The Ideological Algorithmic Apparatus: Subjection Before Enslavement

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Abstract This article applies a Lacanian-Marxist critique to Maurizio Lazzarato's theories of social subjection and machinic enslavement as they relate to algorithmic and social media. Lazzarato's approach has been taken up in recent scholarship on social media to explain the role of algorithms and software in subjecting users to capital. In contrast to his approach, this article argues that social subjection, the interpellation of desire, and the political dimension of the class struggle must be given priority over machinic enslavement.

Introduction

The endnote to Jacques Lacan's paper, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire" explains that the printed version of the text differs from the original presented at the colloquium on "La Dialectique" in 1960.[1] Lacan notes that the published version of the paper includes a final section on "castration," on which he lacked the necessary time in his presentation to address. In his presentation, the concluding section on castration was replaced with a few short and quick remarks on "the machine," by which, he says, "the subject's relation to the signifier can be materialized."[2] This substitution of castration with the machine, and vice versa, presages the distinction made by Deleuze and Guattari, and more recently elaborated by Maurizio Lazzarato, between "social subjection" and "machinic enslavement"?[3] On the one hand, "castration" implies the priority of subjection, precisely in the sense that it is this very cut that produces the desiring subject within the register of the Symbolic order; on the other hand, placing an emphasis on the machine seems to displace the centrality of castration in the desiring-*machine*, as it is dubbed by Deleuze and Guattari. The Lacanian parallax, between castration and the machine, conveniently introduces a topic that I would like to explore in this essay.

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Using the example of algorithmic and social media, I argue for the priority of what Lazzarato refers to as "social subjection" (and hence, castration in the logic of producing a desiring subject), and I disagree with the way that he positions the relationship between subjection and enslavement. Here, I use social media as a tactical model for making this argument because of its centrality in neoliberal capitalism, both as fixed capital, but also as a communications medium. Generally, my goal is to unravel how we might come to understand the role of algorithmic and social media in the context of the capitalist mode of production. Social media overlaps two critical functions, democracy and surveillance, even as it also superimposes the functions of (exploited) labor and enjoyment over those states. The nexus of these overlaps amounts to what Jodi Dean refers to as "communicative capitalism."[4] This is a medium of communications, and therefore plays a role in the production and circulation of information and meaning. However, my claim is that ideologically the production of meaning in social media is tied principally to processes of social subjection, which help to incorporate subjects into the matrices of machinic enslavement, and (ultimately) exploitation. In contrast, for Lazzarato, subjection seems to be a process by which people are interpellated *out of* the assemblage of the machine. I argue, instead, that the subject *precedes* enslavement in the machinic assemblage, and therefore ideological interpellation needs to be understood as an instance that takes place prior to machinic enslavement.

My own reference to subjection is located at the intersection of "castration," in the Lacanian-psychoanalytic sense, and the class struggle. The overlapping contexts of the subject's entry into the Symbolic order, and her positioning relative to the class struggle, logically precede her enslavement in the machine, regardless of the fact that the machine is definitively and retroactively a force of subjection both in terms of exploitation and the circulation of desire. Social media, as "meaning machines," to use Langlois's term,[5] in this respect are not unlike the ideological apparatuses theorized by Althusser,[6] but they are distinguished by the way that they also overlap processes of exploitation and interpellation directly. In other words, the algorithmic logic of social media attracts the user-subject through the lure of desire, whereby she is interpellated by the processes of the platform; but at the same time, it is through this process of interpellation, and searching out her "lost object" of desire in the matrices of social media that the user-subject also participates in the production of value that is expropriated by platform owners, and appropriated more generally by the class of capitalists. Nevertheless, without her prior entry into the Symbolic order as a desiring subject, enslavement would be difficult, or even impossible, since no basis would exist for its ability to draw in her attention.

By referring to the "ideological apparatus" in my title, I am of course alluding to Althusser's theory of ideology, subjectivity, and his disciplinary technologies of interpellation, which he referred to as the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).[7] Just as Althusser's interest was in coming to understand the way that capitalist relations of production are reproduced, so too do my interests lie in the way that algorithmic media facilitate both the formal matrix of exploitation, as well as the modes of interpellation that tether people to these matrices. Expropriation is still made possible in (neo)liberal capitalism because of the wage relation and commodity fetishism, which veils the social relation of exploitation by giving the worker *something* back; however, the value of this *something* remains far below the value of the expropriated surplus value inscribed into the commodity.[8] Although recent literature proposes viewing capitalist relations of production in terms of the real subsumption of labor and subjectivity—that is, "the restructuring of social relations according to the demands of capitalist valorization"[9]—and in terms of social production rather than simple commodity production,[10] my claim is that the commodity form, and hence fetishism, still factors heavily in the precipitous subjection relative to the class struggle that facilitates the subject's enslavement to the machine. The logic of fetishism is key and works at a formal level, in the exploitation of what Christian Fuchs calls the "prosumer commodity"[11]—a confluence of being both a producer and a consumer of information—and the exchange of data for meaning/meaningfulness and enjoyment. How then can we conceive these overlapping and converging apparatuses of exploitation and enjoyment?

My reference to Althusser and the concept of the ISAs also takes into consideration the way that the Slovenian School of Lacanian scholarship has elaborated the notion of interpellation and the differences between Althusser's concept of the subject and that developed by Lacan. Mladen Dolar, for instance, notes that for Althusser, "the subject is what makes ideology work; for [Lacanian] psychoanalysis, the subject emerges where ideology fails."[12] Slavoj Žižek, likewise, highlights the fact that the Lacanian approach to interpellation reverses the formula proposed by Althusser: "it is never the individual which is interpellated as subject, *into* subject; it is on the contrary the subject itself who is interpellated as x (some specific subject-position, symbolic identity or mandate), thereby eluding the abyss of *$* [the void or gap that marks the subject within the Symbolic order]."[13] My own understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and interpellation, therefore, draws primarily upon the Lacanian conception, seeing the subject as expressing primarily the gap or lack within the Symbolic order; however, for the desiring subject, action revolves around evading this lack—assuming a subject-position or identity within the Symbolic order, as Žižek puts it, which remains tied to the subject's

pursuit of the "lost object" of desire.[14] But it is the subject's entry into the Symbolic order, the product of "symbolic castration"—that is of giving up or losing that element which is perceived as "completing" the subject—which activates desire. Therefore, as I see it, the desiring subject precedes her own enslavement into the machine, including smart machines like algorithmic and social media.

