

Lies, Lawlessness and Disbelief: An Attempt at Thinking Art and Capital

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*this sentence is a lie*

## 1. *conceptual capitalism and risk management*

Capitalism is no longer the simple fordist system of production and consumption. It has, in its post-fordist lifetime become a more and more complex and intangible form. Today, it is a conceptual capitalism that has become unmoored, free floating, and all encompassing. As it continues, capital has the amazing ability to subsume everything it encounters, including criticism and resistance.<sup>1</sup> This proliferation seems to leave little room to resist – there is no longer a way to step outside and critique, since the death/failure of *really existing socialism*,<sup>2</sup> but this means only that critique must come from within, which is no small feat. It is a method riddled with paradox and self-defeat, but this perhaps reflects the nature of capital itself – as a system it offers up many moments of fissure or collapse that can be manipulated. The vastness of capitalism and the complexity of the bureaucracy necessary to hold together a system of “order” that directly contradicts chaos theory inevitably begins to circle and break down. It is these moments of circuitry, of fissure, that this essay will focus on.

Contemporary capitalism is conceptual capitalism – it runs on the idea of money in the form of loans, mortgages, hedge funds, junk bonds; it is fictional money and a fictional market based on an elaborate system of risk management, which implies some intrinsic (but impossible) knowledge of the future. It also seems that this fictional market can be bolstered by belief alone. *‘The financial crisis of 2008 showed enormous sums of money spent not on a real, concrete problem, but rather to restore belief in the market. Capital, in all its intangible forms, is the Real of our lives’.*<sup>3</sup>

If what Žižek states is true, and capitalism can be equated with Lacanian theory of the Real<sup>4</sup>, it again seems to close down access to it further still. It is opposed to reality, which encompasses the Imaginary and the Symbolic and it is located beyond them, out of reach, but exerting influence. It is undifferentiated, without fissure, always in its place.<sup>5</sup> It is impossible to imagine, to verbalize, to integrate in the Symbolic order. But perhaps this impossibility is the moment, the fissure, which can bring about its demise.

The signification of the Real is attempted in the Symbolic order, but is impossible. The Symbolic structures everything, and through repetition is subject to the death drive. That is, in its constant return to enjoyment the Symbolic transcends beyond pleasure in search of death. This could be seen as some radical call to accelerationism, a desire to weaponize capitalism against itself, and in a way it is, but not in the apocalyptic sense that accelerationism implies, pushing it to its extreme.<sup>6</sup> Rather, a radicalism could exist in simply exploiting these impossibilities, finding weak points in rationality, and the supposed rationality of capitalist systems, in its inherent bureaucracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Place and Fitterman, *Notes On Conceptualisms*, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> For Lacan, psychoanalytic experience is divided into three orders, the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Each aspect is distinct, yet interdependent.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, “Seminar on the Purloined Letter,” 55.

<sup>6</sup> Noys, *Persistence of the Negative*, 5.

This Symbolic capitalism is contingent in regards to the Real; it does not spring from it<sup>7</sup>, but is created out of a desire to verbalize the impossible, to understand something that is impossible to understand, to socialize this intangible system. It could be said that it is impossible to speculate on the origins of the Symbolic once it is in place, generated as it is from a primal prohibition, a negation, *le-nom-(non)-du-pere*<sup>8</sup>; once capitalism is in place, it becomes impossible to see an alternative to the universe it creates.<sup>9</sup> This is mostly due to the all-encompassing nature of conceptual capitalism. Perhaps then, the ability to catch it in a paradox, in a state of bureaucratic failure, could open up a space to trip it up and think *other* and could offer a *passage a l'acte*.

*other other other*  
*say it three times in the mirror*

Employing the idea of a contingent conceptual capitalism, that is, one which is not necessary, which is indifferent to existence, one can argue that in fact it is very possible to think of the *other* to capitalism. It is logic and rationality that trips it up, that prevents any thought of the alternative, just as it is strictly impossible to think infinity, or an ancestral time prior to human existence. Science can prove facts about both ancestral time and descendant time (prior to and after the death of consciousness), but philosophy is paradoxically stuck with the idea of a relation to the world before or after the existence of thought<sup>10</sup>. How can thought think the death of thought?<sup>11</sup> According to Hakim Bey it is impossible to really conceive of death – it appears rather as ‘*an unpleasant vagueness*’<sup>12</sup> – the death considered is never *actual* death. Similarly, how can one think anti-capital from within conceptual capitalism? If it is permitted that both the universe and capitalism are contingent, and therefore completely indifferent to human existence and human thought, then the possibility for alternatives opens up.

A speculative and realistic approach to *thinking* capital can restore our ability to resist.

*Once it is granted that the tension between equality and liberty cannot be reconciled and that there can only be contingent hegemonic forms of stabilization of their conflict, it becomes clear that, once the very idea of an alternative to the existing configuration of power disappears, what disappears also is the very possibility of a legitimate form of expression for the resistances against the dominant power relations.*<sup>13</sup>

If conceptual capitalism encompasses everything, there is less and less physical space for resistance, unless resistance moves into the conceptual realm as well. The idea, the imaginary, the psychical: these all offer a variety of forms of resistance to a boundless

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*, 238.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 5, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 223.

<sup>12</sup> Bey, *T.A.Z.*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 5.

capital. For the concept, in its true dematerialized form, is capable of altering systems, of bolstering illogic, of predicting the future. It is the very boundaries of thought, beyond which lies psychosis (the lack of the Symbolic, or capital) that prove to be integral in terms of non-knowledge and the unknown, a knowledge of the unknown, or a thinking of the impossible. Perhaps lies, fiction and the radical un-real can be the site of production for a capitalist alternative.

*Ideas are characterized as both distinct and obscure. They are distinct insofar as they are perfectly differentiated via the reciprocal determination of relations and the complete determination of points – but obscure because they are not yet differentiated – since all Ideas coexist with one another in a state of virtual perplexation.*<sup>14</sup>

Ideas are simultaneously two things, distinct and obscure. Graham Harman introduces the idea as something not only possible, but actual insofar as an idea is thought as an image. This introduces all things *possible* to the realm of the *actual*, even if only in thought.<sup>15</sup>

The contemporary mantra of *risk management* as a fundamental economic strategy is in itself paradoxical. If, in fact, a risk could be managed, then it would not really be considered a risk. This term depends on the belief in an organized system of capitalism that extends both directions through time – the idea that it is a constant that can be depended upon, is predictable, forever. In fact, the amount of bureaucracy that goes into even the tiniest element of conceptual capitalism manifests itself through many circular moments, many points of fissure. In compatibility with Gödel's Theorem of incompleteness, no system can be totally defined without incurring some kind of paradox. There will always be statements that are true, but that cannot be proved within the system. If the system is capable of proving certain basic facts, then one particular truth the system cannot prove is the consistency of the system itself.<sup>16</sup>

*Risk management* is nothing more than a reaffirmation of our collective *belief* in the predictive qualities of financialization, our collective *consent* to the idea that an intangible, unmoored, all-encompassing economic system can be predicted. In fact, prediction alone is a falsity that humans fall prey to frequently; the notion of the future as anything other than a continuation of the past is a mental operation at which the mind continues to fail. When thinking of tomorrow, the mind just projects another yesterday.<sup>17</sup> The future, or rather a human relation to the future, is deemed philosophically impossible. After all, how can consciousness think something devoid of consciousness?<sup>18</sup>

It is impossible for thought to think an object or event in-itself – in this sense, thought can only experience a relation between the subject and the object-as-given. Lacan argues in his fifth discourse that we do not derive libidinal enjoyment from object relations, but rather it is capital's link of subject-to-object that frustrates and isolates the subject.

