the next day, their consumption and reproduction needs ultimately just as unfulfilled as the still-hungry White Castle customers.

Virtual Pauper and Abject Rush

In this final section, I detail how the Safdies' addiction narrative presents its characters' pursuit of the fix or "rush" in tandem with images of abjection and disposability. Rather than as a superficial image of excess (as warned against by Denning), however, I read the film's depiction of the rush as foregrounding the notion of the virtual pauper, because there is a gap between the depicted pursuit of this need— the rush— and the latter's nonfulfillment. This gap embodies virtual poverty in a contemporary setting because it highlights, in a stark form, the indifference of the socially mediating and historically particular value-form regarding proletarian reproduction.

Denning invokes Marx's claim in the *Grundrisse* that the concept of the free labourer already contains that of the virtual pauper. The notion of the virtual pauper does not establish immiseration or wageless existence per se, but points to the underlying structural precarity haunting both waged and wageless life. In *Heaven Knows What* we see this spectre of precarity actualized through the lives of those like Harley, Ilya and Mike, who are all discarded labour from the point of capital, relying on panhandling and petty theft to survive. As Denning remarks, however, Marx's notion of virtual poverty is not meant to imply that all workers will become panhandlers. Instead, virtual poverty is

an “account of bare life” that underscores the contingency of abstract labour in relation to the individual’s “organic presence” as they try to survive (Denning 97). Through the film’s glaring capturing of virtual poverty on the level of addiction, the portrayal of *Heaven Knows What*’s central characters speaks to a more generalized precarity underlying the lives of all those dependent on the abstraction of “free labour” to survive.

In one remarkable sequence, the film presents an extreme close-up of Harley attempting to thread the eye of a needle after she exchanges nervous glances with Ilya. The sequence of Harley’s persistent, excruciating failure to thread the needle is uncomfortable to watch, but the viewer’s anxiety is intensified as the opening claps of an EDM track fade in. The needle’s eye and the thread once again fail to intersect, and as the track drops, we are taken from a shot of Harley’s dirty fingernails to scenes of the drug users queasily raving in the park. It is significant that the failure to thread the needle and the latter image’s disconnection from the overlaying non-diegetic EDM music introduces the ensuing partying scenes. The following brief euphoria of the partying crew is on one level shown as an escape from the sheer banality and repetitiousness of addicted, rush-seeking wageless life under capitalism. This is a life that fails to meet proletarian needs, as reiterated through the close-up of the failed needle threading which also stands-in for the failure to fulfil the pursued rush of the addiction habit. Yet the sequence’s ensuing intoxication reads more like a solidification of the abstractions of abject social reproduction, given that the soundtrack is introduced by the shot of a failed symbolic act of social reproduction (needle-threading). Furthermore, the menacing figure of Ilya looms over Harley and Mike as they romantically embrace in the dark, following the party, bringing the whole park sequence full circle. The destructive figure of Ilya, who envelops the sequence, threads together images of abject social reproduction, audiovisual renderings of uneasy euphoria, and an overall sense of agitation and claustrophobia.

Figure 5: Still from *Heaven Knows What*

Harley's need to obtain a rush is a recurring motif in *Heaven Knows What*, and this agitated pursuit to fulfil her addiction also allegorically foregrounds the gendered logic informing the abstractions of wageless life. In Harley we see a subject whose every day existence depends on indifferent market reproduction, but who is also naturalized by the gendered sphere and burdened with social reproductive activities like care and friendship. For example, as Harley attends to Mike's injuries from Ilya's violent attack, she automatically assumes such social reproductive work in spite of Mike barraging her with a host of intrusive questions about Harley's attachment to Ilya. The gendered sphere is one "whose dissociation is necessary to make the production of value possible" (Endnotes, "The Logic of Gender" n.p.); social reproductive activity is not directly value-producing but instead constitutes the background conditions of "dead labour" that allow capitalist social forms to subsist.[70] The subsistence of neoliberal

[70] Endnotes (2013) situate contemporary value dissociation in a "feminisation" logic, a "movement by capital towards the utilisation of cheap short-term flexibilized labour-power under post-Fordist, globalised conditions of accumulation, increasingly deskilled and "just-in-time"", which produces, for most of the population, not greater mobility and freedom but rather abjection. Abjection is here defined by Endnotes as "what cannot be or is not worth subsuming" under market relations (even as it is structurally necessary to the latter), embodying a state where subjects are saddled with extra social reproductive burdens alongside the imperative to earn a wage for survival. While increasingly denaturalized, the category of gender is also a powerful constraint; capital and the state's increasing refusal to pay for social reproduction means that gendered activity "does not appear to those performing it as some unfortunate natural fate, but more like an extra burden that one must deal with alongside wage-labour" (n.p.).

capitalist social forms against a background of gendered abstractions is illustrated in *Heaven Knows What* through the extra burden Harley carries alongside her panhandling to sustain her addiction. While the male characters of the film actively hustle, Harley is frequently portrayed by the Safdies as passive and lacking the entrepreneurial spirit of those like Mike. Take one scene where the nervous energy of Mike's hustling routines is contrasted with Harley's desire to simply "feel a rush". The close-up of Harley illuminated in neon is overtaken by Mike snapping,

> what are you talking about, your wakeup? It's not morning time, why would I give you a fucking wakeup? It doesn't make any sense. I promised you a wakeup and you didn't even go asleep yet to wakeup!

The ensuing back-and-forth highlights the triviality of Mike's timeframes, with another character interjecting that taking the hits all at once ultimately makes no difference from splitting them up. Having convinced Mike to give her all her wakeups at once, Harley enjoys her high while watching *Hellraiser: Revelations* (2011), and here *Heaven Knows What* tempers the earlier neon, vaguely euphoric associations of sustaining the addiction habit with scenes of bodily mutilation from this poorly received and quickly made *Hellraiser* franchise instalment. Once again, the film's depiction of the rush, here through entwining images of repetitive mutilation, symptomizes unfulfilled needs and foregrounds the abject abstractions that reproduce wageless addiction routines.

Figure 6: Still from *Heaven Knows What*

It is the film's depiction of Harley and her destructive relationship with Ilya, however, that affirms the strongest connections between addiction, the intoxicating rush, and the latter's nonfulfillment via images of death and disposability. In *Heaven Knows What*, the theme of Harley's addiction is often registered through the narrative of her abusive relationship with and compulsive love for Ilya. The story of this relationship arguably provides the film's representation of addiction with more narrative cohesion, along with all the gendered ideological problems such cohesion raises. For the film in many ways does not go beyond the question posed in Clara Miranda Scherffig's (2016) review: "are narratives of women's addiction only relatable when juxtaposed with love stories?" (n.p.). Indeed, the portrayal of Harley as completely infatuated with Ilya renders her a largely passive, if central, figure in the film. While those such as Mike and Ilya are more mobile and active, Harley is often shown high or falling asleep. The film at times raises questions around the Safdies' representation of a central female character, something which is compounded by how the subsequent successes of *Good Time* and *Uncut Gems* depended not insignificantly on uncritical and unnuanced portrayals of toxic hustling masculinity.

Yet, there is something in both Harley's and Ilya's proximity to self-annihilation and death which, corresponding with certain addiction discourses, figures the impoverished social reproduction characterizing American urban decline. The significance of addiction under modernity is frequently described in terms of self-annihilation. In Dana Seitler's (2018) vivid formulation, addiction gives truth to the entwinement of "being-toward-death" and the maintenance of the self; addiction is, moreover, a fundamental enactment of the death drive (and indeed, for Lacan, Seitler notes, every drive is a death drive). In other words, the proximity to complete self-annihilation is bound up with survival and the maintenance of the self. On one level, we can read Harley's addiction narrative as corresponding to Seitler's description of "a psychoanalytically banal, unsurprising fantasy of living at risk" (4), most painfully apparent in Harley's opening suicide attempt and later proclamation to Mike that she has already "proved" that she would die for someone she loves. On another level, however, the film's sequence in which a reunited Harley and Ilya pursue a rush of low-level theft to both satisfy their addictions and flee the city, only for Ilya to leave Harley once more and perish in an abandoned basement, reinforces the ultimate identity between proletarian reproduction and abject disposability under 2010s capitalism. Opening with the film's

most “irreal” moment, where Ilya throws Harley’s cell phone (itself an emblem of contemporary addiction) into the sky before the phone explodes into a firework display, the sequence ultimately marks one of the most brutal recent representations of addiction-euphoria as completely integrated into and incapable of overcoming the bleak cyclicality of social reproduction under crisis-ridden capitalism. The montage sequence following the fireworks, soundtracked to more Tomita and showing Harley and Ilya together in rapture (mirroring the film’s opening moments) is completed by Harley reading declarations of love for Ilya from her memoir over the images and sound. *Heaven Knows What*’s punishing realism shortly returns, however, and for the remainder of the film this tragic return undercuts any sense that the abstractions underpinning wageless life might be escaped or refused. Having made a sizeable sum of money selling stolen energy drinks, Harley and Ilya buy bus tickets to Florida. Moments later, Ilya changes his mind about skipping town and asks to be let off the bus—as Harley sleeps—before hitching a ride back to the city. A while later, Harley, waking-up to find Ilya gone, also asks to exit the vehicle, but faces far more resistance, and is only released after smashing a window in rage. In contrast to the relative mobility of Ilya, Harley faces greater difficulty hitching a ride back to the city. Here we again witness the extra gendered burden underpinning Harley’s wageless life of addiction.

I want to suggest, however, that the irreal firework display scene does momentarily allegorically undermine value’s stranglehold over proletarian consumption and addiction. The interruption of the realist addiction narrative through the non-narrative transformation of Harley’s phone into fireworks briefly expresses a ghostly apparition of euphoria unchained from the monotony depicted in the Safdies’ film. Fireworks, Adorno argues, are akin to an apparition in the sense that they

> appear empirically yet are liberated from the burden of the empirical, which is the obligation of duration; they are a sign from heaven yet artifactual, an ominous warning, a script that flashes up, vanishes, and indeed cannot be read for its meaning. (*Aesthetic Theory* 81)

The phenomenon of fireworks is for Adorno similar to the artwork’s relationship to empirical reality. Regardless of how much art distances itself from the empirical, it cannot completely relinquish its wish to intervene into and change reality, which of

course cannot be actualized but only conveyed as a ghostly after-image (or apparition).[71] Just as natural beauty is allegorical in how it posits a dimension beyond the realm of social nature and synthesis, refusing "the univocity of judgment" (82) (as argued in Chapter 1), the firework display qua apparition is a non-narrative irruption that projects a prismatic utopian image, and arranges further constellations (82) and therefore further lines of allegorical inquiry. Yet the apparition, argues Adorno, is distinct from natural beauty by appearing more actualized, achieving greater determinacy, and vying more with "the syntheses of significative thinking" (despite art's ultimate hostility toward this "irreconcilable enemy") (82). The firework display in *Heaven Knows What*, non-narrative in its artificial, momentary flashing-up and resistance to interpretation, yet also in its radiant playfulness and truck with the "art-alien layer" (82) of the circus, is an apparition of fulfilment beyond capitalism's addictions. The irreal rejection of Harley's cell phone, a symbol not only of broader addictive habits but also of Harley's hustling-timeframes through working with Mike, becomes one of the few moments of genuine joy in the film, with Harley and Ilya, in the scenes following, shown laughing and embraced in rapture. While the film's non-narrative moment is ultimately exorcized through the Safdies' return to bleak realism, we momentarily glimpse an image of need and desire disentangled from the value-abstractions that underpin proletarian survival (waged and wageless alike) in the 2010s. The fact that this irreal momentariness preserved by the film is cancelled so harshly only underlines the utter dominance of capitalism's separating logic, and therefore presses more urgently the need to be rid of—to be detoxified from—the value-form.

Finally, the film's narrativization of addiction as so embedded in capitalism's determining forms and thus figuring a detoxification from the value-form itself, is captured through the Safdies' refusal to portray any of the main characters as exceptionally ravaged by addicted wageless life. Indeed, it is important to recognize that social reproductive separation is a fate common to *all* genders composing wageless life, even though unevenly shared. As Harley and Ilya leave the bus and their dealings with the Other outside their community, the couple's differing fates highlight an uneven but nonetheless shared logic of abjection. Following the aborted attempt to start a new life

[71] Samuel Beckett's refusal, despite his austere detachment from the empirical, to exorcize the clownish, slapstick, "the vagrant fiddler" from his plays, is a further example of this artistic impulse, argues Adorno (81-2).

away from the city, Ilya returns to shoot-up in a candle-lit basement. After passing out from the high, he horrifically burns to death, and this harrowing scene is made more devastating by the fact of real-life Ilya's death following the completion of *Heaven Knows What*. Meanwhile, the film ends with Harley arriving back at the White Castle restaurant with Mike and the crew. She sits down sullenly as Mike continues another story about hustling his way through a deal. Harley may have rid herself of Ilya, but the closing scene does not suggest a culmination of or escape from the drama— instead, a return to the negativity of the present, the hustle, constraints, and survival patterns of inner-city addiction. Harley and Ilya's pursuit of the optimum intoxication and addiction-fulfilment through their stint of theft and hustle ends only to narratively reinforce the persistence of the abjection structuring all wageless life. At the same time, the sheer tedium underscored by this closing scene again gives the lie to addicted wageless life being somehow in-excess of the status quo, as well as to the so-called satisfactions of waged life. Harley's return to repetitious talk, among the drug users, of labouring for survival, ultimately figures a profound identity between wageless and waged life. Only in a world free from "free labour" as a precondition for survival, this addiction film suggests, might we escape and be detoxified from such monotony.

Addiction and Mega-Event Euphoria in *Luk'Luk'I*

Cree-Métis director Wayne Wapeemukwa's first feature film opens with a visual display of blurred fluorescent red, green, white, yellow and blue, paired with a cacophony of crowd noise from the 2010 Winter Olympics. *Luk'Luk'I* opens with a moment in Canadian cultural history where "the eyes of the world were fixed on glittering, prosperous, smug Vancouver" (Wapeemukwa, "Director Statement" n.p.). The camera transitions to a straight-on view from the roof of a noirish space just a few blocks away from the Olympic stadium, a high camera angle presenting the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood shrouded in darkness. It would initially seem that this contrast between the bright spectacle of the games and the accompanying gentrification throughout Vancouver (including large parts of the Downtown Eastside area), and the dark, empty space of the neighbourhood, is the film's primary concern. However, it soon becomes clear that it is not spatial unevenness per se but rather, like with *Heaven Knows What*, a world of addiction and separation that is *Luk'Luk'I's* main concern.

As with the Safdies' film, the role of gentrification as instantiation of separation is not figured through, say, the juxtaposition of glistening new condominiums with run-down buildings, where, in the context of Vancouver, "zones of darkness and despair and the zone of happy prosperity are parts of the same city" (Sommers and Blomley 53). The immediate backdrop to the interrelated individual stories in Wapeemukwa's film is the last day of the Vancouver Winter Olympics on the 28th of February 2010 and the ripples of the real estate state, facilitated by this mega-event, figure as an absent presence throughout *Luk'Luk'I*. As Myka Tucker-Abramson (2010) argues, the neoliberal transformations of the economy that occurred alongside the presence of the Games, for example through large wealth transfers from public services to the private sector, can be viewed as the "bright-sided" torn-half of disaster capitalism's various "shock doctrines". Jeff Derksen (2013) describes the impact of the Games' "mega-event euphoria" in terms of "the enclosure of space and the controlled access to space . . . police presence and the monopoly of violence, surveillance, and most euphorically, consumption and cultural nationalism" (52). Thus, following the cacophony that introduces the film, such figurations of the sunny mega-event euphoria recur throughout the film, as do the director's frequent use of the five colours of the Olympic rings, which haunt the minutest of interactions between characters.

Luk'Luk'I, which is also the Indigenous name for Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, takes place over the course of the evening of the 2010 Olympics' closing ceremony. Most of the five main characters depicted play versions of themselves and re-enact scenes that actually occurred. More so than *Heaven Knows What*, *Luk'Luk'I's* hybrid form is marked by features of the docudrama genre. The docudrama has a long history of being adopted by filmmakers to tackle social issues. As Steven N. Lipkin, et al. (2006) note, the docudrama has historically often served the function of "portraying issues of concern to national/international communities, in order to provoke discussion about them", while during the twenty-first century the genre has "increasingly focused upon "ordinary citizens," thrust into the news through special (and often traumatic) experiences" (14). In a sense, *Luk'Luk'I* is true to the docudrama form in its blending of fiction with documentary,[72] capturing the trauma of those displaced as a

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[72] For more on the essentially fictional domain of the docudrama see Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (1991) (160).

result of not only the Games but the continual processes of settler colonialism.[73] Yet while such hybrid dramas as the docudrama and "mockumentary" often ultimately affirm a symmetry between what occurs in reality and what is depicted on screen (Lipkin et al. 23), the recurrence of irreal and non-narrative elements in *Luk'Luk'I* frequently undermines such conventional symmetry.

The irreal elements in *Luk'Luk'I* often take the form of intoxicated states, functioning allegorically to dramatize the relationship between the urban subject and the totality of settler-capitalist social relations. The combination of realist and irrealist depictions of addiction in *Luk'Luk'I* again raises the problem of representing a contemporary urban centre in crisis. In what way does Wapeemukwa's film present antagonistic constellations of consumption crises with the logics of land extraction and dispossession, and to what extent do these constellations depend on departing from realist modes?

Before undertaking further analysis of the film, I will provide some historical background to the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, including details of the increased prominence of addiction over recent decades, particularly among Indigenous communities. What is now called the Downtown Eastside was Vancouver's original townsite, established in the 1870s, organized around resource extraction and processing, and serving, overall, as an industrial hub due to the area's proximity to canneries, warehouses, grain elevators, dockyards, rail yards and the Stamp Mill (Proudfoot, "The Derelict, the Deserving Poor, and the Lumpen" 93). The Downtown Eastside also once contained a lodging-house district to accommodate a range of workers, including miners, loggers and migrant labourers working in remote work-camps. The neighbourhood remained a strong working-class community well into the twentieth century, but the economic decline following World War II, including the relocation of waterfront industries, increased suburbanization (increasingly moving residents out of the area with local businesses suffering as a result), and the removal of the streetcar service that brought many pedestrians into the area, led to a growing deterioration of the

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[73] Indeed, the hybrid nature entailed by digital filmmaking, democratizing the process by allowing non-professionals to have control over production and narrative, has been argued as more conducive to Indigenous modes of storytelling. In Aren Bergstrom's article, "An Indigenous New Wave in Film" (2015), Daniel Northway-Frank makes this point, quoting poet and activist Duke Redbird: "Film is a European way of looking at things and video is Indigenous because the image is always evolving and moving. Video is inherently Indigenous, he [Redbird] said" (n.p.).

neighbourhood (Proudfoot 94-5). The residential demographics of the Downtown Eastside also shifted, as did representations of the neighbourhood in mainstream discourse. By the early 1960s, the neighbourhood was increasingly a permanent home for retired resource workers, as well as “new social groups . . . including transient men, First Nations people, and younger substance abusers” (95). While the Downtown Eastside had always been a much more diverse area than typically portrayed in the mainstream, brutal waves of deindustrialization in the latter half of the twentieth century increasingly turned the area into one composed of groups more marginalized than white working-class labourers, including drug users, homeless populations, sex workers and Indigenous communities. The rise of heroin and gentrification within other parts of the city additionally contributed to the changing composition of the neighbourhood.

As a city increasingly structured by the financialization of housing and its growing contradictions, Vancouver in the 2010s failed to provide affordable housing for poverty-stricken drug users in the Downtown Eastside. Since 2010, Vancouver regional housing markets have seen an intensification of speculative investment by owners of money capital (Kalman-Lamb 309). Canada’s “growing dependence on housing-based accumulation and consumption in the Toronto and Vancouver regions” (310), with homeownership rapidly declining (despite the promises of earlier financial bubbles) and the prices of privately-owned housing assets skyrocketing, meant that in 2016, for instance, Vancouver saw 46 percent of its population faced with unaffordable housing, with one quarter of all renters suffering from a critical lack of affordability (311).

Overall, the neighbourhood’s problems with drug addiction and overdose have been shaped by a history that includes “the growth of the drug trade, deinstitutionalization and erosion of support for patients with mental health problems, the widespread loss of affordable housing in other parts of the city, as well as macro-economic factors such as the neoliberal retrenchment of the welfare state” (Proudfoot 100). As such, it is unsurprising that the spike in overdose deaths during the 2010s, due in part, among many other reasons, to the introduction of more lethal opiates such as fentanyl, hit the area particularly hard.[74] Moreover crises of addiction and overdose have unevenly impacted Indigenous communities. Consider, for instance, that in 2018 the rate

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[74] Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is over ten times stronger than heroin, arrived around 2011, with the number of fatal overdoses jumping from 211 in 2010 to 978 in 2016. The BC provincial government declared a public health emergency in April 2016 (Lupick 374).

of overdose deaths among First Nations people was 4.2 times higher than other residents of British Columbia, and that the percentage of women in this category was significantly higher than for non-First Nations deaths ("First Nations Opioid Overdose Deaths Rise in 2018" n.p.).