Thus, when we look at algorithmic media we find that the interrelationship between exploitation and enjoyment are compressed into a single form. When using a popular social media site, like Facebook, for instance, we find that it is at once a source of exploitation, expropriation, and interpellation. Not only does subjection takes precedence at the level of the desiring subject; it also, I claim, precedes at the level of the gap or lack in the social—or in other words, the political at the heart of the social (i.e., the class struggle). But Lazzarato's view, which prioritizes enslavement, or the intersection of enslavement-subjection, *misses* the priority of exploitation, and therefore the role of the class struggle, itself, at the heart of the mode of production. I argue instead that algorithmic and social media make possible a deeper identification between the production of surplus value through exploitation and the lure of desire in what Lacan referred to as surplus-enjoyment. Although I believe that Lazzarato goes too far in reifying the subject in the assemblage of the machine, I still agree that the machine occupies a component part in reproducing both the capitalist processes of exploitation and interpellation, particularly in the new age of the algorithmic media, like social media, and digital automation. Nevertheless, it is the context of the class struggle (socially and politically) and "castration" (psychically), which is missing in Lazzarato's account, that positions our understanding of the role played by the machine in reproducing capitalist class interests and power.

(Re-)Inventing the Matrix

When discussing the convergence of labor and enjoyment in algorithmic media, it is difficult not to draw an analogy with the Wachowski siblings' *The Matrix* (1999), in which humans are exploited by the machines as sustenance, where the humans' pleasure and enjoyment provide the main source of energy fueling the machines. Yet, it is this imagery that frames the contentions I have with the kind of perspective held by Lazzarato, in which the subject-object dualism is dispelled with the effect of displacing the centrality of the subject-subject *antagonism* of the class struggle.[15] It is in this sense that I place emphasis on subjection over enslavement, while still attempting to maintain the significance of enslavement in the apparatus theory of ideology and subjectivity.

Social subjection and machinic enslavement encompass the intersection of politics and technology. In the history of capital, machinery developed in order to reduce the amount of necessary labor time, to make processes of production more efficient, and to discipline the labor force through automation, the threat of unemployment, and de-skilling. Machinery also proved critical in what Marx refers to as "relative surplus value," when the length of the working day was shortened, and capitalists needed to find mechanisms for producing the same amount (or more) of surplus value in a shorter period of time than what was produced in longer periods of the working day (what Marx refers to as "absolute surplus value"). Machinery therefore made possible the production of relative surplus value within the limits of shorter working days, where labor power could only be put to work for a fixed and given amount of time. Automation in machinery thus helps to reduce the amount of *necessary* labor time within the context of the capitalist mode of production, increasing the amount of *surplus* labor as the *source* of surplus value and profit.

Revolutions in productive technology (from the early-/mid-nineteenth century onward) also emerged in parallel with the rise of new (analogue) entertainment technology and media, from the Daguerreotype and film to radio and television.[16] However, the machinery that changed everything was the development of digital automation and information technology, from the desktop computer to the laptop, the internet, the smartphone and tablet, software, social, and algorithmic media.[17] The latter have converged in ways that now make possible the overlapping functions required to discipline populations and enforce contemporary mechanisms of control, so that we have, in a single device, machinations of enjoyment *and* labor, but also of democracy, surveillance, *and* control.[18]

When we consider the productive and the consumptive aspects of algorithmic new media—labor and entertainment—we start to see in what sense the logics of surplus value and surplus enjoyment overlap. Surplus value and surplus-enjoyment have a parallax relationship in the same way that exploitation and ideology, historical and dialectical materialism, and the subject and object share a parallax relationship.[19] We cannot necessarily comprehend the matter at hand unless it is viewed through an identifying gaze that approaches the object from the inverse sides of the same problem. To better explain this overlap, let's take the example of the episode, "Fifteen Million Merits," from the Charlie Brooker series, *Black Mirror* (2011-). In this episode, which takes place (like all episodes of the series) in the not-too-distant future, people "work" in "factories" that combine physical labor with entertainment. Workers perform labor by riding stationary exercise bicycles. While doing so, they watch television on a large LCD display screen positioned directly in front of them. Work stations are lined up

in rows, with each worker cycling side by side. Each has his or her own television monitor, which they use to select and watch a program of their choice, or to play an interactive videogame. The purpose of this labor remains unclear (conceivably it is to generate energy to power this dystopian society). There is no mention of what kind of value is being produced and for whom. However, the more each worker cycles—the longer he or she spends performing their work—the more they accrue in wages measured in "merits." A worker's wealth in merits is displayed whenever they plug into an interactive display, which are located at various locations on every wall in this claustrophobic world that only seems to support indoor living.

The episode follows the life of Bing (Daniel Kaluuya), a quiet loner who goes back and forth, every day, from his small wall-to-wall display screen bedroom to the cycling centre where he works. In his bedroom, just like at work, he watches TV and plays videogames. From time to time, banner ads for pornography websites pop up in the middle of his viewing. He is able to ignore the ads but is forced to pay a fee from his merits. If he chooses to close his eyes during the ad, an alarm bell sounds and red lights flash until he once again continues to consume. This is truly a society of the spectacle, where people are continuously enjoined to "amuse themselves to death," in which entertainment and labor converge in ways that demonstrate the homology between surplus value and surplus-enjoyment. Ideologically, people are driven by the superego injunction to "Enjoy!,"[20] and even when they attempt to evade this injunction it is re-enforced through threats of indirect (punitive) violence (a reference to contemporary postmodern culture in which the prohibition to enjoy has been transformed into the obligation to enjoy). In this world, media is hyper-personalized—it is "mass" media, only in the sense that the masses consume simultaneously, but personalized because of the direct individualized engagement with the sites of consumption. Materially, then, this engagement fuels the drive to produce—or, at the very least, it provides distraction and amusement at the same time that workers are driven towards laboring activities, not unlike the dangling of the carrot in front of the horse. This model best explains the overlap in algorithmic and social media between labor and enjoyment, between the production of surplus value and surplus-*jouissance*. It demonstrates precisely the way in which I here conceive the role of algorithmic media in interpellating subjects through the lure of desire, while they at the same time participate in the production of surplus value. But it also encapsulates the intersection of what Lazzarato refers to as social subjection and machinic enslavement. Therefore, in the following section I outline the distinction between these terms. I do so, however, in order to lay claim to the fact that social subjection takes precedence over machinic

enslavement. As I have already alluded to, above, such a priority is tied to the precedence given to the production of the desiring subject.

Lazzarato: Subjection and Enslavement

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari,[21] Lazzarato contends that subjectivity is produced by and within capitalism in two ways, or through two apparatuses: that of social subjection, and that of machinic enslavement. According to Lazzarato, subjection "equips us with a subjectivity, assigning us an identity, a sex, a body, a profession, a nationality, and so on."[22] Machinic enslavement, conversely, "occurs via desubjectivization by mobilizing functional and operational, non-representational and asignifying, rather than linguistic and representational semiotics."[23] With machinic enslavement, the subject loses her individuality and becomes a mere cog in the machine, or "a component part of an assemblage," which includes structures not normally conceived as "machinery," such as businesses, the financial system, the media, welfare state institutions like schools, hospitals, museums, theatres, and (of course) the internet.[24] Subjection, in other words, deals in the construction of *individuals*—it is interpellation in the sense attributed to Althusser; enslavement, however, incorporates people as "dividuals"—that is (to paraphrase Deleuze),[25] as samples of data and data sets.[26] Machinic enslavement, therefore, refers to the way that people are incorporated into a human-machine assemblage.