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<sup>14</sup> Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 172.

<sup>15</sup> Harman, *Circus Philosophicus*, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Huberman, ed., *For the Blind Man*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Kurant and Taleb, "Unknown Unknowns," 128.

<sup>18</sup> Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 223.

Capitalism is successful in the sense that it produces a continual desire, but no longer satisfies it, which for Lacan - and a world full of neurotics - falls in line with our drives.<sup>19</sup>

Lacan also reorients Marx's analysis of surplus value. An older, more tangible form of capitalism sold objects for more than it cost to make them. This 'surplus value' is what Marx stated that the capitalists stole from the proletariats – it was used by the capitalists for leisure or libidinal enjoyment. Now, capital demands this surplus value to be re-invested at the level of production to create an unrelenting, perpetual motion machine of production and consumption of money by a business in-itself. We are now, according to Lacan, all proletariats, subject to the will of capital that has taken over the role of master from the capitalists themselves.<sup>20</sup>

*The debt circulates on its own orbit, with its own trajectory made up of capital, which, from now on, is free of any economic contingency and moves about in a parallel universe (the acceleration of capital has exonerated money of its involvements with the everyday universe of production, value and utility). It is not even an orbital universe: it is rather ex-orbital, ex-centered, ex-centric, with only a very faint probability that, one day, it might rejoin ours.*<sup>21</sup>

This faint probability is the only thing tying us to capital.

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<sup>19</sup> Declercq, "Lacan on the Capitalist Discourse," 78-79.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> Baudrillard, *Global Debt and Parallel Universe*.

*In 1942 the Ministry of Defense labeled Gruinard Island as X Base. It was an isolated island that had been deemed acceptable for testing the viability of an anthrax weapon, as it was unknown if the spores be able to survive the blast. An anthrax bomb was dropped on a herd of sheep kept in individual crates, their heads in hoods so they could not lick the spores. Of 15 sheep, only 2 survived. The test was repeated with less success as a change in wind direction caused the bomb to land in a peat bog where it sank. The test was moved to Wales.*

*In 1981 operation dark harvest – led by a team of microbiologists – collected soil samples from Gruinard Island, which had since been quarantined. Their demand was for the government to decontaminate the island or the samples would be weaponized and distributed. Two samples were found outside a research facility in Porton Down, and in Blackpool, where the ruling conservative party were meeting.<sup>ii</sup>*

## 2. *unknown unknowns*

Unknown unknowns are intrinsic to this conceptual, contemporary capitalism, and operate as the risk that can eventually cause a system to fail. Failure emerges from the unprecedented, from the unthinkable, from the things you do not know you do not know.<sup>22</sup> Instead of attempting to *predict* these events for market gains, what would it mean to merely acknowledge the paradoxical nature of thinking the unthinkable? *Unthinkable* operates as the other to any thought capacity, and in an attempt to access this impossible, it would be possible to access a non-knowledge, something on the edge of logic, of research, of ideas.

Non-knowledge is not the same as ignorance, but rather references the other of the knowledge system itself, an indeterminate zone between knowledge and ignorance.<sup>23</sup> Huberman addresses this topic in the exhibition catalogue: *For the Blind Man in the Dark Room Searching for the Black Cat that Isn't There*. The phrase was initially attributed to Charles Darwin's description of a mathematician, but here is used to underscore the type of knowledge, the type of logic, that art explores. *A work of art that isn't*. As a method of generating new forms of thinking and unknown circuits of consciousness, visual art often verges on logic.<sup>24</sup>

Quantum physics is constantly pushing the boundaries of the unknown. If these formulations, these theories, constitute the boundary of the known, imagine the possibilities contained in unknown unknowns. This of course is impossible, but in the impossible lays unimaginable possibilities. The acceptance of the fact that there are unknown unknowns and, like dark matter, they are invisible, but make up the majority, could operate as a placeholder for limitless possibilities.<sup>25</sup> The things we do not know are impossible, contradictory and badly behaved; the things, then, that we do not know we do not know could be more radical still in terms of reality and the perception of it –an impossibility for thought, but this is the heart of it, the possibilities contained in the impossible. It is fundamentally possible for *anything* to be true (or conversely false), to be known (or to be unknown)<sup>26</sup>. The more this point is exhumed the more amazing and simultaneously frustrating it can become.

Quantum reality proves that we can alter reality just by looking at it. Photons behave differently under scrutiny than when left to their own devices, which leaves us incapable of describing their behaviour.<sup>27</sup> Einstein asked physicist Niels Bohr if he really believed that the moon disappears when no one is looking at it, to which the retort was “can you prove otherwise?”<sup>28</sup> The answer is of course no, we are incapable of removing ourselves, of removing our relation to the thing-in-itself, of removing the impact of thought from suppositions of reality.

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<sup>22</sup> Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Huberman, *For the Blind Man*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Kurant and Taleb, “Unknown Unknowns,” 131.

<sup>25</sup> Trotta, “Dark Matter,” 84.

<sup>26</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64-65.

<sup>27</sup> *Horizon: What is Reality?*

<sup>28</sup> *Horizon: What is Reality?*

*'Quantum physics is an exciting theory because it is extremely precise, it is mathematically beautiful, it describes everything. It just doesn't make sense.'*<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the language of mathematics is not a language invented in order to describe reality, but rather is the basis on which the physical world manifests, and slowly consciousness grasps more and more of this structure. If the theory is wrong, fundamental physics will hit a roadblock beyond which is it impossible to tread; if the theory is right everything is potentially understandable, dependant on thought's capacity to understand.<sup>30</sup> These fundamentally opposite poles of reality offer, to us, the same plain of comprehension – the capacity of thought, the very limit of which we cannot pass.

