

ROBERT CARLEY

Money's Gest: Or the Postmodern Materialism of Fictitious Capital Formations

Introduction

The rationalisation of work in modern society owes a debt to science and technology. The first attempt to apply scientific principles, wholesale to the industrial labour process in modern society occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1911, Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* contained four major principles, the first: "the development of a true science (of management)."¹ This managerial science was applied to the tremendous reserve work force that was either disorganised, organised through the traditions of the various skilled trades, or organised politically, according to the principles of labour unions. So, it would stand to reason that the second requirement was, "the scientific selection of the workman." Taylor toiled under the premise that if there was a massive reserve labour force available to producers at any given time then the manager should be able to pick the best (strongest and most intelligent) worker, train the worker appropriately and use the worker in the most efficient manner. He would do this, first and foremost, through the principles of his science, and also by regimenting the work day for maximum productivity (this included "free time" e.g. breaks, bathroom breaks, etc.) and by offering wages 60% to 100% higher than is customary for the type

of work in question. Taylor had tradition, labour unions and workers' self interest working against his scientific scheme; however, his system was implemented by others with relative success in America, Germany and France.

Even before 1911, the worker was facing an assault on another front, the development of mechanised production methods in industrial capitalism. Karl Marx describes the role machine production played in the life of the worker in his "Fragment on Machines" from the *Grundrisse*:

The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour and its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system whose unity exists not on the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual insignificant doings as a mighty organism.²

The further development of machine technology meant a further subsumption of what Marx calls "living labour" to industrial modes of production. According to Marx, subsumption of living labour to industrial forms of production would reduce the yield of "necessary labour" within the production cycle. In other words, part of the rationalisation of the process of the development of better productive machine technologies requires less command and supervision by a human labour force. The better the machine, the less human intervention required. Furthermore, it was generally in the interest of industry to invest in fixed capital (such as machines) at the beginning of production cycles in that way the owner or investor could discern the amount of money they would receive as a return on their investment since the capital amount was fixed over the production cycle and did not vary. Also a machine can be made to last longer than a single production cycle without any reinvestment. Giving machines the lion's share of the labour greatly reduced labour costs at the beginning of the new production cycle.

What is truly interesting about these two points in the rationalisation of work converging (represented through the quotations from Taylor and Marx) is the role of technology. It seems that for both production and management of labour the most important requirement of technology is that it work to construct socially necessary components of industry as always readily available: whether it be the scientific selection of the workman or the development of new productive technologies that operate most efficiently on their own and that, of course, it greatly facilitates the availability of resources (i.e. manufactured or otherwise, converted into useful forms, like water into electricity to power households) in near ubiquitous amounts. This particular drive in rationalisation represents the emergence of a consolidated logic of capitalist systems regarding the universalisation of the production of material goods. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger, in a discussion about science and technology—up to and through the modern period—gives us an epistemological and ontological framework for discussing the social penetration of the logic described above. Using Heidegger's essays as a ground, I will explain how features of the capitalist rationalisation of work verge dangerously toward objectifying what it means to be a human subject in the modern world. In other words, the development of capitalist logic over time, in the areas of both production and finance, occurs at the cost of making wage labourers subject to its process only as objects or resources. Further, in order for capitalism to function optimally in the areas of finance and production it always seeks the greatest yield at the least expense. So that capitalism may achieve these goals it has created a condition whereby things that were once material investments in the logic of the capitalist production process necessarily become completely unreal, immaterial and both potentially and actually destructive. It should be mentioned that Karl Marx in *Capital*, volume three, has described such conditions. Both the danger posed to human subjectivity and the seeming

unreality of material processes in the world together engender the political tenets of late capitalism. Capitalism, as ahistorical process—in other words, capitalism in itself—echoes features of the postmodern. The postmodern has been described by Jean-François Lyotard as “‘the lack of reality’ of reality” but without “the invention of other (definitive) realities” (parenthetical addition mine).³ It is this condition that late capital verges toward dangerously and, further, it has its early conception of the rationalisation of the world of work through technology and science to thank for it. Using Bertolt Brecht’s notion of the social gest, I hope to expose the postmodern materialism of high corporate finance as a kind of ontological container for technological progress, the development of productive machine technologies, dead labour, and the positing of living labour through the extension of the horizon of capital across the globe. Brecht’s social gest mitigates the connection between the materialist and ontological concerns of Karl Marx’s early work with Heidegger’s ontological and epistemological framework in his discussion of technology. I will further explore the terms of this connection by referring, briefly to plot elements in one of Brecht’s earlier plays, *Drums in the Night*. And finally, the complicated mechanics of this technique highlight the spiralling unity of oppositions that construct the social relations upon which capital depends, in order to perpetuate itself throughout history and forward into the future.

