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Our Mandate

This journal represents an attempt to explore issues, ideas, and problems that lie at the intersection between the academic disciplines of social science and the body of thought and political practice that has constituted Marxism over the last 150 years. New Proposals is a journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry that is dedicated to the radical transformation of the contemporary world order. We see our role as providing a platform for research, commentary, and debate of the highest scholarly quality that contributes to the struggle to create a more just and humane world, in which the systematic and continuous exploitation, oppression, and fratricidal struggles that characterize the contemporary sociopolitical order no longer exist.

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Introduction

Charles R. Menzies

New Proposals Editorial Collective

Navigating the Academic Workplace

“It’s the same everywhere,” a trusted mentor said to me many years ago. We were chatting over coffee after spending time listening to conference papers. I’d been complaining about the run of the mill academic politics. In his trade mark fashion my mentor cut right to the chase, “Go into your class room, close the door, and get on with your teaching. Write, research, and ignore the politics. It doesn’t get any better then where you are.”

I wasn’t really willing to believe him; our department was moving toward a reasonably polite, but stressed, parting of the ways between Sociology and Anthropology. The grass looked greener at a lot of different places. I listened to him anyway, hunkered down, did my academic work, found my research feet, and looking back at it I realize it was one of the best pieces of academic advice anyone ever gave me. My mentor’s advice took me through tenure and finally to promotion as a full professor.

His was hard advice to follow. It is really easy to get sucked into the meaningless webs of gossip, intrigue, accusation, and posturing that constitutes the white noise of departmental politics. There are times that I wished I had paid more attention to his advice as I found my self strangely isolated or pulled into maelstroms of conflict. There are other times when I thought I was following his advice but then

got pulled up short when colleagues took a different view and acted in ways that seemed to suggest I was very much involved. Yet throughout all of this I have tended to effect what I considered to be disinterested engagement with departmental politics. Doing so has in fact allowed me the space to focus on things that matter to me as an Indigenous scholar.

I do a good deal of work on behalf of and within my home community. I also do work with and for other First Nations and Native American Tribes. This is exciting work. It is also work that can be intensely conflictual. University politics still flame out on who can represent. But community conflicts are just as likely to be within community and between neighbouring communities as much as between communities and non-Indigenous people. The stakes are not based in academic prestige. No, in these conflicts real dollars, lives, and community wellbeing are on the table. These are not situations for the faint of heart. They are important and have real implications for Indigenous people and our wider society.

It seems that the contemporary university has a difficult time coming to terms with these critical issues and concerns. Within the university we tend to focus on saying rather than doing. I confess to finding it hard to get excited about wordsmithing forty-word vision statements when many Indigenous

people simply want dignity and respect in life. I want the university to count back home even as I want it to be a real place for debate, discussion, and learning. Yet, I am at times disappointed by the way things turn out.

I've written about these kinds of situations. In one paper, Standing on the Shore with Sabaan, I decry the continued use of our Indigenous communities as sources of data for outsiders to experiment with. In a second paper I discuss the history of collaborative research and point to ways in which anthropology and anthropologists still have a long way to go. In a more recent paper I appropriate anthropological techniques and subsume them fully within my own Indigenous perspective calling attention to the blindness of non-Indigenous colleagues. These are works that can offend and for that I do not apologize: why is the colonized always asked to apologize to the colonizer?

True, there is something about an assertive and vindicationist Indigenous perspective that challenges fellow travelers and opponents alike. It compels me to develop a more interested engagement in university politics. Universities need to be safe places for Indigenous peoples, not battle grounds. But, as our African American cousins are showing us throughout the US universities are not safe spaces for the colonized. We must first engage in order to make over the university.

Almost 20 years after receiving my mentor's advice I realize that part of his directive to close the door on departmental politics was so that I could focus on what it really means to be an Indigenous scholar navigating the foreign waters of the western academy. Let me assure you it can be done: I've managed so far. It can be a rough ride. But with the armour of position, and such little power it might accord me, I shall now turn my gaze onto the mundane word of academic politics so that those who come after me might never experience the same obstacles and injuries my generation has.

With this issue of *New Proposals* we introduce the student showcase section. Here we foreground outstanding work completed by undergraduate and early career graduate students.

The balance of our articles and comments highlight the importance of class struggle politics. This is fundamental to building a new and better world. To ignore social class in the face of a multitude of competing subjectivities is to deny a future possibility of true liberation. In the same way that struggles on the ground are about what counts, about what might make real differences, so too should our progressive intellectual engagements be about identifying ideas and approaches that contribute to further the class struggle that will one day end the tyranny of minority capitalist rule.

Student Showcase

Patching up False Dichotomies in the Birth Subculture

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University of British Columbia

ABSTRACT: Some birth scholars (Melissa Cheyney, Robbie Davis-Floyd, and Elizabeth Davis) have argued that there are two models of birth that value different kinds of knowledge. They assert that the “technocratic” model has been adopted by “mainstream” culture, which values reason and scientific knowledge. Meanwhile, the “countercultural” birth subculture, which has adopted a “holistic” model, values intuition and “body knowledge” instead. However, my research does not support this argument. Rather, the 119 birth stories I analyzed suggest that, even if the birth subculture rhetoric supports those scholars’ dichotomies, their birth experiences do not. Neither group appears to uniformly hold their respective values, thus weakening the original dichotomy between the “mainstream” group and the “countercultural” group. Moreover, I demonstrate how the dichotomy between reason and scientific knowledge on the one hand, and intuition and “body knowledge” on the other, is also inaccurate. Feminist epistemology also warns that this dichotomization undercuts a diversity of thinking styles by limiting them to just two.

KEYWORDS: birth stories, homebirth, natural birth, epistemology, reason, intuition, science

Introduction

In Pamela Klassen’s (2001) ethnography of homebirth in the United States, she writes that American home-birthing women participate “in a culture of birth that challenges the control they see wielded by a biomedically dominated obstetrical establishment over women’s reproductive lives” (135). This birth subculture is not limited to homebirthing women, but comprises all those who “insist that birth is a natural process” (135), that is, those who venerate “natural birth,” including unmedicated birth, waterbirth, unassisted childbirth, and other emergent childbirth methods that aim to challenge “medical” birth (i.e., physician-attended hospital birth). This challenge is reified by scholars who portray these women, and the birth subculture in which they participate, as countercultural. One way that these scholars reinforce this portrayal is by arguing that the birth subculture values intuition and “body knowledge” as legitimate sources of knowledge, while mainstream Western culture prefers reason and

scientific knowledge. Such scholars include Melissa Cheyney (2008), Robbie Davis-Floyd (1996), and Davis-Floyd and Elizabeth Davis (1996).¹

My research consisted of analyzing 119 birth stories from three anthologies of “natural birth” (Brown 2013, Gaskin 2003, Menelli 2005), reading additional birth subculture resources (e.g. books, magazines, blogs, websites), and consulting numerous academic analyses of childbirth and epistemology. I found that the professed dichotomy between mainstream birth culture and the natural birth subculture does

1 In reifying this dichotomy, Cheyney, Davis-Floyd and Davis reinforce the ideological rhetoric of the birth subculture in which they are all a part: Cheyney is a licensed midwife, homebirth activist, Chair of the Oregon Governor’s Board of Licensed Direct-Entry Midwifery, Chair of the Midwives Alliance Division of Research, and a self-proclaimed “homebirth consumer” (Cheyney 2010:118, Midwives Alliance of North America n.d.); Davis-Floyd describes herself as “an advocate of the wholistic, not a technocratic, model” of birth (2004:6); and Davis is a licensed midwife and “served as a representative to the Midwives Alliance of North America for five years and as President of the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council for the United States” (n.d.).

not have much ontological or epistemological support. Although the dichotomy is affirmed by rhetoric in the birth stories and additional birth subculture resources, a deeper exploration into these birth stories problematizes the issue. My study reveals how neither mainstream culture nor the birth subculture complies with the generalizations proposed by Cheyney, Davis-Floyd and Davis. Moreover, I explain how pitting intuition and “body knowledge” against reason and scientific knowledge is false in itself.

This article begins by overviewing how rhetoric in the birth subculture (particularly in my examined birth stories) professes to value intuition and “body knowledge” equally to or more than reason and scientific knowledge, and, in doing so, implies a dichotomy between these sources of knowledge. This section also examines how these assertions are repeated in scholarship by Cheyney, Davis-Floyd, and Davis. The next section demonstrates how these authors use the previous assertion, in combination with the claim that “mainstream Western culture” values these knowledge sources oppositely, to argue that the birth subculture is countercultural. Drawing extensively on birth stories and epistemology, I challenge this argument by exposing how neither the birth subculture nor “mainstream Western culture” uniformly hold the values they are believed to by Cheyney, Davis-Floyd, and Davis. In the final section, I draw on other birth scholars and feminist epistemology to argue that the very dichotomy between the two “kinds” of knowledge is false. My conclusion joins other scholars’ warnings of dichotomizing birth cultures and thinking styles; it also considers a possible explanation for the positioning of the birth subculture as countercultural.

Birth Subculture Rhetoric

The rhetoric found in the birth subculture insists that those within the subculture value intuition and “body knowledge” as equal or superior to reason and scientific knowledge. Gaskin (2003) advises childbearing women to “not to let your over-busy mind interfere with the ancient wisdom of your body” (243). Brown (2013) advises that if childbearing women “develop a condition requiring medical intervention,” they should ask themselves what their “gut” or “intuition”

says, emphasizing that “it’s always a good idea to trust your instincts” (34). By using “gut,” “intuition” and “instinct” interchangeably, Brown also demonstrates the fluidity of meaning surrounding these words within the birth subculture.

Several women’s birth stories confirm this valuation of knowledge sources expressed by Gaskin and Brown. One way they do this is by acknowledging how much they value the intuitive (as opposed to rational) abilities of their midwives and birth communities. Karen Lovell (2003) indicates that one reason why she chose to give birth on The Farm (Gaskin’s commune in Tennessee) was because it had “in tune’ midwives” (7). Moreover, upon reflection, she appreciated that her midwives “looked at things intuitively” (8). When Charmaine O’Leary (2003) found herself unexpectedly pregnant and without much support, she traveled to The Farm after learning that it was “an intuitive community” (81). Rosemary Larson (2003) explains how her assistant midwife’s intuitive and bodily connection helped her cope with labour: “She also provided me with instructions on how to push and when, which were so in tune with what I was doing that I almost thought she could feel it. She was my rock, my stability, grounding me when my body was overwhelmed with contractions” (36).

Other birth stories reveal how intuition and “body knowledge” is considered “authoritative”; that is, it constitutes the “basis for legitimate decision-making” (Jordan 1993:13; cf. Cheyney 2008:257, Davis-Floyd 1996:125, Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:238). Lois Stephens (2003) relates how she had the urge to push before reaching full dilation (80). Usually a woman is not considered “ready to push” until she has fully dilated, and pushing beforehand is discouraged because it causes swelling and slows progress (Brown 2013:148). But Lois chose to obey her body’s urge instead: “I started feeling like pushing before I was fully dilated. I leaned forward. Soon I could feel the baby’s head enter the birth canal. My body just took over when I started pushing, and I loved it!” (Stephens 2003:80). This excerpt reveals how Lois’s decision was based on a bodily urge, not scientific or medical knowledge.

Like Gaskin, many women asserted in their birth stories that obeying their intuition or bodily instincts improved the birth experience, while thinking or rea-

soning made it worse. Sara Jean Schweitzer (2003) writes: “I didn’t want fear to prevent the baby from coming, so I tried not to dwell on thinking about the birth experience” (29). Rosemary Larson (2003) suggests that, during early labour, she was able to sleep and remain relaxed because she “didn’t think about anything ‘extra’ the whole time. [She] didn’t think about how the birth would be, or about the fact that [she] would soon have a newborn in [her] arms” (34). Marianha Nelson-Schaefer (2003) recounts: “I tried to take each contraction one at a time and not think about what was coming next. This seemed to help a lot” (123). Shannon Brown (2013) avoided vaginal exams and chose to remain ignorant of her dilation process because she “didn’t want to be discouraged by not seeing enough progress” and she “knew how important it was to stay relaxed and positive” (15). Kathryn B. Van de Castle (2003) repeats the “good advice” of her sister to not “read a bunch of books” because “too much reading could interfere with the ability to flow with what your body is telling you” (24). Because of that advice, Kathryn “never picked up a birth-preparation book” (24). Later, Kathryn articulates a similar sentiment during her labour:

I noticed that when I tried to look at things, it put me more in a thinking mode, but when I was listening, I was more in a feeling/instinctive mode. For instance, hearing that I was all right really made me feel better. If it had been written down and I was reading it, it would not have made me feel as good. Thinking was scary. Feeling wasn’t. When I was in feeling mode, things didn’t seem so overwhelming. [Van de Castle 2003:25]

Sometimes this valuation is even expressed by women who have training in medicine or other sciences. For instance, Kathryn’s sister, who insisted that she not read too much, was an OB/GYN nurse (Van de Castle 2003:24). Sometimes it is the childbearing woman herself who has the medical training. Heidi Rinehart (2003a) was a medical student when she attended a homebirth talk by Dr. Stanley Sagov and Ina May Gaskin that was sponsored by The Humanistic Medicine Task Force of the American Medical Student Association (112). Despite the fact that Heidi could not “remember a single thing

they said about home birth,” she felt that “it made such intuitive sense that a new baby would arrive at home in the midst of his family” (112). Here, Heidi privileges her intuition over rational knowledge to develop an opinion about home birth. After completing her residency training in obstetrics, she expresses a resentment of her education, which she calls “indoctrination into the culture of obstetric pathology” (113). When pregnant, she felt that she knew “too damn much about obstetrics and all the bad things that can happen” (114). She expressed gratitude for her long labour because she “needed time to distance [herself] from what [she] thought [she] knew about birth” (Rinehart 2003b:121).

Similarly, other birth stories reveal a denigration of medical and scientific knowledge, and a refusal to consider it authoritative. Rachel Kellum (2005a) gave birth to her first child in a hospital. Arguing with her doctor about episiotomy, she recalls: “I did not want to be cut under any circumstances, but he insisted I could crush my premature daughter’s head if I didn’t have the incision” (140). She remained firm against episiotomy, and her doctor instead performed an amniotomy (against her wishes) to speed up her labour (140). Rachel explains: “[The doctor] soberly inform[ed] me that had I carried Sage to full term, she wouldn’t have been able to pass through my small, unusually shaped pelvis” (124). For her next child, she planned a midwife-attended homebirth. After delivering him vaginally and weighing him at ten pounds, she continues: “Suddenly I felt incredibly vindicated. I knew that no one, not even medical science ‘authorities’ like the doctor who shot through me with fear after Sage’s birth, has the power to name or describe the capability of my body but me” (138). She was so confident in her own beliefs – and in the falsity of the doctor’s beliefs – that, for her third child, she planned and carried out an unassisted homebirth, that is, a homebirth unattended by a midwife or other medical professional (Kellum 2005b).

Beyond birth story anthologies, this knowledge valuation system is affirmed formally by certain birth-related associations and scholars. In 1992, the Midwives Alliance of North America (MANA) released a Statement of Values and Ethics, which formally codified (among other things) the valuation

of women's intuition and bodily wisdom:

We value: ...

A mother's intuitive knowledge of herself and her baby before, during, and after birth.

A woman's innate ability to nurture her pregnancy and birth her baby; the power and beauty of her body as it grows and the awesome strength summoned in labor. [Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:244]

In 1994, MANA also codified their sanctioning of midwives' use of intuition as a legitimate source of authoritative knowledge (Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:258-9).

Additionally, some scholars assert – and even encourage – the existence of this knowledge valuation system within the birth subculture. For instance, Cheyney (2008) writes that by “asserting the value of intuition or ‘body knowledge,’ home-birthers are claiming multiple, legitimate forms of authoritative knowledge” (259). In her comparison of hospital-birthing women and home-birthing women, Davis-Floyd (1996) states that “these home-birthers ... tended to reject medical definitions and value judgments in favor of their own lived experience” (143). One of her informants, Kristin, explicitly associates birth with her “discovery” of intuition and self-trust; she writes: “[Birth was] an incredible discovery of the power of my intuition, and the value of trusting myself” (Davis-Floyd 1996:148). In a separate article, Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) assert that both midwives and their clients supervaluate their “natural bodies” over science (239) and sometimes rely exclusively on intuition (239), which they qualify as involving the body (237). These two authors personally support this supervaluation of intuition; Davis conducts workshops to “heighten its status as a viable and valid source of authoritative knowledge” and both authors acknowledge that their article also supports this endeavour (245).

False Claims of Counterculture

One of the ways that Cheyney, Davis, and Davis-Floyd portray midwifery and homebirth as

countercultural is by asserting that intuition and “body knowledge” are valued in midwifery and homebirth, but not to Western society at large. Davis-Floyd (1996) includes a two-column table that outlines the “basic tenets of the hegemonic-technocratic model and the alternative-holistic model [of birth] as they have emerged from the words and behaviors of the women in the study” (150). Under the “hegemonic-technocratic” category, the author lists: “Medical knowledge is authoritative”; meanwhile, under the “alternative-holistic” category, she lists: “Intuition/inner knowing are authoritative” (150). The author claims that this distinction is supported by her research: while none of the hospital-birthing women who reflected the “hegemonic-technocratic” model of birth “reported much respect for, or reliance on, their own intuition or ‘inner knowing’” (138), home-birthing women who reflect the “alternative-holistic” model “often regard *a woman's intuition or ‘inner knowing’ more highly than the objectively obtained information of tests*” (146, italics in original).

Additionally, Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) insist that, in the West, intuition or inner voice is “culturally devalued” while “left-brained deductive reasoning” is “supervalued” (241, 251). They claim that intuition is “devalued in the West” and that “regarding the acquisition of information, Western society gives authoritative status only to the highly linear modes of inductive and deductive reasoning” (240). Likewise, Cheyney (2008) argues that “in a society that grants ... conceptual legitimacy only to ratiocination,” homebirthers assert “the value of intuition or ‘body knowledge.’ ... In doing so, they implicitly challenge the (over)reliance on technology and hypervaluation of scientific ways of knowing that they believe characterize more medicalized approaches to childbirth” (259). Moreover, Cheyney states that when “families refuse participation in socially prescribed hospital birth practices, they effectively undermine unequal power relationships between doctor and reproducing woman as patient ... [and] transition from dependence on external authorities ... to reliance on subjective knowledge or the ‘inner voice’” (260).

In the birth stories I read, I did not find clear examples of this explicit positioning of the birth subculture as countercultural due to its valuation

of intuition and “body knowledge.” However, my sample size is too limited to conclude whether or not this argument is expressed by childbearing women within the birth subculture. Davis-Floyd (1996) makes this argument the focus of her article, but it is unclear whether her informants make the same link between this knowledge valuation system and cultural “heresy.” However, in their article on midwifery, Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) did provide some examples of American midwives who express a similar sentiment. For example, they quote Judy Luce, a homebirth midwife, who stated:

I think, because we're in a culture that doesn't respect intuition, and has a very narrow definition of knowledge, we can get caught into the trap of that narrowness. Intuition is another kind of knowledge—deeply embodied. It's not up there in the stars. It is knowing, just as much as intellectual knowing. It's not fluff, which is what the culture tries to do to it. [Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:239]

The authors do not provide examples of childbearing women who hold the same opinion; however, that does not mean that those women do not exist.

In contrast, there are many women within the birth subculture who are sceptical of this knowledge valuation system or who exhibit the opposite valuation. Sheila Kitzinger, one of the world's most prominent natural birth advocates and birth anthropologists, argues how the imperative to obey one's bodily knowledge is problematic in the context of sexual abuse, which, unfortunately, is widespread. In a book dedicated to preparing women for natural childbirth, she writes:

It's difficult to say to a woman, “Be in touch with your body, trust your body,” when she's been exploited. She relives the memory, sometimes a vivid one, of sexual abuse in her birth experience. ... These women are not in a separate category of women. All of us know what sexual exploitation is like. It's not an illness. They can't be categorized as women who have been sexually abused, and treated differently. [Kitzinger as cited in Cook and Christenson 2010:7]

In the same vein, Pamela Klassen (2001) writes about a home-birthing woman, Stefanie Harter, who

saw her bodily urges and desires as an impediment to the goal she made based on rationality and scientific knowledge. During her homebirth, Stefanie “screamed, ‘I want drugs now!’” but did not receive them; afterward, she expressed gratitude for being denied what her pained body desperately wanted, but what her “modern mind” did not want (185). Klassen writes: “Having made the decision not to alleviate her pain with drugs on the basis of scientific knowledge and personal commitment, Stefanie did not want her mid-birth bodily desperation to change her plans” (185).

Likewise, another home-birthing woman, Jaime, explained how intuition is not the best source of knowledge during childbirth; in fact, listening to one's intuition may cause more pain than otherwise. When author Shannon Brown asked Jaime for her “#1 Natural Birth Tip,” she replied: “Relax. It's the most counterintuitive thing in the world at that moment, but I genuinely felt less pain the more I focused on relaxing my muscles. Even if you feel like you can't control the tensing of the rest of your body, concentrate on relaxing your face” (Brown 2013:208). This advice implies that, when it comes to pain relief in natural birth, it is better to focus and concentrate than to obey one's intuition. Similarly, Kelly Camden (2005) found that she could better cope with her labour pains if she rationally considered each of them with her scientific knowledge:

During my pregnancy I had read every book on childbirth that I could find, watched lots of videos and talked with nearly every mother in town. I understood the physiology of childbirth, and part of my coping mechanism was to rationalize each sensation I felt. When there was immense pressure in my lower back, I told myself, “OK, the baby is against my back and I can counteract this pressure.” [Camden 2005:2]

Thus, Kelly valued rational thinking and scientific knowledge because it actually improved labour, and Jaime devalued intuition because it worsened labour.

In other birth stories, women valued reason and scientific knowledge not because it reduced pain, but because they trusted the accuracy of information from scientific or technological sources more

than from their body or intuition. For instance, while Michele Zeck's (2005) feelings told her that she was not pregnant, she trusted the results from a home pregnancy test more than her own inner knowledge: "I bought an Early Pregnancy Test on my way to work, just to put my mind to rest – I knew I was not pregnant. I went to the restroom the second I arrived. That stick couldn't have turned positive any quicker than it did" (17). Michele admits that she still did not completely accept her pregnancy until she used a fetal monitor:

I needed to hear the baby's heartbeat, and we finally did for the first time at about the 17th week. Until that day, a part of me was still in denial about being pregnant. I didn't want to get my hopes up in case something went wrong during my first trimester. Once I heard that little heart beat I was overwhelmed with happiness. I really was pregnant! There really was a little person growing inside me. The reality of having a baby finally set in. (20)

Similarly, when Marianha Nelson-Schaefer (2003) experienced a long painful labour without much progress, it was a Doppler machine that assuaged her inner fears: "When they checked the baby's heartbeat they used a Doppler, and you could hear it in the room. It was so nice to hear. It gave me confidence and let me know everything was all right" (123).

Rosemary Larson (2003) notes the discrepancy between her own bodily knowledge of her baby's position and that which was evident through the use of a mirror. She gives more authority to the mirror, which provided her with an "outsider's" perspective, than to her embodied perspective: "They asked if I wanted to see the baby's head, and I couldn't believe that it was far enough down to see since I hadn't pushed very much. A hand mirror magically appeared, and I saw the purple-gray, squashed little quarter of my baby's head. The mirror helped me focus. I would look down as I squatted and pushed and would be so involved that the pain seemed far away" (36-7). These examples of trusting rational or scientific knowledge more than intuition or "body knowledge" contrasts sharply with the birth subculture rhetoric as well as the corresponding arguments by Cheyney, Davis-

Floyd, and Davis.

In their analysis of birth subculture literature, Bledsoe and Scherrer (2007) found that these texts use "admonition language" to "urge women to conduct births in ways that are defined as natural" (51). In the birth stories I analyzed, several childbearing women use "admonition language" to urge women to trust one's intuition and bodily wisdom; however, this imperative lies in contrast with the events recorded in their narratives. Maisha Khalfani (2005), a home-schooling, stay-at-home mother of colour with four children, advises women to "relax and enjoy the experience; your body knows exactly what it's doing" (71). She further emphasizes the wisdom of the birthing body when she writes of her own labour: "My goal was to relax and let my body do its job" (70). However, her birth story reveals a different perception of her body's knowledge. She recounts,

Mild contractions came on Friday afternoon ... All day Saturday I had contractions. By Saturday night they were STRONG. Thank God for the Bradley classes we had taken. ... By Sunday afternoon I had been in hard labor for quite some time ... At 7:30pm there was still no sign of Safiya. One of the midwives did some acupuncture around my ankles and all of the sudden, these deep, heavy-duty contractions began! [Khalfani 2005:69-70]

Here, Maisha relates how her body was in pain and slow to progress on its own; but due to the external knowledge from Bradley classes and acupuncture, she was able to reduce the pain and jumpstart her labour. She continues,

Suddenly, my body was ready to deliver this baby. My husband held one leg, a midwife held the other, and they told me to push. And PUSH I did, with every fiber in my body. I remember wanting to take a nap during the pushing. My husband told me I couldn't do that yet, but I could take a nap once Safiya was out. [70]

In this passage, Maisha does not rely on her body's knowledge to push, but on the direction of her husband and midwife. Furthermore, she listens to her husband's advice to stay awake and push rather than her bodily desire to take a nap.