Dreamwork, specters, illogic, the impossible – it is where thought begins to break down in terms of accuracy or coherent narrative that it begins to get interesting. On the fringes of thought lie truth, radicalism, subversion and change. And on the fringes of reality are lies, paradox and the imaginary. Does this mean that truth can be found in lies, paradox and the unreal?

The market depends on our belief in it, and our lack of faith can have catastrophic results. So bolstering collective belief in markets is the main strategy for their stabilization. But consciousness is not so simple; the market begins to rely not only on our belief in it, but in our belief in our belief in it<sup>31</sup>, and so on ad infinitum. An infinite regress of belief created in order to prop up that self-same belief. How can consciousness continue to reconcile itself with this infinite regress? In quantum physics, observing photons can change how they behave. In the market, disbelief can cause it to collapse. A ping pong ball, by the time it's bounced nine times factors the gravitational pull of a body standing next to the table into it's bounce, by the 56<sup>th</sup> bounce ever single elementary particle of the universe has to be present in your assumptions<sup>32</sup>. In reality, many things are affected by human existence, but thought, or existence itself is not one of them.

*It is not true that in order to live one has to believe in one's own existence. There is no necessity to that. No matter what, our consciousness is never the echo of our own reality, of an existence set in "real time." But rather it is its echo in "delayed time," the screen of the dispersion of the subject and of its identity - only in our sleep, our unconscious, and our death are we identical to ourselves. Consciousness, which is totally different from belief, is more spontaneously the result of a challenge to reality, the result of accepting objective illusion rather than objective reality. This challenge is more vital to our survival and to that of the human species than the belief in reality and in existence, which always refers to spiritual consolations pertaining to another world. Our world is such as it is, but that does not make it more real in any respect. "The most powerful instinct of man is to be in conflict with truth, and with the real."<sup>33</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> *Horizon: What is Reality?*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 10-11.

<sup>32</sup> Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> Baudrillard, *Radical Thought*, 2.

Asleep, unconscious or dead. These are the three options in which one is identical to oneself. But what does that mean? Harman discusses sleep as a lack of relations. We still exist as pieces that make a physical whole, but the thing we lack in sleep is relations. *'Sleep is our closest approach to the freedom from relations in which we are most ourselves'*<sup>34</sup>

An object, too, can be dormant. It is capable of existing apart from a specific situation, and therefore is capable of existing apart from any situation at all; therefore, it is relationless, or has the possibility to be relationless. Unlike objects, however, this dormancy is not so much a freedom *from* the world, as a dormancy *to* the world, withdrawn, incapable of anything else.

*Yet, in a sense we are always inside the world through the fact that we are made up of pieces – and only therefore are we free, with our components doing the work of liberty on our behalf. For there is an excess in our pieces beyond what is needed to create us, and this excess allows new and unexpected things to happen.*<sup>35</sup>

So perhaps seeking freedom in individuation, in isolation, as the linking of subject to object, in the perpetual delay of satisfaction that capitalism offers is the achievement of the exact opposite of the freedom sought. Perhaps the individual freedom presented by capital and democracy is in fact a relationless sleep that removes the other, the alternative, removes the opportunity for change, and ultimately time itself.

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sleep

Freudian kettle logic is an example, a joke employed by Freud to explore the mind's capacity for self-deception. It is this logic, or rather this illogic that some manages to access the impossible. Kettle logic refers to the thought process of a mind on the defensive. It shows the impossibility of thought or rather it's circular nature, that manages to disregard laws of non-contradiction. It goes as follows:

A neighbour is accused of borrowing a kettle and returning it with a hole. He answers simultaneously that 1) he did not borrow the kettle; 2) it was unbroken when he returned it, and 3) that it was broken when he borrowed it.<sup>36</sup>

Freud uses this to unpack dream logic, during which time mutually exclusive answers or states can easily co-exist. *"Wendy Brown says that dreamwork provides the best model for understanding contemporary forms of power. It produces a confabulated consistency"*

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<sup>34</sup> Harman, *Circus Philosophicus*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Žižek , *The Iraqi Borrowed Kettle*.

that covers over anomalies and contradictions”<sup>37</sup>. Žižek uses Freudian kettle logic to explain the U.S.’s right to wage war on Iraq, and the notion of the pre-emptive strike, which renders events of the future to a fictional or probabilistic past.<sup>38</sup>

Žižek also argues:

*If we postpone our action until we have full knowledge of the catastrophe, we will have acquired that knowledge only when it is too late. The certainty on which to act is never a matter of knowledge, but a matter of belief. If, accidentally, an event takes place, it creates a preceding chain which makes it appear inevitable – Hegelian dialectic of contingency and necessity. In order to confront a disaster – we should accept it as fate, as unavoidable, and then retroactively insert into the past of the future possibilities on which to act in the present.*<sup>39</sup>

This is frighteningly similar to the rhetoric of war used by the right, but employed by the left with regard to environmental disaster. Both the right, and the quite radical left in this instance, are using the same logic of prediction to validate an action. The difference, it seems, is Žižek’s disbelief, or awareness of the impossibility of a situation that requires action despite the fact that the specifics of the situation itself are still largely unknown.

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<sup>37</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Žižek, *The Iraqi Borrowed Kettle*.

<sup>39</sup> Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 151.

*The Rajaneeshee Bioterror Attack was an event in 1984 that incapacitated 750 people in the Dalles, Oregon. It was an attempt by the Rajaneeshee Cult to rig local elections by incapacitating citizens of the town who would ordinarily vote against their candidates. A strain of salmonella was deployed through salad bars at various restaurants around the town, around 10 in total, in the run up to the elections. This was one of only two confirmed bioterror attacks to harm humans, and remains the first and single largest bioterror attack in United States history.<sup>iii</sup> The strain of salmonella was bought legally from a medical supply company in Seattle. Inquiry into the event did not result in a verdict of 'deliberate contamination' until a year later, when a rift in the politics of the cult itself caused information regarding the attack to be disclosed by the cult leader, who then called for an investigation.*

### 3. *system failure*

For both Freud and Marx access to the truth of a system lies in what can appear as a pathological, insignificant or unintentional distortion of the system itself.<sup>40</sup> For Marx the system is society, and the distortion is a crisis; for Freud the system is the psyche and the distortion is a dream or a mistake – both are symptoms, implying the system is accordingly diseased. Through Freudian slips the desire of the unconscious is revealed – these accidents, these failures, lead to *real truth*, real unmediated desire. Lacan called the Freudian unconscious ‘*the knowledge that doesn’t know itself*’, and for Žižek, these are unknown knows.<sup>41</sup>

In psychoanalysis, these parapraxes are thought of as simultaneously a mistake *and* not a mistake. Simultaneous contradiction in thoughts and actions seem to break the laws of non-contradiction, but rather than conform to a hyper-rational, systemic, logical reality, they perhaps offer insight into a more complex structure subjected to chaos theory and illogic. The structures of bureaucracy that employ these contradictory moments were explored frequently in the bureaucratic masterpieces of Franz Kafka. He uses a frustratingly sublime system in his book *The Castle* to draw attention to the everyday experience and proliferation of these systems.

