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The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization

By

Jasper Quentin Bernes

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Abstract

The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization

by

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Most people spend much of their lives working. By working, I mean “wage labor”: activity undertaken in exchange for money in a society where money is necessary for survival. This has not always been the case, and it is not the case universally, in all places, or for everyone. But it is now a fact of life so foundational in most parts of the world as to seem a feature of nature rather than history. I begin with truism because I think that the fact of work, in all its bluntness, has never been accorded proper importance in literary criticism or cultural criticism in general. There is, of course, a convenient explanation for the absence: historically, art has been either the province of the leisured classes or something made and experienced outside of the bounds of the workday. Art is, therefore, an exception to the rule of work. And even Marxist critics –those whom one would expect to believe, as Marx did, that production and labor were foundational in capitalism – tend to approach the painting or the poem from the side of the market, consumption, and everyday life, for the understandable reasons outlined above. If they tell a story about capitalism’s determinative effect on art, it is usually a story about the penetration of market logics into the realm of art, a story about commodification. Few ask what the *work of art* might share with *work in general* or how the constant technological and social refashioning of the workplace might affect the horizon of possibility for artworks.

My dissertation, “The Work of Art in the Age of Deindustrialization,” attempts to provide one answer to these questions, a historical answer, by a reading of important literary and artistic works from the 1960s and 1970s. These are decades in which twin political and economic crises – the political militancy we associate with 1968, on the one hand, and the crisis of profitability and the dollar we associate with 1973 on the other – force a profound restructuring of capitalism and class relations. In particular, the multiple transformations of the labor process – deindustrialization, the rise of the service sector, the introduction of information technologies into the burgeoning managerial and white-collar sectors – provide

a useful vantage from which to investigate the rapid changes in art and writing. Whereas the much-documented aesthetics of objects, things and facticity associated with modernism took its bearings from the factory-system (or, in a variant, anti-industrial form, from the artisanal and craft forms industrialization was in the process of destroying) such a cultural mode becomes increasingly anachronistic in the postwar era. As I argue, the productivist aesthetic of modernism gives way to an aesthetic of administration and distribution that takes signs and social relations rather than physical matter as its primary “material.” Instead of the factory or workshop, such a mode draws from the routinized cognitions of office work and the forced conviviality of the service sector.

The relationship between the economic and the cultural is not, as it might seem, a case of simple synchronicity or one-to-one correspondence. Experimental poetry, for example, is *avant-garde* in the sole sense that it is speculative, a laboratorial mode which runs ahead of the work-a-day world rather than simply reflecting it. Such experimental modes elaborated critical responses and forms of technical imagination which aimed to respond to the rigid hierarchies of 1960s society and yet, via a kind of “cunning of reason,” laid some of the foundations for the new work relations which became dominant in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, part of my argument is that some of the most recognizable of avant-garde devices – erasing, replacing, counting, sorting, arranging by chance or rule – have been thoroughly integrated into the very office machinery (now generalized into the home) which writers use to produce their works.

Such recuperation builds upon an uneasy affinity between left- and right-wing critiques of postwar capitalism. If leftists, countercultural figures and artists took aim at the rigid, bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of the corporate form and work-life in postwar society, targeting the managerial layer in particular, they found strange bedfellows in a class of business management theorists and economists who saw in that same layer a hindrance to profitability. In response to the artistic and countercultural critique, businesses concoct a new, flexible, “flattened” and adaptive corporate form that trims the middle-managerial layer by imposing upon workers a set of pseudo-democratic work relations under the sign of such corporate shibboleths as teamwork, flexibility, participation, creativity and self-management. Rather than the industrialization of culture that Adorno and Horkheimer famously bemoan, my dissertation describes the same operation in reverse – the “culturization” (or aestheticization) of industry, where the workday absorbs the resources, faculties and affects associated with the aesthetic. This operation is designed to produce more highly-productive, motivated workers but also to ward off and absorb the countercultural and artistic critiques that might lead to disaffection. The aesthetic, in this regard, becomes a mechanism for the establishment of a pseudo-democracy and a pseudo-autarky. If “self-management” – the ideal of labor militants, communists and anarchists since the 19th century – once meant freedom from the imperatives of the boss it now means, increasingly, in light of this reorganization, an internalization of such imperatives.

My first chapter traces the thematics of “management” and “self-management” as they appear in the early poetry of John Ashbery, and in his controversial book *The Tennis-Court Oath* (1962) in particular. Numerous poems in this collection – developed from an earlier

poem, “The Instructional Manual” – take up the position of the midlevel employee, who is both the object of commands and the producer of commands. The contradictions in this standpoint – examined in C. Wright Mills’ *White Collar* and many subsequent studies of “the new middle class” – provide insight into this transitional moment in capitalism, in which the extensive growth of deskilled white-collar work created, for large firms and the post-war bureaucracy, a crisis of management. One of the ways in which this appears in Ashbery’s poetry is through a subtle and inventive play with free indirect discourse and point of view, in which individual moments and voices manifest as antagonistic fragments in an intersubjective field, requiring the “managerial” intervention of the arranging, organizing poetic voice or mind, a mind that is itself fragmented by its multiple allegiances and responsibilities. The experimental collages of *The Tennis Court Oath* illuminate the curious ambiguity of that special commodity, labor-power, which is at once object and subject: a thinking object, a commodity that speaks.

As I discuss in my second chapter, one site where all of these meanings are contested – a site that again attracts the interest of both artists and business management theorists – is the emergent discourse of cybernetics. Through the central notion of “feedback,” cybernetics presents an image of social self-regulation based upon reciprocal, horizontal relations rather than explicit hierarchies. Writers and conceptual artists borrow from this discourse to model utopian social forms, ones where form is embedded less in explicit command than in something like a changeable grammar or syntax – cybernetics calls this “information” – which can be revealed and manipulated by art. To give just two examples, both Hannah Weiner in her *Code Poems* and Dan Graham in his *Works for Magazine Pages* follow the founder of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener, by treating information – and by extension, the formative powers of cultural labor – as a kind of anti-entropic, organizing force. Following Benjamin Buchloh, I describe this development as an “administrative aesthetic,” since the cultural artifact comes to see its vocation as one of regulating social relations. Though I treat only a handful of figures in this chapter, the list of writers and artists influenced by this conception of information (and its close cousin, entropy) provides a remarkable cross-section of the period. A partial list of figures who help forge these new aesthetic values would include, in fiction, William Burroughs, William Gass, Kurt Vonnegut, Philip K. Dick and Thomas Pynchon; in poetry, Charles Olson, John Ashbery, A.R. Ammons, Hannah Weiner and Bernadette Mayer; and in art, Hans Haacke, Robert Smithson, Dan Graham and Martha Rosler.

One of the reasons why it has been difficult to approach the cultural transformations of the 1960s and 1970s from the side of labor rather than, say, consumption – from the side of the workday rather than leisure time – is that increasingly these two spheres commingle, and the values associated with leisure time are invoked to make the workday more tolerable, at the same time as the protocols and routines associated with work colonize the space of leisure time. This crossing of spheres bears in particular upon the relations between unpaid “reproductive” or domestic labor (the housework associated with women) and waged labor. The subject of my third chapter, Bernadette Mayer’s project *Memory* (1972) – performance, installation and epic poem – investigates the crossing and blurring of these spheres, as everyday life is increasingly subsumed by the protocols of office work, and as office work is

increasingly colored in the shades and hues of the street or the home. *Memory* models this process of merger and blurring through its incorporation of multiple media (type, photography, audio recording), artistic genres and techniques. In this sense, Mayer's elaboration of a "total" artwork which merges different technologies into one single apparatus prefigures the coming reorganization of office work around the personal computer.

THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

JASPER BERNES

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INTRODUCTION: THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

The following study, my dissertation, will argue that the *work of art* and *work in general* share a common destiny. Such a claim seems obvious, especially for anyone familiar with Marxist thought. And yet, it is perhaps so obvious that it has hardly ever been made with any thoroughness, although the works of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, for instance, feature the beginnings of such arguments. As we know, most people on the planet spend the majority of their lives working, not out of choice but out of necessity, performing unfree activities in exchange for the money which they need to survive. That is, the need of such money, and the means of survival it represents, is what makes work unfree, even when people enjoy work or find fulfillment and meaning in it. He who does not work shall not eat, as the saying goes. This is the principle which organizes capitalist societies (and many other social forms as well), coming as close to a “human condition” as anything else we are likely to identify. Through a study of a particular historical period, I will argue that, inasmuch as it is the dominant form of social activity in capitalist societies, unfree work affects the horizon of possibility for aesthetic activity. This is not a relationship of simple reflection, where art is a mirror held up to some underlying economic “base” assumed to hold the truth of the world, much less one of homology, where art reflects some ineffable *weltanschauung* distributed evenly across the whole of society. Rather, I argue for a complex set of reversible mediations between different spheres: on the one hand, wage labor and other types of unfree work provide the social and technical *means* for art work. Artists and writers draw from the methods and means and techniques available to them – many of which come from the worksite – and in doing so respond to the world of work, recasting it, critiquing it, celebrating it, or constructing alternate social arrangements from it. At same time, however, industry looks to art as a sphere that can be commodified and art work as an activity that can be turned into wage labor. Finally, in searching out its own methods, industry also looks to art for transposable techniques, means, and materials which it can borrow and put to work, so to speak. To Adorno and Horkheimer’s notable examination of the industrialization of culture, we must add an understanding of the corresponding aestheticization of industry.¹ And we must understand both of these phenomena as dialectically entangled with an active, and sometimes critical, engagement by writers and artists with the methods and materials of capitalist work.

Obviously, neither compelled work nor wage labor is unique to capitalist societies. But capitalism is distinct in that it makes labor – and the conditions of labor – particularly central to its own development, constantly inventing new ways to make work or workers more productive, either by extending the time of labor (what Marx calls absolute surplus value) or transforming the means of labor through the use of more productive methods and technologies (what Marx calls relative surplus value). I follow Moishe Postone in arguing that it is only because of capitalism’s drive to dominate, rationalize, standardize and intensify labor, and in particular its drive to submit it to a common temporal measure under the pressure of intercapitalist competition (what Marx calls abstract labor time), that labor appear as an abstract entity at all. Because capitalism abstracts labor – in both senses of the

word – it appears as a substantial entity, a category that is not merely ideal but real, a living breathing abstraction.² Before capitalism, labor was entangled with a mesh of activities, some productive and others unproductive, and not easily distinguished from such activities. I would argue, therefore, that it is only as a result of capitalist abstraction that the work of art comes to share a common fate with work. Indeed, one might argue that it is this process of abstraction which constitutes the aesthetic object, along with the distinction between art and labor upon which it depends.

In capitalism, therefore, the historical refashioning of labor and its conditions plays a major role in social transformation more generally. History in capitalism is always, to some extent, the history of work, and the violent transformations of the last few centuries should be understood as intimately entangled with the violent refashioning of labor – its methods, its materials, its distribution into different occupations, its attitudes, and the corresponding balance of power between bosses and workers. Literary and artistic history, too, bears some special – though perhaps less direct – relationship to such transformations, and it is this relationship I intend to explore. In particular, I look at the restructuring of labor that takes place in the already-industrialized countries of the global north – what was once upon a time called “the first world” – beginning in the 1960s, a transformation of the conditions of labor which, as many will claim with some persuasiveness, puts into jeopardy the very nature of capitalist work and production, and figures a new crisis of the capitalist system as a whole.³ If capitalism *is* industrialization, and *is* the mechanization of work, then there might be no possibility of a truly *postindustrial* capitalism, properly speaking. Hence, the doubleness of the prefix “post,” which indicates its dependence on an industrial moment that, as we know, persists as a dominant in the so-called developing countries, and in a residual form in the post-industrial countries. In the US and Europe, however, the transformations of this period are vast. To understand them, we need to understand their background context in the immediate postwar period, from 1945 to around 1965 or 1970.

These were years of great prosperity, referred to frequently in the historical literature as “the postwar boom” or sometimes even “the Golden Age of Capitalism,” characterized by numerous “economic miracles” (in West Germany, Italy, Japan, and France).⁴ By nearly every available measure – wages, profitability, investment – wealth increased greatly across the US, Europe and East Asia. Particularly among white workers, wages in the US grew steadily during this period, facilitating the subsequent expansion of markets for new mass-produced consumer goods and the construction of numerous houses to fill with these new products. There was, correspondingly, a massive growth in US productive capacity and blue-collar manufacturing jobs, and a particularly important part of postwar history is the story of increasingly affluent factory workers who only a couple of decades before had been fighting for subsistence wages. But, importantly for what follows, the period likewise saw a vast increase in the white-collar workforce, an increase which occurred alongside rather than in spite of the increase in blue-collar work.

Capitalism during this period is often described as conforming to a “virtuous” cycle, in which increases in productivity and wages were mutually constitutive, rising together. This allowed for a “compromise” between capital and labor, in which workers would relinquish control over the conditions of labor in exchange for a larger share of the fruits of such labor. Capitalists could therefore institute a wide spectrum of techniques to rationalize and intensify labor in accord with the profit drive, and it was the success of such

productivity-increasing programs which allowed capitalists to share their gains with workers and still keep a handy sum for themselves. Typically, one speaks (sometimes interchangeably) of two types of managerial programs: Taylorism and Fordism. Taylorism refers to the “scientific management” techniques popularized by Frederick Winslow Taylor at the turn of the century, which involved an analysis of existing work practices (“time and motion studies”) and an attempt to reconstruct such practices by way of precisely choreographed movements designed for maximum efficiency. Fordism, which often incorporated Taylorist management techniques, refers in particular to the automation of production through the establishment of assembly lines where workers at different stations perform a single task, notably pioneered in Henry Ford’s factories.⁵ Fordism also refers to a particular social arrangement in which workers are paid enough to purchase the products they make. Henry Ford famously paid workers five dollars per day, so that they could purchase cars. Fordism thus becomes a particularly potent way to understand the postwar order and its increases in productivity and wages. Both Fordism and Taylorism typically imply processes of “deskilling” and “routinization” which allow workers to begin a job with no training, and tend to increase managerial control over the pace and design of work. They also make it much easier to replace workers, since the years of apprenticeship which craft-based production required are done away with.⁶

The process of deskilling – in particular, the Taylorist variant – was also applied to white-collar jobs, especially in the years following WWII. White-collar jobs began to outnumber blue-collar ones by 1956 and the rapid transformation of such positions meant that they were effectively split into a class of managerial, professional and technical positions that came with substantial privileges and another class of clerical jobs whose pay was quickly being eroded and which were also being submitted to the pressures of routinization and deskilling.⁷ This lower rank of clerical workers was, as we know, often but not always composed of women, which is to say that the division of labor was, in this case, also a gender division of labor (and a racial one, too, largely through the exclusion of non-whites from white-collar work).⁸

In an important study of post-WWII fiction and white-collar work, Andrew Hoberk reads the novels of this postwar period as constituted from either, on the one hand, “a fantasy of entrepreneurial labor in a white-collar world” or, on the other hand, mere “stylistic revolts” against the “ultimate proletarianization of mental labor.”⁹ Hoberk draws upon influential contemporaneous accounts by C. Wright Mills, William Whyte, and David Riesman, all of whom emphasize or lament the “threatened individuality” of a postwar middle-class no longer characterized by entrepreneurial property-ownership but by white-collar mental labor in the managerial and professional ranks.¹⁰ As with their blue-collar counterparts, for white-collar workers prosperity meant an erosion of control and a deterioration in the conditions of work. My dissertation picks up where Hoberk’s study ends, looking at the art and literature that emerged once this process of proletarianization was a step or two further along. But rather than treat these cultural products as ideological deformations of an experience of labor and class, as Hoberk does, I suggest we look at them as experiments with imaginary alternatives to the real (and imagined) problems that contemporary labor presented, both for white-collar and blue-collar workers. Associated as they are with the political and countercultural left of the 1960s and 1970s, or with various faces of the neo-avantgarde, the figures I examine do not imagine – as, for instance, Nabokov does in Hoberk’s account – forms of heroic individualism set against the

routinized world of alienated mental or manual labor. Instead they typically imagine new forms of collectivity that might take the place of the bureaucratic, stultifying collective life of the postwar world. If, in C. Wright Mills' account, the transformation of modern work goes beyond the mere dispossession of the means of production, such that "rationality itself has been expropriated from work [along with] any total view and understanding of its process," the works that I examine try to form "total views" of a process they invent based on the real processes they observe. In other words, their "total views" are modeled in part on the economic world they actually have, and in part on the economic life they wish they had.¹¹ However, unlike the notion of "economic fiction" which Michael Clune develops in his study of ideas of the free market and postwar literature, where literary texts provide not an "image of economic reality, but a space in which the economic undergoes a change," I am not afraid to make claims for the effectivity of the aesthetic sphere.¹² In the amalgam of realist and speculative modes I examine in the following pages, imaginative transformations of actually existing economic conditions become, as we will see, laboratories in which the emergent social relations, techniques and ideologies of the future economy, and future conditions of labor, are developed – in most cases against the intention and conception of the artists and writers themselves.

Initial postwar accounts of the "new middle class" of white-collar workers tended to emphasize the "political indifference" which followed from their ambivalent class position, "powerless and estranged but not disinherited," as C. Wright Mills describes it. Mills connects the "apathy" of this class to a "larger problem of self-alienation and social meaninglessness."¹³ But by the late 1960s, the vectors had changed a great deal, in part because of the ongoing proletarianization of the lower orders of this class, and even Mills, in his "Letter to the New Left," written during the last years of his life, would ascribe the end of "the age of complacency" to middle-class "students and young professionals and writers."¹⁴ Similarly, Herbert Marcuse, whose influence in the 1960s was as great as Mills', would reverse the grim assessment of the white-collar middle-class which he offered in *One-Dimensional Man*. In that book, he suggested that because of "the transformation of physical energy into technical and mental skills," white-collar work was a form of freedom that actually entailed "masterly enslavement." In his account, both blue-collar and white-collar workers had been "incorporated into the technological community of the administered population," mastered by the machines that had liberated them from exertion.¹⁵ Such domination held for the machinist as much as it did for "the typist, the bank teller, the high-pressure salesman or saleswoman, and the television announcer."¹⁶ But within only a few years, with the publication of his *Essay on Liberation*, directed at the New Left of the time, Marcuse would likewise soften some of his initial contentions, describing "scientifically-trained, intelligent workers" as a " 'new working class' ...vital for the growth of the existing society." The student revolt of the period was, therefore, a revolt of these future white-collar workers, one capable of "hit[ting] this society at a vulnerable point."¹⁷ Though Marcuse's hopes ultimately lay with the urban lumpenproletariat in the industrialized countries and the rebellions of the developing world, he would acknowledge that despite the differences between "the middle-class revolt in the metropolises and the life-and-death of the wretched of the earth – common to them is the depth of the Refusal."¹⁸

Thus, by the mid-1960s, there arose the possibility that this partly-proletarianized middle-class (or "new working class," as others called it) might revolt against the alienating character of their routinized work, against the new forms of technocratic management and

control which had come to administer even the administrators. At the same time, however, there was the promise of awakening rebellion among the classic industrial working class, as a new wave of discontent spread across the manufacturing sectors of the most developed countries. Rates of absenteeism, job turnover and sabotage among blue-collar workers began to rise in the mid-1960s across most of these countries, followed by a global wave of strikes after 1968 in the US.¹⁹ The US strike wave of 1970 still stands as one of the largest in US history, with over 5000 strikes. In Italy and France from as early as 1960, various theorists and militants, breaking with Marxist orthodoxy, began to talk about a new “rebelliousness ... in large part incomprehensible from the classic ‘protests and demands’ framework” and an antagonism that was not a demand for better terms but “a refusal of the command of capital as the organizer of production.”²⁰ The explosions that arrived with France’s May ’68 and Italy’s “creeping May,” incomprehensible from a perspective that only focused on material prosperity, but completely predictable by the lights of the new theories of alienation, only confirmed that something different was afoot. In the US, toward the end of the 1960s, the mainstream press featured article upon article about the new “blue-collar blues” and the “new resistance to certain forms of work.”²¹ Alarm about this wave of dissatisfaction in the US – which seemed to threaten that the revolt among students would spill into the organized working-class, as had happened in Europe – spawned a now-classic government study, *Work in America*, which spoke of “the anachronistic authoritarianism of the workplace” and suggested, rather bluntly, that “[d]ull, repetitive, seemingly meaningless tasks, offering little challenge or autonomy, are causing discontent among workers at all occupational levels.” This discontent, the study concluded, manifested in overt and covert ways, “as measured by absenteeism, turnover rates, wildcat strikes, sabotage, poor-quality products.”²² Whereas earlier analysts would speak of the auto industry as the central example of the so-called compromise between capital and labor, now it was “the *locus classicus* of dissatisfying work; the assembly-line, its quintessential embodiment.” Moreover, the report continued, “the dissatisfaction of the assembly-line and blue-collar worker is mirrored in white-collar and even managerial positions.” The factory had spread, and the factory was a source of resentment: “the office today, where work is segmented and authoritarian, is often a factory. For a growing number of jobs, there is little to distinguish them but the color of the worker’s collar: computer keypunch operations and typing pools share much in common with the automobile assembly line.”²³

In nearly every industrialized country, therefore, the so-called “compromise” between capital and labor began to break down, and workers were less willing to accept speed-up, routinization, and deskilling in exchange for material prosperity. The struggles of the period put into question the very character of industrial work, and not just the distribution of wealth between capital and labor. Qualitative rather than quantitative demands were the order of the day. If the goal of Fordist and Taylorist reconstructions was “the displacement of labor as the subjective element of the labor process and its transformation into an object,” these struggles manifested the return of that subjective element as a new terrain of struggle.²⁴ As the authors of *Work in America* contend, pay alone was no longer satisfactory: “adequate and equitable pay, reasonable security, safety, comfort and convenience on the job do not insure workers against the blues.”²⁵

Such demands were difficult to articulate, or at least more difficult to articulate than a simple demand for better pay, since the changes they proposed were global and relatively structural. They usually consisted of calls for a greater participation in decision-making, for a

democratization of the workplace, for more varied and creative work, for greater autonomy and even for worker's self-management. This latter demand was, of course, especially true in the European case, in Italy and above-all in France.²⁶ But in the US, too, as Jefferson Cowie notes, a new wave of working-class struggles among miners and office workers, farmworkers and autoworkers rallied around "the 'new' qualitative demands of health and safety, quality of work life, and union democracy." Such struggles were leavened "with youthful energy, a sixties-style discontent, and an anti-authority mood created not by protesting the war but, more typically among the working-class, from actually serving in it."²⁷

In the pages that follow, I will argue that the various literary and artistic experimental cultures of the 1960s and 1970s helped to articulate these new qualitative demands. In reacting against the same bureaucratic, "one-dimensional," conformist and hierarchical society as the workers of the time, the artistic and literary cultures of the period took part in a larger expression of arguably countersystemic values (which one notes, of course, in the counterculture, in the women's movement, and in the antiracist struggles of the period). That artists and writers are quick to formalize, articulate and transform these attitudes, visions and values should only surprise us if we consider the sphere of culture as entirely abstracted from the contemporaneous transformations of the economy. Whether or not artists and writers themselves worked under these new conditions, where new attitudes and maladjustments were developing, is beside the point. They knew someone who did, or read about those who did, or partook of the products of such forms of work. My claims therefore have to do with social experience – an experience of the society around them – rather than personal experience strictly speaking.

My argument, however, is not that artists simply registered, though the articulation of their own dissatisfactions, contemporaneous expressions of discontent. Though this did happen, many of the artistic articulations I attend to in this study precede, often by several years, the full-flowering of the qualitative critique in the advanced capitalist countries. It would be absurd to suggest that artists and writers precipitated such rebellions – this discontent had been brewing, somewhat quietly, since the 50s. What is less absurd, however, is to suggest that they provided some of its key terms and coordinates. When workers began to critique, in large numbers, the alienation, monotony and authoritarianism of the workplace, they did so, in part, through the use of aesthetic categories, concepts and ideologies. This is why Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello refer to the qualitative critique of work that comes to the fore in this period as *the artistic critique* (as opposed to the largely quantitative demands of *the social critique*). Speaking of the French situation, they describe "the main themes of the artistic critique," which involve critique of society in general and not just work, as follows:

On the one hand, the disenchantment, the inauthenticity, the 'poverty of everyday life', the dehumanization of the world under the sway of technicization and technocratization; on the other hand, the loss of autonomy, the absence of creativity, and the different forms of oppression in the modern world. Evidence of this in the family sphere was the importance of demands aimed at emancipation from

traditional forms of domestic control ('patriarchal control') – that is to say, in the first instance, women's liberation and youth emancipation. In the sphere of work and production more directly of interest to us, the dominant themes were denunciation of 'hierarchical power,' paternalism, authoritarianism, compulsory work schedules, prescribed tasks, the Taylorist separation between design and execution, and, more generally, the division of labour. Their positive counterpoint was demands for autonomy and self-management, and the promise of an unbounded liberation of human creativity.²⁸

This particular variant of the artistic critique – “inspired by Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, and Surrealism” – “developed in the small political and artistic avant-gardes of the 1950s” before spreading through the various workplaces, particularly among white-collar workers.²⁹ My dissertation depends upon the observation of a similar thematic convergence between artistic avant-gardes of the 1960s in the US and the workplace struggles that emerge toward the end of the 1960. I will argue that these experiments pick up on a mood, a structure of feeling, about the alienation of modern work, and give such a mood a set of themes and ideas from which the wave of resistance at the decade's end borrows quite liberally. The story is a bit more complex, and features a few more dialectical twists and turns, since these demands for autonomy and self-management, for more flexible schedules and routines, and for de-hierarchization, get instantiated in a particularly unsatisfying form with the emergence of new regimes of “flexible work” and “team work” – often described as post-Fordism or Toyotism. This new regime responds to the critiques of the period by instituting new forms of autonomy and self-management that are really regimes of self-harrying, self-intensification, and inter-worker competition disguised as attempts to humanize the workplace and allow for freedom and self-expression in work.

There is no single term or point of contact that links the aesthetic situation with the workplace; rather, the following chapters explore a network of terms, practices, attitudes and values that link the two spheres. However, for our immediate purpose, perhaps the best introduction to my argument can be had by exploring the ideas that attach themselves to the concept of “participation” – or sometimes “collaboration” or “interaction” – in the art of the 1960s. As we have already seen, this term also plays an important role in the new qualitative demands and new antagonisms that emerge from 1960s workplaces. In terms of art and participation, we might think, first, of the “happenings” of Allan Kaprow and others, semi-scripted performances where there were no audience members, only “participants.” Brought into object-filled environments where they were sometimes given instructions, and sometimes not, the participants (or so the idea went) would become active producers rather than merely passive consumers of the art work. As Kaprow writes, “[T]hrough the artist sets up the equation, the participant provides its terms, and the system remains open to participation.”³⁰ The participatory thematic of the period runs as much through the Happenings of Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg as through its near-cousins in Fluxus, as well as Latin American neo-Concretism, Viennese Actionism, the experiments of the Situationist International in its early artistic phase, and numerous currents of 1960s art, inasmuch as the entire field saw a move away from the strict production of objects and toward performances, conceptual elaborations, installations, environments and earthworks. Indeed,

we can take an even broader viewpoint and note that, “Art and Objecthood,” Michael Fried’s famous (and in some quarters infamous) response to the minimalist sculpture of the late 1960s, which objects to the new art’s reliance on what Fried describes as “theater,” is really an objection to the participatory character of that sculpture. Fried is repelled by the “special complicity that [the] work extorts from the beholder.”³¹ In the same way that the Happening is completed by the spectator-turned-participant, the minimalist work, for Fried, “depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it *has* been waiting for him. And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone – which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.”³² In other words, the minimalist object demands that the spectator become a *participant*.

In most cases, these strains of anti-illusionistic, participatory art are given specific political overtones, whether revolutionary or not, and connected both directly and figuratively to the political aspirations and tumults of the late 1960s. Much of this material trades on an older avant-garde politics that announces its opposition to the separation of art and life, intending to bring the technical means of art-making to bear on life, and the social problems therein, in new ways.³³ Indeed, proving that such boundaries were irretrievably blurred – so much so that avant-garde negations of them might be redundant – by the end of the 1960s the term “happening” had entered the mainstream vocabulary as an all-purpose term for political demonstrations, cultural events, or simple recreational gatherings. In particular, the technical methods of the participatory arts of the period were quickly put to use in the newly-theatrical political demonstrations of the period, perhaps most notably in the case of the Dutch provos, wherein theatrical performances by large groups of participants were engineered to provoke violent over-reaction by the police.³⁴ There is an underlying equation here, which seems to suggest that the transformation of art practices into life practices through the use of participatory mechanisms is, in and of itself, a kind of revolutionary politics, or at the very least a direct contestation of the domination at work in capitalist societies. This is clear, as well, in the participatory “do-it-yourself” art of Fluxus – which often involved the creation of small kits (“fluxus boxes”), filled with items and instructions non-artists could use to make their own “art” (or rather, experience). By promoting a “NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all people, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals,” Fluxus would “FUSE the cadres of cultural social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.”³⁵ In Brazil, too, neo-concretist artists Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica proposed and elaborated forms of sculpture in which the object becomes “a mediator for participation” rather than a point of contemplation. As with the previous examples, Clark writes that such an art form would mean “the collapse of social preconceived ideas, of separations of groups, social classes, etc.”³⁶ In Germany, Joseph Beuys, in his typically grandiose manner, takes the participatory theme to its seemingly maximal limits, drawing out some of the thought underlying many of these examples. Beuys insists on the ultimate identity of artistic and political projects, stating that “art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power.” Revolution, in this sense, would simply mean the extension of artistic methods and principles across the social totality, a process he refers to as “social sculpture/social architecture,” in which the liberation of the powers of creative self-expression and autonomy are “a politically productive force, coursing through each person and shaping history.” In a society modeled on such principles, “EVERY HUMAN IS AN ARTIST.” Acknowledgement of this fundamental baseline of creative potential is the foundation for numerous other forms of participation: “Self-determination and participation

in the cultural sphere (freedom); in the structuring of laws (democracy); and in the sphere of economics (socialism). Self-administration and decentralization (threefold structure) occurs: FREE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM.”³⁷

Perhaps the richest evocation of these themes can be found in the work of the Situationist International, a group which Boltanski and Chiapello cite as particularly central to the articulation of the artistic critique in France. Guy Debord, chief theoretician of the SI, is perhaps best known for his development of the concept of *spectacle*, or rather *the spectacle*, which in his characterization is a total machine for the management of human activity through semi-automatic representation. What is important, for our account, is that the spectacle produces, and feeds off, non-participation. It presides over an “empire of passivity” where “the individual’s own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him.” The spectacle exists through “the spectator’s alienation from and submission to the contemplated object” but also through the separation of subordinates from those who make decisions.³⁸

The specialized role played by the spectacle is that of spokesman for all other activities, a sort of diplomatic representative of hierarchical society at its own court, and the source of the only discourse which that society allows itself to hear.³⁹

As the apotheosis of alienation, hierarchy, and nonparticipation, spectacle neatly encapsulates everything the figures we have been discussing so far fought against. Perhaps more importantly, the SI from its very earliest stages – long before Debord coined the term *spectacle* to describe late capitalism and its pathologies – had developed an anti-aesthetic politics, based on a reading of the historical avant-gardes and their failures, that conforms to some degree with the participatory thematics described above. Against the enforced passivity and separation of modern life, they propose the “construction of situations”:

The construction of situations begins on the other side of the modern collapse of the idea of the theater. It is easy to see to what extent the very principle of the theater – nonintervention – is attached to the alienation of the old world. Inversely, we see how the most valid of revolutionary cultural explorations have sought to break the spectator’s psychological identification with the hero, so as to incite this spectator into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life. The situation is thus made to be lived by its constructors. The role of the “public,” if not passive at least a walk-on, must ever diminish while the share of those who cannot be called actors but, in a new meaning of the term, “livers,” will increase.

Let us say that we have to multiply poetic objects and subjects...and that we have to organize games of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects.⁴⁰

Though we know that the SI thought very little of the projects of Fluxus artists, and Happenings, treating them as essentially spectacular reenactments of counter-spectacular practice, the family resemblance between all of these projects is unmistakable, even if we acknowledge, as I do, that the SI presented the most serious and theoretically elaborated version of this project, allied in ways that were not merely figurative with actual processes of class struggle. If by the end of the 1950s the SI had resolved to “begin with a small-scale,

experimental phase” dedicated to the development of “Situationist techniques” that would counter the false world of the spectacle, the actual course of capitalist restructuring would eventually put those techniques in the service not only of the art world they thought moribund, but the capitalist order they opposed whole cloth.⁴¹

Since this dissertation focuses on experimental writing as much as art – though writing that often enough in the period under discussion is treated as conceptual art or a species of performance – let us look at how the participatory thematic and the critique of the artist-spectator distinction emerges in the terrain of literature. Such themes sometimes emerge in the literary sphere as theories of the “writerly” (*scriptible*) or “open” text, to borrow Roland Barthes characterization and Umberto Eco’s similar concept. Such a text does not impose an authoritative meaning on the reader like the “readerly” text, but instead enjoins him or her to participate in the elaboration of its meaning. In the manifesto-like declaration at the beginning of *S/Z*, Barthes grandly claims that the age of the readerly text has passed: “what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*.” In the present “the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.”⁴² And yet, in the very next sentence, Barthes writes: “Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader.”⁴³ This seeming contradiction, describing an age that is at once dominated by the writerly and readerly modes, resolves itself once one recognizes that the writerly and readerly are not so much categories of text, nor even modalities of reading, as they are possibilities within reading and writing as such, inasmuch as writing is an activity that can be undertaken by a certain type of active reader.