Czarina Walker, a “devoted wife,” “loving mom,” and founder-owner of a software development company, expressed a very similar respect for the body’s natural wisdom as Maisha. In her birth story, she writes: “My job...was to relax and let my body do what it was designed to do naturally” (Walker 2005:112). But at the same time, she describes how her body did not relax naturally or easily; in fact, it took a lot of training and practice:

We had chosen to use the Bradley Method to birth our baby. ... Being that I have an uptight, somewhat high-strung, fairly stressed-out personality, my husband had voiced serious concerns about natural childbirth throughout my pregnancy. ‘This method is based on you relaxing? Is that actually possible? Don’t you think maybe you need a back-up plan?’ But I had practiced relaxing, and even visualized relaxing while in labor, throughout my entire pregnancy. [Walker 2005:109-111]

The Bradley Method, also called “Husband-Coached Childbirth,” is one of the most popular commercial natural childbirth education services; it costs between US\$200-500 and at least 24 women in the birth anthologies used this method (Brown 2013:90; Gaskin 2003; Menelli 2005:326). The 12-week course is based on the work of Dr. Robert Bradley, who, according to Pamela Klassen (2001), shares the belief that women can succeed in natural birth if they reach a state of animal instinct; although for him, this instinct was “not innate to women’s bodies,” but “socially developed” (142). To reach this “instinctual” state was “still an achievement, demanding training and the proper surroundings” (142). Thus, women who follow the Bradley Method, like Czarina, are not necessarily relying on their bodies’ innate wisdom; rather, they are trusting in the training and knowledge of a medical doctor. Moreover, Czarina expresses gratitude later on in her birth story for her massage therapist, Julie, who helped her relax during pregnancy and labour: “Julie had agreed to help me relax through labor with massage, and while I had made it through the first part of labor myself, I was very happy to have Julie help me through the rest. My mom and my husband’s mom, my husband and Julie all took turns during contractions”

(Walker 2005:114). This passage reveals that even Bradley’s “instinct” training was not enough to relax her completely; she also relied on Julie’s knowledge of massage to physically manipulate her body into a more pleasurable state.

Maria T. Brock Kundargi (2005), a Native American social worker who practices attachment parenting, also reveals a contrast between the birth subculture “admonition language” and her birth experience. On one hand, she tells women: “I think the secret to having a great birth is to feel as safe about the experience as you can physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. When we feel safe we can really let go and allow the process to unfold naturally. Surrender to the birth” (Kundargi 2005:84). On the other hand, she reveals that that the way her body and labour were naturally unfolding was less than ideal:

I wanted to push. It felt natural. When the midwife told me it was OK to push, I kneeled down in the water and squeezed my hands so tight around my husband’s fingers. I thought I was hurting him, but I wasn’t. ... The first pushes were very unproductive, so the midwife checked and said I still had a “lip” left, and not to push during the next few contractions, which was really hard to do. But within three or four contractions, the lip opened up and I could push again. I was so tired that I would have a contraction and then fall asleep, literally, and then jerk awake with another contraction. [Kundargi 2005:81-82]

Here, Maria recognizes her own bodily perspective of reality can be false: when she squeezed her husband’s fingers, she thought she was hurting him, but in reality she was not. This passage also shows that Maria recognizes that her natural pushing urges were unproductive and even tired her out to the point of falling asleep. Moreover, she decides to ignore her bodily urge, despite the fact that it was “really hard to do,” and instead follows the advice of her midwife; thus, she deems her midwife’s knowledge, not her intuitive or bodily knowledge, as authoritative. This happened again at another point in her labour: “I cried at some points because of the pain, but my midwife encouraged me to let that go” (83).

In addition to her midwife, Maria recognized the knowledge authority of her yoga instructor, who taught her new poses to help in labour: “The class that helped me the most was a three-hour Yoga for Pregnancy and Childbirth class. I used the poses during labor, and they were so effective” (84). The fact that she expresses such gratitude for the class itself implies that she does not think the poses would have otherwise come naturally to her body.

Rene Martinez (2005), who lives with her husband Marti in Alaska, repeats familiar “admonition language” of the birth subculture. She tells women:

Let go of fear, and above all, trust your instincts about your body and your baby. You are in charge of this birth. You know yourself and your needs, and you must communicate them. ... Have faith in your body’s ability to do what it knows how to do. A thousand years ago, no one needed a fetal monitor, or to be told when to push. A woman listened to her body and it led her. Have courage to not listen to the mainstream. [Martinez 2005:107]

Yet, in her birth story, she discloses several cases when it was others, not her body or her instincts, that led her to an enjoyable birth. She recalls:

After breakfast we went home and called the midwives to check in. They suggested things to try, and said to call if anything changed. Marti got a nice fire going in the wood stove and then went out for a round of golf. My mom would talk me through the contractions and rub my back. I remember her saying, “You are really doing good, it shouldn’t be much longer now.” I snapped back at her, “My friend labored like this for four days and didn’t make any progress!” I think that was the low point. I hadn’t slept and was getting tired. It was time for a change. About that time, Marti came home and ran me a bath. It was about the last thing I wanted to do, but once I was in the water it felt good. Later, my mom and Marti came up with the great idea to take a walk after dinner. Again, it was the last thing I wanted to do, but once we were outside the fresh air felt good. [Martinez 200:100-101]

At first, Rene’s birth experience is influenced by others in subtle ways: her midwives make some

suggestions for her to do, her husband makes a nice fire, and her mother helps with her contractions. But after coming to a low point in her attitude and bodily stamina, her mother and husband suggest she do things that, while she did not want to do them, ended up making her feel better. This indicates that Rene not only obeyed other’s advice when they conflicted with her own opinion, but she also valued them as they proved to be more helpful than when she had been following her own lead.

When Cheyney (2008) writes about how home-birthing women value intuition and “body knowledge,” she draws particularly on one narrative told by one of her unnamed informants:

My labor was taking forever and at one point I just started high stepping around the house. ... I was lifting my knees up to my chest with each step. I didn’t really realize I was doing it at the time, but it just felt right and pretty soon after doing that I started to feel like I had to push. ... Afterward, the midwives said it was really good that I had done that because the baby’s head was tilted to one side, and by doing that, I was shifting my pelvis and encouraging the baby to move her head. ... I just think it’s really amazing that my body knew what to do. I wasn’t conscious of it, but my body knew. ... I have a lot of respect for myself, for my body because of that. What if I had had an epidural? How could I have listened to my body? [Cheyney 2008:259]

Like the previous birth stories, this narrative reflects the birth subculture “admonition language,” particularly against receiving an epidural, which is assumed to eliminate the body-mind connection required to receive bodily knowledge. Here, though, the childbearing woman does indeed obey her feeling to start “high stepping around the house” (Cheyney 2008:259). However, it is only after her midwives rationally explain the productivity of this behaviour that the feeling is described as “knowledge.” Before that point, she says that “it just felt right” and she “didn’t really realize [she] was doing it” (259). But after being educated about the physiology of her movements, she asserts that her body “knew what to do,” which inspires respect and attention (259). It is telling that both this woman and Cheyney decided

to use this particular example instead of, say, another narrative that did not involve a rational or physiological explanation of intuitive or instinctual behaviour. This suggests that they value intuition and body knowledge when it can be defended rationally and scientifically.

None of these examples prove that the birth subculture unilaterally values reason and scientific knowledge over intuition and body knowledge. However, they do show that there is room to diverge from the inverse knowledge valuation system. This divergence can be interpreted as permissible or even endorsed when the context of their publication is taken into account: the examples are published in birth story anthologies that disseminate these stories with an aim to promote natural birth (c.f. Brown 2013:1; Gaskin 2003:130; Menelli 2005:351). Moreover, some of these birth stories repeat the proposed birth subculture rhetoric despite the valuation of reason and scientific knowledge in practice; this demonstrates the strength of discourse within the birth subculture even in the face of contradictory experience. Some scholars, such as Cheyney, Davis-Floyd, and Davis, appear to have taken this discourse at face value and have used it to position the birth subculture as countercultural. However, to the degree that the birth subculture values reason and scientific knowledge (and, conversely, devalues intuition and bodily knowledge), it loses its countercultural position.

The birth subculture further loses its countercultural position to the degree that mainstream culture values intuition and bodily knowledge; the following section argues that this degree is greater than what Cheyney, Davis-Floyd, and Davis claim. I have already written how Davis-Floyd (1996) uses a table to position the valuation of intuition or “inner knowledge” as alternative to the “hegemonic-technocratic” model of birth (150). I have also articulated how Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) assert that intuition is “devalued in the West” and that science and Western society supervalue “left-brained deductive reasoning” (240-241). Moreover, Cheyney (2008) insists that “rely[ing] on intuition as a primary source of authoritative knowledge [is] a revolutionary act in a society that grants legal and conceptual legitimacy

only to ratiocination” (259). However, these claims about hegemony, science, and Western society are inaccurate.

First, what Cheyney (2008:259) refers to as “body knowledge” – and describes as a “bodily and experiential” way of knowing – is simply known under a different name in philosophy: empirical knowledge. For empiricists, the information we gain from our bodily senses and experience constitutes “the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge” (Markie 2015). And it is the testing of empirical information on which the scientific method is based; thus, empirical knowledge is essential to science (Hansson 2015). Therefore, it is false to insist that valuing “body knowledge” challenges the hegemony of science and “technomedicine” in “Western society” (Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996).

Second, the claim that valuing intuition is counter-hegemonic is also false. Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) themselves acknowledge the theories that scientific innovation is often linked to intuition (240). This link is not foreign to the scientific community; in fact, Intuition Peak in Antarctica honours this very idea (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research 2005). It should not be expected that scientists hold intuition in contempt, since all science relies on mathematics, which, according to mainstream theories of mathematics, relies on intuitive axioms (Horsten 2015). These theories assert that all mathematical statements can be reduced down to axioms, and we believe those axioms are true because they are intuitive, *not* because they can be logically deduced from something else (Horsten 2015). For example, the mathematical axiom of identity (i.e., everything is identical to itself) cannot be proven with deduction; it is simply intuitive to us, so we accept it as true. The authority of mathematical axioms, then, is based on intuition, not deduction. All axioms are intuitive in this way, and thus anyone who uses any form of mathematics ultimately relies on intuition.

In philosophy, intuition is not only authoritative with regard to mathematics, but also to morality, ethics, and epistemology. For instance, social intuitionism argues that people make moral decisions more based on intuition than rational thinking. One ontological support for this claim is the fact that many moral

judgments happen automatically, even if they are rationalized in retrospect (Haidt 2001). Ethicists have pointed to the intuitive appeal of the ethic of reciprocity, or “the golden rule,” which appears in almost every ethical tradition (Blackburn 2005:154). Furthermore, it is ironic that Davis-Floyd (1996) positions the “alternative-holistic” model of birth as “very un-Cartesian” because, in fact, Descartes was a major champion of the intuition-deduction thesis in epistemology, which argues that all knowledge comes from either intuition or deductions made from intuition (Markie 2015). Even more ironic is that Descartes’ concept of infallible intuition, that is, that intuition can never be false (Markie 2015), aligns precisely with the concept expressed by Davis-Floyd and Davis’ informants (1996:250). Moreover, this concept contrasts with Tony Bastick’s idea of intuition, which Davis-Floyd and Davis explore in detail (1996:240, 250). And finally, it is not only Descartes but foundationalists in general who agree that knowledge comes from a combination of empirical knowledge and “unaided reason” through intuitive ideas (Blackburn 2005:139, 308).

Therefore, the valuation of intuition and bodily experience as authoritative knowledge does not render the birth subculture countercultural. Even if the birth subculture upheld this valuation system as stringently as it claims, it would do so in harmony with science and mainstream society.

False Dichotomies

As I have hinted at, there are significant problems with simply asserting the existence of a dichotomy between reason and scientific knowledge on the one hand, and intuition and bodily or empirical knowledge on the other. One problem is a matter of semantics. For instance, Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) mobilize more than four definitions: one from the American Heritage Dictionary, one from the psychologist Tony Bastick, at least one from their own assumptions about intuition, and several more from their informants. Some of these definitions have opposite characteristics; for example, Bastick’s concept of intuition is fallible (i.e. it can produce false beliefs), whereas most of the informants conceived of intuition as infallible (i.e. it always produces true

beliefs). Moreover, the informants themselves have diverse notions of intuition between them. For instance, when Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) asked their informants “where intuition is located,” they received many different answers, including:

“All through the body”; “It’s cellular”; “It’s in my stomach”; “It’s inner knowledge – you don’t know where it comes from”; “Your heart, your dreams”; “Your connection to the universe”; “My higher self”; “My heart, my chest, my throat”; “I’m very auditory – I hear it as a voice coming from deep inside.” (247)

Another of their informants described an intuitive process thusly: “a cone of power comes straight down the width of my head, through my body, and out through my hands” (247). The authors themselves describe intuition as a “still, small, culturally devalued inner voice” (251).

Thus, in analyzing women’s accounts of giving birth, it would be naïve to assume that they all use the word intuition in the same way. In fact, the context provided in some birth stories not only insists that the mother-authors define intuition differently, but helps me to see the specific ways in which their concepts of intuition differ. For example, some of these women used “intuitive” to describe a career, such as “a medical intuitive” or “an intuitive nutritional consultant” (Lee 2005:122). Others use it to describe an inanimate object, such as “an intuitive book” (Wildner 2005:174). And, as mentioned previously, Shannon Brown, the author of *Natural Birth Stories* who contributes her own natural birth story to the anthology, implies that intuition, instincts, and “gut” feeling are one and the same (2005:34).

Yet another concept is proposed by Charmaine O’Leary (2003), who juxtaposes her “good” inner voice with her “bad” inner voice:

I have always been a strongly intuitive person. I have great trust in my intuition, and it has always served me well. In fact, I like to put myself in adventurous situations that would stretch my intuition muscles ... I would never have imagined not trusting that small voice inside. It has always seemed so right. Yet, at the time after my baby was born, certain circumstances led to me listen to a voice that was really misguiding me. This voice

was angry, mean, and full of darkness. ... As this critical voice grew to huge proportions in my head, I started to believe that I was hearing the voice of God. Yet God was telling me to do awful things to my baby. I remember many a night holding my baby in complete terror while a loud, inner voice railed at me to trust God and bring harm to my dear little girl. [O'Leary 2003:83]

Charmaine continues to explain how she attempted benevolent suicide, was admitted to a mental institution, and did domestic chores in an encouraging household:

Finally, I learned again to discriminate and identify negative thoughts and cut them away from my mind. ... An interesting reward came from having lived through such a frightening illness: I could tell if a woman was experiencing postpartum depression. ... The problem is that most people have no language to describe this experience. Another problem is that it can be seductively interesting, and some women I've met actually prefer it to reality, because it can be entertaining and a bit magical. These women need to be reasoned with and talked out of this idea, for their own sake and for the sake of their children. [O'Leary 2003:84]

For Charmaine, intuition is a positive inner voice, but another inner voice, a bad one, may also exist in one's mind. This bad voice might impersonate God. Moreover, one must be reasoned with to avoid its seductive influence.

These examples are just a sample of the many diverse ways that intuition and "body knowledge" can be conceived. Without clear, unifying definitions, it is difficult to maintain the dichotomous categorizations proposed by Davis-Floyd and Davis. The fact that the authors include several definitions within their own article only renders their categorizations less certain.

A second problem with the authors' proposed dichotomy lies in the assumption that people can easily distinguish between the knowledge they deem "intuitive" or "embodied" and that which they deem "rational" or "scientific." This assumption is a dubious one, especially since "contemporary Western women are becoming far more knowledgeable about the technicalities of birthing than any cohort in history"

(Bledsoe and Scherrer 2007:63). Indeed, the majority of women whose birth stories I examined educated themselves about the birthing process and/or advised pregnant women to do the same. With such ample scientific knowledge and reasoned arguments at the forefront of their minds, how can childbearing women be sure that their "inner voice" is not being informed by their rational-scientific knowledge? This is precisely what Pamela Klassen (2001) argues in her study of American home birthing women. Using the language of instinct and bodily knowledge, which Klassen finds to be used in conjunction with intuition, the author states that "in these women's experiences, instinct is also a learned capacity to listen to one's self and one's body. The 'truth' that their bodies speak to them changes over the course of their bodily history of birth in which they learn and develop techniques of childbirth" (153). It appears, then, that the line between the two binary oppositions may be much more ambiguous.

A third problem is that, as I have already suggested, the proposed dichotomy between bodily or empirical knowledge and scientific knowledge is a false one. The empirical knowledge we gain experientially through our bodily senses is vital to the production of scientific knowledge (Hansson 2015). Since the scientific method cannot function without empirical or "body knowledge," positioning them as dichotomous is blatantly false. But, as shown earlier, this is precisely what Cheyney, Davis-Floyd, and Davis do.

Finally, the dichotomy between reason and intuition as proposed by Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) – and reiterated by Cheyney (2008:259) – is similarly dubious. In their article, Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) include the subheading "Reason versus Intuition: Accuracy and Source," which clearly reaffirms the proposed dichotomy (250). Moreover, the authors write that intuition exists "in contrast" to reason, and even place them on opposite sides of the brain, with intuition on the right "holistic" side and reason on the left "analytic" side (240-241). Some mothers repeated this rhetoric in their birth stories; for example, Emily (2013) writes: "I could feel my body shifting to right-brain function only ... Labor Land. Labor Land is a dream-like, non-analytical,

place where you just go off intuition” (Emily 2013:47). Yet at other times, Davis and Davis-Floyd claim that the process of intuition is “transcendental” because it involves “cross-hemisphere, whole brain functioning” (Davis-Floyd and Davis 1996:241). As it turns out, however, both of these arguments are unsupported scientifically, even if held in popular belief. Neuroscientists understand that “it is not the case that the left hemisphere is associated with logic or reasoning more than the right” (Jeff Anderson as cited in Wanjek 2013).

Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) also link reason to deduction, and, further, deduction to Descartes (240). But this is ironic because, as suggested earlier, Descartes did not see deduction as oppositional to intuition. In fact, because he adhered to the intuition-deduction thesis, he thought the two worked in harmony and were fundamentally interconnected (Markie 2015). Furthermore, Cartesian epistemology demonstrates how intuition is fundamentally interconnected with reason in general. If intuition is infallible, as Descartes and Davis-Floyd and Davis’ informants claim, then reason compels us to believe our intuition, since it is true by definition. In fact, *not* believing intuition, or simply questioning its veritability, would be irrational, since intuition cannot be false. Thus, we *are* using reason if we adopt intuition as authoritative knowledge because it is infallible; so, for the informants, reason and intuition must be interconnected, even if the connection is not acknowledged.

Meanwhile, Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) insist on associating Descartes only with deduction, pitting deduction against intuition, and claiming that deduction is supervalued over intuition “in the West” (240). But, as Margaret Atherton (2002) reminds us, “philosophers have developed accounts of more ways of thinking than just two” (26). She warns that insisting that Cartesian reason is hegemonic, even for 17th century Western society, systematically ignores the influence of the different styles of thought proposed by George Berkeley or John Locke (who, as an empiricist, emphasized bodily sense-experience), while “further examples abound in other periods” (35). Furthermore, she warns that by “narrowing attention down to only two styles of thinking,” which, I argue,

is what Davis-Floyd and Davis are doing, they are “undercutting rather than encouraging diversity” of thinking styles (35). This is particularly important here given that this (i.e., undercutting diversity of thinking styles) is precisely what Davis-Floyd and Davis (1996) accuse their opponents of doing: “Jordan points out that ‘to legitimize one kind of knowing devalues, often totally dismisses, all other ways of knowing’ ... Her words capture in a nutshell what the larger technomedical culture has done” (258). Hence, Davis and Davis-Floyd appear to be committing the very crime for which they hold others accountable. To her credit, Cheyney (2008) acknowledges “multiple forms of knowledge” (259). However, she clarifies that these can be categorized into two groups: that which is “intellectual, rational, or logical,” and that which is “more bodily and experiential” (258-259). Thus, Cheyney adopts the same dichotomous rhetoric that is discouraged by Atherton and adopted by Davis-Floyd and Davis.

Conclusion

Feminist epistemologists have demonstrated how we should be wary of dichotomizing ways of thinking when there is significant evidence against it (Lloyd 2000:172). My article has shown why dichotomizing “mainstream” birth and the birth subculture is also flawed, and I do not stand alone in this critique. Although Klassen (2001) calls home-birth a “countercultural movement,” her assertion that home-birthing women hold onto “the techniques and knowledge base of biomedical obstetrics” blurs the line between medical birth and “natural” birth (77, 135). Meanwhile, Alison Phipps (2014) presents a more overt critique. She argues that although birth activists use their connection to the “alternative health arena ... to position themselves as avant-garde, counter-cultural and discriminated against,” they nonetheless “make appeals to science in order to stress the benefits of their preferred practices” and their ideas have become hegemonic since the introduction of “normal birth” campaigns in the U.K. and North America (Phipps 2014:119-120, c.f. 105-113).

Phipps also reveals a commodification-based similarity between “mainstream” birth and the birth

subculture. While birth activists perceive “women requesting birth interventions as being conditioned by consumerist values,” they themselves profit from their publications (via “natural birth” product placement and advertising) and commercial support services, “even though they are often recommended as though there is no profit motive” (Phipps 2014:123-4). This is one possible explanation of why the dichotomy permeates birth subculture rhetoric: by presenting a certain kind of birth as radically different from the mainstream kind of birth, the “natural birth” industry can profit from various products and services that are deemed necessary to “achieve” the counter-cultural birth, since it cannot be easily learned through free mainstream sources. This in turn may also explain why the birth subculture is largely composed of white, middle-class women who can afford these products and services (cf. Bledsoe and Scherrer 2007; Klassen 2001; Phipps 2014).

As it stands, my article has demonstrated how the dichotomy between mainstream culture and the birth subculture is inaccurate to the extent that it relies on the proposed dichotomy of thinking styles as well as the assumption that the two birth models value either pole over the other. Although Cheyney, Davis-Floyd, and Davis have argued – alongside the rhetoric found in the birth subculture to which they belong – that this dichotomy is real, I have provided significant evidence to the contrary. My research shows that the birth subculture does not uniformly value intuition and “body knowledge” over reason and scientific knowledge, nor does mainstream culture do the opposite. In fact, simply dichotomizing these thinking styles is inaccurate, and it commits the very same error that Davis-Floyd and Davis accuse their opponents of doing – that is, dismissing a diversity of thinking styles.

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The Gnostic Tourist: Gambling, Fly-Fishing, and the Seduction of the Middle Class

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ABSTRACT: Borrowing techniques from creative non-fiction, this article explores the parallels between gambling and fly-fishing in late modern capitalism. It introduces the concept of gnostic tourism and argues that some forms of contemporary leisure create moments of singularity in which the actor comes to feel as though he or she has penetrated to the heart of a deep secret. This, in turn, creates an affective state that fuels serial consumption. Implications are explored in relation to the potential for a more critical form of political consciousness.

KEYWORDS: gambling, fly-fishing, gnostic tourism, play, serial consumption

An Approach to Understanding Serial Consumption

In his classic book *Learning to Labor*, Paul Willis taught us about how a specific set of young males in England convinced themselves to accept similar roles as their fathers' within working class life in the context of an industrial economy of the early 1970s. A partial penetration of class structures, coupled with their desire to fight back against the social and bureaucratic conformity of formal schooling, helped create a situation in which "the lads" came to celebrate manual labour and the workshop culture that surrounded it over the white-collar life that formal education supposedly offered to them (Willis 1977). The lure of the steady pay-packet available at young ages, the value system of a shop-floor that resonated with their family socialization, and the pleasures of steady girlfriends and soon-to-be-wives allowed these young males to seduce themselves into lives that would eventually play out as the noisy desperation of the subordinate classes in a de-industrializing England.

In 1989, David Harvey argued that contemporary postmodern cultural formations are characterized by the ongoing contraction of both time and space in order to service capitalism's drive for continuous expansion through flexible accumulation. If so, it follows that the most highly valued forms of contemporary leisure might be those that offer to disrupt the flow of time and re-inflate a sense of space. In this article, I want to offer the suggestion that two seemingly opposite forms of contemporary leisure (fly-fishing in wilderness areas and gambling in Las Vegas casinos) actually helps to foster a very similar structure of feeling (Williams 1977). I will be arguing that those I refer to as gnostic tourists talk themselves into spending large sums of money in order to pursue an emotional state that allows them to create an affective moment that overrides the space-time compression of the contemporary economy and makes them feel as though they have

apprehended an inner truth about either capitalism or a natural environment that is assumed to exist outside of capitalism. Both gambling and fly-fishing offer participants a kind of supersaturated sensual experience (gambling in high tech and ‘cutting edge’ cultural worlds such as Las Vegas and fly-fishing in a romanticized version of the ‘natural world’). Seemingly opposites, they actually converge in the late capitalist economy as practices that allow self-selected consumers to seek out deeply sensual experiences. But they offer more than this. Each, in my opinion, gives the participant something extra. Each offers a chance to catch a glimpse of whatever it is that most fascinates that person about the present world they inhabit as human beings. In the case of fly-fishing (and many other kinds of sport fishing, hunting, and eco-tourism, e.g. Dunk 1991:112), the person involved often feels that she or he is gaining a glimpse into the ebb and flow of “the natural world.” Fed-up with contemporary social formations, the fly-fisher does not fish so much as pursue the opportunity to know nature in a way that seems to be unmediated by the institutions that dominate his or her daily life. Equally fed-up with daily routines in the capitalist world they inhabit, gamblers fly to casinos in Las Vegas in order to *feel* the ebb and flow of money in a direct and sustained fashion. In other words, both casino gamblers and fly-fishers in late capitalist economies have a gnostic desire to understand what we essentialize as ‘nature’ or ‘the economy’ as a form of direct, sensual and individualized experiences.