Kafka illuminates the circuitous nature of bureaucracy that simultaneously keeps a system running and necessarily undermines efficiency or productivity. It is maintained, however, as both efficient and productive, because of the very nature of bureaucracy and its unnavigable, hierarchical structure. It eludes critique via an inaccessible complexity and a blameless structure in which no *one* is responsible; the convolution and departmental nature of any system is also a way of postponing any real critique ad infinitum.

In perhaps the most exasperating demonstration of the use of hierarchies, Kafka describes the impossible phone system of the Castle. Although, in theory, it is designed to connect disparate areas and facilitate the dispersal of information, in fact what you get is paradox.

*‘There’s no fixed exchange with the Castle, no central exchange which transmits our calls further. When anybody calls up the Castle from here the instruments in all the subordinate departments ring, or rather they would ring if practically all the departments – I know this for a certainty – didn’t leave their receivers off. Now and then, however, a fatigued official may feel the need of a little distraction, especially in the evenings and at night, and may hang the receiver on. Then we get an answer, but of course an answer that’s a practical joke. And that’s very understandable too. For who would take the responsibility of interrupting, in the middle of the night, the extremely important work that goes on furiously the whole time, with a message about his own private troubles? I can’t comprehend how even a stranger can imagine that when he calls up Sordini, for example, it’s Sordini that answers.’<sup>42</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> Žižek, *First As Tragedy*, 101.

<sup>41</sup> Žižek, *What Rumsfeld Doesn’t Know*.

<sup>42</sup> Kafka, *The Castle*, 73-74.

*'I didn't know it was like that, certainly,' said K. 'I couldn't know of all these peculiarities, but I didn't put much confidence in those telephone conversations and I was always aware that the only things of any importance were those that happened in the Castle itself.'*

*'No,' said the Superintendent, holding firmly onto the word, 'these telephone replies from the Castle certainly have meaning, why shouldn't they? How could a message given by an official from the Castle not be important?'*<sup>43</sup>

Mark Fisher discusses this logic in relation to the contemporary structure of a call centre, and relates that in turn to the structure of capital itself. He describes a negative theology, which is a product of capital's illogic – even though the core is inaccessible, we cannot stop searching for it. It is not that there is *nothing*, but that there are many layers of *some things*, none of which are capable of exercising responsibility.<sup>44</sup>

Reality is structured in the same manner, modeled off this centreless call centre. The Symbolic, which is meant to structure everything, including the psyche, is comparable. The big Other – Lacan's radical alterity of language and law, is thus centreless too; the authority it commands is partially in place due to its inaccessibility. Fisher goes on to describe it as a fiction.

*The big other is the collective fiction, the symbolic structure – it can never be encountered in itself; instead, we only ever confront its stand-ins... One important dimension of the big Other is that it does not know everything... When the illusion that the big Other did not know can no longer be maintained, the incorporeal fabric holding the social system together disintegrates.*<sup>45</sup>

The big Other here is represented as fiction and illusion. It passes off responsibility by claiming ignorance to the things it does not know that it knows: its disavowed beliefs or unknown knows.<sup>46</sup> Žižek uses these terms to discuss how the abuse of power in cases like Abu Ghraib are justified by claiming a convoluted ignorance. Once that façade of ignorance is broken down, and becomes clearly a non-knowledge, simultaneously known and unknown, the system begins to falter. It is fiction, and non-knowledge here that give the big Other its power.

As Nicolas Nassim-Taleb points out, it is the *manipulation* of facts that produces the appearance of knowledge or causality. Consequently, the true/false binary begins to blur with fact bolstering fiction, and fiction communicating fact in a reciprocal relationship that leaves little room for knowledge.

*We want to be told stories which can provide consequential distortions of reality. Could it be that fiction reveals truth while non-fiction is a harbour for the liar? Could it be that fables and stories are closer to the truth than is the thoroughly*

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>44</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Žižek, *The Iraqi Borrowed Kettle*.

*fact checked news? Just consider that the newspapers try to get impeccable facts, but weave them into a narrative in such a way as to convey the impression of causality (and knowledge).*<sup>47</sup>

Access to truth lies in fiction, lies, illogic. Freudian slips reveal truth. All these designations of known and unknown become a paradoxical web of narrative, and truth is lost somewhere in the midst of it all. To claim that truth is the ultimate goal of a system, or resistance to that system is not so simple either. But perhaps a continued search for truth over *meaning*, a prioritizing of understanding non-knowledge over a *belief* in the known, or even a revelry in the inaccessibility of truth itself and settling for the glimmer that these system failures can cast toward truth is enough.

Ray Brassier states that he is a nihilist because of his dedication to truth over meaning:

*Like Nietzsche, I think nihilism is a consequence of the 'will to truth'. But unlike Nietzsche, I do not think nihilism culminates in the claim that there is no truth. Nietzsche conflated truth with meaning, and concluded that since the latter is always a result of human artifice, the former is nothing but a matter of convention.*<sup>48</sup>

This conflation of truth and meaning ultimately results in paradox. In the ultimate disavowal of truth, Nietzsche undermines the rationale behind relinquishing illusion in the first place. If, via nihilism, the pursuit of truth results in no-truth, it attains solely an infinite regress. If nothing is true, then the statement “nothing is true” is also not true.<sup>49</sup>

This negation of meaning is a method to embrace the inherently chaotic – a universe as the structure in which the conditions for chance arise, but not itself subjected to these same conditions. Just because the physical laws of nature do not change, does not mean that they cannot or will not.<sup>50</sup> This is the line of reasoning put forth by Quentin Meillassoux as an argument for the necessity of contingency. If nothing but contingency is necessary, then one is forced to confront the absolute possibility involved in a universe that is indifferent to existence. There is no over-arching meaning or order, simply hyperchaos. Rationality, then, is the realization of this hyperchaos; the rational end of a phenomenological worldview reduced solely to the experience of relations or givenness.

*'Chaos theory predicts that any universal control system is impossible.'*<sup>51</sup> But capitalism is a system of bureaucracy that strives for order, for this universal control in spite of chaos. It actually begins to resemble chaos in its desire to circumvent chaos, as order becomes so overwhelming and inefficient that elements, cracks, fissures can be seen as disorder. And yet *'chaos is too much of a threat to the imperial dream of order'*.<sup>52</sup>

The notion of subtraction as proposed by both Badiou and Hegel involves a three-tiered interpretation of the word – “1) to withdraw, disconnect; 2) to reduce the complexity of a

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<sup>47</sup> Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Thacker, “Nihil Unbound,” 460.