As with *Heaven Knows What*, Wapeemukwa's film retells stories from the lower echelons of the contemporary North American city, grappling with how the larger economic forces of crisis play out on an everyday scale. The five residents centrally depicted in *Luk'Luk'I* include an Indigenous sex worker (Angel Gates), a drug user and harm reduction worker (Eric Buurman), an Indigenous man from the prairies (Mark, played by Joe Dion Buffalo), a man with arthrogryposis multiplex congenita (Ken Harrower), and a local transgender celebrity who roams the streets on rollerblades (Angela Dawson, aka., Rollergirl). The depiction of the five separate but interrelated stories offer a diversity of perspectives (countering ideologies of diversity and inclusion accompanying the gentrification of the Downtown Eastside),[75] and also underscore the persistence of a kind of unity-in-separation, primarily through dispossession and the expropriation of land. The film draws attention to how dispossession, informed by a long history of colonialism—a history that, rather than just a historical precursor, is an active "ongoing relation of theft, displacement, foreclosure, and violence" (Byrd. et. al. 6)—underpins the apparently disconnected lives of the five Downtown Eastside residents portrayed.

While *Heaven Knows What* draws attention to the inner strife that can arise within wageless communities, *Luk'Luk'I* highlights the persistence of community as a form of collective storytelling through the very tensions and fissures that exist within the social fabric of the Downtown Eastside. In his statement on the film, Wapeemukwa discusses the central role of fantasy in his narrativization of the Downtown Eastside. The documentarian impulse of *Luk'Luk'I* is frequently interrupted by depictions of individual fantasy sequences. By showing how experiences of living in the Downtown Eastside are structured by individual fantasies, Wapeemukwa conveys how "fictions" shape realities both on a micro-level, but also on the macro-level of the inverse "fictions of settler patriotism" (Wapeemukwa n.p.) that structured the euphoric narratives surrounding the

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[75] See, for example, the discourses of diversity that sought to justify the construction of the new Woodward's building, as if diversity did not already exist in the Downtown Eastside (Proudfoot 88-89).

2010 Olympics. Wapeemukwa describes some of the main intellectual threads informing the film's creation:

> [H]ow can the games unite nations while their venues are on stolen native land? What are the fictions which make this reality possible? In what ways do fictions of settler patriotism causally interact with the reality of colonial domination? (n.p.)

For Wapeemukwa, discordantly centring the perspectives and fantasies of the five individual residents is an attempt to puncture the ideological fictions of unity surrounding the Games.

However, we should not read *Luk'Luk'I* as merely counterposing the concrete individual viewpoint against the abstract colonial ideology. Rather, the combined individual fantasy sequences in the film allow the viewer to grasp a deeper truth that unites the Downtown Eastside residents yet eludes positive representation. Importantly, it is not some unified, coherent truth that each character offers only an impoverished version of; instead, it is the very dissonance created from the clash of fantasies that creates a kind of truth-effect. Drawing on the work of Slavoj Žižek, Wapeemukwa further states that

> this truth "is not the 'real' state of things, that is, the 'direct' view of the object without perspectival distortion, but the very gap, passage, which separates one perspective from another". (n.p.)

The gaps between perspectives betray a deeper truth regarding capital's crisis-management-need for land and resource extraction. Beneath the ideologies of unity propagated through the 2010 Olympics mega-event, the historical reality of capital's recurring need for intensified predations on land and resource extraction is rendered through the unity-in-separation embodied within the clashes of character fantasies within the film.

Jodi Byrd, et al. (2018), argue that contemporary financialization involves an intensified, racialized abstraction of the constitutive separation of the value-form: "economies of dispossession are at once epistemologies of commensurability and differential devaluation" (4). The state-backed techniques of debt and austerity within cities like Vancouver, where housing is heavily financialized, carve out and differentially devalue groups "on the basis of economic criteria determined by relations of accumulation that benefit finance-asset-owning classes" (9-10), in a manner similar to

the gentrification logics outlined by Samuel Stein. Byrd et. al. remark that such techniques, under the guise of economic necessity, essentially flatten and homogenize racialization, heteropatriarchy and colonialism through a common language that renders everyone subject to "the conceit of debt" (9). Financialized abstractions facilitate the recurring "primitive accumulation", the theft, violence and force that Marx[76] identified as always accompanying capitalist development. Financialization is described according to

> the rationalities that enact and disavow racial and colonial violence by constituting people, land, and the relations of social life as translatable into value form, making incommensurate histories, experiences, and forms of social being commensurate by reducing them to their meaning and value within "the capital relation," placing them within the ontology of dis/possession. (Byrd et. al.7)

This framing of the relationship between financialized abstraction and colonialism can be transposed to the specific spectacle of the 2010 Olympics, which was as much a drive to accelerate Vancouver's "brand" or "product" status as it was a spectacle of national unity. The 2010 Games solidified the relationship between the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous populations and Canadian narratives of national unity.

How then does *Luk'Luk'I* allegorize the separating logics of dispossession— which work in tandem with gendered and racialized violence— underlying the contemporary financialized and gentrified North American city? Key to the following analysis is the film's reoccurring fantasy sequence of a UFO figure, an irrealist figure that haunts the character Mark at multiple moments of the film and disrupts Wapeemukwa's documentary-style narrative. In what follows, I frame this UFO sequence as allegory rather than individual fantasy.

The first two times that the UFO appears in the film directly follow Mark injecting heroin, but the final two times do not make this earlier connection explicit and thus cast doubt on an explanation of the UFO as mere drug-induced hallucination. Indeed, as with the depiction of Harley's addicted state in *Heaven Knows What*, we should read Mark's drug use as not merely an ideological obfuscation of his real conditions of existence, but

[76] For the significance of the dispossession of Indigenous lands in relation to Marx's own writings, as well as a critical debunking of the economic and technological determinism and developmentalism often falsely attributed to him by some Indigenous scholars (including Coulthard, in places), see John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Hannah Holleman, "Marx and the Indigenous" (2020).

rather as a means through which the Real of real abstraction is navigated. Further than this, however, the striking intrusion of the UFO into the film's realist presentation marks a certain kind of anti-narrative accentuation. The arresting of the narrative through this reoccurring supernatural figure further points toward that which cannot be narrativized within the limits of capitalism's crisis-order. Following the theoretical reconstructions of Adorno in Chapters 1 and 2, such non-narrative accentuation can be read as figuring the lacking, unfulfilled needs created under capitalism's crisis-order, as well as a proto-utopian impulse toward detoxification from the value-form.

Wapeemukwa's above statement regarding the interaction of settler patriotist fictions with the impoverished reality of spaces like the Downtown Eastside might imply that the film's main concern is the dramatization of unevenness. I argue, however, that *Luk'Luk'I*'s UFO figure allegorizes not merely spatial unevenness but the constitutive yet historically specific logic of colonial separation that continues unabated on Indigenous land. Mark's vision of the UFO figure fantasy sequence unifies the film's five-character stories in their separation. I propose that the figure of the UFO is the "very gap", alluded to by Wapeemukwa above, between the film's multiple character perspectives that produces the "truth effect" of the unmet and therefore uncontainable needs produced by settler-capitalism in the 2010s.

UFO as Totality and Conspiracy

Before exploring the UFO sequences in further detail, I want to briefly compare the irreal accents and arrests accompanying Mark's narrative with the film's more dynamic individual fantasy narratives, as found in those of the other main characters such as Eric, Angel and Rollergirl. The latter narrative sequences are intoxicating self-idealizations and are always accompanied by pop music. Crucially, the fantasy sequences of Eric, Angel and Rollergirl all follow a scene where the individual in question is cruelly denied autonomy and recognition in some way. Eric's karaoke performance and idealized reunification with his son (which contrasts with his jittery, drug-induced state upon actually meeting his son later in the film), follows an altercation with his "prick" boss, who lambasts Eric for working slowly. Rollergirl's music video-like fantasy sequence, where she dances with burlesque female cops on rollerblades to an EDM soundtrack, immediately follows the culmination of suffering transphobic abuse at the hands of the police and the medico-state apparatus. Following a physical assault by

a group of male hockey fans, Rollergirl is humiliatingly dead-named by two police officers during questioning and subsequently confined to a jail-cell where she is denied her dilator. Meanwhile, Angel's intoxicating fantasy, a slow-motion sequence depicting her taking a shower and soundtracked to the synth-pop of Electric Youth, follows a belittling interaction with a medical facility. In an uncomfortable exchange, Angel is told by the veterinarian that her dog, Cupcake, will be "monitored" overnight, despite having no injuries. The close-ups of Angel's tattoos in the fantasy sequence, elevated as if in a music video, counter the vet's infantilizing comment of Angel's "cool tattoos," while the images of cleansing, coupled with the music's refrain "where have you gone sweet innocence?", reads like a brief attempt to reassert bodily autonomy against the medical apparatus' biopolitical management.[77]

Figure 7: Still from *Luk'Luk'I*

However, such fantasy sequences are always interrupted, with the music cutting out abruptly and a sobering scene of personal despair usually following. Such

[77] While one might counter this framing by saying that the focus on Angel's naked body is a form of objectification or spectacle through the male gaze, it is worth noting that Wapeemukwa established personal relationships with each of the individuals and ensured that they had maximum control over the filming, including staging a number of the scenes themselves: "not only the ethics but also the content is highly dependent on my relationships with the non-actors" ("The Façade of Settler Patriotism: Wayne Wapeemukwa Talks Luk'Luk'I" n.p.)

interruptions could highlight the unreality of the individual fantasies in the face of oppressive material reality, or, alternately, hint at latent utopian impulses persisting within the direst of circumstances. Yet the interrupted fantasies also point at the failures of the politics of recognition and reconciliation within 2010s multicultural Canada. The film's discordant interruptions point at reproductive crises cracking through the ideological veneers of reconciliation. Since the 1980s, Canada has insisted on a state politics of multiculturalism whereby the recognition of marginalized identities takes centre stage all the while that Indigenous land suffers further encroachment at the hands of the Canadian state. *Luk'Luk'I* frequently frames recognition as a technique of surveillance, of the management of colonized bodies, rather than a progressive path toward "reconciliation". Mirrors frequently surround and frame shots of Angel at moments of intimacy and vulnerability, for example. In one scene, the bar mirror frames the entire scene of Angel on the phone being denied speaking-time with her daughter on her birthday. As Clint Burnham (2018) remarks, such shots "remind the viewer that Lacan's mirror stage is, for many of these residents, more of a surveillance technique than a vanity set-up" (n.p.)—for a marginalized Indigenous person like Angel, state recognition (as figured through the mirror) incurs and conceals a slow violence that continues to deprive her of familial relationships. Multicultural Canada does not require meaningful recognition of or from those colonized—in one scene we see Angel from the perspective of the bathroom mirror, but Angel does not "recognize" herself by looking at her reflection. The Canadian state, rather, only needs land, labour and resources:

> Thus, rather than leading to a condition of reciprocity the dialectic either breaks down with the explicit nonrecognition of the equal status of the colonized population, or with the strategic "domestication" of the terms of recognition leaving the foundation of the colonial relationship relatively undisturbed. (Coulthard 40)

The management and dispossession of Indigenous subjects continues under real estate regimes of urban displacement such as gentrification and, given the disproportionate impacts of such displacement on Indigenous, low-income and racialized groups, the process of gentrification is clearly one latest mutation in settler colonialism.

The persistent surveillant UFO figure that haunts Mark acts as a sobering counterpoint to the aforementioned intoxicating, self-affirming fantasies within the film. But what exactly is the nature of the UFO figure? Is the UFO an allegory of colonialism itself? Indeed, the reoccurring figure of invasion and intrusion in *Luk'Luk'I* is congruent

with Coulthard's remarks that "invasion is a structure not an event" (125)—that the dispossession of Indigenous lands is integral to capital's contemporary accumulation strategies and crisis-management. Yet I argue that the UFO allegory in *Luk'Luk'I* is more multi-dimensional than merely standing-in for the totality of colonialism. Even though the UFO ultimately allegorizes the colonial relation, the figure also maps crises in social reproduction by constellating addiction habits with the state crisis management of the 2010s colonial relation, as well as tracing the contours of utopian impulses based around the fulfilment of human needs.

I want to first draw attention to the film's second appearance of the UFO figure as it appears alongside the figure of the medical apparatus. In this sequence, Mark receives his methadone dose from a treatment centre. Lacking any discernible appearance or spoken words from the medical assistant and with a distorted screen mediating Mark's transactional attainment of his dose, here the film's representation of capitalism's provision of essential consumption is defined wholly negatively, through its very absence of representation. Mark sells part of the dose for cash, before proceeding to shoot-up in an alleyway while looking up at the sky. The camera rotates a hundred and eighty degrees and scans the sky from the ground up. Suddenly it is night, and the UFO throws a dim light through the sky and onto Mark, before it disappears in a flash.

Figure 8: Still from *Luk'Luk'I*

The UFO sequence in the alley follows a depiction of the limitations of actually existing harm reduction programmes. Drawing on Phillipe Bourgois' critique of methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) in the U.S., Jesse Proudfoot (2019) notes how such MMT forms of harm reduction often control and limit the amount of euphoria patients are entitled to. Although patients may be receiving dosages that help them manage their addictions, the policies and philosophies underpinning such harm reduction programmes are nonetheless "premised on the suppression of illicit enjoyment" (220).[78] The fact that Mark immediately leaves the clinic to shoot-up in the alley before witnessing the looming UFO figure of the colonial relation can be read as a comment on the limited reach of many actually-existing harm reduction programmes and policies. Such state-backed forms of harm reduction frequently fail to address the wider contexts of the opioid crisis (including the colonial relation and the disproportionate way that it creates addiction problems among Indigenous populations), and often amount to mere forms of biopolitical management.[79] It is also important to note that this scene fades into Rollergirl's aforementioned humiliation by the two cops. Before visually witnessing the events, the alley scene is overlaid with voices of the police officers shamelessly deadnaming Rollergirl, refusing her identity. Lodged between a scene framing the indifferent medical apparatus and then a scene vividly detailing the police's bigotry (in total amounting to the scientific-military-industrial complex at the service of greater accumulation-by-dispossession), Mark's vision of the UFO arrests the realist narrative of everyday violence by non-narratively allegorizing the colonial relation.

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[78] Proudfoot additionally notes how harm reduction is often not simply about public health policy but can also be understood as "a strategy for governing public space and remaking the city for the benefit of the middle class" ("The Libidinal Economy of Revanchism" 224) Harm reduction is often driven by the state's desire to remove drug users from public space, surveilling their habits and pleasures so that "undesirable" individuals do not encroach on the order and attractiveness of the city—that they do not, to put it slightly differently, interrupt gentrification.

[79] Though addressing cloning and epigenetics rather than harm reduction medical facilities, Byrd (2018) makes an incisive point about the failure of science to disentangle itself from the colonial context: "[W]hile science might offer concrete insights into the nature of life as a discretely material and embodied object mineable at a molecular level, those material facts remain coproduced within the structures of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and financialization that use dispossession—of land, of territory, of body, and of self—to further expand indebtedness, profitability, surveillance, and control. Reconciliation and recognition, as Coulthard's work demonstrates, only serve "to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power" ("Variations Under Domestication" 134).

The film's condensation of the colonial relation as invasion-structure into the figure of the UFO creates something of a conspiracy narrative trope. Folkloric and the property of the paranoid individual, rather than rigorously scientific, the conspiracy narrative nonetheless contains a utopian kernel of truth in its gesture toward the totality of the mode of production. In his commentary on popular conspiracy theory films, Jameson (1992) highlights this utopian kernel thus: "in the intent to hypothesize, in the desire called cognitive mapping—therein lies the beginning of wisdom" (*The Geopolitical Aesthetic* 3). While Jameson's remark is situated in the context of the need for a renewed socialist totalizing politics within the historical background of heightened postmodern nominalism, the conspiratorial figure of the UFO can be read in the context of *Luk'Luk'I* as an allegory antagonistic toward the state's own totalizing practices. The latter, as Coulthard underlines, reduce Indigenous justice to concerns of mere identity-inclusion and recognition. As Peter Kulchyski (2016) argues, the state is one distinct totalizing power within the overarching logic of the capitalist mode of production. However, Kulchyski also argues that, although Coulthard recognizes the state's totalizing logics, Coulthard could have also addressed more thoroughly the mode of production as pertaining to the concept of totalization. For Kulchyski, greater emphasis on the mode of production could have prevented Coulthard from being forced to enter debates over essentialism versus constructivism when arguing for the egalitarian perspectives and grounded normativity found within Indigenous cultures.[80] Specifying the latter cultures as embodiments of a *distinctive* mode of production (which Kulchyski identifies as the gatherer and hunter mode of production (43)), argues Kulchyski, would have emphasized more strongly alternative totalizations in and against the overarching totality of capitalism. Kulchyski's refinement of Coulthard is also similar to WREC's notion that peripheral irrealism frequently reactivates archaic modes of representation to convey the contradictory experiences of capitalism within the peripheries (72).

Despite this critical significance of the conspiratorial and the latter's truck with the folkloric, the UFO allegory does not amount to a rejection of the scientific and medical apparatuses, which still mark advances on criminalizing or moralistic discourses around

[80] In his helpful corrective to Coulthard's work, Kulchyski proclaims that "absent a strong notion of mode of production, the Indigenous cultural turn becomes based on an essentialised 'ethnic' difference" (43).

drug use. Indeed, alternative harm reduction programmes seeking to go beyond state-sanctioned enjoyment and instead centre the lives and choices of drug users appear to have a dual commitment to the medical and the conspiratorial (in the sense of pinpointing responsibility on the system rather than the individual). These "detoxifying" political practices can be found in a range of historical examples, from the 1970s Bronx, in which groups like the Young Lords combined detox programmes and needle exchanges with anti-racist politics,[81] to the contemporary organizations such as the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) and their anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist informed harm reduction advocacy and organizing. Thus, while the UFO figure is in one sense a sobering reminder of the colonial relationship that underpins the aforementioned failed recognition scenes and Angel's and Rollergirl's fantasies of individual autonomy, the UFO also, read in conjunction with the medical and conspiratorial, affirms the persistence of harm reduction's utopian impulse to "embrace the many broken and miserable places inside ourselves" (O'Brien n.p.) and work toward fulfilling the manifold proletarian needs neglected by capitalism's perpetual inducement of lack.

Settler colonialism is interested not in fulfilling the needs—regardless of how "toxic" or "uncomfortable"—of human beings, but only those of capital. For Coulthard, "settler-colonialism is territorially acquisitive in perpetuity" (152), meaning that Indigenous communities are not only frequently excluded from access to stable, secure homes, but also that their means of subsistence is entirely dependent on the constitutive separation of the settler colonial property-relationship. In a moving scene from Wapeemukwa's film, Mark arrives on his skateboard at a house in an affluent residential neighbourhood, a bouquet of flowers in hand. Mark knocks but no-one answers. He goes around the house, the camera adopting the view from inside the empty house, as Mark peers through the windows to see if anyone is home. Suddenly, the same police officers who abused Rollergirl appear at the front of the house. One officer, Constable Adams, asks Mark if he lives here, to which he replies "Yeah, I used to". Mark is then told that he must come with the officers. Several scenes later, Mark sees the UFO follow him once more while looking out the back of the police car window. Finally, Mark walks into the light of the UFO in Vancouver's CRAB Park and vanishes. The cause of Mark's

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[81]See M.E. O'Brien "Junkie Communism" (2019) and Mia Donovan's documentary film *Dope Is Death* (2020)

disappearance is depicted as having something to do with the property relationship and the perceived threat of Mark obtaining a home, of fulfilling needs, for himself. Mark's attempt to visit somewhere he "used to" live culminates, following the state's intervention (in the form of the police), in his erasure from the land.

Figure 9: Still from *Luk'Luk'I*

How are we to read Mark's disappearance, and moreover his apparent willingness to be taken away by the UFO in the final instance? Does his disappearance suggest the total subsumption of Indigenous communities into the necropolitical, separating property relation that ultimately lies at the heart of Vancouver's sugar-coated gentrification? Does the film ultimately leave us with the harrowing reality of the disappearance of Indigenous bodies from their land? Once again, it is important to pay attention to what immediately follows Mark's disappearance—the film's final scene in which Angel is picked up for sex work by an unidentified man in a car. The latter scene, which has drawn some controversy from critics, portrays off-screen, through sound alone, the sexual assault and murder of Angel by the man. The film ends by invoking the Downtown Eastside's many missing and murdered women, murders, disproportionately of Indigenous women, that have occurred since 1978 yet without significant media

coverage and investigation until the early 2000s.[82] As Audra Simpson (2016) points out, such cases are part of, not aberrations from, the fundamental colonial-capital relation of multicultural Canada, where female bodies are "like land, matter to be extracted from, used, sullied, taken from, over and over again, something that is already violated and violatable in a great march to accumulate surplus, to so called "production"" (n.p.). For Simpson, "the state is a man" (n.p.)"[83] and it is impossible to separate gendered violence from the state's continual reproduction of the crisis-ridden capital-labour relation via separation from land and subsistence. *Luk'Luk'I*'s ending underscores such a reality in a deeply uncomfortable way, avoiding trigger-warnings and foregrounding the aural over the visual. In this regard, the film's closing sequence contrasts with the ending of Taylor Sheridan's film *Wind River* (2017) in which, following the story of an investigation into the sexual assault and murder of an Indigenous woman in Wyoming, the audience is visually confronted with a title card stating that no demographics on missing Indigenous women currently exist.