Heidegger, Enframing and Destining: The Danger

In Martin Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology” the concept of enframing (*Gestell*) describes the process that makes objects in the world readily available to be used or consumed. Heidegger questions the essence of technology and does not find it to be inherently destructive. However, the rather loaded concept of enframing (which I will “unpack” in the

course of my discussion) is ultimately neutral. Heidegger introduces other concepts into his discussion of technology that describe the development of particular techniques which emerge from the direction society gives to technological innovation. Heidegger's best illustration of the form enframing takes in the ordering of productive work comes on pages fourteen and fifteen of his essay. He explains:

A tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [*bestellte*] appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon [*stellt*] nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy....⁴

This quotation, from beginning to end, describes a total system where nature is *challenged*. As Heidegger clarifies one paragraph before, nature is given “the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”⁵ This “challenging” is a Heideggerian concept and a component of enframing. Challenging is a more invasive setting-in-order in that it subordinates nature and wrings from it (Heidegger uses the term “reveal”) every atom of its usefulness, towards enlisting it into a process that will produce, in some cases manufacture, and store its power to be put in the service of human need.⁶ Heidegger puts it as follows: “It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at minimum expense.”⁷ The notion that swiftness, expediting, is central to the process is important, and more will be discussed about the speed of these productive processes later. However, the process takes action as such to drive toward an efficiency whereby the most can be produced at

the least expense (presumably to the producer). This is the material impetus for the process that Heidegger describes; they are the unavoidable economic laws that drive the challenging of nature. We will see, later in the paper, that “driving onto the maximum yield at minimum expense” is a tremendous force in the laws of capitalist production. Further, this statement links the unreality of late capitalism to the de-subjectifying forces introduced in the capitalist rationalisation of the labour process.

Back to Heidegger’s “challenging.” Heidegger describes how challenging “unlocks and exposes” nature in such a way that it is readily available. This, too, is a step in the enframing process known as the “standing-reserve.” It is not the case that anything which is produced is standing-reserve. The standing-reserve is a placating of nature in such a way that it is made and ordered to be at hand for human subjective need. This is the case whether it be a bottle or keg of beer in the bar room or, the example that Heidegger uses, an airliner that stands on the runway. He goes on to say of his example that “it stands on the taxi strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation. For this it must be in its whole structure and in every one of its constituent parts, on call for duty, i.e., ready for takeoff.”⁸

It seems that things in the world may be ordered in such a way that they are standing-reserve to human need, and this is the most favorable arrangement for anyone to be able to realise their need. Standing-reserve closes the mediating space between subjects and objects. Objects need not be “appropriated” through human action because they already have been; they are ready-made. However, when this tendency becomes more than just a tendency and one’s relationship to the world is such that all objects are standing-reserve or, in Heidegger’s words, “when man investigating observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object

of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.”⁹ For Heidegger, once the concept “standing-reserve” appears as a way of revealing, “man” has “already been claimed by a way of revealing.” That way of “revealing” is enframing: “that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology.”¹⁰ In this way of revealing, nature is approached as an object to be researched, studied, and made to stand-reserve. In short, enframing puts things into the position of standing-reserve. However, the concept “standing-reserve,” as discussed previously, merely means that they are made real, useful and ready: an airplane waiting on the runway, an apple in a bin waiting to be brought into the supermarket, a glass of beer, beer waiting in a keg, etc. Now, the question becomes, what happens when other people are made to stand reserve?

Heidegger is well aware of the fact that modern technology requires the human as standing-reserve. He says, “If man is challenged, ordered to do this (e.g. exploit the energies of nature), then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve? The current talk of human resource... gives evidence of this.”¹¹ Moreover, technology for Heidegger is an applied form of science. He states that “man’s ordering attitude and behavior display themselves first in the rise of modern physics as an exact science. Modern science’s way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces.”¹² We now have the added problem of human subjectivity as nature, and the problem of this subjectivity standing-reserve in the enframing process.