<sup>50</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 84-85.

<sup>51</sup> Bey, *T.A.Z.*, 108.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 120.

*situation to its minimal difference; 3) to destroy the existing order.*"<sup>53</sup> In this sense, subtraction offers simultaneously a withdrawal from the hegemonic field and in doing so an intervention into that same field.<sup>54</sup>

*One should withdraw from being immersed in a situation in such a way that it renders visible the "minimal difference" sustaining the situation's multiplicity, and thereby causes its disintegration.*<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 129.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

*The Romanian government, in its attempt to tackle the recession, has passed a new law to impose tax on the practices of witches and fortune-tellers for the first time. Witches protested the new tax law by cursing the president and his government, and throwing poisonous mandrake root into the Danube river, so evil will befall them<sup>iv</sup>. Since then, Romania has passed yet another new law affecting witches and fortune-tellers. Practitioners can now be fined or even face prison time if their predictions or spells do not come true.<sup>v</sup>*

#### 4. *transcendental nihilism or negative resistance*

*While nihilism is often dismissed as a disenchantment with the world that doesn't make sense, and that doesn't make sense "for us", it can also be regarded as the pinnacle of thought itself, taken to its logical conclusion*<sup>56</sup>

Nihilism, in this sense, is not an existential crisis of meaning that needs to be overcome, but is, rather, the rational conclusion of thought without privileging anthropocentric beginnings of solipsistic or phenomenological rhetoric. It is truth, thought in a universe ambivalent toward existence, meaning, and certainly the conflation of the two.

Negativity allows an unmoored exploration of nihilism that can surpass the boundaries of solipsism and phenomenology in order to access an imaginary, conceptual zone. Potentially this removal of the subjective experience from a philosophy of nihilism can allow it to transcend a simple disregard for human life, in order to extend beyond the idea of existence or the finite. A space begins to emerge for consciousness to think about the things it is impossible to think about, like the end of consciousness, or infinity. It unmoors the possibilities of thought from thought itself.

*I consider myself a nihilist precisely to the extent that I...believe in the difference between truth and falsity, reality and appearance. In other words, I am a nihilist precisely because I still believe in truth, unlike those whose triumph over nihilism is won at the cost of sacrificing truth. I think that it is possible to understand the meaninglessness of existence, and that this capacity to understand meaning as a regional or bounded phenomenon marks a fundamental progress in cognition.*<sup>57</sup>

At least a realistic negative or misanthropic reaction to contemporary free-floating capitalism could facilitate its demise. The circuitous, adaptive, engulfing properties of capitalism offer little physical space for resistance. Many radical movements are slowly co-opted by capital, slowly removed from their original context in order that they actually propel the will of capital. May '68 is gradually transformed in thought from a symptom of capital to an effect of capitalist reason.<sup>58</sup>

The essential other to this capital lies in our *disbelief* in it. Resistance to faith and poor logic of religion is an unwavering commitment to disbelief and disobedience. Vitalism and affirmation offer nothing but a weak solution to the problems of capital – rather than translate a negative reaction to an existing structure into an irrational (although positive) desire to give meaning to the fundamentally meaningless, why not revel in the disappointment and negativity of a strong, symptomatic reaction? The laws of thermodynamics state that the energy of a system must be conserved – but this unnecessary, irrational, conversion from a negative reaction to a meaningless affirmation results only in entropy, in a loss of the overall energy.

The big Other is omnipotent, it exists simultaneously everywhere and nowhere,

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<sup>56</sup> Thacker, "Nihil Unbound," 459.

<sup>57</sup> Brassier, "I Am a Nihilist."

<sup>58</sup> Noys, *Persistence of the Negative*, 69.

internalized to such a degree that it no longer needs to manifest, but there are moments of vision, of escape from this Symbolic order. In psychoanalysis, these moments are known as a *passage à l'acte*, and signify an exit from the symbolic. They are also, more often than not, traumatic, with everything pathological the word implies. These are the moments to search for, the negative, traumatic, moments, which occur with the slippage of bureaucracy. Moments that cause an odd, useless, and fundamentally traumatic experience.

Game theory attempts to mathematize the social relationships between humans, to describe the structure of the big Other through the actions of encountering the other (Lacan's *objet petit a*). It essentially analyzes situations in which one person excels at the expense of another, and how one can rationalize the other person's thoughts and actions in order to benefit your own. Essentially, every action tries to account for what the other person will do, in an attempt to come out on top. This theory was developed by John Nash, who decided that people would always act in their own personal interests at the expense of the other. This model of social behavior had at its heart a dark vision of a self-interested, distrustful human, and slowly it filtered into economic theory. The theory became truth, and was applied to warrant a new form of capitalism and to reinforce the theories of economist, Friedrich von Hayek. He proposed that individual freedom would stabilize the market, if everyone lived as selfish, isolated and suspicious of the other.<sup>59</sup>

For Lacan *'the self is an Imaginary construct, made of parts of one like an other so to be recognized as one like an other, thus made contingent.'*<sup>60</sup> It is a desire to be recognized as another by another that forces the constructions of these imaginary isolated selves. Every action is the product of strategy. Nash was, however, suffering from paranoid schizophrenia during the time he developed game theory.

Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm and political theorist Isaiah Berlin both discussed a divided concept of freedom – split between a negative and positive pole. Fromm discussed negative freedom in an evolutionary sense, not as a freedom *to*, but rather a freedom *from*. Thus negative freedom, for Fromm, is *'namely freedom from instinctual determination of his actions'*<sup>61</sup>, a humanity conscious of existence and therefore free from base instincts.

Berlin called it negative liberty, and argued that it alone could prevent tyranny. In both cases of a negative versus positive ideal of freedom, however, the two sides become indistinguishable. The argument presented for two separate types of freedom is theoretically plausible, but practically impossible, for neither side can exist without the other. What remains is nothing but the worst of both, neither a freedom *from* nor *to*.