Luk'Luk'I's two final disappearance scenes are distinctive, yet they also complement one another. The first of these scenes—Mark's dissolution into the UFO's light—is a fantastical, intoxicating dissolution of the subject, like Odysseus going open arms into the Siren song, whereas the scene showing Angel's murder sees the subject disappear from view, only for her struggling voice to persist off-screen. In the film's final turn of the screw in its dialectics of intoxication, we are reminded, in the very disembodied way through which these disappearances are narrativized, that such colonial abstractions persist in ways often invisible to the naked eye of multicultural Canada. Mapping such structural separating violence perhaps requires modes of seeing different from those provided by most forms of visual realism.

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[82] As detailed by Geraldine Pratt in "Abandoned Spaces Women and Spaces of the Exception" (2005).

[83] "The state that I seek to name has a character, it has a male character, it is more than likely white, or aspiring to an unmarked center of whiteness, and definitely heteropatriarchal. I say heteropatriarchal because it serves the interests of what is understood now as "straightness" or heterosexuality and patriarchy, the rule by men. As well, it seeks to destroy what is not. The state does so with a death drive to eliminate, contain, hide and in other ways "disappear" what fundamentally challenges its legitimacy: Indigenous political orders" (Simpson, "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty" n.p.).

Yet it is ultimately the persistence of Angel's voice following her disappearance on-screen that, while not affirming anything like an alternative, Indigenous-based land politics, at least tells us that the historical violence toward and erasure of Indigenous peoples will not end so long as the separating totality of the colonial relation remains intact. Mark's addiction and Angel's sex work are forms of social reproduction that are toxic not in-and-of-themselves, but because separated from means of safe access and support, because they are modes of survival punished under a system driven by the satisfaction of the needs of capital, rather than humans. The allegorical effect of detoxication that arises out of these scenes' non-narrative accentuations, whereby the realities of addiction and sex work are laid bare in moments beyond narrative realism, denotes a utopian purging of value-form separation on proletarian bodies. Furthermore, just as the UFO figure embodies the truth of the colonial by bearing a gap in the symbolic order (to return to Wapeemukwa's psychoanalytic language)—a point of impossibility in portraying the Downtown Eastside "realistically"—so too is this truth embodied in the voices of the missing and murdered women. Horkheimer and Adorno note that the cold, detached description of the hanging of the "faithless maidservants" in *The Odyssey* is punctuated by a silent caesura, thus allowing "the events narrated to be transformed into something long past, [causing them] to flash up a semblance of freedom that civilization has been unable wholly to extinguish ever since" (61). The non-narrative silence that follows[84] *Luk'Luk'I*'s graphic closing moments similarly invites the spectator to pause and remember a whole history of those who are not mere victims, but who embody an alternative mode of relating to the Earth, who "in their persistence and vigor", Simpson reminds us, point to "the failure of the settler project to eliminate them" (n.p.).

[84] In contrast to the aforementioned logic of trigger warnings that accompany much contemporary popular culture, the film's moment of resistance here follows the temporal logic of the *after* rather than the *before*. In enacting the distinct mode of the *after*, the Adorno-esque caesura embodied in the period of silence following the off-screen violence reinforces the recurring theme of this Chapter that separation (in this case, in its specific colonial form) is both ongoing and already-established in the context of 2010s capitalism.

Chapter 4.

Sing, Unburied, Sing and the U.S. Hinterlands' Dialectics of Intoxication

This final chapter explores the aesthetic and political significance of intoxication in Jesmyn Ward's 2017 novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. In this Chapter, I build on Chapter 1's reconstruction of a Marxist critical theory of intoxication as informed by Benjamin and Adorno's explorations of allegory, as well as Chapter 2's framing of contemporary allegory in relation to the sphere of human and non-human natures that capitalism appropriates to sustain accumulation and manage crises. This Chapter shows how concerns around the relationship between states of intoxication—and interrelated questions of consumption and need—and capitalism's economic and ecological crises, play out in Ward's narrative of addiction and crisis in 2010s rural Mississippi. The allegorical role of intoxicating consumption in Ward's novel brings together distinctive meanings simultaneously yet also points at that which *cannot* be narrativized. Intoxication both illuminates and gestures beyond, in a proto-utopian register, the economic decline, environmental destruction and racial violence characterizing 2010s America. Specifically, I show that Ward's text points toward the political formations that will likely fill the void of declining extra-urban regions within the U.S. in the years to come. I do so by drawing attention to the ecological and social reproductive[85] dimensions of Ward's novel, as they are allegorized through a constellation of intoxicatory states—from animistic traditions to drug-highs to hallucinatory dreams.

Through reading Ward's novel, this Chapter again grounds a contemporary addiction narrative within a historical context of crisis and decline and focuses on the relationship between narrative and non-narrative, on the one hand, and economic categories of exploitation such as wageless life and surplus populations, on the other

[85] As with Chapters 2 and 3, my understanding of social reproduction is informed by the notion that capitalism seeks to commodify all forms of life (see Best 2021) by continuously separating individuals from their means of subsistence. I therefore do not identify social reproduction with a labouring, quasi-productive essence of collective, hidden labour (as has been charged of Marxist-feminists like Silvia Federici). Rather, as contemporary cultural forms like *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and *Heaven Knows What* demonstrate, even the most "non-productive", "abject" forms of life and reproduction are engaged with the ravages of the value-form—such modes of existence do not exist "outside" the latter.

hand. This Chapter also addresses the racial dimensions of such economic issues in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*'s extra-urban, semi-rural setting. The spatial context of Ward's novel, and of this Chapter's questions more broadly, is not the inner-city, but rather what Philip Neel (2018) has described as the near and far hinterlands.

The hinterlands, in Neel's terminology, refer to those areas beyond the inner city which, though often obscured by mainstream analysis and popular representation, are crucial for the production of value, even as such spaces are riven with precarious work, disinvestment, collapsing infrastructure and overall exclusion. The far hinterland, more typically though not exclusively rural, is often "a space for disaster industries, government aid, and large-scale industrial extraction, production, and initial processing of primary products" and is frequently dominated by the informal economy (Neel 17-18). The near hinterland, on the other hand, designates those spaces on the edges of the city, where neighbourhoods, often "suburban" in nature (yet typically "decaying, industrialized" (95)—far from the middle-class havens often found in North American cultural representations), intersect with logistical spaces and other sites of production and consumption "disavowed" by the inner-city core (18, 102-4). Gentrification, the rise of the "creative class" in cities, and accompanying demographic shifts, has seen the "transformation of old postwar suburbs into the primary settlement zones for new immigrants and for those leaving expensive urban cores" (18-9), resulting in ghettos and forms of resistance—typified, for Neel, by the suburban riots of Ferguson, Missouri in 2014—distinctive from those found in the city.

As such, Neel argues it is no longer possible to identify peripheral spaces outside and potentially against the orbit of capital, as with the peasant politics of the past (17). Non-urban spaces like those of farming and agriculture, more than ever, have been subsumed into a thoroughly globalized and "connected", yet increasingly opaque, capitalist totality. The far hinterland, therefore, is not exclusively rural; rather, such spaces are "excluded" on account, among other factors, of their geographical distance from the concentrated wealth of the financialized city:

> we can define clear islands of affluence, encircled by a near hinterland composed of identifiable industrial-logistics expanses that gradually fade into a farther hinterlands of agriculture, black markets, and (half-) abandoned fields, factories, and forests. (120)

Neel's account of "America's new landscape of class and conflict" marks a crucial intervention within Marxist geography and political economy, through its sharp (and autobiographically informed) analysis of 2010s politics beyond the urban. However, Neel's text has not, so far, received much engagement within literary and cultural studies. Furthermore, Neel's analysis does not sufficiently explore the particularly racialized logics and experiences characterizing the hinterlands. This Chapter uses Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* as a case study to address some of the gaps just noted.

Ward's Bois Sauvage, the setting of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, is a fictional town situated somewhere between the Gulf coast and the endless forests of the Mississippi Delta. While the area exhibits some traits of the near hinterland, it more closely resembles the American far hinterland, as outlined in Neel's taxonomy. A large part of the novel concerns a road trip, comprised of two children and three young adults, up north and back through Mississippi to Parchman prison through a depopulated landscape, with production out of sight and drug trafficking one of the few hints of capital's circulation. The world portrayed in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is characterized by wageless life, environmental damage, black markets, incarceration, and the policing of surplus populations. Yet it is also a world in which marginalized groups and individuals, particularly those of African American descent, have established forms of survival and resistance, whether through the escapism of drugs or engagement with "African-based spiritual practices" (Mellis 1). Ward's novel explores in particular how the latter inherited forms and traditions, from the plantation through Jim Crow to the accelerated "war on drugs" of the 1980s, have endured but also changed during the early part of the twenty-first century.

An important intermediary figure for reading the politics of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, one which has not been sufficiently explored in the secondary literature on the novel, is that of intoxication, because Ward frequently portrays altered states of consciousness as a means by which her characters register larger forces beyond their control. As suggested by Neel's remarks on the spatial proximity of the far hinterlands—where class consciousness amounts merely to "the commonality that comes from being increasingly surplus to the economy, though also paradoxically integral to it" (13)—the individual and collective illumination of contemporary spatial regimes of accumulation is increasingly difficult. Combining social geography and theory with first-hand accounts of precarious work, *Hinterlands* regularly raises the problem of cognitive mapping by dramatizing the

relationship between intoxicated states and the “hidden” mechanisms of capital’s workings.[86] Ward similarly stages intoxication as a stand-in for the individual failure to represent larger forces. In Ward’s 2013 memoir, *Men We Reaped*, for example, the narrator’s intoxicated state often substitutes for her inability to form a coherent narrative of the multiple deaths and overall bleak life chances inflicted upon poor black men in her hometown of DeLisle, Mississippi.[87] But *Sing, Unburied, Sing* goes further than Ward’s earlier work by exploring the relationship between working-class African American experience and larger socioeconomic forces through multiple narrators, with varying states of intoxication—whether methamphetamine highs, animistic outlooks or ghostly dreams—figuring at crucial moments of the novel. It is these moments that I pay close attention to in this Chapter to explore the political significance of cultural representations of the North American economic hinterlands.

On one level, drugs play a politically significant role in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* by highlighting the uneven and racially discriminatory logic behind decades of a failed “war on drugs”. A pivotal moment in the novel is a scene where the family are stopped on the road by a police officer who nearly shoots 13-year-old Jojo. The distressing scene is told from the perspective of Jojo’s heavily intoxicated and hallucinating mother, Leonie, who has just ingested, in order to hide, her and her partner’s supply of methamphetamine. While Jojo and Leonie, both of whom are of African American descent, narrowly survive the ordeal, their precarious situation is sharply contrasted with the immobility of the white, wealthy, drug addict and family lawyer, Al (from whom Leonie and Michael collect the drugs), who does not need to venture through the harsh landscape to get his fix. Yet Leonie’s vividly detailed hallucinations in this scene are far from the only moment that intoxication acts as an intermediary figure for larger abstract forces. Throughout, the novel’s multiple narrators—Jojo, Leonie and Richie, the ghost of a young boy who once

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[86] Take, for instance, Neel’s vivid account of the “tweaker” (the methamphetamine addict) as a brutal figure for economic collapse: “The babysitter had what I would later come to recognize as tweaker eyes, bespeaking other explosions happening at other scales: the euphoric chemical explosion of dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain, the periodic explosion of meth labs in the forest like the sound of ancient trees finally being felled, the slow explosion of a rural way of life out into a groundless scattering of scams and desperate, private miseries” (61-2).

[87] Early in this text, Ward addresses her self-perceived failure, in her previous writings, to represent her characters with the degree of realism they deserve. At a party with friends, she responds to her friend’s assertion that she is writing about “real shit” by drinking “a third of [her] bottle” (69). She then ponders: “How to look squarely at what was happening to the young Black people I knew in the South, and to write honestly about that. How to be an Old Testament God. To avoid all of this, I drank” (70).

resided in Parchman penitentiary with Leonie's father, River (or Pop)—describe varying intoxicated states as a "song" that helps the characters navigate a larger story and find "home". For critics like James Mellis (2019) and Victoria A. Chevalier (2020), the animistic and Afro-syncretic traditions that Jojo and Leonie inherit (to varying degrees of success) from their grandparents symbolize alternative modes of resistance against oppressive white society. For these critics, also, it is subsequently incorrect to regard *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, with its alternation between realist portrayals of precarity and surrealist depictions of ghosts, through the generic lens of magical realism. Critics like Mellis argue instead that Ward's invocations of alternative ontologies, which connect spiritual practices with non-human vibrancy, render *Sing, Unburied, Sing* "part of the body of African-based spiritualist fiction, rather than as [a] work . . . of magical realism" (3).[88]

Despite the welcome critiques, particularly in Chevalier's work, of the Eurocentrism that often underpins the magical realist genre, ceding the terrain of Western aesthetic frameworks entirely to "African-based spiritualist fiction" risks eliding attention to capitalism's continual structuring sphere of influence in regions like the U.S. South, as well as to how works like *Sing, Unburied, Sing* register and respond to such spaces of exploitation.[89] Furthermore, Ward often shows the limitations of trying to survive and resist "racial capitalism"[90] through recourse to nature and archaic African

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[88] Mellis defines African-based spiritual fiction as "African-American realist fiction with African-based spiritual and religious elements (particularly Voodoo, hoodoo, conjure and rootwork) incorporated into the universe of the work" (3). He identifies the genre's resurgence within the context of social movements and popular culture against white nationalism and racial violence in the 2010s (13).

[89] This is essentially a version of the argument regarding "peripheral irrealism" forwarded by the Warwick Research Collective (2015). For more on the significance of "irrealism" as a form of cognitive mapping in relation to the figure of intoxication, see Chapter 3.

[90] "Racial capitalism" is a term, first developed by Cedric Robinson, that I borrow in this chapter to denote both the racialized experience of 2010s hinterland capitalism, as well as the longer history, alluded to frequently in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, of North American capitalism and its dependence on slavery, violent dispossession and the Othering of black life. As Charisse Burden-Stelly (2020) summarizes, Robinson's crucial intervention was to show that capitalism never fully broke from feudalism but rather inherited the latter's racial ideologies and practices to consolidate race as a category to subjugate non-Europeans across the globe. Burden-Stelly develops Robinson's insights to argue for a modern theory of U.S. capitalism in which "the irresolvable contradiction of value minus worth arises":

> Blackness is a capacious category of surplus value extraction essential to an array of political- economic functions, including accumulation, disaccumulation, debt, planned obsolescence, and absorption of the burdens of economic crises. At the same time,

traditions. Although it is perhaps tempting to read through the grandparents' animistic traditions Ward positing an alternative epistemology and ontology to Western enlightenment and the latter's associated perpetual plundering of the Earth, such a reading ignores how *Sing, Unburied, Sing* frequently questions the possibility, desirability and applicability of a complete identification with such alternative intoxications. In showing how Ward's novel draws attention to multi-layered, intersectional regimes of repression that include racial oppression, "speciesism" and the destruction of the natural world, Chevalier argues that *Sing, Unburied, Sing* ultimately affirms such alternative modes of being, whereby

> we might have a chance to rewrite the future from a liberatory, ethical ground—for black and brown subjects, modes of being that center and privilege non-Western models of life and death, non-human animals, and the earth itself, upon which all rely. (Chevalier 217)

Chevalier's reading is problematic in that it frames the issues of the novel solely in terms of domination rather than exploitation. Elision of the centrality of economic exploitation for reading Ward's novel results in both an elision of the text's overarching social totality and a more concrete horizon of utopian possibility.

As I argue throughout this Chapter, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* establishes the primacy of economic concerns through not only the portrayal of wageless life and uneven development, but also, importantly, through the depiction of unmet bodily needs, most prominently in the forms of extreme hunger and thirst. The novel consistently highlights how the economic system pushes low-income people into distorted modes of survival and induces both material and spiritual impoverishment and lack. Ward often frames such distortions on the level of drug consumption, for example in her description of a man peddling methamphetamine: "[he is] cooking, moves as easy and sure as a chef, but there is nothing to eat here" (89). Importantly, without downplaying America's long history of racial discrimination, Ward frames these logics as encompassing all ethnicities and demographics, rather than solely as afflictions that "hinge on the regimes of racial difference, the visual, and embodiment" (Chevalier 217). Chevalier's commentary on the

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> Blackness is the quintessential condition of disposability, expendability, and devalorization. (n.p.)

While such larger Marxist debates and concerns are beyond the scope of this Chapter, the broad category of racial capitalism, qua Robinson and Burden-Stelly, is a helpful corrective to Neel's neglect of such concerns.

latter “regimes” are informed by Cary Wolfe’s notion of “speciesism”, a mode of “systematic discrimination” that involves a fundamental repression underlying Western ethical and political discourse (Wolfe qtd. in Chevalier 217). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, reading the contemporary addiction narrative for traces of nonidentity, often through the figure of detoxification, illuminates crises in consumption as registrations of crises in capitalism, and moreover opens-up the utopian possibility of ethical alternatives against the value-form. The issue is that such ethical critiques of identification as found in Chevalier and Wolfe remain at the level of discourse rather than value-form abstraction. In my reading of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the degrees of resistance or alternative possibility lie within the very framing of bodily need as persistent lack within and against the economic system. In other words, we must locate resistance in the novel immanently to the crisis-ridden value-form of the 2010s hinterlands, rather than purely through recourse to alternative animistic ontologies abstracted from the characters of the grandparents, about whom Ward frequently does not paint a liberatory picture. Therefore, while this Chapter does foreground the significance of how Ward’s novel articulates the faint glimmers of a politics and ethical mode of relating based around needs-fulfilment rather than capitalist reproduction, I nevertheless warn against the undialectical positing of alternative ontologies sundered from materialist, class-based analyses.

My reading pays particular attention to how economic objectivity weighs on the perspectives of individual characters in the novel. In the undead figure of Richie, for example, we can see the novel’s attempt to map the racially coded logic of capitalism’s crisis form, including its “fixing and unfixing” of “entire ways of life” (Gilmore 179), which inevitably entails world-ecological insights into American capitalism over the *longue durée*. Finally, this Chapter considers the ideologies and utopian impulses surrounding the intoxications of two significant characters who do not narrate any part of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*: Michael (Leonie’s white partner and father of her children, whom the group are collecting from Parchman) and Kayla (Leonie’s infant daughter). Through these two characters, I show how *Sing, Unburied, Sing* hints at both reactionary and emancipatory impulses and formations which, as Neel shows, have and will likely continue to fill the political vacuums left by the impoverished hinterlands.

On the one hand, as is seen in the character of Michael, the novel gestures toward the rise of far-right politics in the hinterlands, epitomized by groups like the Oath

Keepers. Neel writes how such groups seek to "create a rural base of power, parallel and opposed to that of the federal government" (28) by focusing on the fulfilment of neglected essential services and advocating a return to the land or the establishment of autonomous zones, in language that often mirrors that of the left (24-5). For Neel, such organizations are characterized by an "oath of blood"—not by any coherent programme or set of beliefs, per se, but rather by "the way they act relative to sequences of struggle and collapse", by their capacity to respond to material circumstances. Though ultimately defined by an exclusionary commitment to racist, identity and blood-based politics, Neel recognizes the legitimate threat posed by these far-right formations because, rather than solely the romantic communitarianism typical of twentieth-century fascism, the contemporary far-right has some material grounding in people's lived experiences of exploitation:

> As one of the poorest generations in recent history, debt and rent are the defining features of our lives. It is this fact that makes the current incarnation of the far right an actual threat, because it increases the probability that some variant of present-day Patriot politics might actually find a mass base, as a program formulated specifically to oppose the extraction of rents from an unwilling population in the far hinterland is translated into a more general opposition of rents as a primary form of exploitation in contemporary capitalism. (44)

While Ward's character Michael never expresses right-wing beliefs or views, there are key scenes where his intoxicated perspective betrays a hostile relationship to the nonidentical Other. The framings of drug intoxication in Michael, as well as Leonie, frequently highlight a desire for order and aversion to anything deemed abject or surplus to that identification. But as Samir Gandesha (2021) argues, in the context of prevailing economic heteronomy such "a drive to extirpate the non-identical or that which cannot be conceptually grasped without remainder" (99) becomes increasingly prevalent as a proto-fascist tendency among large sections of the global population, not least of all in the U.S.