In North America, these distinctions, taken up by experimental writers, do end up as claims about varieties of texts rather than varieties of reading practices, and become affirmations of the superior political, intellectual and social effectivity of the writerly or open work. Particularly seminal here are the essays which emerged from the symposium, “The Politics of the Referent, which Steve McCaffery organized in 1976. His own contribution, published as “The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered Writing,” gives a lucid articulation of the participatory thematic as it appears in the “language-centered writing” of the 1970s:

Language-centered writing involves a major alteration in textual roles of the socially defined functions of writer and reader as the productive and consumptive roles respectively of a commodital axis. The main thrust of this work is hence political, rather than aesthetic, towards a frontal assault on the steady categories of authorship and readership. What it offers is the alternative sense of reader and writer as equal and simultaneous participants within a language product. At its core, linguistic reference is a displacement of human relationships and as such is fetishistic in the Marxian sense. Reference, like commodity, has no connection with the physical property and material relations of the word as grapheme.⁴⁴

By stripping language of reference, reducing graphic marks to their material characteristics, the writer allows the reader to become a co-producer of meaning, a “participant within a language product.” This becomes the instantiation of a communist principle in language: “Phonemes of the Word fragment! You have nothing to lose but your referents! Non-

grammatical emphasis is equal emphasis. Non-subordination. Non-hierarchy.”⁴⁵ As Lyn Hejinian describes these ideas, in a later statement which is equally seminal, and substantially more precise and modest in its claims:

The “open text,” by definition is open to the world and particularly to the reader. It invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies. It speaks for writing that is generative rather directive. The writer relinquishes total control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive.⁴⁶

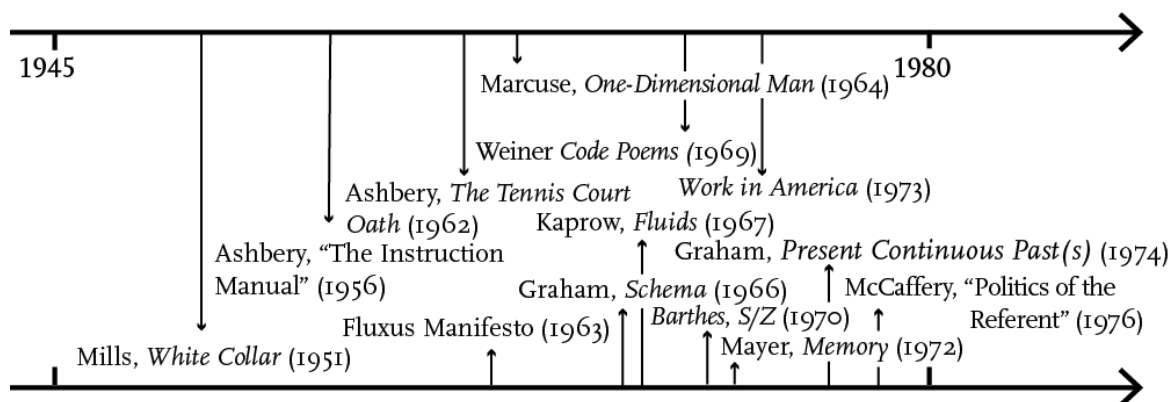
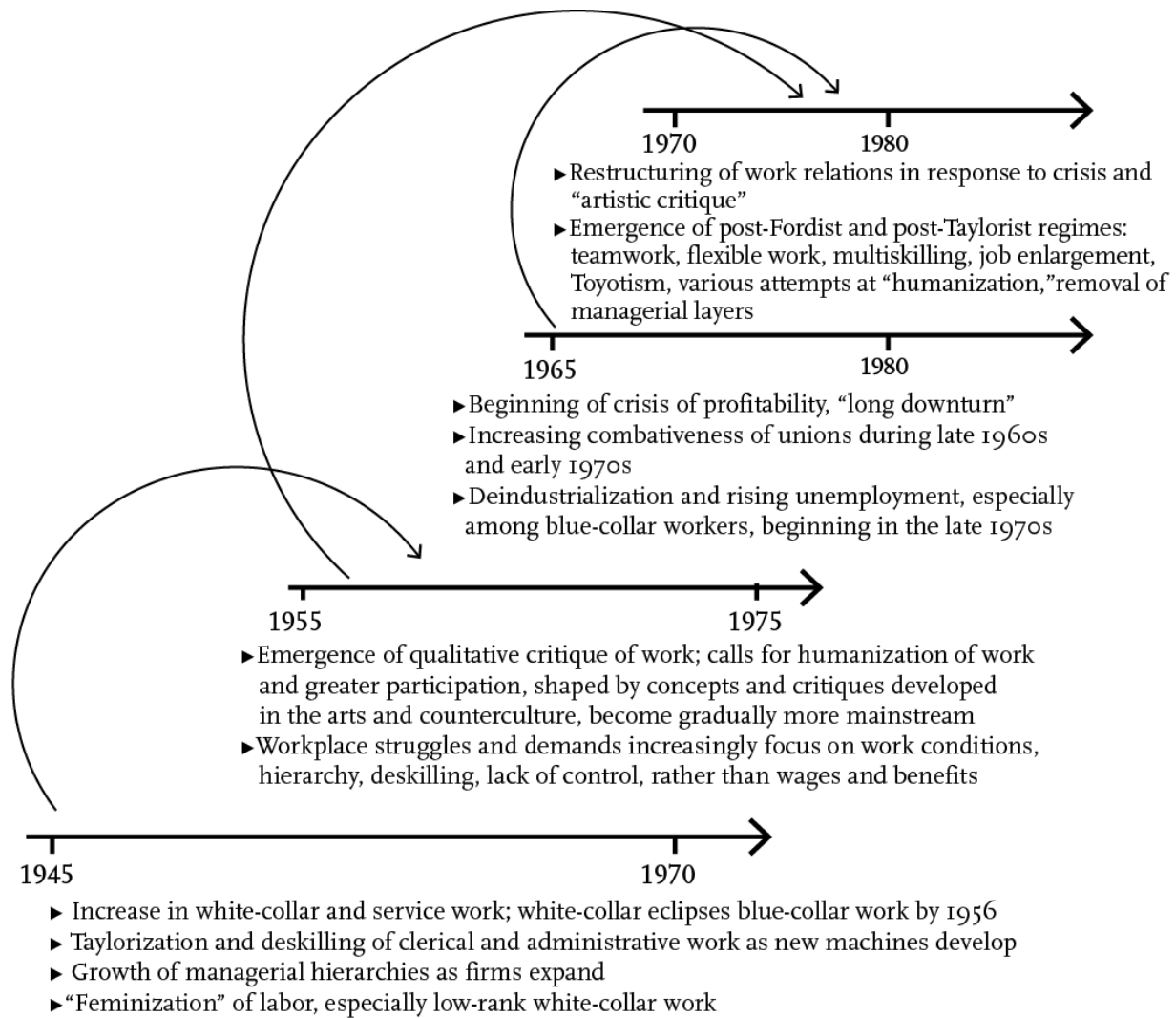
The anti-authoritarian, pro-participatory character of the quote could not be clearer: writerly participation is a rejection of social and economic non-participation. As one of the most highly-regarded experimental poets of her generation, Hejinian helped popularize the active reader theory, such that it is now almost accepted as truism in the world of experimental poetry.⁴⁷

We might be tempted to sum up the preceding claims as follows: in the context of the rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s, resistance to the “anachronistic authoritarianism of the workplace” and the hierarchical relationship between those who command and those who follow commands, finds its corollary in a critique of the enforced passivity in the arts, a critique, in other words, of the division of labor between artist and spectator, writer and reader, which condemns the latter to inactivity. Under the sign of participation, collaboration, and interaction, artists and writers imagine forms of art and writing that allow for reciprocal, “democratic” relations between artist and audience, or even, in the most radical version of these themes, a demolition of such distinctions. The problem with this story is that the timing is not right, or not completely right. Rather than merely seeing both the workplace and artistic manifestations of the times as expressing some underlying anti-authoritarian or libertarian spirit – a view which is certainly correct in part – my dissertation asks us to consider the historical succession of these struggles, in which the “artistic critique” in many ways seems to precede and prefigure the critique in the workplace. I say “seems” because I do not want to make it sound as if the critique did not exist in the workplace before artists, writers and intellectuals began their critique. Rather, the artists provide tropes, motifs and forms of articulation for a dissatisfaction that had its own vernacular articulation. They give it thereby a certain visibility and, perhaps more importantly, lend it a new conceptual vocabulary.

The diachronic story becomes more complicated, however, when we consider that this *qualitative* critique of work emerges at the same time as the postwar industries themselves begin to encounter severe problems with profitability. Indeed, even though most histories identify the beginning of the economic crisis of the period as occurring in 1973, with the oil crisis, the corresponding inflation crisis and subsequent recession, Robert Brenner has recently demonstrated that the high profit rates of the postwar boom really began to evaporate as early as 1965, once an “irruption of lower-priced Japanese and German goods” made it extremely difficult for manufacturers to pass on their increasing costs through higher prices.⁴⁸ Since wage-growth had already been limited from its highs in the 1950s, and repressing wage growth to zero seemed difficult, the response by firms was

instead to rely on the managerial prerogatives they had gained under the so-called compromise, and further Taylorize, speed-up and intensify work. The qualitative critique of work that spreads during this period, then, should not surprise us at all. The renewed workplace struggles that began in late 1960s and early 1970s are a response to the attempt by capitalists to manage the crisis, first through various forms of intensification and then, once the crisis continues and worsens in 1970s, by beginning to attack wages and defang the unions which were reluctantly pushed into the fray by an increasingly combative workforce. This is the opposite of the story that has often been told of this period –referred to as the profit-squeeze thesis – which suggests that the crisis of the period was brought on by rising wages and rising combativeness. In a version of his account of postwar economic history that addresses in particular the workplace struggles of the period, Brenner argues convincingly against the idea that the crisis was caused by such struggles – an idea which the data on wages and profitability does not support.⁴⁹ What these struggles did do, however, is make it more difficult for capitalists to solve the crisis through conventional methods, motivating instead a full-scale reconstruction of work and workplace relations, not to mention the social relations of capitalism overall, undertaken during the long period of low growth and stagnation which lasted from the 1970s until the present (with a short period of affluence in the late 1990s), sometimes referred to as “the long downturn.” (See chart on next page).

The new order that gets constructed in the 1970s has been referred to alternately as “post-Fordism” (a term meant to emphasize both its difference from and continuity with Fordist and Taylorist methods), “neoliberalism,” “flexible accumulation,” and “post-industrial society” where each of these terms stresses different aspects of the transformation. What is important for my argument is that – as Boltanski and Chiapello, Alan Liu, David Harvey and many others emphasize – aspects of the “artistic critique,” such as the critique of work from the standpoint of participation, become essential parts of the restructuring undertaken by capitalists in order to improve profitability. This is done not only in order to respond to the critiques, neutralize them and keep them from producing more problems in terms of absenteeism, low-productivity, sabotage, and strikes, but also in order to achieve the needs of corporations to intensify labor and trim costs, particularly administrative costs. Self-managing workers, ones who “participate” in managerial decisions, require fewer supervisors, as long as one can find mechanisms to keep the productivity of such workers high. The essential duplicity of many of these initiatives – responses to the resistance to intensification which are essentially new forms of intensification – was apparent to many commentators from the beginning. As Braverman writes, summarizing the early 1970s attempts to ameliorate worker dissatisfaction which often went under the banner of “job enlargement” and “humanization,” firms were essentially engaging in campaigns to increase productivity through new means: “[Such reforms] represent a style of management rather than a genuine change in the position of the worker. They are characterized by a studied pretense of worker ‘participation,’ a gracious liberality in allowing the worker to adjust a machine, replace a light bulb, move from one fractional job to another, and to have the illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives designed by a management which deliberately leaves insignificant matters open to choice.”⁵⁰ As the crisis intensifies, and the restructuring (a decades-long process) continues, these transformations become increasingly less superficial and more structural. Nevertheless, Braverman’s basic point stands: firms enlarge or humanize work, allowing opportunities for



participation, only when it likewise increases worker productivity. Furthermore, as Boltanski and Chiapello note, transformations of the qualitative character of work often permit an erosion of pay and benefits – that is, concessions to the “artistic critique” allow for an attack on the material gains made by the “social critique” during the immediate postwar period.

The argument of this dissertation is, therefore, that the critique of labor posed by experimental writers and artists of the postwar period becomes a significant force behind the restructuring of capitalism, by providing important coordinates, ideas and images for that restructuring.⁵¹ As David Harvey describes it, in what is still one of the best accounts of the transformation, the response to the “crisis of Fordism” pits the rigidities of the old industrial system against a new regime of “flexibility.” Against the “rigidity of long-term and large-scale fixed capital investments in mass-production systems ... that presumed stable growth in invariant consumer markets,” the new regime counterposes decentralized production where “a whole network of sub-contracting and ‘outsourcing’” based upon “small-batch production” “[has] the virtue of bypassing the rigidities of the Fordist and satisfying a far greater range of market needs, including quick changing ones.” Such decentralized production can be linked by a self-modulating “just-in-time inventory-flows delivery system, which cuts down radically on stocks required to keep production going” by linking the producers through computerized systems of ordering, shipping and receiving.⁵² Furthermore, the plants and factories themselves are often equipped with reprogrammable, multi-use equipment, rather than the single purpose machines of the Fordist assembly line, an arrangement referred to as “flexible specialization.”⁵³ These new regimes of mutability in production and circulation required a new type of worker. Therefore, against the “rigidities in labour markets, labour allocation, and in labour contracts” as well as the “seemingly immovable force of deeply entrenched working-class power” which supported such contracts, employers introduced new “flexible arrangements” which meant an “increasing reliance upon part-time, temporary or sub-contracted work arrangements.”⁵⁴ Linked through by information technology, these new flattened, downsized or lean structures were filled with self-managing “work teams” that participated in management decisions (managers are now “coaches” “ and “facilitators”). Instead of asking workers to do the same thing over and over again, these teams would be filled with “multiskilled” workers who were flexible not only in terms of scheduling but also tasks accomplished.

These new organizational structures are based on a new work ethic and a new spirit of capitalism that, though different in its norms than ethics of the preceding “Fordist” era, remains nonetheless an inducement to intensified labors. Many of the chapters in the following study discuss the way in which such values, activities and structures are prefigured by the writerly and artistic discussions underway in the late 1960s – whether self-management in the case of Ashbery, flexibility and multiskilling in Mayer, or horizontalism and reciprocal, participatory intersubjectivity in my study of Weiner and Graham.

A careful reader will have noted a slippage in the preceding discussion. Whereas I began discussing the change in occupational structure, and the shift from blue-collar to white-collar work, I quickly changed the subject, talking instead about the transformation of the methods, means, attitudes and social relations of work. These two topics are not easily disentangled, since these new regimes develop first in the world of white-collar work and

then spread into other sectors, such that much of manufacturing work under these new regimes increasingly resembles clerical and administrative activity, as automation shifts workers from direct contact with materials to an increasingly supervisory role. Nonetheless, the argument of my dissertation is that the transformation of the kinds of things people do for work – a shift from an industrial manufacturing-oriented economy to a post-industrial economy oriented around administrative, technical, clerical and service-work – has tremendous implications for the kinds of art people make and the kinds of literature they produce. This is to say that, while artists and writers in 1960s and 1970s develop a conceptual grammar that is important to the restructuring of work that follows, they do so under conditions where the horizon of possibility for art has already been deeply changed by the transformation of work in the immediate postwar period. We can grasp this former change as a process of *deindustrialization*, one which means that people, by and large, turn from work based on making things or objects to work oriented around the performance of administrative-technical processes or the provision of services to customers. This process begins, as I have noted, in the 1950s but accelerates quickly from the 1970s onward. A central part of my argument, therefore, is my claim that, as workers in the US turn away, increasingly, from the production of things, so too does art.⁵⁵ This is one way to contextualize Lucy Lippard's description of the late 1960s as involving a "dematerialization of the art object."⁵⁶ The dematerialization of the art object occurs alongside a more general "dematerialization" of social production. Though it might be incorrect to think of the art or the work as immaterial – both involve physical activity and manipulation of matter even if their end-goal is not an object – the term nonetheless grasps the importance of these shifts. This is why Benjamin Buchloh, in one of the best essays on conceptual art and its turn to institutional critique, has characterized this art as "an aesthetic of administration."⁵⁷ For Buchloh, post-Duchampian conceptual art, which follows from the nominalism of the readymade (which could make any object art merely by its placement in the museum), transforms the aesthetic such that it "becomes on the one hand a matter of linguistic convention and, on the other the function of both a legal contract and an institutional discourse (a discourse of power rather than taste)."⁵⁸ Artwork in this case becomes paperwork, the production of documents which guarantee the art-status of the work in question. Buchloh, too, identifies this work with the "newly established postwar middle class, one which came fully into its own in the 1960s." Positioned as it was "between logical positivism and the advertising campaign," the conceptual art of the 1960s allowed members of this class to "assume their aesthetic identity in the very model of the tautology and its accompanying aesthetic of administration."⁵⁹ But Buchloh mistakenly attributes to the entirety of this class privileges which had already been eroded. Though some of the conceptual art of the period might rightly be seen as "managerial" in its attitudes, much of it seems to match the standpoint of a mere functionary, an administrative assistant, a manager in name alone, or a cleric, idly shuffling and filing the papers of a routinized art industry. One notes, for instance, Sol LeWitt's description of himself "merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise."⁶⁰ For, although Buchloh is correct to note that "this class's social identity is, namely, one of merely administering labor and production (rather than producing) and the distribution of commodities," these administrators are often themselves administered, and as such develop forms of antagonism toward their work that carry with them a will to experiment with and imagine new workplace relations.⁶¹ I attend to the

speculative dimension of the art of the period more than its cynical dimension, which is not to deny the presence of cynicism.

As for the experimental writing of the time, much of which was actively aligned with the artistic practices of the period, the corresponding term might be “the turn to language,” seen in the McCaffery passages above as an emptying-out of the referential or expressive capacities of language and a focus on its “material” characteristics, functions and conditions. Encompassing as it does the “chance-based” compositions of John Cage and Jackson MacLow, the collage techniques of New York School writers, and the radical fragmentation and agrammaticality of “Language poetry, the “turn to language” seems at first pass the exact opposite of conceptual art, its emphasis on linguistic *materiality* in stark contrast to the immateriality of conceptual art. As conceptual art was turning the visual object to little more than words on a page, or a canvas, the poets were either attributing to language a kind of sculptural immediacy and heft, or attempting to fill out the words on the page by transforming poems into performances and installations.⁶² And yet, despite this seeming opposition, the art and the poetry were also beginning to look increasingly similar, such that it was difficult, at the time, to tell whether someone was an artist or a writer – and indeed, many of the figures under discussion in what follows inhabited both worlds seamlessly, which is one of the reasons I borrow from art criticism and literary criticism equally.

Seen from the perspective of the independent histories of poetry and visual art, this merger might appear perplexing. Seen, however, as a response to and reflection on deindustrialization and a reflection on the increasingly routinized character of white-collar clerical and administrative work, it makes a great deal of sense. Like clerical work, both the art and the writing of the period treat language – or symbols, more generally – as a kind of material medium, or substance, to which one applies a series of techniques or processes: rearranging, sorting, cataloguing, parsing, transcribing, excerpting. For conceptual art and experimental writing, what is happening is “dematerialization” or “materialization” only in the sense that some things which are not really material – verbal and written signs – are treated as if they were. The only difference is a difference in the angle of approach. The name for the partly-materialized and partly-dematerialized object is, as we will see in Chapter 2, information. Information is a sign that behaves like matter, or is treated like one, as in the case of binary code, which maps exactly (rather than merely approximately, as in the case of the written mark) to the physical arrangement of transistors. Such materialized signs were the object of an increasing amount of workplace activity and, for a time, important strains of art and writing.

Take, for instance, Jackson Mac Low’s seminal proceduralist poems in *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*, based in part on the techniques behind John Cage’s chance-generated music. Mac Low’s poems use a “chance-acrostic” method, in which a word, name or phrase becomes a tool for extracting language from a particular text.⁶³ By applying the phrase “Call me Ishmael” to *Moby Dick*, for instance, Mac Low produced a poem spelling out the phrase acrostically. He would extract the first word beginning with C on the third page of the book (since C is the third letter in the alphabet), the first word beginning with A on the first page of the book (since A is the first letter) and so on, until the whole phrase was spelled out:

Circulation. And long long
Mind every
Interest Some how mind and every long⁶⁴

By treating a literary text as a mass of material – or information – to which one applies an algorithmic process, Mac Low’s poetry of the period bears a remarkable resemblance to the actual activities that made up contemporary clerical and administrative white-collar work, much of which involved the translation of one set of materials into an alternate notation system – whether the translation of speech into stenography, stenography into typescript, or invoices into punched cards using keypunch machines. Mac Low’s textual manipulations also bear a strong resemblance to that old standby of clerical work, filing, inasmuch as they recategorize material according to alphabetic indices.

In one of the most referenced pieces of writing about the art of this period, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America,” Rosalind Krauss claims that a distinguishing feature of much “post-Movement art” is its adaptation to the “formal character of the indexical sign.” This means “jettisoning....pictorial and sculptural codes,” producing instead a “message without code,” where the relationship between sign and referent follows the logic of “the physical cause, the trace, the impression, the clue.”⁶⁵ This gives photography a privileged place in the new division of the art, since the photograph is indexical in a special kind of way, produced through a physical-chemical process, but the index emerges in all kinds of artistic modes, so long as “truth is understood as a matter of evidence, rather than a function of logic.”⁶⁶ For Krauss, indexical art takes extraction or selection as its technique, rather than active construction or formation, much less symbolization. It is analogous, in this respect, to the photograph, which displays a “dependence on selection from the natural array by means of cropping.”⁶⁷ Even though Mac Low works with verbal rather than visual signs, his chance-acrostic poems are equally dependent upon cropping, or what counts for cropping in the realm of the verbal, an abstraction of bits of language from the source text. But we can go further than Krauss, who never really explains *why* the “logic of the index” comes to dominate in this period. If she notes a waning of art’s powers of symbolization or logical articulation, I would argue that this should be referred to the general enervation of intellectual work or symbol-based work, which increasingly asks workers to treat written signs as a kind of *material* to be manipulated, processed, extracted, shaped, collated, cut-and-pasted, and transcribed, irrespective of its referential content.

In terms of occupational structure, deindustrialization means more, of course, than the rise of clerical and administrative work in inverse proportion to manufacturing jobs. Typically, sociologists and historians speak about the rise of the “service sector,” or tertiary sector, a vaguely defined section of the economy that includes the white-collar office jobs described above but also health care workers, educators, store clerks and cashiers, hair stylists, flight attendants, waiters, baristas and massage therapists. We might, however, usefully distinguish between those service-sector jobs which involve direct contact with consumers, customers, patients, students or the like, and those which, like the clerical work above, involve instead the administration and distribution of information, goods, or other people. Jobs where the contact with other people, the service, is treated as a commodity (waiting tables, nursing, teaching) tend to feature a routinization and commodification of human feelings, attitudes and personalities which mirrors the cognitive routinizations of clerical work. Robert Reich has proposed describing these jobs as “in-person services.”⁶⁸ As Arlie Hochschild notes in her seminal study of “emotional management” by flight attendants, *The Managed Heart*, this work involves a kind of “deep acting,” where one’s very character and personality are overtaken by the protocols and demands of the job.⁶⁹ In her early version of a chapter from her soon-to-be-published book, Sianne Ngai links this type of

work – “affective labor,” as it’s sometimes called – with what she calls “post-Fordist performance,” a category which includes performance art and Happenings, as well as contemporary film and types of writing with strong performative characteristics.⁷⁰ If the turn toward certain types of conceptual art and experimental writing has as its horizon the routinized cognitions of clerical work, then the emphasis, in other forms of art and writing, on immediacy, interactivity and intersubjective relationality has as its horizon the forced conviviality of the service sector.

In thinking about the shift from the production of objects to the provision of services, we might look at a couple of transitional examples. Two works, both of which involve the production of objects from ice, signal this shift through the very ephemerality of their choice of material. For instance Allan Kaprow’s most frequently referenced happening, *Fluids*, enjoined participants to construct a “throw-away architecture” from blocks of ice, which then melted. Even though the piece featured manual labor, all that remained of the performance by the time it was completed were some documents, and the experiences of the participants. While the goal might have seemed, at first, to involve the production of objects, such objects turn out to have been means, tools or props, for the production of an experience. The point, then, is that the shift to service work is not immaterialization at all (indeed, many services involve backbreaking labor: custodial work, for instance, or restaurant work) but a different arrangement of materiality, one that aims at different results.⁷¹ For Kaprow, experience is an objectless physicality, “an experience is thought which has been ‘incorporated,’ on a muscular, neural, even cellular level, into the body.”⁷² Ice, too, figures as an emblem of the transition from goods-oriented toward service-oriented work in a later performance by David Hammons, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, in which the artist sold snowballs on the sidewalk in Harlem.⁷³ One bought in this case the experience of having bought a snowball, since the ball itself could not be preserved. One bought also bought the conceptual residue of the performance, which humorously counterposed black artist and white snowball.

We might also read the work of one of the most famous poets of this period, Frank O’Hara, as likewise entangled in the protocols and logics of contemporary service work. O’Hara’s “I do this, I do that” poems are often read as examples of a post-war *flânerie*, detailing the poet’s movements through the city during periods of freedom and leisure. But such leisures are usually, implicitly or explicitly, circumscribed by periods of work, such that they can take on a hurried or frenetic quality. This is especially true in *Lunch Poems*, the collection most widely available during his lifetime, where the conceit of the book is that many of the poems were written both during and about “lunch hour.” Many of the most-celebrated poems in that collection seem, at first glance, a mere catalogue of what the poet saw, bought and ate, as in the following well-worn stanzas from “The Day Lady Died”:

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days

I go on to the bank
and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
doesn’t even look up my balance for once in her life
and in the Golden Griffin I get a little Verlaine
for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard...⁷⁴

As a record of the poet's interaction with various commodities – the poet as consumer – it is also a record of interactions with postwar New York's service workers: Linda Stillwagon, the bank clerk, the bookseller, and the waiter or waitress who serves him his hamburger and malted. But because "The Day Lady Died" is a poem, rather than an actual lunchtime walk through the city, and because all of these commodities and sights and sounds are made available for us, the readers, as much as they are for the speaker of the poem, I think the consciousness at work behind the poem should be identified as much with the position of the bank tellers and store clerks as the consuming "I." The moment of half-intimate recognition between Miss Stillwagon and O'Hara is particularly instructive. Balanced between personal acknowledgement and impersonal politeness – he almost knows her name, she recognizes him as a regular customer – the exchange mirrors our own relationship as readers to the flow of proper names in the text, which we experience as familiar simply because they are mediated by a consciousness that treats them as such but which, for many of us, will be unfamiliar or unknown.

O'Hara takes the vast, impersonal world of 1950s Manhattan and makes it familiar, provides an intimate and therefore less threatening view of it. This is, increasingly, the role that service workers are asked to play – providing a human face to abstract, alienating and often overwhelming systems, personalizing them and making them sensible and coherent. This is something the store clerk does as much as the flight attendant, the waiter as much as the bank teller. Such workers are instructed to act "like a friend," to make the store or restaurant seem "like home," in order to compensate for otherwise disorienting social processes. O'Hara's charisma is the charisma of the salesperson. In the postwar period such charisma becomes more and more essential. As the world of commodities which the consumer confronts becomes more and more bewildering, and as the processes for getting them to the consumer submit to the same Taylorist pressures as all other industries, workers are asked to perform the kinds of personal recognition that came with the neighborhood-based shops which the sites of mass consumption were displacing.

We might therefore begin to talk about a "front-office" and a "back-office" aesthetic, one based on the forced conviviality of service work, and the other on the routinized cognitions of clerical and administrative work. The problem, however, is that things are not nearly so simple. In the course of the restructuring of office work, the new flexible, self-motivating white-collar workers are increasingly expected to display attitudes – sensitivity, charisma, lightheartedness – associated with in-person service work. This is part of a larger shift among firms to a focus on "corporate culture" and morale, which involves all kinds of "team-building" efforts designed to boost morale, foster affective links between workers (and especially between workers and their managers), and establish forms of solidarity with the company.⁷⁵

There are two things that we must note about these affective values and the activities that go with them. One is that these are attitudes associated with women, and with the kind of unpaid domestic work that women are asked to do as wives and mothers (work which women are contesting, with greater and greater intensity, during this period).⁷⁶ This transformation of the affective character of work is part of the overall "feminization of labor" during the period, where the term refers both to the entry of large numbers of women into the workplace and the transformation of occupational structures and tasks associated with them in such a way that work is "feminized." That is, even male workers are asked to display

attitudes associated typically with women – sensitivity, tolerance, care – often resulting in hysterical attempts by feminized male workers to assert their masculinity, as both Sianne Ngai and Heather Hicks show in their readings of the art, film and literature of feminized labor.⁷⁷

The fact that workers are asked to bring to the workplace attitudes and affects associated with unpaid domestic work is part of a larger scrambling of the boundaries between the home and worksite, labor and leisure. As some work is recoded in the language of domesticity, so too is work made to seem, for some, a kind of leisure or hobby, especially as technological devices allow the worker to work from home, and therefore, remain on the clock continuously.⁷⁸ The importation of these values into the workplace therefore assists in the lengthening of the work-week – and with it the erosion of benefits and wages – which has occurred over the last few decades, such that Americans now work longer hours than any industrialized country. Through a kind of cunning of reason and a reversal of the old Marxist thematic of the “transformation of quantity into the quality,” the qualitative critique of work passes into a “quantitative” worsening of work.

As we have seen, the challenges to postwar capitalism, as well as the actual restructuring that takes place, concern management as a concept, a set of practices, and an actual group of people within an enterprise. Because the managerial layers grow precipitously in the immediate postwar period, and because the challenges to capitalism from the lowest ranks concern deskilling, overmanagement, lack of autonomy, and routinization, this layer comes under fire beginning in the late 1960s, with firms attempting to institute forms of self-management, an elimination of redundant managerial layers (particularly through the use of information technology), and various forms of “flexibility” (as we’ve discussed above). At the same time as there is a compression or elimination of this managerial layer, there is also an extension of managerial protocols, attitudes and processes across the entirety of the work force, such that manufacturing work involves the supervision of automated processes, clerical jobs are reclassified as “administrative” inasmuch as they involve administering flows of data and, by extension, other people (since information technology becomes, largely, a form of management), and even in-person service jobs come to involve a great amount of administrative work.

My first chapter therefore concerns itself with an investigation of this “aesthetic of administration” by way of the early poetry of John Ashbery. Despite its reputation as a poetry of cerebral and pastoral contemplation abstracted from everyday life, these early poems turn with surprising frequency to work and the workplace. Beginning with his early and frequently anthologized poem, “The Instruction Manual,” whose speaker is engaged in writing an instruction manual “about the uses of a new metal” (the poem is, in part, based on his experience working for Houghton Mifflin), Ashbery’s poems investigate the class position and psychic entailments of the “new middle classes.” These are people who exercise a “derived power,” inasmuch as they are “links in chains of power and obedience, coordinating and supervising other occupational experiences, functions and skills,” as Mills writes in his powerful early study.⁷⁹ Using Mills in order to understand the contradictory pressures on these workers, I focus in particular on the various images of work which appear in Ashbery’s second book, *The Tennis Court Oath*. The multiple, fragmented voices

in these poems, collaged together from found materials, inhabit a strange middle ground between autonomy and subjection. Through his subtle and inventive play with free indirect discourse and point of view, Ashbery treats these different voices as contributors to a vast production which he must organize, one which requires the “managerial” intervention of the arranging, supervising poetic voice or mind. The labor of the aesthetic itself and its constructive powers becomes identified, therefore, with management. But because Ashbery also sees himself as allied with a fundamentally pastoral poetry of refusal, the organizing structure of the book places him at odds with his own impulses. These contradictions result in frequent images of interpersonal (and inter-worker) antagonism in the book, antagonism which, I argue, picks up on the blue-collar blues and white-collar woes of the coming decade.

Even though they remained hegemonic until the early 1970s, Taylorism and Fordism always had ideological rivals in the world of business management theory. Throughout the postwar period, in universities, government think tanks, and in select firms, managers and researchers experimented with non-Taylorist protocols, ones that would become important to the construction of the new “flexible” structures of post-Fordist corporations. Among these heterodox theories, the discourse of cybernetics presents a particularly interesting example, since it provided inspiration not only to a generation of management theorists and economists but also to artists, intellectuals and counterculture figures, establishing a strange elective affinity between the anticapitalist and pro-capitalist intelligentsia – and providing, as a result, one of the obvious linkages which allowed for the recuperation of the “artistic critique” and its transformation into a mechanism of exploitation. Emerging out of the military industrial research programs of WWII, cybernetics was a would-be science of everything, purportedly capable of explaining the workings of a robot, an animal, a human being, and a multinational corporation alike, since each one of these entities operates, from a cybernetic framework, through process of self-regulating “feedback.” As an “applied social science” – in other words, a speculative attempt to reengineer corporations and other social forms – cybernetics presents an image of social self-regulation based upon reciprocal, horizontal and participatory relations rather than explicit hierarchies. This is appealing to firms looking not only for a way to cut administrative bloat and trim costs, but respond to the problems of worker disaffection and low morale as well. At the same time, the discourse appeals to artists and writers interested in developing a “participatory” practice, one that undoes the division of labor between reader and writer, spectator and art maker. Cybernetics promises a mode of collaboration and collectivity in line with ideas about the liberation of art from the narrow confines of artists. And because cybernetics treats “communication” and “action” as essentially exchangeable terms, the cybernetic view of the world allows artists to inhabit that interzone between the world of embodied materiality and the world of disembodied signs where so much of the conceptual art and experimental poetry of the period resides. By bringing communication and action into alignment, for instance, cybernetics presents an image of a world in which every poem is, in fact, a performance, inasmuch as the signs of which it is made of are never separate from the activities of human beings. In my second chapter, I examine Hannah Weiner’s *Code Poems* alongside Dan Graham’s *Works for Magazine Pages*, both of which sit uneasily between the space of conceptual art (in the broadest sense) and experimental poetry. Both also put cybernetic discourse to work in order to model alternate social relations. I argue that in the case of both figures the real medium of their respective project is labor. And while both of them engage in an earnest attempt to model improved relations between people in acts of labor or

communication, each of their respective projects turns unintentionally dark, as it becomes apparent that such participatory relations can quite easily turn into an indirect (and therefore efficient) method of social control.