Inspired by the work of Marx, Dean MacCannell pointed out as far back as 1976 that contemporary alienation lay at the heart of the push toward a new ‘leisure class.’ “For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles” (MacCannell 1976:3). I am suggesting that, in 2015, large numbers of people have come to the realization that insight is just as likely to be found through tourism ‘at home’ and have begun an extensive exploration of our own cultural formations in order to better understand their place in the (capitalist) world. In particular, ‘authenticity’ can now be found in play rather than necessarily in the work of others,

as per MacCannell’s original suggestion. The foundation of this ‘search,’ of course, lies in the fundamental alienation that workers (members of the proletariat) experience through their assigned roles in production processes, including the concomitant ‘relations of production’ that they are pressured to assume as an adjunct of their wage economy lives (e.g. Marx 2011). Though Marx’s concept of alienation is multi-layered and complex (e.g. Meszaros 2005), it is enough to note here its importance for understanding larger issues such as the relation between alienated labour and Marx’s central theory of value (e.g. Ollman 2003:83).

Paul Willis undertook his study in a strongly industrialized urban centre that at the time still offered its working class inhabitants significantly better than minimum wage jobs in the manufacturing sectors. In contemporary North America and Western Europe, the late capitalist or service-based economy has taken on a new importance in the decades since this study was conducted. Many manufacturing jobs have shifted to less wealthy (and therefore lower wage) countries such as China, India, and Mexico. At the same time, in countries like the United States, Canada, Britain, France, and Germany permanent underclasses have been left largely to shift for themselves, while increasing numbers of wage-economy jobs have become located within the service economy. In an industrially dominated Fordist economy (Gramsci 1971; Harvey 1989, Allison 2006), the emphasis was on a relatively stable (i.e. geographically, and to some extent, socially) labor force that consumed its own products (e.g. televisions and trucks). Antonio Gramsci used Fordism as a term of reference for the industrial method of mass production, or production by assembly line, focusing on the United States (Gramsci 1988:275). This form of production calls for a morality that celebrates an almost puritanical and very disciplined worker, one who will make ‘rational’ decisions about what to consume as well as being the ‘kind of person’ who always shows up for work on time in order to keep the assembly lines running (Gramsci 1988:290-91). The labourer’s ‘high wages’ should not be used for excessive alcohol consumption or other indulgences that might impede him or her as a machine-like worker and she or he is

encouraged to maintain a strict self-discipline. These values were created not just because of Fordism but also through the business philosophy of Taylorism (Taylor 1911). As Lisa Rofel tells us, “Taylorism in the West treated the body as if it were a machine, so that movement would become rapid and automatic without involving any thought” (Rofel 1997:165).

In the post-Fordist or service-oriented economy that has emerged in an unprecedented period of ‘free trade,’ however, flexible accumulation becomes the new model for both production and consumption, as well as other aspects of human behaviour. Production shifts to whatever location offers corporations the best compromise between cost and quality, and consumers themselves become consumed by the idea of the next best thing (Allison 2006: 97). This shift is closely related to the proliferation of mass media and the advertising industry, which encourages individuals to abandon their enlightenment-led beliefs in “the sovereign subject” and begin seeing themselves as an unstable collection of signs, most of which may be purchased or sold (e.g. MacLaren 1991:147). As David Harvey (2001:121) suggests, these trends tend to lead capitalism to “a restless search for new product lines, new technologies, new lifestyles, new ways to move around, new places to colonize – an infinite variety of stratagems that reflect a boundless human ingenuity for coming up with new ways to make a profit.” A very high level of personal consumption becomes necessary if capitalism is going to create market increases in the super-industrialized nations in order to sell the huge range of new products produced by multinational companies through the cheaper work forces located elsewhere (e.g. in India, China, and other countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America). Zygmunt Bauman notes that this reversal of moral pressures now denies the desirability of a delay of satisfaction and celebrates a kind of consumerist syndrome in which any economic procrastination is a vice rather than a virtue (Bauman 2005:83).

It might be said that the late capitalist economy is a middle class economy, in that it turns an unprecedented percentage of the population into believing that they are a new kind of professional. It is important to note that I am using the term

‘middle class’ throughout this paper to refer to a kind of vernacular middle-class – a ‘class’ position that is embraced principally through self-definition (by large numbers of North Americans, for example). This self-definition is primarily expressed through consumption patterns and holds even in the face of the historically increasing economic gap between the truly wealthy and the rest of the population. In a sense, I am referring to people who do not understand their own class positions in Marxist terms (e.g. as an outcome of a relation to a mode of production; Marx 1992) but who have a more Weberian sense of social stratification (e.g. Weber 1968). In particular, they accept the notion that social ‘status’ is an important part of defining stratification (or what for Marx would be class) position (e.g. Weber 2005:155-157; Bendix 1962:85-87; Parkin 1982:90-108). As Reinhard Bendix (1962:86; italics in original) puts it: “In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that a specific *style of life* can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle.” In the contemporary period, I am suggesting that status is largely confirmed through consumption, and consumption is justified by a sense of entitlement as a member of the ‘professional’ middle class. In the present time, the terms ‘profession’ and ‘professional’ have undergone unprecedented extension. This can be confirmed by speaking with those who occupy various jobs that would have, in the past, relegated a person to ‘non-professional’ status. Nurses, school teachers, mechanics, hair stylists, plumbers, and many others occupying similar occupational positions now typically see themselves as “professionals” in some fundamental sense. As such, they demand the kinds of wages that they believe professionals should receive and, most importantly, expect to consume within the late capitalist economy in a similar if sometimes lesser manner than “other professionals” – even if it means going into substantial debt in order to do so. I am suggesting here that large numbers of people who live in countries that are becoming dominated by service-oriented economies expect to live in a similar way to the older bourgeoisie and their allies; that is, they expect to fully participate in the consumption of what used to be called luxury goods or services (such as diamond rings or foreign

vacations). Zygmunt Bauman (2005:81) suggests that in this situation it becomes vital to turn individual dissatisfaction into a permanent state; former 'must have' products very quickly become denigrated as old fashioned or 'so yesterday.' An even better way to stimulate this form of economy is to create products and services that constantly give birth to "new needs/desires/wants." "What starts as a need must end up as a compulsion or addiction" (Bauman 2005:81). Both gambling and fly-fishing are capable of producing not only many new needs/desires/wants, but also plenty of compulsions and addictions. This is addiction in both the strong sense (as a compulsion that *must* be met or at least dealt with), but also in the weaker sense (as something that we convince ourselves we voluntarily want to do, over and over; becoming serial consumers of a single type of product, service, or experience).

As any walk and talk through a Las Vegas casino will remind us, the 'leisure class' today (i.e. those who are willing to pay for relatively expensive leisure activities) can include hair-dressers, car mechanics, plumbers, or carpenters almost as easily as it encompasses lawyers, dentists, and university professors. Other than the true underclasses in geographical areas such as North America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan (e.g. the unemployed, people working for minimum or near-minimum wages, those relying on social welfare or employment insurance incomes or old age pensions), almost any more than a minimally waged person living in these places is likely to indulge in the consumer society and use credit in order to buy a boat for bass fishing, a motorcycle for weekend cruising, or just decide to take the family out for a Sunday brunch at a restaurant. The difference lies in the level of indulgence. In Las Vegas, for example, hair dressers and plumbers are more likely to book their rooms in the older Fremont Street hotels, while middle-managers, school teachers, and non-corporate lawyers are more likely to stay in hotels right on the Las Vegas Strip such as Mandalay Bay, or Paris Las Vegas – or perhaps even the Bellagio or Venetian hotels on the nights when they have room sales. Members of the true bourgeoisie might in turn be found in the Four Seasons or at Wynn Las Vegas. However, any of these

visitors can and often do pay from \$98.50 to \$155 (US) for seats to watch the Cirque du Soleil show called O (for Ocean) at the Bellagio Hotel; and any of them might be found watching the free dancing fountain show that occurs every fifteen minutes in front of that same hotel and then afterward wander into the Bellagio's casino for a little gambling. These potentially shared experiences are part of the luxury economy that we have created for ourselves in North America, Western Europe, parts of Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific. This is a consumer economy that, in many other areas of the world, only the truly wealthy can expect to experience.

Before proceeding further, I would like to take a moment to reflect on what this article has to offer to the reader. This work has been written as an experimental form of literary ethnography (e.g. Sharman 2007; Tsao 2011). Since there have been a great many "experimental" and perhaps even more "literary" forms of ethnography written since the call went out for a greater variety of exposition in *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), I would like to further clarify what I mean by this statement. More specifically, I see this work as being within the tradition of creative nonfiction, in which the author tracks back and forth between vivid and even visceral scenes and narrative summaries (Narayan 2007:138).

Creative nonfiction has emerged in the last few years as the province of factual prose that is also literary – infused with the stylistic devices, tropes and rhetorical flourishes of the best fiction and the most lyrical of narrative poetry. It is fact-based writing that remains compelling...that has at its heart an interest in enduring human values: foremost a fidelity to accuracy, to truthfulness. [Forche and Gerard 2001:1]

Unlike Narayan (2007:138), however, I do not see narrative as automatically opposing argumentation, but rather prefer to develop an argument through narration. I agree with Sharman (2007:119) that we should not shy away from either the aesthetics of ethnography or from the emotions of the senses. I also parallel Paul Stoller (2007:188) in thinking that imagination is indispensable to ethnography and, again, with Sharman (2007:128) in believing that a

more aesthetic anthropology is also a more personally and politically engaged anthropology.

A more literary form of writing need not imply that the critical side of intellectual activity is being left behind (for good examples, see Benjamin 1968, Jameson 1992, Williams 1977). Using elements of montage (e.g. Benjamin 1999; Mickel 2013; Taussig 1987) or the technique of *in medias res* (launching into a description in the middle of the action, without our usual anthropological contextualization leading up to the description beforehand) (Mickel 2013:182) need not imply that the work is somehow less scientific or valid. This article, for example, is not just about telling stories; it is about the serious issue of hyper-consumption in our contemporary world. As a form of science, all inductive assertions presented in this paper are written in such a way as to be fully challengeable or even testable by other ethnographers or even by our more statistically oriented colleagues. That shouldn't have to mean that everything has to be written in the form of staid hypotheses, or show up in our work as relentlessly rational argumentation of the 1, 2, 3 variety. I would also suggest that not only first-hand descriptions can be fruitfully subjected to more literary techniques, so can the words of other people (i.e. quotations). Juxtapositions rather than the usual transitions are relevant in this regard and can serve as a corollary to the cinematic technique of jump cuts (offering the reader two or more slightly different angles onto what seems to be the same subject and thereby offering a meditation on the notion of seamless continuity in relation to that subject, e.g. see Marcus 1990). Montage need not imply radical differences in imagery and small things can often lead to conclusions with broader implications.

[I'm] attempt[ing] to capture the portrait of history in the most insignificant representation of reality, its scraps, as it were. [Walter Benjamin quoted by Hannah Arendt 1968:11]

[Montage involves] the ability to capture the infinite, sudden, or subterranean connections of dissimilars, as the major constitutive principle of the artistic imagination in the age of technology. [Stanley Mitchell quoted by Michael Taussig quoted by Allison Mickel 2013:178]

This, then, is not a more traditional work of “thick description” (Geertz 1973) or a standard piece of empirical ethnography. However, I reject the notion that this automatically makes it a work of thin description. I prefer to see it as an ethnography of width, in which what at first seems to be about relatively narrow or even trivial actions and events can be teased out in such a way as to point to much larger social processes (for other examples of this, see Fife 2004b, 2006, 2014). The goal is not to present a fully formed and detailed analysis of either fly-fishing or gambling (e.g. in the valuable way that Washabaugh and Washabaugh 2000 did for fly-fishing, or Schull 2012 for machine gambling in Las Vegas). Rather, its purpose is to use observation and evidence gathered during the course of shorter periods of field research in order to couple that with a detailed reading of secondary literature in a comparative framework as part of an attempt to generate new ideas regarding underlying processes of over-consumption in the contemporary service-oriented economy. In more specific terms, I have been undertaking periods of field research on a yearly basis since 2000 on the issue of tourism in the island of Newfoundland (e.g. Fife 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2010). In the course of that ethnographic work, fly-fishing became one important sub-set of activities that I needed to investigate (e.g. Fife 2010, 2014, in press) and I draw upon that research here. Observation and informal conversations rather than systematic research (e.g. Fife 2005) informs this paper in relation to gambling (in Las Vegas and elsewhere). Three visits (totaling roughly 20 days) to Las Vegas, half a dozen several day visits to a casino in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and two single visits to a casino in Hull, Québec, have convinced me that such seemingly disparate activities as fly-fishing and casino gambling have something very much in common in the contemporary social milieu of North America and that this “something” is worthy of consideration. It is therefore on the basis of informal observations in casinos in Las Vegas (and elsewhere) and over a decade of on and off field research involving fly-fishing on the island of Newfoundland, numerous conversations with both fly-fishers and gamblers, extensive reading of the literature involving both topics, and the auto-ethnographic analysis

(e.g. Chang 2009; Reed-Danahay 1997)) of my own experiences engaging in both activities, that I offer the anthropologically informed speculations in this paper.

At Play

Play, including types of play such as gambling and fly-fishing, can be thought of as forms of enchantment. As such, the moments in which play occurs are moments of vulnerability – easily broken or shattered. As Johan Huizinga (1950:21) elaborated for us over seventy-five years ago: “The play mood is *labile* in its very nature. At any moment ‘ordinary life’ may reassert its rights either by an impact from without, which interrupts the game, or by an offense against the rules, or else from within, by a collapse of the play spirit, a sobering, a disenchantment.” What, then, stops myself or others from standing up from the slot machine, excusing ourselves from the next deal at the blackjack table, or pausing in mid-throw on the craps table and saying: “What am I doing – this could cost me a lot of money. And, for what?” Alternatively, what keeps mosquitoes, black flies, sunburn or bad weather from driving us away from the trout streams? What hinders the sobering moment from developing along the hundred plus kilometer highway journey to a favorite fishing spot, when we might pause long enough to think: “Wait a minute, why am I risking my marriage or at least my domestic harmony, blowing off the book that I really should be writing for my professional betterment, and spending thousands of dollars to catch a little fish that I’m going to put back anyway?” What is it that we seek in these moments that allows us to remain enchanted, at least enough to keep coming back for more?

The Seduction

Gambling:

It is three or perhaps four in the morning, I’ve lost track after being at the slot machines steadily for five or six hours. Two machines over, hell (or perhaps heaven) breaks loose. A sleepy-eyed woman is startled awake and bursts into a sing-song voice: “I’ve won, I’ve won.” She repeats this many times, getting louder with each phrase, until it becomes a kind of mantra. Even the machine seems to be excited, emitting an array of shrieks and moans that

sound as if they will continue forever, never leaving us in silence again. A bright light circles a clock-like device, as if something important has occurred and the many sounds being produced are not yet enough to draw proper attention to it. “I think it’s over a thousand; I’m pretty sure it’s over a thousand,” she says. A man who appears to be in his fifties runs over and gives the woman a hug, then quickly returns two rows over to his own play. A husband? Lover? Friend? It is hard to tell by her reaction, which is friendly and knowing, but not quite intimate. Perhaps she doesn’t want to fully share the moment with anyone else. “Yes, it is; it’s well over a thousand.” She lets out a whoop that makes the bedraggled group of us scattered around the same row of machines smile. Restless, I get up to find another machine. Passing her, I make sure to lean in and say “Congratulations, that’s great.” She beams up at me and inadvertently parodies Elvis Presley’s famous tag line: “Ah, thank ya, thank ya very much-ah.” I laugh, and she thinks I’m laughing in happiness for her rather than because I’m getting a bit loopy after the free drinks and the non-stop gambling and the accidental parody. And perhaps I am genuinely happy for her. I’m not quite sure at this stage of the night, or morning, or whatever it is outside of the world of dimmed lights and soft voices – as if we have been speaking to lovers rather than to slot machines. And each of us thinks: perhaps something will happen again, soon, and maybe to me.

Fly-Fishing:

I’m standing knee deep in a very cold river, just outside of Gros Morne National Park. There is a keen edge to the wind, as there so often is in Newfoundland, but the sun plays peek-a-boo behind the clouds and it’s not unpleasantly cold in my thigh-high wading boots and the old anorak that I use for fishing. There are salmon in the river – I caught glimpses of them through binoculars when I scanned the water from a roadside bridge. The river is flowing at some speed, so I move very little from my initial spot. A splashing sound occurs to my left, and I turn just in time to catch the tail end of a good-sized Atlantic Salmon disappearing back into the water. Damn, I should have had my fly in the river by now. I tie on a Blue Charm, the favourite salmon fly for this part of Newfoundland, and begin casting toward a place I saw from the bridge, where several Salmon are resting

slightly away from the current. After a number of casts there are more splashes, to my right this time. I move back up onto the riverbank and make my way upstream; slide back down into the water, and try my luck again. This scene begins to repeat itself, moving up or down stream as I become tired of my useless casts in one location or another. I chase the splashes – seldom a good idea, but the action always seems to be someplace just a little out of the reach of my admittedly amateurish casting and I can't bring myself to resist the temptation. Besides, the water is chilly and I welcome the brief interludes of time spent back upon the land. At the same moment, I also resent leaving the water, having just gotten used to the insistent pressure on my legs and the feeling of being part of the flow that only comes after the passage of time. It is as if each moment I re-enter the river I have to begin again, looking for that sweet spot of calm familiarity. After a few hours, I get a sharp tug, but when I jerk my rod to set the hook, there is nothing at the end of the line but my own adrenaline. It is enough to keep me going. A Belted Kingfisher chatters his way back and forth across the river as he moves from tree to tree. Perhaps he is scolding me for being in his river. At one point, I'm casting repeatedly when splashes begin in several directions at once. The fish are everywhere, jumping simultaneously as if someone has given them a signal. Are they mocking me? I don't seem to notice that I cease casting, simply standing in the river watching the Salmon leap, twist, turn and flop back into the water – again and again. It seems to last for a very long time, but cannot be more than seconds, gradually diminishing in intensity, before they finally go quiet. Eventually, I notice that what sun there is outside is closing down for the day and I leave the water for good. It has been one of the best days of fishing that I can remember.

Sensual Worlds Within Social Worlds

Fly-fishing often takes place in rural, even remote locations – far from our everyday lives (for an exegesis of fly-fishing, from the perspective of those who have spent an inordinate amount of their lives pursuing it, see: Geirach 1988, 2003; Leeson 1994; McGuane 1999; Richards 2001; Douglass 2002; Tapply 2004; Wickstrom 2004; Reid 2005). Alongside of the banks of rivers, at the edge of ponds, and at the estuary mouth we fly-fish for salmon and trout. Whether

sitting in a small drift boat and sliding down a river system, using our waders to carefully walk out up to our waist in the stream, or crawling on our knees through tall grass so that the trout will not see our presentation of the fly, we are part of what we think of as the natural world. Water brushes against us as it slides by; soil stains our pant legs as we kneel or crawl; trees provide cooling shelter for us (as well as for the fish) from the strong sun; overcast and even rainy days leave us wet and chilled but often produce the best fishing. As we pursue what many fly-fishers (e.g. Eisenkramer and Attas 2012) think of as an art-form or a spiritual discipline (e.g. Fife in press), we feel the breeze on our face and the sharp sting of the mosquito; hear the throaty roar of a spring or fall warbler; see the startled leap of a nearby deer as it becomes aware of our presence; or feel a thrill of fear as we stumble upon a bear who has staked out the salmon stream before our arrival. There is a feeling that almost anything can happen, because we are no longer in the world of concrete and steel that make up most of our everyday lives. We assume that what will happen will be good, but know (though probably do not really know) that it could also be bad. We might fall on the slippery rocks and drown while trying to wade to a likely looking pool in the middle of the river; tumble out of a boat as we reach with the net for a large rainbow trout; wander around lost in the woods trying to find our way back to the car or discover that we are unable to re-scale the steep, almost cliff-like sides of the valley that we unthinkingly scrambled down in our waders when we were in a hurry to reach the river. Mostly though, these possibilities produce *frisson* rather than fear and enhance our fly-fishing experiences. It is what makes water crashing over rocks seem louder, birdsong sound brighter, and the well-known bumper sticker “the worst day of fishing beats the best day of working” seem like real wisdom. For many, fly-fishing is the essence of a wilderness experience; one of the few true ways to feel a part of what they see as a natural as opposed to a social world.

In contrast, gambling in Las Vegas casinos would appear to be everything fly-fishing opposes. Las Vegas is a city of cities and even of countries – utilizing a semiotic sleight of hand in order to saturate our

senses by appearing to be every city condensed into one (for an exegesis of gambling in Las Vegas, from a number of different perspectives, see: McCracken 1997; Martinez 1999; Earley 2000; Schwartz 2003; Green 2005; Stratton 2005; Zaremba 2009; Schull 2012). A visitor may stay at the Paris, New York-New York, Venetian, Bellagio (representing Italy's Lake Como area), Monte Carlo, Luxor (Egypt), Riviera, or many other "real" or imaginary (e.g. Mandalay Bay; Excalibur; Circus-Circus) locations represented by hotel complexes. If fly-fishing represents nature, Vegas is concrete, glass, and neon lights. Being in a casino at one of the larger hotels is being in a 24-hour, seven-day a week, 365 days a year cultural event. The loud calls from craps tables mingle with the whirls, clunks, bells and whistles of slot machines. Multiple screens play basketball, football, hockey, horse racing, and other major sporting events simultaneously for the benefit of the sport-book; the sounds of half-heard singers or other acts spill out from adjacent barrooms onto the casino floor; and the soft talk and barking laughter of card players can be heard coming from the poker area. If fly-fishing offers sights, sounds, and feelings at a leisurely pace, gambling in a Las Vegas hotel offers a cacophony of competing sensations – a sometimes joyful and sometimes sad excess of experience.

Las Vegas! The name conjures a collection of images: To people around the world, it means fun, excitement, bright lights, entertainment, escape... or, more concretely, mega-sized hotels – the ten largest in the world – and casinos, measured in acres; luxurious showrooms; theme parks; monorails; marquees as large as office buildings, lit with the names of the biggest stars; shopping centers; specialty stores; and nearly every type of restaurant imaginable. [McCracken 1997:ix]

It is as if there is an attempt to condense the excess of the city of Las Vegas into the over 100,000 square feet of casino space offered in any of the single larger hotel complexes. No clocks remind players about the time; floating waitresses in hotel-themed costumes offer free drinks; smokers light up anywhere and everywhere they wish, and – above all – there is the non-stop action. In the casino, as in Las Vegas more generally, the human senses are not

so much seduced as assaulted. A riot of colours, flashing lights, gambling noises, and free drinks play upon us as we in turn play the games. We lose ourselves and become the dice, the cards, or the slot handle in our quest to be cyborg gamblers; i.e. gamblers who strive to fully incorporate "the action" into our bodies (on cyborgs, see Haraway 1989, 1990, 2000; Gray 2002). To gamble in Las Vegas is, above all, to participate wholeheartedly in the service-oriented form of capitalism.

Las Vegas is the first city of the new century, the one that owes its allegiance to the shape of the new universe, to the signs and symbols of a culture of entertainment. (Hal Rothman 2003:31).

Although both gambling and fly-fishing are long-standing practices in many parts of the world (e.g. Schwartz 2006, Washabaugh and Washabaugh 2000) each has achieved a changing emphasis in the entertainment-led economy of 21st century super-consumption. Turn on the television set, and if you have cable or satellite service chances are that you will come across poker tournaments being broadcast on almost any given evening on half a dozen different stations. Fishing (like golf) has its own cable channel: the World Fishing Network (WFN). Fishing shows are a staple form of programming for several other networks that specialize in outdoor or sport pursuits. Sport fishing, like poker and other forms of gambling, also has its tournaments. In particular, bass (spinning-tackle) and trout (fly-fishing) contests are popular among both viewers and participants. Go to a well-stocked bookstore, and dozens of glossy poker and fishing magazines can be found in the magazine racks. Each helps to sell both the idea of poker (and gambling more generally) and sport fishing as not just hobbies but as ways of life. Thousands of books on each topic do the same thing (e.g. a visit on April 15, 2015 to the internet site of book seller Amazon netted 11,368 titles about sport fishing – 4,451 about fly-fishing alone – and 14,497 titles for gambling). Gambling and fly-fishing (along with other forms of sport-fishing) are not just something that a small number of people do on the odd occasion, but rather ubiquitous forms of serial consumption for the masses in the entertainment economy.

Gnostic Moments: In Search of Illumination

In general terms, Gnosticism can be thought of as referring to the desire to obtain assumed-to-be-secret knowledge about a key aspect of life. In early Christianity, Gnostics were a very loosely organized sub-set of Christians who generally believed that our world was created by a lesser divine being. This secret knowledge helped explain why life on earth often appeared to be a kind of living hell. The true God could only be found in the spiritual realm, and enlightenment could only be discovered through gaining a Gnostic understanding of the human predicament (e.g. Churton 2005; Filoramo 1990; Jonas 2001; King 2003; Meyer 2005; Pagels 1979).