On the other hand, the revolutionary counterpart to the oath of blood is what Neel terms the oath of water and I read this figure through the character Kayla and her capacity to communicate with multiple ghostly entities at once. Neel's oath of water similarly addresses the pragmatic unfolding of activity (over analysis) and struggles based around reproduction and the fulfilment of essential needs and services. Yet the oaths of water can be witnessed in the rise of riots and other extra-parliamentary leftist

movements during the 2010s, from Occupy Wall Street to the suburban uprisings of Ferguson. Despite the many differences and shortcomings of these latter struggles,[91] Neel argues that in all of them one can recognize that the

> proto-communist oath is not unified by identity but by a reflective fidelity to the unrest itself . . . The unity of this oath is . . . the inclusive, flowing unity of those who wish to push the rift open, to spread it further, to extend it longer, or to ensure that the potential spread . . . [an oath of water] seems to seek nothing but further erosion, the growth of the flood (155).

Regardless of the extent of one's agreement with Neel's analysis and commitments, I maintain, in this Chapter's conclusion, that *Sing, Unburied, Sing*'s closing moment of non-narrative polyphonic diegesis, entwined with images of consumption, reproduction and need, as well as the figure of the child (Kayla), gestures at, without foregrounding in any coherent sense, such future floods. In other words, Ward leaves us with a premonition of future heightened ecological and economic crises, as well as of the unmet needs of future generations somehow surplus to yet fully subsumed under the capitalist value-form.

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Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* tells the story of an African American and mixed-race family living in Bois Sauvage, a fictional town in rural Mississippi. Each chapter is told from alternating perspectives, predominantly those of Jojo and his mother, Leonie, although three chapters are also told from the viewpoint of Richie the ghost. As the novel unfolds, we learn that Pop, who tells intermittent stories to his grandson Jojo of his time at Parchman prison, mercy killed Richie to prevent his lynching at the hands of a white mob. The ghost's appearance mid-way through *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is driven by Richie's desire to learn the exact events surrounding his death, but the completion of this story is one layer among many other harrowing tales, including the death of Leonie's brother, Given, by the cousin of her white partner and father of her children, Michael (the shooting is deemed a "hunting accident" rather than racist murder), and the death of Leonie's Mama, Philoméne, to cancer.

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[91] Joshua Clover (2016) has termed these movements and events "circulation struggles", designating the replacement of the strike (which is geared toward shutting down production) by the riot as the primary form of struggle. For a critique of Clover's analysis, see Moody 2018.

While death haunts the novel, both figuratively and literally, with the ghosts of Given and of an unidentified “multitude” (283) also playing important roles, the book’s central drama concerns a road trip to present-day Parchman. Leonie, along with her friend Misty, bring Jojo and her other child, the infant Kayla, up through the Mississippi Delta to retrieve recently released Michael from prison. Michael, whose racist father (and former Bois Sauvage police chief) enabled Given’s murder to go without justice, is serving time for drug trafficking. While Michael is shown to clearly care for Leonie and his children, he is nonetheless, like Leonie, afflicted by drug addiction and is disconnected from Jojo’s and Kayla’s lives. The children are largely provided for by their grandparents, River and Philoméne, both of whom display a deep, at times spiritual, knowledge of the relationship between the children’s needs and the Earth. Philoméne is an herbal healer while River performs his farm work with an intimate connection with animals (a trait also shared by Jojo, who we learn can hear and understand the needs of animals). This apparent opposition between the rootedness of the grandparents and their more ecologically sensitive, holistic “intoxications”, versus the rootlessness of the parents’ drug habits, will be challenged later in this chapter.

Estranged from their respective parents (though to different degrees and for different reasons), Leonie and Michael do not own a home and subsist on precarious, insecure income and employment. Leonie works late-night bar shifts, after which she often gets high with her co-worker, Misty. It is during these late-night sessions that her hallucinations of Given frequently occur. Meanwhile, we learn that Michael worked as a rig welder on the Deepwater Horizon during the time of the oil spill disaster that occurred there in 2010.[92] After coming home “with his severance money and nightmares” (92), the traumatized Michael is unable to find “another job anywhere in Mississippi or Alabama or Florida or Louisiana or the Gulf of Mexico” (93) and subsequently turns to drug trafficking. As those like Endnotes (2010) and Neel have noted, the heightened collapse of stable employment over the past decades has led, particularly in hinterland areas, to a rising dependency on such illicit activity for income.

Alongside the perspectives of individual characters like Leonie and Michael, Ward’s novel utilizes the physical landscape of Mississippi itself to dramatize the

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[92] For more detail on this disaster see the Smithsonian’s online report, “Gulf Oil Spill” (2018).

economic and ecological crisis of the far hinterland, as well as the broader history of North American racial capitalism.

Sedimentation, Stagnation, Surplus

The novel's rural Mississippi setting is marked by a history of extreme poverty and racial inequality, both emblematic of historical injustice and violence in the U.S.[93] and typical of the stagnation and wageless life continuing to define the contemporary hinterlands.[94]

Much of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* comprises a road trip, but the journey is not a heroic, emancipatory voyage of self-discovery and growth. Myka Tucker-Abramson (2022) argues that while the road novel, as an (often male-centric) exploration of the unknown, achieved global significance during the 1950s at the height of U.S. economic expansion, the subsequent onset of economic crisis from the 1970s onward has seen writers refigure this genre "to unearth the geographies and histories of American Empire" (n.p.).[95] While I will not focus on the road in much detail here, it is important to note its role in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* in bringing together a long history of economic and racial injustice. Ward's road is one defined not by lines of flight or escape, but rather immobility and cyclicality. The ghosts of victims of racial violence (Given and Richie) haunt the two main characters (Jojo and Leonie) throughout the journey and temper any significant character development. Meanwhile, the novel's harrowing, all-too-familiar scene of police brutality, in which a police officer pulls over the family and nearly shoots (an unarmed) Jojo highlights not random acts of racial domination, but rather a system that

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[93] As Marcus Tribbett remarks of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*'s Mississippi setting: ""The most southern place on earth" embodies the long legacy of racial oppression in the United States, bound up in a system of white on black violence, of forced labor first through slavery, then through Jim Crow segregation and incarceration, a system founded and maintained on bloodshed and brutality" (Tribbett 26).

[94] Though far less significant than that of Western states like Nevada, Mississippi land has seen an increased share of federal government ownership (5.0% between 1990-2018: "Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data", 17). As Neel shows, in hinterland zones people often "experience class exploitation as largely a matter of rents, rather than wages" (*Hinterland* 37); shrinking industrial output means a shrinking tax base and therefore more federal ownership and higher taxation on land and property. For Neel this explains both the incoherence of Liberal calls for greater state taxes and state ownership in non-urban areas, because the state is already serving capital through such means, and the rise of far-right, anti-government land-based politics.

[95] I thank Myka Tucker-Abramson for sharing further details of her project over private correspondence.

disciplines black spaces and mobility (Cobb 135). The physical journey in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is "haunted, hunted, and policed for black subjects who inhabit the road" (Cobb 135), and while, for white characters like Misty, a billboard showing "*Mississippi's Most Beautiful Courthouse*" offers some aesthetic sense of escape (95), for racialized subjects like Leonie, who understand the reality of incarceration, they can only "watch the road roll out . . . like a big black ribbon" (95-6).

However, if the road is portrayed throughout Ward's novel as a haunted, hunted and self-enclosed space, it is questionable whether this space is presented only as a site of racial immobilization. In fact, Misty's naïve comments about the courthouse trigger Leonie's memories of Michael describing the horrors of incarceration. The unfolding of the road "like a big black ribbon" leads Leonie to think about her partner's letter that states: "*This ain't no place for no man. Black or White. Don't make no difference. This is a place for the dead*" (96). While *Sing, Unburied, Sing* certainly does deal with the afterlives of slavery, lynching and Jim Crow-era segregation, Ward also addresses, in her novel's mapping of the post-2008 economic crisis, how incarceration impacts the lives of all economically marginalized subjects, regardless of race, even if the impact is far more extreme and disproportionate for black subjects. The role of surplus and crises in relation to incarceration will be explored later, but it is important to recognize that emphasizing exploitation over domination here is not a comment on any kind of "neglecting" of white working-class concerns. Rather, an emphasis on economic exploitation can underscore the particular racially encoded functioning of precarity and disposability as instantiations of capital's increased generation of surplus populations among all demographics. As Annie McClanahan (2019a) argues:

> The problem, in other words, is not that we've "paid too much attention" to race at the expense of class, but rather that racialization as a technique of bodily ascription creates a segment of the working class who can be more literally paid too little. As demographic data on life expectancy among the poor and people of color suggests—but as conservative demographic ideology can never admit—the capital flight, outsourcing, and hyperexploitation that are often part of capital's desperate search for renewed profitability in a period of stagnation are today rendering whole populations or regions "disposable," and the same forms of racialized hostility and state violence long applied to black subjects are increasingly being applied to new surplus populations as well. ("Life Expectancies: Mortality, Exhaustion, and Economic Stagnation" 369-70)

We will also see later that Michael's character and background—the son of a wealthy former police chief—point in the direction of nihilistic and even far-right tendencies, which Ward's novel maps as responses to the crisis.

I want to now move away from the significance of the road space specifically, as both registration of uneven spaces (Tucker-Abramson) and temporalities and as critique of "black immobility" (Cobb)—as important as these components are for understanding Ward's novel. I want to focus instead on the novel's prominent images of stagnation and surplus that underpin and weave together the economic and racial injustice afflicting the main characters. Such imagery can be found most notably in Richie's chapters, where the irrealism of his intoxicating dreams and visions registers the realism of an economic system in complete crisis with no room for socioeconomic or even personal growth. After the characters arrive at Parchman and collect Michael, it becomes clear that the journey home will be one of unearthing the past. As Jojo's observation of the prison prompts a recollection of Pop describing Richie's suffering following a severe whipping, Richie's ghost makes his first appearance in the novel. The following chapter is the first written from Richie's perspective, and the opening paragraph, wherein Richie recognizes Jojo as River's son, is illustrative of how geological metaphors permeate the novel—even down to descriptions of individual characters:

> Even if he didn't carry the scent of leaves disintegrating to mud at the bottom of a river, the aroma of the bowl of the bayou, heavy with water and sediment and the skeletons of small dead creatures, crab, fish, snakes, and shrimp, I would still know he is River's by the look of him. The sharp nose. The eyes dark as swamp bottom. The way his bones run straight and true as River's: indomitable as cypress. He is River's child. (133)

In this recognition scene, Richie's unearthing of Jojo's family background is akin to uncovering the layers of sediment accumulating over time beneath the waters of the Mississippi River Delta. Yet this discovery also mimics the flow of the river into the Gulf of Mexico. In the passage, the omission of punctuation in the first part of the first sentence is gradually met with more frequent caesuras and alliteration, before ceasing and leading into a series of more emphatic caesuras. The effect, coupled with descriptions of Jojo having "eyes dark as swamp bottom", is one of water flowing and then stagnating. The penultimate line, though, is suggestive again of flow, before the final discovery of Jojo's family background resolidifies, through the reassertion of caesura and earthy descriptions, a sense of stagnation: "indomitable as a cypress. He is

River's child". The water escapes into the Gulf, but this "escape" is ultimately a reassertion of origin rather than a line of flight.

Ward's treatment of the Mississippi landscape as effectively an extension of the character's bodies (and vice versa) features prominently throughout *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, but the above passage is particularly striking in its constellation of pieces of ecological and economic crisis. The discovery of dead non-human "sediment" and "skeletons" as precursor to the discovery of "River's child" is suggestive of the 2010 oil spill and the attendant climate crisis that will shape generations to come. Yet this passage also speaks to how Jojo's generation is built upon layers of "dead labour", of the various precarious, wageless and deindustrialized populations characterizing the hinterland, as evident, in the novel, in Leonie's long but unreliable service work and Michael's insecure welding work. Furthermore, the decreased capacity of Pop and Mama's household to be self-sufficient, as evident in Mama's decline and increasing inability to rely on herbal remedies, is also suggestive of the increased spatial integration of far hinterland regions (or "peripheries") into capital's circuits.

Additionally, the way this passage suggests initial flow, before stagnation, then another surge, before immobility again, can be read in terms of the broader logics of capital predating the 2010s. Specifically, we might read in this flow how the economic system does not produce growth so much as new crises and the subsequent management of surplus land and populations, before generating even further surpluses. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) argues that the rapid growth of America's prison-industrial complex toward the end of the twentieth century can be attributed to the need to put growing surplus land and populations to use, which "the newly developing political economy had not absorbed in other ways" (54). For Gilmore, the state's need to discipline increasingly un- or precariously employed (and usually black) (surplus) populations, as well as to extract value from surplus land "idling" as a result of processes like suburbanization and removal of irrigation (64-70), results in the heavily racialized mass incarceration that receives so much media and cultural attention today.[96] But rather than solely a system of domination, Gilmore emphasizes how this fixing of certain populations is inseparable from capital's perpetual need to resolve crises:

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[96] See for example Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010).

> the production of surplus is necessary, or else there's no profit, while the overaccumulation of surplus is crisis. The system does not, however, mechanically function irrespective of time and place; crises are historically specific and their generalities play out in particular ways in particular places. (57)

As argued in the Introduction, capitalism is increasingly beset by a crisis in value production because of the rising organic composition of capital as well as the decline of cheap natures and so a falling "ecological surplus. The fixing of surplus populations and land through the growth of prisons is one attempt to resolve accumulation problems, but this "geographical solution that purports to solve social problems by extensively and repeatedly removing people from disordered, deindustrialized milieus and depositing them somewhere else" (Gilmore 14) cannot hide the system's endemic stagnation and low productivity[97]—in other words its terminally declining growth.

As Gilmore shows, the "prison fix" will vary across time and space, as we see in Ward's Mississippi compared to Gilmore's California. Yet Ward's introduction of Richie's first-person narration also signals an artistic attempt to map the broader racial logics of capitalism in the U.S. Richie will later describe the unearthing of his fate as allowing him (and us) to "conceive that Parchman was past, present, and future all at once" (186), while River earlier compares his witnessing of the awful treatment of Parchman inmates to his great-great-grandmother's "death march to the coast" (69) when she was shipped as a slave from Africa. The repetition of flow, stagnation, flow, and then further stagnation and/or capture, is evident in Richie's aforementioned opening passage, as well as the whole chapter's prominent alternation between images of flight and of burrowing, culminating in the image of Richie, joining the characters on their journey home, settling "in the crumpled bits of paper and plastic that litter the bottom of the car . . . crouch[ing] like the scaly bird" (141). The rise and fall, the flow and capture, is a key motif in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, and it formally maps the perpetual negotiation of surplus and crises under America's centuries-spanning system of racialized exploitation, up to its present declining growth.

Drawing attention to the importance of the longer history of racial capitalism provides a world-ecological angle on the novel. The novel's dramas of consumption and

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[97] As Gilmore notes, "In my view, prisons are partial geographical solutions to political economic crises, organized by the state, which is itself in crisis" (26).

bodily need, whereby the characters of Leonie, Michael, Jojo and Kayla communicate their present and future material needs in a distorted way through the figure of intoxication, as will be explored below, are informed by a longer history. It is a history in which the plundering of colonies, slave labour and the extraction of energy and resources intertwine.[98] The figure of Richie in the novel traverses different timeframes and constellates different moments of North American destruction and dispossession, all of which are unified under the logic of valorization. Upon realizing the cyclical "nature of time" (187), Richie, "trapped" by Parchman in his dreams, wanders past, present and future incarnations of the penitentiary, even "the Delta before the prison [with] Native men . . . ranging over that rich earth", but he cannot disentangle any linear history or progression between each "version" of the land in which he is entombed (186-7). Capital's racialized resolutions of surplus and crises bring together "past, present, and future all at once", and since Richie's ghost is ultimately not exorcized (by the novel's end) from the world of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, it is impossible to remove this vast historical context from the drama of the novel's "living" characters.

Profane Illumination?

Despite the significance of past hauntings, of a long history of racial trauma and dispossession, in what follows I want to draw attention to the ways *Sing, Unburied, Sing* speaks to a twenty-first century politics of the near and far hinterlands. As stated in the introduction, throughout her novel Ward constructs states of intoxication not only to show how escape is essential for her characters' survival, but also to suggest an affinity between such states and narrative sense-making. Jojo's ability to see ghosts and communicate with animals is described by Richie as akin to being "part of the song" (183), in which "home" is a site that blurs the boundaries between oneself and the Earth:

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[98] To draw on an example from outside of Ward's novel, such a constellation can be seen through the mundane commodity of sugar. In the context of the modern world system, Houston A. Baker (2016) summarizes the pivotal role of African slave labour (a "cheap nature", in Moore's terminology) in the historical formation of agricultural economies in the U.S. South:

> The historical backstory of the South's agricultural economies of labor and profit forms a longue duree commencing with the "gang production" of sugar as a cash crop in the Mediterranean. With European navigational successes . . . the West Coast of Africa became accessible for trade, expropriation of gold, and the securing of African bodies for labor. Sugar and other forms of plantation production (tobacco, rice, cotton) demanded monumental numbers of laborers in order to turn their greatest profits. The African slave trade produced such labor. (13)

““It’s why you can hear animals, see things that ain’t there. It’s a piece of you. It’s everything inside of you and outside of you”” (183). Richie describes his own past, conversely, as a hard, concrete, suffocating space: “No opening. No heartbeat. No air” (183). Richie hopes that the “song” of River’s story will help him reach “home”, but the closure Richie eventually receives leaves his ghost still lingering on in the present. Richie is deprived of the song that he so desires to comprehend his past and return “home” to the Earth; as River’s tale is finally completed, Jojo realizes that the sound he hears from Richie is not singing but “a whine that rises to a yell that rises to a scream, and the look on his face is horror at what he sees” (256). Richie’s horror-inducing vision, here, is a kind of mapping of the Mississippi area, stretching beyond the character’s road journey “past the highways and towns back to the swamps and stands of trees hundreds of years old” (256). This startling vision of deep time would appear, again, to speak to the original racial violence that underpins the creation of American Empire.

Yet Ward also describes an earlier vision from Richie that cognitively maps the more recent history, outlined above, of incarceration as (racially coded) resolution of systemic crisis outside urban areas. In this extraordinary, hallucinatory passage, Richie, resting underneath River and Philoméne’s house in anticipation of learning the truth of his fate, describes a dream of a utopian land from which he is deprived access. Described as a “golden isle” covered in golden air, whose inhabitants are perpetually “crooning in the yellow light”, the space portrayed here is one of immense sensuousness, of “vivid blue and dark red, cloudy pink and deepest purple” (241). Richie notes the presence of people who “fly and walk and float and run”, are alone yet together, and are never silent. The repetition of “they” pronouns throughout suggests an envy of the perceived *jouissance* on the part of the inhabitants. Such envy is most striking in the following passage:

> Ever present is their singing: they don’t move their mouths and yet it comes from them. Crooning in the yellow light. It comes from the black earth and the trees and the ever-lit sky. It comes from the water. It is the most beautiful song I have ever heard, but I can’t understand a word. (241)

What can be read here is not only a comment on uneven development and economic and racialized segregation of social space, but also an inverted image of Gilmore’s “golden gulags”, of the land fixed by capital’s (often state) actors to resolve crisis and score quick accumulation. The passage connects the social space depicted in the dream

to the materiality of the earth itself; the “gold” of both the island’s landscape and its inhabitants “comes from the black earth and the trees and ever-lit sky”—physical nature has clearly been put to work here in a manner that recalls Jason W. Moore’s analysis of the historical dependence on cheap nature, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, though “green and hilly, dense with trees, riven by rivers”, the latter “flow backward: they begin in the sea and end inland”, again hinting at the imbrication of spatial fixes with the domination of land. All of this suggests that the “gold” of the affluent island relies on the resolution of surplus—in this case, surplus land—to sustain its apparent “growth”, where “hip . . . roofs” and “massive skyscrapers . . . look as if they should collapse, so weirdly they flower into the sky”. Richie is deprived of the song that binds the collectivities of the golden isle; lacking access to that golden song, he instead keens in isolation (242). This isolation, this suffocating “dark underbelly of River’s house”, which recalls Harriet Jacobs’ long isolation and captivity hiding from her slaveowners in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), signifies a space of incarceration, the counterpart to the urban gentrification that capitalizes on surplus and devalued land (Gilmore 69).