The restructuring of work involves, as we have seen, the scrambling of previously steadfast oppositions: oppositions between work and leisure, the worksite and the home. At the same time as the art of the period submits itself to a zone of indistinction where it is impossible to tell it apart from any number of life-practices or experiences that are not considered art, capitalist firms import values associated with leisure and the home in order to make work more tolerable. The confusion does not end there, however, since the protocols and routines of work begin to colonize the space of leisure as well. This crossing of spheres cannot be understood apart from the “feminization of labor,” since the entry of massive numbers of women into the workplace, women who are expected to bring with them the values associated with the home, effectively erodes the border between work and home, especially once men, too, are expected to behave accordingly. Though there are many important works – especially from the 1970s – which investigate the place of unpaid “reproductive” or domestic labor, I structure my third chapter around Bernadette Mayer’s multifarious project *Memory* (1972), which is, at one and the same time a performance, a conceptual work, an installation and an epic poem. In attempting to document, down to the smallest detail, every aspect of her life for 30 days – using photographs, audio recordings, and written notation – Mayer effectively demonstrates the subsumption of the entirety of life by the protocols and routines of work. Though the project starts out with the intention to enlarge her experience of life, and her capacity for perception, through new technical means, the compulsion to document becomes very quickly tyrannical. In this sense, Mayer’s elaboration of a “total” artwork which merges different technologies into one single apparatus prefigures the coming reorganization of office work around the personal computer, a technology which has probably done more than anything else to ensure that work and home-life are unified, by enabling white-collar workers to accomplish tasks from home, and in that sense, never leave work.

This overturning of previously stable oppositions – labor and leisure, home and worksite – is one of the reasons why most economically-oriented accounts of the cultural transformations of the period fail to register their connection with changes in labor and the labor process, confusing such changes with mutations in the market, in the commodity-form and consumption, changes in the built environment, the metropolis and the space of flows, changes in technologies (but not production technologies), as well as processes of globalization or financialization. Because so many of the new jobs that are created in the postwar world involve the circulation and sale of goods, the provision and distribution of credit, or the administration of people in new ways, it is easy to approach these new developments as if they were simply circulation or consumption or “culture,” ignoring the work that makes such things possible: the production of circulation, the production of consumption, the production of culture, accomplished by truck-drivers, supermarket clerks, accountants, copy editors and gallery assistants. This is certainly the case with Fredric Jameson, whose monumental work on postmodernism registers with extreme sensitivity the extent to which capitalism in the postwar period has actively refashioned areas of life beyond

the worksite, in accord with the imperatives of accumulation. But it is remarkable that Jameson, who has done so much to advance Marxist literary criticism and Marxist theory in general, and who has so improved our capacity to think historically about cultural objects, rhetorics, genres, and forms, hardly discusses the transformation of labor and the labor process when examining postmodernism and its new cultural logics.⁸⁰

I therefore partly agree with Andrew Hoberek that Jameson's approach to the emergence of postmodernism, inasmuch as it comes at these transformations from the market-side of the commodity-form, suffers from a "symptomatically postmodernist turn away from production and toward consumption."⁸¹ The point, however, is not that one should shift over to the worksite from the marketplace – as Hoberek implies – but rather that we should understand the marketplace *as* worksite. It is not, therefore, that Jameson is attending to the wrong things, but rather that he does not register that the things he is interested in – changes in the built environment, in technology, in the market, in the international space of flows – also have work and workers behind them, and that the changes at stake for him also involve changes in the character and form of work. Hoberek suggests that Jameson deserves critique via his own method – in other words, that Jameson unknowingly reproduces the postmodern symptoms whose unconscious repetition he elsewhere critiques. But as Chris Nealon has shown, Jameson's version of symptomatic reading only infrequently takes the form of "debunking," rather it is a "symptomatic reading that is also a friendly reading," in which one locates the blockage in a particular text as containing the information necessary to its own solution.⁸² In other words, rather than suggest that Jameson is looking in the wrong place, we might interpret differently what he finds there. As such, I diverge from Hoberek's claim that we should "understand postmodernism... as the universalized world-view of the new white-collar middle-class." For one, the claim is essentially anachronistic, based on an extension of his economic and cultural analysis of the 1950s forward into the period of postmodernism (as far forward as the 1980s and 1990s), as if the only thing that changes during this period is that this process of middle-class universalization had become more hegemonic. The universalization that Hoberek describes is a reflection of real rather than merely ideal processes. Although in the last few pages of his book, Hoberek recommends that the white-collar workers "stop thinking of themselves as middle-class, if by this we mean occupants of a position outside the binary logic of capital," presumably because the decline of middle-class fortunes brought on by proletarianization had finally, become "statistically noticeable" by early 2000s, I would argue that Hoberek misses the mark by a couple of decades at least, since wages for most white-collar workers actually began to stagnate in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁸³ Add to this the fact that hours worked were rising precipitously among white-collar workers during the 1980s and 1990s, and one begins to see how thin the special privileges of white-collar workers really were. Thus, during the period in which postmodernism began to appear as a theoretical object, there was a real equalization of the experience of the white-collar workforce with many of their blue-collar counterparts. (Indeed, since at least the 1980s, one must confront the fact that an autoworker or longshoreman or coalminer can earn much more than their white-collar counterparts). At the same time, as I've demonstrated above, there was also a generalization of the values, attitudes, processes, and protocols associated with white-collar work across most of the workforce, as most work, whether it was office work or not, became informationalized. Thus, though no doubt there is a fair amount of ideological projection in the postmodern novels Hoberek discusses, such universalization as

existed had its basis in an actual process of proletarianization and actual similarities between white-collar and blue-collar workers, something which one cannot understand with the same tools as one would use to examine the class standpoints of the 1950s.

Postmodern culture is not, therefore, the symptomatic expression of a falsely-universalized experience of alienated mental labor. Rather it is, firstly, the cultural expression of a set of alternatives to these alienated labors, and secondly, the cultural expression of the transformation of these alternatives into a new regime of unfreedom, based on, for instance, “flexible” work, multiskilling, participation, and teamwork. These moments of the dialectic of contestation and recuperation are difficult to disentangle, and it is easy enough to read the entire structure as ideological from the start, as if the original alternatives were engineered to fail or only advanced cynically. If my account is oriented around an eventual tragedy, it avoids assuming that such a tragedy was written into the structures from the very beginning.

I am therefore signaling a certain difference between my account and Jameson’s form of historicization. As Nealon makes clear, this kind of historical thought depends upon a notion of necessity which is also, at one and the same time, a notion of tragedy. This is quite clear in the last few pages of the first chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, where understanding something in historical terms means giving to the past the shape of an “inexorable logic,” seeing it as the unfolding of objective limits in which we can read “the determinate failure of all the revolutions that have taken place in human history.”⁸⁴ In assessing Jameson’s contributions to literary criticism, Nealon demonstrates that by making “failure the normative standpoint for reading the political unconscious in and out of literature” he also ends up necessarily treating history as so much dead, inert matter that must be reconfigured by the critic:

In this Sartrean parable, events can be revealed to participate in causal necessity because matter precedes human action, ontologically and logically: it is there before us, and can therefore be said to have a determinative effect on human action. Since 1981, Jameson’s linkage of causation to a notion of inert matter that awaits “restructuration” has made a good claim to be just what historicizing readers need in an unrevolutionary era: it seems to suit perfectly an era of defeats for the Left.⁸⁵

I would add that this approach to the historical object as inert is also an approach from the side of consumption and the marketplace, one that confronts the object as *already produced* by invisible, mute labors. What such an approach forecloses is the possibility of having been the agent who worked up the now practico-inert matter into its present shape.

With the migration of manufacturing to industrializing or recently industrialized countries, this is a stance more and more residents in deindustrialized countries must take to the commodities they consume, produced as they are through globally-distributed processes that remain necessarily opaque. But at the same time, millions upon millions of workers are constantly reorganizing this pre-made matter that arrives by plane or ship – transporting it, inventorying it, controlling its circulation, selling it directly to the consumer. The tragic approach is the approach, therefore, of the consumer, whose work of restructuring comes after the fact. It is also the approach of *the reader, the critic, the*

interpreter, who approaches the cultural object, text, or moment as already done, its fate sealed by the priority of a material foundation we are incapable of understanding, much less changing. Jameson, therefore, does not consider the text from the standpoint of the writer which is also the standpoint of the present, the standpoint of the openness of the work in the moment of its making. If the problem for Nealon with Jameson's "ontologization of matter...is that it tends to muffle our ability to understand capital as experimental and uncertain," I would add that it also makes it difficult to understand the experimental and uncertain character of the resistance to capital.⁸⁶

The dissertation that follows does not feel forced to choose between, on the one hand, a tragic mode of reading, and on the other, an attention to the speculative, resistant experiments which attempted to imagine alternatives to the practico-inert determinations of capital. There is only an opposition between these two modes if one is unwilling to think dialectically. The tragic mode is a necessary recognition of the counter-revolutionary powers of capital. As Boltanski and Chiapello write, "[t]he capitalist system has proved infinitely more robust than its detractors – Marx at their head – had thought... because it has discovered the route to its survival in critiques of it." But it's unclear that we will ever be able to truly say "*why* what happened ...had to happen the way it did" (emphasis mine) unless we are able to register the totality of determinations at work in any moment. Such a totality certainly exists, and it is certainly possible to say "*that* what happened had to happen the way it did," but any account of *why* will likely be incomplete, partial and subject to revision. *Why* is a horizon. It is the proverbial last instance of Engels by way of Althusser, and I would argue, therefore, that the tragic flaw whose traces we read in the symptom does not so much reside *inside* the works I examine in the following pages, but *between* these works and the forces they encounter. Without at all giving up on an account of determination, of the manifestation of objective limits and forces – which is the fundamental task of any historical criticism – we must at the same time resist producing a theodicy of objective conditions, justifying the ways of history to man. It is true that capitalism can neutralize and turn to its advantage any opposition that does not overcome it, but this does not necessarily mean the forms of opposition of the past were wrong from the start. In the case of art, their failure can easily be referred to their inability to align with meaningfully powerful social forces, or more often, their alignment with the wrong social forces.

Nealon suggests that the tragic mode has something to do with Jameson's privileging of narrative and his sense that narrative and history are intimately bound together.⁸⁷ Poetry, on the other hand, seems for Nealon better suited to registering the experimental mutations of capital. The works I examine in the following pages were, at the time of their making, highly tentative, exploratory, provisional. Some of them were extremely marginal in terms of audience, or the social position of the artists and writers. They were part of the leading edge of an unfolding cultural present, rather than the elaboration of fully-worked out aesthetic programs. They are thus better objects to read against transformations which were, during the period under discussion, entirely tentative, marginal, incoherent and undeveloped as well. Such works, because of their hazy, confused and often confusing character, pick up on what Raymond Williams has described as the "pre-emergence" of new cultural values, attitudes and perceptions. Writing about these pre-emergent phenomena, which he identifies as "structures of feeling," Williams puts his methodology into terms that almost seem like they were designed to offer an alternative to the tragic mode of Jameson, cautioning against the "regular slide towards a past tense" and the "regular conversion of

experience into finished products” which makes the present-tense experience very difficult to register, as the following by Williams quote makes clear (though I am less interested in his distinction between the person and the social than I am in his temporal distinction):

If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present: not only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions, but not always as fixed products, defining products. And then if the social is fixed and explicit – the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions – all that is present and moving, all that escapes, or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, ‘subjective.’⁸⁸

The works that I examine in the following study are unique in that they take this moment of liquidity, of indefinite relations, moods, and attitudes before their hardening into the practico-inert, as their medium and material. They attempt to actively take hold of the process by which the indefinite becomes definite, the subjective objective, the present past, and immaterial material. The dematerializing art and the materializing art of the period imagine themselves as being able to convoke into being, through the manipulations of signs, new social relations and new objects, which now become subject to the caprice and shiftiness of information. If they failed, and ultimately ended up hardening into shapes other than those imagined, this is all the more reason to understand such failure alongside their aspirations and potentials. As we enter into a new age of liquidity, when the social, political and economic transformations which began in the 1960s and 1970s appear to have encountered severe limits, and in which it remains unclear what future capitalism as such can have, we need all the help we can get in understanding how the new comes into being.

CHAPTER ONE: JOHN ASHBERY'S FREE INDIRECT LABOR

“The Instruction Manual” is admittedly an odd place for an account of Ashbery’s poetry to begin. As Marjorie Perloff notes, given its transparency and directness, the poem is not exemplary of anything else in *Some Trees* (1956) or the later books.¹ It is an anomaly in a book of anomalies, a book that, compared with the more thematically unified later volumes, seems a mere miscellany, a “collection” of experiments, pastiches and sketches for a variety of germinal styles which never came to fruition. And yet, the fact that Ashbery almost never again wrote anything so flat and transparent might make it a *more* appropriate place for an investigation of Ashbery’s early work to begin, as if he had disclosed something in that poem which needed to be covered up again just as quickly. If “The Instruction Manual” is a set of instructions, an *ars poetica* – and Ashbery wrote many of these – it is one for a poet that never emerged, a how-to that Ashbery never took up. It is a set of instructions made to be disobeyed, perhaps because it makes his poetry all too simple and diagrammatic, contains its sleight-of-hand and casual mastery within a petty frame about alienated life and work. Perhaps this kernel of truth – the ground of the poem, its escapism – had to be obscured in the later work.

As I sit looking out of a window of the building
I wish I did not have to write the instruction manual on the uses of a new
metal.²

There is no better figure for the subsumption of the writer and writing by society, by capital and its compulsion to work, than the technical writer, the writer of manuals, whose every sentence is both subject and object of the managerial hierarchies of post-war society. By the middle of the 1950s, white-collar workers like the one pictured in “The Instruction Manual” had begun to outnumber their blue-collar complement, and a series of defining and popular books – from C. Wright Mills’ *White Collar* (1951) to William Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (1956) – singled out this group as a crucial and contradictory feature of the new society, ambiguously situated in between the two poles of capital and labor.³ Because wartime and postwar automation in the manufacturing sector aimed not only to reduce the amount of laborers needed to produce everyday items but, in the view of David Noble, to wrest control over the speed and quality of labor from their hands and place it in the care of a vast technical, clerical and managerial superstructure, the white-collar workforce multiplied even while US dominance in manufacturing was still reaching its peak.⁴ As manufacturers learned to exploit the “uses of [...] new metal[s],” they required more white-collar workers who could supervise and design such work processes, or write about them in instruction manuals. Still, these white-collar workers were not the simple beneficiaries of Henry Ford’s assembly-line and Frederick Taylor’s “scientific management,” which attempted to reduce mental and physical activities to easily reproduced and fragmented routines. As Harry Braverman makes clear in his influential study of automation, *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*, they were also, in turn, submitted to the same processes of automation, routinization and deskilling.⁵ When the speaker of Allen Ginsberg’s “America,” published the same year as “The Instruction Manual,” declares that

“I will continue like Henry Ford my strophes are as individual as his automobiles more so they're all different sexes,” he is reflecting less on the dehumanizing and de-individualizing character of Fordist industrial work than the application of these processes to mental labor, and writing in particular.⁶

Such workers are in a curious position. They are not owners – in other words, they are not entitled to the profits from the firm – but they are proxies, often, for the will of the owners. Indeed, a technical writer seems a perfect of the example of the double-edged nature of Taylorization for white-collar workers. The instructions which the speaker writes *are* the routines – here become a kind of script – which other workers follow. And yet, the process of producing such scripts is itself scripted and routinized. With the development of the corporate form, the functional aspect of capital (command, organization, management) gets hived off to employees, and the single unifying consciousness that might have existed in the small firm, supervising every aspect of a production process, shatters into scores of small tasks and positions, each one correlated with some aspect of a process that can no longer be visualized in entirety. To return to the example at hand, while the writer of the instruction manual or the report might potentially hold this view of the totality, it is a view paradoxically inscribed within a singular, monotonous and partial task. Such an intermediary position means that, as Andrew Hoberk notes in his study of the white-collar middle-class in postwar American fiction, workers like the speaker of “The Instruction Manual” tend to experience “mental labor [as] the site of both transcendence and disempowerment,” the former indexing a past life of petit-bourgeois entrepreneurialism and the latter a future life of thoroughly proletarianized drudge work.⁷ But whereas Hoberk wants to establish the new, white-collar middle-class as a distinct class position, and therefore demystify its pretension to universality, I interpret these claims to universality as deriving from real features of white-collar working life, since these workers were often *both* bosses and employees, at the same time as they were called upon to mediate between executives and simple subordinates. This does not make their experience universal but it does give such workers a unique and uniquely privileged viewpoint, however full of contradictions

Written during Ashbery’s time working for a textbook company, “The Instruction Manual” dramatizes the doubleness of white-collar work by making the speaker both the commander and executor of commands, both the one who contemplates an imaginary excursion away from the banality of the working day and into the streets of idealized Guadalajara, and the one who actually carries out such a journey. The speaker is at one and the same time up in the window working on his instruction manual and wandering the streets of an imagined Guadalajara. He is both the writer of instructions and executor of instructions. And therefore when the dual subject of the poem (both “I” and “you”) encounters the old woman whose son is absent because he has a job at a bank in Mexico City, the speaker is reminded of his own similar absence and the job from which he strives to escape. He is thrust back upon the spectatorial or touristic mode. This is the point of the dual subject: the “I” commands a “you” to submit to an experience, but reserves himself and stands apart from the experience. The circularity of the poem, descending from its office window into the city and then rising to the churchtop vista at the end, the whole of the city spread before the two, serves to remind us of the uncrossed distance between the “I” and the “you,” between the speaker in his office and his doppelgänger. As we will see, this kind of play with point of view is a constant in Ashbery’s poetry and, in later books, remains

connected to the theme of white-collar work precisely because such work, like literary point of view, is often about managing relations between people.

A brief biographical note is in order, if only because “The Instruction Manual” contains biographical references that are important for my argument. Inspired by Raymond Roussel’s *La Vue* – an elaborate fifty-page meditation on a beach scene suspended inside a penholder – the poem was one of the last works Ashbery wrote for the collection *Some Trees*. It was written, in other words, *after* the book had already been accepted by Auden for the Yale Younger Poets award. At the time, Ashbery worked at what he describes as “various menial jobs in publishing,” including a job in the college advertising department at McGraw Hill.⁸ Soon after, he left for Paris and stayed there for 10 years, writing the poems in *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) which the rest of this chapter will focus on.

The flight from work and into the scenery of Guadalajara therefore anticipates, in a sense, his flight from the US and his jobs there. The later poems are written in “a state of restless experimenting,” as Ashbery describes them, cobbled together from cheap paperbacks bought on the Paris quais, magazines like *Esquire*, and other English-language material found in the American library.⁹ Going forth, in this sense, also involves a looking back – the flight from the US into the experimental climes of France requires a recourse to the conversational, demotic language he had left behind, as well as images of the alienated labor and office work that the US now signifies. His later remarks on Gertrude Stein’s self-imposed exile could also be said of himself during this period: “[her] distance from America afforded the proper focus and even the occasion for a monumental study of the making of Americans; the foreign language that surrounded her was probably also a necessary insulation for the immense effort of concentration that this book required.”¹⁰

We will turn to the later work in a moment, but first it’s worth taking a moment to think about how much a poem like “The Instruction Manual” differs from its modernist predecessors, many of whom were still writing at the time of its publication. As a poem about work, “The Instruction Manual” brings us a great distance from the ethos of craft one finds in the modernism of Pound, Zukofsky, Oppen, Williams. These were poets for whom the contact with elemental materials (wood, stone, metal) – or, rather, the representation of such contact – still vouchsafed an artisanal dignity, where the made thing bore witness to the distinct hand of its maker. Oppen: “Native now / Are the welder and the welder’s arc / In the subway’s circuit.” As elsewhere, Oppen’s central figure is that of human activity hardening into an inert form that, while still testifying to the dignity of human action, is also and always a block for us, a form of maiming. We make things – we are *homo faber* – and the things we make transform us, terribly. “By acting upon the external world and changing it, man changes his own nature,” says Oppen, in the voice of Marx.

The crippled girl
Painfully in the new depths
Of the subway, and painfully
We shift our eyes. The bare rails
And black walls contain

Labor before her birth, her twisted
Precarious birth and the men
Laborious, burly . . .

Deliberately she sees
An anchor's blunt fluke sink
Thru coins and coin machines
The ancient iron and the voltage. . .¹¹

For Oppen, poetry is a language of craft and things, a language capable of restoring, and making visible, the work contained in the reified world around us; it proposes, against the mercenary and technocratic barbarization of matter and bodies, an artisanal grammar of tool, matter, environment, a grammar of the dignity of materials and makers and a potentially equanimous relationship between bodies and things which subtends the horrors of capital and WWII, and whose absence he perpetually elegized. The entirety of Oppen's late books are a kind of mourning for this relationship to the world, a sad, Heideggerian dirge for the lost fight against the infernal, practico-inert materiality that modernity and industrialization had become.

Though Ashbery and Oppen are writing at the same time, none of this elemental or vital contact with materials is available for Ashbery – there is no primary relationship to matter, no craft really. His matters are verbal, prefabricated, demotic; they are made elsewhere and by others, and what they offer to the intending consciousness is arrangement, not making. The sentimental, clichéd phrases and images that flash up in Ashbery's poems are not merely objects of ironic ridicule, though they are ironic. They are literally *what there is to say*: they are the life we live, the general form of experience that we must fill out. Ashbery's attitude toward these languages is a mostly loving one – no one has ever had a clearer sense of the *power* of the cliché, the way it can dawn like a revelation. His goal is to make this debased language come alive, not to replace it with a new language more erudite or more able to absorb the weight of past history, as with Pound or Eliot. As he says in an essay on the New Realists – artists such as Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely and Raymond Hains – their attempt to “come to grips with the emptiness of industrialized modern life” requires them “to accord it its due.”¹² The products of the age of mass production and consumption from which they construct their art “are a common ground, a neutral language understood by everybody, and therefore the ideal material with which to create experiences which transcend these objects.”¹³ What does it mean to treat mass-produced objects as a given? For one, it means the impossibility of imagining them as objects one might make. Such objects simply appear, pre-fabricated. If one has a responsibility toward them, it is a responsibility to move them around, administer and rearrange them, sort them and inventory them. In other words, the attitude which Ashbery attributes to the so-called New Realists, and more generally approves of, is the attitude of white-collar workers and workers in the service sector who, rather than producing commodities, ensure that they get to their destination.

These themes are developed, as we'll see, in *The Tennis Court Oath*, a book which has remained something of a shibboleth, polarizing Ashbery's admirers, who treat it alternately as his most interesting or his most unsuccessful work. As described above, the poems keep looking over their shoulder at the America from which Ashbery has fled, in the same way that the speaker of "The Instruction Manual" is forced to return to the "emptiness of industrialized modern life" after his imaginary jaunts. In certain poems of *The Tennis Court Oath*, this is figured as an explicit return to the banality of work:

The Division was unsuitable
He thought. He was tempted not to fulfilling order written down
To him. The award on the wall
Believing it belonged to him.
Working and dreaming, getting the sun always right.
In the end, he had supplanted the technician
With the bandage. Invented a new cradle.
The factory yard resounded
Filling up the air. ¹⁴

The start of this poem is a near match for that of "The Instruction Manual," except here the rebelliousness is a bit more explicit: not "I wish I did not have to write [the instruction manual]" but "He was tempted not to fulfilling order written down / to him." This is one shade away from *Bartleby's* "I would prefer not to." But whereas the earlier poem is limpid, here a slippery, intentionally infelicitous grammar is part of the general insubordination, one that seems in the second line to parody slavish and hypercorrect attempts to avoid splitting an infinitive. Is he not tempted or is he tempted into not fulfilling the order? It is almost as if this attempt at hyper-correctness or obedience throws the whole sentence into disarray: the present participle and abstract noun (order rather than "the" order), followed as they are by the modifying past participle, make the whole construction elegantly awkward. And as before, the question of work is a question of writing. This is a written "order," one dependent upon a "division" of labor between command and execution which the next couple of lines put into terms familiar to those of us who are acquainted with Marx's account of the commodity fetish, where the possessed object, token of alienated subjectivity, comes to "believe" for us, via the prosopoeia of the capital-labor relationship, at the same time as it becomes a metonym for the unfree laborer's reduction to a mere thing. The thingification or reification of the subject (as fulfiller of orders) finds its complement in the personification of the object: "The award on the wall / Believing it belonged to him." The problem that the book confronts, however, is a situation where the person who resists commands – or is tempted to resist them – is also someone who gives commands, a "link in chains of power and obedience," as C. Wright Mills describes such workers.¹⁵

These early books of Ashbery's come at the end of the modernist project, a project that, as I indicated earlier, takes its bearings from the organization of the capitalist mode of production in the early twentieth century. The claim of this chapter – and the entire dissertation – is that the end of the modernist project corresponds to a transformation not only of the way that people work, but a transformation of the kind of things people do for work, a transformation, in other words, of both technical means and occupational structure. If Ashbery is one of the quintessential postmodern poets, it is in part because his writing in

the 1950s and 1960s, in a sort of transitional moment between cultural modes, recognizes what has changed in the dominant structuring relations of capitalism. I do not mean to claim that Ashbery intentionally sets out to write about the capital-labor relationship or contemporary changes in the labor process, only that, inasmuch as the majority of people spend the preponderance of their time working, engaging in historically-variable forms of work, these activities are bound to become legible in artistic making and doing. But periodizing the relationship between the mode of production and cultural forms requires a bit of finesse, if we are to make connections between Fordist assembly-line production, Taylorization, the deskilling of workers, the end of artisanal production, or any other features of early twentieth-century capital-labor relations, and modernist forms. For even though the factory of machine-age, assembly-line mass production *is* the dominant image of working life within modernism – in Wyndham Lewis, in William Carlos Williams, in Pound and many others – we must remember that these forms, emergent in the early twentieth century, did not become generalized or preponderant until after WWII, despite the fact that Henry Ford’s assembly line and the experiments of Taylor with “scientific management” are pre-WWI phenomena. There is a curious lag between mode of production and cultural forms that does not quite match with the sense Marx gives, in the famous passage from the *Preface to a Critique of Political Economy*, of the productive forces racing ahead of residual, decaying and outmoded social relations until the latter are destroyed by their inability to resolve the contradictions of the former. To the contrary, certain artistic modes may be said to capture the *emergent* relations of the mode of production, to become one site where such relations are worked out in experimental fashion.¹⁶ Art is laboratorial in this sense; it is one of the loci where the emergent relations are fleshed out, just as they are in universities, in the most technologically advanced workplaces, and in the alternately cruel or paternalistic daydreams of the masters of the world.

Such an account must complicate any attribution of a ruptural character to cultural production, at least in the case of transitional works like the books under discussion here. If, in George Oppen’s quintessentially modernist poem above, he mixes up images of skilled craft and the deskilled labor that will replace it, this is because such is the balance of the day, and because the most common stance toward deskilling and machine-based labor – Pound’s stance, and Williams’ – during the modernist period features both an attraction to its powers of abstraction, extraction, focalization and procedure and a simultaneous horror at its dehumanizing, debasing effects. What one notes is an attempt to leaven the powers of this kind of labor with images of the craftwork it will eventually destroy.¹⁷ Modernism is not the art of Fordism, then, but the art of Fordism in its emergent phase, as it colonizes and transforms the residual forms of production of the nineteenth century. What characterizes the beginning of postmodernism, in this schema, is not the beginning of a new mode of production but a sense that the previous one had run its course, become generalized, and that the abstractive, focalizing and routinizing energies of both modernist cultural forms and Fordist deskilling were now dominant. There was nothing else, no hope of leavening it with a residual ethos of craft. To be postmodern is at first, as T.J. Clark indicates in the beginning of *Farewell to an Idea*, merely to recognize the finished character of both modernism and the modernity to which it corresponds.¹⁸ A paradigmatic case here would be Pop Art as it emerges in the 1960s. For what are Warhol’s soup cans and dollar bills but images of serialized, deskilled and routinized mass production? And yet they stand in relation to, say, Francis Picabia’s bizarre, eroticized machines by suggesting, with their deadpan realism,

that there is nothing else, there is no hope for an alternate Fordism. In their absolute solidity, they begin the process of becoming-sign, of dematerialization, that we associate with the postmodern. Postmodernism begins with this recognition, and only later, in taking from the abstracted, generalized productions of Fordism, proposes new constellations and interrelations between them. “The Instruction Manual,” in this sense, corresponds to the moment of recognition discussed above, and attempts, unsuccessfully, to flee from this reality. In the later poems of *The Tennis Court Oath*, on the other hand, the products and processes of this triumphant modernity are examined and decomposed, in order to begin to trace out the possibilities that develop with Ashbery’s mature style. The inchoate, half-formed character of *The Tennis Court Oath* is thus part of its interest, in that it suggests not only why Ashbery is the great poet of his time, but the other kinds of poet he might have become, had the modernity we now have been different.

The Tennis Court-Oath is a book about many things, and if I draw out the leitmotif of labor I do not mean to suggest that it is dominant in the book, or even fully explicit everywhere. But the recurrence of scenes of employment, of the image of the “factory” and Ashbery’s habit here, as elsewhere, of naming characters not by proper names but by employment, by category – teacher, janitor, secretary, pilot, soldier, policeman – merits extended attention, probably because Ashbery seems, as aesthete, the last person to consider labor as a central category. Labor is rather the hidden and necessary correlate of what the book presents as its central theme, political representation, or representation in general. He takes as his subject, in part, the social function of naming, the blending of abstract and concrete qualities that makes this person into a “teacher” or “janitor” and that enmeshes them in a matrix of power. Factory yard and tennis court, workplace and political assembly, are thus two sites where Ashbery investigates the ways in which we meet each other on uneven terms, whether as “representatives” or as “managers.” For the most part, the theme of political representation hangs under the sign of America, as if the title of the collection, with its reference to the French revolution, had subsumed the US under a larger liberal-democratic imaginary. Unsurprisingly, then, “America” is one of the best poems in the collection, and one of the clearest expositions of the themes and devices at work there. What we encounter in “America” and America is a collection of subjects without predicates and predicates without subjects: the fragmented grammar of America and “America” allegorizes the problem of representative democracy: “Millions of us / The accident was terrible.” The poem presents “a the stars,” where the question of the relationship between individual “stars” or citizen-fragments to their total coherence as nation is radically indeterminate, carrying both a definite and indefinite article. Ultimately, the poem attempts to imagine – in its confected syntax – new relations between the stars (or perhaps the poem imagines its inability to imagine such):

proud
of these stars in our flag we don’t want
the flag of film
waving over the sky
toward us – citizens of some future state.¹⁹

The poet rejects the flag as ground and containment, as the grammar of belonging for the particle-stars, just as he rejects conventional relationships between phrase and sentence in anticipation of some new mode of interrelationship, some “future state.” The flag is a principle of collection and assembly. It becomes, if we follow the logic of the poem, a “chain,” an “order” and a “border.” But it is also a made thing, a product of labor and the “lathes around / the stars with privilege jerks.” Three times in the poem, a janitor appears, a janitor who is a figure of class violence, like the “cold anarchist standing / in his hat.” In his second appearance, he stands opposed to the “conductor” and, consequently, the principles of arrangement and ordering of the flag: “Person / blocking the conductor / Is the janitor with the red cape. . . His face hidden by the shelf / thought intangible.” As character, the janitor is at the thematic and formal level what stands in opposition to the ordering syntax of the flag: a custodial labor that dwells among waste and disorder.

A careful reader will immediately note the connection between the conductor in this poem and the director of the opera, who might also be a conductor, in the sestina “Faust,” where, during a production of *The Phantom of the Opera*, the musicians and the “phantom / scene painters” are threatening a strike whose point is to disrupt the repetitive, serialized form of labor inscribed within the compulsions of the sestina form.²⁰ The scene-painters are, like the janitor, opposed to the “director.” Like “America,” “Faust” presents a vision of the backstage labor which goes into any cultural production, the phantom of labor which, having constructed the opera house, still remains hidden within it as a tormenting demon. It is no small wonder, then, that when the janitor appears for the third time in “America,” after “blocking the conductor. . . ,” he returns with a “wrench with which he’ll kill the intruder.”

In *Tennis Court*, the aesthetic is both a political and economic management and mediation: it is political representation (at the level of who speaks and how) and economic (at the level of who works and for whom). The poet identifies uneasily with the figure of the conductor or director, with the labor of this management. There are thus two kinds of labor that are brought into relation – one a technical-managerial labor, creative, colored by art and the aesthetic, and the other a deskilled and purely subservient labor. Take, for example, a moment later in the book:

Yellow curtains
 Are in fashion,
 Murk plectrum,
 Fatigue and smoke of nights
 And recording of piano in factory.²¹

As with nearly all of the poems considered so far, terms of art are superposed on terms of work, and the two become difficult to disentangle. At a certain level, these lines seem to say, making music is little different than the use of machines one might find in a factory, involving here the striking of a dull pick – “murk plectrum” – on strings. But at another level, perhaps, music is compensation or illusion, laid atop the brute materiality of labor, “[t]he factory to be screwed onto palace / The workers – happy.” The production of the music itself, at a certain level, is simply the movement of labor – “[t]he tears a fifth time of the workers pulling down the board through the trees / Plectrum.”