In their Secret Book (Apocryphon) of John, written sometime in the second century A.D., we hear of how the Demiurge... took counsel with the archons and created the seven planets— hence the false god's claim to “have none before him.” (The zodiac provided the image for the grim fetters that held humans in ignorance, or agnosis: that is, without gnosis”). [Churton 2005:23-24]

It has been connected with Buddhism, nihilism, and modern movements such as progressivism, positivism, Hegelianism and Marxism. Gnosticism was pivotal to Carl Jung's reflection on the collective unconscious and archetypes. Gnostic themes have been detected in the novels of Herman Melville, Lawrence Durrell, and Walter Percy, among others. The literary critic Harold Bloom even contrived a new Gnostic novel, *The Flight to Lucifer: A Gnostic Fantasy*. [King 2003:5]

A gnostic tourist, therefore, is someone who is searching for a true experience; one that rises above everyday life and offers insight into an important aspect of the world “as it really is.”

Gnostic: One seeking or using secret knowledge in order to achieve salvation. (Valantasis 2006:149).

Achieving a gnostic consciousness is often understood to involve a lot of time and effort on the part of individuals. Becoming the ultimate poker player, expert sport handicapper, or consummate fly-fisher

is not something that occurs overnight. Invariably, as in all forms of gnosticism, those who consider themselves to be moving toward true insiderhood also assume that most other people are likely to be either unable or unwilling to work hard enough to achieve the same insights as themselves.

I was in a fly shop once when a guy walked up to me and asked how long it took to get really good at this [fly-fishing]. ...I said, ‘Ten years, if you fish three or four times a week.’ His face fell. He was thinking a couple of weeks, tops. The face of the clerk who was signing him up for a few courses fell a little, too (Gierach 2003:70).

Fly fishing, as I have come to know it, is not really a form of fishing at all. It is an art, and its practitioners must be prepared to spend years accumulating a fine sort of knowledge, the sort that I, as a poet in another room of my life, squeeze from memory like the gush of leaves in spring (Reid 2005: 35-36).

Even while spending large amounts of time fly-fishing, the assumption remains that only the few will truly come to understand its essence.

The guy running the store was loading them up with the most expensive gear he had to offer, and they weren't flinching. I knew what would happen to all that gear, and the salesman probably did too. These two middle-aged guys' idea of fishing up to this moment was cruising a reservoir, flipping lures out of an overpowered, sparkle-painted bass boat. They would never put in the time to learn fly-fishing, and being too vain to fish badly in public, they'd soon ditch their fancy new gear in a closet. [Soos 2006:17]

How do insiders know who they are? They know through moments of deep insight, flashes of penetration into the heart of things.

The events of my life and brook trout often meet at the line of demarcation between the world of the fish and the world of the fisherman, between the seen and the unseen. This division will be the surface of a stream, which I imagine, from the fish's point of view, as a silvery horizon, but which I see as a green sheet. Still, the moment of illumination has often come here, with a trout taking a fly out of

the boundary between its world and mine. [Nova 1999:3]

You spend a lot of your time in the fisherman's trance, which is a comfortable enough place to be. Fishing is one of the few ways I know of to let go of the past, forget about the future, and live in the moment. And living in the moment is the only way I know of to accurately understand life without getting pissed off. [Geirach 2003:44]

Separation, alienation, letting go, and illumination combine to create a gnostic moment over and over again for many fly-fishers. These moments, I would contend, are most likely to happen during the kind of sensual saturation that blue skies, running water, intense concentration, and valley stream or mountain pond bring together during fly-fishing. To cease to be alienated from our own "true nature" as just another species in the wilderness is to achieve the gnostic moment through fly-fishing. It is a powerful cultural aphrodisiac and it brings many humans back time and again to chase similar experiences through serial consumption.

Gnostic moments are also likely to happen in the sensual saturation of Las Vegas casinos. In this case, enlightenment comes when one truly becomes part of the action.

Action expresses, in a word, the whole gambling experience. It means playing with chance, taking a challenge, the excitement of living in top gear. In gambling, this is the pay-off. In our routine urban lives, most of us are cogs in the wheel of work, taxes, social and family obligations. Gambling offers a fast way out. [Spanier 2001: 51].

The action is everything, more consuming than sex, more immediate than politics; more important always than the acquisition of money, which is never, for the gambler, the true point of the exercise. [Joan Didion, quoted in Spanier 2001:46]

Witness my words earlier in this paper when I described the woman who had just won over a thousand dollars at a slot machine. She was experiencing a moment of pure action and her joy in the moment was obvious for anyone to see on her face. Nor is win-

ning necessary to achieve this state. The trance-like state that Geirach speaks of above for fly-fishing can also commonly be experienced while throwing dice at the craps table, watching the roulette wheel spin, or when one has achieved a rhythm at the blackjack table.

Just as many fly-fishers commonly say that what they do is not really about catching fish, gamblers often say that the point of gambling is not about money. This does not mean that neither fish nor money count; each offers a way to keep track of what you are doing. In gambling, money is how you *know* that you are gambling. In a contemporary casino in Las Vegas, the flow of money reminds you that you are part of the constantly speeded up movement of currency that defines late capitalism. It is the tail by which you can grasp the beast of contemporary capitalism and turn it into a moment of illumination. Just as the moment of illumination in fly-fishing allows one to feel as though she or he is moving past the cobwebs of our socialized lives and finally grasping the natural world in its assumed-to-be naked glory. Each of these activities entails what I refer to as a moment of singularity. The gambling experience that I am speaking about involves the non-addicted (cf. Schull 2012), casual gambler or sporadic gambler, such as the tourist who comes to Vegas two or three times a year. For these people, the buzzing, light-filled, super-stimulated environment of Vegas remains an important part of what makes them want to take up temporary residence in the gambling world. I would argue that the gnostic tourist is in fact coming to Vegas because they are drawn to locations that seem to both *exemplify and overcome* the contraction of time and space that Harvey suggests is characteristic of postmodern capitalism. The flow of money can be felt by gamblers in Las Vegas. It can be felt as the craps player prepares to throw the dice, the poker player waits for the card in the air to land, or the machine gambler touches the button to set everything in motion.

When I'm gambling, I am having the best time of my life and I am having the absolute worst time too. I'm talking about those nanoseconds when you are waiting for that card to fall or the white

ball to drop into the red or the black or the dice to stop rolling. It can be absolutely terrifying and absolutely beautiful. ... You are terrified and you are also totally alive. ... People will tell you that they gamble to win, but I don't believe them. It's those brief seconds before you know the outcome that really turns you on. [Assistant Manager in a Last Vegas Casino, quoted in Earley 2000:478]

These are concentration points that serve as an experiential metonym for the speeded up/squashed down rush of capital through an economy that is defined as much by financial and information flows as by industrial production. In that moment, all other stimuli are crowded out of consciousness and only the flying dice, the falling card, or the touch of the button truly count. Soon afterward the sights, sounds, smells and other stimuli of the typical Vegas casino flood back into the gambler's consciousness. But for that brief second of being in front of a slot machine, the poker table, or the craps table, one is able to feel as if she or he has penetrated into the essence of capitalism and momentarily held at bay the ordinary fragmentations of the daily contemporary world.

Gnostic tourists who pursue fly-fishing seem to be attempting to get as far away from these sorts of service-oriented commodity forms as possible. Yet, they too seek an inner truth. In this case, they seem to be looking for the heart of Nature – defined as more or less everything that a concrete-mediated, urbane, bright lights/big city experience is not. This search is helped by becoming saturated within the sights, sounds, smells, feelings, and even taste of unfamiliar (in the sense of non-everyday) brushes with waterways, winds, skies, insects, fish, and other non-human elements. Singularity comes with a great cast, placed just right, falling softly on the water in front of where you believe a prime fish to be lurking. This is the moment of tense expectation, when everything else recedes in anticipation of a strike and your senses become concentrated solely upon the tension of the fly line.

A cast of my bamboo rod has directed me to this place, this moment, this fish. And I find that it is not in the having but the using of this rod that I

have found a way to live with my wanting. Catching this grayling has let me see again the beauty in the world. ... I will move on up the river, casting under the cut banks, into the eddies, and behind the sweepers. To be out on the river is enough. [Soos 2006:21]

This singularity explodes into a rapid motion upward upon the first feel of a hooked fish, when the insects begin to buzz again, the water recovers its sound, and the air regains its cooling feel. This encounter, too, is mediated by expensive outlays: thousand-plus dollar fly rods and reels, cabins and river guides, four wheel drive vehicles and drift boats. It is this mediation that allows one to search for the state that makes one feel as though both time and space have disappeared through the endless now of fishing, ordinary limitations giving way to feelings of being nowhere and everywhere – both in the moment and with all the time in the world.

Implications

Whatever else culture once was or is, it is now always about inequality: transforming it, localizing it, creating it, trapping people within it, making it necessary to oppose or evade it – all this simultaneously and sequentially, all this and much more. [Sider 2014:215]

As was true for “the lads” in England as described at the beginning of this article, these moments of illumination are only partially penetrating. There is no essence of nature that exists outside of contemporary social and cultural influences (e.g. Williams 1977); outside of contemporary capital. It is equally true that a momentary feeling of standing inside the monetary flow that ‘stands behind’ late capitalism does not necessarily imply a critical understanding of that type of economy. These are really moments in which human beings realize their gnostic desires to *know* the dominant social force of their lives (capitalism) and the underlying reality that this economic force seems to leave out (nature). These are experiences that capture and realize these desires within whole if fleeting moments *and* present them to ourselves not as if they were about our desires for understanding

but rather as if they were moments of connection with the essence of nature and the essence of the economy. To know the economy in this fashion, especially a service and financial oriented economy that is said to be knowledge-based, gives one a moment of great satisfaction. In such an economy, to be *in the know* is to achieve the promised key to success and happiness. In this sense, fly-fishing can be seen as an attempt to know the outside of capitalism; gambling to know the inside of it. Rather than attempting to ‘visualize power’ (Wolf 1999) or to understand their economic/social life through words and/or imagery (e.g. Toscano and Kinkle 2015), as intellectuals are inclined to do, I am suggesting that large numbers of people prefer to seek an understanding of their socio-economic situation by chasing a ‘feeling.’ These feelings are grasped through metaphor, as money stands for capitalism and chasing wild fish stands for all that is not capitalism. It is this affective state that ultimately fuels serial consumption and the growth of niche capitalism. It also very much speaks to Marx’s understanding that “the extension of products and needs falls into contriving and ever calculating subservience to inhuman, refined, unnatural and imaginary appetites” (Marx 2011:115-116).

Both of the above forms of knowledge/feeling are ultimately an illusion, as was the economic and social penetration of “the lads” of Paul Willis, because both achieve these affective states only by leaving out large amounts of relevant information and therefore actually play into the uncritical growth of contemporary capitalism and its concomitant environmental losses. The illusion is created through sensory saturation, which allows individuals to feel as if they are deeply embedded in the action (economic or natural) – a position that very much *seems* like knowing things that other people do not know. In each case, it is the feeling that one could almost reach out and touch the flow of money (gambling) or the flow of natural life (fly fishing) that creates the illusion of being in at the beginning of what makes a capitalist urban civilization or what makes nature “real.” Such a feeling is deeply seductive and it allows us to forget that both gambling and fly-fishing (and related activities such as other sport fishing, hunting, and eco-tourism) are big business. In pursuing these moments we are not

just hoping for a glimpse into the reality of economic activities or the natural world, we are also feeding the beast of capitalism without a critical regard for who or what gets hurt by this particular form of economic relations.

There is nothing inevitable about this situation. Our desires to fully know could become desires to fully critique and transform contemporary capitalistic practices. Many fly-fishers (and others involved in sport-fishing, hunting, and eco-tourism) use their moments of illumination as inspiration for becoming “environmentalists” (e.g. Dunk 1991:112). Unfortunately, this usually means little more than calling for the “protection” of certain rural spaces (so that they can continue to enjoy their fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and so forth in them; secure in the illusion that “wilderness” is still out there somewhere; often creating boundaries at the expense of rural populations; e.g. Fife 2010) or specific species such as salmon. It does not normally involve looking closely at contemporary capitalist practices in countries such as Canada or the United States (as well as globally) and creating both new laws and new social norms that would in any way threaten to curtail the consumptive orgy of cars, monster houses, massive energy use, and food wastage that fuels the environmental problems that make the idea of wilderness so necessary and attractive in the first place. I know fly-fishers who consider themselves to be radical environmentalists in relation to fish conservation, but who see no contradiction in their families owning and driving three cars, living in huge energy-wasting houses, taking a dozen trips a year in jet fueled airplanes, and above all insisting that their children are entitled to live the same high consumption life-styles as they take their places as adult citizens. But we do not necessarily have to settle for the limits of neo-liberal environmentalism. The illumination that fly-fishing and similar endeavours provide could just as easily feed a more practical and critical reflection of current economic and social practices. The moment of illumination could also become the moment of critique (of capitalist ecology, of capitalist excess, of capitalist inequalities).

On the surface, it is more difficult to see how casino (or other) gambling could lead to more

encompassing critiques of contemporary economic and social forms. However, I'm reminded here of something I noticed in the casinos of Las Vegas. It is common to come across players in wheelchairs, small motorized three wheelers, or using canes or even walkers on the casino floor. The physically challenged seemed to me (though I have no statistics to confirm this) to make up a much larger percentage of the population in a casino on any given night than would be true of a similar number of people in a non-gambling venue. I wondered, if this were true, why it might be so. Insight came to me on this issue when I was reading books that explained what every regular gambler knows – the house (e.g. the casino owner) always has a percentage advantage in every game of chance. What this means is that the law of statistics will, over time, ensure that anyone who gambles long enough, whether at such relatively low house advantage games as blackjack or high house advantage machine gambling, will eventually lose all of their money to the house (e.g. Schull 2012). We know this and yet we do it anyway. Why? One explanation is that, as stated above, non-addicted people gamble not really for the money or even to win, but for the action. Another take on this, and one that implicates the special knowledge available to physically challenged individuals, is that we *know* that we can only win for a short time but that we desperately want to experience those periods of winning as an affirmation that it is possible to win at all. Who knows this better than a physically challenged person? Life itself is a losing proposition. There is no way to beat physical deterioration (and, finally, death), whether it comes earlier or later in life. Just as in gambling, there is no way to beat the house over time. As an anthropologist acquaintance of mine who lives with a degenerative nerve disease that has long placed him in a wheelchair said to me in a phrase that rang for me in its simple truth: “We call you guys TABS: The Temporarily Able Bodied.” We *are* all going to be in the same physically deteriorating circumstances, sooner or later. We are all TABS and we will all lose over time to the house percentage. But, for a brief moment, we can experience being able to run, jump, fish or gamble – depending on the bodies that we have right now. In gambling, we might also

experience the moment of beating the house; holding off the odds for just a little longer, and therefore feeling like we know, really *know*, what our life in the overwhelmingly complex social economy of late capitalism is supposed to be about. This tends to lead us to seduce ourselves into seeking more and more gambling experiences and therefore continuing to feed capitalism as if nothing has changed. However, revelatory moments could also lead at least some people to reconsider the excesses of Las Vegas in relation to the excesses of late capitalism. Along with feeling the action, all gamblers experience being winners and losers in very graphic and immediate ways. There is no reason to assume that this could not prompt some gamblers to critically reflect on why we agree to wholeheartedly participate in any system in which the house advantage is rigged to create so many happy losers.

Similarly, it is difficult to ignore the growing signs of pollution in many of the locations where fly-fishers go to practice their sly craft. Too often we find bits and pieces of plastic on the lake shore or floating on the river current. It is not unusual to slip on bottom garbage while wading, or to watch a chemically induced foam roll into the shore. The beer and pop cans along the river-banks are near ubiquitous, even in locations that initially seemed difficult for the fisher to access. Fishers have of course also added to this pollution. It is common, for example, to pull in what seems to be a satisfying weight on the line only to find a tangle of someone else's broken off line, lure, and even lead weight hopelessly entangled with your own fly line. Fly-fishers are often keen observers and note when a place they are long familiar with changes in terms of water flow or volume, or when the fish stocks clearly become degraded because of other activities in the area, such as oil production, or mining, or other industrial activities upriver or in the ground water catchment area (see Fife 2010). Again, it is quite possible to imagine fly-fishers becoming increasingly radicalized in terms of environmental degradation, as they are so often in a position to have first hand experiences with that degradation and its effects on their own favorite fishing areas. As in gambling, revelatory moments have at least the potential to lead to a more critical form of consciousness.

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Defining Working-Class Literature(s): A Comparative Approach Between U.S. Working-Class Studies and Swedish Literary History

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ABSTRACT: In this article, we compare the phenomenon of working-class literature in Sweden and the United States. After examining how working-class literatures have evolved in both countries, we analyze how they have been conceptualized in two academic fields: contemporary U.S. working-class studies and the study of Swedish literary history. We discuss the material and historical contexts shaping these conceptualizations, critique them on theoretical grounds, and offer ways that comparative approaches help us better understand the phenomenon of working-class literature. Our main argument is that our analysis makes visible two important features of this literature. The first of these, inscribed in the very concept of the term, is that working-class literature is both a literary phenomenon and a phenomenon relating to working-class life. The second feature – a far less obvious, but not less important one – is that working-class literatures are always historically and geographically situated and, thus, assume divergent shapes in different times and locations. We argue that working-class literature as a phenomenon is, therefore, always in a process of new formations. In doing so, we move away from narrow nationalistic views of working-class literature as a defined term and, using a comparative approach, allow for new vantage points in the analysis of the relationship between class and culture.

KEYWORDS: working-class literature, working-class studies, American literature, Swedish literature

Introduction

Capitalism exists as an economic system where the movement of people, resources, and capital are unevenly experienced and translated across the globe. Fluidity (of borders, of markets, of regulations, of culture) is a key component of the “logic” of capitalism in our current period – as well as of resistance to it. Therefore, those who are interested in understanding the class dynamics of contemporary capitalism need an optics of class and class struggle that seeks understandings of non-monolithic working-class cultures that exist materially at specific locations but are acted upon by international forces. One particular way to begin to create a strand of this optics is to examine a prominent form of working-class culture, namely working-class

literature. Unfortunately, however, the term itself is ambiguous and rife with theoretical conundrums, and the phenomenon to which it refers is heterogeneous.

The aim of this article is to begin to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of working-class literature through a comparison of how it has developed in two countries – Sweden and the United States – and, more importantly, how it has been conceptualized in two academic fields: contemporary U.S. working-class studies and the study of Swedish literary history. By establishing a dialogue between these places and fields, we explore differences as well as common threads of working-class literatures and the historical forces that helped create them, thereby

allowing us greater understandings of the phenomenon of working-class literature.

Our main argument is that this comparative dialogue makes visible two important features. The first of these, inscribed in the very concept of the term, is that working-class literature is both a literary phenomenon and a representation of working-class life. The second feature – a far less obvious, but not less important one – is that working-class literatures are always historically and geographically situated and, thus, assume divergent shapes in different times and locations. Thus, we approach the phenomenon of working-class literature on two levels. On the one hand, we view it as a historically and materially situated phenomenon, which takes on various shapes and is constructed in myriad ways at different historical moments and places. On the other hand, we argue that the concept of working-class literature can be used as an umbrella term for various kinds of phenomena emerging at the intersection of working-class practice (experiences of class injustice, class struggle, etc.) and literature – phenomena that bring to the fore questions of vital importance for the understanding, from historical and global perspectives, of capitalism's class dynamics. The understanding of working-class literature to which this article wants to contribute is one that incorporates both these levels.

We will first outline the conceptualizations of working-class literature within contemporary U.S. working-class studies and the study of Swedish literary history respectively, and discuss the material and historical contexts shaping them. While certainly not an exhaustive study, this summary outlines some of the major divergences between these two national literatures, exploring why working-class literature has been marginalized in the U.S. as it has become a celebrated national literature within Sweden. We then explore specific ideological factors for this divergence, namely the powerful overreach of the Cold War and its politicized chilling effect of this literature as mere radical *propaganda* within the U.S. and the aesthetic transformations of working-class literature in Sweden that allowed this literature to be aesthetically examined as *literature*. Thereafter, we offer theoretical critiques of these conceptualizations

before suggesting possible comparative approaches that might help us expand and better understand the phenomenon of working-class literature. An underlying argument running throughout this essay is that although working-class literature is a phenomenon that is place and time specific threading itself through a national identity (no matter how much a nation may try to erase it), by comparatively examining the ways that working-class literature has evolved and transformed in the U.S. and Sweden respectively, we will have stronger, more robust lenses to better conceptualize the aesthetic-political dimensions of working class-literatures.

Working-Class Literature Within Contemporary U.S. Working-Class Studies

Within contemporary U.S. working-class studies, the phenomenon of working-class literature has received a fair amount of scholarly attention, and the field has had a substantial impact on how it is understood today. John F. Lavelle even argues that “working-class literature, as it is being defined today, takes its genre position from a reworking and capturing of characteristics derived from contemporary working-class studies” (Lavelle 2012:97). Nevertheless, the question of what makes a text specifically “working-class” is much debated by scholars affiliated with contemporary U.S. working-class studies, revealing ideological fault lines often expressed in essentialist assumptions and definitions of both “the working class” and “literature.”

Historically, U.S. working-class literature has often been understood as a literature born from writers of the working class.¹ For many critics, the authorial background of a writer has become an essential criterion, making the aesthetic qualities

1 We have consciously used the term U.S. working-class literature instead of “American” because the nature of our project is to be dialogic with other international working-class literatures. Linguistically, “American” has imperialistic implications; we are interested in exploring national understandings of these literatures by offering and learning from comparative accounts, not by exerting one literature over another. Nicholas Coles and Janet Zandy (2007:xx) explain in the introduction of their anthology *American Working-Class Literature* that they use the word “American” to refer to literature produced in the territory that now comprises the United States. Although we understand their reading, we feel as if the term “American” is a loaded term and thus use the term United States throughout the essay.

of a text secondary – categorization depends on whether or not the author speaks “authentically” from a working class position. Peter Hitchcock, in his book *Working-Class Fiction in Theory and Practice*, for example, states the common myopic view of many scholars of working-class literature who have focused almost exclusively on the writer’s background: “It is better that the literature of labor be barely ‘literature’ than for it to be barely ‘labor’” (Hitchcock 1989:7).² To primarily discuss the literary value or analyze the form of a particular working-class text has been seen as leaving oneself open to accusations of academic elitism and being insensitive to worker’s conditions and lives.

This conceptualization of what is considered working-class literature in the United States has deep roots, some of which solidified in response to the most recognized era of this literature: 1930s proletarian fiction. In many of these championed texts, members of the working class were regularly represented as (white) masculine dispossessed workers coming to a revolutionary consciousness. These novels, as contemporary critics such as Philip Rahv and others claim, were often dogmatic in their political views, and aesthetic principles were often discounted for clear, doctrinarian expressions of content.³ Michael Gold, one of the most celebrated representatives of this strand of proletarian writing, denounced any discussion of the “style” of working-class novels as a bourgeois conceptualization – according to him, proletarians should only have “clarity, force and truth in writing” (Rideout 1992:227). Granville Hicks, while editor for *The Masses* in the 1930s (his political thoughts continued to evolve during his life), believed in the revolutionary potential of formally straightforward writing and criticism and judged works solely for their ideological content. This “revolutionary sen-

timentalism” of Gold and the “mechanical Marxism” of Hicks, as James Farrell stated in his book *A Note on Literary Criticism*, were attributes of a particular dogmatic “Leftism” that allowed for no gray areas of debate (Farrell 1993: 21-23, 52). These notions would tolerate little movement of the ideological frame – or aesthetic interpretations. This rigidity led many literary critics in future generations to a disavowal of the literature; since the debates were about political content with little regard to form, these texts did not have a literary legacy to call home and were (mostly) ignored.

This dominant view of U.S. working-class literature is certainly not the only view that has been expressed. Several critics – Michel Denning, Cary Nelson and Barbara Foley being the most prominent – have rightly and expertly shown that there were many working-class authors who consciously used Modernist techniques and experimentation to forward their politics. Foley’s groundbreaking *Radical Representations* methodically explores the aesthetic experimentation in literary proletarianism, dismissing the commonly held idea that these writers were Communist hacks following step-by-step propagandist formulas. Rather, through literary and historical analysis, Foley shows how the Communist-led Left “established certain parameters of the discourse in which these writers were engaged” (Foley 1993:xi), while also allowing for large spaces of experimentation and ideological interpretation within these texts.⁴ Denning, in his classic exploration of the artistic Left in *The Cultural Front*, details the many guises and varied genres of writing in the twentieth century that was deeply concerned with class issues, showing how experimentation in form allowed for new ways to talk about the working class. This expansive view had a cumulative effect upon both the politics of the day as well as Modernist writing: instead of shielding themselves from Modernism, Nelson, in his reading of American poetry from 1910-1945, sees a dialectic relationship between the two stating, “Modernism, in short, is beginning to work changes on and be shaped by the poetry of the American left” (Nelson

2 Hitchcock attempts to have a wider definition of working-class literature, even stating that he does not wish to have a “monopoly of class effects to writers born within the working class” (Hitchcock 1989:106). He states throughout his treatise, however, that there is a categorical difference that is based on the class origins of the writer.

3 See Philip Rahv, “The Novelist as Partisan,” *Partisan Review* 1 (April-May 1934):50-52. In this article, Rahv famously dismissed much of proletarian literature claiming it as merely “the literature of a party disguised as a literature of a class.” Barbara Foley in *Radical Representations* (1993), however, questions this popularly held belief and methodically explores the various nuances of radical literature produced during the Great Depression.