Berlin's negative liberty demands that systems of power should be restrained – that individual freedom could again create stability. Laws are in place only to ensure that an action does not encroach on someone else's right to freedom. The clause of its implementation, and where it differs from positive liberty, is that the promoters of

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<sup>59</sup> *The Trap, Fuck You Buddy.*

<sup>60</sup> Place and Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms*, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 26.

negative liberty must never believe that it is an ideal solution, that it is the best and final answer, because violence and coercion ensues. If a final utopian solution is decided upon, nothing becomes too big a sacrifice in order to achieve that goal, and with this forceful implementation comes the opposite of the original utopian solution.<sup>62</sup>

Likewise, negative resistance must never believe it is the final answer, and in resisting conversion to affirmation, circumvents this. Negative resistance is nothing but the belief that disappointment creates potentiality, whereas any assuredness in an unknown solution does nothing but impose limitations and restrict potential. The same differentiation can be seen in Badiou's distinction between destruction and subtraction:

*...destruction is correlated with the bad infinite of trying to track the real to a final, pure and ineliminable identity which always remains out of reach and so which thus fuels further cycles of destruction. In contrast subtraction does not produce the real as an identity, but as a gap to always be kept open.*<sup>63</sup>

Herein lies the fundamental strength of negativity: it does not purport to offer an essentializing solution. A solution, in this sense, produces nothing but an infinite regress of trying to realize itself, cycling through violence and coercion in order to actualize, but actually achieving only a coercive meta-solution requiring the application of yet another escape route, yet another solution. Negativity, or subtraction for Badiou, opens a space, and it is this autonomous space that can in turn be removed from capital.

*Today, Badiou argues, to stay faithful to communism requires an 'originary subtraction' capable of creating a new space of independence and autonomy from the dominant laws of the situation. ...Badiou puts his Faith in the creation of independent 'zones' or 'spaces' of resistance that can be subtracted from the laws of capital and the state.*<sup>64</sup>

In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, a harmonious civilization is created through control and indoctrination. There are no extreme emotions or complicated relationships – the structure and simplicity keeps society happy, but ultimately empty. What is missing is the futile human desire to allow thought to reach its natural conclusion, and to find that conclusion, ultimately, depressing. The character of the Savage, introduced into this society eventually subtracts himself from it, not by attempting to destroy it, but by remove and negativity. He demands something *other*, he demands the right to be unhappy.

*'... I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.'*  
*'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'*  
*'All right, then,' said the Savage defiantly, 'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.'*  
*'Not to mention the right to grow old, and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the*

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<sup>62</sup> *The Trap, We Will Force You to Be Free.*

<sup>63</sup> Noys, *Persistence of the Negative*, 137.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

*right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.' There was a long silence. 'I claim them all,' said the Savage at last.*<sup>65</sup>

Unhappiness, today, is treated like a disease. The rate of depression is climbing furiously, especially among younger generations, generations that have known nothing other than conceptual capitalism, and the pervasion of psychological disorders. In a recent study, Psychological Science reports that not only are angry people more likely to make automatic judgments about social groups, but so are happy people. Researchers believe that this is due to a lack of analytical thought in the happy subject.<sup>66</sup> People experiencing sadness, on the other hand, are more likely to think. *"Sadness, however, has been shown to promote systematic processing of information that, in turn, decreases stereotypic judgments."*<sup>67</sup> Perhaps happy people are more likely to be bigots.

Hatred, here, is characterized not simply as ignorance, but ignorance of ignorance. With negativity, with analytical thought, with a meaningless return to contemplation, a space begins to emerge in which *(non)knowledge* becomes not only possible, but emancipatory.

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<sup>65</sup> Huxley, *Brave New World*, 211-212.

<sup>66</sup> Holt, "Against Happiness."

<sup>67</sup> Bartlett et al, "Prejudice from Thin Air," 319.

*Studies have shown a seemingly weird correlation between IMF loans and the frequency of cases of tuberculosis. A simple explanation implicates the IMF standards of 'financial discipline' in the rise of TB. This financial discipline includes cuts to public spending and therefore public health services, at which point humanitarians have to intervene as 'charity' due to the appalling health conditions of the, now economically viable, country.<sup>vi</sup>*

## 5. *the law*

Now in Britain, due to increased ‘security’, the government can decide who the right kind of free individual is, and the probability of an individual’s ideas causing them to commit a crime in the future. These terrorism laws are bordering on thought police, or the big brother of George Orwell’s *1984*, but they are already in effect. The accused (use of the term *accused* becomes rather illogical in relation this specific non-crime) can be detained in advance of committing a crime.<sup>68</sup> It seems to be an exception in a society that has absorbed the big Other, the symbolic structure, so well it has become saturated, self-policing. Indeed, *individual freedom* has become more of an internalized police state that goes hand in hand with a rampant increase psychological self-diagnosis and self-help.

In relation to this, all the previous talk of freedom and truth now needs to be reconciled with the incongruous predominance of authority. Is it not contradictory to seek freedom within a system of authority, of limitations, of laws? The law, justice, equality and freedom all seem to cluster around this notion of authority in a way that both bolsters and undermines their fundamental conception. Negative liberty, however, assumes that no society can function without some kind of authority, if only to demarcate the boundaries of each individual’s liberty – to provide a tangible limit point beyond which personal freedom is jeopardized.

*(you cannot give away a freedom you do not yourself possess)*

According to Deleuze, decision makes philosophy a political matter: ‘*True freedom lies in a power to decide, to constitute problems themselves.*’<sup>69</sup> This freedom to pose problems, rather than solutions, operates within a negative field of critique. It embraces a political critique that is, by nature of negation, opposed to the political. The power of decision is something that, although representative of true freedom, is also inaccessible within democracy and the law. Decision becomes restricted to a set of pre-determined choices that are deemed *appropriately free*, or free enough. In the end, what is witnessed is the outcome of decision rather than the possibilities posed by unrestricted access to decision itself.

In his essay, *What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen*, Frédéric Bastiat proposes the idea that not all the ramifications of an action are visible. Because something is done, something other is not done. When scrutinizing the government, it is only what is done that is evident, as opposed to the other things that remain un-done. The alternatives remain invisible. ‘*But there is an alternative; it is less obvious and remains unseen.*’<sup>70</sup> Although Bastiat was arguing against trade restrictions and government interference in economics, it is easy to see in his argument the same logic of unknown unknowns mentioned previously. It is easy to see the possibilities contained in the thought alternatives it provides.

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<sup>68</sup> *The Trap, We Will Force You to Be Free.*

<sup>69</sup> Noys, *Persistence of the Negative*, 56.

<sup>70</sup> Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 111.

Likewise, the only crime publicly discussed is the crime forced into the public realm by the law. The only noted criminals are the ones who get caught.<sup>71</sup> The catching of criminals serves to bolster the belief that the law is to be upheld, or even feared. The alternative, the unseen, is that it cannot punish what it does not know. The law is logically incapable of ignorance, which provides nothing if not a huge pitfall. It is good to be bad. Being bad, being inappropriate (with all the ambiguity that implies) is the greatest attack on the contemporary self-policing that this big Other, this instilled sense of propriety, encourages.