The preceding discussion has been largely oriented toward the content of the poems. But Ashbery's thematic elaboration of the different types or moments of labor is complemented by a formal exposition. We cannot fully understand what he is saying about intersubjective relations in and as labor without taking account of the syntactic fragmentation of the poems, the overlapping points of view, pronominal shifts and species of direct, indirect and free indirect discourse. Although they almost never feature narrative beyond the level of the anecdote, Ashbery's poems are nonetheless highly *novelistic* – frequently resorting to pastiche of 19th-century melodrama and to the technical machinery of point of view and free indirect discourse in the realist novel. Many of his poems – especially those in *The Tennis Court Oath* – read as if someone had deconstructed a novel by Henry James, removing all of the contextual material so that what remains are epiphanic fragments, snippets of dialogue, and incomplete descriptions.²²

The longest poem in the collection, “Europe,” is the perfect place to take full measures of these formal techniques and devices, in part because it draws much of its language from a British young adult novel, *Beryl of the Biplane*. It begins in the register of “employment” and “construction”:

To employ her
construction ball
Morning fed on the
light blue wood
of the mouth
cannot understand
feels deeply)²³

Curiously, though, this is a construction or making which at some level connotes an unmaking, since, as David Herd notes, “construction ball” is a particular and paradoxical adaptation of wrecking ball, and invokes the necessary disarticulation of fragments of speech and writing from which the new constructivism of the poem might emerge.²⁴ The objects of this construction are as much subjects and subjectivities as they are materials. Like “America,” its cross-Atlantic complement “Europe” pictures a play of partial subjects unmoored from any containing frame. Here as elsewhere, Ashbery establishes an indeterminacy between subjects and predicates, exemplified in this instance by the uncertain relationship between the “mouth” (metonym for speaker or speech) and the final two phrases that seem to float free from it. The indeterminacy about who is speaking originates, I will argue, from the indeterminate class position described above, the white-collar worker who is both commander and commanded, the speaking mouth and its object. As a result, the poems in the collection take on a curious mixture of obedience, insubordination and authority. These are contradictory personalities, or combinations of personalities, about whom one can say “You had no permission, to carry anything out, working to carry out the insane orders given you to raze / the box.”²⁵

Many Ashbery critics have written about this hallmark indeterminacy of point-of-view, most of them helped along by Ashbery's provocative remarks on how the movement in his poems “from one person in the sense of a pronoun to another . . . helps to produce a kind of polyphony.”²⁶ But for the most part these studies, by Bonnie Costello or, more recently, John Emil Vincent, have focused almost exclusively on Ashbery's complex

deployment of the second-person pronoun (which can function as both a pronoun of direct address and an impersonal pronoun). Though important, singular attention to the “supremely elastic” character of the second-person pronoun and its ability to allow for “a polyphony of writer and reader” distracts us from an examination of polyphony in his work more generally, the way in which the poems rest not just upon mutations of the second person pronoun but upon a cascade of characters and subjects, pronouns and points-of-view.²⁷ Ashbery’s remark that “we are somehow all aspects of a consciousness giving rise to the poem” seems just as much a reference to the wider social field from which the poems emerge – a field involving not just an “I,” a “you”, and a “we”, but also “he”, “she” and “they” – as it seems an attempt to trouble or reconstitute the relationship between writer and reader, especially in light of passages like the following:

106

she was trying to make sense of
 what was quick laugh
 hotel – cheap for them
 caverns the bed
 box of cereal

Ere long a flare was lit
 I don’t understand wreckage

107

Blue smoke?	The steel bolts
It was as though	having been replaced
She had	by a painting of
the river	one of wood!
above the water	Ronnie, thoughtfully
	of the silencer

plot to kill both of us, dear.

pet

oh

it that she was there²⁸

In a mere dozen lines, Ashbery decocts a welter of points-of-view and modes of address, stringing them between five different pronouns and characters. Fragments of reported speech, reported thought and, depending on one’s reading, free indirect discourse magnetize to the different perspectival centers. But Ashbery’s technique is syntactical as well

as grammatical: the multiple perspectives of the passage find their complement in the different reading *pathways* the poem allows. In the first lines of section 107, for instance, one must equally choose a path through the wreckage and a subject to whom one attaches the various fragments. Additionally, the subjective wreckage, the wreckage of viewpoint and standpoint, finds its complement in the various states of matter, the various textures, that flash up in the poem – *smoke, water, wood, metal* – as if the problem for the poet were the correlation of different subjectivities or points-of-view with different states of matter. But as with almost all of Ashbery’s poems, such a synthesis is merely hinted at, and what remains is a bland, impersonal pronoun, an “it.”

Poetry criticism is mostly ill-equipped to account for what Ashbery is up to in these kinds of passages, at least at a technical level, inasmuch as this kind of play of discourse and pronoun is something we are more accustomed to encountering in a modernist novel. We might try to adapt from narratological theory and see (despite its focus on the novel) if it can be applied productively to poems like these. The problem, though, is that the poems are not narrative, and much of the pleasure of the novel and its special resources with regard to point-of-view has to do with the particular *continuities* that narrative creates, even in writers like Joyce or Beckett or Genet. Fragmented poetry of the sort that Ashbery writes offers no such continuities, either of character or point-of-view, even if point of view is still one of the chief points of interest in these poems, part of their exposition of a complex collectivity.

The seminal account of these techniques is Ann Banfield’s *Unspeakable Sentences*, where the title refers to the “speakerless” character of sentences of free indirect discourse (which she calls, making a finer point, *represented speech and thought*). Banfield’s account is rigorously grammatical, localizing the complexities of free indirect discourse in specific linguistic features: tense shifts, temporal and spatial deictics (in particular deictics like “now” and “here” alongside past tense constructions), nouns and adjectives of quality (conveying subjective states), and various syntactic inversions. Whereas earlier accounts of free indirect discourse had insisted on the presence of a kind of dual voice or dual consciousness, a blending of both the narrator’s and character’s thought or speech, Banfield demonstrates that such a view is grammatically incoherent. In represented speech and thought, we encounter a point of view – what she calls a SELF – without any enunciating voice, or narrator (what she calls a SPEAKER): “Rather than being narrated, consciousness in this style is represented unmediated by any judging point of view.”²⁹ Such sentences feature a kind of objective subjectivity, one that is not the transmission of thoughts from speaker to receiver, but that simply is, manifesting in a curiously unmarked or unattributed speech and thought. Such sentences are, in this way, unspeakable and unspoken:

In speech, subjectivity is always linked to expression in what is formally an act of communication, and its particular nature is masked by the social role it dons in discourse. Through narrative, language is revealed to contain another sense of subjectivity than the one directly implied by the act of saying ‘I’³⁰

In the political terms described above, such sentences feature political presentation rather than representation – they are figures of a sort of direct democracy, in which our mediation by another fails; the conductor fails to represent or contain the striking musicians.

One of the problems with analyzing Ashbery's poem and similar forms of experimentation according to the schema that Banfield provides is that her account has to do with an effect created, often, by the *sentence as a whole*. But in the poems under discussion here, because of the fragmenting force of the line, such effects appear below the level of the sentence. The result is that what Banfield calls "the parenthetical context" – attribution of the represented speech or thought in a parenthetical phrase (he thought, they agreed, she feared) – is missing or ambiguous, and it becomes difficult to attribute certain expressions to certain characters, or even to determine the type of discourse featured. In the lines from "Europe" above, for instance, "Blue smoke?" could be direct discourse or free indirect discourse, depending upon whether or not one reads it as a continuation of the "I" in the previous section, or it could be an anticipation of the "she" in what follows, who may or not be Ronnie, and to whom the discursive fragments may or may not be attributed as further forms of free indirect discourse. Nonetheless, many of the semantic and grammatical features that Banfield associates with "represented speech and thought" – I will use the term "free indirect discourse" unless I am referring to Banfield's characterizations – are present in Ashbery's poem, albeit often in a germinal state: questions and exclamations of the sort that indirect discourse does not allow, salutations like "dear" that seem to pertain to either directly quoted (monologic) or free indirect speech, and the subjunctive *as though* which establishes the "she" as a mental center of gravity, an expressive "self" that cannot be attached to any narrator or "speaker."

At the same time, there are certainly examples in "Europe" of the kind of clearly demarcated discourse of Banfield's account. Section II, for instance, beginning with "[t]he editor realized" is clearly an expression of the editor's thought – given the present tense of "other men come down" and the colloquial, subjectivizing "gosh." Though the disorder of the poem always makes other attributions possible, the indentation of the lines after the first indicates that we are meant to hang all of this under the "editor". Furthermore, and this bears on the poem as a whole, fragmentation and disorder themselves are clearly thought-mimetic in a way that indirect discourse or reported thought cannot be. This is the presentation of "a view" – as the fourth line has it – one that might be "spoiled" or "blocked," but a view nevertheless.

Or take section 32, an almost paradigmatic case, which is either a pastiche of the novelistic sentence or a passage directly lifted from a novel, clearly marked as free indirect discourse once the past progressive gives way to the conditional and the temporal locator "in a moment":

The snow stopped falling
on the head of the stranger.
In a moment the house would be dark.

The effect of this is to magnetize the lone fragment in the following section ("mirrors – insane") to whatever consciousness – the "you"? the stranger? the "I"? – appeared in the preceding sections. Section 37 is equally clear, featuring the deictic "now" and a past tense.

Clear, too, is the dual tense structure, and the “again” at the end of section 58 (“And naturally it is all over again, beginning to get tired you realize”) which leads us to a reading of 59 as free indirect discourse. Even the last section of the poem, III, once again borrowed from Beryl of the Biplane, features the characteristic combination of past tense and deictic “now.”

Many of the passages in *TCO* often become a referendum on the status of the “you,” as if Ashbery were trying to give it the kind of plasticity that impersonal pronouns have in other languages, to make it the grammatical subject of a free indirect discourse freer still, unmarked by any attributing frame:

More upset, wholly meaningless, the willing sheath
glide into fall . . . mercury to passing
the war you said won – milling around the picket fence, and noise of
the engine from the sky
and flowers – here is a bunch
the war won out of cameos.
And somehow the perfect warrior is falling.³¹

As noted earlier, fragmentation of this sort – in the context of multiple characters and points of view – cannot but help seem the represented thought or speech of some unidentified character, and not that of the speaker (unless the speaker appears nearby as an “I”). Furthermore, the “you” can only be with great difficulty read as an addressee (with an implied “I”). But is this the indirect speech of the “you,” or the indirect thought of another character – a third-person – recalling the “you”? Or is this a non-specific you, an impersonal pronoun and thus a stand-in for the subjectivity of the surrounding phrases? Is the phrase “here is a bunch” direct speech, or some kind of interiorized narration or memory? The noise of the engine – of a swarming, extra-individual consciousness – makes such decisions impossible. What we have are “cameos” emerging out of a social field – brief interpellations which, as various forms of “you,” fix the equally various phrases to a shifting subjective center.

As rich of a site as “Europe” is for such investigations, grammatical analysis of the laser-clear sort that Banfield’s book recommends starts to seem a poor match for the text, inasmuch as Banfield’s theory is always *singularizing* and Ashbery’s book is so much about the multiple. For Banfield, there is always only one expressive self to a sentence, and whether or not this is true, grammatically, it is unclear that Ashbery believes it. In terms of a philosophy of free indirect discourse, we might find a better match for Ashbery in the expansive definitions one encounters in Gilles Deleuze’s work on cinema, and in *A Thousand Plateaus*, with Felix Guattari, as well as in the thinkers he draws upon: Valentin Voloshinov and Pier Paolo Pasolini. For Deleuze and Guattari, free indirect discourse subtends all language; a swarm of unattributable voices, ideas, expressions, precedes any *individuation* of language into direct discourse, into the saying or writing of an “I,” a “He” or a “She.” It precedes any tagging of one piece of language to a particular body: “Language in its entirety is indirect discourse. Indirect discourse in no way supposes direct discourse; rather, the latter is

extracted from the former. . . My direct discourse is still the free indirect discourse running through me, coming from other worlds or planets.”³²

This seems an apt characterization of the basic philosophy of language at work in “Europe” and elsewhere, his poems “receiving / dreams and inspirations on an unassigned / frequency,” as he writes in “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” a work that in its meditation on the tension between perceiving and perceived self, between first and third person, might be said to put the entirety of self-experience in the register of a free indirect discourse twisting back upon itself in the convex mirror.

But the concept of free indirect discourse offered up by Deleuze and Guattari, as germane as it is to Ashbery’s sensibility, will not get us to the properly historical character of the technique in *TCO*. I will argue that Ashbery’s stance as receiver, distributor, assembler and disseminator social voices has to do with the changed character of the capital-labor relationship in the 1960s. If early modernist experiments, under the ethos of industrialization, could imagine the artist as maker, as fabricator and artisan of social forms – as the creator of a new language, *sui generis* – deskilling and, later, deindustrialization remove this contact with primary materials and reposition the artist as administrator of prefabricated forms, received from elsewhere, made by unknown characters. In the same way, Ashbery receives the fragments of an American vernacular in France, attempting to remove the “stars” from “the flag we don’t want,” and to understand forms of American English as implicated within questions of political representation, alienation and exploitation. The free-floating discursive fragments received hearken both to the political self-representation of the multitude and its exploitation or manipulation by the receiving subject. Free indirect discourse, in this way, is a product of struggle between represented and representing voices.³³ The swarm of indirect discourse that forms the pre-individual “plane of consistency” is not originary, as Deleuze and Guattari sometimes indicate, but the product of the abstractive, “deterritorializing” machine of history and its production of new subjects and new class relations in capitalism.

At the base of this social relation is nothing less than the building block – the cell-form of capitalism, as Marx calls it – within the commodity-relation and its fetishism. We will recall that Marx’s treatment of the commodity-form involves a number of rhetorical techniques, prosopoeia (personification) chief among them. The commodity is a thing that speaks to others for us, and speaks for others to us. Commodities are “social hieroglyphics”; the social form of the market and value inscribes itself in things, and as a result, this social character is mistaken as a property of the things themselves. Subsequently, in a second movement, the “voice” of the commodities, itself already thrown from elsewhere, ventriloquizes itself in the mistaken pronouncements of people about these commodities.³⁴ There is thus, in capitalism, a constant alternation between a “personification of the thing and a reification of the person.”³⁵ The commodity *is*, as a structure of alienation, a form of indirect discourse – since, in its prosopoetic powers, it speaks *for us* and *for another*. When we receive money in exchange for a wage, we receive, in mystified form, a naturalized token of our subordination to the will (and voice) of another. And when we purchase a commodity, we receive in mystified form the will and voice of another whose life we have been granted the rights to dispose of as we see fit. Capital is a thing which grants one rights to appropriate and manipulate the life activity of another. And since it is in and through the commodity that we speak to each other as social subjects, without the ability to attribute specific

activities to specific bodies, the capital-labor relationship expropriates us of this attribution, expropriates us of our ability to say *that is I* or *that is mine* or *I did that*: “The award on the wall / believing it belonged to him.” We might say, therefore, that labor in capitalism is a form of *free indirect activity*, in which the other speaks through us or to us or for us. “Free” because the capacity to labor can be put in the service of another and under the command of another, and therefore bought and sold; and “indirect” because it only benefits the laborer indirectly, by virtue of being exchangeable for the necessities of life. The *Tennis Court Oath* describes a particular variant form of this labor, and a particular moment in its development, when the relationship between the ventriloquist and the ventriloquized (or, to translate it into the idiom of activity, between commander and executor) becomes entirely reversible. As corporations increase in size and scope, requiring more and more complex systems of administration, control and accounting, management becomes more and more difficult to locate in a particular person. Here is how Mills describes this confusion, a confusion we will quickly connect to the tangle of points-of-view in Ashbery’s poems:

Seen from below, the management is not a Who but a series of Theys and even Its. Management is something one reports to in some office, maybe in all offices including that of the union; it is a printed instruction and a sign on a bulletin board; it is the voice coming through the loudspeakers; it is the name in the newspaper; it is the signature you can never make out, except it is printed underneath; it is a system that issues orders superior to anybody you know close-up; its blueprints, specifying in detail your work-life and the boss-life of your foreman. Management is the centralized say-so.

Seen from the middle ranks, management is one-part people who give you the nod, one-part system, one-part yourself. White-collar people may be part of management, like they say, but management is a lot of things, not all of them managing. You carry authority but you are not its source. As one of the managed, you are on view from above, and perhaps you are seen as a threat; as one of the managers, you are seen from below, perhaps as a tool. You are the cog and the beltline of the bureaucratic machinery; you are the link in the chains of commands, persuasions, notices, bills, which binds together the men who make decisions and the men who make things; without you the managerial demiurge could not be. But your authority is confined strictly within a prescribed orbit of occupation actions, and such power as you wield is a borrowed thing. Yours is the subordinate’s mark, yours the canned talk. The money you handle is somebody else’s money; the papers you sort and shuffle already bear somebody else’s marks. You are the servant of decision, the assistant of authority, the minion of management. You are closer to management than the wage-workers are, but yours is seldom the last decision.³⁶

This passage is a remarkable treatment not only of point of view, but of point of view seen from different points of view within the contemporary organization. It demonstrates that the “centralized say-so” can’t easily be attributed to any particular character, but exists in a strange interspace not unlike the difficult-to-attribute predicates of Ashbery’s poems.

Many commentators on the class politics surrounding free indirect discourse will suggest that the blending or indeterminacy of consciousness in such texts produces what Pasolini calls “an irrational interclassism” where “the bourgeois class itself, in sum, in

cinema, identifies itself, again with all of humanity.”³⁷ For Pasolini, who follows earlier commentary by Voloshinov, the breakdown of the dividing line between character and author marks the inability of literature (or film, which is his object) to encounter proletarian life as such. All of these writers will argue, in one way or another, that the result of such techniques is a kind of averaging-out of consciousness, the construction of an abstract middle-voice that negates the particularity of any specific character or speaker. While this is no doubt one possible result of these literary techniques, it seems just as possible – and I believe that this is what we notice in Ashbery – that rather than a reconciliation of the various voices or consciousnesses, what these devices allow us to experience is their contradiction, their antagonism to each other. The particularly experimental character of Ashbery’s use of free indirect discourse seems designed to make us experience the incompatibility of each voice or moment, their refusal to fit together into the presentation of a single, stylized spread. This is because, as much as Ashbery must identify the work of producing these poems, and joining together the various found voices (the “papers” which bear “somebody else’s marks”) with the arranging, directing consciousness of the “conductor” and the “centralized say-so” of management, he also identifies with the generalized insubordination which such a system incites.

In terms of the technical discussion of free indirect discourse and the stakes of labor within Ashbery, this would illuminate what we note in the leitmotif of labor and the particular play of characters and points-of-view we encounter. Simply put, in Ashbery’s poems we encounter a field of intersubjective antagonism that is not, or not simply, the subsumption of all voices and moments within a single, unifying consciousness. The standpoint of the managerial, midlevel employee identified in the “The Instruction Manual” is inherently unstable, and gives way to a subject that turns out to be nothing more than a clutch of contradictory “commands, persuasions, bills and notices,” a contradictory subject with “no permission, to carry anything out” but whose disobedience must, therefore, involve “working to carry out the insane orders.”

Among the poems in *Tennis Court*, it is perhaps “Landscape” that best reflects the unstable, contradictory stance described above. The poem is notable because the first half features an impersonal third-person description – hence “landscape” – concerned with various dysfunctional features of the life of a “village,” which then gives way, in the second stanza, to first-person and second-person address attributable to the original speaker. The unitary speaker of the poem is, perhaps, a counterpoint to the persistent images of breakdown proffered throughout:

The pest asked us to re-examine the screws he held.
Just then the barman squirted juice over the lumps.
It decided to vote for ink (the village)
There was surprise at the frozen ink
That was brought in and possibly rotten.³⁸

One is in a bad place when “a pest” – an agent of corruption – is responsible for various interconnecting ligature or “screws.” And just as we would expect from a reading of previous poems, problems with interconnection are also problems with representation – the village, an “it,” votes for “ink” (or writing of some sort) but it is “frozen” and “possibly

rotten.” Likewise, “the rapid extension meter” – applicable, perhaps, to the non-descript “lumps” – is “thrown out of court.” Such problems continue in the second stanza:

The charcoal mines were doing well
At 9½ per cent. A downy hill
Announced critical boredom for the bottler
Of labor tonic. It seemed there was no more
Steering-wheel oil or something – you had better
Call them about it – I don’t know,
I predisposed the pests toward blue rock.
The barometer slides slowly down the wall
It has finished registering data.

Despite a certain prosperity – measured at 9 ½ per cent of something – the alienation of work (“critical boredom”) has begun to afflict the bottlers of “labor tonic,” where the latter refers either to something sold to induce labor in pregnant women or, in this context, something used to induce better or less resistant labor: a managerial tonic, akin to “steering-wheel oil” in its ability to reduce the problems in directing or guiding activity. The workers are reduced to (or spoken for by) a mere thing – “a downy hill” – just as their village has become an “it.” The stance of the speaker here is supervisory, moving from observations about the global state of things, and the data associated with them, to recommendations for actions to improve them. What we observe in “Landscape” is a problem of management, a problem with managerial data, and “steering,” in which the subordinate characters are figured as objects, as the effaced agents of passive voice constructions, or the unidentified speakers of summarized knowledge: “[t]here was surprise,” “ink/ [w]as brought in,” [i]t seemed there was no more,” “the paper lining had gotten/ unpinned, or unstuck.” Indeed, in “Landscape,” only inanimate objects take on active verbs: “the bathers’ tree explained,” “the barometer slides,” “the glass sanctuary repeated. . .” These are the objects which mediate and transmit the effaced activity of the subordinates and workers in this poem. The barometer, then, is a metonym of some kind of refusal, just as the coming apart or unpinned of the square doctrines and paper lining is most likely the unattributed work of “pests” or saboteurs. Though Ashbery does not flesh out these antagonisms through the technical means of free indirect discourse, the relationship established between speaking subject and spoken object (here, personified in various inanimate agents) is largely the same. What we note, then, is the failure of the mediating (in this case, managerial) voice to speak for another. The final line of the poem suggests that the breakdown in hierarchy is terminal: “The ladder failed.”

The white-collar middle class of the immediate postwar period, the alienated workers described by Mills, Riesman, Whyte and others, was a class in transition, its already-circumscribed powers quickly evaporating through the very processes of routinization and deskilling which had conjured it into being. Perhaps more accurately, a certain *portion* of the postwar white-collar middle class – clerical workers and certain lower-rank managers and technicians – would find its autonomy and privilege eroded, while another portion, comprised of executives, directors, and professionals, would continue to enjoy a fair amount of power. The transformation of the white-collar middle-class might be better described, then, as a polarization rather than a deterioration, such that certain white-collar workers

come to resemble, in numerous ways, their blue-collar counterparts, experiencing with them a shared condition of “critical boredom,” to use the idiom of Ashbery’s poem. These white-collar workers will come to see their own “derived power” as, ultimately, the power of another, and participate in a broad-based revolt against the alienation of modern work – particularly its dull, hierarchical and authoritarian character. Toward the end of the 1960s, this revolt will mean a marked uptick in strikes, in absenteeism, sabotage, low productivity, and a general loss of morale. Broadly understood as emerging from a newly-dominant qualitative critique of work, a critique of work as domination and disempowerment, rather than exploitation, the new struggles that emerge in the late 1960s will take management as such as their explicit object and target, taking aim at the “right to manage” which many firms had reserved in exchange for wage increases. Read in light of the struggles of the coming years, “Landscape” seems a portrait of this breakdown of management, and the polarization it produced among white-collar workers.

As we will see in the succeeding chapters, this convergence of “white-collar woes” and “blue-collar blues” will lead capitalist firms to propose a large-scale transformation of organizational structure, designed not only to neutralize the antagonism described in this poem and others like it but to cut down on labor costs. Part of this meant generalizing the standpoint of white-collar workers, by forcing all workers, even those on the lowest ranks, to perform routine administrative and bureaucratic tasks. Many firms will organize low-level workers into partially self-directed “teams,” engaged in a variety of rotating tasks, and cut out as many middle-managers as possible. In a sense, such attempts to improve “corporate culture” and encourage “teamwork” aim to produce the kind of “irrational interclassism” described by Pasolini in his critique of free indirect discourse. They aim, in other words, to produce a universalized solidarity with management, where management means – as Mills makes clear – a pervasive structure of intentionality more than it does a set of persons.

The problem for Ashbery, as we’ve seen, is that he can’t imagine any form of collective life outside of the managerial mediation of white-collar work, such that his experimental re-arrangement of varied social materials through collage no longer seems a work of avant-garde negation but part and parcel of capitalist functioning. At the same time, he identifies with a pastoral poetry of leisure, refusal and distancing, one which attempts to turn its back on modernity and its urgencies.³⁹ This contradiction is never resolved in *The Tennis Court Oath*, and it is one of the reasons why his later books depart so strongly from its modes and methods. Indeed, these later books do seem to have resolved the antagonistic play of voices and points-of-view that we encounter in *The Tennis Court Oath*, by adopting a much more amicable alternation of pronouns and viewpoints – usually “I”, “We” and “You,” – which will seem essentially fungible perspectives on a central experience, rather than irreconcilable singularities. In other words, the later books do orient their play with point of view toward a new humanism, or in Pasolini’s less-than-charitable terms, “a pseudohumanistic function.”⁴⁰ When work appears in these later books, it is drained of all antagonism. Even violence itself is strangely muted. This is a world in which “quelled / The rioters turned out of sleep in the peace of prisons / Singing on marble factory walls.”⁴¹ Where the earlier poems offered us antagonism, here we are offered instead an affective compromise with management:

... keeping the door open to a tongue-and-cheek attitude on
the part of the perpetrators,

The men who sit down to their vast desks on Monday to begin planning the
week's notations, jotting memoranda that take
Invisible form in the air, like flocks of sparrows
above the city pavements, turning and wheeling aimlessly
But on the average directed by discernible motives.⁴²

As opposed to the opposition between pastoral refusal and the managerial aesthetic, the two modes have become essentially identical. As we will see, this is not all that different from what happens over the course of the actual restructuring of labor from the 1970s onward, as firms seek to import values associated with the home and leisure into the workplace in order to make work more tolerable. In any case, in the later poems, there is often no longer any anxiety about placing collectivity under the sign of administration:

He thought he had never seen anything quite so beautiful as that crystallization into a mountain of statistics: out of the rapid movement to and fro that abraded individual personalities into a channel of possibilities, remote from each other and even remoter from the eye that tried to contain them: out of that river of humanity comprised of individuals each no better than he should be. . .⁴³

If the truth of this averaging-out of subjectivity, this acceptance of the managerial, occasionally erupts into the poems, it is easily shut out:

They had not merely served the purpose but were the purpose – what population is to the world. But it dawned on him all of a sudden that there was another way, that this horrible vision of the completed Tower of Babel, flushed in the sunset as the last ceramic brick was triumphantly fitted into place, perfect in its vulgarity, an eternal remainder of the advantages of industry and cleverness – that terror could be shut out – really shut out – simply by turning one's back on it.⁴⁴

Ashbery's poetry of the 1960s and 1970s therefore provides a perfect entrée to the themes discussed in the rest of this survey, prefiguring not only the rebellion against the postwar regime of work – against deskilling, routinization, hierarchy – but also some of the emergent responses to that rebellion.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SERVOMECHANICAL WORKER IN HANNAH WEINER AND DAN GRAHAM

Today, outside of a few specialized applications, the would-be metascience of cybernetics is remembered, if at all, only as a hazy prelude to modern computing and information technology.¹ But cybernetics was popular on a scale that might be difficult to appreciate today, and enjoyed a following during the 1960s and early 1970s that extended far beyond the academic and military-industrial research centers where it was born.² Books like Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings* and Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* sold millions of copies, while cybernetic theorizations had made plausible contributions to economics and anthropology, business management theory and art criticism, psychoanalysis and linguistics, not to mention its core areas in the applied and theoretical sciences, which everyone expected would soon be completely transformed by such research. The status of cybernetics as the overarching future framework of not only the natural but the social sciences (and even the arts) seemed virtually assured, even to its enemies. Just as importantly for our purposes, a glance at some of the most important works of art and literature from the period reveals the enduring presence of what we might term a "cybernetic imaginary." From the explorations of heat-death and the pathos of thermodynamics in William S. Burroughs and Robert Smithson, Thomas Pynchon and Philip K. Dick, to the allegories of information in Hans Haacke and Dan Graham, to the exploration of dynamics of feedback in Jean Tinguely and Vito Acconci, Charles Olson and A.R. Ammons – this vast thematic cluster organizes many of the best-remembered works from the period.

How do we understand this development? How do we explain the broad appeal for artists of this "science of everything," born from the Anglo-American research programs of WWII and gradually gaining in popularity and clout such that, by the mid-1960s, it provided key conceptual frameworks for both the counterculture and the corporate elite, neo-avant-garde artists and Johnson-era technocrats. Cybernetics is, in the formulation Norbert Wiener gives it, "the science of control and communications." Its central concepts emerge, in part, from attempts by Wiener and others to develop self-correcting artillery guns – in other words, guns that could "sense" the degree to which their shots were lagging behind the target and correct automatically. This required a certain form of "feedback" whereby action on an external object – in this case, the target – produced a form of internal action, or self-regulation (the adjustment).³ Such mechanisms of self-regulation and homeostasis became, for Wiener and others, the basis of a general theory of servomechanical self-reflexivity that could describe and predict the behavior of animals, machines and humans, as well as extra-individual "organisms" like corporations, families, and even "the economy" and "society."⁴

Obviously, in asking about the immense success of cybernetics, the most common sense answer can't be avoided: cybernetics is closely connected to technological developments – in computing and electronics – that were extremely important to the course of postwar society. But my argument is that, alongside these real-world applications, this "science of control and communication" promised, without necessarily having anything concrete to show for it, a response to social and economic issues that seemed especially pressing.

“Control” and “communication” were centrally important for societies whose economic policies were based on Keynesian “social planning,” whose hierarchical, multilayered corporations raised new problems of managerial control and the dispersion of managerial commands, and whose deskilled manufacturing system was designed to remove workers’ control over the content and pace of production. It is thus hardly surprising that cybernetics appealed to corporate management, military engineers, or government technocrats. What might be surprising, however, is that it appealed to the hippies and artists of the counterculture, whose ostensibly libertarian or communalist politics put them in direct conflict with the managers and technocrats. This is because cybernetics promised a holistic, organic form of “control,” less reliant on outright domination and instead premised on reciprocal, horizontal interactions. It often presented itself as a solution to the problems associated with unilateral, top-down decision making, and therefore promised democratic empowerment and participation in managerial decision-making for subordinates. As a result, it became equally popular with groups that thought the problems of the age arose from too much control, and those who thought it arose from too little. While from the standpoint of the counterculture and certain parts of the left, cybernetics suggested the organizational form of a future postcapitalist society no longer based upon domination and exploitation, it also suggested to decidedly pro-capitalist elements a set of mechanisms whereby techniques of domination and exploitation might be perfected and made more tolerable.

As the major capitalist economies begin to encounter severe political and economic challenges, beginning in the late 1960s, cybernetic ideas gain currency as a potential way to “de-administrate” firms and remove some of the managerial layers that had become a drag on profitability. But they also solve another problem by responding to the increasingly prevalent, and intense, critiques of capitalist work which focus on qualitative rather than quantitative demands, targeting in particular the alienating, machinic, rote and routinized character of deskilled blue and white-collar labor. Faced with this critique – which Boltanski and Chiapello call “the artistic critique,” precisely because it percolates outward from the counterculture and the avant-garde – capitalist firms eventually engineer a form of pseudo-empowered, “flexible” and “self-managing” work that meets these demands in certain ways while also, at the same time, forcing a mechanism for newly intensified exploitation.⁵ The meeting between cybernetics and the neo-avant-garde is thus a key site where the contradictory meanings of “self-management” – ancient ideal of the workers’ movement, as well as historical anarchism and communism – knot together, where “self-management” as the negation of management and self-management as the internalization of management become increasingly difficult to distinguish.

In my argument, the artists and writers who participate in the “cybernetic imaginary” of the period unwittingly share an elective affinity with the very technocrats that they imagine themselves opposing. Alongside various think-tanks like RAND and the university research programs where cybernetic ideas flourish, the art and writing of the period is *experimental* in the sense that it is speculative, that it models possible social relations (by focusing on the interaction between artist and audience, or on the “process” rather than the “object” of artistic making). It is a laboratorial mode which prefigures, in important ways, the actual restructuring of the labor process that, in response to the political and economic crises of the period, begins in the 1970s and intensifies during the 1980s.

Here is an example of the cybernetic imaginary:

My life is my art. I am my object, a product of the process of self-awareness. I work part-time as a designer of ladies underwear to help support myself. I like my job, and the firm I work for. They make and sell a product without unnecessary competition. The people in the firm are friendly and fun to work with. The bikini pants I make sell for 49¢ and \$1.00. If things can't be free, they should be as cheap as possible. Why waste time and energy to make expensive products that you waste time and energy to afford?

Art is live people. Self respect is a job if you need it.⁶

Thus reads the copy for Hannah Weiner's first "one-man show," *Hannah Weiner at Her Job*, which took place in March 1970, among hundreds of similar "happenings" and performances. Best known for her later "clairvoyant" or "clair-style" poems, composed from the words that she began to see everywhere – on walls, on people's faces, in the air – Weiner was at the time of this show a poet associated with Fluxus and the New York art scene in general, in which the lines between poets, conceptual artists, dancers and musicians were particularly hard to distinguish, and in which artists routinely made works that consisted of little more than words on a page, while poets "exhibited" their poetry in the form of elaborate performances and installations. The paragraph above demonstrates one of the possible relationships established between the neo-avant-garde and contemporary labor. If "art" had become synonymous with "life," realizing an old, avant-garde wish, then it had also become synonymous with "work," since most people spend much of their life at work.⁷ Going to work counts as an artistic act or event. Under such conditions, making things or laboring becomes secondary to the fundamentally artistic work of self-making and self-fashioning, where "product" and "process" are one. We also see how this collapsing of "art" into "work" humanizes and aestheticizes the space of labor, suddenly become a place where making and selling takes place "without unnecessary competition."

Though it is less explicit here than in other works of Weiner's from the same period, the notion of self-production and self-objectification derives less from Hegel's dialectics than it does from Norbert Wiener's cybernetics, and in particular the core cybernetic concept of "feedback." Feedback is a theory of purposive action that depends on notions of "circular causality." Through feedback, an "organism" acting on an external object can come to indirectly act upon itself, and thereby modulate or regulate its own behavior. "I am my object, a product of the process of the self-awareness." The statement could have been written by either Weiner or Wiener.⁸

The term cybernetics comes from the Greek word for "steersman," *kybernetes*, which, Norbert Wiener notes, is the root for our word "governor." As discussed above, cybernetics bases its notions of self-regulation on the mechanical devices called servomechanisms or, alternately, "governors." But what has not yet been adequately examined is the relationship posited between communication and these mechanisms of control. For cybernetics, there is essentially no difference between communication and control: "When I control the actions of another person, I communicate a message to him, and although this message is in the imperative mood, the technique of communication does not differ from that of a message of

fact.”⁹ To take the example of the artillery guns, the action of the gun is itself an act of communication, it communicates (to itself) the degree to which its aim is correct or incorrect, and modulates its own actions accordingly.

Although the techniques for mechanical self-regulation date from the invention of the water clock, or clepsydra, and feature in devices as familiar as the household thermostat, one of the best examples of the servomechanical union of communication and action is cybernetician W. Ross Ashby’s “homeostat.” This is a device made from four interconnected electrical devices such that the electrical output of one device becomes the modulated electrical input of the other three. The manner in which these devices modify their own voltages through the network of input and output is exceedingly complex, yielding up thousands of possible permutations. But despite their complexity, the results divide rather simply into either stable or unstable patterns. The voltages either hover around the mid-range or, alternately, fluctuate back and forth randomly. What makes this machine seem a plausible model for homeostasis and self-regulation, however, is that the thousands of possible unstable states lead, by design, to a stable one. If any of the voltages depart too much from the middle range, the whole machine resets and tries a new initial input. It continues to reset until it finds an initial input which leads to a stable range of voltages. Thus, this is a self-stabilizing machine, what cyberneticians call a “hyperstable” device, capable of self-modulating and self-regulating – through the mechanism of “feedback” – in response to changing inputs (which come to stand in for the “environment”). Such devices provide, for many cyberneticians, a plausible portrait of how the body regulates its own temperature, how an animal learns from its behavior, how a market equilibrates between supply and demand, and how a corporation adapts to changing conditions.