Lazzarato is keen to emphasize the role that machinic enslavement plays in producing capitalist subjectivity, particularly since, according to him, several contemporary social theorists, such as Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler, and Žižek,[27] ignore this aspect, preferring to focus on questions relating to social subjection.[28] Against these thinkers, Lazzarato claims that unlike feudal society, power relations in capitalism are impersonal and emerge out of the organization of machines.[29] As he puts it, "capital is not a mere relationship among 'people', nor is it reducible to an intersubjective relationship." Power relationships do exist, but according to Lazzarato they are constituted by "social machines"—by which he refers to corporations, collective infrastructures of the welfare state, and communications systems—and are "assisted" by technical machines, such as algorithmic media.[30] Unlike subjection, (and this seems to be one of his central claims) enslavement dissolves the subject-object dualism, replacing it with "ontologically ambiguous" entities, hybrids, or what he refers to as "subject-object bi-face entities."[31]

Theorists that place their focus on subjection, according to Lazzarato, would seem to draw out too rigidly the subject-object dualism. Lazzarato remains somewhat critical of this stance, particularly since, for him, this would also seem to be the same process as drawn

out by capital: "by dividing the assemblage into subjects and objects, [property rights, for instance] empty the latter (nature, animals, machines, objects, signs, etc.) of all creativity, of the capacity to act and produce, which they assign only to individual subjects whose principle characteristic is being an 'owner' (an owner or non-owner)."[32] By prioritizing the assemblage of machinic enslavement in this way, Lazzarato, it would appear, seems to place the class antagonism in a secondary position, relative to the machine.[33] That is to say, by viewing the production of capitalist subjectivity primarily as a product of dividuals, who are only *then* interpellated as individuals, Lazzarato seems to want to do away with the subject-object dualism, which he regards as central to the interpellation of the subject. This formulation, in some ways, is not too dissimilar to the Althusserian one, where individuals are interpellated as subjects. By comparison, Lazzarato sees *dividuals* being interpellated as subjects. The interpellation of the subject is something that withdraws her from the assemblage, forcing her into a subject position that only then divides us between subject and object. However, while working to disparage the subject-object dualism, Lazzarato misses, not the dualism, but the *antagonism* between *subjects*. Not an "intersubjective" relationship, but a subject-subject *antagonism*; or, in other words, the class struggle. In pointing to the subject-subject antagonism of the class struggle, my point is not to ignore the side of enslavement, but to draw out the fact that the technical object, regardless of the fact of enslavement, is that which is caught at the intersection of the tension of class power.

If I can put it somewhat differently, I claim that machinic enslavement is in a *secondary* position, relative to the class struggle, which does in fact prioritize what Lazzarato refers to as social subjection. The machine is that object which is caught in the tension produced by the class antagonism. Therefore, while I agree with Lazzarato that attention to machinic enslavement is pivotal to any theory of exploitation and emancipation, it must still be understood in the context of the class struggle. The development of productive machinery is a significant component of the class struggle, and attempts by capital to either increase rates of exploitation, or to replace workers with "labor saving technology," are crucial; but these elements proceed from the class struggle. Machinic enslavement is perhaps a precondition for later manifestations of the class struggle but is not logically prior. It is within the class struggle, too, that the kinds of subjectivization required for machinic enslavement are produced, first in the sense of reproducing the forms of inequality (including those that are tied to our embodiment, i.e., race and sex) that are necessary for the continued (re-)production of surplus value, and then in the sense of interpellating subjects by way of enjoyment. Lazzarato is, in fact, quite clear on this point when he explains that, "enslavement does not operate through

repression or ideology… [Rather] it takes over human beings 'from the inside', on the *pre-personal* (pre-cognitive and preverbal) level, as well as 'from the outside', on the *supra-personal* level, by assigning them certain modes of perception and sensibility and *manufacturing an unconscious*. Machinic enslavement formats the basic functions of perceptive, sensory, affective, cognitive, and linguistic behaviour."[34] In this sense, Lazzarato's lineage is fixed precisely on Deleuze and Guattari's productive model of desire in their schizoanalytic methodology, which sees the signifier so much as a tyrannical territorializing mechanism similar to the way that, as they see it, social subjection, *secondarily*, interpellates the subject out of the assemblage.[35] My claim, however, is that machinic enslavement is only productive as a critical category if it assumes a prior desiring subject, or a desiring subject that *precedes* its interpellation by the meaning machines of enslavement.

However, one of the benefits of using machinic enslavement as a valence of comprehension is that it helps to renew contemporary questions about the relationship between smart technologies, such as algorithmic media, capitalist exploitation, and interpellation. In this way, the logic of enslavement is useful for rethinking the modes of ideology critique. Rather than conceiving enslavement in the manner described by Lazzarato, it is worth conceiving it in terms of the subject-ideology logic introduced by Althusser in his theory of the ISAs, and the relationship between exploited labor and ideological interpellation. The two converge in algorithmic and social media, where users are exploited as prosumer commodities, but are also inscribed into the productive assemblage through their participation in the production of their own surplus-enjoyment.

Inside the Meaning Machine

Just as Lazzarato seems to prioritize machinic enslavement in capitalist subjectivity, recent approaches in critical social media studies afford the same priorities to algorithmic media. Ganaele Langlois, for instance, claims that in the age of social media meaning is no longer simply a human process—it has become tied to technological and commercial processes.[36] What she refers to as "meaning" is not so much the content of a medium as much as it is the way in which algorithmic media and technology assigns "meaningfulness" to pieces of content. With participatory media, governance processes are geared towards "enabling and assigning levels of meaningfulness."[37] Meaningfulness involves both processes of "assigning cultural value to information" and "strategies to foster a specific cultural perception of the platform."[38] Assigning meaningfulness becomes important when considering the fact that platforms are geared towards *fostering as much participation as possible*.[39]

Langlois's central argument is that software itself is a cultural actor.[40] To make this case, she draws on a range of theoretical perspectives, most notably Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Autonomist Marxism. As she describes it, ANT "defines nonhumans such as technical objects as possessing agency, as being able to influence, reshape, and bend to their will other nonhuman and human actors."[41] As an actor, software is not just "a neutral conduit, or a mirror of our desires: it can impose a specific will, it can transform us, it promises to reveal new meaningful horizons, yet at the same time, it is not on the same footing as human actors in that it neither thinks nor is capable of any kind of cultural understanding."[42] Langlois defines the user as "someone who experiences nonhuman produced meaning and is potentially transformed by it, someone for whom meaning is directly tied to the ordering and making sense of one's existence."[43] This conception of the user(s) is significant since, ordinarily, we have come to think of social media as interactive, wherein we engage with other *human* actors, agents, participants, and users, in our networks. However, Langlois is keen to point out that much of our interaction on social media is not so much (only) with other human participants—we in fact engage quite substantially with nonhuman actors in the form of software and algorithmic technology that contribute to the production of meaning and meaningfulness. For this reason, she dubs algorithmic media as "meaning machines."