If the inhabitants of the island in Richie’s vision, who enjoy their “graceful gatherings of round, steady huts with domed roofs” (241), represent the urban “islands of affluence” (Neel 120), marked by gentrification, the “creative class” and the FIRE (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate) industries, Richie’s isolated dwelling can be read, in its distance from the golden isle, as a disavowed hinterland space. Yet it is not just the figure of incarcerated space as capitalized surplus land that highlights uneven development in this passage. The figure of Richie himself as captive and excluded from the golden song draws attention to the casting out of surplus populations from urban centres into hinterland prisons, as detailed by Gilmore. The fact that this spatial metaphor is deployed by Ward through Richie’s dream after the family’s encounter with the police officer on the road is revealing. The constellation of the road/cop scene and Richie’s dream certainly highlights the disproportionate racial character of American policing, but one might also read the unevenness figured here in terms of the particular economic exploitation occurring in the near and far hinterlands of 2010s America. For Neel, the continuation of low economic growth and general austerity has resulted in poorer regions seeking greater shares of a shrinking tax base. Predatory practices such as the enhancement of police and legal mechanisms, including stop-and-search, for debt collection, surveillance and incarceration have increasingly been deployed to manage,

discipline and extract value from surplus populations through extortionate legal fees, with such fines disproportionately hitting poor black residents (Neel 132-4). Yet despite this disproportionality, it is noticeable that these predatory practices are nonetheless increasingly generalized across the whole population. The fact that the race of both the police officer and the inhabitants of the golden isle in Richie's dream are unspecified by Ward suggests that the novel is dealing not exclusively with racial domination, but also addressing interlocking economic exploitation, particularly the latter's spatial logic. Incarceration as frequent crisis fix in the near and far hinterlands cannot be defined exclusively on identity lines.

How are we to read, in the dream, the significance of the "golden song" on the affluent island that mesmerizes Richie? One reading might recognize the island as having stolen and reappropriated the strength, solace and spirituality that poor African Americans have historically found through "song", as in the Blues tradition, jazz and hip-hop; as Marcus Charles Tribbett (2019) argues, "Ward's novel is part of a living tradition of resistance to oppression through song" (23). Jojo, as already mentioned, has access to a kind of "song" that provides a sense of "home", of interconnectedness with broader human and non-human natures. Very early in the novel, Jojo explains that he cannot help but understand the needs of animals, by hearing their voices and even just through looking at them, which he describes as "like looking at a sentence and understanding the words, all of it coming back to me at once" (15). He seemingly inherits this magical, animistic disposition from his grandparents. River describes how his great-grandfather taught him that "there's spirit in everything . . . In the trees, in the moon, in the sun, in the animals", and that possessing knowledge of this might help restore balance to the world, "[s]o the crops will grow, the animals breed and get fat for food"" (73). On her death bed, Philoméne reveals that her abilities do not extend as far as Jojo's ability (unbeknownst to her) to see the dead:

> "I ain't never have the talent for it. Seeing the dead. I could read people, read the future or the past in they bodies. Know what was wrong or needed by their songs: in the plants, in the animals, too. But never saw the dead. Wanted it so bad after Given died." (237)

Jojo's similar capacity to read and be in-tune with the song of human and non-human needs is evident throughout *Sing, Unburied, Sing*; following Leonie's failed attempt to remember and concoct one of her Mam's herbal remedies for Kayla, the following

chapter, narrated by Jojo, in its opening lines foregrounds the boy's intuitive awareness of what Kayla truly needs: ""Kayla need to eat. I can tell by the way . . ."" (107).

However, it would be a mistake to read this "song", which Richie so craves, as some more authentic ontology or spirit to be contrasted with the "corrupt" intoxications that colour Leonie's and Michael's worldviews. Such an affirmation of a non-hegemonic, "Afro-syncretic" and post-human ontology and/or ethics can be found in some secondary literature on *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. For critics like Chevalier, for example, Ward's novel, in highlighting both environmental and racial injustice, affirms "a new ontology" by deconstructing hegemonic narratives that privilege not only the human over the non-human but also White knowing over Black being (or White epistemology over Black ontology) (215-17). Chevalier argues that the ability of Jojo and Kayla to communicate with the non-human and the dead, coupled with their animistic heritage from River and Philoméne, symbolizes an alternative ethical relationship, organized by "non-Western models of being in Afro-syncretic and indigenous ontologies" (217). Yet these kinds of readings downplay the role of economic relations in shaping the characters' experience. As I have already suggested, Ward's novel is concerned not solely with racial domination, but also draws attention to the inseparability of racial domination from issues of economic exploitation across space and time.

I argue that the novel's recurrent motif of "song" should be read through the allegorical figure of intoxication. Indeed, the novel's "songs" frequently take the loose form of intoxicated states, whether through Richie's visions, Leonie's drug-high, Michael's romantic identification with the Earth, or Jojo's and Kayla's communication with the dead. This intoxicating song is allegorical insofar as this recurrent figure frequently manifests as the need for Ward's characters to make sense of their material surroundings. Rather than deplore intoxicating manifestations of the song different from the kind that Richie idealizes in Jojo, one must recognize how the novel's intoxicated states articulate a relationship, however distorted, to real material surroundings and needs. Furthermore, in a Jamesonian vein, this allegorical relationship via the intoxicating "song" on the level of individual characters appears, as with Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping (see Introduction), as both ideological and utopian, perhaps most evident in the aforementioned passage from Richie's dream, where the golden isle is described as exclusionary (in being achingly beyond the reach of Richie), yet also idyllic and beautiful.

If there is, as we shall see, something proto-utopian even in characters like Leonie and Michael, there is, on the other hand, perhaps something flawed about the "song" that Richie valorizes in River and Jojo. Furthermore, in overemphasizing the affirmation of alternative ontologies, critics like Chevalier overlook the sense of failure that Ward often attaches to the animistic and African American folkloric traditions passed down by Philoméne and River. Indeed, the ceremonial rituals conducted through both grandparents—the completion of the story by Pop and the spiritual sacrifice of Mama—are not enough to allow Richie's ghost to pass on. As Saidiya Hartman (2002) details, a hallmark of African diasporic literature is the identification with ghosts and the dead, and the accompanying sense of mourning attached to the loss of African traditions following the onset of the transatlantic slave-trade.[99] The persistence of ghosts in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* similarly addresses this key feature of the African diaspora and the afterlife of slavery, but this novel's hauntings must also be read in the context of the historical period and geographies of twenty-first century crisis-capitalism. Although Ward does highlight the significance of both the traditions and traumas passed down through the three generations present in the novel, she also underscores the distinctive ways that Leonie, Jojo and Kayla respond to their circumstances. There are multiple examples in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* that caution against solely relying on traditions or even reverting to pre-capitalist ontologies (as stressed in Chevalier's interpretation) to survive and resist the racialized exploitation of the American hinterlands.

Firstly, at the point of the road journey in which Leonie fails to remember the specific ingredients for a herbal remedy to treat Kayla's sickness, the reader glimpses the disconnect between the nourishing and balance offered by a maternal figure and Leonie's experience growing up. Describing her Mama's body breaking down, after her initial insistence that making tea from pokeweed shoots would cure her cancer, Leonie makes the following remark about her mother's herbal remedies:

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[99] Exploring how tourism in places like Ghana and Senegal attempt to channel a collective pan-African memory of life before slavery, Hartman remarks: "The fixation on roots reveals the centrality of identity not only to the transactions of tourism, but in staging the encounter with the past. Identification and bereavement are inextricably linked in this instance; since the roots we are encouraged to recover presuppose the rupture of the transatlantic slave trade and the natal alienation and kinlessness of enslavement. Put differently, the issues of loss and our identification with the dead are central to both the work of mourning and the political imagination of the African diaspora. And, for this reason, grief is a central term in the political vocabulary of the diaspora" (758).

> She thought that if she taught me as much herbal healing as she could, if she gave me a map to the world as she knew it, a world plotted orderly by divine order, spirit in everything, I could navigate it. But I resented her when I was young, resented her for the lessons and misplaced hope. And later, for still believing in good in a world that cursed her with cancer, that twisted her limp as an old dry rag and left her to disintegrate. (105)

The "misplaced hope" that Leonie ascribes to her mother's spiritual practices is ultimately confirmed for her towards the end of the novel. At Philoméne's deathbed, Leonie follows (this time successfully) her mother's teachings and obtains cemetery rocks, cornmeal and rum, allowing the "last *mystere* . . . Maman Brigitte . . . the mother of the dead" (215) to enter Philoméne and take her from life ("a mercy" as Pop describes it (271)). But while Richie romanticizes this act of sacrifice as akin to the "song" he heard "from the golden place across the waters" (245), ultimately the "mercy" only intensifies the already fraught relationship between Leonie and her son, Jojo. The latter, having explained earlier that his mother has a history of concocting failed, misremembered herbal remedies ("Leonie kill things" (108)), believes that Leonie has in fact accidentally killed Philoméne. For her part, Leonie cannot accept the passing of her brother's ghost along with her Mama in the mercy; she and Michael leave the children for days on drug binges, with Leonie's need to witness Given again a primary driver of her escapism.

The belief in navigation via spiritual practices is also called into question with the paternal figure of Pop. Pop leaves Jojo a small "gris-gris bag" (221), composed of a feather, tooth, and a small rock in a leather bag. A handwritten note instructs Jojo to keep the bag close, as a form of protection and guidance in Pop's absence. Yet while Jojo survives the intense scene in which the police officer pulls the group's car over, it is unclear whether Jojo survives because of the gris-gris bag. As Jojo reaches for the bag, the officer believes he is reaching for a gun, and aims his weapon at the boy. A spew of Kayla's vomit over the officer diffuses the situation. Later, when Pop asks if the bag worked, Jojo shrugs and replies ""I think so. We made it. Got stopped by the police, though. And Kayla was sick the whole time"" (221). However, the details of this event from Leonie's hallucinatory perspective, having just ingested a bag of methamphetamine to hide the drugs from the cop, suggest that other factors ultimately save Jojo from becoming another black child murdered by the police:

> Given-not-Given reaches out again, this time to Michaela, and it looks as if she sees him, as if he can actually touch her because she goes all rigid all at once, and then a golden toss of vomit erupts from Michaela's mouth and

> coats the officer's uniformed chest. Misty drops Michaela and bends and gags. Phantom Given claps silently, and the officer freezes. (165-6)

The description of a "golden toss of vomit" mirrors Richie's description of a "golden song" and "golden isle", suggesting the possibility of a form of relating not anchored to a fixed place or tradition of song. Vomiting and detoxification are recurring themes in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and their importance, especially regarding Kayla, will be addressed later. But it is also significant that the above vision of Leonie's is the first point in the novel where Given is potentially more than a "hollow figment" (150); though his presence is still brought about by drugs, the ghost appears to impact immediate events beyond Leonie's imagination. Foregrounding Leonie's intoxication in this way, as entangled with the state's attempts to discipline non-white subjects, highlights the frequent necessity of drug use as a means of surviving the system's worst ravages. Reverting to ancestral traditions in this case, as Jojo reaches for the gris-gris bag, if anything seems to exacerbate the situation.

In the above examples, we see that, despite the significance that Jojo, and even Leonie, attach to the spiritual intoxications and healings of the grandparents, there is a certain disconnect between these practices and the historically particular crisis-ridden period that the younger generations face, including increasing unemployment and precarity, and evermore severe instances of police violence. As will be explored later, it is Kayla's articulation of the song through a figure of *detoxification*, rather than just intoxication, which suggests greater applicability for the crisis-ridden far hinterlands of 2010s America.

For if the "song" as a kind of grounded healing and nourishment can be read as an important avenue for resisting racialized domination and exploitation at key points of the twentieth century, providing the basis for, among other things, proto-revolutionary feminist and anti-racist consciousness raising, as Angela Y. Davis (1998) details in her study of the black female Blues tradition, the path of resistance through intoxicating musicality is less clear in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Davis underscores the importance of how artists like Bessie Smith insisted upon centralizing African American folk culture and taking seriously "the practices variously called conjure, voodoo, or hoodoo", while resisting the latter's exoticized and sensationalized forms constructed by white society (159). Such practices were essential for the artists' articulation of a "black feminist consciousness" (160). Meanwhile, Davis points to the way Gertrude "Ma" Rainey once

foregrounded the consolations and inspirations of "home", rather than uncertainty and the unknown, in her songs about travel and the road: ""Home" is evocatively and metaphorically represented as the South, conceptualized as the territorial location of historical sites of resistance to male supremacy" (80). In the 2010s South as depicted in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, however, the reassurances of spirituality and "home", though not entirely lamented as a "loss of natal affiliation" (Hartman 762),[100] are nonetheless marked by greater uncertainty. Ward frequently creates a sense that the old forms of African American resistance no longer apply and will have to be reconstructed anew, culminating in the novel's final, tentatively hopeful depiction of the next generation, in the form of Kayla. Before looking to Kayla, however, it is important to address the reactive formations or solutions hinted at during certain moments of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

Oaths of No Future

Jojo and Kayla's parents, Leonie and Michael, use and deal in drugs to cope with their bleak economic circumstances. For Leonie, whose drug use also allows her to cope with the trauma of losing her brother, Given (as evident from the fact that she is frequently haunted by the latter's ghost when she gets high), the world of drugs pulls her away from familial grounding as both parent and daughter. But Leonie's states of intoxication are not presented purely in terms of evasion and forgetting; they can also be read as (distorted) efforts to construct new worlds and mappings. As Leonie recalls her efforts to help her mother make herbal remedies, her high is described as trilling through her veins like a "discordant song" (104)—this high, rather than the spiritual teachings, constitutes Leonie's means of navigating her circumstances and surroundings. The evasion of parental duties and responsibilities that comes with her drug-binges is frequently expressed as a romantic longing for home, something unified and all-encompassing. In the following passage we can see this desire of Leonie's, which also

[100] For Hartman, in contrast to Davis, the longing for "home" in African diasporic literature cannot rid itself of the fact that "the title to home and kin emerges only in the aftermath of the dislocation and death of the Middle Passage and the social death of enslavement; in short, it is a response to the breach of separation" (764). I would argue that Hartman's specification of this longing for home as an outgrowth of the separations of slavery can be enriched, for the period of the 2010s, with a supplementary account of the continual separation imposed through processes like "free" labour and primitive accumulation.

assumes a larger spatial significance, beginning from the intimate contours of the body to embrace the entire globe:

> His [Michael's] blood thuds thickly under my ears, the skin of his arm like tepid water. The road winds through fields and wood, all the way south to the Gulf, and the light that cuts through the windows flutters all around. Where the road meets the Gulf, it skirts the beach for miles. I wish it ran straight over the water, like pictures of the bridge I've seen that links the Florida Keys to the coast, wish it was an endless concrete plank that ran out over the stormy blue water of the world to circle the globe, so I could lie like this forever, feeling the fine hair on his arm, my kids silenced, not even there, his fingers on my arm drawing circles and lines that I decipher, him writing his name on me, claiming me. The world is a tangle of jewels and gold spinning and throwing off sparks. I'm already home. (152-3)

As with Richie's vision of the golden isle, the utopian imagery evoked here has an intimate connection to place. However, such utopian images are figured alongside images connoting reactive, separating spatial formations, an apparent inextricability of heaven and hell that we also see in Richie's vision. The "stormy blue water" is subordinated to an "endless concrete plank" to "circle the globe" while Leonie's kids are "silenced" as Michael writes "his name on me, claiming me" (153). These images point not only to the incarcerating logic accompanying the racialized law of surplus land and populations, but also to a desire for domination. If only in repressed, unconscious forms, the latent nostalgia for hierarchy and domination expressed in Leonie's and Michael's drug "adventures" reflect a longing to be rid of the abject, whereby the relationship with the Other has been subsumed under a short-circuiting between the body and the landscape. Though far from articulate, such glimpses of the desire to purge the nonidentical are rendered more threatening and congruent with Neel's "oaths of blood" in the context of the absence of political alternatives under widespread wageless life in the hinterlands.

Regarding Michael, there is no concrete evidence that he participates in reactionary and racist views, in firm contrast to his parents. Despite his shortcomings, Michael is clearly a loving partner and father and distances himself from his father "Big Joseph". Yet, it is not Michael's conscious attitudes or beliefs per se that point in the direction of reactionary formations. Rather, the latter can be glimpsed through the allegorical role of Michael (and Leonie) as a drug addict, or "tweaker", in the novel. For Neel, the tweaker is a stark contemporary figure of the material deprivation that has increasingly characterized large swathes of rural America since the 1990s. The brazen

devastation and nihilism frequently accompanying representations of the meth-user is for Neel indicative of the broader economic and ecological collapse endemic to many rural American regions. Crucially, the figure of the tweaker is more open to whatever forms of organization come to fill the void of isolation, wageless life and a scorched earth:

> As even the new Christian sects collapse, a vacuum is left at the social core of the small towns and expansive counties that compose rural America. This vacuum has not yet been filled, but the tweaker is in a way a vanguard of whatever's coming. And this vanguard is neither inherently right wing nor left wing, despite the long-standing affinity between Nazis and amphetamines. The tweaker instead represents the most basic recognition of the ways in which the far hinterland has been made futureless, an organic nihilism emerging from the American countryside, unprecedented and unpredictable. (Neel 63)

This vivid description of the tweaker as a figure for the "futureless" far hinterland might seem at odds with Leonie's above-quoted desire for an encircled, jewel-tangled world. Neel's account might capture the figure of the tweaker from the outside-looking-in; however, paying closer attention to how characters like Michael fill the vacuum from the perspective of intoxication might articulate better the subjective-objective relationship between economic destitution and tendencies towards reactive politics of identity. Ward does not, however, provide a huge deal of insight into Michael's experience of intoxication, since *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is not narrated by him at any point. Rather than an interiorized state of intoxication that we witness from Leonie, Michael's relationship to the "oaths of blood" can be glimpsed through the constellations formed, in Ward's novel, between Michael's drug habits and some of his significant interactions and relationships with other characters.

Firstly, the aforementioned desire for order and projection of false reconciliation, at the exclusion and even domination of others, which is glimpsed through Leonie's drug-high, is more readily apparent in a key interaction between Michael and Jojo. Michael cooks bacon for the children and prompts Jojo to remember an earlier fishing trip when Michael opened up about working on the oil rig. The reader is initially drawn to a discrepancy between Michael clumsily poking the bacon and leaving it sizzling in oil despite it being "already maroon and stiff" (226), and Michael's apparent embryonic identification with the Earth. Yet even this identification is littered with hunting metaphors, references to blood, and the taming of water. What begins as Michael's

attempt to explain what really happened to Jojo's uncle, Given, is recounted by Jojo in the following way:

> Michael pokes the bacon. That night on the dock, he didn't tell me how or why Uncle Given left. Instead, he told me about working out on the rig. How he liked working through the night so when the sun was rising, the ocean and the sky were one thing, and it felt like he was in a perfect egg. How the sharks were birds, like hawks, hunting the water. How they were drawn to the reef that grew up around the rig, how they struck under the pillars, white in the darkness, like a knife under dark skin. How blood followed them, too. (225)

This mythic framing of nature as enclosed ("a perfect egg") and also an unmediated cycle of violence ("like a knife under dark skin . . . blood followed them, too") (225)—that is, unmediated by human social processes—betrays a latent desire to dominate the Other or the nonidentical. Michael's framing in some ways parallels Horkheimer and Adorno's articulation of how the archetypal subject of enlightenment identifies wholly with a reconciled image of unmediated nature only to place nonidentical nature under firmer control. Odysseus, Horkheimer and Adorno's ideal Western subject, "achieves his estrangement of nature by abandoning himself to nature, trying his strength against it in all his adventures" (38). Likewise, Michael hardens his own sense of self, in the face of dangerous work on the oil rig, by giving himself over to a blissful image of nature. Yet Michael's fantasy of an unmediated access to nature also mirrors Leonie's drug high as a romantic yet frozen response to severe circumstances, as detailed earlier. In both characters' cases, such circumstances refer to (though to different degrees and levels of awareness) economic precarity and the death of someone close (Given).

As Jojo continues to recount the fishing trip, the reader learns more about how deeply the Bridgewater Horizon oil spill affected Michael. Michael says he "*actually cried*" [italics in text] at the dying dolphins "oil-burnt, sick with lesions", washed up on the shores of Florida, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi (226), but Jojo attaches most significance to Michael's following remarks:

> Some scientists for BP said this didn't have nothing to do with the oil, that sometimes this is what happens to animals: they die for unexpected reasons. Sometimes a lot of them. Sometimes all at once. And then Michael looked at me and said: And when that scientist said that, I thought about humans. Because humans is animals. And the way he looked at me that night told me he wasn't just thinking about any humans; he was

> thinking about me. I wonder if Michael thought that yesterday, when he saw that gun, saw that cop push me down so I bowed to the dirt. (226)

The logic implied here is that the ideology dictating that animals sometimes “die for unexpected reasons”, backed up by a corporate-scientific alliance (“scientists for BP”), shorn of any account of mediation, parallels a concern for humanity shorn of any awareness of mediating structural conditions such as systemic racism. Jojo questions Michael’s genuine concern in an instance of racist police violence, not just on the grounds of carelessness but in relation to a broader structuring ideology that lacks awareness of mediation, of the violent negativity that governs the lives of those deemed disposable by capitalism.