For Wiener, the cybernetic turn restored to scientific description a notion of purposeful activity that arises *from* mechanistic physics, not in spite of it. Cybernetics offers a teleology without any theological notion of final causes or intentions, by demonstrating how a purely mechanical series of causes, reacting back upon themselves, create purposeful action all on their own. If you line up the billiard balls of mechanistic causality in a certain way, they become a self-organizing, self-reproducing system, one that gives “the appearance of a purposefulness in a system which is not purposefully constructed simply because purposelessness is in its very nature transitory.”¹⁰ Two essential features distinguish these mechanisms:

One is that they are machines to perform some definite task or tasks, and therefore must possess effector organs (analogous to arms and legs in human beings) with which such tasks can be performed, the second is that they be *en rapport* with the outer world by sense organs, such as photoelectric cells and thermometers, which not only tell them what the existing circumstances are, but enable them to record the performance or nonperformance of their own tasks. This last function, as we have seen, is called feedback, the property of being able to adjust future conduct by past performance.¹¹

To return to the relationship of communication to action, and Wiener’s statement above, self-observation *is* self-control under such conditions. They are two moments of a single process of feedback. This is how it makes sense to describe oneself, as Wiener does, as “the product of a process of self-awareness.”

Such cybernetic themes are explicit, also, in the text produced for the “Fashion Show Poetry Event,” described by Weiner as a process of “feedback” between writers and artists, makers of language and makers of things:

We communicated to the artists our generalized instructions. They translated instructions into sketches, models, and finally actual garments. The feedback (i.e., the garments) was then translated by us into fashion language. We have also translated this information into the language of press releases aimed at both the general and the fashion press and into the language of this theoretic essay.¹²

Weiner’s contribution to the project was, as described by John Perreault, “a cape with hundreds of pockets proclaiming ‘one should wear their own luggage.’”¹³ The materialized “instructions” of the poets bear within them numerous pores or holes that emblemize the “difference between a description and that which this description appears to describe. . . the difference between a real fashion show and the imitation of a fashion show.”¹⁴ As we will see, Weiner is fascinated by these spaces of error and indeterminacy opened up by translation, precisely because they open onto possibilities for learning, adaptation and self-regulation. In a cybernetic model of sociality, error is learning and (as we will see) organization arises through a process of disorganization. As the writers of *Tiqqun* describe it, cybernetics is part of a “historic compromise where law is redefined by way of chaos, and the certain by way of the probable.” In this “Second Empire of Reason,” founded upon the “practical problem of the mastery of uncertainty,” error and certainty, order and disorder are not so much opposed as dialectically intertwined: “[c]ybernetics consequently aims to disturb and to control in the same movement. It is founded upon the terror which is an element of evolution – of economic growth, of moral progress – because it provides the occasion for the production of information. The state of emergency which is of the nature of crises, is that which permits autoregulation to begin, which permits the perpetual motion of self-management.”¹⁵

To hear Jack Spicer, one of Mayer’s poetic contemporaries, tell it, humans are special machines that develop through a process of scarring:

The trouble with comparing a poet with a radio is that radios
don’t develop scar tissue. The tubes burn out, or with a
transistor, which most souls are, the battery or diagram
burns out replaceable or not replaceable, but not like that
punchdrunk fighter in the bar. The poet
Takes too many messages. . .

The poet is a counterpunching radio.¹⁶

The poet’s scar tissue is what distinguishes her from a mere transmitter or receiver of messages, and demonstrates the possibility of responding variably to the messages received. The poet is a figure of resistance, then, but also a figure of self-discipline and self-control. The difference, however, between Weiner and Spicer’s poet is that, in Weiner’s case, in all of the examples above, the modulation of the individual and the group is effected through labor as much as through violence.

Like the two examples above, where she takes on alternately the stance of salesperson and manager, all of Weiner's work from this period remains preoccupied with labor, as much as with the mundane, everyday activities that fill up our waking hours. At a certain level, Weiner aims to bring the special resources of art to bear on labor in a way that humanizes it, makes it seem more tolerable and pleasant, based on cooperation rather than competition, abundance rather than scarcity, equality rather than hierarchy. Take, for example, her piece "World Works," where she modifies a shop sign by writing "the word THE over WORLD WORKS".¹⁷ The addition of the article changes "works" from noun to verb, suggesting the presence of unnamed agents – workers. It thus demystifies the impersonal "works," but it also presents a certain assurance that things function as they should: "the world works" in the sense that there is an invisible order which equilibrates the functioning of things.

I wanted to do World Works because I wanted to create the feeling that people all over the world were doing a related thing at a related time, although they would be doing it individually, without an audience and without knowledge of what others were doing. It is an act of faith. We have unknown collaborators.¹⁸

But whatever the aim, Weiner's description of her act of *détournement* establishes uncomfortable parallels between her vision of labor as a world-wide act of collaboration and the various neoclassical, "free-market" economic theories which likewise see the market (and in particular, the price-function and money) as allowing for a massive act of nearly miraculous coordination, in which millions of individual actions are "organized," without any central control, for the greatest possible benefit of all.¹⁹ In the case of these theorists, however, competition *is* the mechanism through which such collaboration takes place. What kind of faith is called for here? Is it faith in the market and money (or something else)? Is the feeling she wants to create a feeling about something that already really exists? Or a feeling about something that *could* exist?

In other conceptual and performance pieces from the same period – in particular her contributions to *Street Works*, a series of street exhibits put together by the Architectural League of New York – a different "feeling" about labor, a much less positive feeling, emerges. In "Street Work IV (October, 1969)," for instance, Weiner hires a frankfurter wagon and distributes free wieners (a pun on her name). Although she intends to continue with the idea – established with "Hannah Weiner at Her Job" – that art is a form of self-distribution, a way of making the self available, and thereby transforming the self through a process of free giving and receiving, here the fact that "anything or anybody can have anything or anybody's name" takes on a sinister character.²⁰ The gift economy, made possible through the sharing of the product – the wiener that is a stand-in for Weiner herself – is troubled by the consequences of that very objectification, which she characterizes in her description of the project as embalmment: "Unfortunately wieners (and pastrami, bologna, preserved meats) contain sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate; one a coloring agent for otherwise gray meat, one an embalming fluid. Both have a depressing effect on the mind."²¹ Finally, In "Streetwork V (Dec. 21)," Weiner cements the forgoing negative associations by playing the role of an actual street worker: "I stood on a street corner, or in a doorway, as if I were soliciting. Women do that in that neighborhood (3rd Ave & 13 St to 3rd Ave & 14th St). It is not a nice feeling at all."²²

What distinguishes the first few examples – with their positive images of “fun and friendly” labor – from the latter examples, based upon the unpleasant affects she associates with prostitution? One answer might lie in the term “self-respect.” In the first examples, “the art” of “live people” allows for “self-respect,” which means, I think, less a way of “appreciating” the self than a way of distinguishing it, making it into something unique and specific. There are forms of interaction between selves that deepen their “self-respect” – or singularity – and then there are interactions that mean a loss of self and the total fungibility of all individuals, a situation where “anything or anybody can have anything or anybody’s name,” where there is no difference between Wiener and Weiner. As it happens, this accords with the technical definition of “information” supplied by Norbert Wiener’s in his description of the servomechanism. Information is a measure of what the other W(e/i)ner – Hannah – calls “self-respect.” Norbert Wiener borrows the term – or rather its specific, technical sense – from the communication theory Claude Shannon develops while working for Bell Laboratories. Shannon wanted a mathematical description for the absolute limit to information compression, since this would essentially define the cost-efficiency of telephonic technology. As it turned out, much of the mathematics necessary for defining information in this way had already been developed in the mathematical physics of James Clerk Maxwell, Josiah Willard Gibbs, and especially Ludwig Von Boltzmann, who had formulated the Second Law of Thermodynamics (that is, the law of increasing entropy) in statistical terms. In Boltzmann’s equations, entropy, the measure of a system’s loss of free energy (or, in terms that are important for us here, its loss of an ability to do *work*) can be described statistically as the number of *possible* microstates that might subtend any observed macrostate. The more possible arrangements of molecules for any observed behavior – in other words, the more randomized the positions of the underlying molecules, and the more uncertain our knowledge of these molecules – the less free energy the system has. Relatedly, this randomization is also more likely, in statistical terms. States in which there is a great deal of internal order will have fewer possible microstates – as, for example, when there is a difference in temperature between one part of a system and another. Entropy is therefore a curiously paradoxical measure: on the one hand, at the level of the microstate, it is a measure of unpredictability, chaos, noise; on the other hand, at the surface level, the macro-level, it is a measure of the *most likely outcome*, measure of the degree to which variety and distinction have been lost.²³ In short, this paradoxical definition of entropy suggests that what is most predictable is unpredictability. For Weiner such conceptions correlate with a profound epistemological shift, one which he claims was far more monumental than the later developments in relativity and quantum mechanics for which it partially paved the way.²⁴

Shannon uses Boltzmann’s probabilistic description of molecules to characterize acts of communication. Specifically, he uses the equations to describe the degree to which any given message can be compressed. Information, in his formulation, is a specific measure of what is uncompressible in a message, what can’t be excised without loss of information. Given a certain probability for any word, letter or sign to appear, and given a certain combinatorial grammar for these signs (*i* before *e* except after *c*), the “information” of a message is the inverse of its “guessability” by a receiver. In English, certain letters and words

(*e* and *the*, for instance) occur in high frequencies: thus, they have low information. Letters and words like *z* or *entropy* occur infrequently, and thus they have high information. For example, if all of the vowels or all of the articles in the preceding sentence were missing, one might still guess its meaning. But if the consonants or verbs were removed one would encounter a string of meaningless characters or an unparseable sentence. We can see, then, how this definition resembles the thermodynamic case – the higher information messages, the messages with less guessable elements, less guessable letters and words, resemble the probable arrangement of underlying microstates in the case of high entropy systems, where the molecules are highly randomized. But, if one accepts these relatively reasonable characterizations, then one is forced to accept a rather scandalous and paradoxical conclusion: information (the measure of “surprisal” and the unpredictability of the sign) is entropy. The more disordered and randomized the message, the higher its information. In this characterization, a string of gibberish is higher in “information” than the sentences you are currently reading. It is important to remember that Shannon – who is concerned almost entirely with the “channel capacities” of communication signals – excludes the semantic dimension from his theory entirely. Although all signs have meaning and are exchanged in order to communicate meanings, “[t]hese semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem.”²⁵ Shannon entropy is a formalism more avant-garde than even the most radical attempts at pure poetry, the formalism of a technocratic society capable of reducing language to a pure play of statistical quantities, stripped of any content or meaning.

It is worth probing the resemblance between Shannon entropy and Boltzmann entropy a bit further, to examine one final point. While the status of a high information message in Shannon’s account does resemble the possible microstates underlying a high entropy thermodynamic system, it is important to remember that this underlying randomization and unpredictability corresponds to the *most likely, most predictable* macrostate, and that similarly, the low information/low entropy case – vowels, articles – corresponds to the least likely macrostate (and the most ordered one), since there are many more types of nonsensical arrangements of signs than there are sensible ones. It is this paradox that has vexed commentators on the connection between information theory and thermodynamics, and which makes entropy such a slippery concept, capable of yielding up so many contradictory philosophical and ideological positions.²⁶ As we have already seen, and as we will continue to see, these contradictions index profound historical changes.

The inverse relationship between microstate and macrostate makes clear some of the implicit problems with this theory when approached from the standpoint of semantics, since randomized gibberish (high information/high entropy) must be, for those who care about what words mean, no different than a low-information dial tone, or the letter *e* repeated over and over again. Shannon resolves this issue by suggesting that, past a certain point of improbability – 50% – the information of the message begins to fall, so that a sign which has a very low probability is just as low in information as a high probability one.

When Norbert Wiener adapts “Shannon entropy” – that is, information – to his nascent cybernetics, he does so in a manner that gives *information* a valence exactly opposite to Shannon’s description. For reasons of philosophical perspective and scientific history that we will touch on shortly, Wiener defines information as the inverse of entropy. Information is that which gives systems internal coherence and differentiation, preserving them from the natural, frictional dissipation of thermodynamic run-down. Information is what

distinguishes machines and animals from static elements. Wiener arrives at this alternate conception of information by retaining the notion of information as a measure of unpredictability but focusing on the macrostate rather than the microstate. As Shannon put it in a letter to Wiener: “I consider how much information is *produced* when a choice is made from a set – the larger the set the *more* information. You consider the larger uncertainty in the case of a larger set to mean less knowledge and hence *less* information. The difference in viewpoint is partially a mathematical pun. . .”²⁷ In other words, the difference is perspectival: Shannon focuses on the conditions of the receiver of the message and the choices he or she is likely to make; Wiener considers the totality of the situation and the absence or presence of workable knowledge – i.e., predictability. Note how Wiener both conserves and inverts elements of Shannon and Boltzmann:

Messages are themselves a form of pattern and organization. Indeed, it is possible to treat sets of messages as having an entropy like sets of states of the external world. Just as entropy is a measure of disorganization, the information carried by a set of messages is a measure of organization. In fact, it is possible to interpret the information carried by a message as essentially the negative of its entropy, and the negative logarithm of its probability. That is, the more probable the message, the less information it gives. Clichés for example are less illuminating than great poems.²⁸

Information is therefore the opposite of entropy – the opposite of disorder and randomness and yet, at the same time, paradoxically, still a measure of improbability. Here, “Law is redefined by way of chaos, the certain by way of the probable,” to repeat the passage quoted earlier.²⁹ For N. Katherine Hayles, who narrates this tortuous history admirably in both *Chaos Bound* and *How We Became Posthuman*, the difference revolves around an emphasis on either source (Shannon) or destination (Wiener), “the uncertainty before the message is sent” or “the uncertainty that remains after the message has been received.”³⁰ She refers to information entropy as “Shannon’s Choice,” underscoring a kind of meta-choice, his choice to describe information as “a choice made from a set.” But what kind of choice is this? The decisions that the receiver makes are already given by probabilistic analysis. It is a kind of pseudo-freedom, a pseudo-choice, one that we have become used to in the information age, where rhetorics of personalization and creative expression – whether in the workplace or the marketplace – mask the fixity of the underlying information protocols.³¹

If we take a step back from both Shannon’s and Wiener’s treatment of information, we realize that these are not really treatments of information as such (there is no such thing), but information as transmitted and received. They are treatments, in fact, of a social relationship, mediated by information, which comes to take on the name “information.” There are people – invisible people – in the examples Shannon and Wiener give. More specifically, there are workers, the information workers of midcentury – typists, switchboard operators, keypunch operators, stenographers, telegraphers – whose “selections” and “choices” constitute information, and for whom the order or disorder of a message has a certain phenomenological reality.

By the end of the 1950s, white-collar workers began to outnumber their blue-collar counterparts, and although many of these workers were managers, technicians or professionals – what Robert Reich will later term “symbolic analysts” – many more were merely routinized and Taylorized clerics, working in the information mills of midcentury.³² For them, the experience of informational order or disorder was quite real, and any technique for compressing, condensing and simplifying the transmission of messages meant a restructuring and reorganization of their work life, allowing them to handle greater and greater volumes of signs (in the same way that manufacturing technology allows a factory-worker to handle a greater volume of raw materials).

Worries about an overwhelming surfeit of information – a surfeit that information workers of the 1960s experienced long before it became a common cultural trope, associated with mass media – permeate “Trans-Space Communication,” a short statement which Hannah Weiner wrote to accompany her performances of *Code Poems* (based upon *The International Code of Signals for the Use of All Nations*, a 19th-century dictionary of phrases for Morse code, signal flags and alphabet flags). Imagining a universalism (and internationalism) of language, Weiner writes that she wants to “develop methods of communication that will be understood face to face, or at any distance, regardless of language, country or planet of origin, by all sending and receiving.”³³ But alongside the wish for a universalizing, global language, there is also a pedagogical component to the code project, a concern “with the use of minimal clues: how much information can be received, and how accurately, through how little means.”³⁴ Weiner realizes that this universalist goal founders upon the sheer wash of channels and signals, the sheer entropy of information in Shannon’s terms, that modernity presents us with. Thus, echoing Jameson’s call for “cognitive maps” as much as Benjamin’s notion of art as a kind of training of the senses or a prosthesis which helps us absorb the shock of modernity, she makes the following Malthusian statement about information glut:

The amount of information available has more than doubled since World War II. In the next ten years it will double again. How do we deal with it?
Do we use more than 5% of the brain now in use?
Do we process quicker?
Do we decode information ore put it in another form (not language) so that the present brain can handle it?³⁵

This is information in the sense Shannon gives it – information as the empty place of information, as entropy, noise, “jam” and dissipation. Norbert Wiener refers to this tendency toward dissipation as the “Augustinian” enemy – an enemy without connivance, cunning, or purpose: the “devil of confusion, not of willful malice,” which the elaboration of purposeful mechanisms in line with humanistic goals can and must defeat. He writes: “Organism is opposed to chaos, to disintegration, to death, as message is to noise.”³⁶

To the extent that they offer an aesthetic simplification of the excessive information which modernity presents, Weiner’s *Code Poems* demand to be seen in the same light as modernist universalisms like Esperanto, C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richard’s Basic English, the functionalism of Bauhaus, or Otto Neurath’s pictographic isotypes, all experiments in a rationalizing and functionalizing abstraction charged with aesthetic and moral value.³⁷ But this is also the Modernism of Frederick Winslow Taylor and so-called “scientific

management,” a key feature of which was the practice of “time and motion studies” that aimed to break down the actions of workers into component parts, identify, measure, and reconstruct them in more and more efficient ways. This analytic was formalized by Frank Gilbreth, who developed a notational script that could convert any motion into what he called “therbligs” – a set of 18 fundamental actions (search, select, find, grab, hold).³⁸ Examining such notations side by side, one notes that the code of maritime signals and Gilbreth’s therbligs are almost mirror images of each other – one translates language into movement, the other translates movement into language.

The *Code Poems* do bear an uncanny resemblance to these instrumentalizing experiments. But one immediately notes the comedic, absurdist strains in the poems. Despite her stated goals in “Trans-Space Communication,” the *Code Poems* end up as satires of hyper-rationalized communication. They end up lampooning, unintentionally, the administrative rationality behind these experiments. As with the formulations of Weiner and Shannon, the *Code Poems* find it very difficult to distinguish informational order from informational disorder, information from entropy, nonsense from clear command:

TQA Possible-ity

- TQB I doubt if it is possible
- FRW Barely possible
- TQD Is it possible?
- TQE Possibly
- TQF Quite possible
- FBJ As slow as possible
- FBG As quick as possible
- FAI As fast as possible
- FBO As soon as possible
- FAY As much (or, many) as possible
- TQC If possible
- FOU Avoid, if possible (impossible)
- PFB Not possible ³⁹

Written as an antiphon – in other words, a poem for two voices – “TQA Possibility” allows for a reflection on the nature of communication in Shannon’s and Wiener’s seemingly opposed definitions: information is both empty *and* full of possibility. Each of the lines is a possible choice from a limited set of possibilities, each one a combinatorial transformation of the basic grammar of possibility. Indeed, inasmuch as the poem seems more interested in enumerating the basic grammatical structures for expressing possibility than indentifying the “it” to which such possibilities refer, the poem seems less about transparency and “trans-space communication” than secrecy. The two voices speak by innuendo and indirection, and the use of “minimal cues” excludes as much as information as it includes. Far from something that might be understood by “all sending and receiving,” meaning in the poem is context-dependent.

Weiner performed these poems, sometimes with the help of the US Coast Guard, at poetry festivals in Central Park, at anti-war protests, at galleries, and on the street. During the Central Park poetry festival in 1968, the Coast Guard-assisted performance involved “alphabet flag hoists, semaphore signalmen, flashing light signals, megaphones, [and] flares.”⁴⁰ But this action of making-public, converting text to the movement of bodies, seems to carry within it the germ of a secret or private language. For an observer, watching the poem performed by Coast Guardsmen with signal flags, such inscrutability would be nearly absolute – a form of absolute opacity rather than absolute transparency. Unless the audience were provided with a score or trained in deciphering the signals, the communication between the two signers would be essentially meaningless.⁴¹

Weiner’s poem, then, underscores the contradictions between Shannon’s and Wiener’s views of information, and perfectly displays the operative ambivalence toward information – is it order or chaos, signal or noise? This is the anxiety, I think, that lurks behind these works, the fear that, in the end, the great multi-channel spectacle of postwar America is nothing but noise, jam, its universalism the universalism of nothingness. It suggests that, in certain cases, rationality and functionalism may simplify, streamline and purify communication but only, perhaps, at the expense of content itself. We can see how this maps to the contradictions of the corporate and economic restructuring of the period, discussed above, where the growth of white-collar and managerial layers designed to establish clear channels of “control and communication” eventually becomes the source of the very disorganization they aim to countervail, as is made clear by any number of absurdist or dystopian treatments of bureaucracy from the period. Rather than increasing efficiency, the new communication protocols that Hannah Weiner sets up – here the manager – contribute to overall confusion and noise.

LWC Follow Me

LWC Follow me
LWF Will you lead?
LWF Will you follow?
LWJ Shall I follow?
LWK I will follow
LWC Follow me
LWF Will you lead?
LWG Will you follow?
LWJ Shall I follow?
LWK I will follow
LWC Follow me
LWF Will you lead?
LWG Will you follow?
LWJ Shall I follow?
LWK I will follow
LWC Follow me
LWF Will you lead?
LWG Will you follow?

LWJ Shall I follow?
 LWK I will follow
 LWC Follow me
 LWF Will you lead?
 LWG Will you follow?
 LWK Shall I follow?
 LWK I will follow
 LWC Follow me
 LWF Will you lead?

In this poem, five different phrases – each one displaying a different stance toward the question of authority, toward leading or following – rotate through the two speaking parts without leading to any resolution. The poem portrays the kind of confusion that can result when people, habituated to acting within explicit power structures and hierarchies, find themselves forced to function without them. (Seeing the work performed by Coast Guardsmen, given the association of the military with hierarchy, no doubt underscores this aspect.) For the reader – encountering this poem on the page, rather than in performance – this confusion is modeled by the different ordinal positions the word “follow” takes, appearing now at the end of the sentence and now at the beginning, alternately leading the way and the falling behind, at the same time as the word “lead” consistently falls at the end of an interrogative sentence, or in other words, in a “following” position. In a certain respect, “LWC Follow Me” renders the linguistic indeterminacy and misprision of “TQA Possibility” as comedy of errors or farce. There is more than a little of the blind-leading-the-blind humor that is a staple of such genres, from Shakespeare through to Beckett. But there is something rather earnest, too, about the anti-authoritarian stance of the poem, one which does not so much destroy the structures of domination and submission crystallized in the maritime code as render those structures transient and reversible. Just as the science of cybernetics was supported, materially and otherwise, by the military-industrial complex, the poem is performed by the disciplined bodies of Coast Guardsmen, *literally* underwritten by US military, and so any claim to have overcome hierarchy must be ironized by this fact. Still, while leadership qua leadership is not exactly overcome, each one of the two voices here gets its turn as leader (and follower). Hierarchies, then, are not so much overcome as detached from fixed persons; what results is vertigo and paralysis, suggesting that if this is a more equitable arrangement it is one that seems unlikely to accomplish much. In sum, the poem seems equivocal on the precise character of the universalism promised by its recourse to the super-transparencies of code. Such universalization and transparency might come, it suggests, at the very expense of saying anything at all: everybody understands everything precisely because there is so little actual communication occurring.

The *Code Poems* therefore prefigure the actual restructuring of labor that takes place in the 1970s and 1980s, sometimes described as “Toyotism” or “post-Fordism,” where managerial command is distributed and decentralized throughout the organization, and where “teams” of self-managing workers, imbued with a certain autonomy, engage directly in production.⁴² Cybernetics and its descendant, systems theory, played an important role in these transformations, especially through the subdiscipline of management cybernetics. Concepts such as feedback, noise, jam (as well as later concepts such as autopoiesis, a term for self-organization) were used to model, facilitate and justify these new work regimes.⁴³

Beyond the explicit invocations, it takes only a little familiarity with the discourse to see the implicit homologies between cybernetics or systems theory and the managerial vernaculars discussed in seminal studies like Shoshana Zuboff's *In the Age of the Smart Machine* or Boltanski and Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. In the world of manufacturing, so-called lean production, sometimes called Toyotism, bases itself upon "just-in-time" delivery systems which coordinate between different suppliers and distributors through feedback signals, in order to ensure that there is never any excess stock in warehouses and each point in the supply chain receives what it needs when it needs it. As far as personnel go, workers are expected to be flexible and adaptive, as well, modulating and refashioning themselves in response to changing conditions, capable of rotating through different job positions, and internalizing managerial imperatives so that direct command is unnecessary. The worker of today is asked to "participate" in his or her domination, to become not only the object but the subject of power. As we have seen, one place where the faculties and facilities of this new subject – new worker – are developed, tested out, and experimented with, is in the art of the period, itself based around ideas of participation, mutability, self-modulation, and itself attuned to the new character of work and the growing predominance of work that takes signs and symbols (as in clerical work) or sociality itself (as in some services) as its primary object, rather than physical matter.

But as we have seen with Weiner – and as we will see in the succeeding pages – art is less an "application" of these new methods than it is a kind of stress test for them, a way of driving them toward their breaking point, disclosing, for instance, the incoherence and gibberish beneath the fantasies of transparency, the will-to-domination beneath the fantasies of self-management. Whether the exposure of these contradictions aids in the perfection of the new dominations, or aids those who would resist them, ultimately has to do with forces beyond art as such.

As a model for corporate organization, cybernetics does not so much banish management as distribute it throughout the firm. Management becomes less a set of persons than an intermediating form, an infrastructure. For cybernetics, we will remember, control and communication are identical. Management, in this sense, is nothing more than the messages, the information, coursing through a firm. Following the cybernetic logic a little bit further, we can say that information is the form of self-regulation which firms use to avoid succumbing to entropy and disorder. Information is organization, and good information, so the logic goes, can replace direct command by managers. The new digital computing technologies that become an increasingly central part of workplaces are, in this regard, often more about controlling workers than they are about making work more efficient. We will remember of course that the opposite of entropy in thermodynamic theory is *work*. Therefore, if information is opposed to entropy, information is work.

The fascination with this new abstract entity – information – would lead influential thinkers like Daniel Bell to declare that capitalism, in its new post-industrial variant, no longer fit with the labor theory of value but instead required a new knowledge theory of value. Information was the central commodity of the postwar economic order; information was to post-industrial capitalism what textiles and automobiles were to earlier periods.⁴⁴ But information was a particularly thorny commodity for a capitalist system, in Bell's view, since it was difficult for an individual to "own" it in the same way one owns a property, and even

intellectual property law provided little protection. Information has a tendency, therefore, to devalue as it becomes generalized.⁴⁵ For instance a new technical innovation for the manufacturing process has value as long as one's competitors don't have access to it. Once it becomes generalized, one loses any competitive advantage it might have brought. Information therefore has a double character, capable of evoking both the renewal or, alternately, the transcendence of the property and commodity system. As such, the term can become, during this period, the central term within Friedrich Hayek's neoclassical economic theory, or alternately, the key term in one of the most significant exhibition of conceptual art, the MoMA show of 1970, *Information*.⁴⁶

Among the many artists and writers who turn to information as medium and object, Dan Graham stands out for exposing the doubleness of information, as both commodity and anti-commodity, work and anti-work, anti-entropic force and source of confusion and noise. I am thinking in particular of his early *Works for Magazine Pages*. He began these works after a failed attempt to run a gallery, and suggests that "[they] could be read as a reaction against the gallery experience."⁴⁷ The experience of failure caused Graham to meditate upon what rendered art visible and valuable. Taking his cue from Dan Flavin's lighting installations, which were based not on the art object itself but the peripheral things the art object needed, like lighting, Graham decides to make art from another kind of peripherality, the magazine advertisement. Like Flavin, Graham makes art from the conditions for art's visibility and value:

Through the actual experience of running a gallery, I learned that if a work of art was not written about and reproduced in a magazine, it would have difficulty attaining the status of "art." It seemed that to be defined as having value (that is, a value as "art"), a work had only to be exhibited in a gallery and then to be written about and reproduced as a photograph in an art magazine. It was this record of the no-longer-extant installation, along with more accretions of information after the fact, that became the basis for the art work's fame and, to a large extent, its economic value.⁴⁸

By focusing on these "accretions of information" – in other words, making art that consisted of no more than these acts of publicity – Graham inaugurates a shift from the production of artistic goods to the provision of artistic services, analogous to the shift from blue-collar manufacturing to white-collar administration. Except that, here, Graham's works imagine white-collar work that is no longer accessory to some other activity, but an end in and of itself. The result in many of the "Works for Magazine Pages" is a kind of absurdist circularity that we will recognize from Weiner's poems above. Since the support or para-art has become the art itself, it no longer refers to anything beyond the space of the magazine. It is entirely hermetic and self-referential. Shorn of content, Graham's definition of "information" resembles Shannon's to a very strong degree.

The most famous of these works is probably "Schema" and its variants, a series of magazine ads that describe themselves according to a list – the schema – of all the requisite qualities of the ads, such as "number of adjectives," "paper stock," and "type face." As the copyeditor of the magazine makes decisions about the things over which the magazine has control – font, ad size, etc. – some of the qualities will change. Each ad is therefore singular in its self-referentiality. But it is also curiously incomplete. As Graham writes, if the copy editors follow the

logic step-by-step (linearly) it would be found impossible to compose a completed version as each of the component lines of exact data requiring completion (in terms of specific numbers and percentages) would be contingently determined by every other number percentage which itself would in turn be determined by the other numbers or percentages, *ad infinitum*.

Although the logic here is rather transparently false (one could, moving back and forth among the qualities step by step, arrive at a final form, without encountering an infinite recursion) it's the thought that counts. What matters is that Graham experiences this search for an airtight self-referentiality as essentially impossible.

Graham refers to this schema as a poem, but it is also in its way a code, and it bears the same wish for complete and transparent determination (and the same resulting emptiness) as Weiner's poems. As Graham writes: "It is not 'art for art's sake.' Its medium is in-formation. Its communicative value and comprehension is immediate, particular and altered as it fits the terms (and time) of its system or (the) context (it may be read in)."⁴⁹ As with the definition of information that Shannon gives us – a definition which Graham was certainly aware of – what we get here is a materialization of form, "a 'shell' placed between the external empty material of place and the interior 'empty' material of 'language.'"⁵⁰ For Graham, such self-referentiality "subverts value." "Beyond its appearance in print or present currency, 'Schema (March, 1966)' is disposable; with no dependence on material (commodity), it subverts the gallery (economic) system."⁵¹

But just how subversive is this? Is this a subversion of the commodity form or its apotheosis? One is cautioned here by the remarkable revelation which emerges in the "Postface" to Lucy Lippard's seminal work *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Recanting her own utopian claims for dematerialized art, she writes: "Hopes that 'conceptual art' would be able to avoid the general commercialization, the destructively 'progressive' approach of modernism were for the most part unfounded."⁵² For Jeff Wall, who, in seeking to explain Dan Graham's turn away from the hard conceptualism of works for magazine pages, provides one of the most compelling accounts of the fortunes of conceptual art, such failure had to do with secular changes in the economy: "Speculative, inflation-driven capital enclosed and reorganized the art world, spectacularly driving up prices on a broad front. Thus the anti-objects of conceptualism were "absorbed" and "negated" (to use the Marcusean terms of the period) as critical intervention by the aura of value imposed upon them by speculation."⁵³ In Wall's account, the 1970s were a moment of reorganization for both the art market and the larger economy, a reorganization predicated by conceptual art's reaction to the art of the 1960s which, in turn, gave way to the craven garishness of the 1980s. In attempting to supersede the dumb theatricality of the minimal object or the craven solicitousness of pop art, conceptual art failed, because its utopianism, its wish to transcend market, spectacle and commodity could often do little more than reflect the hated structures in ironic paraphrase: conceptual works concretized the "the cultural dilemma of the falsification and ruination of art by mimicking that ruination; reflecting it in their own structure." Conceptualism is therefore hamstrung by an "ironic mimicry of the mechanisms for control and falsification of information and social knowledge whose despotic and seductive forms of display are copied to make language."⁵⁴ This claim chimes with an equally important essay on conceptualism by Benjamin Buchloh, for whom such work was never really critical of postwar society but from the start possessed by an ethos of

disenchantment and disillusionment that everywhere saw the limits imposed by the commodity-form and spectacle as insuperable. Because of its fidelity to a stale and ultimately tautological scientific positivism, for Buchloh the cancellation of pop art and minimalism in conceptual art meant “replacing an aesthetic of industrial production and consumption with an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation.”⁵⁵

Buchloh presents a very particular set of examples in order to depict conceptual art as essentially cynical from the get-go. But even if we agree with Lippard that there was a genuinely utopian strain within many of the experiments of the period, a genuine desire to destroy the commodity-character of art, what Buchloh shows us is that most conceptual art could only imagine such destruction because it confused the production of commodities with the production of tangible objects as such. Not understanding that commodification is, first and foremost, a set of social relations, much conceptual art thought that by refusing materiality (of a certain sort) it could refuse commodities. As such it simply shifted the locus of art-making from the production of commodified objects to commodified services, events, or concepts, mimicking the shift already underway from manufacturing to white-collar and service-sector work.

In Graham’s statements about “Schema,” the situation is a bit more complex, since he realizes that the symbolic or conceptual apparatus which surrounds the art object – the work of gallerists, advertisers and various clericals – is what gives art value, not what takes value away from it. Where he errs, though, is in thinking that detaching such administrative work from material objects will destroy the value relationship: even dematerialized processes or “objects” can have value; commodities do not need a material base.