Langlois's appeal to ANT and assemblage theory is consistent with the attempts of these theories to bypass the subject-object dualism. Hers is an approach that prefers to see us all as human-nonhuman hybrids, who are *transformed* into subjects by the "tyranny of the signifier." In this, she follows quite closely with Lazzarato, whom she draws upon in her analysis of social media and subjection. Meaning machines, she explains, "are assemblages of diverse technological, human, and cultural components that work through signs in order to create not only meanings, but also effects of meaningfulness and meaninglessness."[44] Meaning, therefore, is not only about language and interpretation, it is also "technocultural."[45] Langlois highlights a concern not simply with meaning and meaningfulness, but also with the ways in which the production and circulation of meaning are enwrapped in regimes of power.[46] Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's denunciation of the signifier, Langlois argues that meaning is no longer the product of a signifying process—it is rather, as she puts it, a plane of existentialization, tied for her to the "asignifying" semiotics of the platform, the algorithm, and coding.[47] She explains that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, contemporary capitalism invests directly "into the field of meaning in order to create ideal conditions of consumption: one wants a consumer product not only because it is useful, but also because it is *meaningful*, because it promises a new sense of existence."[48] Rather than empha-

sizing the interpretive aspects of meaning Langlois prefers a practice of analysis that looks at the *conditions* through which meaning is made rather than the meaning as such.[49] Therefore, she places her focus on the way in which meaning machines "distribute" meaningfulness.

Langlois stresses the economic role that meaning machines play in contemporary semiotechnological capitalism. Platforms, she explains, are not simply designed to mine meaningful data from users. They also play a part in defining and redefining meaningfulness, but they do so mainly according to a specific profit logic.[50] In this sense, I would argue, meaning machines serve a function that is not so dissimilar to the classical definition of ideological hegemony, whereby people submit themselves to the conditions of their own exploitation because of the way that they are inscribed into the superstructural and cultural logics of meaning and meaningfulness. However, according to Langlois, meaning machines differ from this more traditional conception of ideology.

According to Langlois, the process of subjection here is not coercive because users still receive something in return for having their data mined: what she refers to as "psychosocial satisfaction."[51] Social media platforms "offer users a way to undertake a work of self-transformation. They do not impose modes of existence; they provoke their arising within users."[52] She explains further that users' engagement with platforms and the role that they play in capitalist accumulation bears no resemblance to alienation in the Marxist sense of the term. This is because users get back satisfaction. But in what sense are users "satisfied"? Is this full satisfaction in both material (i.e., objective value) and psychical (i.e., satisfaction of the drive) sense? Or, is it closer to the kind of satisfaction that Herbert Marcuse described as "repressive desublimation"?[53]

In repressive desublimation, like the postmodern injunction to "Enjoy!," prohibition gets displaced in favour of obligatory enjoyment; unfortunately, what becomes apparent when enjoyment is prescribed is that the object of desire, while no longer prohibited, remains impossible to attain and is therefore all the more damagingly repressive. Or, to put it another way, according to Todd McGowan, with digital technology the temporal limit placed on locating the object of desire disappears as the object becomes available in the spaces of the database.[54] However, every achieved object seems not to even provide the kind of psychosocial satisfaction that Langlois describes. No longer prohibited, but still dissatisfying, the objects available (even though they attribute meaningfulness) remain non-satiating, propelling continuous participation. Recall that the platform is geared toward engendering as much participation as possible. The more we participate, the more we contribute to the accrual of data. Lacking the prohibition to enjoy, the only way to explain the failure of the object/meaningfulness to satisfy

the desire of the user is by attributing this failure as contingent rather than necessary. In this way, users remain able to "acknowledge the hopelessness of consumption while simultaneously consuming with as much hope as the most naïve consumer."[55] Approached in this way, it is possible to argue that psychosocial satisfaction is more a myth, one that helps also to mask the extent of users' material exploitation.

Drawing a parallel example, we could say that the claim towards user satisfaction follows precisely the ideological logic of commodity fetishism and the wage relation, whereby it appears as though workers receive back a fair "something" (the wage) for the work that they provide, therefore reifying the fact of exploitation. While I agree with Langlois that the production of meaningfulness through the platform and algorithmic media is tied to profitability, my claim is that meaningfulness is here only produced as a lure, to downplay the role of exploitation (and, yes, alienation—even in the form of expropriation), and the dynamics of class struggle in the same way as traditional commodity fetishism. Regardless of the fact of the role of the fetish form in obscuring capitalist relations of production, it is worth elaborating upon the history of technological development within capitalism as a force driven by the class struggle. The drive towards automation and the emergence of algorithmic media is a component part in the development of capitalist mechanisms of control and exploitation.

Capitalism and Machines: The Drive towards Automation

Automation first arrives due to capital's drive to reduce its dependence upon living labor.[56] This tends to make sense if we put it into the context of the elementary contradictions of capital, beginning with competition. Capitalists are in competition with each other and must find ways to constantly expand and grow their operations to avoid being overtaken by their competitors. To do so, individual capitalists need to find ways to increase profits by lowering costs. Historically, this has meant a greater amount of investment in labor saving technology or machinery.

Machinery helps to surmount the barrier of competition at the same time that it overcomes the barrier of labor. The frailty of the human body makes labor a barrier to production. But labor also creates a barrier to capital because of the political clout of organized labor, which constantly demands from capital the shrinking of the length of the working day, at the same time that it demands increased benefits, including the increase of wages. Shortening the length of the working day means that less surplus value is produced; as well, paying out more in wages takes away from the potential profits of the capitalist. The introduction of machinery therefore helps to intensify the relative amount of surplus value produced within the confines of a short-

er working day, while disciplining labor through de-skilling and the threat of unemployment. By "transferring workers' knowledge into machines," capital is able to automate the process, reduce the amount of necessary labor time, and increase the amount of surplus labor as the source of profit.[57] Automation is therefore the dream of capital, and "the information age," as Nick Dyer-Witheford puts it, "has meant, first and foremost, a leap toward a new, digitized level of automation," where capital has in the era of post-Fordism invested in digital machines and automated services.[58] But this still tends to impose a third barrier to capitalist accumulation: a crisis of effective demand for commodities in the market. As the working class becomes increasingly deskilled, loses wages from deskilling and stagnation, and loses benefits as the result of the new austerity regimes of neoliberalism, workers who are also consumers have less money to spend in the market; and, since profit is only garnered from the sale of commodities, we reach a crisis of accumulation or overproduction. These are problems I've addressed elsewhere.[59] My present concerns have to do with the role of machinery and automation as it is tied to new forms of subjection. In that sense, how can we come to understand the role of algorithmic media in the context of the capitalist mode of production?