On The Objectlessness (and Subjectlessness) of Standing Reserve: Karl Marx

Heidegger discusses what I’ve described above as the supreme danger of enframing. Once enframing becomes the way humans mediate their relationship to nature—the only way—what

Heidegger describes as “destining”¹³ human subjectivity falls under the purview of standing-reserve. It would seem, then, that *prima facie* Frederick Winslow Taylor’s system for ordering labour is simply this: the application of science, through the technology of scientific management, to make workers—human subjects—standing-reserve. In other words, Taylor’s system could be seen as Heidegger’s worst fear realised.

Taking his cues from Karl Marx, French doctor, psychologist and former Communist Party member Bernard Doray wrote extensively on Taylorism and Fordism. In his book, *From Taylorism to Fordism: A Rational Madness*, Doray discusses the application of the science of scientific management to labour. He says,

In an earlier article, I attempted to investigate why it is that most of those who are involved practically in these sciences are unable to state their objective clearly, and stressed that expressions such as ‘the science of work’ or ‘the science of men at work’ are both vague and ambiguous. There is, I believe, a definite advantage to be gained by using the expression ‘the labour process’ to define their object more clearly, as it implies a dialectical articulation with the other dimension of commodity production: the process of valorization.

What the mode of production presents as natural forms of labour are in fact forms which have already been subordinated to and molded by valorization.¹⁴

The process of valorisation in capitalism represents the capitalist logic of what it means to be produced as standing-reserve. As Doray notes, like commodities, labour has already been valorised, that is, labour has been rendered standing-reserve. In order to describe this process, it is necessary to take a detour through Marx’s work on labour, specifically as it concerns the worker and his or her subjectivity.

Alienation relates to the condition Heidegger describes as standing-reserve or, more specifically, the emergence of “human resources” in the language of professional occupations. In Marxism, alienation is a physical, psychical and social phenomenon. In *Capital* vol.1, Marx

describes the passage of labour into commodity form (what Doray describes as the process of valorisation); in this, alienation features as a *necessary condition*. He writes,

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relations of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.... It is only a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.¹⁵

This passage has in many ways become the “imprimatur” of Marx's concept of the commodity. In this definition alienation has both an objective quality and a subjective quality. In an objective sense, alienation represents itself back to the worker as exchange value or money—“the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.” This represents an “objectivist” expression of alienation through the money form. The worker who, at this point in the production process, has “subjugated” nature, now is subject to that object in its produced and manufactured form—or the object on the market as a commodity. How this is possible will become clear through a discussion of the subjective effect of alienation on the worker; then it is at this point that we can discuss the question of the worker's subjectivity as it pertains to alienation.

Georg Lukács, treating the same passage cited above, responds directly to this question of the worker's subjectivity when he states that “subjectively—where the market economy has been fully developed—a man's activity becomes estranged from himself, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its own way independently of man just like any consumer article.”¹⁶ And, of course, in order for the worker to

“reclaim” what has been “objectified” from his or her labour, the worker “realises” the condition in which he or she is present and then offers up—in a fully developed market system—the money commodity as a token of reclamation. This action is entirely necessary for the worker’s survival, as is his or her participation in capitalism as labour. Again, this dynamic is what Doray means when he says that the worker has “already been subordinated to and molded by valorization.” Marx explains this further:

The worker... sells labour as a simple, predetermined exchange value, determined by a previous process—he sells labour itself as *objectified labour*; i.e. he sells labour only in so far as it already objectifies a definite amount of labour, hence in so far as its equivalent is already measured, given (*necessary, my addition*); capital buys it as living labour.... It is clear therefore, that the worker cannot become rich in this exchange, since, in exchange for his labour capacity as a fixed, available magnitude, he surrenders its creative power, like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage. Rather, he necessarily impoverishes himself....¹⁷

The worker enters the picture “necessarily impoverish(ed).” Further, impoverishment, from the subject position that capital creates, is *felt*; it requires the surrender of the worker’s creative power.¹⁸ To magnify this relationship further the worker is the “living labour” that capital realises as necessary labour. In other words, the wage that is to be paid to the worker is doled out in advance; it is dependent on the profit generated from the previous cycle of capitalist production on the one hand, and on the other hand, the “realisation” of the branches of production that will reproduce themselves through what is socially necessary (labour). At this point, the worker has no choice: either the worker starves or enters into these relations. The process of valorisation reaches its apex: either way the worker is “claimed” through capital. Also, this represents to capitalism an exchange on the market no different from any other. Valorisation is such that the worker’s entire “being” is given over for a wage and that wage places the worker in a specific situation or relationship. The worker is trapped—in order that the

worker can “get back” what it is that they produced they must accept their wage and in doing this they accept their position as standing-reserve, as a mere resource. The process of valorisation is complete. The worker’s imminence—his limited function in society—becomes the form (commodity form) through which the worker becomes the standing-reserve. The worker stands-reserve for the producers, for the capitalist class.