In fact, his claims about the subversion of value effected by “Schema” are directly contradicted by a later magazine work, “INCOME (Outflow) PIECE (1969). Ringing changes upon similar money-art – Duchamp’s *Monte Carlo Bond* (a photocollage in the form of a bond, sold to raise money for a trip to the casinos), Yves Klein’s exchange of gold for “zones de sensibilitie picturale immaterielle” – Graham incorporated himself (or intended to) and then made shares of Dan Graham Inc. available for \$10 each: “The ‘object’ . . . will be to pay Dan Graham, myself, the salary of the average American citizen out of the pool of collected income.” Making clear his association of cybernetics, information theory and economic thought, he describes this experiment as follows:

the artist changes the homeostatic balance of his life (environment) support by re-relating the categories of *private* sector and *public* sector; a modus operandi, a social sign, a sign of the times, a personal locus of attention, a *shift* of the matter/energy balance *to mediating my needs* – the artist places himself as a situational vector to sustain his existence and projected future (further) activities in the world. Money is a service commodity: in come and out go while in-formation.⁵⁶

In such a situation, what the shareholders would buy is not an actual art object, nor much less ownership over Dan Graham and his productions but “information on social motives and categorization whose structure upholds, reveals in its functioning, the socio-economic support system of media.”⁵⁷ Graham sells information about selling, making himself into a market researcher.⁵⁸ Although from what I can ascertain he never had any buyers, Graham’s original plan was to field responses to the stock offering – “feedback” – and then use this to gradually transform the magazine advertisements. Now, given his

earlier statements, I think it is clear that Graham intends to subvert value in this case by extracting value from “valueless” activity. That is, the work is meant ironically. Like the Duchamp examples he follows, he means to show the merely nominal and arbitrary character of economic value with regard to art and, perhaps, with regard to all things. The work is ironic in the very specific sense of the term; it means to prove a point opposite to its apparent significance.

But in another sense, this negative characteristic of the work – its attempt to negate art-value as such – hides the ways in which it is actively developing a model of subjectivity and self-transformation with which we will already be familiar. This is a model of the worker as endlessly adaptive, responding and modulating one’s activities in response to “feedback.” We note that this model of the self is built upon an entrepreneurial metaphor, where the self becomes analogized with a business, and the relations between individuals – mediated here by the cyberneticized feedback of information – are figured as market relations.⁵⁹ We can sum up as follows: while the reduction of art to nothing more than “information” seems to mean, in Graham, a destruction of art-value and art-work (enabling someone to draw value at will), the entire practice is really part of an experimental development of a new regime of flexible, adaptive, white-collar work based upon an internalization of market values.

This is quite clear in Dan Graham’s video installations from the 1970s. Though most read these works by way of Lacanian psychoanalysis – particularly Lacan’s ideas about the mirror stage – or a Foucauldian thematic of surveillance, given the analysis above we can see very quickly that both surveillance and ego image in these works are part of a larger project, borrowed from cybernetics, of modeling self-regulating, adaptive subjects. The mechanisms of self-observation in these works – combining mirrors, video cameras, displays, and other devices – resemble, in no uncertain terms, the increasingly prevalent attempt to make workers self-managing and self-modulating, to instantiate mechanisms of adaptation and self-training that could cope with the volatilities of capitalist production.

For a privileged sector of the workforce, “learning is the new form of labour,” as Shoshana Zuboff writes.⁶⁰ Companies are impelled to restructure around a flexible, adaptive core of workers, and then rely on another sector of workers – temporary workers, sometimes outsourced or offshored, without benefits or privileges – to expand as market conditions prevail. For this core group of workers, though, the values that we associate with the creative class, or with marginal, bohemian groups, have become indispensable to production: in other words, as Seltzer and Bentley describe it, firms inculcate in these workers “an individual autonomy” and “a questioning attitude to received wisdom.”

As conditions change more rapidly, companies are more likely to recruit for adaptability and fresh ideas rather than standardised skills and experience. This is reflected in the shift away from industry specific skills and competencies towards more personal qualities and ‘soft’ skills such as communication, teamwork, reliability, problem solving, positive attitudes toward learning and the capacity to manage one’s own training.⁶¹

Dan Graham’s videoworks are an early exposition of this endlessly plastic and mutable subject, one whose self-mutation is mediated by a temporal technology that makes the present part of a feedback loop between past and future, between adaptation and prediction. In *Present Continuous Past(s)*, for instance, one of his first videoworks, Graham

establishes an opposition between present and past, mirror and videoscreen: the former reflects “present” time and the latter, through an eight-second delay, on a closed-circuit TV, reflects the past. The piece consists of a small room – a cube – not much larger across than the inhabitant is high. The room could fit three or four people comfortably. On one wall, at eye-level, there is a video camera, and directly below it, a video display. The opposite and adjacent walls are mirrored. On the videoscreen, the inhabitant of the room will see (provided that she has not occluded the camera’s view of the far wall) her own image eight-seconds earlier and, in the far mirror, a small thumbnail of her own image sixteen-seconds earlier, inside of which, of course, is an infinite regress of past times, becoming gradually more and more illegible. For Graham, this opposition between mirror and videoscreen is, as he says, a way of destroying the illusions of depth and self-presence which the ego ideal of the mirror presents: “Unlike the flat visuality of Renaissance painting, in the video image geometrical surfaces are lost to ambiguously modeled contours and to a translucent depth.”⁶² As Eric de Bruyn has demonstrated, Graham’s video works involve a topological imagination based in large part on cybernetic concepts, a kind of inversion of the spaces of interior and exterior.⁶³ If the mirror displays the body image, an image which naturally displaces the perceiving subject, causing her, in Lacan’s famous formulation, to experience herself as missing, the video displays not outsides but insides, exteriorizing the interior, remembered perceptions of the subject, which are themselves splayed and flattened, unfolded onto the surface of the video screen. As Graham writes:

This [video feedback] removes self-perception from the viewing of a detached, static image; video feedback contradicts the mirror model of the perceiving “self.” Through the use of videotape feedback, the performer and the audience, the perceiver and his process of perception, are linked, co-identified. Psychological premises of “privacy” (as against publicness) which would derive from the mirror-model, depend on an assumed split between observed behavior and supposedly observable, interior *intention*. However, if a perceiver views his behavior on a five to eight second delay via videotape (so that this responses are part of and influence his perception), “private” mental intention and external behavior are experienced as one.⁶⁴

This is, of course, a bit of rhetorical sleight-of-hand, since all that Graham has done is transform the antagonism between (absent) perceiving subject and self-image from a spatial to a temporal dynamic. As anyone who has ever tried to point a video camera at the screen to which it outputs will know, this kind of internal self-presentation is strictly impossible, in spatial terms. Once output becomes identical with input, all that appears on the screen is a kind of visual noise.

Nonetheless, however idealized in its effects, *Present Continuous Past(s)* clearly brings into opposition two different kinds of subjectivity. The first, associated with the mirror, is that of an angst-ridden subject, whose identity remains trapped in a perpetual present of either changelessness or constant change. The second, associated with video, is an adaptive, flexible, self-modulating subject, who calculates her present and future according to a receding series of past self-images. The latter, as we have already seen, correlates with the new kind of worker valorized by what Boltanski and Chiapello describe as the “projective city” and the ideology of “connexionism.” In their account, during the late 1960s, as the postwar economies in the US and Europe begin to enter into crisis, and as a wave of revolt

among students and workers sweeps the world, considerable antagonism develops among midlevel white-collar functionaries – *petit cadre*, as the French call them – about the degree to which contemporary work and life in general was alienating, rigid, and uncreative. Boltanski and Chiapello call this critique of alienation the *artistic critique* and associate it with the spirit May '68. They distinguish it from a social critique, focused on exploitation, the wage share and the extraction of value, rather than domination. In their account, in the decades following '68, capitalism restructured according to a new logic which subsumed the artistic critique and backgrounded the social one, by making work for a certain sector of the work force ostensibly more creative, participatory, and democratic. This meant an adverbialization of job titles where one is defined by *projects* and not by positions; an ostensible de-hierarchization of corporate structures; an elevation of the consumer to a position of agency and choice; and a whole ideology of flexibility, connectivity, and personability. Such changes were effected not only to counter the effects of the artistic critique but to deal with the problems of corporate rigidity and bureaucratic sclerosis: "To oversimplify, we can say that this change consisted in substituting self-control for control and, consequently, in externalizing the very high costs of control by shifting the burden from organizations on to wage-earners."⁶⁵

Present Continuous Past(s) presents an image of the "great man" in this society, one who conforms to the new justificatory logics of merit in a connexionist or "projective" society. These new business management rhetorics were, in part, a popularization of ideas developed in management cybernetics, which imagined responding to the problems of organizational inefficiency by remaking the corporation along the lines of the cybernetic organism. One can hardly mistake the similarity between cybernetics and 1990s management texts from which Boltanski and Chiapello build their case:

Far from being attached to an occupation or clinging to a qualification, the great man proves *adaptable* and *flexible*, able to switch from one situation to a very different one, and adjust to it; and *versatile*, capable of changing activity or tools, depending on the nature of the relationship entered into with others or with objects. It is precisely this adaptability and versatility that make him employable – that is to say, in the world of firms, to attach himself to new projects.⁶⁶

Most important, obviously, is the notion that the new social forms which respond to the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s recuperate the left critique that emerges among social movements, artists and various countercultural groups. Artistic experiments like Graham's therefore become laboratories of new social relations, but relations whose ultimate meaning remains contingent upon the uses to which they are put. There is no way to say, a priori, whether a critique will be a true threat to the rule of capital or not – what is potentially revolutionary in one moment can become definitively system-reinforcing in another. We must be cautious, therefore, about easily leaping from an analysis of particular artistic and cultural logics to an account of the uses to which such logic is ultimately put.

Present Continuous Past(s) presents the transformation of the technical conditions of selfhood and the emergence of the adaptive, flexible worker. Later video-works expand on this model by modeling not just the cybernetics of the relation to self but relation to others as well. Perhaps the most salient of these, for our present purposes, is *Video Piece for Two Glass Office Buildings*, which uses video cameras, mirrors and monitors to mediate between

two disconnected workspaces. For Graham, reflecting on the emancipatory potential of closed-circuit TV, the new medium of video is importantly distinct from its parent medium film: “The centralized production facilities of film or broadcast TV exploit the saleable (product) aspects of culture at the expense of the existential. A cable system, by contrast, presents the possibility of becoming two-way and decentralized. Individuals, families and the local, extant cultural system could be given potential self-determination and control. Local cable television could feed *back* the immediate environment.”⁶⁷ *Two Glass Office Buildings* makes these potentials explicit: inhabitants in facing buildings find the same video camera mounted upon a monitor as in *Present Continuous Past(s)*, and are similarly wedged between the camera-monitor apparatus and the mirror facing it. But unlike *Present Continuous Past(s)*, the monitor displays the recording from the camera in the opposite building, a recording that now includes the other inhabitant’s room and, reflected in the mirror, the other inhabitant’s monitor which contains an image of her own room, delayed by eight-seconds. This self-image competes, as it were, with the view into her own room reflected in the mirror, a view which depends upon the relative opacity or transparency of the interceding windows. Graham thinks of this inter-building figure eight topology as breaking the impersonality and opacity of the sub-modernist office building, with its rhetorics of “structural and functional efficiency.” *Two Glass Office Buildings* aims to invert the rhetorical codes of the glass and steel building, where “the glass’s literal transparence not only falsely objectifies reality, but is a paradoxical camouflage; for while the actual functioning of a corporation may be to concentrate its self-contained power and control by *secreting* information, its architectural façade gives the illusion of absolute openness. The transparency is visual only; glass separates the visual from the verbal, insulating outsiders from the content of the decision-making processes, and from the invisible but real, interrelationships linking company operations to society.”⁶⁸

We should see very quickly how Graham’s architectural critique is really an organizational critique, and his claims about modernist office buildings really claims about the hierarchical work relations they house. Graham aims to break these organizational structures open through the de-hierarchizing power of a bi-directional video channel, where the commanded is commander, the manager an employee, and the employee a manager – and where, furthermore, the relationships between workers and consumers, or workers and citizens, are overturned. We should note here as well the role that transparency plays. Rather than direct hierarchical commands, transparency – that is, open information – allows for reciprocal relations to develop among people.

Graham’s video installations are therefore part of an experimental development of relations of self-management among workers, where management is contained within the flows of transparent information rather than effected directly by personalities. But the turn to the artistic critique by firms was less of a capitulation than it was a chance to “substitute a ‘psychological’ compensation for increased material insecurity,” as Boltanski and Chiapello write. Furthermore, self-management is often the face of an increasingly intensive work regime, now self-administered rather than sent down from on high, as workers internalize an entrepreneurial ethos:

[I]n the case of wage-earners who have not been casualized the fact that autonomy has been granted in exchange for the assumption of greater responsibility, or in the context of a general recasting of working methods, results in a paradox revealed by

surveys into working conditions: wage-earners are *simultaneously* more autonomous and more constrained. . . .

The creation of ‘zones of autonomy’ at work really does allow workers to experience a ‘dignity at work’ that was ‘unheard of on the Taylorist assembly line.’ But it is accompanied by numerous new constraints associated with the reduction in stocks, versatility, and the creation of responsibility for maintenance, which tend to increase the mental burdens. In addition, these new zones of autonomy are narrowly framed by procedural constraints. The activities undertaken are in fact framed increasingly and monitored by computer systems that not only define the relevant categories recognized by the system, but give them a ‘prescriptive force,’ which leads to structuring tasks through ‘grammars of action.’ Moreover, there is no doubt that it was the computer revolution in control which helped to facilitate employers’ conversion to the theme of autonomy.⁶⁹

In conclusion, returning to Hannah Weiner, and the place where we began, we observe that *Two Glass Office Buildings* bears a deep resemblance to the dialogic *Code Poems*, inasmuch as both works model reciprocal, flexible relations between people mediated by “information” and processes of “feedback.” That is, both examples construct new models of subjectivity, and work, based around the servomechanism. And in both examples, information takes on a curious doubleness. Both Weiner and Graham imagine information as the destruction of relations of domination, the liberation of activity from control, whether the control of the art system or the corporate workplace. But in both examples, too, information increasingly takes on a negative aspect, manifesting as a form of domination in its own right. The narrative of critique and recuperation I have offered here is, therefore, a bit more complicated than it might seem, since the overcoding of the sincere utopianism of the works with negative affects seems to foresee, and respond in advance to, the uses to which they will be put.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RISING ORGANIC COMPOSITION OF BERNADETTE MAYER'S *MEMORY*

In a series of provocations written in 2007 for the popular poetry blog, *Harriet*, gadfly conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith repeatedly described his writing projects – which involve the execution of routine tasks such as transcribing the entire contents of one issue of the *New York Times* – in terms of contemporary information work. “Contemporary writing,” says Goldsmith, “requires the expertise of a secretary crossed with the attitude of a pirate: replicating, organizing, mirroring, archiving, and reprinting, along with a more clandestine proclivity for bootlegging, plundering, hoarding, and file-sharing.”¹ If Goldsmith is right that the horizon of contemporary writing is increasingly determined by the technical demands and competencies of information work and office work, the analysis and historicization provided in this study tells us how we arrived at such a juncture. That is, through an examination of the restructuring of work and worklife that begins in the 1960s, we can better understand not only the cultural transformations often gathered together under the label “postmodernism,” but present-day developments which, as the culmination of these developments, often treat writing as essentially a form information management. Part of this story involves, as Goldsmith indicates and as we already know, the transformation of clerical work, and there is perhaps no better artifact through which to examine the cultural effects of such a transformation than Bernadette Mayer’s *Memory* (1972), a conceptual experiment and writing project that is also, like Goldsmith’s secretarial-managerial poetics, involved with processes of “replicating, organizing, mirroring [and] archiving.”

We will turn to *Memory* shortly. But first, a bit of context. Even in the 1960s, as we will remember, there was a fairly widespread understanding, on both the left and the right, that the US was quickly becoming a new kind of postindustrial economy based around services and information rather than material goods. Early accounts of the postindustrial transition emphasized the emergence of a new class of technicians, managers and other highly educated professionals. But such visions were almost always blind to the profoundly destructive and destructuring force of such an emergence. The emergence in the 1970s of the term *deindustrialization* marks a sense that this transition was far from smooth, and often meant economic ruin and unemployment for vast numbers of the manufacturing workers who, rendered superfluous by automation and competition from new producers in East Asia and Europe, could not easily transition to the new jobs. Furthermore, what many commentators could not foresee was the swell of low-paid, routinized white-collar and service-sector jobs that would eventually absorb those expelled from manufacturing sector, thereby ushering in several decades of wage stagnation. Clerical work, in this sense, is the dirty secret of the postindustrial “knowledge-based” economy.

Particularly archetypal here – as an example of postindustrial utopianism – is Daniel Bell’s influential work of “social forecasting,” *The Coming of Postindustrial Society*. Bell’s book updates the old Hegelian vision of the middle class as universal subject, suggesting that most job growth in the coming postindustrial era would occur among the ranks of college-educated professionals and managers. Such claims ignored what should have been obvious even in the 1960s – namely that most job growth occurred in low-paying, unskilled white-collar occupations. In suggesting that class struggle had been essentially abrogated by this

new middle class and that the labor theory of value needed replacing by a new “information theory of value,” Bell demonstrated a remarkable obliviousness to the way in which most work with information did not involve the kind of glamorous theorizing and synthesizing we associate with scientists and managers, but rather the routine administration of flows of data. This was an era characterized as much by women in typing pools and young men in mailrooms as it was by managers and technicians.²

As I have indicated, these triumphal narratives tend to fall apart rather quickly when held against any accounts of the actual development of the labor market in the advanced capitalist countries.³ In particular, attention to the experiences of women as they enter the labor market provides a strong counternarrative to the Bell forecast.⁴ Postindustrial societies are characterized by an increasing “feminization of labor,” meaning not only that large numbers of women enter the workforce but that labor methods and job positions are themselves “feminized.” As the characteristically male industrial worker is displaced by ongoing deindustrialization, there are more opportunities for schoolteachers and receptionists and fewer for machinists. Furthermore, as women enter these fields (as well as fields previously barred to them), the values and affects associated with certain jobs change, and both male and female workers are asked to display attitudes and perform tasks historically coded as female.⁵ The entry of women into the workforce therefore effects a double transformation: a transformation not only of the gender balance of staffing but of the character of the jobs themselves. Whereas “secretary” in the 19th century often referred to a male worker, the typical male clerk of 19th century fiction – a Weberian bureaucrat, in other words – by the early 20th century it evoked a domestic worker displaced into the office, an “office wife,” as secretaries were often called.⁶ In the late 20th century, however, an inversion occurs as male workers – displaced from the industrial jobs they had occupied previously – flood back into low-level, white-collar positions, and are often asked to take on roles and attitudes coded as female.

“Feminized” labor in the late 20th century is therefore a matrix of displacements. In particular, it is a site where we can examine the increasingly complex transpositions of unpaid domestic labor and wage labor. In the works for which she is most well-known – *Midwinter Day* or *The Desire of Mothers to Please Others in Letters* – Bernadette Mayer stages a continual conflict between the unpaid work she does in taking care of her children and her house, and the work of poetry itself. *Midwinter Day*, in particular, offers a feminist challenge to the modernist long poem, bringing all of the technical complexity of the form to bear on a single day of her life, in all its mundane and trivial detail. It thus attempts to show how such creative heroics might take place neither by virtue of an invisible and unwaged domestic work, nor in spite of it, but rather alongside and through such activities. Most critics of Mayer rightly examine these later books as feminist critiques of the sexual division of labor.⁷ But few look at the way in which, even before the birth of her daughters, Mayer was concerned with the invisibility of the work we do to take care of ourselves and others, work which I will follow Marxist Feminism in describing as “domestic” labor and, in a more expansive sense, “reproductive” labor.⁸ From the very beginning, her writing sought to illuminate the myriad quotidian tasks that underlie and make writing possible and are so often left out of literature: the preparation of meals and the washing of clothes, running errands and purchasing groceries. As she notes repeatedly in her later book, *The Desires of Mothers to Please Others in Letters*, writing and womanhood seem entirely opposed (and yet mutually reinforcing) terms: “And now everybody acts as if, well if you can do it that’s fine,

you're extraordinary, if you're a woman doing it, that is having a man living with you and having children and, they say, still writing."⁹ Whereas other writers had the advantage of "wives" – "he [Williams] and Hawthorne and Stein had devoted wives," Mayer is more like "Whitman, exempt."¹⁰ We note that the presence of Stein and Whitman complicates Mayer's presentation of patriarchy, indicating that it involves relations of dependence and domination that do not always lineup with sexual identity.

Such reflections begin early on. In *Memory*, one of her most ambitious projects, the domestic tasks of "wives" are not so much opposed to "feminized" clerical work as intermixed with it. In other words, Mayer positions reproductive labor under the sign of clerical labor and everyday life under the sign of administration. As we will see, *Memory* is an epic of filing and cataloging, transcribing and sorting, where the lines between these kinds of activities and the work of running errands, shopping, cooking, cleaning, maintaining relationships, and getting from place to place, begin to break down. *Memory* thus runs together what capitalist ideology tends to separate into different spheres.

Indeed, *Memory* is such a complex object – as conceptual experiment, written text, performance, and installation, relying on writing, photography, and sound recording – that we need to be very clear about what exactly we are referring to. A brief summary is in order: in July 1971, Mayer shot one roll of film per day and made audio recordings in order to document her everyday experience. Once the month was over she attempted to remember (or recreate) the lived experience of that month in writing, using the visual and aural documents as aids. The result was a 200-page text with entries for each of the 31 days of July and a concluding coda, entitled "Dreaming." Finally the work was exhibited as an installation in 1972: the photographs were displayed as 3x5 snapshots in a grid on the wall, accompanied by a recording of Mayer reading the text. The text was released on its own, as a book, in 1975.

Much of this process is described in the book itself: as a work of total memory, it is by necessity a description of itself, a memory of *Memory*, and the early stages of the project: taking photographs and developing them, making recordings, typing up drafts. At the same time, however, it documents all of the other peripheral activities – shopping, cooking, traveling, running errands – upon which its artistic labors depend. *Memory* positions Mayer in the midst of vast flows of refractory data which she must sort, order, and annotate, but such information work constantly discloses its own preceding and succeeding moments, dissolving production into reproduction, and merging its aestheticized clerical labors with aestheticized domestic labors. Take, for example, the following Steinian passage:

Kathleen doing the dishes she does them she did them last week she did them again she didn't do them right the first time why does she have to do them again do them again, she said. I'll do them again there she is doing them again look at her doing them she does them typewriter teletape tickertape typewriter tickertape teletape Kathleen is doing the dishes she's doing them again when will she finish when will she finish."¹¹

Typing and dishwashing are both homologous and structurally interdependent – homologous because they are serial, repetitive tasks associated with women's work (seriality is given by the stuttering repetitions in the passage above) and structurally interdependent because without domestic work the typist could not survive and without typing the

dishwasher would be, at least in this case, invisible. Armed with this reading, we can see that from the very first lines of the book – “& the main thing is that we begin with a white sink a whole new language” – *Memory* characterizes mundane domestic tasks as fundamentally entangled with language work.

Earlier, we referred to clerical labor and reproductive labor as spheres, suggesting that their interrelationship is primarily spatial. This makes sense, given how much this gendered division of labor depends upon ideas about the public and private spheres. But the passage above suggests forms of interconnection that are temporal and logical as much as they are spatial. Perhaps, in this light, we might think of these as “moments” or “stages” in a Hegelian sense (and in the sense in which Marx and the writers inspired by him borrow from Hegel).¹² We might think of the relationship between unwaged reproductive labor and waged labor as involving both logical and temporal succession, where each moment is the necessary “presupposition” of the others both in cognitive, logical terms and in terms of their actual unfolding in time. As we will see, such a logic of moments structures both the making of *Memory* and any experience we might have of it as a book, installation, or concept.

In these same opening sentences discussed above, Mayer employs a pun – one that runs throughout the whole work – on the word “dash,” a word that comes to refer at the same time to the brand of detergent, the typographic mark, the action, and eventually the redacted name of a character: “picture books & letters to everyone dash you tell what the story is once . . . concentrated dash was all there was mind nothing sink. . . with my white pants in it.”¹³ At one level, this continues the work of equating typing and washing, the domestic and the clerical. “Dash,” in this sense, chains together writing and clothes-washing. (Later in the book, the image of the clothes-washing sink will merge – via the technique which Mayer refers to as “double exposure” – with the darkroom sink where Mayer develops the pictures for *Memory*.) But looked at in a more expansive, thematic sense, “dash” gets us to one of the primary questions about *Memory*: why is it so hurried, harried, frantic, dashing about from place to place, moment to moment? One answer is already available – the doubling of clerical work (paperwork) and domestic work (housework) means that Mayer is doubly exposed, and doubly impelled to get things done. She is responsible not only for composing the book but for all of the things that make writing the book possible. This goes some way in explaining the headlong intensity of the work, her compulsion to “race-write,” to “race against time.” We are in the presence of what feminist sociologists call “the double day,” the doubling down of paid and unpaid labor as women enter the workforce but are still, nonetheless, required to do the work of maintaining a household, taking care of men and children, buying and cooking food, cleaning. In *Memory*, it is as if the “I do this, I do that” poems of Frank O’Hara, with their liberatory exploration of the everyday spaces of commerce and exchange, are inscribed instead with a sense of finitude and lack, hung under the sign of labor and not leisure. If Frank O’Hara is the poet of leisurely shopping, then Bernadette Mayer is the poet of running errands.

The freneticism of the book – and the way that this freneticism is connected to labor domestic and otherwise – makes *Memory* an interesting test case for Sianne Ngai’s remarkable writing on the aesthetic category of the “zany,” which she describes as a “performing that never stops,” one whose freneticism and manic intensity derive from the condition of labor in postindustrial society and particularly its “feminization.”¹⁴ “Zaniness,” for Ngai, registers two important transformations in postindustrial society, two facets of

what she describes as “the putting to work’ of social or relational skills.” First, it is “an aesthetic that encodes male emotions about the feminization of postindustrial work” as well as “female emotion about capital’s concomitant penetration into a set of competencies once safeguarded as unambiguously feminine.”¹⁵ Secondly, as an affect about the unfun-ness of fun, it registers an aggressive response to the subsumption of leisure life by work life, the incorporation of forms of play and pleasure into our work lives. Zaniness – a kind of grimacing, exaggerated sense of fun, responds to compelled enjoyment, responds to the subsumption by capital of our feelings and capacities for pleasure, the extent to which worklife, for service workers especially, requires that they put on a smile and adopt an attitude of convivial obligingness. Once one reads Ngai’s compelling article, one begins to notice the zany – as personal and cultural style – nearly everywhere, and as with all of Ngai’s work on affect, one sees how it indexes a profound uneasiness and rebellion, though one that is rendered in a somewhat sublimated, neutralized form.

And yet despite all of the parallels between *Memory* and Ngai’s zany – they are both about work, about women, about the turn to service work and clerical labor, about the transition from industrial to postindustrial capitalism, about the erosion of the division between leisure and labor, unpaid domestic work and paid work, women’s work and men’s work, white-collar and blue-collar work – *Memory* is not at all zany in mood. Though *Memory* has all of the freneticism of the zany – “performing that never stops” describes it perfectly – it has none of its false cheer, and although it is concerned with feeling and care and the reproduction of relationships it has none of the aggressive solicitousness or exaggerated servility of the zany. On the contrary, it tends toward the dry, robotic, or mechanical. It may be the case, then, that the zany is *one* response to the transformation of working life over the past few decades, the other being a much more visibly angst-ridden freneticism. In other words, perhaps *Memory* indexes the freneticism of the stressed-out and the overworked who are unable to convert compelled activity into artificial conviviality.

Nonetheless, even if Mayer’s experience of freneticism and overwork tends toward the cheerless, Ngai’s work helps us see that the tone of *Memory* is how the time of *Memory* sounds – its tone is an expression of a harried and hectic temporality. To investigate this temporality, and the affective qualities it gives rise to, we will therefore need to be much more specific about the character of the double day. As women enter the workforce, their days double both in terms of hours worked and kinds of work done. Women experience a “speed-up” (or intensification) of their labor as the amount of activities they must fit into an hour, and the number of hours they need to be working, increases, something Arlie Hochschild refers to as the “time-bind.”¹⁶ But there is also a vertiginous mirroring of unpaid and paid activities, since the “feminization of labor” involves not just the capture of women as waged workers, but the subsumption of previously unwaged activities by capital.¹⁷ Activities that once belonged to the home migrate into the workplace, and, gender-typed as female, women migrate with them: into childcare, laundry services, fast food restaurants, nursing homes, and the like. The reorganization of such activities by capital – their mechanization – along with the machinery of the modern home (dishwashers and washing machines) is what reduces the amount of unpaid work a woman has to do, allowing her to channel it into paid activities. But these paid activities take on the character of the unpaid ones: secretaries and nurses and flight attendants are waged captures of the attitudes and affects of housework – what Nancy Folbre calls “care work” – and the “working woman,” under the worst conditions might be expected to go from taking care of her boss (as “office

wife”) to taking care of her husband and children. In such a situation, there is no escape from either waged labor or unwaged labor, as both reflect each other and intermix and merge into one long, endless workday.

The long excursion above should go some way in putting the freneticism of the poem into context, and underscoring the way in which its speed reflects a doubling and redoubling of the time of life. To get a full sense of the pace – which has to do with both intensity and extension, speed and duration – it is necessary to quote from the book at length (at least once). The following is from the long, lined entry for July 1:

I was sitting on my legs making phone
machine a drill starts up again to drive down
calls someone patted my head with shining eyes with eyes was working in
downtown heroine & strychnine will our teeth start
a room with a piano, in & out the door, I went to two record stores
to hurt & rear window in the rain did I hear it:
to get. . . we looked through catalogues of sounds I don't know but there
hurricane Erica Attica state prison & demands free
were always a lot of papers around if I had started coming over there
image in & out the window sound reels half
all the time I would have flunked out of school, why didn't he?
there's a bag with a container of coffee
for paper full of sounds on record, the index file with a girl
we drank it. I was sitting on my legs making calls
on a beach in color on it the calendar behind it big breasts plugged in
someone pats you on the head with shining eyes with eyes
what view I've also seen from eddie's window two e.b.'s
was working in a room with a piano, in & out the door
he was here tonight you can always tell the time, the view was
I went to two record stores to get
coronet vsq brandy & yellow yellow taxis down broadway, myself as
we looked through catalogues of sounds but there
a whore, the circus theater climax I was bored that day listening to
were always a lot of papers lying around working being done
sounds, I was looking at our notebook more lists of sounds a bakery
if I had started coming over there all the time I would
a restaurant a bar a plane taking off cars going by the 20th century
have flunked out of school
fox fanfare many songs & musics a sign saying vertically howard
and on for papers full of sounds on record
that view again higher it looked threatening like rain & clock
the index file with a girl on a beach in color on it
reads 12:10 we were up early we did the light on me was morning light
calendar behind big breasts plugged in¹⁸

The typescript for this passage shows that Mayer used a “cut-up” technique to produce these lines: she took one typewritten page, cut out every other line from the page, and then glued the remaining skeleton atop another typewritten page.¹⁹ The alternating weave of the two passages, each one of which indexes two different memories, figures the doubling and redoubling of Mayer’s various labors – making phone calls, cataloguing and indexing “sounds,” shopping – as well as the sense of interruption and distraction that occurs when one switches back and forth between different tasks. The drilling machine interrupts the phone call, and Mayer’s errands are suffused with the scrambled-together reports of first Hurricane Erica and then the Attica prison riot. As we will see, Mayer’s experimental technique produces a remarkable poetic representation of the “multi-tasking” that comes to dominate the working lives of white-collar workers, and the harried freneticism which accompanies it, the freneticism of the so-called “flexible” (or precarious) worker.

We will return to multi-tasking and flexibility below, but first let’s note how, in the quoted passage, a quasi-secretarial labor (marked by the sexualized image of “the index file with a girl on a beach” as well as the patronizing pat on the head) threads the references to domestic and quotidian activities – shopping, coffee, a bakery. Behind this interleaving of moments, the construction machines add another dimension, signifying masculine, “productive” labor. Finally, these entangled forms of labor are themselves entangled with images of leisure: the “index file” with the beach, the catalogues of sounds with the bottle of brandy. The “big breasts” of the girl on the beach are “plugged in” to the machinery of production. As such, the passage is a rather remarkable portrait of the joining together of separate “moments” of social reproduction and production – again, not as temporal succession but as logical reciprocity, as moments.²⁰ But the relationship between the moments is not necessarily without its hierarchies – in this presentation, the moment of clerical work dominates both the space of domestic work and leisure (which together we might term “everyday life”). We are in the presence of what Adorno and Horkheimer referred to as administered life – modes, methods, and techniques originally developed in the waged workplace come to “subsume” and so transform spaces outside of the wage in order to make them conducive to conditions of capital accumulation.²¹

Most of the work portrayed in *Memory*, it must be acknowledged, is unwaged. Her clerical labors are put in the service of her own artistic projects, those of her boyfriend, Ed Bowes, or her friends. They are pseudo- or para-clerical, we might say. But this is the most instructive point – *Memory* investigates the way in which the whole of life gets subsumed under the protocols, affects, and techniques of waged work. The book is not just a representation of this subsumption, but its agent as well: it converts quotidian activities into *art work*; it portrays a world where, at any moment, one may or may not be acting out a part in someone’s artistic project, or even acting out multiple parts in multiple projects at the same time. All at once, Mayer is collaborating with her friend Jacques on his play, working on her boyfriend’s film, and at the same time documenting the experiences so that they can be repositioned inside of her own project, *Memory*. In the passage above, for instance, one does not know whether the phone calls she makes are “personal” or “business” (or even if this is a tenable distinction). The same goes for the trip to the record store. Everything is brought into the circle of work. Under the beach, the office.