It would be false to suggest that living (i.e., human) labor has become obsolete in the information age. At the same time that factory and wage labor have been reduced, relatively speaking, within the context of the developed world, there has been an expansion in the areas of service, creative, knowledge-based, and affective sectors of the labor market.[60] This is one reason for the use of the term post-Fordism to describe the post-factory, post-welfare state period of automated production. It could also be argued that this period, where we've seen the broader integration of automated production systems, is better understood using Marx's terms as the greater transition from the formal to the real subsumption of labor under capitalism,[61] where capital itself *appears* to be immediately productive as it "puts to work science, technology, and the embodied knowledges of the collective;"[62] or, in other words, fixed ("dead") capital as opposed to variable ("living") capital in the form of human labor power, itself appears to be the source of surplus value. In the case of formal subsumption, capitalism integrates already existing social relations and means of production into its own valorization process; whereas in the case of real subsumption, capitalism produces its own social relations, or as Jason Read puts it, capitalism begins to posit its own presuppositions.[63] In the transition from formal to real subsumption, capital must eliminate the pre-existing legal and social orders antagonistic to its own drive towards profit; hence, Marx's statement in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, "every form of production creates its own legal relations, form of government, etc."[64] In the case of formal subsumption, labor power still appeared

necessary as immediately productive, whereas in real subsumption the technical organization of labor is intensified and further mystified.[65] Automation reduces the amount of necessary labor, while now surplus labor is "free" to roam; it has become "liberated" as "entrepreneurial labor."[66] This is perhaps one way to imagine the "real subsumption of subjectivity" (as Read calls it), or the (re-)territorialization found in social subjection, which emerges only as part of the grounding needed for machinic enslavement. In this sense, subjects caught in machinic enslavement are interpellated as entrepreneurs,[67] and this forms the basis of social subjection. But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves here since this still seems to evade the problem of the class struggle, which as we saw above, is foundational in the very transition towards machinery and the movement from formal to real subsumption of labor. Where does algorithmic media fit into this new territory?

Algorithms, according to Tiziana Terranova, are examples of fixed capital. Automation frees up surplus labor by reducing the amount of necessary labor, which capital then needs to re-territorialize in order to maintain the process of wealth accumulation and expropriation by the few.[68] Capital, in other words, must find ways to control the time/energy released: "it must produce poverty and stress when there should be wealth and leisure, it must make direct labor the measure of value even when it is apparent that science, technology, and social cooperation constitute the source of wealth produced. It thus inevitably leads to the periodic and widespread destruction of this accumulated wealth, in the form of psychic burnout, environmental catastrophe, and physical destruction of the wealth through war."[69] Automation and algorithmic logic are thus caught up in the class struggle in this way: depending upon who is in control—that is, the class power that programs and gives them purpose—automation and algorithmic logic can either be a means of exploitation, or a means of emancipation. The latter point is argued by Srnicek and Williams in their defence of full automation, leading towards a post-work society.[70] Nevertheless, so long as we remain within capitalism, it is difficult to see how full automation will bring anything less than increasing proletarianization *as* "precaritization," where surplus labor is deterritorialized as unemployed ("entrepreneurial") variable labor.

According to Terranova, algorithms are part of a "genealogical line that… starting with the adoption of technology by capitalism as fixed capital, pushes the former through several metamorphoses," the culmination of which is automation.[71] Like Langlois, Terranova draws upon assemblage theory in order to examine the productive role of algorithms and automation. As she puts it, algorithms are part of an assemblage "that includes hardware, data, data structures (such as lists, databases, memory, etc.), and the behaviours and actions of bodies."[72] Drawing on the Autonomist use of Marx's "fragment on machines,"[73]

and the conception of the "general intellect,"[74] Terranova argues that algorithms are a means of production that "encode a certain quantity of social knowledge… [but] they are only valuable in as much as they allow for the conversion of such knowledge into exchange value (monetization) and its (exponentially increasing) accumulation."[75] From this perspective, there is an advantage to beginning from the premise of subjection: doing so allows us to subjectivize the conversion of social knowledge into exchange value through its appropriation and accumulation by the class interests of capital, expropriating the value created by users and workers. In this sense, it is clear that the logic of the algorithm has its origins in a particularly territorialized class subjective position, and one that builds its power and interests through processes that include the interpellation of social subjects and the reproduction of ideological hegemony that inscribes the subject into the machinic assemblage. It's from this perspective that we might look at the algorithmic ideology.

The Algorithmic Ideology

Despite all of the attention being paid these days to the impenetrability of algorithmic technology, with its manners of "deep learning," it is worth being reminded that algorithms are in fact technologies that originate in social processes. They have the ability to structure human behaviour, but they do so in the context of complex social processes and existing political tensions. Algorithms impact users by learning about and forming preferences, and by impacting decisions about participation and content production.[76] But these technologies are still refined within the larger organizational, social, and political structures tied to the capital-class dynamic.

Algorithms, according to Ian Bogost, are like metaphors. They are simplifications that "take a complex system from the world and abstract it into processes that capture some of that system's logic and discard others." [77] McKelvey explains that social media platforms, and their software, represent a set of instructions that guide and lead towards a specific task, whereas algorithms are, themselves, the instructions.[78] An algorithm is, in other words, "a recipe, an instruction set, a sequence of tasks to achieve a particular calculation or result."[79] It is worth breaking through their opacity using descriptions such as these because it allows us to move past the view that algorithms are these "elegant" objects guiding our lives, into which we blindly place our faith.[80] We should ask, for this reason, how decisions are made behind the design of the algorithm and the platform. As Finn remarks, "while the cultural effects of computation are complex, these systems function in the world through instruments designed and implemented by human beings."[81] It's in this way that algorithms are not neutral

arbiters of information, but are inscribed with ideology through and through.

Algorithmic ideology is inscribed directly by what Finn refers to as "pragmatist approach," a method for *defining* a problem and searching for a method to solve it.[82] The pragmatist approach would seem to posit the existence of a problem in neutral terms. However, as Mager points out, engineers and designers are employed predominantly by corporate social media sites, whose motive is primarily based in profit generation.[83] Mager invokes the "California Ideology," which as Marwick notes is the ethic of the Web 2.0 era that prioritizes the combination of creativity and entrepreneurial agency that is characteristic of neoliberalism.[84] The venture capitalism of Silicon Valley bankrolls this complex system. In order to understand the ideology of the algorithm, it is necessary, then, to interrogate the discourses employed in defining the problems and methods used in the design of algorithms, in the sets of instructions that they establish, and to position these within the political (economic) context of the capital-class structure.