The way in which Michael’s offers of familial reassurance to Jojo are immediately undermined by his violent punishing of Kayla for rolling around on the floor (“smacking [her] hard on the thigh, once and twice, his face as pale and tight as a knot” (228)), reinforces this imbrication of a desire for “home” with violent, authoritarian impulses. Chevalier reads this scene of Michael beating Kayla as indicative of the contradiction whereby the “hegemonic status” of whiteness can only ever extend sympathy to nature but not to racialized Others:

> As a sign of white male patriarchy, Michael mourns the earth he refuses to protect, and fails his own family. His failure as a father is also figured in his language; he “punctuates each word with a slap,” as he physically disciplines Kayla in this scene (228). In this racialized (political) world, Michael’s identification with nature is ultimately short-circuited by his positionality in white patriarchy. (227)

Yet, as I have already suggested, Michael’s treatment of his daughter does not occur *despite* a positive, reconciled relationship to nature. Identification with nature is not akin to mourning it. Rather, Michael’s mimetic relationship with nature is already hardened, marked by an effort to persevere through hardship by grasping the object of nature through identification without remainder. Michael’s violent outburst at Kayla results from how he perceives his daughter to disrupt a comforting image of nature without mediation and abjection, a disruption whereby “whatever residue of uncontrolled or uncontrollable (non-identical) nature remains elicits an automatic response of revulsion” (Gandesha 99). Discussion of this scene with Michael and his kids therefore prompts further consideration of some of the surrounding economic factors to Michael’s framing of both non-human nature and racialized subjects, factors which Chevalier does not address in

her reading. Furthermore, grasping such material objectivity highlights that Michael's inability to recognize the nonidentity between his subjective desire for identification and the ruined landscape of nature's preponderant objectivity is not a personal failure, an incorrect ethical standpoint, but rather is an allegorical instance of the reactionary impulses rippling through the crisis capitalism of the U.S. 2010s hinterlands.

On the one hand, as already suggested, the prevalence of economic precarity appears to contribute significantly to Michael and Leonie's escapism and desire for a frictionless world devoid of antagonism. As mentioned in the introduction, what Neel calls the exclusionary "oaths of blood" that characterize contemporary right-wing formations and networks is frequently rooted in material, land-based relations against exploitation through state-imposed rents. For Gandesha, who draws on both Adorno and Neel, manifestations of authoritarian personalities that are found in the recent rise of far-right populism can be traced to tensions between the ideals of self-actualization and freedom offered by the political sphere and the "increasing heteronomy within the "economic" realm" (Gandesha 102). There is thus an objective material basis for the psychological phenomenon of the authoritarian personality among the lower echelons of society, whereby "[i]ndividuals constantly fall short of their ego ideals as a result of which there is a corresponding proliferation of guilt, anxiety, frustration and ultimately anger" (Gandesha 102). The material impoverishment of the far hinterlands becomes fertile ground for reactionary politics; while Michael is clearly not engaged with this kind of politics in any explicit, concrete way, his oscillation between (false) reconciliation with nature and aggression indicates traces of an authoritarian personality, potentially susceptible to some form of blood-based politics.

On the other hand, beyond Michael's own personality traits, Michael's relationship with his own father, a member of the upper class and the world of law enforcement, points further to the reactionary formations and impulses arising in response to capitalism's crises. For Leonie, the figure of Joseph, Michael's father, former sheriff and owner of a large estate, looms over Michael despite his rejection of his family's ways and willingness to "see" Leonie beyond the colour of her skin (54). Leonie cannot avoid noting the physical similarities between the two men, their large frames resembling "the way a house settles into the earth underneath it" (54). This physical resemblance is present despite how Michael is the "balm" to Leonie's "walking wound" (54). The grounding and nourishment that Michael provides Leonie, mediated through

the self-soothing of their shared meth usage, has dark undertones that frequently form grim associations with the fate of Leonie's brother, whose murder was covered up as a "hunting accident" by Joseph. Leonie's visions of Given while under the influence highlight this dark association, while the above reflections on the similarities between Michael and Joseph directly precede a distressing incident involving Leonie and Joseph. After Leonie leaves a note explaining her plan to collect Michael from prison, Joseph suddenly turns his lawn mower toward Leonie, whom he despises. While Leonie escapes the confrontation, she observes Joseph pick up his rifle from the seat of the mower, "something he keeps for wild pigs that root in the forest, but not for them now" (56). Through Leonie the reader is also made aware of the children's intuitions of Joseph's impending racist outburst and violence toward Michael, just before meeting Michael's parents as a family for the first time. Leonie, still shaken from the ordeal of ingesting large quantities of meth, observes "a dark constellation of blood" on Kayla's forehead and Jojo hearing "like an animal and [taking] a step back toward the car" (203). Joseph guards his land, seeking to purge it of what constitutes for him the nonidentity of non-human animals and non-whites, and such associated imagery is never far from the shadowy corners of Leonie's and Michael's enclosed drug rituals.

Overall, these constellations of intoxication and drugs, via Michael and Leonie's escapism, gesture at the broader class compositions, antagonisms and reactionary projects of the far hinterland. Nevertheless, it is important to note, as Neel, Alberto Toscano and others have,[101] that the rise of far-right politics in deindustrialized spaces is not wholly attributable to a misguided but nonetheless truthful expression of proletarian anger and resentment. Certainly, one should not overlook the extent to which far-right networks channel real material anger at "the extraction of rents from an unwilling population in the far hinterland" (Neel 14). Yet, in overstating neo-fascist politics as something like a "return of the white working class", accounts of contemporary fascism can end up overlooking the role of wider upper class interests and involvement in such politics. As Neel notes, these far-right formations and their desire for "the *return* of worlds amid the collapse of the world-shattering rituals of capital" (57) are actually frequently ideological foils for the material interests of petty proprietors and other sections of the middle-to-upper classes. Moreover, these material interests are often

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[101] See Alberto Toscano, "Notes on Late Fascism" (2017).

upheld by the very “liberal elites”—someone like Al, perhaps—that the right purports to be against:

> The material core of the far right is instead the whitening exurb, the actual home of most Patriots and Third Positionists, which acts as an interface between the metropolitan and non-metropolitan, allowing the wealthier landholders, business owners, cops soldiers, or self-employed contractors to recruit from adjacent zones of abject white poverty, essentially funneling money from their own employment in urban industry into hinterland politics projects. (Neel 57)

Michael and Leonie, through their enclosed escape of the meth high, frequently bear traces of an oath—not of water or even really blood, but of no future. The worlds of these characters, constructed against the backdrop of economic heteronomy, are ones in which the presence of the nonidentical, what is surplus to atomized addiction and intoxication, frequently becomes intolerable, as evident in Michael’s beating of Kayla moments after his romantic identification with the earth, and Leonie’s inability to recognize the reality of Given’s ghost beyond “whatever weird corner of my brain calls him up when [she is] high” (150). In Ward’s novel, intoxication can be read as a hinge figure, around which reactionary tendencies, as well as material relationships to unfulfilled needs, coalesce.

Detoxifying Flood

If in the above examples Michael and Leonie tend toward the purging of the nonidentical and Otherness, Ward’s novel also hints at a more radical understanding of “detoxification”. In terms of its role in the novel, detoxification does not amount to a straightforward denunciation of drug use and other potentially harmful consumption habits, but rather can be read as a utopian impulse against the toxic, racialized stranglehold over space and bodily needs conducted through value-relations in the far hinterlands. Detoxification, in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, is something like the dialectical negation of intoxication, yet is nonidentical with the latter. As shown throughout this dissertation, I read both figures—the first associated with the attainment of different states of consciousness, the second with purging and a kind of asceticism—as allegories of capitalism’s crises, mapping the relationships and dissonances between the individual and the system. But detoxification in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, primarily through the figure of Kayla, also draws the reader’s attention to what resists narrativization. At

the end of Ward's novel, Kayla's communication with the dead through an incomprehensible song of "half-garbled words" (284) is associated with the soothing and cleansing qualities of water. Moreover, the novel's end on this sense of embodied healing points at a limitation to Jojo's and Leonie's recurring desire to "see" the origins of their family's grief and trauma, instead allowing the "multitude" of ghosts in the trees to shudder, in remembrance and ease, but not leave (283).

The non-narrative figuration of ghosts found broadly within literatures and theories of the African diaspora opens the way for reading resistance in and against racial capitalism. Congruent with her broader theoretical concern with articulating the figure of the ghost as "a crucible for political mediation and historical memory [which] has no other choice than to refuse the unreconstructed spectacle" (18), Avery Gordon (2008) argues that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) emblematizes an "other sociology" that deploys the non-representational form of the ghost to address the unspoken and forgotten voices of North American slavery (Gordon 150). *Beloved,* a novel that Ward has cited as an influence for *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, tells the story of an African American mother (Sethe) in the nineteenth century who is haunted by the ghost of her child, Beloved, whom Sethe killed to prevent her from living a life of slavery. Like River's completion of the story revealing his mercy killing of Richie, Morrison's novel slowly unravels the unspeakable mercy killing of Beloved at the hands of Sethe, but for both Morrison and Ward the narrative closure does not signal resolution and the ghosts of slavery persist. For Gordon, the persistence of the spectral is a reminder of the persistent horror at the root of exchange society:

> The presence of the ghost informs us that the over and done with "extremity" of a domestic and international slavery has not entirely gone away, even if it seems to have passed into the register of history and symbol . . . [the task] involves confronting the trauma of the Middle Passage, confronting what reaches down deep beneath the waters or beneath the symbolics of emancipation, free labor, free citizen. This trauma links the origin of Slavery with a capital S to the origin of modern American freedom, to the paradigmatic and value-laden operations of the capitalist market. This is a market whose exchange relations continue to transform the living into the dead, a system of social relations that fundamentally objectifies and dominates in a putatively free society. The Middle Passage is the decisive episode that establishes the amnesiac conditions of American freedom: emancipation as enslavement. (168-9)

First published in 1997, Gordon's text perhaps reads as somewhat dated since the intensification of mass incarceration and police violence through the 2000s and 2010s reaffirms the contemporary political urgency of slavery's afterlives and legacies, beyond merely a "register of history and symbol". There is a moment in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* where Michael's lawyer, Al, reveals the name of his urn containing his meth as "my Baby: my Beloved" (148). Rather than just the persistence of historical trauma, however, the reference to Morrison's text here immediately moves to a description of consumption and need, with Leonie responding to the presence of Al's drugs thus:

> I pull out the pack and Michael looks as if he wants to turn and run—and then like I am holding his favorite food, macaroni and cheese, and he wants to eat. Instead, he grabs my hand and pulls me toward him, surrounds me, breathes heavy into the hair at my temple, making it flutter. Five minutes later, we are high. (148)

In this final section of the Chapter, I want to underscore the connections that Ward frequently makes between the non-narrative spectral and the material bodily needs of consumption, whether manifest through drug-escapism or hunger. Ward's deployment of the ghost not only opens alternative ways of seeing, as Gordon argues through Morrison, but additionally registers capital's crises through intimate consumption and the nonfulfillment of needs.

Before arguing for this connection between the spectral and bodily need in more detail, I want to address some of the issues around theoretical accounts that frame the ghostly in relation to similar but less historically materially grounded concerns of embodiment. In particular, the emphasis on ontological or hauntological relationality that characterizes other non-narrative framings of black resistance, for example in Afro-pessimism, can come at the price of a resignation from politics altogether. Non-narrative form plays a key role in Afro-pessimism insofar as many of its theorists underscore the fundamental, persistent "social death" that has marked black subjects since slavery, and which cannot be eradicated within a modern world that is historically premised on the Othering of black life. Afro-pessimism denotes a broad range of theoretical discourse, growing in the twenty-first century in tandem with the increased visibility of black suffering, concerned with the fundamental anti-Blackness of modernity and the seeming impossibility of eradicating such anti-Blackness from all civil and progressive movements

and discourses.[102] Frank Wilderson III (2014), for example, argues that progressive politics largely does not reckon with the social death of blackness as "a condition, void, not of land, but of a capacity to secure relational status through transindividual objects—be those objects elaborated by land, labour or love" (*The Black Liberation Army* 9). In other words, for Wilderson the goals of progressive reallocation and redistribution of resources and social reproduction mean little if they leave untouched this ontological condition of void relational status, the anti-Blackness upon which Western liberal democracy is ultimately premised. Wilderson underscores the difficulty, for black subjects, of engaging with the political discourses of Marxism, for example, given the latter's imbrication in modernity's anti-Blackness:

> The inherent anti-Blackness of political discourse can be discerned by discovering the anti-Blackness of narrative itself, by examining how the ontology of basic elements which constitute narrative are themselves constituted by the violence of slavery and how and why the narrative elements cannot be assimilated by genealogical isolates. (9)

Resistance, it would seem for Wilderson, must be conceived solely in the domain of non-narrative relationality rather than narrative political discourse.

While Afro-pessimism importantly articulates the non-narrative persistence of violent, racialized social and property relations under centuries of capitalism, Wilderson's refusal of narrative precludes the possibility of anti-racist, anti-imperialist-informed politics centred around the material processes of, for example, racialized surplus populations in America. As Kevin Ochieng Okoth (2020) argues in his critique of Afro-pessimism, the latter's emphasis on the supposed unique ontological relationality of blackness-as-social-death ignores the global "political and intellectual tradition that has tried to bring the interconnection between race, neocolonialism and imperialism to the forefront of radical politics" (n.p.). Okoth argues that while "we can acknowledge that racism has been written into the 'base' of capitalism . . . [and that] as with the Césaires' strategic essentialism, there is a space for the affirmation of a positive Blackness directed at challenging colonial prejudices still tied into the national fabric of states in the

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[102] As Annie Olaloku-Teriba (2018) notes, the discourse of Afro-pessimism can be difficult to pinpoint because over recent years "Culture, society and political struggle have all had the Afro-pessimist gaze turned on them, churning out articles and citations in large numbers" (96). However, Olaloku goes on to highlight that it is the work of Wilderson and Jared Sexton that originally announced and set the parameters of the discourse. Similarly, my discussion and critiques of Afro-pessimism are largely levelled at aspects of Wilderson's work.

Global North" (n.p.), the emphasis on ontological relationality in writers like Wilderson severs Blackness from "the global historical context in which racialised subjects emerged" (n.p.).[103]

In my following readings of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, I distance myself from accounts such as Wilderson's that delink the important non-narrative, ghostly figurations of slavery's afterlives in African diasporic culture from any notion of progressive politics. While not an Afro-pessimist, Chevalier's own overemphasis on ontological relationality, as noted earlier, mirrors some of Afro-pessimism's disconnection from cross-racial materialist investigation into processes such as uneven development and the creation of surplus populations. The persistence of non-narrative does not warrant the dismantling of narrative. The nonidentity of narrative and non-narrative form must be retained for any politics and ethics of needs situated against the value-form's logics of compulsion, dependency and crisis. I therefore argue instead that *Sing, Unburied, Sing*'s non-narrative limitations, through their frequent associations with not only the ghostly but also bodily need, gesture toward broader future struggles likely centered around reproduction and consumption (without affirming any actual or potential revolutionary energies), in and against exhausted social reproductive relations.

Sing, Unburied, Sing recurrently foregrounds the bodily needs of its main characters. This can be seen in the novel's frequent sensual descriptions of hunger and thirst. For instance, in Leonie's recollection of Philoméne describing the realization that she could hear voices beyond the spoken word, Philoméne says she heard the pangs of hunger in her own mother (Leonie's grandmother):

> "When I was younger, my Mama complained about her stomach, how she had ulcers. They was sounding to me, saying, *We eat, we eat, we eat*; I was confused and kept asking her if she was hungry." (41)

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[103] With reference to the comparative study of race in the U.S. and Brazil in Denise Ferreira da Silva's work, Okoth further contends that attending to such material global processes of racialization means

> we can avoid US-centric ontological (supposedly universal) conceptions of Blackness while simultaneously emphasising the histories of interconnection between Black populations across the world. In short, the object of analysis is not the afterlife of slavery but the multiplicity of afterlives of slavery and colonisation; the aim is to study how these exist within a global system structured by imperialism. (n.p.)

Meanwhile, as the group on the road departs the meth cook's home, Jojo describes an unimaginable "plenty" of cases of soda, "cases of soup, cases of crackers, cases of toilet paper and paper towels . . . So much food the boxes of it reach to the ceiling in the living room. I am hungry and thirsty: my throat a closing hand, my stomach a burning fist" (84). Jojo later steals some crackers and juice from the home, silently and stealthily sharing them with Kayla as his "stomach burns" (80). Indeed, Jojo importantly intuits Kayla's sickness as matters of hunger and thirst: "Kayla need to eat . . . I can tell there's something wrong with her stomach" (107); "Kayla is thirsty. She's drunk half of it, and she's pulling hard on the spout, her lips puckered like it's a bottle" (116). Such importance attached to the basic need of hunger for poor black people living in the U.S. South has been described by Ward in many of her other works.[104] Yet *Sing, Unburied, Sing* also contains many references to the need for relief not only through nourishment but also through the purging of the body. At moments of anxiety and danger, both Jojo and Leonie express a desire to expunge the contents of their bodies. For example, the traumatic meeting with Michael's parents makes Leonie wish she could "throw up everything . . . organs all, bones and muscle, until all that was left was skin" (207).

We can see this reoccurring figure of detoxification play out on a broader political level by returning to the encounter with the police officer. As the group are pulled over by a police officer, Leonie frantically swaps seats with Michael (who does not have a driver's license) and ingests a whole bag of meth before the car is inevitably searched. Upon being questioned, Leonie instantly realizes her mistake in revealing that the group are travelling home from Parchman prison: "The handcuffs are on me before the *n* is silent" (162)—little is required for police terror to proceed apace on racialized subjects. As she begins to hallucinate from the drugs, Leonie describes herself suffocating, first

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[104] See, for example, Ward's 2018 article in *The Atlantic* in which she gives a startling account of growing up in Mississippi:

> My mother says we never starved, and this is true. I had it better than my grandparents and my mother did when they were young, but I remember hunger. I think it was the hunger of childhood, the need for fuel to grow, but it was blinding sometimes. Sometimes not even the food in my belly appeased it. I recall eating four hot dogs once and still feeling as if my stomach were filled not with food but with air. The hunger was most insistent during and after hurricanes, when crackers and Vienna sausages and sardines were meals. When I was a teen, I read Richard Wright's memoir, *Black Boy*, read of him putting his mouth under a water faucet as a child growing up in Mississippi and drinking until he could swallow no more, so that his belly would fill with something, anything. The familiarity of that unquenchable desire floored me. (n.p.)

from the baggie caught in her throat, and then from the squeezing, shaking “great hand” of the high kicking in. Such language around suffocation (“I can hardly breathe” (161)) resonates with the murder of Eric Garner and the subsequent consciousness-raising, protests, and direct actions against police brutality during the 2010s. Meanwhile the near shooting of Jojo as he reaches into his pocket for his gris-gris bag alludes to the police murder of Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old boy who, apparently perceived by the officers to be drawing a weapon, was merely playing with a toy gun.

Leonie’s ingestion of the drugs is framed by Ward as a survival mechanism, a necessary act to stop the actual or “civic death” of “a lifetime of shame, contempt, scorn, and exclusion” (Alexander 142) resulting from incarceration. Leonie’s intoxication-as-survival-mechanism in this scene could be contrasted with what she earlier remarks on as the out-of-step herbal intoxications taught to her by her mother. Indeed, the “golden toss of vomit” emitted by Kayla that ultimately saves Jojo is partly a result of Leonie giving her daughter a concoction composed of a misremembered herbal remedy that upsets Kayla’s stomach further. On the other hand, Leonie’s swallowing of the drugs, pushing her body and drug high to an extreme level, culminates in both the detoxification of Leonie’s body through Michael’s concoction of milk and charcoal (a remedy that, despite Jojo’s misgivings, as with his doubts over the effectiveness of Leonie’s stomach remedy, ultimately saves Leonie) and Kayla’s “golden toss of vomit”. These detoxifying acts are prefigured by a moment earlier in the chapter, just before the encounter with the officer, as Leonie, only semi-conscious, reminisces fondly about how her mother soothed her, evoking images of water and cleansing:

> I knew she [Philoméne] was calling on Our Lady of Regla. On the Star of the Sea. That she was invoking Yemaya, the goddess of the ocean and salt water, with her shushing and her words, and that she was holding me like the goddess, her arms all the life-giving waters of the world. (159)

Situated, in the same chapter, alongside the detoxification figured through both Kayla and Michael, this blissful reminiscence suggests that some element of alternative traditions may help subjects survive, if not resist, contemporary capitalism.