The process of valorisation—in short, “what the mode of production presents as natural forms of labour are in fact forms which have already been subordinated to and molded by valorization”—shares a particular affinity with Heidegger’s description of standing-reserve, where “even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.” Or, in the case of labour, the subject disappears into the subjectlessness of standing reserve. Taylor’s scientific process of managing labour also enables us to imagine, along with Doray and Heidegger, the drive (the destining) to make objects in the world stand-reserve for human need. We need only refer the above by Heidegger to the previous sentence: “when man investigating observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.” This quotation describes the dimension that Taylor adds to the scientific rationalisation of the labour process through a principled method of selecting the labourer, through scientific study and specific calibrations of the worker in relationship to his or her working day: ultimately through approaching a human as an object of research.

Postmodernity and the (Un)reality of Late Capitalism

Earlier in this paper, during the discussion of Heidegger's concept of "challenging," I promised that I would return to Heidegger's claim that challenging "expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at minimum expense." At the beginning of my paper, I claimed that in capitalism's seeking out this goal it creates material out of thin air so that it may receive the maximum yield at minimum expense. I have already described the effect this "principle" of capital accumulation has on the labourer. My claim echoes that of David Harvey in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* that "labour control, both in production and in the market place, is vital for the perpetuation of capitalism."¹⁹ In connection with this he also states that "capitalism is necessarily technologically and organizationally dynamic. This is so in part because the coercive laws of competition push individual capitalists into leap-frogging innovations in their search for profit."²⁰ These dynamics of capitalist expansion contribute to a situation of unreality in contemporary culture and society. Capitalism's expansion, which can only occur not through investment but through the creation of real values (on which investment can then be based), offers capitalism a constant challenge. As Heidegger himself has noted, it faces this challenge by looking to maximise production and cut costs. Harvey notes that "capitalism has to... actually achieve an expansion of output and a growth in real values, no matter what the social, political, geopolitical and ecological consequences."²¹ It is only the labourer active in the labour process who creates "real values," and we have seen the social consequences of capital undermining the labourer for the sake of streamlining the labour process—so that capital can come closer to its goal it must place a greater number of people into this relationship. Further, it must manufacture

value for itself so that, in periods of crisis, it does not self-destruct. This dynamic places us closer to the dangerous situation that Heidegger describes in his discussion of enframing.

Capital necessarily places itself into periods of crisis where people are neither buying the goods that its producers are responsible for (therefore not warranting any further production, any purchase of fixed capital, e.g. plant infrastructure, or any purchase of variable capital, e.g. labour) nor are people spending their own money. A glut of money and of inventory occurs and this is known as overaccumulation. There are few ways to combat overaccumulation through capitalist enterprise. Of the limited choices available to the producer, one is through the devaluation of capital surpluses. This is a highly destructive way to deal with overaccumulation. If possible, the equipment used for production can be devalued, but in many cases goods that have been produced are destroyed before they reach the market. In the case of labour, it, according to Harvey, “can similarly be devalued and even destroyed (rising rates of exploitation, falling real incomes, unemployment, more deaths on the job, poorer health and lower life expectancy).”²² Harvey also warns that “uncontrolled bankruptcies and massive devaluation expose the irrational side of capitalist rationality in far too brutal a way for it to be sustainable for long.”²³ The key here is that capitalism always encounters periods of crisis which, in its exploration for solutions, submerge it into irrational and unreal avenues of its own logic in the interest of providing solutions to the crisis. In many cases devaluation is regulated through monetary policy, tax breaks, etc. However, taken to its ends, capitalism relies, ultimately, on the destruction of its own goods and in some cases its productive machinery and the dissolution (or destruction) of living labour to effect a change in the crisis. This “irrationality” is built into the system of rationality that enables capital (to echo Harvey) “to... actually achieve an expansion of

output and a growth in real values, no matter what the social, political, geopolitical and ecological consequences.”