Napoli points out that "one of the key functions that algorithms perform in contemporary media consumption is to assist audiences [and users] in the process of navigating an increasingly complex and fragmented media environment."[85] It could be argued that algorithms aid in the mechanization of human life by automating mental as well as physical labor. Part of the problem is that new media and the internet have created a sea of abundant content that makes navigation quite difficult and time consuming. Algorithmic media, such as Google's PageRank, Amazon's recommendation software, and Facebook's EdgeRank algorithms, circumvent this problem by learning about users and making recommendations. In this sense, rather than escaping the tyranny of the signifier, algorithmic media help to procure the re-suturing of the signifying chain that Deleuze and Guattari saw being dismantled by capitalist processes of deterritorialization and lines of flight. Algorithmic media reconstitute the broken-down signifying chain that was one of the chief categories of postmodern deterritorialization.[86]

Writing about Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm, Taina Bucher applies a Foucauldian approach to question the regimes of visibility on Facebook.[87] Looking at Facebook through the model of panopticism, Bucher argues that the problem with Facebook is not so much the threat of visibility or surveillance. Rather, it's the threat of *invisibility* that troubles users: "the possibility of constantly disappearing, of not being considered enough. In order to appear, to become visible, one needs to follow a certain platform logic embedded in the architecture of Facebook."[88] It is curious, then, that Bucher sticks to the Foucauldian paradigm rather than looking towards Lacan. That is, rather than approach this problem of the threat of invisibility through the prism

of panopticism, why not look at it through the Lacanian register of the big Other—that is, of the Symbolic order itself?

When approaching the question of visibility—or the threat of invisibility—it is worth considering the mediating "gaze" of the Lacanian big Other: the virtual entity whose agency we assume in order to confer shared meaning upon an object.[89] Although we know that this agency does not exist—that the big Other does not exist—we assume it because we remain in the dark regarding the Other's own self-knowledge of its non-existence—that is: do others know that the big Other does not exist.[90] Because of this, appearances tend to matter since we find ourselves requiring the acknowledgement of the Other to prove our existence—that is, to give us meaning. The big Other, in this sense, is the missing agency of meaningfulness that Langlois (above) discusses. It confers meaningfulness upon us. There exists, then, a precipitous act on the part of the user to anticipate in some fashion the reaction of the Other. But this is so at the level of the network, of other users, who acknowledge our presence conferring upon us our own place within the network.

As Bucher explains, the algorithm—the EdgeRank algorithm in the case of Facebook—works towards regulating our relationship to its regimes of visibility/invisibility. But it is perhaps in this way that algorithmic logic is built, not upon giving us what we seem to desire, but by constantly *denying* us this. It has learned the practice of keeping us *dis*-satisfied, rather than satisfying our desire. That is to say, what if the algorithm learns, not to give us immediately the object of our desire—the thing we (think) we want—but instead prevents us from obtaining the object—keeps it constantly at a distance? In doing so, we continue to search and, in the process, receive back a portion of surplus-enjoyment (not direct [impossible] enjoyment, but a little nugget of pleasure that keeps us going) at the same time that we generate surplus value for the site. This is the way that algorithmic logic, I claim, interpellates us as users, and how it mediates between surplus value and surplus-enjoyment. The more dissatisfied we remain, the more we are eager to search out the lost object of desire; the more we search it out, the more we generate in terms of surplus value. This is why subjection (returning to my initial thesis)—subjection as negation, as a negative rather than a positive position of immanence—takes precedence over enslavement.

Desiring Machines Redux

According to Lazzarato, capital pays for social production by buying the labor force.[91] However, because he speaks primarily about the relationship between social and technical machines, it is unclear to whom precisely he refers—that is, what is the subjective position

occupied here—as the "capital" that buys labor power. He goes on to argue that, although it appears as though capital is buying labor power, what it actually purchases is "the right to exploit a 'complex' assemblage," which includes various components of the forces of production, including not only machinery, but also wider societal spaces that include transportation, the media and entertainment industries, and ultimately the entirety of the urban environment.[92] Such a rather "holistic" approach to production and exploitation has, on the one hand, the ability to foreclose upon the exploitation of labor in the form of unpaid labor time; and, on the other hand, ties—at least for Lazzarato—the question of production to that of desire. With a focus on desiring-production (in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense), Lazzarato puts this problem in terms of the changing of the valences from the political to the "subjective economy." Capitalism's strength, as he puts it, includes desire into its very matrix of production. Desire, he says, is the basis of production.[93]

This is a perspective that follows very closely to that of Deleuze and Guattari. With their concept of the desiring-machines, they argue against the psychoanalytic conception of desire as a force arising from lack, in search for something: an "acquisition." They contend that the psychoanalytic conception of desire, based on the dialectic of lack and acquisition, is too idealistic. Instead, they claim, desire is a productive force.[94] For them, capitalism is a force that deterritorializes, it decodes the forces of repression that submerge the positivity of desire.[95] Theirs, then, is a project to maintain the lines of flight against the territorializing impetuses of the ruling ideology, including those produced within the psychoanalytic discourse. They seek, in other words, to fight against the territorializing interpellations of social subjection. Schizophrenia, according to them, is a product of the capitalist machine's lines of flight; hysteria, conversely, is a product of the territorializing machine of ideological discourses, such as psychoanalysis.[96] For them, "desire can never be deceived."[97] It is an affirmative, as opposed to negative, force of production, and one that is *self*-stimulating.[98]

In the Lacanian paradigm, desire is the result of a lack. But how this lack is defined is significant for thinking the relationship of the subject *to* her desire, enjoyment, and interpellation. Lack is an elementary dimension of desire since, without it the subject would be complete and therefore would not need to search out satisfaction. According to Todd McGowan, this lack is constitutive of the subject and it is impossible to resolve or cure the subject's lack in order to "achieve a harmonious whole."[99] The goal of psychoanalysis is not to "cure people of their lack," but to teach people to embrace the *constitutive* role of lack. Lack is the result of "castration," a controversial claim in the Freudian literature, to be sure. However, part of what makes Lacan's approach innovative is that he reconceives lack in terms of *symbolic* castration.

In other words, "castration" is the result of the subject's entry into the Symbolic order of language and meaning. On the one hand, lack is always already constitutive of the subject; however, on the other hand, it is paradoxical in the fact that symbolic castration retroactively introduces a sense of past wholeness or completeness, when *jouissance* or enjoyment was total. Entry into the Symbolic order is castrating to the extent that, in order to exist within the confines of the social-Symbolic order, the subject is forced to renounce this totalizing *jouissance*, and thereby, in losing a part of herself, is interpellated/subjectivized as a desiring subject. Desire is born of this constitutive loss of enjoyment. The act of searching out that object—what Lacan referred to as the *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire—produces a supplementary form of enjoyment: a surplus-enjoyment. It is in the act of searching out the lost object of desire (an object that only exists insofar as it remains lost) that the subject procures a degree of *surplus*-enjoyment. The act of searching *produces* this object on the inverse side of lack *as* surplus. It's in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari are correct—that desire is productive; that desire and production are consubstantial with each other—but for the wrong reason. And it is precisely the constitutive lack of the subject that demonstrates the priority of subjection in the psychic or libidinal economy of power.