However, Ward’s earlier evocation of the archaic figure of conjure in the healing woman (Martin 119) does not ultimately provide a sense of positive representation for African American culture, a returning of the conjure “to the status of honoured ancestor and spiritual leader” (Martin 129). In the end, the appearance and role of Given’s ghost

in the cop scene underlines detoxification as a response to the heteronomous conditions of racial capitalism. Kayla's vomiting over the officer is caused, at least from Leonie's hallucinatory perspective, by the intervention of "Phantom Given". The figure of the ghost here braids together archaic magical elements, themes of survival, and the presence of the historical trauma that seemingly escapes narrativization. Michael pushes for the purging of Leonie's body through the charcoal-milk mixture just as the Leonie arrives at a moment of apparent illumination, perceiving that "Phantom Given is the heart of a clock and his leaving makes the rest of it tick tock tick tock, makes the road unfurl, the trees whip, the rain stream, the wipers swish" (167). Amidst the violent atemporality of the traffic-cop scene, as relayed by an intoxicated Leonie, in which a scene typical of life among poor blacks in America is played out again, the novel narrativizes the entwinement of atemporality and temporality for racialized populations in the U.S. Intoxication provides a moment of historical grounding, whereby the "leaving" or disappearing of a black subject (Given) is shown to be a precondition for the temporality of capitalist progress to unfold, making the "rest of it tick tock" and putting non-human nature—"the road . . . trees . . . the wipers"—to work. This connection between temporality and atemporality amid the terror of racialized state violence is captured by Christina Sharpe (2016) in the following:

> Transatlantic slavery was and is the disaster. The disaster of Black subjection was and is planned; terror is disaster and "terror has a history" . . . and it is deeply atemporal. The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery. The disaster and the writing of disaster are never present, are always present. (5)

The purging of the Phantom Given hallucination from Leonie is a narrative precondition for both her intoxicated insight into the "disaster" of racial capitalism and her subsequent detoxification (178-9).

Yet, in framing Phantom Given as both "the heart of a clock" and also that which must be purged for "the rest of it" to function, the passage also foregrounds a moment of non-narrative stasis. The paradoxical living death of Phantom Given that is highlighted in this section can again be read in relation to Afro-pessimism. For Franco Barchiesi (2012), for example, African American experience and remembering are marred by the "unnameable" loss of transatlantic slavery, making "subjective narrativization [of African American experience] impossible" (10). However, I would argue that the inextricability of these non-narrative moments of the novel from sensuous articulations of consumption

and bodily need does not collapse questions of subjective narrativization altogether. In the scene presently under discussion, the dramatization of Phantom Given is surrounded by immensely affective descriptions of Leonie's body high, for example,

> I bend in half, my mouth in my elbow and knees, and moan. Wish it was Mama's lap. My jaw clacks and grinds. I swallow. I breathe. All delicious and damned. (167)

Similarly, upon hearing the completion of River's story concerning Richie's tragic fate, Richie's scream—not, as Jojo initially perceives, a song—suggests that his sudden vision of "everything beyond us . . . past the highways and towns back to the swamps and stands of trees hundreds of years old" (256) exceeds the boundaries of narrative sense-making. The only thing that renders palpable the racial trauma is, as Pop describes, the persistent smell of blood—over the course of two pages, the word "smell" is here repeated by Ward eleven times, accompanied by other intensely sensual descriptions of Pop's life in the years following his mercy killing (256-7). The way in which Ward consistently weaves together non-narrative themes with sensuous descriptions of taste, smell and consumption shows that consumption is a crucially persistent concern in the novel. The continual presence of unfulfilled needs in a capitalist system marked by exhausted social relations, a system which continually prioritizes accumulation and the management of surpluses and crises over human well-being, is one of the most important features of the novel. The presence of unfulfilled material needs is underscored through the novel's narrative limits, but these limits are nevertheless narrativized through the individual characters. The non-narrativizable content in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* does not merely signify the continual presence of Blackness as an ontological lack but points to a dialectical interplay with subjectively articulated consumption needs, which themselves are inextricable from a broader narrative of the capitalist mode of production.

Ward's novel closes by foregrounding the political significance of those that persist after the story (in particular of Richie, Philoméne, Leonie and Michael) ends. Jojo encounters Richie again, who explains that he is one of many ghosts that cannot successfully "find home" and leave their purgatorial state behind. Alongside Richie, Ward details the presence of a "black-knuckled multitude" of ghosts that remain on the land, and they are described by Richie thus: "So many of us . . . Hitting. The wrong keys. Wandering against. The song" (282). Jojo then witnesses Richie transform into a snake

and ascend a tree “full with ghosts . . . women and men and boys and girls [some of them] near to babies . . . Black and brown and the closest near baby, smoke white” (282). Though none of the ghosts reveal their deaths, Jojo can perceive the causes “in their eyes” and he subsequently details a succession of the horrors surrounding their prior living fates (282-3). While this vivid moment is predominantly focused on racist murders, detailing fragmentary accounts of life as a slave, of lynching and of police brutality, Ward suggests in her mentioning of the nearest baby that, again, whites are not exempt from ravages of the system. The multitude of ghosts stretching far through the trees seemingly encompasses the growth of surplus populations across identity lines, whose fate is inseparable from the management of and contestation over future land surpluses and climate breakdowns.

However, it is not Jojo but Kayla who possesses the right language to communicate with the dead. Indeed, a contrast between the two generations of Leonie and Kayla in how each relates to the dead and the accompanying figure of water is established in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*’s final two chapters. Whereas Leonie ultimately succumbs wholly to intoxication, Kayla’s communication with the dead in the final chapter retains a dialectical relationship between intoxication and detoxification, invoking Philoméne’s healing practices, her attention to needs, not as a means of purging the present of its hauntings but of gesturing at the reproductive dimensions of present and future political struggles among exploited subjects in the near and far hinterlands.

Philoméne’s death and Given’s “second leaving” push Leonie and Michael further away from their parental responsibilities, as they indulge road trips and their drug habits to the extreme. As Leonie describes the solidification of her and Michael’s enclosed world, where they “pretend at forgetting” (275), Ward again deploys water imagery to convey the characters’ relationship to their material surroundings: “Our world: an aquarium” (274). The condensing of Leonie’s past trauma (her inability to “breathe”) into a “dome of glass” (274) figures a temporary protective shield against the oncoming “floods” of multiple socio-economic and political crises. Here we can also read connections to Ward’s previous novel *Salvage the Bones*, which depicts a family in the build up to and aftermath of hurricane Katrina.[105] Despite the family’s efforts, they are

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[105] Katrina and its aftermaths, as a contemporary allegory of racial inequality in America, is a lingering presence throughout all of Ward’s work, as Vinson Cunningham (2017) of the *New Yorker* puts it:

ultimately left open and vulnerable by racist society to the devastation of Katrina's floods. The novel's narrator, Esch, frequently invokes the figure of Medea, a maternal protector whose victimhood at the hand of gendered domination pushes her to destroy what she holds dear. Just as Medea kills her children to protect them from Jason, and just as Sethe kills Beloved to rid her of a life of slavery, Leonie's figurative effort to shield herself against the oncoming floods destroys her relationship with her children and underlines the imbrication of protection with domination in a world where global human needs are not prioritized.

Furthermore, the novel's depiction of the need to separate one's individual self from the water may figure a broader blockage to committing an "oath of water", to committing to larger proletarian struggles across time and space, as outlined by Neel. In contrast, Kayla, as described by Jojo, is calm in "the way she takes all the pieces of everybody and holds them together" (284). Her "half-garbled" song to the tree of ghosts at the end of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is described as comforting because it is "like she remembers the sound of the water in Leonie's womb, the sound of all water" (285). This extension of the maternal associations of water to "the sound of all water" is significant in the context of contemporary struggles. The "the sound of all water" points at an ecological, non-exclusionary relationship to what Neel vividly describes as the floods of crises surrounding the future generations. One can read the identification with water at the end of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* in relation to Neel's "proto-communist oath . . . not unified by identity but by a reflective fidelity to the unrest itself" (Neel 155). Although the ghosts are comforted by Kayla, the image of the multitude in the rural landscape here figures an inclusive community spread "further", "longer" by "those within the hinterland [increasingly] thrown into a condition of survival on the edge of the wage relation" (Neel 170), those of the disproportionately impacted younger generations who may "decide to seek nothing but further erosion, the growth of the flood" (Neel 155). Unlike Leonie and Michael, Kayla does not shy away from the oncoming flood.

Only one of her books, "Salvage the Bones", which won the 2011 National Book Award for Fiction, takes Katrina as its primary subject, but the storm lingers, ghostlike, in the others, operating as a grand, whooshing metaphor for the vulnerability—physical, emotional, environmental—of the residents of rural Bois Sauvage, the fictional Mississippi coastal town in which all her novels are set. ("Jesmyn Ward's Haunted Novel of the Gulf Coast", n.p.)

Neel argues that the extra-urban riots such as those of Ferguson prefigure wider struggles based around the increasingly populated but impoverished hinterlands; as well, such struggles will likely centre around climate change because of the increasing exposure of these areas to events like wildfires. The wider struggles, the larger floods, gestured at by Kayla's interactions in the final moments of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, certainly foreground the role of the non-human. The multitude of ghosts are described by Ward as a kind of human/non-human assemblage: "They perch like birds, but look as people" (282). Yet this framing does not ultimately posit an alternative, ecologically informed ontology capable of dismantling Western Enlightenment, as we earlier saw argued by Chevalier. Rather, Ward foregrounds political struggles over the means of survival and needs in the hinterlands. She does so by figuring the social reproductive dimensions of the ghosts. For, as Richie explains to Jojo moments before Kayla's communication with the dead, the inability of the ghosts to depart, to return home, stems from a failure to register the needs of the dead:

> "I can't. Come inside. I tried. Yesterday. There has to be some need, some lack. Like a keyhole. Makes it so I can come in. But after all that— your mam, your uncle. Your mama. I can't. You've"—he makes that break-sucking sound again— "changed. Ain't no need. Or at least, ain't no need big enough for a key." (281)

Richie cannot enter home because a need has not been identified. The unmet needs—the hunger and thirst, for example—that Ward describes across all her work, as at the heart of the racism embedded within Mississippi, is the "subtext" of the stories told by generations of black Americans, but here these needs are laid out in bare fragments. Ward's predominant use of caesura here points to a non-narrative arrest in the story, punctuating the narrative with the urgency of the unmet needs that persist as capitalism's crises endure.

As the ghosts of Richie and the multitude "do not leave . . . don't still, don't rise, don't ascend and disappear" (284), Kayla's acceptance of these persistent hauntings further draws attention to the persistence of unmet needs. Rather than the completion of a narrative, as provided by River's telling of Richie's fate, Kayla sings "a song of mismatched, half-garbled words, nothing that [Jojo] can understand" (284). In a manner that brings together the magical intoxications of her grandmother and the detoxifying survival instincts of her parents, Kayla's non-narrative, cathartic song of "mismatched, half-garbled words" evokes maternal comfort and prompts the ghosts to "open their

mouths wider . . . so they look like they're crying, but they can't" and ultimately "smile with something like relief, something like remembrance, something like ease" (284). The reassertion of the "lack" or unmet needs of the ghosts—Richie's missing keyhole—through the multitude's open mouths[106] and inability to cry is not a cause for resignation, as evident from how "something like relief" is still found. The figure of the child, Kayla, is a figure for the future which does not posit growth, but rather the 'oaths of water" that encompass all "excluded" populations and foreground the minimal utopian demand to fulfil needs that remain systematically neglected and unfulfilled. Even the coarseness of this demand to fulfil the lack created by capitalism, however, may prefigure, as Adorno claims in "Theses on Need", forms of flourishing beyond present comprehension:

> The demand for production solely in view of the satisfaction of needs belongs to prehistory, to a world in which production is not organized according to need, but in view of profit and the establishment of domination, and in which lack therefore prevails. If lack disappeared, then the relation between need and satisfaction would itself be transformed . . . To be useless [*unnütz*] will then no longer be shameful. Conformity will lose its sense. Productivity in its genuine, undisfigured sense will, for the first time, have a real effect on need: not by assuaging unsatisfied need with useless things, but rather because satisfied need will make it possible to relate to the world without knocking it into shape through universal usefulness [*Nützlichkeit*]. (104)

A mode of production oriented around the satisfaction of needs, "even and especially those produced by capitalism" (103), would likely move intoxication beyond the isolated, enclosed forms embodied in those like Leonie and Michael.[107] To be intoxicated by the non-human world might instead resemble a half-garbled melody "which is low but as loud as the swish and sway of the trees that cuts their whispering but twines with it at the same time" (Ward 284), where communication with nature is no longer stamped with the imposition of usefulness.

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[106] "[T]he Mississippi I grew up in, the Mississippi that I live in now, that I'm raising my children in . . . resists the desire to rise above the circumstance of caste that we are born into and to never worry about the next time you'll eat or whether your children are hungry. The desire to avoid having to feed your children the cheapest, most filling food you can—beans and rice one day, hot dogs the next—and still see them openmouthed" (Ward, "Racism is 'Built Into the Very Bones' of Mississippi" n.p.).

[107] Even while, as Adorno's remarks about the fulfilment of needs produced by capitalism indicate, such a mode of production would satisfy the material factors and utopian longings underpinning Leonie and Michael's intoxications.

At the very least, Kayla's incomprehensible yet somehow resonating melody prompts us to ask what "floods", emerging out of manifold crises, might arise in the decades ahead. Just as Neel can only identify a nameless "approaching flood" with the beats of "guns cocking over trap snares unrolling to infinity" (175), Ward ends her book by constellating pieces of economic and ecological crisis through fragmentary sounds, unable to cohere the polyphony into a narrativizable form.

Overall, Ward's novel illuminates the crisis-ridden contemporary by mapping the latter's ideological and utopian elements in the far hinterland. Such allegories reaffirm the political stakes of intoxication not solely through Kayla's non-narrative polyphonic flood, nor Jojo's animism, nor Leonie's intoxication-as-survival, nor Michael's proto-authoritarian identification with the Earth, nor Richie's startling visions of the long history of racial domination, but through reading all these intoxications together at once in a constellation.

Conclusion

This dissertation has shown how three addiction narratives allegorize the intensified forms of separation marking capital's economic and ecological crises in 2010s North America. Although each of the three texts are situated in distinct North American spaces, *Heaven Knows What*, *Luk'Luk'I* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* all combine social realism with irrealist interruptions and arrestations to stage what I have been terming a negative dialectic between narrative sense-making and non-narrative stasis and pause. The formal and thematic non-narrative limitations apparent in each of the texts analyzed do not merely underline failed efforts to map an increasingly opaque capitalist totality. Rather, the way that such negative dialectical dramas are staged on the level of bodily need and crises in consumption habits underlines the fundamental discordance between capitalist expansion and the needs of the planet. Given the unravelling of capital's crisis tendencies following the 2008 global financial crisis, symptoms such as addiction and overdose, during the 2010s, increasingly belie North American capitalism's capacity to shore up social reproduction through wage increases and social safety nets. The latter were, in part, possible following the end of the Second World War, under a Keynesian system whereby, nevertheless, "the needs of human beings [were] smuggled in" (Adorno, "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?" n.p.), in which objective class antagonisms remained, and where the faint stirrings of the economic crises that would surface in the 1970s could be felt.

This project has also argued for the allegorical significance of intoxication, via the thought of Theodor Adorno, showing how representations of the sensorily disorienting or of heightened states of consciousness can map the tensions between the individual and the social totality. I have shown that, during the 2010s, allegories of intoxicating consumption tend to illuminate the heightened discrepancy between capitalism's relentless drive to sustain valorization and accumulation, rather than an expanded sensorial world of alternative futures and possibilities. Given this, my project has largely framed traces of utopian possibility in 2010s North American culture as weak and minimal. I have mostly suggested, at least in Chapters 3 and 4, that the utopian impulses of 2010s culture lie in the degree to which artworks foreground the negativity of the value-form on the level of the most intimate impulses of need and consumption. Such impulses at least illuminate something of the binding relationship between capitalist

crisis and consumption crisis, and therefore underline the urgency of replacing a system premised on the accumulation of surplus value with one oriented around true needs-fulfilment. Furthermore, by illustrating through allegory how the routinized pain and toxicity of addiction arises out of individual tensions and even antagonisms with capitalism's governing abstractions, I hope to have added to the increasingly widespread and welcome recognition, in media, academia and popular culture alike, of how addiction and other mental health afflictions ultimately derive from unjust social relations, rather than individual failings and biochemical imbalances.[108]

As well, I reiterate that exploring deeply felt "personal" dimensions of everyday experience such as addiction through a Marxist and value-form framework can aid in renewing the importance of critical theory and dialectical criticism in the twenty-first century. Within an academic context where critique has apparently "run out of steam" (Latour) and humanities departments, beholden increasingly to market logics, turn more and more to reading strategies that merely affirm the pleasures, affects and surfaces of the text, Carolyn Lesjak (2013) has argued that theory's task today is to "hold together the visceral, affective, and local textures of experience and the global, virtual, derivative-driven flows of capital" (Lesjak, "Reading Dialectically" 264). If attention to the lived and felt spatial dimensions of capitalism should form part of a renewed project for "reading dialectically" the objective global crises and unevenness of contemporary times, the intimate and, sadly, increasingly familiar, everyday sphere of addiction is a visceral entry-point into arguing for theory's timeliness and continuing relevance.

This project focused largely on the North American geographical and historical context rather than the truly global nature of addiction as registration of capitalist crisis in the 2010s. Indeed, the American overdose crisis, the opening topic of the Introduction, has often been framed in popular discourse as a phenomenon peculiar to white rural and suburban America. Such stereotypes elide the extent to which drugs have long wreaked havoc on racialized populations within America and across the globe, whether through addiction or drug criminalization.[109] As well, by discursively framing the overdose crisis as merely a cultural or moral, rather than economic, matter, addiction and overdose

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[108] See for example Mark Fisher, "Why mental health is a political issue" (2012); Colette Shade, "Mental Health is a Political Problem" (2021).

[109] See for example Mia Donovan (dir.), *Dope is Death* (2020); Donna Murch, "How Race Made the Opioid Crisis" (2019).

become disconnected from a broader account of capitalism's ever-mutating crisis-logic, in which the miseries of wageless life, racialized incarceration and environmental devastation, to name but a few, can be shown to symptomize the structural, ever-desperate need for capital to address "its underlying problem of insufficient profitability" (Mattick Jr. 226). Yet, as Chapter 2 outlined, such crises in capitalist valorization are global in nature, given especially what Jason Moore argues is the global decline of the appropriation of "cheap nature".

In this Conclusion, I provide a short reading of a text outside North America to consider further the allegorical relationship between addiction and global crises. Set in a Singapore land reclamation site populated by migrant labourers from China, Bangladesh, and other regions of the Global South, Yeo Siew Hua's film *A Land Imagined* (2018) allegorizes the negativity of social reproductive separation on a more global and openly political level than the primary cultural texts analyzed throughout this project.

I thus want to conclude by returning to some of the utopian speculations inferred toward the end of my reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Chapter 2, in which I highlighted how the critical mode of allegory can illuminate some of the political and ethical responses arising out of toxic consumption's entanglement with capital's global spaces and processes of appropriation. Singapore director Yeo's third feature film, the neo-noir, surrealist *A Land Imagined*, situates consumption crises (depicted in Yeo's film primarily in the forms of insomnia and addiction) within a global context of capitalist crisis. Yeo's film emphasizes value-form separation on the level of consumption and need, formally through an irreconcilable dialectic between narrative and non-narrative forms, in a manner similar to the texts analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4. But through the film's foregrounding of dependency on digital consumption in the context of a warming planet, looming exhausted cheap nature and intensified border regimes, *A Land Imagined* also foreshadows the heightened crises and precarity of the early 2020s following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Digital Abstraction and Global Separation

A Land Imagined depicts precarious migrant labour on a land reclamation site in Singapore, a site where sand is imported from neighbouring countries such as Malaysia,

Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia in order to develop the island-state's coastline. The experimental film, cast with a mixture of professional and non-professional actors, begins as an investigation led by insomniac Detective Lok (Peter Yu) into the disappearance of a Chinese migrant construction worker named Wang Bi Chen (Liu Xiaoyi). Opening with static shots of gargantuan construction sites and immense machinery, a landscape largely devoid of human presence, *A Land Imagined* begins by establishing the peculiar socio-economic context driving Singaporean development, with Lok, observing the reclamation site from a car park, remarking to his partner: "I remember that 30 years ago, this place was a part of the sea. It's nothing but reclaimed land now. In 30 years, even the ports of Keppel and Tanjong Pagar will move here".