4 This is further explored in Alan Wald’s trilogy of 20th century U.S. communist literary modernism. For an in depth reading of many of these texts – with a focus on the author’s biography – see *Exiles from a Future* (2001), *Trinity of Passion* (2007), and *American Night* (2012).

1989:136-137). What these three critics – and others – reveal is that the championing of the revolutionary white male worker in proletarian novels was only one particular strand of working-class literature and that Modernist literary techniques influenced (and were influenced by) writers of working-class texts, expanding and reinventing this literature.⁵

However, the perceived legacy that places a particular vision of proletarian literature as the epitome of working-class writing has certainly left a shadow over any attempts to define and examine U.S.-based working-class literature, and the view of this literature as a literature defined primarily by the identity of its authors is still prevalent in current debates. As Sonali Perera states, “too often, in literature and criticism alike, the working-class is seen and represented as masculine, metropolitan and revolutionary” (Perera 2014:80).

This focus on a fetishized working-class identity has gone hand in hand with a relative downplaying of questions about form, style and aesthetics, which can be illustrated by the following case: In 1995, under the auspices of Alan Wald, the University of Illinois Press began publishing the *Radical Novels, Reconsidered* series. Publishing texts of forgotten works from such authors as Abraham Polonsky, Grace Lumpkin, Anzia Yexierska, Alfred Maund, Alexander Saxton, among many others, the series reissued radical texts first published from the 1920s through the 1950s to help solidify and emphasize the Left’s radical tradition. As Wald states, “the Left can become strengthened by understanding its own legacy in all its richness” (Wald 1998). For some critics, though, the republishing of these “lost” works, although clearly displaying the strong roots of the Left’s political legacy, had little to do with emphasizing a literary tradition. Werner Sollors, reviewing, in the *Journal of American Ethnic History*, four of the inaugural books republished in 1995/1996 attacks the rationale for the whole series on aesthetic prin-

ciples. Asserting that they are “B” novels without “defensible aesthetic claims,” he attacks the series as a politically motivated, misguided restructuring of the U.S. canon without concerns for aesthetic principles (Sollors 1998:100). While Sollors’ vitriolic remarks are testament to the missiles thrown in the canon wars of the 1990s and are clearly hyperbolic (the series was praised by others), it does speak to the way these novels were introduced and narrativized by its supporters. These texts were testament to the Left’s vibrant history but there has not been a sustained effort to connect them to a *literary* tradition.

This focus on politics, rather than on aesthetics, is one of the reasons for the marginalization of working-class literature in the United States. As Jim Daniels observes about this literature in an article on working-class poetry in *New Working-Class Studies*, this is a genre that exists “on the margins” (Daniels 2005:134) of American literature, and in the very first sentence of their foreword to their anthology *American Working-Class Literature* Nicholas Coles and Janet Zandy highlight that this literature constitutes a tradition that is often “concealed” (Coles and Zandy 2007:xv). If working-class literature is primarily discussed in terms of its *politics*, then it is hardly surprising that it attracts limited attention as a *literary* phenomenon.

The relative downplaying of questions about aesthetics and literariness in relation to questions about working-class experience and politics in constructions of U.S. working-class literature has also marginalized working-class literature in literary studies, where it has received only limited critical attention and, hence, remained a relatively vague phenomenon. The latter has been pointed out by, among others, Janet Zandy – one of the most prolific scholars of working-class literature within the field of contemporary working-class studies – in her anthology *Calling Home: Working-Class Women’s Writing*, where she claims that despite “the spate of critical theories of the past twenty years, we do not yet have a critical construct that does justice to American working-class literature” (1993:10) and that we (hence?) do not even “know where the borders of working-class literature are” (1993:7–8). The same point has since been iterated by several

5 There are certainly other scholars who do focus on experimentation and minority voices within proletarian literature. Paula Rabinowitz in *Labor and Desire* (1991), explores the way modernist techniques allowed for female sensibilities and voices to enter into proletarian fiction. *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940* edited by Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz (1987) displays many of these techniques.

other scholars, for example by Renny Christopher and Carolyn Whitson who in their article “Toward a Theory Of Working Class Literature” argued that there is “no agreed-upon definition of working-class literature” (Christopher and Whitson 1999:71), and by Paul Lauter who in an article with the telling title “Under Construction: Working-Class Writing” underscores that “the definitional problem continues to haunt” (Lauter 2005:64). Fifteen years after first highlighting that the borders of working-class literature were unknown, Zandy admitted that, despite the increasing interest in working-class literature within the field of working-class studies, little had changed and that the definition of this phenomenon was still in the making: “Arguments about definitions of what is or isn’t working-class literature . . . continue and are coterminous with the development of working-class studies” (Zandy 2008:46).⁶

This definition (un)making seems to go hand in hand with some resistance within contemporary U.S. working-class studies to the very idea of defining the phenomenon of working-class literature, and especially to defining it in academic theoretical terms. In *Calling Home*, for example, Zandy argues that to “try to fit this literature into the neat academic categories of genre or period is like squeezing a wilderness into a cultivated park” (Zandy 1993:9). A similar argument is put forward by Christopher and Whitson who argue that “working-class literary productions” are “too radically diverse to be encompassed by a single grand theory” and advocate the development of an eclectic theory “aligned closely to the literature by writers with origins in the working class, a theory aligned with both our intellectual orientations and our gut feelings” (Christopher and Whitson 1999:73). In her book *Hands: Physical Labor, Class, and Cultural Work*, Zandy takes this argument even further, claiming that “a priori definitional approaches” are an unsuitable starting point for the study of working-class literature, advocating for a move from “what is” to “what makes a text working class,” which, she argues, would make it possible to “discern the indicators that enable a reader to recognize a working-class text and to identify strategic elements . . . that shape working-class writings” (Zandy 2004:85). Thus she

proposes, much like Christopher and Whitson, that “we build theoretical models out of attentive observation of the texts themselves,” which “may involve quieting the theoretical voice and *listening* to the voices of working-class people themselves” (Zandy 2004:85).

Zandy’s plea for listening to the voices of working-class people indicates that she primarily views working-class literature as a literature produced by members of the working class that expresses working-class experience, stating clearly in *Hands* that this literature “centers the lived, material experience of working-class people” (Zandy 2004:90). This connection between working-class literature and working-class experience is emphasized in much of Zandy’s writing. In *Calling Home*, for example, she claims that literature “is a powerful resource for understanding class difference” and that the “writers in this anthology *represent* the diversity of working-class experience, its contradictions and commonalities” (Zandy 1993:5), and in the article “The Making of American Working-Class Literature” she highlights that working-class writers expose “the lived experiences of working people” (Zandy 2008:45).

Christopher and Whitson also explicitly define working-class literature as a literature expressing working-class experience, as evidenced by their definition of “the literature of the working class” as “works written by working-class people about their class experience” as well as by their claim that “working class literature reproduces, in literary form, the conditions of the working class” (Christopher and Whitson 1999:71). In her introduction to the anthology *Critical Approaches to American Working-Class Literature*, Tokarczyk underlines that this is indeed the dominant view within contemporary U.S. working-class studies by arguing that, within this field, working-class literature is seen as a cultural manifestation of “working-class life” and that “critics of working-class literature often focus on unearthing working-class writers’ representations of the lived experience of class” (Tokarczyk 2011:5). That she herself also subscribes to this view is evidenced by, among other things, her claim that “working-class literature is grounded in the experiences of working-class people” (Tokarczyk 2011:6).

6 Wald counters many of these types of criticism in his trilogy.

This focus on working-class literature as an expression or manifestation of working-class life or experience does not mean that scholars within the field of U.S. working-class studies completely ignore its *literary* dimensions. Christopher and Whitson argue that “working class literature reproduces, *in literary form*, the conditions of the working class” (1999:71, emphasis added). Tokarczyk explicitly underlines that working-class literature is “an *artistic* expression of working-class people’s lives with its own *aesthetic* and themes” (Tokarczyk 2011:5), and Lauter argues that “we need always to consider the inescapable literariness of what is involved in the second term of our subject, ‘working-class *writing*’” (Lauter 2005:73). Nevertheless, within contemporary U.S. working-class studies, there is clearly a reluctance to analyze, discuss, and evaluate these texts as literary objects. Coles and Zandy, for example, stress that the most important feature of the tradition of working-class literature is that it gives witness to “the ways in which working-class people have lived, labored, and given meaning to their experiences” (Coles and Zandy 2007:xix) and in “The Making of American Working-Class Literature” Zandy describes it as “a line of American literary history that emerges from the lives of workers” (Zandy 2008:42).

For critics like Christopher and Whitson, this focus on the a priori authenticity of the working class writer calls for an overhaul of the way academics analyze literature stating that “working-class literature, at base, cannot simply fit into the status quo of literary criticism” (Christopher and Whitson 1999:72). Their view, which uses an exceptionalist framing of this literature, assumes that literary studies – especially those with theoretical bases – are not able to properly analyze working-class literature. Thus, the conceptualization of working-class literature in contemporary U.S. working-class studies tends, generally, towards a view that constructs it as an expression or testimony of working-class life, experience, and politics, rather than as a literary-aesthetic phenomenon. As John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon explain in their introduction to the anthology *New Working-Class Studies* “cultural representations” such as working-class literature are viewed as “sources for understanding working-class experience” (Russo and Linkon 2005:1). Literature

about and by the working class – with its own exceptional theoretical models that places it outside of other literary genres and phenomenon – is therefore read as expressions of working-class life, rather than part of a literary history. Below, we will explain why we think this limits and distorts our understanding of working-class literature. First, however, we will give an account of the history of Swedish working-class literature and its conceptualization within the study of Swedish literary history.

Working-Class Literature in the Study of Swedish Literary History

In Sweden, working-class literature has often – just like in the United States – been viewed as an expression of working-class experience or ideology, and, historically, the most important criterion for defining the phenomenon of working-class literature has been that authors born of the working class have written it. Nevertheless, in Sweden, there has been a relatively higher interest than in the U.S. in working-class literature as a *literary* phenomenon. The most important reason for this is that working-class literature is recognized as a central strand in modern Swedish literature.

Early in the twentieth century, working-class literature had a breakthrough in the site of national literature and at least since the 1930s it has, as has been pointed out by several scholars, constituted a central strand in Swedish literature. This acceptance of working-class literature both by large audiences and by critics and scholars is a very different experience than what has happened in the United States. Lars Furuland and Johan Svedjedal argue, for example, that, in Sweden, working-class literature has been a “broad literary current . . . , stronger and more diverse than in the other Nordic countries, England, France, Germany and Russia” (Furuland and Svedjedal 2006:25), and Rochelle Wright claims that the “dominance, in the literary profile of the 1930s and well beyond, of writers who not only came from humble backgrounds but chose to write about their class of origin is . . . a unique phenomenon in world literature” (Wright 1996:334).

The importance of working-class literature in modern Swedish literature is evidenced, for example,

by the facts that several working-class writers were elected members of the Swedish Academy, or that, in 1974, two of them – Harry Martinson and Eyvind Johnson – were awarded the Nobel prize for literature in their capacity as representatives for the tradition of Swedish working-class literature (Nilsson 2014a:21–22). Besides these prestigious awards, working-class writers have also been extremely successful on the Swedish book market. After World War II, for example, many of these writers reached mass audiences, mainly through inexpensive paperback editions of their works distributed by cultural organizations affiliated with the labour movement. Many sold several hundred thousand books during the 1940s and the 1950s, and some of them even managed to sell over a million copies, in a country that, in 1950, had around 7 million inhabitants (Nilsson 2006:75–76). That these successes have given working-class literature a prominent position in modern Swedish literature is demonstrated by the fact that the volume of the standard work on Swedish literary history covering all types of national literature in the period 1920–1950 is sub-titled “Modernists and Working-Class Writers” (Lönroth and Delblanc 1993). Still today, working-class literature – represented, for example, by such celebrated contemporary authors as Kristian Lundberg, Johan Jönson, and Susanna Alakoski – remains an important stand in Swedish literature (Nilsson 2014a:23). Given these successes in the site of literature – among critics, scholars, and readers – it is hardly surprising that it has attracted attention *as literature*.

Lars Furuland has made the most significant contribution to the academic study of Swedish working-class literature. In his seminal study of the representation of the rural proletariat in Swedish literature before 1920, he defined working-class literature as “belletristic works who thematize conditions in the working class and are written by authors who in one way or the other have been affiliated with the labor movement” (Furuland 1962:14).⁷ This definition – which for a long time constituted the conceptual foundation for the study of Swedish working-class literature – emphasizes both working-class literature’s thematization (but, perhaps, not

expression) of working-class life and – through the criterion that working-class writers should be affiliated with the labour movement – its *political* dimensions. The latter aspect was also further emphasized in a later version of Furuland’s definition, which stressed that working-class literature should be understood as literature “about,” “by,” and “for” workers, and argued that the most important criterion was its ideological “content” or “anchorage” (Furuland 1984:15).

This construction of working-class literature as a literature ideologically affiliated with the labour movement is, at least in part, a result of the fact that it first came into existence in Sweden as a literature produced, distributed and read exclusively within this movement, aiming at propagating its political ideals and contributing to the dissemination of socialist class consciousness among workers.⁸ However, after its breakthrough in the site of national literature, Swedish working-class literature has undergone substantial transformations. The working-class writers who became popular outside the labour movement in the early twentieth century did not – as their predecessors in the labour movement’s counter public sphere had done – write propagandistic works. Instead they turned to more conventional genres within modern literature, such as realistic prose fiction. Thereafter, Swedish working-class literature has been conditioned more by dominant *literary* practices than by labour-movement politics. Whether this is indicative of working-class writers abandoning “proletarian” ideals and adapting to hegemonic “bourgeois” aesthetics, or if they have contributed to a “democratization,” or even “proletarianization,” of Swedish literature is a question that has been the object of scholarly dispute for a long time. In the 1970’s, for example, the critic Arne Melberg claimed that the breakthrough for working-class literature in national literature was a result of it becoming “absorbed by bourgeois institutions” and integrated into “bourgeois forms of production” (Melberg 1973:85, 101). A similar argument – resembling the one put forward by Michael Gold in the U.S. – was made by the critic

7 All translations of non-English quotations are our own.

8 A good overview of this early period in the history of Swedish working-class literature is given by Brigitte Mral (1985) in her *Frühe schwedische Arbeiterdichtung*, in which she analyzes the poetry published in the Swedish labor movement’s newspapers 1882–1900.

Birgitta Holm, who argued that when working-class writers entered the bourgeois institution of literature, this led to “proletarian experience” becoming subordinate to “bourgeois self-understanding” (Holm 1975:247). Others, however, have reasoned that working-class writers have affected real changes in Swedish literature including Lennart Thorsell’s (1957) argument that working-class writers contributed to the democratization of Swedish literature. When awarding Martinson and Johnson the Nobel prize, Ragnar Gierow of the Swedish Academy pronounced that “the many proletarian writers or working-class poets” who, on a wide front, “broke into” Swedish literature had done so, not in order to “ravish” it, but to “to enrich it with their fortunes” (Gierow n.d.).

Regardless of how one views the effects working-class literature may have had on Swedish literature in general, or how one interprets working-class literature’s evolution from the labour movement’s counter public sphere to the site of national literature, one cannot ignore the fact that it has become recognized as an integral part of Swedish literature and that this has made necessary changes to its conceptualization. Furuland, for example is aware that his original definition of the phenomenon of working-class literature is relevant only for working-class literature from a specific historical period, and that it is necessary to modify and expand it as this literature continues to develop.⁹ In his last extended project on working-class literature – the 560-page “handbook” *Svensk arbetarlitteratur* [Swedish Working-Class Literature], co-authored with Johan Svedjedal – Furuland explicitly comments on this:

However, the author’s background alone cannot determine membership in the literary strand that we aim to delineate here. It would even place an author like Martin Koch (who came from the poor petit bourgeoisie) outside of working-class literature – despite his conscious choice of motifs from

9 The definition proposed by Furuland in 1962 was made within the context of a research project on older working-class writing. The author given most attention by Furuland (1962:304) in this project is Alfred Kämpé, who he describes as a “typical proletarian writer.” However, in immediate connection to this characterization, Furuland (1962:304–305) also argues that this term is not applicable to later generations of authors.

the working class and his promotion of socialism. [Furuland and Svedjedal 2006:25]¹⁰

Nilsson (2006:12) has also demonstrated that Furuland’s original definition might even reject the most iconic Swedish working-class author, namely Ivar Lo-Johansson, and argued that this discrepancy is one of the fundamental reasons for Furuland’s revisions of his definition.

Thus, Swedish working-class literature has changed over time. After originating as a political literature existing mainly within the labour movement, it has evolved into an important strand within national Swedish literature. This has, in turn, made necessary changes in its conceptualization and definition.¹¹ The most important aspect of this change has been that more emphasis has been put on its literariness.

In fact, already in Furuland’s original definition it is highlighted – by way of defining it as “belletristic works” – that working-class literature is a *literary* phenomenon. In the years following Furuland’s groundbreaking work, many researchers have also emphasized working-class literature’s literariness. One good example of this is Conny Svensson’s (1974) study on the role of symbolism and allegory in five novels by working-class writer Gustav Hedenvind-Eriksson. In the substantial contemporary research on Swedish working-class literature – which has followed the emergence in recent years of a new generation of working-class writers, and a general increase in interest among readers in working-class literature – this focus on literariness has become increasingly important.¹² Central themes in this research are, for example: analyses of narrative and rhetorical structures in

10 Martin Koch is one of the pioneers of Swedish working-class literature, and his novel *Arbetare* [Workers] from 1912 is generally considered to be a landmark in the history of this literature.

11 Scholars who have not revised their definitions have come to the conclusion that the tradition has ended. Philippe Bouquet (1990:31), for example, argues that the generation of working-class writers emerging in Sweden in the 1930s was the very last one. This narrow view of working-class literature is reminiscent of some U.S. scholars’ view of working-class literature who understand proletarian fiction during the 1930s as the epitome of working-class writing.

12 A good overview of current research on Swedish working-class literature can be found in Jonsson et al. 2011 and Jonsson et al. 2014. Both of these volumes are in Swedish. Two of few recent English-language research publications on Swedish working-class literature are Nilsson 2011 and Nilsson 2014a. The latter of these contains a short historical overview of the tradition of Swedish working-class literature.

working-class literature (Vulovic 2009; Forsberg-Malm 2011), working-class writers' adaptations of different literary genres (Agrell 2014; Arping 2014; Testad 2014), the reception of working-class literature by literary critics (Johansson 2011; Johansson 2013; Johansson 2014), and working-class writers' attempts to develop literary styles adequate for the promotion of socialist class consciousness or the critique of class injustice (Agrell 2011; Öhman 2011; Nilsson 2014b; Hamm 2014).

The increased focus on its literariness within the academic study of Swedish working-class literature has not resulted in its political dimensions, or its role as a source of information about working-class life and history, being made invisible. On the contrary, questions about, for example, the representation in working-class literature of experiences of class and gender are frequently addressed (See, for example, Landgren 2014; Jonsson 2014; Rosenberg 2011; Mischliwietz 2014a; Mischliwietz 2014b, Arping 2011). These discussions, however, are often marked by a high degree of consciousness about the importance to analyze working-class literature *as literature*. Beata Agrell's (2011) analysis of the construction of a "proletarian self-understanding" in working-class literature from the early twentieth century, for example, is intertwined with analyses of both the role played by working-class writers in Swedish literary life during this time and working-class writers' appropriation of various (originally non-proletarian) literary genres. Another example is Åsa Arping's analysis of contemporary autobiographical working-class literature, which stresses the fictionalization in this literature of working-class experiences and argues that working-class writers self-consciously make visible "the bourgeois tradition of narratives about individual Bildung and development that have become almost naturalized in our culture" (Arping 2014:238).

This double focus on literariness and experience/politics is also emphasized by Nilsson. Already in the title of his book *Literature and Class: Aesthetical-Political Strategies in Modern Swedish Working-Class Literature*, he highlights that literary aesthetics and politics are intimately connected, concluding that this literature's interventions into "cultural class struggle"—its bringing to the fore of "questions about class," and its contribution to "the formulation of various forms

of critique of class injustices"—have always been "mediated through the site of literature" and that they therefore have also been "interventions in aesthetic struggles within this site" (Nilsson 2014a:159).

The Ideological and Historical Context of the Study of Working-Class Literatures in the U.S and Sweden Respectively

As seen above, there has been a marked divergence in the way that working-class literatures have been recognized and conceptualized in Sweden and the United States respectively, especially after World War II. Whereas Swedish working-class literature has been recognized as a central strand in modern Swedish literature and—hence—has received a fair amount of attention from scholars of literature, in the U.S., working-class literature is, as Zandy has pointed out, "still struggling for name recognition in the academic marketplace" (Zandy 2004: 84). Below we will make a brief exploration of some of the institutional conditions responsible for these differences.

Historically, working-class literature in the United States has often been (or been viewed as being) closely affiliated with political movements on the Left (especially communist organizations).¹³ This affiliation of working-class literature and left-wing or communist politics became a problem for scholars because of the long reach of the Cold War in U.S. universities. Although McCarthy's fanatical search for communists made international news in the 1950s, the fear of "Reds" in the classroom and university laboratories, ginned up by sensationalist articles in the Hearst press during the Great Depression, was articulated by many congressmen—and one of the reasons why twenty-one states had mandatory loyalty oath programs in place for all government employees by the middle of the 1930s (Schrecker 1986:68). But it was the 1940–42 Rapp-Coudert committee of the New York State legislature designed to identify the extent of communist intru-

13 Several scholars, for example, have argued that 1930s proletarian literature had close ties to the Communist Party. One example of this is Barbara Foley's claim on the very first page in *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929–1941* this literature was part of a "Communist-led cultural movement" (Foley 1993:vii). Alan Wald's trilogy (as discussed above), also explores the Left's connection to Communism.

sion in New York City public education that laid the foundation for McCarthy – and put pressure on universities to control radical professors and monitor their teaching and research. The committee was public theater intended to have radicals self-inflict their own punishment by naming names; the first public witness-informer was Bernard Grebanier, an assistant professor of English at Barnard College, who supplied thirty names of associates whom he claimed were Communist sympathizers (Kutulus 1995:203–04). The first shot across the academic bow of higher education, thus, used a professor of English as ammunition. Although the Committee did not particularly target Humanities faculty, English professors were certainly within the crosshairs of state and federal committees. As David Montgomery states, “The Cold War reshaped university structures and the content of academic disciplines, just as it penetrated the whole fabric of political and intellectual life” (Chomsky et al. 1997:xii).

Universities were therefore on the radar of Cold War committees designed to protect the United States from radical intrusions and cooption. Just as importantly, though, during this time, universities were concurrently becoming central “weapons” in the Cold War effort. Federal monies poured into universities – and while much went to the hard sciences that were designing actual weapons – the federal government also supported many programs in the humanities, including “area studies, language, graduate fellowships, and building construction” (Levin 2013:11). According to Richard Ohmann, in his thoughtful personal reflection on English departments’ complicity during the Cold War, “Literary studies were an integral, if minor part, of the military-industrial-government-university complex, and claimed a residual share of the spoils” (Chomsky et al. 1997:80). The result was that English departments, who benefited from the federal monies both in direct and indirect ways, “struck an ambivalent posture of disengagement from and antagonism toward the postwar project of untrammelled capitalist development and U.S. dominance in the world. Politics – including focus on class inequalities – were isolated from literary criticism within most English literature

classes (Chomsky et al. 1997:77, 85).¹⁴

English departments did not just become ambivalent to politics because they were benefiting financially, they also did so for self-protection. The Rapp-Coudert committee’s actions prophesized what would soon become a televised hunt for “Reds” in government positions – including universities. Truman’s Executive Order 9835 that barred anyone “sympathetic” to Communists, fascists or other totalitarians from holding any government positions was the legal foundation for the McCarthy hearings. While again, these hearings mostly focused on university professors of the sciences, English university professors, including Saul Maloff, Tom McGrath, Harry Slochower, Margaret Schlauch and F.O. Mattiessen, were victims of McCarthy witch hunts (Schrecker 1986:259, 285–86, 294, 305). The actual number of English professors who lost jobs or whose careers were derailed are impossible to discover – within the veiled world of academia, hiring and firing decisions are translucent at best – but most importantly, the Cold War created an atmosphere of fear where any mention of class politics outside the purview of hegemonic national discourse could lead to unofficial academic banishment. McCarthyism, as Ellen Schrecker contends, was a bloodless repression that was “nonviolent and consensual” where government agencies identified or insinuated potential threats and university employers, in self-serving ideological lockstep, would fire them or not renew contracts (Schrecker 1986:9).