To put things somewhat differently, Deleuze and Guattari fail to notice that repression—far from being a simple restriction on desire—is in actuality the very *condition* of desire. Desire, in other words, is only activated by the obstacle that prevents its full realization. Deleuze and Guattari therefore precede a similar mistake made by Judith Butler in her (Foucauldian) description of subjection as "passionate attachment." According to her, power is constitutive of subjectivity. Power, she says, provides the conditions of possibility that define the existence of desire, and therefore we come to depend upon power to preserve the very "beings that we are."[100] Although Butler is here much closer to the Lacanian conception of subjectivity and desire, in the sense of demonstrating the tie between repression/power/obstacle and desire, she seems to leave no way out—that is, no way of escaping the interpellative call of power. The difference, then, between her conception of power/desire and the Lacanian conception is that, as Mladen Dolar puts it, the subject for Lacan emerges where interpellation fails.[101] Here, then, we come to the heart of the problem with the conception of social subjection. While Deleuze and Guattari, Butler, and Lazzarato, conceive subjection very closely to the Althusserian conception of interpellation—the interpellation of the individual/desiring-machine as subject—the Lacanian approach, through the view of the desiring subject as lack, conceives the subject as marking the point of ideological *failure*. The subject emerges at the point of *rupture* in the Symbolic order.

Deleuze and Guattari, then, conceive subjection as akin to the erection of obstacles to desire. But, as McGowan is keen to point out, the problem is that "capitalism's contingent obstacles obscure the necessity of the obstacle. Capitalism's deception consists in convincing us, as it convinces Deleuze and Guattari, that desire can transcend its failures and overcome all barriers. We don't need more desire, but rather the recognition that the barrier is what we desire."[102] Or, as Samo Tomši puts it, capitalism strives to reject castration, and therefore Deleuze and Guattari are correct in claiming that capitalism is "anti-Oedipal."[103] However, capitalism imposes a perverse position on the subject (i.e., through fetishism: fetishism disavowal/commodity fetishism), and therefore creates the deception that we desire the eradication of the obstacle, when in fact it is the obstacle that we desire since *it* creates the semblance that the lost object (the *objet petit a*) is conceivably attainable.[104] The precedence of castration assumes the priority of social subjection prior to the subject's enslavement to the machine. A desiring subject is assumed as always already existing in order for enslavement to become active. Furthermore, what the logic of the barrier in the subject's libidinal economy recalls is the very same logic in the expansion of capital, which constantly strives to overcome its own self-imposed obstacles: that is, "the limit to capital is capital itself." This again demonstrates the homology between surplus value and surplus-enjoyment.

It is therefore possible to agree with Lazzarato, Langlois, and Deleuze and Guattari, that algorithmic media are desiring-machines of sorts. Algorithmic media combine automation and entertainment into a perpetual motion machine that produces surplus value through the luring combustion of surplus-enjoyment. In this way, algorithmic media are a response to the potential suffocation of desire tied to the digital spatialization of time, whereby the sea of abundance of available objects begins to show the phenomenal impossibility of the lost object (the *objet petit a*). Algorithmic media, however, enjoin us in a constant search for the impossible lost object. This is the way that the *objet petit a* is inscribed into the algorithmic. The power of the algorithm is its ability to constantly stage and then displace desire. Algorithms therefore assign, not meaning or meaningfulness (pace Langlois); instead, they reproduce the lack constitutive of subjectivity. It is the very opacity of the algorithm that veils the surplus entity: the fact that the search generates its own object(s): surplus value and surplus-enjoyment.

Class Struggle as Real

In the closing pages of *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari write: "Those who have read us this far will perhaps find many reasons for reproaching us: for believing too much in the pure potentialities of art

and even of science; for denying or minimizing the role of classes and class struggle…"[105] Indeed, for them, "revolutionary action is no longer considered in terms of 'real' components of society: relations of power are no longer interpreted in terms of the class struggle."[106] Since, according to them, the intersection of enslavement and subjection produces new subjects—even in terms of what Jason Read refers to as the "real subsumption of subjectivity"—the antagonisms that inhere in late capitalism can no longer be understood in the more traditional language of the class struggle, that is in terms of the agencies of capital and labor. Instead of the class struggle, "revolutionary transformation occurs in the creation of a new subjective consciousness born of the reconfiguration of the collective work experience."[107] Class struggle (and "classes"), like the subject as lack, is for them too idealistic since it assumes a transcendental teleologism that conceives struggle according to the dialectical logic of historical materialism. Class struggle and the desiring subject, both as lack, correspond as negative correlatives of each other, but it is precisely this fact that, as I've tried to show, affords them their priority in the logic of the machine.

As we have seen, class struggle is the motor that, itself, drives technological innovation and transformation within capitalism. In order to confront the barriers of competition and labor, capital invests in new machinery, large scale industry, and in recent times, digital automation technologies. Even as Antonio Negri explains, "the *antagonistic* element of subjectification is sometimes missing in Deleuze."[108] The machinic element, too, according to him, is "moved by the class struggle, which belongs to the technical composition of antagonistic labor power."[109]

"Class struggle," according to Žižek, "designates the very antagonism that prevents objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole."[110] Žižek's conception of the class struggle is particularly negative. It does not delineate a positive antagonism between directly evident groups (i.e., the working class vs. the bourgeoisie). Rather, class struggle functions, according to him, in its very "absence"—that is, in its very absence, it represents the "unfathomable *limit* that cannot be objectivized, located within the social totality, since it is itself that limit which prevents us from conceiving society as a closed totality."[111] Class struggle, therefore, is Real, according to Žižek, in the Lacanian sense. It is "a 'hitch', an impediment which gives rise to ever-new symbolizations by means of which one endeavours to integrate and domesticate it… but which simultaneously condemns these endeavours to ultimate failure."[112] Class struggle, then, is "not the last signifier giving meaning to all social phenomena… but—quite the contrary—a certain limit, a pure negativity, a traumatic limit which prevents the final totalization of the social-ideological field."[113] It is out of this limit point, this point of negativity, that the radical agency of

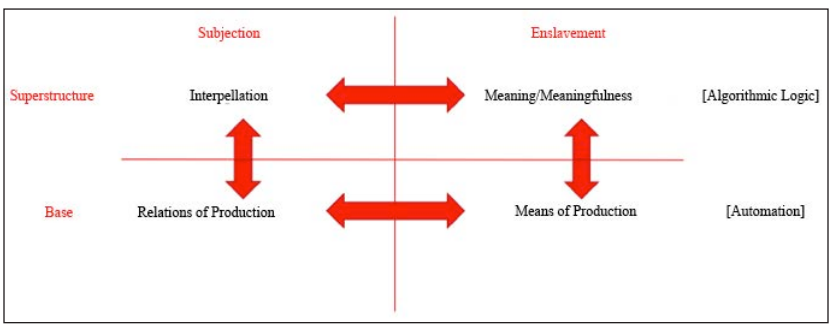
the proletariat (not simply the "working class") emerges. But it is also in the process of displacing this limit, in the attempt to subsume and move beyond this limit, that capital is driven to ever higher orders of its own self-transformation. This, as we have seen, too, is the logic that is formulated within the trajectory of the lacking subject, as she disavows the non-existence of the impossible lost object of desire. It is in this way that class struggle as limit, and the subject as limit, overlap as points of negation that fuel and propel the material and machinic transformations of capitalism.