Figure 10: Still from *A Land Imagined*

Figure 11: Still from *A Land Imagined*

Lok's initial investigations uncover some of the exploitative conditions of those working on the site, including the company failing to pay its workers on time, unsafe

working conditions, and the withholding of passports. Lok then relays to his partner a recent dream about Wang, despite having never met the migrant worker, and the narrative suddenly shifts to Wang's perspective, to an account of the days preceding his disappearance. What follows details Wang's own persistent insomnia aggravated by a workplace injury, his friendship and subsequent separation from Ajit (Ishtiaque Zico), a fellow worker from Bangladesh, and his addiction to a video game in a 24-hour cybercafé. Prior to his disappearance, Wang forms a close bond with Mindy (Luna Kwok), one of the cybercafé attendants, and the two drive to the coast at night to swim in the illuminated port waters. Meanwhile, Wang forms another close friendship with Ajit, who suddenly disappears before Wang discovers an unidentified body buried underneath the sand on the construction site. As the film returns to Lok's investigation, Wang appears to Lok in one of the cybercafé's computers, apparently relaying an earlier scene involving Wang. *A Land Imagined* closes with Lok exploring more of the reclamation site and being unconvincingly reassured by Ajit, seemingly under the coercion of the company, about the site's good working conditions. Lok is then shown joining Mindy and a group of Bangladeshi workers dancing joyfully. As Lok notices a lone figure resembling Wang standing separately from the dance and watching the Singapore cityscape across the water, the film abruptly ends.

In a somewhat Lynchian vein, what initially appears as a detective mystery into the cause of a missing individual, one afflicted by an addiction habit, becomes a surrealist investigation into the more perplexing mysteries haunting *A Land Imagined*'s geographical setting. As with the world of *Twin Peaks*, unexplained occurrences and non-narrative moments of dream-logic interrupt the film's narrative impulse to explain the nature of an individual's disappearance (and possible reappearance). Meanwhile, as with the central detective character of Cooper throughout the *Twin Peaks* universe, Lok's identity gradually appears increasingly imbricated in the life of the investigated, with several of Lok's lines mirroring those of Wang's and both characters sharing an inability to sleep and a similar fixation on a first-person shooter video game. Alongside the film's frequent depictions of the reclamation site as a vast inhuman landscape, *A Land Imagined* furthermore portrays the identities of Wang and Ajit, both of whom disappear before apparently reappearing later in the film, as ephemeral and at the mercy of larger forces. As Anita Lundberg and Jasmin Thamima Peer (2020) summarize, the transient state occupied by Wang and the other workers, as well as *A Land Imagined*'s overall

formally loose structure, mirrors the myriad flows and actors composing Singapore's socio-economic formations:

> The land comprised of shifting sands from surrounding countries; the nation-state forever constructing its identity-Dream; built by the labour of interchangeable flows of migrants chained to precarious contracts as documented ID, but without identity. (206)

In this reading, the way Yeo anchors the identities of the labourers and, analogously, the Singapore land itself in a global network of economic flows and relations affirms *A Land Imagined* as a certain exercise in cognitive mapping. The film is allegorical, then, to the extent that it posits a homology between the precarious, seemingly fleeting existence of those like Wang and Singapore's land, in which "[s]and is mined, or dredged, transported and sold, by a complex network of multinational companies, agents, contractors, sub-contractors, and labourers, and is brokered by governing authorities at local and national levels" (Lundberg & Peer 216).

However, posing such a homologous relationship between labour and land in Yeo's film falls short by merely highlighting the separation between Wang's everyday habits and routines and an apparently incomprehensible, disembodied context of globalization. Such a reading risks missing how value-form abstraction works on proletarian bodies, including everyday habits and consumption through an antagonistic, pervasive logic of separation. Conversely, paying more attention to the film's portrayal of addiction, bodily need and intoxicated states underlines the negativity of social reproductive separation on the lives of migrant workers such as Wang. In turn, such depicted consumption crises prompt richer insight into the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism itself, as well as the system's baleful attempts to address these crises, as we move into the 2020s.

As the sleepless Wang wanders into the purple and red neon-lit cybercafé, populated by male clientele absorbed in various screens displaying pornography, video chats and online games, Mindy approaches Wang by asking "Isn't that stimulating?", before reminding him that "the air-conditioning is not free here". With its plethora of computer screens and headphones, as well as air-conditioning, the 24-hour cybercafé is thus in one sense presented as a form of temporary reprieve from the hardships and sleeplessness endured by the migrant workers. Yet the space is clearly also a space for

workers to satisfy their digital cravings,[110] their distorted needs created through yet unfulfilled by their lives of separation; in this sense, the space is similar to the accounts of separation through drug dependency described in earlier Chapters. But *A Land Imagined* also establishes a confluence of other contemporary abstractions such as digital surveillance, and how these modes of economic power also instantiate the compulsions of the value-form through consumption-based crises. The role of digital technology, as highlighted in the scene in question, does not liberate workers from the demands of physical labour but rather acts as a mode of discipline and surveillance. As Jason E. Smith, in conversation with Tony Smith (2020), describes of today's endlessly distracting smart technologies (embodied here, in *A Land Imagined*, in the spatialized form of the cybercafé):

> The "smartphone" stands in as the signal innovation, or contrivance, of the age, its "star commodity." . . . For the most part, it simply brings together older devices (the mobile phone, the personal computer). Providing access to a panoply of diversions—shopping, streaming music and video, interpersonal communication—by means of a single, interactive screen, these apparatuses complete a confluence underway for decades now: the fusion of commerce and news, entertainment and sociality, self-stylization and civic life on a one-size-fits-all, touch-sensitive LCD (or OLED) screen . . . In the workplace these innovations promised to lead to what Paul Mason heralded as an "exponential takeoff in productivity." That's precisely what has not happened. What we got instead are increasingly tight webs of surveillance and tracing, on the streets and in workplaces. (n.p.)

In the context of globally declining economic growth and falling profit rates, such dazzling technologies perform the role of squeezing as much living labour out of individuals as possible. In Yeo's film, the depicted intoxicating space of the cybercafé stands as the flipside to the shots of landscapes of immense machinery—both symptomize the grinding stagnation inherent to a rising organic composition of capital and landscapes of dead labour. We will see later how this crisis-induced separating logic is articulated specifically, in *A Land Imagined*, through Wang's immersion in his video game.

The cybercafé also has the narrative function of helping Wang navigate what increasingly appears as a conspiracy at the reclamation site, following his discovery of both Ajit's disappearance and the foreman Jason's deception regarding Ajit's

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[110] On the addictiveness of social media see, for example, Mattha Busby "Social media copies gambling methods 'to create psychological cravings'" (2018).

whereabouts. Following his further discovery of a dead body buried under reclaimed sand, Wang reads about a Chinese worker causing trouble at the construction site and grows increasingly paranoid, demanding that an online gamer who he has also recently befriended reveal Ajit's location. Later, with the café empty and the mysterious gamer friend absent, the film's perspective moves to inside the video game. Overlain by an ambient soundscape, in this scene Wang claims to have dreamt his own death, while on-screen his shooter avatar jumps over sandy terrain toward a mountainous daytime skyline. Momentarily, the virtual environment's geometric space collapses and distorts into abstract shapes; coupled with the use of ascending synthesizers, the scene briefly conveys a sense of euphoric escape into and beyond the sand. But as the synths slowly descend and become surrounded by a menacing bassline, the shooter returns to ground and engages in gunfight with other players. Wang's intoxicating ascent into a gold-tinged, formless landscape is harshly brought back down into a shadowy, violent underworld. After Wang describes feeling like "being forgotten by a kind of ignorance", claiming to have disappeared into his "own dream", the film returns to Lok's perspective for the remainder of the narrative.

Figure 12: Still from *A Land Imagined*

Figure 13: Still from *A Land Imagined*

A Land Imagined's portrayal of Wang's complete immersion in the shooter game tempers any sense of utopian enclave or refuge. The intoxicating sequence, whereby glimpses of euphoria are interrupted by scenes of militarized gameplay, underlines the seeming inescapability of Wang's precarious material existence, with Wang thereafter seemingly trapped inside the computer before returning to the physical realm at the film's close, solemnly watching the glistening city that he and other labourers have helped build yet remain excluded from. Migrant labour is essential to globalized capitalism in the twenty-first century. As Harsha Walia (2021) argues, the precarity experienced by such labourers is not an unfortunate coincidence of more unregulated access to a global pool of "free" labour, but rather a structural part of how nation states' border regimes segment, discipline and extract value from such cheap labour pools. The compliance of migrant workers is necessary to sustain accumulation and uphold class power:

> Temporary labor migration is a crucial method of accumulation, helping to facilitate the holding of more than $9.1 trillion of global wealth by 2,200 billionaires, while the world's poorest 3.8 billion hold $1.4 trillion. Migrant workers are kept compliant through threats of termination and deportation, dangled in tandem as union-busting mechanisms, thus revealing the crucial connection their migration status and precarious labor position. (Walia 7)

The role of both digital and migrant labour in Yeo's film converge through the virtual figure of violent surveillance. As Walia further notes, migrant worker programs are carceral regimes that racially hierarchize and immobilize migrant labourers as a flexible

"insourced workforce" (139) under neoliberal capital. The rights of these cheap labourers, whose insourcing is made possible by an advanced globalization that nonetheless segments and immobilizes these workers under regimes of "border imperialism" (Walia 139), are undermined and denied to a degree not experienced by "legal" citizens.

In Yeo's film the militarized gameplay, characterized by not only gunfight but also the persistent sense that Wang is being monitored by an unidentifiable presence within the computer, underscores the violent value-relations that aim to restore profitability to a system in decline and that disproportionately impact on racialized migrant workers. In this sense, Wang's absorption and immersion into the cybercafé's virtual spaces reads less as a generalized condition of what Jonathan Crary (2014) describes as an all-encompassing 24/7 capitalism characterized by "the parcellization and fragmentation of shared zones of experience into fabricated microworlds of affects and symbols" (53). Rather, Wang's fragmented consumption habits not only substitute for the disappearance of his few friends and collapse of communal bonds, but also allegorize the proletarian separations at once specific to Singapore's reclamation project and global in scope. As Lundberg & Peer outline, Singapore's dependent relationships with neighbouring countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia for the importation of sand have been increasingly fraught in recent years, with all the aforementioned nations having imposed bans, at various points, on exporting sand due to regional politics "combined with various environmental problems caused by sand extraction" (216). This is a region-specific instantiation of what Jason Moore argues is the decline of global "cheap natures", as outlined in Chapter 2, with cheap resources such as land becoming ever more costly and environmentally damaging, and hence no longer providing the cheap fix that they once did during capital's earlier frontier expansions.

In *A Land Imagined* the significance of digital addiction and intoxication lies perhaps not so much in the extent to which these phenomena resemble heightened versions of "traditional" forms of addiction, but rather in how such forms of consumption allegorize heightened crises in capital's valorization processes and thus, in turn, the reproduction of capitalism's global subjects. Against a backdrop of global stagnation and decline, as well as what Moore describes as a rising ecological surplus and a threat to the end capital's cheap nature regimes, it is likely that the hyper-exploitation of

precarious migrant labour will continue during attempts at revitalization and development in “global cities” such as Singapore. In the context of Singapore’s land reclamation project becoming increasingly costly and environmentally toxic, there is a sense of both desperation and menace to the foreman Jason’s admission to Lok: “we’ve never stopped reclaiming land. We’ll reclaim for as long as we can”. Despite the clear demarcation of limits to global capital’s cheap nature fixes, profit squeezes on living labour will not cease, as is most startling apparent in migrant labour programs that “restrict the mobility of impoverished racialized people *unless* they agree to inclusion as migrant workers with deflated labor power and no legal or social citizenship” (Walia, 7 emphasis in text).

By focusing on Wang’s sleep deprivation, hallucinations and failed attempts to compensate for his alienation through his video game addiction, *A Land Imagined* foregrounds proletarian separation within intimate social reproduction. Such separation can indeed be charted back to the very origins of capitalism itself, where, as Crary notes, by the mid seventeenth century sleep’s “incompatibility with modern notions of productivity and rationality began to be identified” (12). The intoxicating, surreal depiction of Wang’s sleep deprivation and addiction allegorizes the contemporary manifestation of capitalism’s centuries-long project to extract from individual bodies as much living labour as possible. Reading the film from a Marxist perspective, then, maps this fundamental yet recurring primitive accumulation on the intimate sphere, where efforts to overcome nourishing, restorative sleep increasingly occur within an intensified global regime of predatory crisis accumulation. In the case of the unidentified worker found beneath the sand in Yeo’s film, migrant living labour is apparently buried by the returning dead labour of land reclamation—a living nightmare of sand that neither Wang nor his on-screen avatar can escape.

Allegories of Need

A Land Imagined would seem, on the whole, to be a narrative of failure. Throughout Yeo’s film, we witness instances of workers banding together in solidarity, some of whom discuss, in one scene, the possibility of organizing to stop the deportation of an injured co-worker named Hao (who may or may not be the same worker that Wang finds buried and reads about online). But the communal and cross-racial bonds occasionally formed among the migrant workers are ultimately undermined by Jason and other company lackeys. The glimpses of solidarity, perhaps most strikingly represented

through Wang's enthusiastic participation in the Bengali singing and dancing with Ajit and others at night, are closed-off by a stratified and separated workforce typical of precarious migrant worker programs. Jason notifies Wang of Ajit's return to Bangladesh to help his disabled mother, even though Ajit had earlier informed Wang of his inability to go home because of the money he owes the company, which retains possession of his passport.[111] Later, Wang discovers that Ajit's passport indeed remains locked in the site's office and Ajit then reappears at work, toward the film's close, speaking to Lok of how well the company supposedly treats him. The workers remain separated from one another, unable to successfully organize against the grueling, unsafe working conditions, against the company withholding pay, as well as the company's overall control over migrant worker mobility. The end shot of Wang, separate from the party and watching alone the Singapore cityscape, seems to underline this failed solidarity amongst the migrant workers, who remain separated both from their means of subsistence and from one another.

Observing the isolated Wang from afar, the detective Lok, in this final scene, seems to have reached a pessimistic conclusion similar to that of Dale Cooper at the end of *The Return*. Unable to situate a landscape of separated social reproduction, marred by afflictions such as addiction, within a broader map of the social totality, both detectives epitomize something of a failed attempt at cognitive mapping by way of a seemingly unsurpassable negativity haunting the landscape. As I suggested in the Introduction, *The Return*'s crucial lesson regarding the persistence of negativity, following Dale Cooper's fateful failed attempt to banish past trauma and negativity from the American landscape, is one of resignation, even quietism. However, at key moments *A Land Imagined* nevertheless reveals some more concrete political and utopian implications in the face of global value-form negativity and attendant consumption crises.

Such implications can be found, first, in the form of two questions. After first learning of Hao's impending deportation, Wang asks his roommate "Do you think things would be different if we had all joined in?". Meanwhile, during his tour of the reclamation site and in response to Jason's assertion that land will keep being reclaimed, Lok

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[111] Yeo has described how many migrant labourers will work multiple years to pay back the money they have borrowed to travel to work in Singapore. The threat of repatriation and being sent back with debt are persistent concerns among the workers. See the video interview, "Yeo Sew Hua on *A Land Imagined* and the State of Singapore NDNF19" (2019).

wonders aloud, "what's the worth of a land that is capable of being forged freely at our will?". Despite their conjectural and perhaps naïve quality, these two questions gesture at the forms of politics and ethics needed, such as worker-led organizing and climate justice, with the 2020s presently underway. In the face of a global pandemic trapping migrant and undocumented workers "in the American dream of choosing to sell one's labor for a wage under deadly conditions or death by unemployment and destitution" (Walia 12), as well as impending irreversible global warming, we are witnessing the growing necessity of both worker power and social reproductive struggles external to the workplace that contest value's colonization of all forms of life, for example through mutual aid programmes. To varying degrees, such movements are calling into question capitalism's very capacity to satisfy needs and promote meaningful and sustainable life.[112]

Finally, in *A Land Imagined* there is a brief, moving moment of care and solidarity between Wang and Ajit that accentuates, both in form and content, the utopian impulse of a politics and ethics geared toward needs-fulfilment, glimmers of which I have sought to uncover throughout this dissertation. Remarking on Wang's inability to sleep following his workplace accident, Ajit gently massages Wang's neck and tells him that he does, in contrast to his insomniac co-worker, still dream. The tender scene then briefly cuts to slow-motion close-ups of Wang and Ajit dancing again with the other workers, but there is no sound, only the voice of Ajit imparting to his friend: "Here I dream all the time. You are dancing. I am singing. But I'm not me. You're not you". The defamiliarizing, haunting quality of this dream-sequence negatively illuminates a politics of solidarity and the satisfaction of immediate needs, represented here in the form of intoxicating joy, as an antidote to capital's global toxifications. Yet this is not an intoxication into the unknown, since the scene's glimpse of nonidentity is firmly grounded in present hardships. The sur-reality conveyed here is one in which things remain the same, but something fundamental has changed: "You are dancing. I am singing. But I'm not me. You're not you". Separation is momentarily overcome, in this sequence, not because the film's

[112] Recent organizing and mutual aid in-and-against the confluence of 2020s crises, which include against unsafe working conditions under the pandemic, hollowed-out social reproductive services, and climate disaster, can be found in but are not limited to: Brazil (see Behague & Ortega 2021); the U.S. ("Amazon climate group plan employee 'sickout' in protest of treatment of workers" (2021)); China (see Mi 2020); and India (see Singh 2021).

depiction of bodies colliding and dancing evades the present, but because the flash of intoxication is anchored in, arises out of, Ajit's attentiveness to Wang's physical needs.

The value-form is not limited to the sphere of production or the exchange of goods, but rather infiltrates and shapes all forms of life, including consumption and interpersonal relationships. On the surface, the task of connecting contemporary addiction narratives with an overarching context of value-relations can seem overly bleak and deterministic. But the persistence of allegory in 2010s culture, which I have highlighted throughout this project, signals the persistence of unmet needs and so also underlines the urgent necessity for a world driven by the fulfillment of needs rather than the production of value. Through allegory, through retaining the narrative and non-narrative tension between the individual and the larger social totality in a constellation, art can still crack open the petrified personifications of capitalist social reproduction. Allegory and art remain utopian not because they prefigure a world of true flourishing to come. Rather, they redirect our perceptions and interpretations of economic objectivity back at the antagonistic social relationships from which such real abstractions derive. Such antagonisms concern individuals' means of social reproduction and subsistence; they concern survival itself. Twenty-first century life intoxicates by increasingly abstracting from material needs and upholding the needs of the crisis-ridden value-form instead. The exhaustions of digital culture and the alarming resurgence of far-right politics are symptomatic of the reactivity of topsy-turvy value-relations. Indeed, as Adorno noted towards the end of *Minima Moralia*, the false newness and collectivity produced under both the culture industry and fascist regimes, which act as a "mere stimulus" that "no longer stimulates", is false because fundamentally separated from the proper reproduction of society's subjects:

> Mankind, despairing of its reproduction, unconsciously projects its wish for survival into the chimera of the thing never known, but this resembles death. Such a chimera points to the downfall of an all-embracing constitution which virtually no longer needs its members. (238)

While the critical importance of art should never overshadow the work of social movements, the former invites reflection on the real social separation at the heart of the manifold dependencies induced and pseudo-intoxications promised by capitalism. Through allegory, art brings intoxication back into dialectical tension with material needs and provides a ghostly afterimage of their reconciliation under a classless society.

Figure 14: Still from *A Land Imagined*

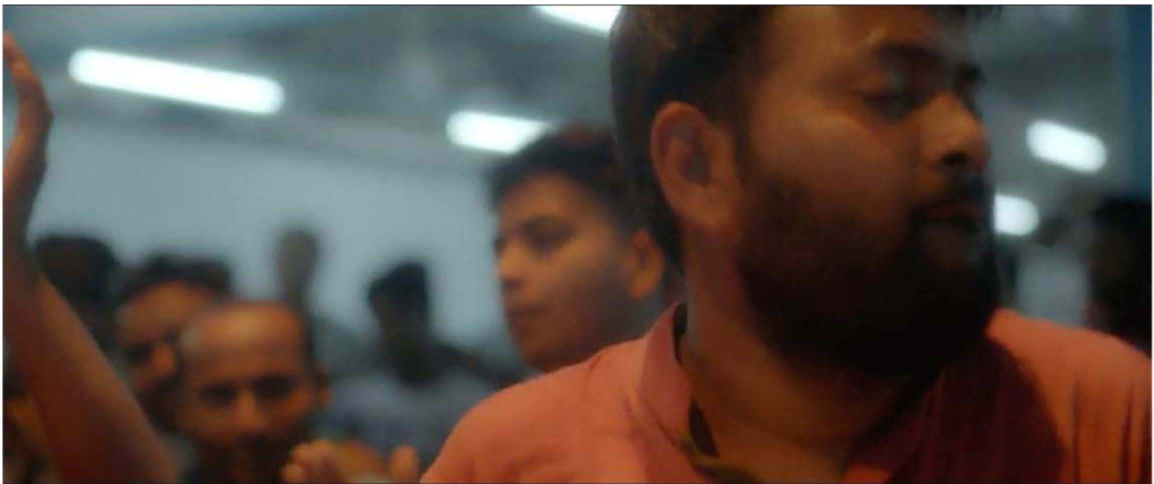

Figure 15: Still from *A Land Imagined*

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