The above solution to the crisis of capital has direct effects on material life (or on the world). In Heidegger’s scheme it is the destruction of the standing-reserve. Heidegger does not offer a parallel to these phenomena in his discussion; however, he is not dealing explicitly with capitalism. However, I do believe that Heidegger would describe this as a part of the destining. Once this path (the path paved through capitalist expansion) becomes the only recognisable “opening” to the development of modern technology in such a way that it “is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at minimum expense,” then the danger here echoes Harvey’s warning about capitalism pressing forward regardless of the consequences. Further, it echoes Heidegger’s danger regarding enframing.

Heidegger discusses how the standing reserve closes temporal gaps that had existed before technology allowed for a mediated experience of the world where necessary objects can be made to be standing-reserve. The point has been made that labour is forced to stand reserve in capitalism. However, capital, in instances of overaccumulation, can quell its crises by closing the gaps that occur as it waits to see its profits from the goods it produced. Up until this point, capital requires material returns on the goods it produced so that it can enter the next production cycle. However, Harvey notes that “excess capital and surplus labour can be absorbed by switching from current consumption to long-term public and private investments.... Such investments mop up surpluses in the present only to return their value equivalent over a long period of time in the future.” Further, Harvey describes how this is possible: “The capacity to make the switch depends upon the availability of credit and the capacity for ‘fictitious capital formation.’ The

latter is defined as capital that has a nominal money value and paper existence, but which at a given moment in time has no backing in terms of real productive activity or physical assets as collateral.”²⁴ Capitalism closes the gap (which would realise itself as a failure in terms of profits realised) by using value that is only speculative. “Fictitious capital formations” consist of financial vehicles that are based on the speculation about profits to be turned in the future. The value that they convey is not real, but rather imagined. These “vehicles” are represented in some paper form, be it stocks or credit moneys, but they are not dependent on anything. If the branch of production in question is able to recuperate its value later on, then the money that was put up is inconsequential. It only has to represent itself to the investors through a portion of its profits. If, however, the branch of production disappears, if it is not able to realise its profit, then the investors lose and the producers lose. In either case, the fictitious capital formation depends upon real value generated in the future or it disappears into thin air, the place from whence it came!

Postmodern Marxist Materialism or Money’s Gest

Fictitious capital formations of the type and degree I wish to explore here consist of a context in which the material relations require a specific level of capitalist who owns both labour power and also the means of production, possibly on a diversified and widespread scale, and has a relationship to a bank or subsidising agent of some kind that would *extend credit* to the capitalist based not only on the capitalist’s present assets but, more significantly, on the promise of a future profit. The primary intermediary in this specific relationship is a producer who requires an innovation in the circulation of capital due to a loss of revenue at the end of a production cycle. This innovation will support the capital requirements for the concurrent production cycle,

whatever that may be. And, finally, this innovation will require a fictitious capital formation of some kind.

Why have I created a scenario, albeit a very general one, whereby the capitalist producer enters into a relationship or a set of relationships that require fictitious capital formations for the enabling of some incorporation of a specific branch of production? By drawing-up the scene as such, I want to show how the valorisation of labour at this level of social relations becomes an entirely speculative enterprise (within this fictitious capital formation), and how now, in this cultural and historical moment, with the span of capital both extending and immuring the globe, the “ontological horizon” of money-capital is all at once so abstract and so total that in the act of marshalling fictitious capital it makes manifest the “triumph” of the scientific and technological revealing that becomes, according to Heidegger, the “planetary imperialism of technologically organized man.”²⁵ To lodge Heidegger’s quotation further within the stream of my argument, the planetary imperialism of technologically organised man is—beneath the ontology and the unyielding progress and expanding scope of science—just that: imperialism. In other words the ground upon which enframing becomes possible (i.e. sciences’ scope) is capital. Capital is the material ground from which this particular ontological horizon and scientific practice extends itself and both the “horizon” is rendered visible by and the practice is extended forward through capital. For example, as we travel in the world we can be secure in the fact that money, in the form of credit, “is everywhere you want to *be*.”²⁶

Exploring the emergence of this seemingly postmodern materialism, the effluvium of capital’s furthest reach through long-term high-risk investment interestingly requires a detour through some very modernist thinkers and writers: Marx and Lukacs, Taylor, Heidegger, and, finally, Bertolt Brecht. At the end of this paper I want to explore and relate Brecht’s concept of

the social gest, developed from the theatre and his training in Marxist thought. It is the special quality of the formation of Brecht's gest coupled with recent research on the relationship of gest to the destruction of historical subjectivity that complements my argument.²⁷