The reverberations of the Cold War had a lasting effect that survived the explosiveness of the national protest movements on campuses in the 1960s. The New Left, which was always a minority movement even on the most radical of campuses (Levin 2013:13), was no match for the administrative waves of educational “reform” crashing on university institutions. New Criticism, a practice that rejected a text’s social history and safely negotiated politically unsavory questions by ignoring them, reigned

14 Interestingly, the skills taught within these courses were sometimes used in support of nationalistic narratives: for example, in 1955, the U.S. government published a manual entitled, “How to spot a Communist” that emphasized literary critical skills to help protect the security of the nation. See http://www.openculture.com/2013/07/how_to_spot_a_communist.html.

supreme in many English departments. In the post 1970s, “practical education” continued to be favoured on campuses across the U.S. and knowledge acquisition that was “technical, adaptable and perhaps, most important, responsive to market pressures,” was lauded with financial and systematic security over fields promoting abstract critical thinking skills (Newfield 2008:8). The Cold War’s focus in the 1950s on university education as a key to protecting the national security of the U.S. morphed in the last thirty years of the millennium as a tool to help create particular types of knowledge in a postindustrial society. As funding for public education was slashed repeatedly in the new millennium, and universities chased after private funding and governmental grants both of whom embraced neoliberalism’s market-focused policies, humanities in general, and English departments specifically, have seen dwindling financial and academic opportunities. Unlike in Sweden where working-class literature became part of a national literature and therefore a legitimate object of study at literature departments, in the U.S., this literature – when taught at all – stayed in the margins.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, multiculturalism became a crucial and polarizing discussion in U.S. academia and, as a result, area studies raised in stature and importance on campuses throughout the United States. Issues of race, gender and sexuality became independent areas of inquiry within their own institutional departments. Class, when mentioned at all, was often seen as a placeholder for white, industrial males (Perera 2014:80). This practice of interchanging “class” with “whiteness,” is a process that David Roediger (1999) shows in *The Wages of Whiteness* had origins dating from at least the 19th century. As Roediger’s analysis of the antebellum labour movement shows, labour organizations and movements saw slavery as a denial of freedom. At the same time, though, they also framed slavery as a degradation of individuals within slavery – slaves and former slaves were unfit for work and embodying republican values. So although labour literature made frequent comparisons between labourers and slaves (“wage slaves” was a popular rallying cry), white workers distanced themselves from the black population and their perceived weaknesses (46). According

to this logic, slavery degraded beyond hope non-whites; capitalism oppressed white workers but with opportunity, they could take their proper economic and social place within society. As Schocket (2006) states, “for American writers who saw racial formation and class formation arise at the same period, race and class have never been fully separable. Blackness is used to give evidence of class difference, which then instigates a search for what lies beneath. Inevitably, what lies beneath is a whiteness that can be claimed as common property in a nation economically divided” (64).¹⁵ For Schocket and Roediger, the literature of labour of the nineteenth century celebrates a whiteness that casts a long shadow into the twentieth century. Working-class literature in the late twentieth century, therefore, often became narrowly conceived to represent the working class as an often romanticized, nostalgic triumph of white, industrial male literature.

This narrowing of the narrative frame, as John Lavelle states, left “any study of the working class in a very precarious state” (Lavelle 2012:56). Walter Benn Michaels’ polemic, *The Trouble with Diversity*, states that identity politics have become a central issue for left-leaning academics and diversity “has become virtually a sacred concept in American life” (Michaels 2007:12). But while differences are celebrated, class structure and inequality – which is inherently about oppression and power hierarchies – is seen as out-of-focus within the narrative glare of individual rights based discourse. For Michaels, diversity “is at best a distraction and at worst an essentially reactionary position” (2007:16); when exploring working-class literature in the U.S., class analysis becomes a corollary within area studies’ programs that focus on identity politics, not as a driving force when theoretically examining texts.¹⁶

Tillie Olsen, in the epigraph of *Yonnonddio*, references the Whitman poem of the same title in order to emphasize the vanishing of a whole class of poor, working class people: “unlimn’d they disappear.” As

15 The interweaving of race and class is a significant issue when exploring working-class literature within the U.S. See Schocket (2006) 34-65; Roediger (1999), Foley (1993) 170-213; Denning (1997) 323-361.

16 For a Marxist critique of identity politics, see Nilsson 2008.

Laura Hapke's *Labor's Text* (2001) shows, however, there is no shortage of working-class literature in the U.S. to discuss – the lines have been written and continue to be. The current infrastructures and policies within universities combined with the privatization of public universities, unfortunately, makes clear that in the new millennium, higher education is now judged “less by its overall contribution to all forms of development – personal, cultural, social, and economic – than by its ability to deliver new technologies and a plug-in work force to regional businesses” (Newfield 2008:10). Humanities departments and courses are being systematically destabilized and English departments are primarily used as “service” to the rest of the university – the consistent attacks on the tenure system in many states within the United States and the adjunctification of its professoriate show a determined, institutional and systematic devaluing of the profession within university life. In this neoliberal atmosphere, as many departments try to justify their worth in economic and “job-ready” terms, courses centering upon working-class issues are not a high priority.

In Sweden too, the state implemented measures to protect itself against communism during the Cold War. However, whereas U.S. McCarthyism took the form of a public witch-hunt, Swedish state-sponsored anti-communism consisted mainly of covert operations aiming at registering, rather than exposing, communists. Interestingly, the anti-communist efforts in Sweden were to a large extent a cooperation between the state and the social-democratic party, which held power in Sweden during most of the Cold War.

During and after World War II, the Swedish military and the secret police registered 40,000 and 60,000 communists respectively (Kanger and Gummesson 1990:54, 59). Parallel to this, employer organizations (probably) also registered communists, as did the American embassy in Stockholm (Kanger and Gummesson 1990:53, 57, 61).

After the war, the social-democratic party built up an organization, Sapö, which clandestinely registered communists in workplaces (Kanger and Gummesson 1990:24–25). In the late 1950s the party also managed to set up a secret organization within

the Swedish military, which, in close collaboration with Sapö, registered some 20,000 communists (Kanger and Gummesson 1990:85–95). This organization – the existence of which was revealed in the early 1970s, but about which little is yet known – is generally referred to as IB, even though that name was not adopted until 1965 (Kanger and Gummesson 1990:96).

The main objective of registering Swedish communists was to help the social democrats to control the trade unions. In addition to this, the registers would make possible the internment of communists in case of a war against the Soviet Union (Kanger and Gummesson 1990:174). Significantly, for our purposes here, there are, however, no indications that literary scholars – regardless of their interest in working-class literature – were targeted by either the social-democratic or the military organizations hunting for communists in Sweden.

One probable reason for this is that Swedish working-class literature was never viewed as being very closely affiliated with communism. As has already been pointed out, Swedish working-class literature has always been ideologically affiliated with the labour movement. This movement, in turn, has been dominated by social democracy, which became the dominant national political force around the year 1930 and led (with the exception of a nine-day period in 1936) every Swedish government from 1932 to 1976. In the general elections during this period, the social democrats received between 42 percent and 54 percent of the votes while also dominating the Swedish trade unions, which until quite recently has organized approximately 85 percent of Swedish workers (today some 70 percent of all employees in Sweden are unionized). In comparison to this, the communist party never was very successful. In the general elections of 1944 it received 10 percent of the votes, but in the 1950s–1970s it only secured electoral support from 3–5 percent of voters, and only occasionally and locally managed to gain influence in the unions.

Among working-class writers, support for labour-movement parties and organizations to the left of the social democracy has probably been higher than in the Swedish working class in general. Above all, many

seem to have sympathized with anarcho-syndicalism (see Furuland et al. 1999). Several well-known writers – such as Josef Kjellgren, Moa Martinson, and Kjell Johansson – have also, at least during certain periods, explicitly supported communism. However, as has been pointed out by Philippe Bouquet (1980:12, 18), Swedish working-class writers have never (at least after this literature entered the site of national literature) functioned as mouthpieces for any labour movement party or organization. This has also never been demanded by any of the labour movement parties in Sweden, including the communist party. Often these parties have also been rather sympathetic to working-class literature in general, regardless of the party sympathies of individual working-class writers. Thus, Swedish working-class literature has been associated with the labour movement in general, rather than with specific labour movement parties.

Because of this, anti-communist politics has not had as important effect on the academic study of working-class literature in Sweden as it may have had in the U.S. What probably has had effects, however, has been what we would like to call Swedish exceptionalism, namely the widespread optimistic idea that the Swedish welfare state had put an end to class antagonism (Nilsson 2014a:27).¹⁷ As has been pointed out by several scholars, interest in working-class literature is generally higher when questions about class are considered to be important in public or literary discourse (Haywood 1997:38, Nilsson 2014a:25). Thus, the idea about Swedish

exceptionalism – as well as more recent ideas and national discussions about Sweden having become a post-industrial and multicultural society, where the working class has disappeared and ethnicity has replaced class as the fundamental principle structuring social life, along with the rise of identity politics (See Nilsson 2010:54-79) – could very well result, following the U.S. model, in working-class literature attracting less attention from scholars.¹⁸ But even if the amount of attention given to this literature has certainly varied over time – increasing “during periods characterized by economic and political crises in which the working class and the labor movement have played important roles, and questions about class, consequently, have received increased attention” (Nilsson 2014a:25), while decreasing during periods when the general interest in class has been lower – it has nevertheless always remained a legitimate object of analysis in the study of Swedish literature. This shows that the academic study of literature enjoys relative autonomy, i.e. that it is not directly determined by ideological processes in other social sites. Because of the consecration of working-class literature as a central strand in Swedish literature, scholars doing research on Swedish literary history have continued studying it even during periods when ideas such as that of Swedish exceptionalism have almost emptied the concept of class of meaning in other social sites.

Working-Class Literature and the Concepts of Class and Literature

Above we have outlined narratives of working class literatures and the historical forces that have helped shape the ways these literatures have been conceptualized in the United States and Sweden respectively.

17 Internationally, this kind of exceptionalism is often connected not to Sweden, but to the Scandinavian or Nordic countries in general. Despite certain differences between these countries, this view makes sense. In comparison with the rest of Western Europe, Scandinavia has been characterized by advanced welfare states, a high degree of economic equality, low unemployment etc. The belief that these factors had put an end to class antagonism has also existed in the other Scandinavian countries. However, it is only in Sweden that working-class literature has become recognized as a central strand in national literature. In Norway, for example, there are several “working-class writers,” but these have never achieved any “positions” comparable to those held by working-class writers in Sweden, and, hence, never formed any “strong movement” comparable to the one existing in Sweden (Fyksen 2014:134). In Denmark the situation was similar. As has been pointed out by Per-Olof Mattsson (2014:70), the Danish author Martin Andersen Nexø has been viewed as a role model and a symbolic father figure for many Swedish working-class writers. However, in Denmark, no other working-class writer has managed to reach his status, and, like in Norway, no strong tradition of working-class literature has emerged. Thus, the strong tradition of working-class literature in Sweden does appear to be exceptional also in a Scandinavian context.

18 American exceptionalism, which underwrites much of U.S. national politics as well as its critical views of literature, is another reason why working-class literature is marginalized in the U.S. Eric Schocket’s polemic in *Vanishing Moments* argues that labor literature – especially when it explicitly denounces the failure of the American dream – reproduces the ideological framework of American exceptionalism. Sympathetic readings and criticism of working-class texts, while it may make the reader feel apathy for individual characters, lead to individualist solutions rather than to questioning systematic ideological issues as that literature’s “plot resolutions, tonality and ethical vision place it fully within exceptionalism’s prescriptive ideology” (Schocket 2006:5). For Schocket, the solution from the quagmire of liberal but ultimately ineffective readings is to “shift our focus from the referent to the act of signification, from the writers to their discourse, from the content to the frame” (Schocket 2006:7).

The differing conceptualizations bring to the forefront theoretical questions concerning the concepts of class and literature, as well as the relationship between them, which we will now explore before offering specific comparative suggestions to help reframe and define the phenomenon of working-class literature.

The relatively narrow framing of working-class literature dominant in contemporary U.S. working-class studies – i.e. the view that it constitutes, primarily, an expression of working-class life – is problematic in several ways. Firstly, it reverberates of a deterministic understanding of the relationship between ‘superstructural’ phenomena such as literature and ‘infrastructural’ phenomena such as class. Secondly, by proclaiming that only working-class people can produce working-class literature (and, perhaps, that authors living working-class lives can only produce working-class literature), adherents of this view insinuate that both the working class and working-class literature are essentialist terms and that both phenomena are defined and bordered.

Regarding the working class, this view has been under debate in academia for a while. Already in the early 1960s E. P. Thompson (1961) stressed – as is made clear in the title of his most important work: *The Making of the English Working Class* – that the working class is always in the making, and in the 1970s, scholars such as Lisa Vogel questioned, from a historical position, the idea of classes being homogenous and bordered categories, stating “at no time were [workers] a monolithic mass sharing a single consciousness” (1977:72). At this present moment, when the nature and materiality of work has significantly changed for a wide spectrum of workers and “the working class” is a socially diverse cross section of the population in advanced capitalist states such as the U.S. – a point elaborated upon by Perera (2014) throughout *No Country* – these essentialist conceptions of the working-class have become objects of an increasingly radical critique. Sally Munt, arguing for a more critical cultural studies view of class, explains, for example, that, “no distinct working class [exists] to be operationalized in academic research ... only many working classes” (Munt 2000:10), reflecting the post-Marxist ideology of Chantal Mouffe who views

individuals as bearing the “locus of many subject positions” (Mouffe 2000:90). This focus on individual agency moves away from traditional Marxist views of class and may lead, for some with extreme views on contemporary Capitalism, to make the claim that as a term *class* is so ambiguous that it has little meaning.

For many Marxist critics, however, viewing the multiplicities of class positions and sensibilities expands, rather than devalues, the way we think of the working class. Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, for example, argue that each individual is not embodied by one class but also “occupies a specific subset of other, nonclass positions within comparably overdetermined and contradictory nonclass social processes” (Resnick and Wolff 1989:159-60). For them, this understanding of class doesn’t empty the concept of the working class of meaning but, rather, discounts the prevailing understanding among some academics that view the sensibilities of the working class as somehow inherently present within individuals and need only to be displayed. Contrary to this idealized view, Resnick and Wolff (1989) insist that class is a social process that is historically structured and overdetermined. Drawing on a Gramscian notion of hegemony, they transform the concept of class from a foundational ontological category to something more dynamic and fluid. Perera also questions the rigidity of understandings of class among literary scholars – especially in this age of periphery labour – and argues for an understanding of class – and working-class literature – as not a fixed identity or “an object of knowledge but as an aesthetic and political movement that is continuously supplemented” (Perera 2014:13).

Although sharing the terminology of some post-modern and post-subcultural scholars in terms of “multiplicities” and “framing,” this view of the working class is different from thinking of class as purely an “identity marker.” For Marxist critics like Julian Markels, who explicitly draws on Resnick and Wolff, class is a “hidden process of expropriation rather than a visible identity site” (Markels 2003:22), which leads him to detaching questions about what working-class literature is from questions about authors’ identities. The central focus of some working-class studies scholars finding “lost texts” and “authentic” repre-

sentations of the working class can concurrently be deterministic, grounding class in ideological identity politics – a move that Eric Schocket (2006:5-7) describes as reactionary. While certainly invaluable attempts to give voice to the forgotten, if working class literature is only viewed through this lens of “authenticity” rather than aesthetic formulations, working-class literature may become centrally concerned about subjects rather than the processes of class formation and struggle.

Part of the attempt within contemporary U.S. working-class studies to narratively frame working-class literature in terms of identity has been tactical and self-preserving, aiming, as the leaders of the field state clearly, at making possible the invitation of academics interested in class and literature to the so-called academic “diversity banquet” and make class a more visible component in the “complex mosaic of class, race, gender and ethnicity” (Russo and Linkon 2005:13). Building from a cultural and American studies model, along with a committed view of intersectionality first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) that connected power with identity and resistance in the cultural appropriation of everyday life, identity became the site for understanding power relations whereby class is not privileged “over other aspects of identity” (Russo and Linkon 2005:12). Viewed from this position, culture – and literature as one aspect of cultural representation – becomes the access point for understandings of identity.¹⁹

As an identity site, however, class is revealed and often fetishized in the objectified figures of the representable (or newly “discovered”) disenfranchised workers. As Schocket argues in *Vanishing Moments*, “[Class] is stabilized, made available for a process of sympathetic identification that leaves the reader affected by the poverty of the scene but not cognizant of the extent to which this scene is discursively constituting the poverty it seeks to mimetically represent” (Schocket 2006:23). While the affect produced from the readings may lead to sympathetic analyses of the text, it may also disguise the social relations of capital and the process of class formations. Without theoretical models and close analysis of aesthetic

forms, these sympathetic readings may focus on the individual subjects in the text, where individualistic ideals are championed. Class becomes objectified but the process of class formation remains invisible. Part of this reason for objectification is that without a clear critical lens to view these texts (or even a willingness by some to theoretically analyze these texts), “literature” becomes subordinate to “working class” and concerns over the practitioner’s authenticity become paramount over the critical literary analysis that helps reveal processes of class formation.

In the study of Swedish working-class literature (within the study of Swedish literary history), the dangers of essentialism are not as grave as in contemporary U.S. working-class studies. According to Nilsson, his reception-oriented definition of Swedish working-class literature – that it constitutes a tradition “made up of literary texts, which, at different times, for different reasons, and in different sites, have been defined as working-class literature” – makes visible that it “is not constructed around some stylistic or ideological essence” (Nilsson 2014a:24). What these definitions have had in common is that they have been made when different kinds of “connections between literary texts and the working class have played a dominant role in the text’s reception” (Nilsson 2014a:24). Sometimes the author’s class background has constituted the link between the working class and working-class literature, at other times it has been a thematic focus on working-class life, or the promotion of working-class politics and socialist class consciousness. Thus, in the contemporary discourse about Swedish working-class literature, the phenomenon of the working class is not fixed, but fluid. It can be understood in terms of identity, but also in terms of class politics, class consciousness, etc.

In addition to this, the relative sensitivity in research on Swedish working-class literature to questions about its literariness, and, especially, to the fact that it achieves its political effects by literary means, makes possible a way out of the determinist conceptualization of the relationship between literature and class still underpinning much research within contemporary U.S. working-class studies.

This view has – just like the essentialist understanding of class – been debated by scholars for

19 While there are many scholars who have contested this view, for a particularly clear rebuttal, see Michaels 2007.

decades. Often it has been presented as a fundamental feature of Marxist literary criticism, and critiqued by scholars hostile to Marxist theory. One example of this is Jacques Rancière's rebuttal to Marxist understandings of working-class literature in his works from the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1960s, Rancière was a disciple of Althusser, contributing, for example, to his *Lire le Capital (Reading Capital)* from 1965. However, in the 1970s, Rancière broke with both his teacher – whom he subjected to severe criticism in *La Leçon d'Althusser* from 1975 – and with Marxism, and tried to develop an alternative theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between class and culture. One result of this attempt is the book *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, where he analyses (among other things) poetry written and read by workers. In the preface to the new English edition of this work from 2012, Rancière (2012:x) criticizes “the fetishist passion for lived experience” that, according to him, characterizes much (essentialist and determinist) research on labour history and literature. “A narrative,” he further claims, “is not a simple relating of facts. It is a way of constructing – or of deconstructing – a world of experience.” Thus, the workers' words need to be “removed from their status as evidence or symptoms of a social reality to show them as writing and thinking at work on the construction of a different social world.” Even though Rancière is highly critical of (some versions of) Marxist scholarship, we do not view his insistence on not reducing working-class literature to a mere source of information about the social world as being in any way incompatible with Marxist theory. On the contrary, we see it as harmonizing with, for example, the anti-essentialist and dialectical Marxist theory developed by Resnick and Wolff (1996:175), who argue that cultural processes such as literature or theory do not reflect, but contribute to the construction of, reality.

By stressing the *productive* role played by literature for class consciousness and class identity, research on Swedish working-class literature moves away from the view of literature as a ‘determined,’ ‘super-structural’ phenomenon, instead opening up possibilities for a re-conceptualization of working-class literature as an *overdetermined* phenomenon

actively engaged in the very construction of the phenomenon of class along the lines proposed by Rancière or Resnick and Wolff. For decades, for example, scholars have analyzed how working-class literature contributes to *the production* of class consciousness, as in Brigitte Mral's study of early Swedish working-class literature, where this literature is described as facilitating the “transmission of political consciousness” from the labour movement to labourers (Mral 1985:4). In contemporary research, this productive dimension of working-class literature is emphasized even more. When analyzing the novel *Yarden* [The Yard] by the contemporary Swedish working-class writer Kristian Lundberg, for example, Åsa Arping does not ask how it expresses working-class subjectivity, but how it brings to the fore questions about “what happens to working-class subjectivity and working-class identity” in the era of post-industrialism (Arping 2011:194), and Nilsson (2014a:156) argues that Lundberg self-consciously (and self-reflexively) “presents a radical attempt at rethinking the very concept of the working class in contemporary post-industrial and multicultural Sweden.” This perspective is also stressed in the very latest doctoral dissertation on Swedish working-class literature, where Sandra Mischliwicz (2014a) analyzes – drawing on theorists such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault – how this literature *contributes* to the discursive *construction* of class.

Working-Class Literatures: Comparative Approaches

The differences between the conceptualizations of the phenomenon of working-class literature in U.S. working-class studies and the study of Swedish literary history respectively are not only products of the difference between two fields of research but also of differences between different kinds of working-class literature. As we have emphasized in this article, in Sweden, working-class literature has been consecrated as an important strand within modern literature, whereas U.S. working-class literature still remains a marginalized literary phenomenon. This difference (as well as other differences which have not been explored in this article) brings to the fore a fact of great importance for the understanding of the

phenomenon of working-class literature, namely that it always exists as a historically specific phenomenon, under historically specific conditions.

Within U.S. working-class studies, scholars are often aware of the fact that they focus almost entirely on U.S. working-class literature. They also often display awareness that their discussions of this phenomenon are conditioned by specifically U.S. discourses on class (see, for example, Lauter, 2005:63). Nevertheless, they seldom try to contextualize their studies by referencing research on working-class literatures from other countries. The latter is true also for research on Swedish working-class literature, which seldom is comparative (one of few recent exceptions to this is Nilsson 2014a, which compares Swedish and West-German working-class literatures).

Above, we have established a dialogue between different traditions of research on (different kinds of) working-class literature in order to shed new light on questions about the concept of class and on how to conceptualize the relationship between the working class and working-class literature. One important thing that we have learned from this is that rather than speaking of working-class literature, we need to speak of working-class literatures. This doesn't mean that we want to abandon the concept of working-class literature – it means that we argue that our construction of this concept must be built on comparative analyses of different kinds of working-class literatures, as well as of different conceptualizations of these literatures. Only from such a perspective can the phenomenon of working-class literature(s) tell us something about how the dynamics of class antagonism is mediated in literature, and function as a catalyst for theoretical development. In the following, we will briefly make some further suggestions regarding how the study of working-class literature within both contemporary U.S. working-class studies and research on Swedish literary history could benefit from such a dialogue.

The explicit focus on literariness in research on Swedish working-class literature could very well contribute to a deeper understanding of the question that, according to Tokarczyk (2011:1), should be central in the study of U.S. working-class literature, namely how this literature “works,” since even

researchers primarily interested in working-class literature's function as expression of working-class life and experience have to take into account that these expressions take on literary forms. Perhaps, though, insights from research on Swedish working-class literature could not only contribute to a better understanding of how U.S. working-class literature “works,” but also to how it *doesn't* “work.” The fact that Swedish working-class literature has been recognized as a central strand in modern Swedish literature has many causes. However, one of them is without doubt the insistence among writers and critics alike on its literariness. Even though both Swedish working-class writers and critics promoting working-class literature have often distanced themselves from allegedly bourgeois forms of literature, for example, they have always aimed at “re-functioning,” rather than “rejecting” these forms (Nilsson 2014a:98–114). In other words: their commitment to the working class and to working-class politics has not resulted in them turning their back on the literary nature of their endeavours. And this, in turn, has probably contributed to making possible the recognition of Swedish working-class literature as an important *literary* phenomenon.²⁰ This indicates that the attempts within contemporary U.S. working-class studies to fight the marginalization of working-class literature could very well benefit from a greater emphasis on its literariness. To use examples mentioned previously: Tillie Olsen's *Yonnondio* has proletarian and communal sensibilities that clearly and openly pronounces its Leftist, radical politics. The author, however, also uses literary Modernist techniques to portray these sensibilities of class inequality and revolutionary desire in ways that are both subtle and imaginative. While Olsen's work could be described as “authentic” because of her working class background, dialectically placing her text within a wide-angle view of the literary tradition of Modernism helps further discuss-

20 This argument can be further supported by a comparison of Swedish and West-German working-class literature. In West Germany in the 1970s, many radical critics argued that working-class literature had (or, should have) virtually nothing in common with “bourgeois” literature. Eventually, this led to a rejection – among both radical critics and working-class writers – of literature as such, which, naturally, resulted in a marginalization of working-class literature in the site of national literature (See Nilsson 2014b:64–70, 114).

sions of the meaning(s) of working class literature.²¹ The same examination can be done for the texts in the *Radical Novel, Reconsidered* series. For example, Alfred Maund's complicated and powerful 1957 novel, *The Big Boxcar*, adapts the form of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and uses it in contemporaneous ways. Discussing the text as part of an adapted literary tradition while discussing aesthetic choices hand-in-hand with its political content can lead to a fuller and more complicated understanding of this text. Although literary tradition and theory can and certainly have been used as a way to devalue working-class literature, this happens only when used narrowly and poorly. By debating aesthetic principles within a literary tradition, class can be discussed as a process rather than an essentialist category. The overarching focus would not be on particular rediscovered subjects; rather, literary criticism and tradition could be used as tools to discover the processes of class.