*In Heidegger's own words: "Transcendere means to step over; the transcendens, the transcendent is that which oversteps as such and not that toward which I step over [...] Dasein itself oversteps in its being and thus is not exactly immanent." (Heidegger 1982:299)<sup>72</sup>*

Impropriety is that which oversteps the bounds of social convention, and is necessarily vague in order to equate the inappropriate with the illegal or unethical.<sup>73</sup> Everything is distilled down into a binary system of right and wrong, irrespective of the magnitude of an offense. This wrongness is indiscriminant, and indeterminate. Performing this wrongness could potentially be a transcendent activity – a *passage à l'acte* – it could also be a very literal removal of the Symbolic order, which Lacan constituted as psychosis.

*The irrationality of religious belief has never impeded its flourishing; indeed, it is precisely what immunizes it against rational refutation, since religion is designed to satisfy psychological needs, not rational requirements. Marx was right: religion will never be eradicated until the need for it evaporates.<sup>74</sup>*

The same could be said of governments and law: it is not the intrinsic irrationality of a system that is the problem, but rather belief in it. 'Truth is produced in the interest of those with power to shape reality.'<sup>75</sup> This *truth production* satisfies psychological need for justice and order, without the rationalization of what that justice or order actually entails. This lack of rationality creates paradoxical systems that are capable of legitimizing themselves and *producing* truth or reality. In this sense 'law legitimizes itself by reflecting a view of existing society that it helped to make and thus reinforces that view by defining it as reality.'<sup>76</sup>

Government will never be eradicated until the need for it evaporates – i.e., until a rational alternative can be thought, it will not exist, until the refusal of the idea of the need for governance predominates.

Foucault states that the law is perceived in society as a powerful discourse only because it claims a scientificity, and that to identify a field of knowledge as science is to equate it

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<sup>71</sup> Taleb, *The Black Swan*, 109.

<sup>72</sup> Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 157.

<sup>73</sup> *K-Punk Blog*, "From Big Brother to the Big Other."

<sup>74</sup> Brassier, "I Am a Nihilist."

<sup>75</sup> MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State," 640.

<sup>76</sup> MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State," 644, quoted in: Stephen, "Sexualized Bodies," 35.

with truth.<sup>77</sup> This lends the law an authority it would not otherwise be able to wield; it is consistently thought of as true and worst of all, *right*, without ever really being *thought* at all.

If, as Meillassoux argues, the laws of nature are necessarily contingent, it implies a hyperchaos that opens infinite possibilities. This theory is based on mathematics, particularly set theory, as a basis for describing the world, and not a relation to or perception of the world that is intrinsically linked to human existence. It allows for the comprehension of both an anterior and descendant time, during which there is no consciousness. The reliance on the laws of mathematics rather than human experience allows philosophy to better grasp the facts that science is constantly proving without sacrifice.<sup>78</sup> Hyperchaos implies that physical laws, upon which science relies for providing a constant against which to test, are too subject to change. The fact that they have not does not imply they will not, but rather that the familiar notions of spontaneity, probability, and chance, are fundamental features of life within this universe. It is not necessary to suppose that the universe itself, and the physical laws on which it is based, can be subjected to the same kind of probability or chance, or even that these would occur with the same frequency or manner.<sup>79</sup>

A performance artist mimicking the hooded dress and pose of a tortured Abu Ghraib prisoner was accused of terrorism in Boston; he was arrested for disturbing the peace, but the charges escalated quickly to two felonies: false report of the location of explosives, and a hoax device. This arrest served not only to reinforce the threat of terror to the American people, but also added an intervention to the war on terror's success story.<sup>80</sup> By publicly arresting and accusing the artist, police managed to reinforce the panic of the always-imminent terrorism threat, and assert their control and subsequent victory over the situation.

The law, after all, often cannot tell the difference between art and terrorism. Alternatively, perhaps it is not *ignorance* of a fundamental difference, but the *knowledge* that any incursion, dissent, any articulation of disappointment is as effective as terrorism in a capitalist system. Especially in a system that relies so heavily on indoctrination and belief.<sup>81</sup>

In *The Trial*, Kafka explores another bureaucratic paradox featuring this idea of the always-imminent threat. It is not terrorism, but rather the law here that poses the unbounded threat. The logic of a legal process is described as infinite and indeterminate, guaranteeing the impossibility of escape:

*...Kafka importantly distinguishes between two types of acquittal available to the accused. Definite acquittal is not longer possible, if it ever was... The two remaining options, then, are (1) 'Ostensible acquittal', in which the accused is to all and intents and purposes acquitted, but may later, at some unspecified time,*

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<sup>77</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 197.

<sup>78</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 103-111.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 64-69.

<sup>80</sup> Critical Art Ensemble, *Marching Plague*, 143.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

*face the charges in full, or (2) 'Indefinite postponement', in which the accused engages in (what they hope is an infinitely) protracted process of legal wrangling, so that the dreaded ultimate judgment is unlikely to be forthcoming.*<sup>82</sup>

This infinite impossibility looms constantly. Neither law nor transgression can exist without the other, but are mutually dependant:

*...for Badiou, while negation provides the necessary force of rupture, it remains bound to what it negates. This is the usual problem of the mutual dependence of transgression and law, given its most pithy formulation by Paul: 'And where there is no law there is no transgression'.*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> Noys, *Persistence of the Negative*, 145.

*Bolivia is in the process of passing a new law to grant nature equal rights to humans. The government plans to establish a ministry of mother earth in order to coordinate these new rights, which includes the right life and to exist. It is not clear at this stage how this abstract legislation will be implemented, but governmental discussion refers to nature with increasing frequency as an earth deity in line with the indigenous Andean spiritual notion of Pachammama.<sup>vii</sup>*

## 6. conclusion (art and answers)

*The art scene has become a territory on which political ideas and projects that are difficult to situate in the contemporary political reality can be formulated and presented.*<sup>84</sup>

This argument does not necessarily posit art as capable of existing outside of political or economic reality, and it does not, by any means, offer an intrinsic other to capital. In fact, in most cases art operates as the pinnacle of capitalism, relying purely on aesthetics, fame and market value. Art, even while posturing as radical, offers not merely a reflection of capital, but capitalism in its purest form. However, it can perhaps offer a space for thought where elsewhere there is none.

*...in some ways art is similar to mathematics in the sense that it also creates ideas and concepts that at the moment of their discovery might not be clearly useful but that at some later point may be introduced into society and change its perspective. Art is a sort of catalyst that influences reality, but in a non-linear, unpredictable way.*<sup>85</sup>

In this sense, art offers a thought space, a perspectival shift, an unpredictable other in the same way that economic crisis is unpredictable. Perhaps then art circles the same thought processes humans use in an attempt to predict the future, by acting on a desire to access something unpredictable, impossible or illogical in the present.

This is not to insinuate that art has all the answers, that it alone is capable of enacting change, but rather, following the guide of negative resistance, it offers a space for critique, a space to revel in disappointment. Art has the capacity to exceed the logic of reality, and can reach conclusions that are otherwise absent in science or philosophy because of the fact that it allows for errant thinking.<sup>86</sup> Its capacity to be illogical, impossible or dead wrong is perhaps its most interesting trait.