Brecht reminds us that modernity signals a radical challenge to the individualist construction of the subject through the gest. He states, "'Gest' is not supposed to mean gesticulation: it is not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes.... A gest... conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men."²⁸ The attitudes that Brecht explores in his plays are fundamentally class attitudes or, more succinctly, the attitudes of the fundamental classes: the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Brecht establishes an exemplary ground upon which to explore "attitudes" that emerge not from the principles of class relations but from those relationships themselves. The challenge to Andreas Kragler in *Drums in the Night* emerges from the bourgeois class expectations of the Balickes, Murk, and the patrons of the Picadillybar, as well as the contrary proletarian class expectations of the "revolutionary" patrons of the Zibebe.²⁹ Nevertheless, the ground from which these expectations emerge is World War One, which represents the subjective trauma from which Kragler is loosed on the world of the play, but, moreover, the War represents the beginning of the international ascendancy of capitalism via industrialisation, colonialism, and the usurpation of the gold standard with a constantly moving, serpentine, and industrial form of capital that already contains the seeds, the potentialities, of its postindustrial offspring. High finance, chained to the nation state begins to rip itself loose, only to take another far more global form in the post-industrial period.³⁰

Now, the gests we are given in the play—the largely lumpenproletarian characters in their bar, sitting, reading the newspaper, and yelling fervently for revolution (a gest that signifies

through both posture and language the coming failure of the communist revolution in Germany) —are complicated by a context that in its cultural, historical, social, and even psychological standing is further convoluted by the shifting material ground that is affected by the determining force of capitalist production and finance. It is the expression of these complications through, on the one hand, the mechanism of the gest in a singular context, and on the other, the complication of several gests coming from different contexts and the social expression of different groups that makes Brecht's device so exemplary in performing class relations (not, by the by, giving static examples of particular lifestyles), within distinctive social and cultural (historical) contexts. This aggregation of contexts, capitalist-material, class-attitudinal, cultural-historical (traumatic), within the specific forum of Epic Theatre, becomes a special space where the multi-layered social formation of Brecht's theatre performances enables us to come closer than ever to recognise the magnitude of the gest, and through it to think about the different material levels that construct social experience. As Brecht notes, "the social gest is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances."³¹ The conclusions and knowledge come out of the dialectic that is generated from the expressive forms of class contact, played out as unselfconscious action and ultimately as social structure within Epic Theatre. To quote Brecht quoting Lenin, "It is impossible to recognize the various happenings in the world in their independence of movement, their spontaneity of development, their vitality of being, without recognizing them as a unity of opposites."³²

To explore further the import of the gest, not only as it relates to Lenin's Marxist-Hegelianism but also to my argument, I wish to set the stage for some present day epic theatre. A CEO stands at a podium in front of his primary stockholders—who barely fill the first three rows of a state-of-the-art stadium-sized hall—and showers them with assurances of the fiscal stamina

of his conglomerate, a large telecommunications firm that has subsidiaries in associated firms working in the research and development of new communications technologies. He smiles a bit too often, sweats, and perhaps swallows audibly between sentences as he presents very creative projections of future successes. He claims that the company is making an astounding profit, well above the level of competitors, when, in fact, the company is not solvent and has no cash flow. We are made to understand, if we do not already, that this man fears the stockholders; it is to them that he feels he owes the truth. Next scene: employees fill the same room to capacity, everyone from middle managers, to technicians, to sales and advertising staff. Their entire pension, their future retirement is staked directly on the performance of this company. The largest pool of expendable labourers, the lower-level technicians, has all of their stock in the company, whereas middle management and other more skilled and senior employees have more diversified pension plans. The CEO delivers the same exact speech to this group, with wild confidence gesturing like Benito Mussolini in 1930.