We get a glimpse, therefore, of the subsumption of leisure by labor that has become a common feature of postindustrial life, where all socializing has “networking” as one of its

horizons and where, increasingly, personal relations, friendships, and acquaintances can be mobilized for financial or cultural gain. This is the condition of the *flexible* laborer who works part-time, contingently, or from home, and is therefore less likely to experience work as a sphere separate from everyday life, less likely to identify with a certain job as a stable and enduring identity that stands apart from other identities. But alongside this understanding of “flexible” as meaning non-full-time, there arise other associations, having to do with the type of work one accomplishes. Workers are flexible when they are not defined by a permanent assignment but constantly adapting, taking on different roles, attributes, skills, and qualities depending on the task or *project* at hand. Boltanski and Chiapello describe this worker as a central feature of what they call *the projective city*, the capitalist mode conforming to the period from the 1960s on, where the “*general equivalent* – what the status of persons and things is measured by – is *activity*.”²² In contrast with earlier modes, “activity in the projective city surmounts the oppositions between work and non-work, the stable and the unstable, wage-earning class and non-wage-earning class, paid work and voluntary work. . .”²³ Such “activity expresses itself in the multiplicity of projects *of all kinds* that may be pursued concurrently,” where projects involve temporary constellations of persons convoked for a particular task. By participating in projects, one expands one’s circle of associates, enlarges one’s network: “by *multiplying connections* and *proliferating links*, the *succession of projects* has the effect of *extending networks*.” Here, “Life is conceived as a succession of projects” and, because the boundary between work and non-work has been superseded, “anything can attain the status of a *project*, including ventures hostile to capitalism.” As a result:

Describing every accomplishment with a nominal grammar that is the grammar of the project erases the differences between a capitalist project and a humdrum creation (a Sunday club). Capitalism and anti-capitalist critique alike are masked. Utterly different things can be assimilated to the term ‘project’: opening a new factory, closing one, carrying out a re-engineering project, putting on a play. . . This is one of the ways in which the projective city can win over forces hostile to capitalism: by proposing a grammar that transcends it, which they in turn will use to describe their own activity while remaining oblivious of the fact that capitalism, too, can slip into it.²⁴

Equipped with this description we can see how so many of the passages from *Memory*, detailing the proliferation of connections, links and relationships between people in the artistic milieus in which she circulates fall under this heading:

If I’m Bernadette devlin if I’m b. devlin I must b. pregnant, called Julia she has something “important” for ed at home, where hannah is, voices on the phone & laughing house of mirrors, nick says anne is at the laundromat, jacques roast beef is in the oven in stockbridge, Kathleen is at the bank and I dial o for operator, define it, stockridge eggs rockridge is burning there are no fires yet today, I dial 413 plus 123 plus operator’s reading for stockbridge I am trying to call the ate r & I call deluxe at 850 10TH AVE 2473220 & speak to I try to speak to the expediter for 16mm film, I speak to otto pellone & he’s the wrong one.²⁵

Memory is, from its very first lines, about relations: it is “picture books and letters to everyone dash.” One sees, immediately, how a network of interpersonal relationships links together the phatic, quotidian everyday with the work Mayer does for Ed’s film or for *Memory*. She is like an “operator” at a switchboard, linking up various people and activities, just as, above, she links together the various “moments” in the cycle of accumulation. Boltanski and Chiapello’s account therefore might lead us to conclude that avant-garde sociality – based upon the coterie, the conversation in the bar or cafe, the little press or reading series or gallery – has been internalized by industry, become a part of its very functioning.²⁶

Importantly for *Memory*, the extensive character of the projective city, its spread in space, described as “connexionism” by Boltanski and Chiapello, develops in parallel to a certain intensive subjective norm, a certain model of “the great man,” here “Enthusiastic, Involved, Flexible, Adaptable, Versatile, Having potential, Employable, Autonomous, Not prescriptive, Knows how to engage others, In touch, Tolerant”²⁷ Judged according to the logics of a vulgarized amalgam of evolutionary science and systems theory, “[t]he great man proves adaptable and flexible, able to move from one situation to a very different one, and adapt to it; and *versatile*, capable of changing activity or tools, depending on the nature of the relationship entered into with others or with objects.”²⁸ Great men cultivate lateral rather than vertical relationships, relying on charm and conviviality: they “prove to be *connectors*, *vectors*, who do not keep the information or contacts gleaned in networks to themselves, but redistribute them among the team members.”²⁹

For those who qualify as great men (or women, though I do not think the gendering is accidental) within such workplaces, there is doubtless an experience of liberation that accompanies the unfixing of all stable work identities. The capacity to shapeshift from project to project is certainly satisfying for many. In fact, Boltanski and Chiapello argue that this satisfaction is one of the goals of the restructuring of the labor process. Developed as a response to worker demands for greater autonomy during the 1960s, the mostly fleeting satisfactions and forms of autonomy of the flexible labor system are part of what has guaranteed its stability even as wages and benefits have been eroded, and even as “flexibility” becomes, increasingly, a mask for redoubled exploitation. For most workers this flexible, project-based style of work hides a deep intensification: workers are *freed* from the alienation of a single task by being asked to perform two or three alienated tasks at once, to be their own managers and co-workers.³⁰ Multiskilling – as this reorganization of work is often called, in contrast with deskilling – is therefore not a return to the craft basis of skilled labor, but a distinct form of deskilled labor where one moves from one deskilled activity to another. As one study described it: “For one cashier, a multi-skilling exercise meant that she was training her colleague to do her job while her colleague reciprocated. . . . An office worker in the large utilities company described how she used to run the print room; now she is part of a multi-functioning team which runs reception, covers the post room *and* runs the print room.”³¹ As many studies have demonstrated, women are more often subjected to this kind of intensification through multiskilling, perhaps because so many are already accustomed to the kind of multiple demands that come from balancing domestic and paid work.³² But as Diane Gabrielle Tremblay has indicated in a recent study of women’s work in technologized workplaces, much of the multiskilling that has emerged in the context of the restructuring of the labor process is really “multitasking,” meaning it doesn’t really provide workers with translatable or portable skills, but merely concatenates deskilled and routinized tasks under

one job heading. Multiskilling becomes a mask for an intensification and acceleration of the time of labor.³³

Memory sets numerous tasks, activities and timeframes in parallel and careens back and forth between them at a headlong speed that is unnerving, providing one of the most vivid literary descriptions of multitasking and the frenetic, harried subject it entails: a request for a Xerox machine turns first into a description of packaging pasta into boxes, then a cryptic remark about “homemade stolen electric typewriters” and “a stolen cassette tape recorder,” and finally, driving directions.³⁴ Intriguingly, the passage suggests that such multitasking means engaging with multiple media and multiple mechanical apparatuses: mimeographs, typewriters, cameras, tape recorders, slide projectors, automobiles. Furthermore, if we keep in mind the full shape of the project – and its extension beyond the text, into image and sound and concept – we see that it not only *describes* multitasking but is itself a work of multitasking, weaving together graphical, photographic and acoustic technologies into a single multi-channel work, one expressed in both *Memory* the installation and *Memory* the book.

With our understanding of multitasking and multimedia and their relationship to the intensifications of the labor under conditions of the double day, we can take a little bit of a step back and place *Memory* in the context of arguments about the transformations of the visual (and theretofore post-visual) arts during this period, their transformation into what Rosalind Krauss has called “postmedium” art. As art critics like John Roberts and Benjamin Buchloh note, the trajectory of 20th-century and especially post-war art follows the process of deskilling in industry, where routinized, processual visual forms that require little traditional skill evacuate the craft values of painting and sculpture, their skills of hand and eye.³⁵ One thinks of early avant-garde art, as well as Minimalism, Pop Art, Arte Povera and other postwar developments, in which standardized, industrial objects and graphics stand in for the artisanal craft of early sculpture and painting.

As conceptual art emerges out of these developments, there seems to arrive a moment of complete and total deskilling, where all the material, craft-based elements of making have been purged and replaced by an administrative (purely cognitive) manipulation of automated processes or prefabricated material elements.³⁶ We can see how these cultural transformations parallel the socio-economic transformations of the period, where the deskilled production of goods gives way to the manipulation of symbols as minimalist sculpture gives way to conceptualism, where the making of things gives way to the provision of services as painting gives way to performance and what Andrea Fraser calls “artistic service.”³⁷ Both Roberts and Buchloh give an account of how the purgative moment of the 1970s is followed by a rematerialization or reskilling of art in the 1980s, but they do not connect it to debates around multitasking. Indeed it seems that the “reskilling” in postconceptual or installation art of the 1980s is not reskilling but multitasking – that is, the setting in parallel of multiple deskilled processes. The institution of the “installation,” for instance, brings together film, painting, sculpture, text and sound art into one space, but in most cases there is no return to the specific craft-based values of any one of these arts. We can see how this also parallels the transformation of the labor process: just as the installation brings multiple, deskilled channels together in parallel, multitasking in the space of the office is often situated around a single hub – the computer – which merges multiple, semi-

automated tasks into a single stream. With the invention of so-called user-friendly computers – computers which use the Graphical User Interface of Apple Computers and the Windows operating system– the intensification and redoubling of office work becomes fully embedded in the material infrastructure of the office: one now routinely shifts from task to task without moving anywhere except virtually. The multiplying tasks of modern office work – and the flexible office worker – are thus effected by a singularization of machines, and by the reduction of all activity to a single medium: data. Alan Liu’s description of this kind of modern “knowledge work,” for instance, demystifies the rhapsodic visions of “flexibility” by noting that, while “[m]ultitasking users are free to inhabit as many different windows or “scenes” as they wish, representing decentralized locations and protocols, diverse projects, or varying aspects of a single project . . . all the while, it is really just one main window – the desktop – that is operative, and the working conventions of that window, which are determined through the underlying operating system and networking choices made at the corporate and server level.”³⁸ The passage rhymes with one of Fredric Jameson’s most trenchant observations about postmodernity, as a site where “the most standardized and uniform social reality in history . . . emerge[s] as the rich oil smear sheen of absolute diversity.”³⁹

If *Memory* joins together the different “moments” in the reproductive circuits of capital and labor, it does so by convoking multiple mechanisms – for film, for sound, for text – around a single purpose, merging them into a single stream. This not only anticipates the “remediation” of all of these media by the new digital medium but more specifically anticipates the coming transformation of office work by the computer, which not only replaced multiple office machines with a new all-in-one device but likewise replaced differentiated job positions with new all-in-one positions.⁴⁰ We see that social identity and technology are not easily separated and that the various experiments of the text are, in their way, laboratorial, developing and testing out new social possibilities with existing technologies. This should remind us of the claim, in Lev Manovich and elsewhere, that the 20th-century avant-garde practices such as collage and montage, dating back to Cubism, Dada and Constructivism, are incorporated into the computer at a structural level, and that the later emphasis on participation and interactivity likewise influences the development of the computer interfaces.⁴¹

This much *Memory* certainly shares with the constant cutting and pasting of late capitalist office workers. But *Memory* might be laboratorial in a further, more specific way: in both a standalone essay and in the fifth chapter of *The Language of New Media*, Manovich suggests, in a post-Kantian turn of mind, that the “database” has become “a new symbolic form of the computer age . . . a new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of the world,” one that rivals linear perspective and narrative in its far-reaching consequences for human subjectivity.⁴² More specifically, he suggest that a particular assemblage – the database and algorithm – characterizes the “new media” world of computer games as well as other applications, in which various procedures are performed upon disorganized data. Manovich works hard to distinguish the results of this application of algorithms to data structures from narrative per se, since such an assemblage lacks an appropriate logic of cause-and-effect in Manovich’s view. *Memory* seems quite explicitly the application of a series of algorithms (procedures) to a fund of unarranged data (here the “memories” in the form of film, tape, typescript). Indeed, given the importance of the procedure, or so-called “chance-based operation, to the experimental poetry that develops in the 60s and 70s, we

might hope someone would provide an account of the database more broadly in these works – in Ted Berrigan’s *Sonnets*, Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life* and Ron Silliman’s *Tjanting*, for instance. Such writing has often been described as relying on paratactic (rather than hypotactic) relationships between parts of speech and verbal elements, seeing the former as free of hierarchy or oppressive determination. To what extent is this akin to the database which, in Manovich’s “represents the world as a list of items” which it “refuses to order”?⁴³

Mayer’s case seems interesting because it represents a transitional moment, not only a moment before computers but a moment before the database as such becomes a determining cultural form. Specifically, if we look at the manuscripts for *Memory* we see that the “processing” to which she submits her verbal memories – typewriter, audio tape – transforms consequential, linear language into something resembling a data structure. Thus these earlier devices that precede the computer are, in their way, involved in the processes of standardization and routinization required for the transformation of language into data – transforming the vagaries of handwriting into the exactitude of type, for instance. The manuscripts and typescripts for *Memory* – held in the Mayer archives at UC San Diego – confirm this sense of the machine as a routinizing and homogenizing device, submitting the language to a purifying operation, in which extrinsic, non-essential elements are purged, leaving only the distinctions necessary for exact reproduction. The text went through multiple drafts before Mayer recorded the final audio version she used in the installation. While the first drafts are all handwritten, composed in a lineated “open field” style with ample white space and frequent recourse to visual arrangements on the page, as well as illustrations, once Mayer transfers these passages to typewriter all of this formal specificity is lost, and the text is run together into blocks of prose, chopped up into sub-sentence bits, and recombined in different orders. Rather than an opposition between “narrative” and “database,” however, we should think of the opposed symbolic form as the “line,” a structure of language that interacts with the grammar of the sentence to produce certain recursive patterns of sound and sense.

The key effect of the destruction of the line – or the conversion of lineated language into run-together fragments – is a sense of hurry, panic, urgency, and speed, since running lineated words together into blocks of prose will, of course, make the language seem more accelerated than it already is. Like punctuation, line breaks and white space exert a braking function on language. It seems fair, then, to suggest that the speed of the book is, in part, a technological speed, impelled by the mechanical rhythm of typewriters, cameras, and tape-recorders, shutter speeds and words per minute. In part, what is being conceptualized here is the way that technologies – especially media technologies – have a tendency to expand the field of the remembered beyond the human capacity to integrate it (notwithstanding their capacity to distort, warp, and reconfigure memory).⁴⁴ This is in part where the panic and frenzy of *Memory* originates: recording and transmission technologies have enabled a transcription of the past beyond the capacity of the human mind to assimilate it. In certain places, *Memory* aims to test these human limits, the limits of human endurance, and by way of various technologies and devices, push beyond them. But this exposure of the inhuman in the drafting process might be why, before exhibiting the project as an installation, she takes the typescript and, in a process exactly opposite to the composition of typescripts from dictation common to secretarial work, makes a voice recording from it, humanizing it, and adapting it once again to the limits of the human body.

It now seems safe to say that, as much as *Memory* is a project about work, one through which we can read the profound restructuring of work and work-life taking place in the 1970s, it is also a project about technology. This is because the history of labor in capitalism is always also, in part, a history of technology. Truly capitalist labor is labor constantly remade and refashioned – become more productive, more intense, more plastic – through changing technological means. It is labor that has been “really subsumed,” as we have seen, remade in accord with the exigencies and needs of capital and the profit-drive.⁴⁵ Indeed, we might say that capitalism proper – what Marx calls the “specifically capitalist mode of production” – only really begins at the moment in which the owners of capital begin to reinvest their profits in new labor-saving technology in order to extract even greater profits.⁴⁶ This virtuous circle of reinvestment – profit which, by way of new more highly-productive machinery, produces greater profits – is what characterizes capitalist accumulation. And therefore, since any account of the restructuring of labor in the postwar period must be, in part, an account of changing technical means, it should come as no surprise that *Memory* so explicitly foregrounds the role of technology from its very first pages:

we are now in an image, sound, his hair was pulled back mind too
they're sons we are reminding you
but now he leans against the machine, reels, & while it's on I've turned
we are now in an image sound his hair was
off the light a powerful light that was on it's off and outside
pulled back
they've turned the people working have turned the saw drill scooper off. 47

Here, the machine has “pulled back” Ed’s mind, fed it into the reels and absorbed it into the past. Elsewhere, Mayer wonders whether “a person [is] a machine when he’s in the movies” and later describes “actors . . . being invaded with machines surrounded with machines.”⁴⁸ Working with a machine means becoming it. The machine, in this sense, represents less something absolutely external to the self than something that was once part of the self but now has become externalized – a memory that, once part of the neural circuitry, has become writing, photographs, and audiotape.

Memory, in this light, depicts the laboring body struggling against its own transformation into and subsumption by the machine, struggling against its own becoming-machine. In this it chimes with one of the presentations of the relationship between capital and labor in Marx, where capital is simply labor exteriorized, become objective. Capital is “dead labor that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor.” It is not, therefore, something absolutely foreign to labor, but simply labor’s own past.⁴⁹ Such an account makes capitalism seem less a conflict between two opposing subjects – proletariat and bourgeoisie, worker and capitalist – than a conflict between two temporal moments (the present and past) or two ontological modalities (subjective and objective). As developed in passages like these, capital is simply the reified weight of the past, collected in the form of worked matter that impels, determines, and conditions present actions.

Some of Marx’s most compelling passages on the nature of the machine develop from this conception. For Marx, the machine is one of the essential forms of capital. Fixed

capital, in the form of the self-propulsive machine or automaton, represents the objectification of subjective will. In the factory-system, therefore,

the material unity [of combined workers] appears subordinate to the *objective unity* of the *machinery*, of fixed capital, which, as *animated monster*, objectifies the scientific idea, and is in fact the coordinator, does not in any way relate to the individual worker as his instrument; but rather he himself exists as an animated individual punctuation mark, as its living isolated accessory.”⁵⁰

There is a kind of reversal of roles – between subject and object, living and dead, material and immaterial, past and present. The machine becomes an “objectified . . . idea” and the worker a mere accessory or moment of punctuation in the syntax of the factory:

Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour process but also capital’s process of valorization has this in common, but (sic) it is not the worker who employs the conditions of his work, but rather the reverse, the conditions of work employ the worker. However, it is only with the coming of machinery that this inversion first acquires a technical and palpable reality. Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labor confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labor-power. The separation of the intellectual faculties of the production process from manual labour, and the transformation of those faculties into powers exercised by capital over labour is, as we have already shown, finally completed by large-scale industry erected on the foundations of machinery.⁵¹

As with the prosopoetic reversals and transpositions of the commodity-form itself, machine-based labor mechanizes and dehumanizes the worker at the same time as it humanizes the machine, making it into the repository of science and intellectual faculties. Dead labor is animated at the same time as living labor is mortified. Marx’s necro-economics means that two types of living-dead confront each other in the workshop – the dead-come-alive of capital, and the living-turned-dead of labor.

This is only one of the ways that Marx characterizes the relationship between capital and labor, and there is good reason to question it or at least investigate its conceptual centrality. Its function might be illustrative – a rhetorical flourish, a way of translating the ideas of *Capital* into a gothic period style. Certainly, there are reasons to worry about the potential heroizing of life and the living, the easy slippage from here into existentialist notions of virility, potency, authenticity. But there is also another way to read this passage that steers us away from existential agonistics. If we replace dead labor with past (or accumulated, or stored, or “remembered”) labor, and living labor with present labor, we see that what Marx is really describing is a complex temporality, where the past remains present in an objective form, in the form of commodities and material accumulation that make demands upon, limit, and fate the course of the present. This is the sense in which Marx’s project is *historical materialism* – an account of history and historical change as materialized force.

We’ll return to discussing *Memory* as a project concerned with tracing the tyrannical weight of the past upon the present (as much as it is also about the determinative force of

machinery on present faculties and capacities), but before we do that, we need to track down a few consequences of the above distinctions. Many will know that, on the basis of a few sentences from the “Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy,” a certain theory of technological determinism has dominated Marxism, especially in the early part of 20th century. This view holds that historical changes emerge from the contradiction caused by *productive forces* (technology, primarily) as they race ahead of decaying and outmoded *social relations* (relations of production). Eventually, the laggard social relations are forced to adjust and catch up with the times. But as we have already seen, there is a certain indistinction between *productive forces* and *social relations*, since machinery is, in fact, the materialization of certain social relations, the materialization of certain relationships among workers and between workers and their bosses. (Machines, for instance, are concrete instantiations of a certain division of labor, workflow, and forms of cooperation and degrees of skill). Thus, in contradistinction to the Preface, what we really confront is a circular (or at the very least overdetermined) causality. This is in line with the account that emerges in other places within Marx, especially in the chapter on “Machinery and Large-Scale Industry,” where Marx reverses the relationship between forces and relations described in the preface, suggesting that, in the case of the passage from the manufacture system (where workers employed precapitalist methods) to the specifically capitalist form of machine-based factory labor, it was the changing social relations within the former mode which made the invention of certain types of machines necessary. Machines were simply the material elaboration of a set of social relations that had already developed in the interstices of the older production methods:

The system of machine production therefore grew spontaneously on a material basis which was inadequate to it. When the system had attained a certain degree of development, it had to overthrow this already ready-made foundation, which had meanwhile undergone further development in its old form, and create for itself a new basis appropriate to its mode of production.”⁵²

This is an exact reversal of the formulation in the Preface, where “At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production.”⁵³ In the specific case of the factory system, social relations were the vanguard.

Such conceptual complexities help to explain the considerable attention devoted to the so-called “Fragment on Machines” (part of his pre-*Capital* notebooks, often referred to as *Grundrisse*) since its publication in the 1960s. Along with “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” this passage has become a veritable touchstone for Marxist theory since its appearance in the 1960s, especially among so-called Autonomist Marxists. The “Fragment on Machines” and the concept of “general intellect” which derives from it owe their appeal, in my view, to the fact that, like the passages quoted from *Capital* above, they offer a much more nuanced account of the dialectic of relations and forces. It is also written in a much denser philosophical register which appealed, no doubt, to a certain growing theoreticism within Marxism.

But it is also probably true that the growing prevalence of white-collar labor made the status of knowledge and knowledge work a particular pressing theoretical concern, such that the account, in the fragment, of machinery as materialized knowledge, held a special appeal.

In the fragment we read that “[t]he science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the workers’ consciousness. . . .”⁵⁴ We encounter a world where “[i]n machinery, knowledge appears as alien, external to him.”⁵⁵ The term that Marx coins for such alienated, partly-materialized knowledge – “social knowledge become . . . a direct force of production” – is “general intellect.”⁵⁶

In general intellect, knowledge becomes not just a force of production but a form of command. It sets certain tasks, commands certain activities. This seems analogous to the status of Mayer’s own experience in *Memory*, where the superabundant complexity of her documented past comes to require continuous transfusions of present attention, and creates, over the course of the experiment, a cumulative sense of acceleration, compounding momentum and, eventually, a sense of an automatic process gone haywire. Because there is an explicit sense of tyrannical control in her presentation of the relationship between past and present – a relationship where the past dominates and determines the present – I think the relationship between present labor and accumulated past labor, between worker and means-of-production-as-general-intellect is a good analogue for the dynamic at play in *Memory*.

The tyranny of remembrance is explicit everywhere, but especially so in the concluding section of the book, “Dreaming,” where she writes “memory stifles dream it shuts dream up,” identifying dream with a creative, improvisatory present free from the exigencies and laboriousness of memory.⁵⁷ As elsewhere, memory as such – memory as data, as record – is identified with being an actor in a movie, performing a role, obeying the orders of a director: “August 4: Grace and I are in a movie directed by Jacques-in-charge.”⁵⁸ This dream recalls an earlier sequence from the entry for July 10, where Mayer and Ed are working with friend Jacques on his film. This involves, strangely, a “dry run . . . without film & without actors” and Mayer describes Jacques as a “Stalinist decision-making lenin at the helm of the cadillac ship.” In both the concluding “Dreaming” entry and the passage for July 10th, Mayer contrasts improvisation with playing a role: “I wish I could write backwards cause film doesn’t seem worth the trouble it would be better to improvise than to try to live with lenin.” Film is to improvisation what memory is to dreaming, such that, in “Dreaming,” even though Grace and Mayer “wind up in church, a liberal service” where Dan Graham (another authority figure) “is conducting something in the aisles” Mayer is able to effect a “reversal a withdrawal” in the power relations:

He [Dan Graham] says this wont hurt a bit we are conducting a test & Grace & I have no shirts on: a white machine is put against our shoulder, then a long needle shot through, through the right shoulder, a dull sharp pain & I ask them to stop & I say Grace & I have already made love as the end of the movie & now we laugh at Jacques-in-charge for not predicting that Grace & another woman will begin to make love, are making love. . . .⁵⁹

On one side: memory, machinery, authority – structures associated with the dominance of the past over the present. On the other side: writing, dreaming, improvisation, anarchy, self-direction – structures associated with the liberation of the present from the tyranny of the past. The following quotation – itself set off within quotes inside of the entry for July 4 – makes this opposition rather clear:

one two three people I saw, money we spent, gave out, the energy it took to get to the country, drinking three cups of coffee to talk about anarchy, to write a letter to anne about an old worn out subject, the destruction of the tapes, feel the breeze the generation gap, think about watching another person, then creating one for people to watch, understanding the desire to watch other people to understand them or just to watch them, not finding any place to set things down then save this for later & wait. I saw I talked about. No decision. No direction. That's good. & No thought. Fans, the energy it takes to wave them. Flags. Get the pillow. The cake is in the oven. Get the beer. Why not talk about the energy of the weather in the city too, three describe it. Waiting toward something to come out of something. Placing something there. To think without thinking. Write without writing. xyz, thoughts with fine edges. So many noises people places things points of view. Put something out in that field. Didn't understand. Now do. The do-nothing school. Against technology. Energy comes from somewhere. Pay. Some way. I feel terrible. Why. Race against time. All the dreams all the notes all the directions nothing comes from it. Need drink. Empty slot. Can't sit up. Cake. The leisure to go beyond the tree. The time. Did ed take a taxi? No, but he did get a ride home in j&k's 1964 cadillac convertible.⁶⁰

In this passage, the cultivation of experience in the present – writing letters, visiting people, drinking coffee and discussing “anarchy” – means the “destruction of the tapes” and the disaccumulation of memory, since attention to the present and the past are set off in a zero-sum competition and Mayer is left “not finding any place to set things down then save this for later.” At a basic level, this is one of the double-binds that structures the book (and plays a large role in later works like *Midwinter Day*): attention to the past, to trying to document the past in all its fullness, continually creates new, undocumented pasts (born from the present that must be ignored while attention is focused elsewhere). The same dynamic functions with the present, which continually races ahead of any attempt to capture it: devoting present time to recording the past creates a new past which must then be recorded, and so on and so forth.

Thus, even though Mayer decides to give herself over to the fullness of an unordered, anarchic present, we notice that this quickly converts back into a “race against time.” The absence of “decision” and “direction” – the paratactic arrangement of different activities, “noises places things points of view” – and her stance “against technology” gives way on its own, without exterior imposition to a sense that she must “pay.” Though the “decision-making lenin” has been removed, the position of authority still remains, if uninhabited, in the form of an “empty slot.” Authority has been suppressed rather than transcended.

As we have already indicated, these relations of domination, effected and mediated by technology, are temporal relations, ways in which the past dominates the present. Since so much of the preceding chapter has concerned the experience of hurry and speed-up within *Memory*, it is worth lingering on the way in which Marxism has given an account of historical dynamics as based upon a conflictual relationship between past and present labor. One of the richest accounts of this temporal relationship – the dominance of the past labor over present labor – comes not from the *Grundrisse*, with its attention to the technical-material aspects of labor, but in Marx's fully developed account of capitalist crisis in Volumes I and III of *Capital*. In both of these books, Marx devotes significant effort to

defining what he calls the “composition of capital” – namely, the ratio between its “active and its passive component, between variable and constant capital.”⁶¹ (By variable capital, Marx means wages; and by constant capital he means everything else – raw inputs, machines, buildings). One way of understanding this ratio is by taking account of how “a definite number of workers corresponds to a definite quantity of means of production and thus a definite amount of living labour to a definite amount of labour already objectified in means of production.” In other words, the “composition of capital” measures the ratio of living to dead labor (or present to past, objectified labor).⁶² But this material measure – the measure of bodies and things in physical terms (bushels of wheat, yards of lumber, tons of iron) – is not necessarily a measure of the relative *value* of those bodies or those things, and since capital is concerned with values, one needs to examine the proportion in value terms as well. These are not independent proportions. In fact, the first proportion (Marx calls it the *technical composition of capital*) has a tendency to determine the latter (which Marx calls the *value composition of capital*). Not all changes in the value composition are due to technical changes, changes in the levels of productivity – but to the extent that such changes in value can be ascribed to changes in productivity, Marx suggests we refer to this composition as the *organic composition of capital*, called “organic” because it has to do with the relationship of what is living to what is dead, what is present to what is past.

The organic composition of capital, then, measures the extent to which production is determined by past values, but it also measures the extent to which production is determined by objectified matter, by things rather than bodies – and it suggests that these are two faces of a single process. Marx’s account of capitalism’s tendency toward crisis – its own drive toward self-dissolution – emphasizes the centrality of a *rising organic composition of capital*. While the introduction of machinery is undertaken in order to increase the amount of surplus value and hence profit that the owners can generate, in the long term the reduction in the number of workers relative to the mass of means of production, or the ratio of wages to other expenses, means that the capitalist will require a larger and larger investment in order to extract surplus value, since all new value comes from labor and the pool of labor is shrinking relative to the pool of means of production.

The standard presentation of the rising organic composition of capital assumes that its central effect is a falling rate of profit, since the rate of new value extraction also falls. The arguments around this point are complicated, highly technical, and might lead us to miss the major point here. Regardless of what we think about the profit rate, what’s important is that rising organic composition of capital measures the extent to which living labor has been thrust out of the production process, the extent to which dead or past or objectified labor predominates. The results of this dynamic are various: it can produce crises of employment for those expelled from production, the so-called superfluous populations; it produces crises of underconsumption (since he or she who does not work does not eat); and it produces underutilization and underinvestment, because in cases of high organic composition investment in new plant and machinery is unlikely to net higher profits. Because of this last point, technical change begins to slow and capitalists pull their money out of production, instead preferring speculation in stocks and real estate. But tracking these developments in all their complexity might cause us to miss the central implication of all of these dynamics: crises in capitalism are the result of a society that has become too wealthy and too productive for its own good, a capitalism that requires less and less work, and which as a result finds its perpetuation threatened. Capitalism is a self-undermining social form.

On the one hand, these developments might seem to imply a slowing down of historical “progress,” measured in terms of technical development. But this “slowing down” finds itself matched by a speeding up. As it becomes difficult to extract increased profits from investment in labor-saving technology, capitalists turn instead to non-technological means of increasing surpluses: sweating and intensifying labor, decreasing pockets of rest and downtime (the so-called “pores” in the workday), extending work hours, and finding ways of getting workers to do unpaid work off the job. Thus we return, by a long and circuitous route, to the harried and frenetic temporality of *Memory*, which we are now prepared to think of as strongly homological with the actual state of capital and labor in the early 1970s, when the vigorous good health of the postwar economy gave way to a crisis of profitability (visible first as inflation) described persuasively by several writers as conforming, more or less, to Marx’s account of capitalist crisis.⁶³

Marx often describes technical productivity by referring to the amount of means of production a single worker can “set in motion.” Improved technologies and improved techniques allow workers to set in motion more and more means of production, more and more material, and over the course of decades and centuries, technical productivity increases by whole orders of magnitude. This is what *Memory* portrays – consciousness and memory under conditions where the rapid development of new technologies for transmitting and recording data can allow a person, by a single mental act, to “set in motion” vast amounts of knowledge and memory. But such a setting into motion is, as Marx seems to indicate above, mediated by the general intellect and the machinery for recording and transmission, such that actual consciousness becomes a mere moment within an increasingly automated, routinized process of thought. The technological sublime is less an instance of a confrontation with the unthinkable than it is a confrontation with things that are being thought for you and, at the same time, by way of your own alienated cognitive faculties. As Hugh MacDiarmid puts it in his “Third Hymn to Lenin,” “anti-human forces have instilled the thought/ that knowledge has outrun the individual brain / . . . And so have turned/ Humanity’s vast achievements against the human mind.”⁶⁴ (The MacDiarmid quote captures well, I think, why the rhapsodic readings of general intellect are so odd, and why their avoidance of the negative affects surrounding the rhetoric of monstrosity in Marx should appear so willful). Here’s Mayer on this fact:

take pictures for a week, say, then put them away dont even show them around for a year & see what you remember & a week’s diary too: call kathleen & ed at noon stay at paul’s cause H might not be home, it’s Friday, villa lobos gas record teletype machine: this is the specious present in my memory presents my memory as it might be styled as the knowledge of an event or fact or state of mind which in the meantime I have not been thinking of but with the additional consciousness that I’ve sure thought of it before I’ve experienced it before, all of it⁶⁵

The techniques in *Memory* are a simulacrum of memory because, to the extent that they are able to expand the range of what one *could* remember, they do so at the expense of being able to *actually* remember things. The techniques remember for you, and so *Memory* becomes an exercise in “the knowledge of an event or fact or state of mind which in the meantime I have not been thinking.”⁶⁶ The moment of consciousness itself – what the mind

can hold – becomes as a result incredibly impoverished. Active consciousness concerns itself, instead, with things to do, responsibilities, various daily urgencies, rather than holding the lived experience of the past in mind. At the same time, the actual expanse of the remembered which the various technologies of memory make possible becomes incomparably vast, an uncompassable wealth – billions or trillions of hours of films which no one has time to watch, photographs which no one will look at, text which no one will read. As with capital in its crises of overdevelopment, *Memory* discloses a strange synthesis of poverty and wealth. In *Memory*, we encounter a vast library of human experience that can't be accessed because of the constitutive forms through which we process that experience. Just as in 1848, today “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of living.” However, in our case, this “tradition” is not the decrepit institutions, forms, and powers of the *ancien regime*, dressing up in costumes of the Roman Empire. Rather it is capital itself, congealed into the various forms in which it is stored– buildings and technologies, but also vast pools of liquid wealth and equally liquid information. The weight of this past speeds us onward, relentlessly, but not “toward” anything. Breaking with such a state of affairs would not only mean breaking with the absurdity of a regime of work that makes us work more and more as work itself is less and less necessary but with a temporality that because it is connected to the *automaton* of capital makes the present a mere adjunct to the past. In another mode of social reproduction, this relationship to the past might look more like forgetting than *Memory*.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 120–167.

² Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 123–185.

³ To give just two examples from a vast number of texts tying the crisis of capitalism to a crisis of work, see Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*; Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*.

⁴ See, for instance, Armstrong, Glyn, and Harrison, *Capitalism Since 1945*, as well as Glyn et al., “The Rise and Fall of the Golden Age.”

⁵ For an account of the distinction between Taylorism and Fordism, see Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, 113–121.

⁶ The classic text on “deskilling” is Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*.

⁷ Bell, *The Coming of Post-industrial Society*, 134.

⁸ McCulloch, *White-Collar Workers in Transition*, 30–36, 94–100, 135–142.

⁹ Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class*, 17, 25.

¹⁰ Mills, *White Collar*; Whyte, *The Organization Man*; Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd*.

¹¹ Mills, *White Collar*, 226.