In *The Stamp of Class*, a personal exploration of the interrelations of class and poetry, Gary Lenhart (2006) specifically examines the aesthetic choices of working-class writers, connecting their texts to a literary tradition (for example, he focuses on Whitman's (complicated) class views as the beginning of a poetic tradition in U.S. writing), arguing that working-class poetry can be judged on aesthetic foundations. Lenhart, like many of the scholars within contemporary U.S. working-class studies, does seemingly hold rigid views of who can write this type of literature; however, he complicates these views, showing that class is somewhat fluid and thus analytical examinations of the aesthetic principles, along with the content, helps reveal the process of working class sensibilities.

Another feature of the research on Swedish working-class literature that could prove to be productive for research on American working-class literature is its focus on this literature's active interventions into politics – as well as on how these interventions are mediated through literature – rather than on expressions of experience. The argument that this path should be explored has been made by dissi-

dent voices within contemporary U.S. working-class studies. Lauter, for example, has pointed out that an “emphasis on expression . . . makes a kind of essentialist assumption, namely, that working-class sensibility is simply *there* and needs only to be recorded,” and advocated a move away from focusing on “expression” towards focusing instead on “the *creation* of working-class sensibilities in texts” (Lauter 2005:72). Schocket's (2006) underlying argument in *Vanishing Moments* (as discussed above) shares Lauter's concern while equally worrying that critics focus too readily on sympathetic readings and not on systematic understandings of class formations and inequality. Perera also argues for an examination of the aesthetic interruptions and experimental formalisms of texts rather than concentrated foci on epochal events and the authors' backgrounds advocating for a “rhetorical analysis of figural logic and the literariness of such texts must be made to supplement the logic of periodized case studies” (Perera 2014:76). Nevertheless, despite these sophisticated readings, much remains to be done.

The main benefit of research on Swedish working-class literature emerging from a dialogue with the research on working-class literature within contemporary U.S. working-class studies would be the possibility of developing a wider conceptualization of its object of study. In Sweden, the study of working-class literature focuses mainly on canonized works. (After all, one central effect of canonization is that works are deemed worthy of academic study.) This of course means that some working-class texts – namely those who enjoy a relatively low status as literature, or are not recognized as literature at all – receive less attention, and this, in turn results in a rather narrow conceptualization of the phenomenon of working-class literature. For example, the vibrant scene for amateur working-class writing centered on Föreningen Arbetarskrivare [The Association of Working-Class Writers] in Sweden has hitherto received almost no attention from scholars, and few attempts have yet been made to analyze the relationships between more traditional working-class literature and contemporary (sub- or popular-) cultural expressions such as hip hop or comics. Older forms of working-class literature – such as the

21 There are certainly critics who have done this type of reading including, Anthony Dawahare (1998), Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson (2007), and Sonali Perera (2014:82–100).

political poetry produced within the labour movement during the late nineteenth century – also attract considerably less attention from scholars of literature than the newer kinds of working-class literature that have been canonized as part of the national literary heritage. In contemporary U.S. working-class studies, on the other hand, the borders of working-class literature are rather porous. *American Working-Class Literature*, for example contains not only traditional literary works, such as poetry and prose fiction, but also examples of oral history, letters, and manifestoes – and explicitly sets out to challenge received notions of literature and literary quality (Coles and Zandy 2007:xxiii). Regardless of what one may think of this very generous definition of the phenomenon of working-class literature, it is obvious that the phenomenon needs to be continually re-negotiated, and that the focus on particular rigid understandings of literariness among researchers interested in Swedish working-class literature may constitute an obstacle to this. A dialogue with contemporary U.S. working-class studies could thus serve as a catalyst for scholars of Swedish working-class literature to develop a broader understanding of what working-class literature is, or what it could be.

Such a dialogue could also help renew the theoretical and methodological paradigm within research on Swedish working-class literature. Even if the focus on literariness in this research certainly has some merits in relation to the focus in contemporary U.S. working-class studies on working-class literature as an expression of, or source of information about, working-class life, it also results in a privileging of certain theories and methods, namely those developed in literary studies. Within the inter-disciplinary field of contemporary U.S. working-class studies,

on the other hand, theoretical and methodological inspiration is drawn from a wide range of academic traditions (such as cultural studies, critical race theory etc.). Since – as we hope to have demonstrated in this article – working-class literatures are historically changing phenomena that assume different shapes when approached from different angles, any researcher interested in this phenomenon must be open to trying out new theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Concluding Remarks

In this essay, we have established a dialogue between U.S. and Swedish working-class literatures, as well as between the conceptualizations of working-class literature within contemporary U.S. working-class studies and the study of Swedish literary history respectively. Through comparative explorations of the historical and material forces that act upon each national literature, as well as on the study of it, we are arguing for a more informed and fluid understanding of the phenomenon of working-class literature. Doing so acknowledges that working-class literature is a heterogeneous phenomenon, always in a process of formation. Loosening myopic nationalist understandings of working class literatures in favour of a comparative approach will expand our understandings of them. Keeping in mind Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's statement in *Empire* that "there is no common language of struggles that could 'translate' the particular language of each" (Hardt and Negri 2000:57), what we are suggesting is not one "cosmopolitan" language that flattens out respective literatures but rather a comparative theoretical analysis that allows for new vantage points to read and understand them.

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Three Nostalgias

Dennis and Alice L. Bartels

Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, many youth in North America, particularly in Canada, expected social progress: a shorter work week; universal, affordable daycare; a guaranteed minimum wage; gender equality; etc. Perhaps there are others who share our nostalgia for the hopefulness of that era; if so, this raises a question: why were the hopes of the 1960s dashed? Why didn't more social progress occur? The answer to this question is linked to widespread nostalgia for socialism in the former Soviet bloc. Large numbers of people in the former Soviet bloc miss guaranteed employment, state-subsidized food prices, gender equality, personal security, and confidence in the future. With the collapse of Soviet socialism, pro-capitalist Western states could abandon any pretense of social progress that had been necessary to demonstrate the superiority of capitalism over socialism. As John Lanchester writes, the end of the socialist model removed "a powerful impetus to show that ordinary people's lives were better under capitalist democracy" (2010:16).

Despite Western assurances to the former USSR that NATO would not expand into Eastern Europe, such expansion was spearheaded by the Clinton

Administration after dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. Subsequent Russian resistance to NATO expansion has revealed another nostalgia – viz., the longing of NATO hawks and conservative Western politicians for a return to Cold War levels of military spending and confrontation with Russia. This nostalgia, perhaps a holdover from Cold War habits, is reflected in deployment of NATO forces to Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Baltic states, and the Black Sea. The Cold War attitudes seem to still pervade Western mass media.

Triumphalism regarding the 'end of history' after dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact was accompanied in various parts of the West by relentless attacks on social safety nets and deregulation of finance capital. This may have resulted in the economic collapse of 2008, and in widespread resistance to the imposition of policies of 'austerity.' These consequences were not anticipated by anti-Soviet Western social democratic parties who may have seen the Soviet bloc as an embarrassing impediment to the growth of mass support for social democracy. The connections between the three nostalgias mentioned above is explored here.

Dimensions of Progress in Canada

Medicare

The promise of progress in Canada during the 1960s and 70s was underpinned by adoption of North America's first single-payer medicare system. Canadian medicare was pioneered by the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation government in Saskatchewan in 1962, despite opposition from the Saskatchewan College of Physicians and Surgeons, insurance companies, and various business groups (Brown and Taylor 2012). The struggle for medicare in Saskatchewan led to The National Medical Care Insurance Act which was passed in the House of Commons on 8 Dec. 1966. The Act provided that the federal government would pay about half of the Medicare costs in any province with insurance plans that met the criteria of being universal, publicly-administered, portable and comprehensive. The starting date was 1 July 1968. By 1971 all provinces had established plans which met the criteria.

Health care in the former USSR had been provided by the state since the 1920s. By the 1970s, the USSR had the highest ratio of doctors to population in the world. Preventative health care measures were undertaken in rural and urban polyclinics. Doctors made house calls. The cost of most medicines was covered by the state (Szymanski 1984).

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women

The introduction of medicare coincided with exploration by governments of further progressive measures, particularly regarding gender equality. In 1966-67, the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson responded to calls from grass roots women's organizations across Canada, including the Voice of Women, the Canadian Federation of University Women, and the Federation des femmes du Québec, to establish a Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The RSCSW was composed of seven members, including Florence Bird (Chair), Elsie G. MacGill, Jeanne Lapointe, and Doris Ogilvie. The RSCSW's report was submitted in 1971. Its recommendations touched upon several issues that were widely discussed in the 1960s and 1970s. These included equal pay for equal work, access to birth control and abortion, a

guaranteed annual income, access to affordable child-care, provision of low-cost post-secondary education, access to affordable housing, prevention of abuse of women and children, particularly 'Indian' and 'Eskimo' women and children.

In the former USSR, all able-bodied adults, including women, were legally required to work or study. Educational levels of Soviet women were among the highest in the world. Women were guaranteed equal pay with men, and had entered many professions – e.g., engineering and medicine – which had been traditionally almost closed to women in North America. Affordable universal daycare and widespread availability of low-cost semi-prepared foods reduced the 'double burden' of childcare and housework, although the double burden still existed. Contraception – i.e., condoms – were widely available. Abortion was available on demand (Szymanski 1984; Mandel 1975). A wide range of educational and occupational opportunities were available to indigenous women in the far north and northeast (Bartels and Bartels 1995).

The Pro-Choice Movement and Dr. Henry Morgenthaler

The pro-choice movement in Canada centred on the actions of Dr. Henry Morgenthaler, whose first abortion clinic was publicly opened in Montréal in 1969. Morgenthaler countered successive attempts by federal and provincial governments to prosecute him with the "defense of necessity" – i.e., as a physician, he had a duty to safeguard the life and health of the women who came to him for abortions. Despite violence and massive publicity by anti-choice religious institutions and individuals, successive juries refused to convict Morgenthaler. In spite of successive acquittals, Morgenthaler served ten months in prison, suffering a heart attack while incarcerated. Morgenthaler's struggles received support from women's groups across Canada. In 1976, the Attorney General of Québec announced that abortions performed in free-standing clinics were legal in the province. Eventually, abortion was legalized and supported by medicare plans in almost every province.

The Canada Pension Plan

Before 1966, income for most seniors was around 50% of the average industrial wage despite a universal Old Age Security (OAS) pension which was first introduced in 1927. Most employment-based pension plans were not portable, required long contributory periods, and had inadequate survivor benefits.

The Pearson government introduced the Canada Pension Plan in 1966. The CPP was a compulsory, contributory scheme for waged/salaried workers between the ages of 18 and 70. Benefits were based on the amount of contributions. The CPP included portability, and provided death, survivor, and disability benefits. A sister programme, the Québec Pension Plan (QPP) was also introduced in 1966. In 1967, an income-tested Income Supplement was introduced. It was intended to assist those who had retired before introduction of the CPP. By 1971, eligibility for CPP and OAS was lowered to age 65, and both were indexed. A spouse's allowance was introduced in 1975. Provisions were made to adjust the CPP contribution period for parents who left the workforce to raise children.

The measures described above significantly improved the retirement incomes of many Canadians.

In the Soviet Union, pensions were introduced in 1924 for Red Army veterans. Pension rights were extended to most Soviet citizens during the 1930s, and by 1940 approximately 2 million people were receiving pensions. (Williamson, Howling, and Maroto 2006:166). During the 1970s, men in the Soviet Union could retire at age 60 after 25 years of work. Women could retire at age 55 after 20 years of work. Pension levels were determined by types of work and years of service, and averaged about 70 percent of maximum wage. Many retirees continued to work part-time. Pensions of workers without sufficient years of service were supplemented by the state. Pensions unrelated to work were received by people with disabilities, including disabled war veterans. In 1989, there were approximately 44 million pensioners.

In many families pensioners were partially supported by younger family members who were working. Many pensioners assisted with childcare and housework. Although all pensioners benefitted

from the 'social wage' (see below), a minority of pensioners, particularly those who lived alone, were poor by Soviet standards – i.e., with an income around 70 rubles per month (Myers 1959; IMF 1991; see below). It should be noted, however, that cafeteria meals and staple foods were heavily subsidized by the state, as were housing and energy costs.

In 1983, incomes of less than 70 rubles per month were not taxed. Incomes of 70 rubles per month were taxed at 25 kopeks. Incomes above 100 rubles were taxed at 13 percent. Collective farmers, disabled people, and war invalids were not taxed. The income tax of individuals with four or more dependents was reduced by 30 percent. A small tax on bachelors was aimed at promoting marriage. (Feldbrugge et al 1985:756).

A Guaranteed Annual Income

In his 1971 book, *Agenda, a plan for action*, Liberal politician Paul Hellyer wrote that the proposal for a guaranteed annual income had achieved a "climate of acceptability in many circles" (149). Proponents of a guaranteed annual income argued that it would free the lowest strata in society from poverty. Critics argued, among other things, that it would remove incentives to work. In Dauphin, Manitoba, the federal and provincial governments supported an experimental guaranteed annual income program – "Mincome" – between 1974 and 1979. For unknown reasons, neither the provincial or federal government issued a report on the results of Mincome. In 2011, Dr. Evelyn Forget concluded that the only groups who worked less after the introduction of mincome were teenagers and mothers of newborns. Mothers wanted to stay at home longer with their babies. Teenagers worked less because they weren't under as much pressure to support their families. Consequently, graduation rates increased. Those teenagers who continued to work were given more opportunities to choose what type of work they did. Hospital visits dropped 8.5 percent, with fewer incidents of work-related injuries, and there were fewer emergency room visits from car accidents and domestic abuse. Additionally, there was a reduction of rates of psychiatric hospitalization, and in the number of mental illness-related consultations with health

professionals (see Carol Goar, “Anti-poverty success airbrushed out,” *Toronto Star*, 11 January 2011).

The Soviet constitution guaranteed employment to all Soviet citizens. Soviet law stipulated that no one could live from rents, speculation, profits, or black marketeering. Workers enjoyed extensive job security, a 40-hour work week, and three weeks’ paid vacation (Szymanski 1984). In the 1970s, most Soviet workers earned considerably more than the legally-guaranteed wage of 70 rubles per month (IMF et al 1991; Szymanski 1984). The ‘social wage’ provided by state for all Soviet citizens included access to subsidized housing, food, transportation, medical care, education, and household utilities. The Soviet subway fare of five kopecks had remained unchanged since the 1930s (Szymanski 1984).

In 1973, the average monthly wage of an industrial worker was 146 rubles (Szymanski 1979:52). Of this, about 30 rubles, or 15% of family income, covered housing (including utilities), medicine, transport, and insurance (Szymanski 1984:129). The remainder went for food, clothing, and luxuries – e.g., savings for an automobile. It should be noted that most families had two incomes.

The range of consumer goods available in the former Soviet Union was small in comparison to the range available to the ‘middle classes’ of Western Europe and North America. This was sometimes attributed by pro-capitalist critics to the absence of free market dynamism in the USSR. Some critics of capitalism attributed the relative abundance of consumer goods in the West to exploitation of cheap labour and raw materials in the ‘Third World’ by multinational corporations. Such ‘spoils of imperialism’ were not generally available to the Soviet economy. Perhaps it should also be mentioned that the production of many consumer goods is now not always seen as a benefit, but as endangering our increasingly fragile environment.

Affordable Housing

The 1970s saw progress in provision of affordable housing. The Liberal minority government, pushed by the New Democratic Party (1972-74), amended the National Housing Act to allow the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation to provide start-

up grants and 100% mortgages at below-market rates to housing co-operatives. Provincial and federal rent supplements were made available to low-income co-op members, while high-income members paid relatively high rents. Seven thousand seven hundred co-op housing units were established by 1979 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2011).

The Soviet state and state-owned enterprises and institutions provided low-cost housing for most Soviet citizens. After the Revolution of 1917, many Tsarist palaces and mansions were converted into small flats. Housing required 2 to 3 percent of the average family budget. Albert Szymanski concluded that in the late 1970s, Soviet working-class housing standards were about a generation behind those of the U.S. (1984:134-35). Many apartment buildings had shared kitchens. Even though approximately 4.1 percent of the Soviet population was provided with new housing every year, demand for housing could not be met. Red Army soldiers sometimes assisted in construction of apartment buildings. Housing was allocated on the basis of need (usually according to family size) and time spent waiting to live in a particular area. Tenants in state-owned housing could only be evicted in very exceptional circumstances (Szymanski 1984).

The development of housing co-ops was encouraged by the Soviet state to help relieve the housing shortage. Co-operatives made up about five to seven percent of the housing stock of the USSR. Co-op members paid a portion of construction costs by instalment (Lykova 2002).

Petrocan

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the formation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) brought a rapid rise in oil prices in the early 1970s. Major US oil companies’ wildly-fluctuating estimates of Canada’s oil reserves led the Trudeau government to establish a state-owned oil company, Petrocan, tasked, among other things, with guaranteeing a steady supply of oil to Canadians. In contrast to the US, supplies of petroleum products to Canadian petrol stations were maintained during the ‘oil crisis.’ Despite opposition from major US oil companies, the government of Alberta, and the

US government, most Canadians approved of the creation and activity of Petrocan (Laxer 2008).

In the USSR, all the major means of production and exchange, including the petroleum industry, were owned by the Soviet state (Szymanski 1979). Revenues from state-owned enterprises, including the petroleum industry, supported, among other things, the ‘social wage’ (see above). In the 1970s, natural gas production in Western Siberia expanded, and exports of natural gas to West Germany began. Oil and natural gas were sold at below world-market-prices to the Eastern European socialist countries and to Cuba (Szymanski 1979).

Reagan, Thatcher, and the ‘End’ of the Cold War

In light of the developments mentioned above, it did not seem unreasonable in the late 1970s to expect that Canadian governments would continue to respond to social movements which sought to bring progress through further state intervention in the economy. Many on the left saw the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher, the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan, and the 1984 election of Brian Mulroney as setbacks which would only temporarily put progress ‘on hold.’ In the meantime, social programmes were cut back or eliminated. In 1985, the Mulroney government was forced by public pressure to cease its efforts to de-index OAS, but in 1989, the universality of OAS ended with the introduction of a clawback for pensioners earning incomes above a certain level. Petrocan was privatized. Federal support for co-op housing was largely eliminated. Polysar, a profitable crown corporation which produced petrochemical products, was privatized in 1988. The Canadian National Railroad (CNR) was privatized in 1995. But the popularity of Medicare insured that Conservative governments could not overtly curtail its funding.

Cold War tensions escalated under Reagan and Thatcher. For example, a 1983 NATO exercise codenamed Able Archer was mistaken by the Soviets as preparation for a ‘pre-emptive’ nuclear strike on the USSR (Prados 2006). Jeffrey Carney, a member of the US Air Force, informed the GDR (East German) intelligence service that Able Archer was only an exercise (2013). His action may have avoided

a nuclear war. This incident never received the notoriety of the earlier Cuban missile crisis.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Soviet socialism were unexpected. In the West, surprise was followed by triumphalism. The ‘magic of the market’ would shortly bring worldwide prosperity. The ‘end of history’ was at hand. Without the counterbalance of the Soviet bloc, NATO was free to subvert governments and to militarily intervene in Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and elsewhere without much concern about possible Soviet, United Nations, or other constraints.

Blowback from Western support of Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan during the Soviet period was not generally anticipated in the West. There have been some suggestions, however, that the US government or its agencies may have had prior knowledge and decided not to interfere with the events of 9/11. In 2006, Senator Patrick Leahy (D, Vermont) asked, “Why did 9/11 happen on George Bush’s watch, when he had clear warnings that it was going to happen? Why did they allow it to happen?” (quoted in Summers and Swan 2011:168). There is little doubt that the 9/11 attacks were used by some Western governments to pursue wars in the Middle East and to reduce the civil rights of their citizens.

Post-Soviet Nostalgia in the Former Soviet Bloc

Educational institutions, mass media, academics, and major political parties in the West have, for decades, attempted to equate Stalin with Hitler and to equate the former Soviet Union with Nazi Germany. For example, Peter Vronsky of Ryerson University claims that “the Russian [*sic*] dictator [i.e., Stalin] killed twice as many people as Adolph Hitler” (quoted in the *Toronto Star*, 25 January 2012). *Bloodlands* (2010), by Stephen Snyder, is an influential reiteration of the equation of Stalin and Hitler. (The U.S. scholar, Grover Furr, has contested all of Snyder’s claims (2014)).

In light of this pervasive equation of Hitler and Stalin in the West, it came as an unhappy surprise to many Western academics and commentators that there is widespread nostalgia for socialism in the former Soviet Union and in other parts of

the former Soviet bloc. For example, Olivia Ward is scathingly critical of Oksana Chernysheva, an 18-year-old Russian who heard from her parents, a bakery manager and a factory worker during the Soviet period, that during Soviet times “the food was tasty and ice cream was cheap.” Ward speculates that Oksana’s parents’ “minds had misted over during the chaos of the Yeltsin era when life savings turned to dust, “wild East” capitalism reigned and swaggering mafia *vors* were the nobility” (*Toronto Star*, 21 June 2014). Ward seems to confuse the period in which Gorbachev’s faction of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union began dismantling Soviet institutions with the effects unleashed by the “shock doctrine” after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Klein 2007). These included increased infant mortality and suicide rates, de-industrialization, and decreases in life-expectancy and living standards, especially for pensioners (Parenti 1997). As well, gender inequality significantly increased (Jennissen and Lundy 2009).

Ward and others seem to have overlooked aspects of Soviet life which many Russians now fondly remember. These include state provision or heavy subsidization of education (including university), medical care, food staples, public transport, daycare, and housing (including utilities). Funding these services came from surplus generated by state-owned enterprises, including banks (see above). As well, the Soviet state attempted to ‘insulate’ the Soviet bloc, with varying degrees of success, from the effects of capitalist economic recessions and ‘market corrections.’

Plans to privatize housing and utilities in the former Soviet Union were widely unpopular because many people did not want to pay ‘market prices’ for rent, home heating, and electricity that would further enrich a new class of capitalists. Partial re-nationalization of the Russian fossil fuel industry (Goldman 2010) provided profits which allowed the Putin government to stabilize and improve Russian living standards (Lynch 2011).

Seth Mydans, in a 2011 *New York Times* article, quotes Lyubov Komar: “I felt more comfortable in the U.S.S.R. ... You always had a piece of bread. You always had work. Yes, sure you can go overseas now, but you have to have money for that and you have to

go into debt. Now, it you don’t have money you can’t do anything.” Mydans suggests that many Russians share this view.

In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Carol J. Williams writes,

The share of Russians who look back approvingly [on Stalin] has been increasing steadily in recent years, and the segment of those who tell pollsters they have no opinion on his place in history has shot up even more sharply, said Denis Volkov, a sociologist with the [independent] Levada Center. He points to this year’s massive Victory Day events as the Kremlin’s message to ungrateful neighbours that they owe their peace and prosperity to the war-time death of more than 20 million Soviet citizens. [reprinted in the *Toronto Star*, 27 June 2015]

Current characterizations of Russia as a corrupt kleptocracy centred on Vladimir Putin “[ask] us to shut out the wider realities of profit-making in Russia which are rooted in the capitalist system that was imposed in the 1990s, at such cost to Russians themselves but to much applause from abroad. That system is something the West has no interest in attacking” (Wood 2015).

Nostalgia for Soviet institutions is not always confined to reminiscence. In the Eastern Ukraine, rebels have nationalized coal mines and revived collective farms. Boris Litvinov, the Chair of the Donetsk Peoples Republic, said, “The Soviet Union was not about famine and repression. The Soviet Union was mines, factories, victory in the Great Patriotic War and in space. It was science and education and confidence in the future” (*New York Times*, 4 Oct. 2014). A popular song celebrating Vladimir Putin’s attempt to revive the Soviet Union was mentioned by Susan Ormiston in a CBC TV report from Moscow on 5 February 2015.

In Germany, mockery of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) following reunification has given way to adoption of various East German institutions, policies, and practices, including ten-year plans to train young football/soccer players, equal pay for women workers, provision of daycare nurseries, generous maternity leave, recycling of household waste, provision of medical

polyclinics, and reforms of the education system. Sometimes, there is reluctance to acknowledge the success of East Germany:

When Germany introduced a bottle deposit system to encourage recycling in 2002, it pointed toward Scandinavia, even though East Germany had a sophisticated recycling infrastructure since the 1960s... When poor results in OECD school ranking led to call for reforms of Germany's education system at the turn of the millennium, a delegation was sent to Helsinki to study Finland's top-ranking system. The Finns told them that they, in turn, had taken their inspiration from East Germany. [Oltermann 2014]

It should be noted that East Germany's institutions and practices were largely based on those of the former Soviet Union.

Tariq Ali writes,

In a poll taken in January [2015], 82 per cent of respondents in the old East Germany said that life was better before unification. When they were asked to give reasons, they said that there was more sense of community, more facilities, money wasn't the dominant thing, cultural life was better and that they weren't treated, as they are now, like second-class citizens. [2015:22]

Progress and Cold War Competition

Competition between the West and the former USSR, including the period of the Cold War involved, among other things, comparisons between various aspects of everyday life in the West and the Soviet Union in an effort to marshal political support for capitalism or socialism. For example, Dr. Norman Bethune and Nobel Prize-winner, Dr. Frederick Banting, returned from visiting the USSR during the 1930s and became outspoken proponents of 'socialized medicine.' The extent to which their views influenced T.C. Douglas, the architect of Canada's medicare system, are unclear, partly because the complete RCMP file on Douglas has not been released in the interests of 'national security.'