The true subject of these proceedings is money; it connects everybody. It is via the “postmodern” materialism of money that we are reminded of the constitution of material culture within the terms and the limits that are made possible by money. Brecht gives us the starting point in modernity. We see the ontological standing of money when we are made to grasp that money makes possible the degree to which the phenomena of enframing in science and technology become ubiquitous and congeal all within their destining. Finally, Fredric Jameson reminds us, in the introduction to *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, of the relationship between the emergence of this phenomenon in our modernist conception of the world and its presence today. I want to conclude with these remarks from Jameson: “Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is

gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which ‘culture’ has become a veritable ‘second nature.’ Indeed, what happened to culture may well be one of the more important clues for tracking the postmodern: an immense dilation of its sphere (the sphere of commodities)...”³³ Although we won’t be seeing a subject like Kragler anytime soon—a traumatised foot soldier in a world war fought at the inaugural moment of a shifting set of economic standards, that created more instability across the globe than they produced the intended beneficent cultural, economic, and social modernising force—we do see a “completion” to the economic questions that arose from modernism, an answer to Taylor’s writing—you cannot extend the regime of fixed capital by trying to make a machine part out of living labour, an extension of Marx’s ideas into the present moment—and finally a dilation of the sphere of commodities that is so absolute it mimics not only Lenin’s musings on Hegel’s *Science of Logic* (cited above), but also, more specifically, Marx’s augury about the power of money in bourgeois society: “If *money* is the bond binding me to *human* life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all *bonds*? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal *agent of separation*? It is the coin that really *separates* as well as the real *binding agent*—the... *chemical* power of society.”³⁴

¹ F. W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1947). The scientific duties that management takes on are outlined on pp.36-7.

² Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on The Grundrisse*, ed. Fleming, trans. Cleaver, et al. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991), 140.

³ Jean-François Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” in *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. R. Durand (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 75.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 14-15.

⁵ Heidegger, 14.

⁶ A similar system, it could be argued, is in place for human desire as well. However, I am using the word “need” in that I do not want to enter into a discussion of desire and the subject or, in the logic of capitalism, the commodity fetish.

⁷ Heidegger, 15.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹² Ibid., 21.

¹³ “Destining” is, as it were, the “icing on the cake” of enframing. It is the point at which “he has already been claimed by a way of revealing.” One thinks of Walter Benjamin’s description of Paul Klee’s “Angelus Novus” where a wind blowing from paradise has caught in the angel’s wings and drags him away. Ironically, Benjamin’s description of the picture is such that it can be said that the angel sees the terror of enframing as a way of revealing, and would insist on another way if it could stand and speak.

¹⁴ Bernard Doray, *From Taylorism to Fordism: A Rational Madness*, trans. Macey (London: Free Association Books, 1988), 72-73.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 164.

¹⁶ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 87.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), trans. Nicolaus (London: Penguin/New Left Review, 1993), 307.

¹⁸ For the best description of this affective feature through which resistance is fomented, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Marxism and Philosophy” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (Indiana: Northwestern University Press, 1964); and, most significantly, Antonio Negri’s *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*.

¹⁹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 180.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 181.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 182.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” in *The Question Concerning Technology*, 152. This quotation was located in my reading of Norman K. Swazo, *Crisis Theory and World Order: Heideggerian Reflections*, SUNY Series in Global Politics, ed. J. N. Rosenau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

²⁶ This is the slogan for Master Card’s advertising campaign.

²⁷ I refer, here, to Astrid Oesmann, *Staging history: Brecht’s Social Concepts of Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Oesmann’s chapter on *Drums in the Night*. argues that Brecht’s use of the gest in this early play, especially by the revolutionary hopefuls, signifies that the social relations that constitute revolutionary action are both reified by revolutionary ideology and damaged by the trauma of WWI. Also, the character of Andreas Kragler signifies a particular moment in the constitution of traumatic German subjectivity such that Kragler emerges from an inarticulate past to return to a bourgeois social role that he can no longer occupy. His choices for “subjecthood” consist of war hero (heroic-tragic subject of a dramatic play), German bourgeoisie, or Spartacus revolutionary. He is not able to occupy any of these fully by dint of the cultural and historical moment that makes all of these categories transitory at best or entirely unstable, given the immediate future of German cultural, political, and social history.

²⁸ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. J. Willett (NY: Hill and Wang, 1964), 104.

²⁹ Bertolt Brecht, *In the Jungle of the Cities and Other Plays* (NY: Grove Press, 1966).

³⁰ My gloss on the political economy of WWI comes from several sources, the primary one being Karl Polyani, “Part Two: Rise and Fall of the Market Economy” in *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (NY: Rinehart, 1944).

³¹ Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 104-105.

³² Ibid., 279. The larger passage by Lenin can be found in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 38 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972)

³³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), x.

³⁴ Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964).