¹² Clune, *American Literature and the Free Market, 1945–2000*, 148.

¹³ Mills, *White Collar*.

¹⁴ Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” 23.

¹⁵ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ Department of Health, Education and Welfare, *Work in America*, 10–75; Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 31–39.

²⁰ Anonymous, “The Bad Days Will End,” 108; Tronti, “The Strategy of Refusal,” 130.

²¹ Summarized in Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 31–39.

²² Department of Health, Education and Welfare, *Work in America*, xv–xvi.

²³ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁴ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 180.

²⁵ *Work in America*, 30.

²⁶ In France, in particular, Serge Mallet was citing “self-management” as “one of the most important indices of the level [of] development.” Mallet, *Essays on the New Working Class*, 123.

²⁷ Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 26.

²⁸ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 170.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Kaprow and Kelley, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, xviii.

³¹ Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 155.

³² *Ibid.*, 163.

³³ “Even yesterday’s distinctions between art, antiart, and nonart are pseudo-distinctions that simply waste our time: the side of an old building recalls Clyfford Still’s canvases, the guts of a dishwashing machine double as Duchamp’s *Bottle Rack*, the voices in a train station are Jackson MacLow’s poems, the sounds of eating in a luncheonette are by John Cage, and all may be part of a Happening...Not only does art become life, but life refuses to be itself.” Kaprow and Kelley, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 81.

³⁴ Kempton, *Provo*, 11–15.

³⁵ “Fluxus Manifesto.” Reprinted in Stiles and Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, 727.

³⁶ Bishop, *Participation*, 106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁸ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 15, 23.

³⁹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 18.

⁴⁰ Debord, “Report on the Construction of Situations,” 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Eco, *The Open Work*; Barthes and Howard, *S/Z*, 4.

⁴³ Barthes and Howard, *S/Z*, 4.

⁴⁴ McCaffery, “The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered Writing,” 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁶ Hejinian, “The Rejection of Closure,” 43.

⁴⁷ One might question how much this sense of participation is really new, and how much it differs from earlier aesthetic ideas, whether Aristotelian *pathos* or Romantic “moral sympathy.” Even if these early modes do require – if we are going to be savvy about it– active participation by the reader, they do not invite the reader to make the art, but rather invite the reader to participate in a world whose coordinates are determined in advance. We might examine, for instance, Charles Altieri’s influential account of modernist poetry to see how different his notion of participation is from the participation we are talking about here: “Whereas mimetic art must emphasize the capacity of its images to correspond to some reality that they portray, the new art can base much more of its relation to extraformal content on the principle of participation. For, when art need no longer worry about providing pictures that match certain codes for interpreting experience, it can devote itself to eliciting the kinds of participation that make us recognize our capacity to dwell in worlds only dimly echoed by practical life. Art is literally empowerment: the making available of exemplifications that enable us to look at ourselves, as we encounter different sites of being and modes of inhabiting them. And the direct testimony provided by such examples promises to free its audience from its dependency on the entire apparatus of representation, and from the positing of interpretations trapped within the narrow expectations cultivated by the ideology of “aesthetic” emotion. There we find ideals that may generate significant social change.” Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*, 56. Though Altieri provides a strong critique of representation (and by extension, hierarchy and non-participation) in this account, the reader is freed from dependency on representation through participating in the re-construction of the *already constructed* world of the art, on terms laid down in advance by the artist.

⁴⁸ Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, 99. For an account of the U.S. economy's descent into crisis from 1965 to 1973, see 99-121.

⁴⁹ Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, *Rebel Rank and File*, 37-76.

⁵⁰ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 39.

⁵¹ Julia Bryan Wilson writes that the turn to "relational aesthetics" has made visible the contributions of artists to the transformation of work: "The emphasis on participation, flexibility, and multitasking is taken from the studio into the factory, and the strong resonance of certain terms – deskilling, dematerialization, participation, alienation – points to a multidirectional flow of influence in the 1960s and 1970s that continues today. The shifting contours of artistic work have roughly paralleled the changes in industrial production in the economy at large. But perhaps, instead of arguing that the alterations in labor practices register more visibly within artistic "work" – as is mandated by the tired 'art reflects society' formulation – we can point to the influence running in the other direction: with the rise of the 'culture industry,' artistic practice began to influence the workplace."

Unfortunately, Bryan-Wilson's very interesting book does not do much to develop an account of the ways in which art influences the workplace in the art of the period. Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*, 219.

⁵² Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 156.

⁵³ See Piore and Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide*, 28-35 for the seminal account; See Wood and Wood, *The Transformation of Work?* for a summary of the debates about flexible specialization..

⁵⁴ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 142, 150.

⁵⁵ See Helen Molesworth, who offers the most lucid assessment of the effect of the transition from an industrial to postindustrial society on art making: "At this crossroads, much of the most important and challenging art of the period staged the problem of labor's transformation, its new divisions, and the increasingly blurred boundaries between work and leisure. Generally speaking, artists responded in one of four ways. Some played the part of both manager and workers, restaging the late nineteenth- and-early-twentieth-century division of labor. Others, emboldened by the professional-ization of the category of artist and liberated by an economic shift away from manufacturing, simplified things by adopting a purely managerial position. Still others had a prescient understanding that the burgeoning service economy would ultimately give way to a leisure economy based on experience. These artists turned to participatory strategies, involving the audience in the art. And finally (although this mapping is by no means chronological), there were those artists who experimented with not working at all, or at least trying to figure out how to work as little possible." Molesworth, "Work Ethic," 39. Note how her idea of the role of participation in the transformations of labor is different from mine, essentially having to do with consumer-producer rather than inter-worker relations.

⁵⁶ Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object...*

⁵⁷ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," 148.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁶⁰ LeWitt et al., *Sol LeWitt*, 373.

⁶¹ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," 128-129.

⁶² See Liz Kotz for a discussion of the turn to the textual in the art of the period, which she situates in the context of experimental writing. Kotz argues that the materialization of language in the art of the

period has to do with new communications technologies. I would argue, by extension, that it has to do with the workplace from which many of these technologies emerge. Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At*.

⁶³See Mac Low, *Representative Works, 1938-1985*, 71–100 for a description of the “chance-acrostic” method.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁵ Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2,” 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁸ Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 217–218.

⁶⁹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 3–23, 33.

⁷⁰ Ngai, “The Zany Science: Post-Fordist Performance and the Problem of Fun,” 17–28; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 174–231.

⁷¹ Kelley and Kaprow, *Childsplay*, 120–127.

⁷² Quoted in Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 172.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 144–45.

⁷⁴ O’Hara, “The Day Lady Died,” 25.

⁷⁵ I have already mentioned some important studies of these developments, by Alan Liu, and Boltanski and Chiapello. Also of particular interest is Waring, which details the various alternatives to Taylorism that developed in its shadows, and eventually became hegemonic during the process of restructuring. Waring, *Taylorism Transformed*.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Chapter 5 of Waring for a discussion of the “sensitivity trainings” which used Kurt Lewin’s style of “encounter group” therapy – popular with parts of the 1960s counter-culture – to counteract the authoritarian and bureaucratic sclerosis of postwar white-collar work, as well as the psychological maladies that attended it. These therapeutic ideas persist as part of the larger discourse of “corporate culture” and “team building,” and are one source for the curious presence of ideas associated with “new age” philosophy in ostensibly conservative capitalist firms. *Ibid.*, 104–131.

⁷⁷ Hicks, *The Culture of Soft Work*, 45–88; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 174–231.

⁷⁸ See Hochschild, *The Time Bind*, 197–218; Liu, *The Laws of Cool*, 76–79.

⁷⁹ Mills, *White Collar*, 69, 74.

⁸⁰ The exception here is the fifth chapter of his book on postmodernism, where Jameson characterizes the *nouveau roman* as the expression of transformed reading habits that, as with the Taylorized assembly-line system, have been broken down into differentiated, fragmented routines. Aside from the anachronism of this account, which disregards the fact that the postmodern period was also a post-Taylorist and post-Fordist one, this provocative (and, I think, intuitively correct account) would benefit from specific references to clerical labor and its technological transformation. For instance, what he describes as “the degradation of the signified into its material signifier” is, as I have noted above, exactly what happens to the symbols which white-collar workers manipulate for pay, rendering them into so many marks to be scanned, manipulated, copied, cut-and-pasted, often irrespective of their particular content. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 141, 131–153.

⁸¹ Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class*, 118.

⁸² Nealon, “Reading on the Left,” 25.

⁸³ Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class*, 129–30, 127.

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- ⁸⁴ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 102.
⁸⁵ Nealon, "The Poetic Case," 867; Nealon, "Reading on the Left," 26.
⁸⁶ Nealon, "Reading on the Left," 26.
⁸⁷ Nealon, "The Poetic Case," 867–868.
⁸⁸ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128–129.

CHAPTER ONE

- ¹ Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, 252.
² Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 8.
³ The three most important of the books are: David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*; William Whyte, *The Organization Man* and C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*. See also Liu, *The Laws of Cool*, 14–141 and Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class*, 1–32.
⁴ Noble, *Forces of Production*, 265–322.
⁵ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 326–348.
⁶ Ginsberg, *Howl, and Other Poems*, 41.
⁷ Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class*, 23.
⁸ Ashbery, "Robert Frost Medal Address," 249.
⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.
¹⁰ Ashbery, *Reported Sightings*, 109.
¹¹ Oppen, *Collected Poems*, 46.
¹² Ashbery, *Reported Sightings*, 81.
¹³ *Ibid.*, 82.
¹⁴ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 106.
¹⁵ Mills, *White Collar*, 68.
¹⁶ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–128.
¹⁷ See, for instance, Pound's "Machine Art" in which he proposes organizing factories according to the conditions of music. Pound, *Machine Art and Other Writings*, 57–86.
¹⁸ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 1–14.
¹⁹ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 69.
²⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.
²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.
²² See, for instance, Clune, "'Whatever Charms Is Alien,'" for an account of novelistic conventions in Ashbery.
²³ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 124.
²⁴ Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, 88.
²⁵ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 100.
²⁶ The whole quote is instructive: "The personal pronouns in my work very often seem to be like variables in an equation. "You" can be myself or it can be another person, someone whom I'm addressing, and so can "he" and "she" for that matter and "we"; sometimes one has to deduce from

the rest of the sentence what is being meant and my point is also that it doesn't really matter very much, that we are somehow all aspects of a consciousness giving rise to the poem and the fact of addressing someone, myself or someone else, is what's the important thing at that particular moment rather than the particular person involved. I guess I don't have a very strong sense of my own identity and I find it very easy to move from one person in the sense of a pronoun to another and this again helps to produce a kind of polyphony in my poetry which I again feel is a means toward greater naturalism." Ashbery, "Craft Interview with John Ashbery," 124.

²⁷ Vincent, *John Ashbery and You*, 5; Costello, "John Ashbery and the Idea of the Reader," 495.

²⁸ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 147–148.

²⁹ Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences*, 97.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 96–97.

³¹ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 130.

³² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 84.

³³ See also the account of free indirect discourse (*style indirect libre*) in the 19th century novel in D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*. Miller accounts such technique part and parcel of a general disciplinary and surveilling power: "The master-voice of monologism never simply soliloquizes. It continually needs to confirm its authority by qualifying, cancelling, endorsing, subsuming all the other voices it lets speak. No doubt the need stands behind the great prominence the nineteenth-century novel gives to *style indirect libre*, in which, respoking a character's thoughts or speeches, the narration simultaneously subverts their authority and secures its own." Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 25.

³⁴ Marx, *Capital*, 163–177.

³⁵ Marx and Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels*, 34:122.

³⁶ Mills, *White Collar*, 80–81.

³⁷ Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry," 551. See also the passage from Miller quoted above, as well as a more recent article by Moretti, "Serious Century."

³⁸ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 113.

³⁹ See, for instance, Chris Nealon on Ashbery's habit of "wandering away" from the violence and catastrophe which capitalism presents: Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, 78.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, his description of his highly-anthologized poem "Soonest Mended" as a "one-size-fits-all Confessional poem." Murphy, "John Ashbery: An Interview with John Murphy," 25.

⁴¹ Ashbery, *The Mooring of Starting Out*, 165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 245.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 338.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

CHAPTER TWO

¹As a recent article makes clear, one of the reasons for contemporary forgetfulness about cybernetics is that many ideas originally attributable to it were later absorbed into various strains of post-structuralism. Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," 123–126.

² The broader cultural (and countercultural) spread of cybernetics is explored by both Turner and Pickering; for a general intellectual history, see Heims and Hayles. The best essay about the political and economic influence of cybernetics is the as-yet-untranslated piece, “L’hypothèse cybernétique” by the French group Tiqqun. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*; Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 50–130; Heims, *The Cybernetics Group*; Pickering, *The Cybernetic Brain*; Tiqqun, *Tout a Failli, Vive Le Communisme!*, 223–342.

³ See Peter Galison for a discussion of the wartime origins of cybernetics. Galison, “The Ontology of the Enemy.”

⁴ For an early “social” application of cybernetics, see the essays collected in Bateson. Cybernetics becomes a robust science of all social systems – the state, the economy, the family, “culture” – with its passage into “second-order cybernetics” and finally, from there, into Niklas Luhmann’s phenomenologically-inflected extension of cybernetics, called “systems theory.” Jameson links Luhmann’s systems theory with the ideology of neoliberalism itself, and sees it as a naturalization of market relations. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*; Foerster, “Cybernetics of Cybernetics,” *Understanding Understanding*, 283–287; Luhmann, *Social Systems*; Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, 92.

⁵ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 165–215.

⁶ Weiner, *Hannah Weiner’s Open House*, 23.

⁷ See Peter Bürger on the double-bind of the avant-garde “art into life” thematic. For Bürger, if the avant-garde succeeds in merging art and life, it loses the very critical distance from which it mounted its critique of the abstraction of art from life. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 47–54.

⁸ See McGurl for an interesting discussion of feedback and the related concept of autopoiesis in relation to post-WWII fiction. McGurl links cybernetics to the emphasis on self-consciousness and self-reflexivity in postwar fiction, from meta-fictional cleverness to the abundant stories and novels that take the writerly self as object. McGurl, *The Program Era*, 48–49, 80–86.

⁹ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

¹² Weiner, *Hannah Weiner’s Open House*, 57.

¹³ Perreault, “Street Works in Colorado; Libeskind and Kirkland in Outer Space,” 6.

¹⁴ Weiner, *Hannah Weiner’s Open House*, 57.

¹⁵ Tiqqun, *Tout a Failli, Vive Le Communisme!*, 240, 257. English translation mine.

¹⁶ Spicer, *My Vocabulary Did This to Me*, 373.

¹⁷ Weiner, *Hannah Weiner’s Open House*, 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ Hayek’s seminal essay on the price-function, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” was both influenced by cybernetics and would go on to exert enormous influence on cybernetically-inflected economics (not to mention economics in general). Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society.” For a history of cybernetics and economics, see Mirowski, *Machine Dreams*.

²⁰ Weiner, *Hannah Weiner’s Open House*, 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For an excellent account of Shannon, thermodynamics and information theory see “Self-Reflexive Metaphors in Maxwell’s Demon and Shannon’s Choice: Finding the Passages” Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, 31–60.

²⁴ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, 9–10.

²⁵ Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” 379.

²⁶ This is Von Neumann recommending the term to Claude Shannon: “You should call it ‘entropy’ for two reasons: First, the function is already in use in thermodynamics under that name; second, and more importantly, most people don’t know what entropy really is, and if you use the word ‘entropy’ in an argument you’ll win every time.” Mirowski, *Machine Dreams*, 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁸ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, 21.

²⁹ See note 14.

³⁰ The quoted parts are from Hayles. Mark C. Taylor observes the contradiction as follows” “As if this situation were not confusing enough, Wiener further complicates things by offering a definition of information that appears to be the precise inverse of Shannon’s position. . . . But the difference between Shannon and Wiener is not as deep as it initially appears. Whereas Shannon focuses more on the information one lacks, Wiener focuses on the information one gains.” Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity*, 120–22; Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, 58–59.

³¹ See Alexander Galloway on the history of “protocol” – or decentralized control – in information technology. Galloway, *Protocol*.

³² McCulloch, *White-Collar Workers in Transition*, 3; Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 177–182.

³³ Weiner, *Hannah Weiner’s Open House*, 54. I owe the idea of a relationship between Weiner’s work and Basic English to Rodney Koenke’s paper, “Hannah Weiner and Basic English” delivered at National Poetry Conference: Poetry of the 1970s (Orono, ME) June 2008 <http://vectors.usc.edu/thoughtmesh/publish/117.php>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁶ Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*, 95.

³⁷ For a paper that makes some of these same connections, see Koenke, “Hannah Weiner and Basic English.”

³⁸ For a history of the therblig and the related time and motion studies, see Price, “Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and the Motion Study Controversy, 1907-1930,” 64–72.

³⁹ Weiner, *Code Poems*, 52.

⁴⁰ Perreault, “Review of Code Poems by Hannah Weiner,” 8.

⁴¹ This is close to the position that both Judith Goldman and Patrick Durgin – two of the best critics of Hannah Weiner – make. Both writers emphasize Weiner’s destabilization of the sign, particularly in her later works, and the way that this discloses language’s dependence on extra-textual structures to produce meaning. As Goldman puts it, for Weiner “language [is] an indeterminate, opaque materiality that we ourselves enliven with belief, but also. . . a form of mediation that announce[s] itself as being curiously existentially indefinite, both there and not there.” Durgin, “Psychosocial Disability and Post-Ableist Poetics,” 131–154. Goldman, “Hannah=hannaH: Politics, Ethics, and Clairvoyance in the Work of Hannah Weiner,” 120–161.

⁴² The best book on post-Fordism is Smith, *Technology and Capital in the Age of Lean Production*.

⁴³ See Beer, *Brain of the Firm*; Jackson, *Systems Approaches to Management*; Jessop, *State Theory*, 273–369.

⁴⁴ Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, xci–c.

⁴⁵ It's worth noting here that Bell misunderstands the role of technological innovation – i.e., knowledge – in the labor theory of value as Marx presents it, and therefore his argument that labor value has been superseded in late capitalism remain fundamentally incoherent. Labor-saving innovations allow for the increased extraction of surplus-value, and therefore profits, at two different levels: at the level of individual capitalists and at the level of capital as a whole. An individual capitalist who possesses a unique labor-saving invention will realize more surplus-value – relative surplus-value – because his output per wage will be higher, but once this innovation becomes generalized through mimicry, and the differences between the productive capacity of individual capitalists eliminated, the new technology still produces relative surplus-value as long as it has cheapened the cost of a consumer good, since it therefore lowers the cost of reproducing labor-power, and increases as a result the time that the worker might devote to the production of value for the employer. This latter effect depends not at all upon individual ownership of technological innovations. Where Bell is right, of course, is that there might be no incentive for the individual capitalist to introduce the new invention – and therefore begin its generalization – unless the capitalist can ensure that others can't do the same quickly. But in other cases intellectual proprietorship is not really necessary. A capitalist might feel compelled to introduce a free technology precisely because he fears that others will do so before him.

⁴⁶ One notes especially the emphasis, in his curator's statement for the show, which Kynaston puts on the works as acts of communication or "stimuli," both terms borrowed from the cybernetic discourse of the time: "The general attitude of the artists in this exhibition is certainly not hostile. It is straightforward, friendly, coolly involved, and allows experiences which are refreshing. It enables us to participate, quite often as in a game; at other times it seems almost therapeutic, making us question ourselves and our responses to unfamiliar stimuli. The constant demand is a more aware relation to our natural and artificial environments. There is always the sense of communication. These artists are questioning our prejudices, asking us to renounce our inhibitions, and if they are revealing the nature of art, they are also asking that we reassess what we have always taken for granted as our accepted and culturally conditions aesthetic response to art." McShine, *Information*, 73.

⁴⁷ Graham and Wallis, *Rock My Religion*, xviii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴⁹ Graham, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, Calif.), and Whitney Museum of American Art, *Dan Graham*, 17. Graham cites Paul Ryan's book *Cybernetics of the Sacred* as an influence. Some of his thinking about information can be traced to Ryan, *Cybernetics of the Sacred*.

⁵⁰ Graham, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, Calif.), and Whitney Museum of American Art, *Dan Graham*, 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Lippard, *Six Years*, 263.

⁵³ Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," 510.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 506–507, 510.

⁵⁵ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," 520.

⁵⁶ Pelzer, *Dan Graham*, 42.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ One should note the resemblance between Dan Graham's experimental conjunction of price and information and Friedrich Hayek's seminal essay "The Use of Knowledge in Society," an argument against "planned" or centralized command economies which claimed that the price signal (redefined as information) and the exchange relations of the market are the only way to efficiently allocate resources in a complex, modern economy. For Hayek, the economic organization of society is about the trading of information – price, in other words, is communication, a communication that is one and the same with organization, as in Weiner. According to these terms, class society and a severe division of labor are necessary because there is no way to uniformly distribute the highly-localized and variable "information" upon which economic activity depends. Because functional differentiation is a necessity, price as a social sign must reassemble the information that no single person can possess:

Fundamentally, in a system where the knowledge of the relevant facts is dispersed among many people, prices can act to coordinate the separate actions of different people in the same way as subjective values help the individual to coordinate the parts of his plan. (526)

Note, of course, how he relies not only upon terms borrowed from communication theory but on a language of homeostasis or economic equilibrium as well:

It is more than a metaphor to describe the price system as a kind of machinery for registering change, or a system of telecommunications which enables individual producers to watch merely the movement of a few pointers, as an engineer might watch the hands of a few dials, in order to adjust their activities to changes of which they may never know more than is reflected in the price movement. Of course, these adjustments are probably never "perfect" in the sense in which the economist conceives of them in his equilibrium analysis. But I fear that our theoretical habits of approaching the problem with the assumption of more or less perfect knowledge on the part of almost everyone has made us somewhat blind to the true function of the price mechanism and led us to apply rather misleading standards in judging its efficiency. The marvel is that in a case like that of a scarcity of one raw material, without an order being issued, without more than perhaps a handful of people knowing the cause, tens of thousands of people whose identity could not be ascertained by months of investigation, are made to use the material or its products more sparingly; i.e., they move in the right direction. This is enough of a marvel even if, in a constantly changing world, not all will hit it off so perfectly that their profit rates will always be maintained at the same constant or "normal" level. (527)

Without using the term, Hayek is describing the price system in terms of feedback. His term for this is "catallaxy" – by which he means a "spontaneous social order." Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society."

⁵⁹ See for instance Michel Foucault on the theory of "human capital." Certain strains of American neoliberal economic theory redefine the worker's wage as the earnings received from "human capital." As a result "the worker himself appears as a sort of enterprise for himself" (225). Workers are thus asked to treat their own capacities as investments to be cultivated, developed and refined. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 215–237.

⁶⁰ Zuboff, *In the Age of the Smart Machine*, 395.

⁶¹ Seltzer and Bentley, *The Creative Age*, 9.

⁶² Graham and Alberro, *Two-Way Mirror Power*, 54.

⁶³ de Bruyn, "Topological Pathways of Post-Minimalism," 53–58.

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- ⁶⁴ Graham and Alberro, *Two-Way Mirror Power*, 55.
⁶⁵ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 191.
⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.
⁶⁷ Graham and Alberro, *Two-Way Mirror Power*, 52.
⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.
⁶⁹ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 431.

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Goldsmith, “Journal, Day Three.”

² Some Marxist thinkers – especially those associated with Italian autonomist Marxism, such as Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno and Franco Berardi – have attempted to reckon with the rise of white-collar and service work, often in terms that are not all that different from Bell’s. Like him, many of these authors claim a suspension of the laws of labor value occurs once knowledge becomes a primary driver of capital accumulation. Despite their superior analytical power, these theories have a tendency to underplay the extent to which mundane forms of informationalized, post-industrial work have predominated, rather than the technical work they assume is central: filing, typing, entering data in spreadsheets, sorting mail, producing internal documents and memoranda, administering the flows of money, bodies and goods.

³ Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 216–354.

⁴ Blackwelder, *Now Hiring*.

⁵ On this development, see, for instance, Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*: “Work is being redefined as both literally female or feminized, whether performed by men or women. To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force; seen less as workers than as servers; subjected to time arrangements on and off the paid job that make a mockery of a limited work day.” Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 149–182.

⁶ The name implies, as Sharon Hart Strom notes, “that women brought their sexuality to the office, where it could be evaluated by men, but . . . also indicates that women were there to take care of their ‘office husbands’, to perform domestic housekeeping and organization chores, and to remain in subservient positions.” Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*, 2.

⁷ Vickery, *Leaving Lines of Gender*, 150–166; Nelson, *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions*, 99–130; Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance*, 149–161.

⁸ “Reproductive labor” refers not only to biological reproduction but to the social reproduction of workers – in other words, the labor-power which capitalism needs – on a daily *and* generational basis. Such a term refers to all of the caretaking work – most of it unpaid – which is necessary for the reproduction of the labor-power of the working class, whether the provision of meals, child-rearing, or training and education. I reserve the term “domestic” labor for the specific form of reproductive labor which takes place in the home – in other words, housework. In the 1970s, significant debates among Marxists feminists (and anti-Marxist feminists) attempted to clarify the precise relationship of these forms of labor to wage-labor and capital accumulation. For summaries, see Malos, *The Politics of Housework*, 1–33; Vogel, *Woman Questions*, 58–65. See also Dalla Costa and James, Federici, and Mies for important contributions to these debates. Costa and James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*; Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*; Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.

⁹ Mayer, *The Desires of Mothers To Please Others In Letters*, 208.

¹⁰ Mayer, *Memory*, 153.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹² For accounts of the importance of the Hegelian logic of the “moment” to Marx’s conception of capital, see Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*; Uchida, *Marx’s Grundrisse and Hegel’s Logic*.

¹³ Mayer, *Memory*, 7.

¹⁴ Ngai, “The Zany Science: Post-Fordist Performance and the Problem of Fun,” 28; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 174–231.

¹⁵ Ngai, “The Zany Science: Post-Fordist Performance and the Problem of Fun,” 25, 48; Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*.

¹⁶ Hochschild, *The Time Bind*.

¹⁷ One of the more interesting accounts of these crossings and reversals can be found in Nona Glazer’s study of what she calls “work transfer,” defined as “the logical and straightforward attempt by some capitalists to insert the consumer into the work process.” Glazer, “Servants to Capital: Unpaid Domestic Labor and Paid Work,” 145. Unlike other attempts to square feminist and Marxist analysis by suggesting that unpaid domestic labor produces surplus value, however, Glazer is more rigorous and less over-reaching in her analysis, suggesting that, like exploitation in commercial enterprises in general, such unpaid consumer labor is only *indirectly* productive of surplus value. However, unpaid labor is still dominated and subsumed by capital. For instance, in retail (one of her case studies), the shift from full-service to self-service (that is, from a system where clerks locate and gather purchases for customers to a system where customers gather their own purchases) means a transfer of activities from worker to consumer, and thus a reduction in wage costs (as well as a temporary increase in profits): “The *work transfer* to consumers means that commercial capitalists hire fewer workers: consumers work in their place and the organization is altered to eliminate some steps in the work process (e.g., consumers locate and collect merchandise, while the prepackaging of goods eliminates measuring and bagging)” (159). Glazer makes clear the doubleness of the doubling under discussion here: at the same time as unwaged women’s work is transformed into waged activity, the remaining unwaged work is rationalized by capital in order to speed up the accumulation process. In the face of such transformations, the bourgeois notion of a dividing line between public and private breaks down.

¹⁸ Mayer, *Memory*, 8.

¹⁹ Mayer, “Memory (typescript).”

²⁰ A terminological note is in order: the term “reproduction” has a double meaning. Most explicitly, it refers to that part of social activity which is tasked with reproducing labor-power. But one also speaks of “social reproduction,” a term which refers to the totality of social activity – in other words, the entire process by which the capital-labor relationship is reproduced. See Chapters 23 and 24 from *Capital Volume I*, on “simple” and “expanded” reproduction, for a use of the term in this way. Marx, *Capital*, 711–751. In the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx suggests that production is a general category and that production, circulation and consumption in their specific senses might all be “moments” of the larger category of production. That is, production is both the general and specific category: “Production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over all the other moments as well.” Marx, *Grundrisse*, 99. Likewise, the interventions of feminist theory within Marxism might be seen as having encouraged us to think of “reproduction” rather than “production” as the general category that predominates over itself and all of the other categories, since capital must not only accumulate but (re)produce the conditions which make accumulation

possible. Once “reproductive labor” in its specific sense comes into view as a crucial aspect of capitalist production, from that moment on everything comes to seem part of “social reproduction” rather than social production *per se*.

²¹ I borrow here from the expanded Marxist notion of “subsumption” that develops simultaneously among thinkers associated with Italian *Operaismo* and the French ultraleft following the dissemination of the so-called “Missing Sixth Chapter of Capital,” published in English under the title “Immediate Results of the Process of Production” as an appendix to *Capital Volume 1*. In this piece of writing, Marx describes capitalism as passing through the logical and historical phases of first “formal” subsumption and then “real” subsumption. In formal subsumption, there is a wage relation between the capitalist and worker, but the means and methods of labor are the same as precapitalist forms – i.e., weavers become wage-laborers but continue weaving using the same tools as previously. In “real subsumption,” however, capitalists transform the means and methods of production in line with specifically capitalist aims – productivity, efficiency, division of labor, and so forth – as we see in the development of the factory system. After the discovery and distribution of this manuscript, Marxists critical of orthodox Marxism, and looking for a way to repair the flaws of Marxist-Leninism, turn to the notion of “real subsumption” to describe a much more expansive process of subsumption and transformation that refashions not just the workplace but the social infrastructure as well. This notion of a “social factory” – as the result of a “real subsumption” of society – will be called by later exponents – describes very well the world of Keynesian, Corporatist or Stalinist states in the early postwar period, “which involve,” as Raniero Panzieri writes, in a seminal article within the *operaismo* tradition, “the progressive extension of planning from the factory to the market, to the external social sphere.” Panzieri, “The Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx Versus the Objectivists,” 59. For a summary of the development of the concept, see Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics*, 69–102. It has gone mostly unremarked that, at around the same time, Jacques Camatte develops a remarkably similar analysis based upon a reading of the “Immediate Results of the Process of Production,” in which he “extend[s] Marx’s range of concepts from the factory to the whole of society.” Camatte, *Capital and Community: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx*, 71–72. Needless to say, the real subsumption of society must by necessity involve the real subsumption of the home, housework, and reproductive labor more generally.

²² Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 109.

²³ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III.

²⁵ Mayer, *Memory*, 78.

²⁶ See Andrew Ross for a similar point. Though his article deals with the regimenting of art as such, he acknowledges that the most significant effect is the generalization of the “mentality” of artists’ work across the entire economy, and not just among so-called “creatives”: “[The] traditional profile of the artist as unattached and adaptable to circumstance is surely now coming into its own as the ideal definition of the postindustrial knowledge worker: comfortable in an ever-changing environment that demands creative shifts in communication with different kinds of clients and partners; attitudinally geared toward production that requires long, and often unsocial, hours; and accustomed, in the sundry exercise of their mental labor, to a contingent, rather than a fixed, routine of self-application.” Ross, “The Mental Labor Problem,” 11.

²⁷ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 112.

²⁸ Ross, “The Mental Labor Problem,” 11.

²⁹ Mayer, *Memory*, 114–115.

³⁰See David Beckerman's "The Meaning of Multiskilling" for a deflation of the myth of multiskilling in the auto industry. For Beckerman "multiskilling is premised on rigidly described work routines." That is, it is built upon deskilled labor, rather than in distinction to it. "Multiskilling," as he writes, "can be the veneer that hides a new round of quicker, swifter, faster." Beckerman, *Training for What?*, 28–42.

³¹ Burchell, Ladipo, and Wilkinson, *Job Insecurity and Work Intensification*, 45.

³² See "Multitasking among Working Families: A Strategy for Dealing with the Time Squeeze," in Christensen and Schneider, *Workplace Flexibility*.

³³ Tremblay, "Change and Continuity: Transformations in the Gendered Division of Labour in a Context of Technological and Organizational Change," 295.

³⁴ Mayer, *Memory*, 44.

³⁵ Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, 9–48; Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions."

³⁶ Though minimalism and pop art mime a logic of industrial production and manual labor, they are often much more oriented toward administrative labor than they might seem. Minimalist sculptors frequently phoned in their orders, rather than producing the sculptures themselves. They are thus managerial rather than industrial workers, and it is a short step from producing a sculpture by phone order to treating the order – either on paper, or as a mere act – as the artwork itself, something conceptual artists often did. See Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers*; Molesworth, "Work Ethic."

³⁷ Fraser and Alberro, "How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction."

³⁸ Liu, *The Laws of Cool*, 169.

³⁹ Jameson, *Cultural Turn*, 72; Liu, *The Laws of Cool*, 169.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Kittler describes the moment of digitization as essentially destroying the distinct phenomenological character of the previously separate media: "The general digitization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. . . And once optical fiber networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other. . . Modulation, transformation, synchronization; delay, storage, transposition; scrambling, scanning, mapping – a total media link on a digital base will erase the very concept of medium." Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 2–3.

⁴¹ Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁴ For an interesting account of the relationship between technology and memory, see Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 2, 99–187. Stiegler's main contention is that all technology is a form of memory. Modern technology, however, effects an "industrialization of memory" which makes the individuation of separate people, each with their own time, impossible.

⁴⁵ See note 17.

⁴⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 1021. As Moishe Postone and others argue, capitalist value – in other words, value based upon "abstract labor time" or "socially necessary labor time" – can only really come into being at the moment at which multiple capitalists compete with each other by trying to reduce the amount of labor expended in production, chiefly through the introduction of new methods and technologies. Before this process of "real subsumption" begins, there can be no universal measure of value based upon time, since time has not yet been made, in practical terms, the chief measure of potential profits. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 277–285.

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- ⁴⁷ Mayer, *Memory*, 7–8.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53, 116.
- ⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 342.
- ⁵⁰ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 470.
- ⁵¹ Marx, *Capital*, 548–549.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 504.
- ⁵³ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 12.
- ⁵⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 693.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 695.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 706.
- ⁵⁷ Mayer, *Memory*, 189.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, *Memory*, 189.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *Memory*, 28.
- ⁶¹ Marx, *Capital: Volume Three*, 244–253; Marx, *Capital*, 773–776.
- ⁶² Marx, *Capital: Volume Three*, 244.
- ⁶³ Duménil and Lévy, *Capital Resurgent*, 21–68; Mattick, *Business as Usual*; Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, 1–40, 97–246.
- ⁶⁴ MacDiarmid, *Three Hymns to Lenin*, 22.
- ⁶⁵ Mayer, *Memory*, 134.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

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