Part of our conundrum lies in the difficulty of thinking, today, in neoliberal conditions, the separation between work and leisure; between the production of surplus value and the pleasure garnered in surplus-enjoyment. The context of the real subsumption of labor in capitalism shows that such a line of separation may potentially be overly archaic, whereby all activity is value producing activity—that is, as social production as opposed to mere commodity production. At the heart of the divergence between the logic of proletarianization and that of the general intellect is, as Jason Read points out, the different arguments found in *Capital Volume I* and the *Grundrisse*.[114] The former presents proletarianization as the force that destroys capital; the latter sees this as the result of socialization—that is, of the *forces* of production surpassing and transcending the *relations* of production. But how, in the case of the latter, do the capitalist relations of production "wither away"? My claim is still that the story of proletarianization in *Capital* provides for us the scenario of the class struggle as the political in the relations of production as the force that realizes the subsumed socialization in the "general intellect." It's in this sense, again, that subjection takes precedence over enslavement.

Subjection and Enslavement: Coda

The relationship between social subjection and machinic enslavement as I've tried to show is dialectical, based primarily in the overlapping lacks of the subject and the class struggle. But each overlaps components of the traditional topography of base and superstructure. Subjection has to be understood on two levels—in terms of the relations of production (i.e., class struggle) *and* in terms of the ideological interpellation that draws people back into and reproduces their position within the existing relations of production. There are similarly two levels to machinic enslavement: that of the forces of production, where the subject as labor power participates and is inscribed into an assemblage of production, of which they remain the conscious operators and therefore the creative component of the new. However, machinic enslavement also operates at the level of meaning production, which fastens individuals into the matrix of production. The lat-

ter is an equally creative component element since it is driven by the combined and accumulated interaction between participants in common. Nevertheless, if we are to truly understand the political at the heart of the capitalist mode of production, the side of subjection needs to be given precedence. Doing so makes it possible to comprehend the intersection of exploitation and ideology in the algorithmic apparatus. Therefore, I propose the following schema as a way of mapping the expanded topography of subjection and enslavement, giving precedence to the left side as a prior instance.



Subjection and enslavement relate to each other in a way that is like the parallax gap described by Slavoj Žižek. They relate to each other, also, in a way that mirrors the parallax of historical and dialectical materialism. If we begin on one side, we end up back on the other, without being able to detect the causal relationship between them, as in a Möbius strip. However, if our interest is political, then we must proceed from the premise that subjection is prior to enslavement. When we begin from the perspective of class struggle and ideological interpellation then we are better equipped for understanding exploitation in terms that include the expropriation of the commons produced in the assemblages of enslavement—otherwise, how are we to understand the direction of wealth privatization, whether by the corporation or by the capitalist class, as such; as well as the interpellation of individual subjects in (or out of) the production of meaning in the matrix of enslavement, which remains a condition of our continued submission to the processes of expropriation that establish, reproduce, and maintain our collective submission to capitalist class power? Just as overly mechanistic economic critiques of capitalism miss the centrality of the political class struggle—the political at the heart of the economic—so too does the assemblage theory of enslavement lose sight of the negative core of subjection, which is the site at which to locate the negation of capital, not only as substance but also *as* subject.

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire." In Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English. Bruce Fink, trans. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006). Thanks to Clint Burnham for reminding me of this passage.
2. Ibid, 701
3. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Joshua David Jordan, trans. (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2014).
4. Jodi Dean, *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). See also Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), and Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010).
5. Ganaele Langlois, *Meaning in the Age of Social Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
6. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." In *On Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2009).
7. Ibid
8. See Christian Fuchs, *Digital LaborLabor and Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
9. Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital: Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), 104.
10. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).
11. Fuchs, *op. cit.*
12. Dolar, 78
13. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 73–74.
14. I take up the differences between the Althusserian and Lacanian conceptions of interpellation in my book, extendingŽižek's reversal of Althusser's formula, arguing that instead ideology interpellates subjects as individuals. Matthew Flisfeder, *The Symbolic, The Sublime, and Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Jodi Dean also makes a similar argument in "Enclosing the Subject." In *Crowds and Party* (New York: Verso, 2016).
15. The historical materialist analysis of capital demonstrates the contradictory logics of capital and labor, where capital, in order to secure its own interests, is logically and rationally required to pursue profit by whatever means necessary. This includes the contradictory requirement to displace human labor-power, which is also the source of value production in commodities. Likewise, to best secure *its* own survival, labor must continuously challenge the interests of capital. It must act according to its own

rational and logical imperatives for survival, which is ultimately antagonistic to the interests of capital since it can create a barrier to the further appropriation and accumulation of capitalist wealth. It's in this sense that I refer to the subject-subject antagonism as "class struggle," rather than refer to other struggles to overthrow existing power, such as anti-racist or feminist struggles. Or, to put the matter differently, while there is nothing contradictory about being a capitalist feminist, or capitalist anti-racist, capitalism is incapable of negating its logical requirement for exploiting labor and remaining intact.

16. See Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
17. See Jay David Bolster and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2008); and, Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).
18. See Greg Elmer, *Profiling Machines: Mapping the Personal Information Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
19. See SlavojŽižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
20. SeeŽižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. 2nd Ed. (New York: Verso, 2002).
21. Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 456–457
22. Lazzarato 2014, 12
23. Ibid, 25
24. Ibid
25. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (1992): 3–7.
26. Lazzarato 2014, 25
27. The same charge can be levelled against these thinkers in that they often neglect the critical political economy analysis of capitalism in their theories of subjection and interpellation.
28. Lazzarato 2014, 13
29. Ibid, 29
30. Ibid, 28
31. Ibid, 30
32. Ibid, 35
33. Although he seems at times to suggest that enslavement and subjection intersect in the production of subjectivity, Lazzarato does claim that "machinic enslavement (or processes) *precede* the subject and the object and surpasses the personological distinctions of social subjection" (Lazzarato 2014: 120, emphasis added).
34. Lazzarato 2014, 38, emphasis added. Such a description of enslavement recalls Michel Foucault's criticism of the terms "ideology" and "repres-

sion." See Foucault, "Truth and Power." In *The Foucault Reader*. Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 60.

35. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
36. Langlois, 24
37. Ibid, 44
38. Ibid
39. Ibid
40. Ibid, 46
41. Ibid, 52
42. Ibid
43. Ibid, 53
44. Ibid, 55
45. Ibid
46. Ibid
47. Ibid, 62
48. Ibid, emphasis added
49. Ibid, 64
50. Ibid, 87
51. Ibid, 97
52. Ibid, 94
53. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).
54. Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
55. Ibid, 29
56. Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 93.
57. Ibid
58. Ibid
59. See Matthew Flisfeder, "Debt: The Sublimated Object of Capital." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 30–31 (2013/2014): 47–63.
60. Dyer-Witheford, 94–95
61. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1*. Ben Fowkes, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1990), 1019–1038.
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63. Ibid, 109
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71. Terranova, 381
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