The conceptualization of art is hopefully a turn away from tropes like the artist genius, away from individual fame and freedom, away from the artist, and toward the art. This however has led Vanessa Place to state that she misses her voice, having removed it from her writing, but the emphasis on a concept over a subjective, solipsistic or emotional reaction is a more radical emphasis to assert within the politics of individuality. If anything can be art, it relies on authorship to distinguish between what is and what is not art. It comes to rely more and more on the expert, the market, on a decision made to choose one artist over another. And quickly *'the cult of the author is replaced by the cult of authority.'*<sup>87</sup>

The incorporation of institutional critique into the institution is a prime example of the paradoxical, all encompassing nature of capitalist culture industry, but this interaction of

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<sup>84</sup> Groys, "Art and Money" 2.

<sup>85</sup> Kurant and Taleb, "Unknown Unknowns," 130.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>87</sup> Place and Fitterman, *Conceptualisms*, 65.

critique and consumption goes both ways. It is therefore possible to use this consumption of critique as a point of resistance, if only to create a kind of vicious, cannibalistic, culture circle.

*While the art market is, at least in financial terms, stronger than ever, and state attempts to instrumentalise culture become more sophisticated, it is still possible to turn the situation around and use the art world itself as a tool – a source of funding, of publicity, of critical reaction, of political access, and of defence for radical ideas in the terms of the liberal philosophy that justifies Modern Western culture.*<sup>88</sup>

The world is necessarily too complex to ever be represented as one image, one thought. Keats expressed this in his notion of *negative capacity*, a capability of being in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.<sup>89</sup> It is the act of extending into the unknown, and knowing only that the unknown is forever unknowable, infinite, that constitutes a creative act. This abundance is inherently against resolution; it asserts only things that simultaneously exist and do not exist.<sup>90</sup>

*(art that isn't)*

The social order, in contrast, produces an ideology of creativity that flatters the work of abstraction within capital. It is easy in this sense to see creativity as the other to the capitalist model of labour and value, but this is not the case. The ideology of creativity is designed to guard the interests of a social order that is hostile to the creative practitioner. Instead, Noys posits an alternate, a *détournement* of work against work– a negative working over of *abstract labour* in the creative industries.<sup>91</sup> The understanding that a creative act is not inherently opposed to the model of labour and value is important to understand how to subtract a creative act from capital.

Place sees this need for work to subvert itself in the creative act, and in doing so activates failure as an alternative model. *'Failure serves to interrupt the work, violating it from within.'*<sup>92</sup>

Ultimately, art does not hold the answers, but is capable of asking the questions.

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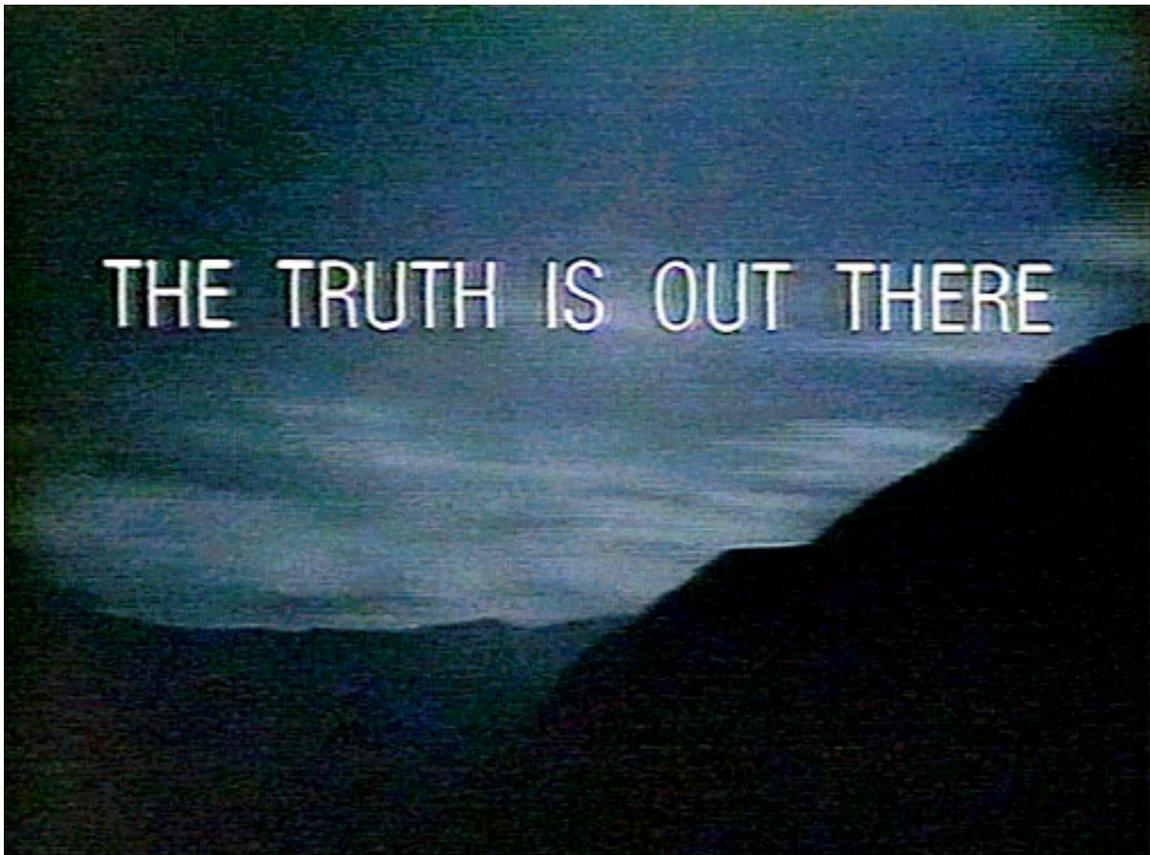
<sup>88</sup> Bradley, "Guarana Power," 323 – 324.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson, *Against Happiness*, 131-132.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>91</sup> Noys, *Persistence of the Negative*, 166-167.

<sup>92</sup> Place and Fitterman, *Notes on Conceptualisms*, 25.



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<sup>i</sup> Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, 17.

<sup>ii</sup> Critical Art Ensemble, *Marching Plague*, 29.

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>iv</sup> Weaver, "Witches to Cast Anti-Government Spell," 23.

<sup>v</sup> Associated Press, "Romanian Witches Curse Government," 20.

<sup>vi</sup> Žižek, *First as Tragedy*, 81.

<sup>vii</sup> Vidal, "Bolivia Enshrines Natural World's Rights," 15.

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