During the Great Depression, pro-Soviet commentators in the West contrasted economic stag-

nation in the industrialized capitalist countries with full employment and spectacular industrial growth in the USSR. Prominent supporters of the USSR included the African-American singer and civil rights champion, Paul Robeson (1988), and Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury (1940). Johnson wrote,

The vast moral achievements of the Soviet Union are in no small measure due to the removal of fear. Fear haunts workers in a capitalist land. Fear of dismissal, fear that a thousand workless men stand outside the gate eager to get his job, breaks the spirit of a man and breeds servility. Fear of unemployment, fear of slump, fear of trade depression, fear of sickness, fear of an impoverished old age lie with crushing weight on the mind of the worker. ... Nothing strikes the visitor to the Soviet Union more forcibly than the absence of fear. The [economic plan] removes at one stroke many of the most obvious fears. No fear for maintenance at the birth of a child cripples the Soviet parents. No fear for doctors' fees, school fees, or university fees. No fear of under-work, no fear of over-work. No fear of wage reduction, in a land where none are unemployed. [Johnson 1940:187]

Margaret Gould, a prominent Canadian social worker and champion of gender equality (Jennissen and Lundy 2009), visited the USSR in 1935 and wrote,

What price the vanity of silk stockings? The Russian woman, poor thing, wears cotton stockings, but she has free medical care before birth, at birth, and throughout her own and her child's life. If she is employed in industry or at a profession, she has sixteen weeks' leave from work on full pay, while her job is kept for her. This also is her right if she is a student attending the university. [1937:165]

After the 1917 Revolution, the life expectancy for all age groups in the USSR went up, and infant mortality declined. A newborn child in 1926-27 had a life expectancy of 44.4 years, up from 32.3 years thirty years before (Dinkel 1985). "In 1960, in the USSR, life expectancy was 68.4 years, in 1970 70.0 years and in 1975 70.4 years. In 1975, life expectancy in the US for the white population was approximately 71.0 years (8 months longer than in the USSR in the same

year), and 67.9 years for the non-white population” (Szymanski 1984: 136).

William Beveridge (b. 1879 – d. 1963), the architect of Britain’s post-war welfare state, was heavily influenced by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Fabian socialists who, in a Minority Report to a Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief Distress (1905-1909), anticipated the measures recommended in Beveridge’s Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services of 1942. The Beveridge Report sold scores of thousands of copies, and was widely regarded in Britain as a blueprint for the sort of society for which Britain’s armed forces were fighting.

Beveridge worked as a researcher for the Webbs on their Minority Report. He wrote, “the Beveridge Report [of 1942] stemmed what from all of us had imbibed from the Webbs” (Harris 2009).

The Webbs were strong supporters of Soviet socialism. During the 1930s, the Webbs chronicled Soviet attempts to provide full employment, health care, old age security, and gender equality (Webb and Webb 1935). It seems very likely that these accounts influenced the Beveridge Report which envisaged institutions that would secure “freedom from” the “five giants” of want, disease, ignorance, squalor, and idleness for men and women (Beveridge 2014). In their last book, *The Truth about Soviet Russia* (1942), the Webbs appended the 1936 Soviet constitution, translated by Anna Louise Strong. The constitution guaranteed the right to work (Art. 118), the right to rest and leisure (Art. 119), the right to health care and to maintenance in old age (Art. 120), the right to education, including higher education (Art. 121), and equal rights for men and women (Art. 122).

The affinity between the Beveridge Report and the 1936 Soviet constitution is unmistakable.

Soviet proposals to the British and French governments for a pact of collective security to contain Nazi aggression were rejected in favour of a policy of appeasement which yielded Czechoslovakia to Hitler in 1938 (Cockburn 1973). This led the Soviets to conclude a Non-Aggression Pact with Nazi Germany in 1939. Many Soviet sympathizers in Western Europe and North America, including the novelist Eric Ambler, were disillusioned because

they had seen the USSR as the main bulwark against Nazi aggression (Marcus 1990).

Finland had been part of the Tsarist Empire before its independence was recognized by the new Soviet government in 1917. In 1918, a bitter civil war was fought in Finland between Communist Reds and conservative ‘Whites.’ Under the leadership of Carl Mannerheim, the victorious Whites starved or killed large numbers of Reds (Taylor 2010). The Mannerheim government shared extreme anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism with the Hitler regime.

In November, 1939, the Soviet Union went to war with Finland in order to secure the approaches to Leningrad. In the West, sympathy for the USSR eroded, and there was much sympathy for Finland. Although Britain and France were at war with Nazi Germany, their governments prepared to send significant military forces to assist the right-wing Finnish government. The US, which had not yet joined the war against Nazi Germany, planned to send significant military aid to Finland. The Finnish government surrendered to the Soviet Union in March, 1940, before British, French, and US plans to go to war against the USSR could be implemented (Fleming 1969). The Soviets secured the Karelian Isthmus and the approaches to Leningrad, but did not occupy the rest of Finland or remove Finnish heavy weapons. In 1941, the Finnish military participated in the Nazi invasion of the USSR (Lunde 2011). A Finnish Volunteer Battalion was part of the Nazi elite *Waffen-SS* (Holmila 2013). In 1947, the victorious World War II Allies (Britain, the US, and the USSR) concluded separate peace treaties with Nazi Germany’s former co-belligerents: Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Finland.

The USSR and Communists who had resisted the Nazis in occupied Europe won immense prestige for the key roles that they played in the defeat of Fascism. As Winston Churchill said in a speech to the House of Commons in October, 1944, “I have always believed and I still believe that it is the Red Army that has torn the guts out of the filthy Nazis.”

In the postwar years, the Canadian authors H. Dyson Carter and Charlotte Carter extolled Soviet society and institutions. In *Sin and Science* (1946), Dyson Carter described Soviet programmes aimed at

ending prostitution and venereal disease. The Carters' periodical, *Northern Neighbors*, was widely distributed in Canada from 1956 to 1989. In *We Saw Socialism* (1951), Charlotte and Dyson Carter wrote,

Capitalists in Canada are fond of sneering at socialism. They call it a "charity system," "living off the government," "handouts from cradle to grave." But nobody lives on charity in the Soviet Union. People there don't "ask the government for new housing, free medical care or old age pensions anymore than we "beg" free public school education! The people do the work, pay themselves wages, make the profits, *take the profits and distribute these profits* fairly to everyone in the form of social benefits. [57-58]

Sympathy for the USSR eroded in the West after mass media campaigns portrayed Western Communists as 'atom spies' for the USSR. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in the US in 1953 despite an absence of evidence that they had passed atomic secrets to the Soviets (Schrank 2004). In Britain, Alan Nunn May and Klaus Fuchs were imprisoned for passing atomic secrets to the USSR while working for the British war effort during World War II, despite the wartime British treaty obligation to provide the USSR with "military and other assistance and support of all kinds" (Ashely and Soames: 49-50; see Broda 2011).

Leftists in the West were disillusioned after revelations by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956 of injustices during the Stalin period (1929-1953), and in 1956 after Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising. Some disillusioned leftists became pro-capitalist cold warriors who persistently attempted to equate injustices of the Stalin period with the crimes of the Nazis. It seems likely, however, that Khrushchev exaggerated or lied about the injustices of the Stalin period in order to consolidate power (Furr 2007). Michael Parenti writes,

Soviet labor camps were not death camps like those the Nazis built across Europe. There was no systematic extermination of inmates, no gas chambers or crematoria to dispose of millions of bodies. Despite harsh conditions, the great majority of gulag inmates survived and eventually returned to

society when granted amnesty or when their terms were finished. In any given year 20 to 40 percent of the inmates were released according to ... archive records." [1997:79]

In order to inflate the number of victims during the Stalin period, anti-Soviet commentators usually add the number of Ukrainian famine victims during collectivization during the early 1930s to the number of gulag victims. It must be remembered, however, that, despite Soviet mistakes in collectivization, many poor and middle peasants favoured transformation of privately-owned land into collective farms. Some rich peasants, in order to avoid taxation and/or expropriation, destroyed their own crops and domestic animals (Werth 1971; Tottle 1987). According to Vladimir Kozlov, head of Russia's Federal Archive Agency, "Not a single document exists that even indirectly shows that the strategy and tactics chosen for [Ukrainian agriculture, 1930-34] differed from those applied to other [Soviet] regions, not to mention strategy or tactics with the aim of genocide" (NBC News, 2 Feb., 2009).

During the Cold War, Soviet foreign-language media reported constantly-improving living standards and industrial growth in the USSR – for example, see *Soviet Economy Forges Ahead*, (translated by Yuri Sviridov, 1973, Moscow: Progress Publishers; also, see various editions of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia Publishing House)). As well, the Soviets gave scholarships to many students from Third World countries for study in the USSR – e.g., at Lumumba University in Moscow. At the same time, Western governments and corporate-controlled mass media barraged Western readers with stories of Soviet human rights abuses, relatively low Soviet living standards, and Soviet economic inefficiencies. For example, when we took an introductory Russian language course at Middlebury College in Vermont in 1980, the course was based on Soviet materials. These included a story about an urban family moving into a new apartment with hot and cold-running water. Some of the American students regarded this story as an example of blatant lying by Soviet propagandists. The students who had this reaction were probably influenced by an

endless stream of Western media accounts of chronic Soviet economic inefficiency. At the same time, Western mass media were filled with stories about the threat of ever-improving Soviet weaponry (see various editions of *Soviet Military Power*, published by the US Department of Defense during the 1980s). The obvious question of how a chronically inefficient Soviet economy could consistently produce world-class weapons was seldom addressed (Bartels 1997).

In 1991, with the dissolution of the USSR and the outlawing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the economic/propagandistic competition between the USSR and the West ended. As John Lanchester writes, there could no longer be “strong and explicit admiration” by left-wing Western European political parties

of the socialist model. In America, the equivalent pressures were far fainter – which is why American workers have, to Europeans, a grotesquely limited vacation time (two weeks a year), no free health care, and a life expectancy lower than that of Europe. Canada, too, is significantly ahead of the U.S., with a life expectancy which is a startlingly three years longer, 81 as opposed to 78 years – and that notwithstanding the fact that Canada spends a dramatically smaller amount on health care, 9.7 percent of GDP as opposed to the U.S.’s 15.2 percent. [Lanchester 2010:16-17]

In a 2010 interview, the U.S. political scientist, James Scott, said, “In a strange way, I find myself nostalgic for the Cold War in two senses. First, I think you could argue, as my colleague Roger Smith argued, if you want to understand the success of the civil rights movement in the US, one major reason during the Kennedy era was the fact that the US was losing the Cold War in part – they thought – because of the fact that we were a racist society. So winning the Cold War became premised upon reforms I fully endorsed, to make society more equitable. Secondly, when it was a bipolar world, the US and the West were interested in land reform in places where the land distribution was wildly unequal. After 1989, the IMF and the World Bank have never talked about land reform again” (Schouten 2010).

Western Nostalgia For the Cold War

Despite vigorous denials that the West gave assurances to the Soviet government that NATO would not expand eastward after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is a matter of public record that on 10 February 1990, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the West German foreign minister, told Edvard Schevardnadze, the foreign minister in M. Gorbachev’s government, that “one thing is certain: NATO will not expand to the east. ... As far as the non-expansion of NATO is concerned, this also applies in general” (quoted in Klußmann, Schepp and Wiegrefe 2009).

Seumas Milne writes that by sending military advisers to the Ukraine, the U.S. and Britain have violated the Minsk peace agreement of February, 2015.

Thousands of NATO troops have been sent to the Baltic states – the Atlantic alliance’s new front-line – untroubled by their indulgence of neo-Nazi parades and denial of minority ethnic rights. ... For the western military complex, the Ukraine conflict has the added attraction of creating new reasons to increase arms spending, as the US Army General Raymond Odierno made clear when he complained... about British defence cuts in the face of the “Russian threat.” [*Guardian*, 4 March 2015]

In June, 2015, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former secretary-general of the Atlantic alliance, said that “the Kremlin’s true goal is to shatter Nato solidarity and reassert Russian dominance over Eastern Europe” (*The Telegraph*, 22 June 2015).

A *New York Times* article (24 June 2015) by Eric Schmitt and Steven Lee Myers was headlined, “NATO Refocuses on the Kremlin, Its Original Foe.” According to Schmitt and Myers, US heavy weapons are being deployed in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. US Air Force B-52 bombers, symbolic of the Cold War, dropped dummy bombs in Latvia about 180 miles from the Russian border.

In a *Guardian* article (24 June 2015), Ewen MacAskill wrote, “NATO, in an echo of the Cold War, is preparing to re-evaluate its nuclear weapons strategy in response to growing tensions with Russia over Ukraine, sources at the organisation said.”

The demonizing of Russia and Vladimir Putin by Western mass media shows that Cold War attitudes remain strong.

Social Democracy And The End Of The Cold War

The split between evolutionary socialism and revolutionary socialism/communism began in the late 19th century when the German social democratic leader, Eduard Bernstein, proposed a 'revision' of Marx's work which omitted the necessity of socialist revolution. Instead, he argued, socialism could 'evolve' from capitalism by electoral and other non-violent means. (Hunt 1995) In contrast, Marxists argued that chronic capitalist crises would compel continuation of capitalist rule by undemocratic means, thus necessitating socialist revolution. At the beginning of World War I, evolutionary socialists supported the German war effort while revolutionary socialists, including Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, opposed it. The split was further exacerbated when the evolutionary socialist/social democratic government of the Weimar Republic authorized suppression of the Communist-led German Revolution of 1918, including the assassination of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

In Canada, the split between social democrats and Communists was exemplified during the 1930s by differences between the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Canada. Some CCF leaders, including Tommy Douglas and William Irvine, were willing to maintain dialogue with Communists (Mardiros 1979), while others were bitterly anti-Communist. For example, David Lewis's father's family came from Russia where they had supported the Mensheviks in the struggle against the Bolsheviks. After emigrating to Canada in 1921, an "anti-Communist ethos" permeated much of Lewis's political activity, including "overcoming" the Communist-led Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union in Sudbury, Ontario (Centre for Policy Alternatives, David Lewis Lecture, 3 November 2011, by Stephen Lewis and Michele Landsberg).

The CCF Regina Manifesto of 1933 advocated nationalization of major banks and industries, and a centrally-planned economy. David Lewis successfully

led efforts to remove nationalization as a policy aim of the New Democratic Party which succeeded the CCF in 1961.

Canada's entry into NATO in 1949 was supported by the CCF.

M.J. Coldwell, speaking for the CCF party, seemed to be interested only in showing that he was tougher on the communists than either of the two "old line" parties. The social democrats, obviously embarrassed by their support of the military alliance, emphasized the need to stress the economic aspects of the treaty, while urging the [Liberal] government to eliminate private profit-making on munitions. [Warnock 1970:41]

A contract employee of the NDP who worked in Ottawa during the 1990s said that the NDP seemed to be fighting a "war on two fronts": against leftists in their own party as well as pro-Soviet Communists who favoured nationalization and central planning, and against neo-liberal conservatives on the right. The collapse of the USSR may have been interpreted by the leaders of the NDP and other Western social democratic parties as a welcome elimination of any possible association of social democracy with Soviet socialism. With the 'taint' of Soviet socialism gone, the floodgates holding back the masses from supporting social democratic parties were expected to open. The war on two fronts would end. But things didn't work out that way. After the end of the Soviet Union, Western social democratic parties were unable or unwilling to stop Western involvement in disastrous foreign wars. New Labour under Tony Blair joined the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Liberal government of Jean Chrétien and the NDP did not. But the NDP supported the NATO bombing and subsequent dismemberment of Yugoslavia in 1999, and the Western bombing of Libya in 2011.

Western European social democratic parties were unable or unwilling to stop deregulation of the financial sector which culminated in the crash of 2008. And, they were unable or unwilling to stem the tide of austerity policies which have subsequently eroded Western social safety nets (Evans and Schmidt 2012; McKibben 2014).

In 2006, the NDP, under the leadership of Jack Layton (b. 1950 – d. 2011), like the Conservatives, focussed on bringing down the Liberal government of Paul Martin, which was on the verge of introducing a national daycare programme and negotiating settlement of many outstanding issues with First Nations. During the subsequent election campaign, the NDP concentrated almost exclusively on Liberal corruption. The RCMP chimed in with allegations – perhaps politically-motivated – of corruption against a Liberal cabinet minister. After the Harper Conservatives came to power, the RCMP allegations against the former Liberal cabinet minister were withdrawn (May 2009).

Almost needless to say, there was no movement by the Harper regime toward a national daycare program. The Parti Québécois established a low-cost daycare programme in Québec, and Liberal governments in Ontario have established full-day kindergarten starting at age four. Neither of these provincial initiatives were supported by the federal Conservatives.

Development of Alberta's tar sands and promotion of pipelines to export tar sands bitumen were the major policy initiatives of the Harper regime. The disastrous environmental and economic consequences of these policy initiatives are now increasingly apparent. This is perhaps reflected in the electoral defeat of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party by the New Democratic Party in May, 2015. Whether the Alberta NDP government can make meaningful reductions in carbon dioxide emissions associated with the Alberta tar sands remains to be seen.

The End of Nostalgias?

In Russia, nostalgia for Soviet socialism has given way to partial restoration of state control and central planning of the economy, particularly in the fossil fuel sector. Maintenance of Russian living standards may thus be overly dependent on continued oil and gas revenues. If these revenues decline because of lower international oil/gas prices, or because of international action to curb burning of fossil fuels, this may threaten Russian living standards. Would such a threat bring an upsurge of political activity aimed at further restoration of Soviet institutions, including

state farms, state-owned non-fossil fuel industries, and comprehensive central planning? Such political agitation would almost certainly involve class struggle as oligarchs and foreign investors' property is threatened. Such class struggle would perhaps increase the threat of pro-capitalist, foreign – i.e., NATO – intervention reminiscent of the Western and Japanese military attempts to overthrow the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War (1918-20; see Kinvig 2006). NATO attempts to quell resurgent revolutionary socialism might also increase Cold War nuclear confrontations. These developments would be fueled by the Cold War-style nostalgia of NATO leaders and right-wing politicians.

Would the processes envisioned above have analogues in the West? The failure of social democracy to replace nostalgia for progress with *actual* progress as social democratic parties drift to the right, could lead to further marginalization of social democratic parties as Western political activists attempt to revive initiatives which require extensive state intervention in the economy – e.g., provision of affordable housing, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, provision of national daycare programmes, restraint of the financial sector, improvement of pensions and old age security, etc. Such initiatives will, no doubt, be opposed by the usual panoply of pro-capitalist forces: chambers of commerce, right-wing think tanks, conservative political parties, etc. These processes might revive or accelerate class struggle.

In the West, it is doubtful that leaders of the sorts of class struggle envisioned above will look to Russia as a model. The years of the Great Depression when the Soviet Union was widely seen in the West as a beacon of progress are long over. The Cold War equation of the USSR with Nazi Germany, remains pervasive and fuels the resurgence of Western nostalgia for Cold War confrontation. Nevertheless, the possibility of revolutionary socialism may arise again in the former Soviet Bloc *and* in the West. While the prospect of progress and communism is uncertain, the prospect of anthropogenic climate change is not. It will shape class struggle and all other aspects of human society for the foreseeable future.

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Between Representations: Identity Crisis and the Bureaucratization of the University

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And it may be that this self-evidence is actually blinding; it may be that it is, at most, recognizable but not thinkable. This question, however, will possibly be resolved only when it has been recognized, perceived, experienced, when it is no longer denied or covered over by the veil of tautology. [Castoriadis 1998:181]

During the years of Stephen Harper's Conservative Party's term in office, a number of TV and web advertisements were released in anticipation of 150 years since confederation. The ads themselves were peculiar: a hodgepodge of quasi-textbook moments from Canadian history designed to draw on Canadians' heart strings – including references to historical events which significantly precede confederation – on the one hand, and present day images of the Canadian military and hockey teams, on the other. Thus, while the War of 1812 (55 years before Confederation) and the Underground Railroad (which of course came to an end – except for those attempting to return to the US – in 1865 with the passing of the 13th Amendment) and the Franklin Expedition (which departed from England in 1845) and the meeting in Charlottetown which resulted in Confederation receive pride of place in representations of Canada, little is said about Canada since

Confederation. The Canadian Government in fact appeared to have a peculiar fetish for British North America and little to say for Canada itself except that we play hockey and fight in wars.

The reason for this is easy enough to understand; few people are going to be disturbed by representations of British North American history and no one, it is assumed, will be upset by the fact that we play ice hockey. The assumption was that the representations were safe. Partisan politics prohibits references to Canadian political triumphs or to specifically Canadian contributions to such things as Human Rights, international treaties, multiculturalism or struggles for recognition. There appeared, in fact, to be a general embarrassment about specifically Canadian history: Vimy Ridge and the Canada-USSR Series were, of course, exceptions.

It may seem peculiar to begin with representations of Canada in a discussion of the university and

bureaucracy, but it seems to me that there is an intimate relation between the two. Both can be understood as the result of a crisis of identity. The Canadian Government's inability to locate any substantial reason why Canada should be celebrated maps onto the university's inability to experience its legitimation in what universities in fact do and the resulting emergence of a self-legitimizing bureaucracy. These are not, of course, new problems, but there does appear to be something of a change of emphasis in recent years. The crisis of representation is no longer presented or experienced as a crisis of representation or identity, but is rather celebrated and intended to be celebrated in its very pointlessness, meaninglessness or emptiness. The bureaucratic nature of the university, with its legions of administrators and administrators' assistants, is itself supposed to be an indication of health and vibrancy. That the teaching and research, what George Grant (1969) referred to as the curriculum, which one might assume is the essence of the university, is in a state of perpetual crisis appears not to disrupt the bureaucracy's ability to generate representations of health and vitality. Max Blouw, president of Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, testified to the peculiar topsy turvy world in which we live when he quite rightly celebrated representations of Laurier as the "party school." I say "rightly," of course, tongue in cheek, but the point is serious. If the institution is legitimated and represented not for its research and teaching, but for the excellence of its bureaucracy, then the bureaucracy should take credit for whatever draws clients to it. Spin the insult to make it a positive reason for choosing Laurier! How far is the celebration of Laurier for being a party school from celebrating Canada for playing hockey?

I have used the word excellence in the preceding paragraph deliberately. The term refers not only to the official rhetoric of university promotion campaigns and self-congratulatory exercises, but also and more importantly to Bill Readings's attempt to consider the nature of the postmodern university in *The University in Ruins*. Readings's book performs two equally important functions: on the one hand, Readings works through the ways in which the postmodern university can no longer fulfill the function of the modern university and thus in an important sense

ceases to exist as a university, while, on the other hand, he considers the self-representation of the university to find indications of this failure of the university to fulfill its traditional role. Readings argues that the modern university, the university out of which all our present day universities emerged, took as its essential mission the creation of the microcosm of the ideal liberal state. More than simply teaching and researching, the university was a community of scholars seeking to create the ideal conditions for the rational pursuit of civil and national well-being. It was, in other words, the ideal space for the generation of ideology and ideological in itself. Nonetheless, Readings argues, taking as his point of departure a contentious reading of Althusser, such a university only made sense within the context of the nation state. The process of de-legitimization of the nation state which began with the collapse of "really existing socialism" and the emergence of a globalization not hindered by explicit claims to empire, rendered the ideological function of the university null and void. The university could no longer legitimate itself by reference to the nation state nor be legitimated by the states reference to it: it could no longer function as part of the ideological state apparatus because the state itself had precisely lost its legitimacy. (Oh how times have changed!)

This legitimation crisis, however, generates a peculiar predicament for the university: the university still has to present itself in some way, it still has to find a way to emphasize its relevance. It is in his discussion of the rhetoric of representation that I think Readings' argument retains its greatest significance. In place of the ideological university, what emerges is what Readings calls "the university of excellence." What is important about the concept of excellence is that it is precisely an empty signifier: anything and everything can be excellent. Readings himself points to such things as excellence in parking and excellence in communications. At Laurier, amongst a myriad of other instances, we have a "centre for teaching innovation and excellence." A centre whose very title is quite simply meaningless. One might as well have called it the centre for teaching. But of course the introduction of the term innovation, another buzz word for institutions of all stripes,

does add the semblance of meaning to the term excellence. Innovation and excellence almost forces one to hear that teaching excellence has something to do with the use of new technologies in the classroom. Of course, there is nothing intrinsic to the relation between innovation and new technologies, and indeed new technologies may precisely hinder the learning and teaching processes. But neither innovation nor excellence mean good.

It is, however, precisely the emptiness of the terms that works to legitimate the bureaucratic nature of the institution. A substantiation of what is meant by good teaching or learning environments, runs the risk of undermining the university's mission to fulfill the mandate of what Grant refers to as the dominant class. The dominant classes, those classes that set the agenda for the university, if not in fact, then surreptitiously through funding agencies, grants and ideologically, are not even remotely interested in teaching and learning, but in the production of a viable and malleable workforce. Within such a context what is required is not learning per se, but the acquisition of skills or know-how. Within the university today it makes far more sense to speak of abilities, skills, practices, methods, in a word techniques, than of teaching and learning.

This was Grant's argument already in the late 1950s. For Grant, the university has ceased to fulfill its traditional function and has become for all intents and purposes a technical institute. The university exists in the interests of techno-capitalism, to be sure, but it also must function in the image of the techno-capitalist society. For Grant, then, if I am reading his argument correctly, the modern liberal university may have ceased to exist, but the university as ideal community of consumer-producers within the techno-capitalist nation state is alive and well. One of the first indications of this is the transformation of the university into the multiversity (not of course referring to the DC comic of the same name). The university, Grant argues, had as its mission the universal within the particular, it emerges out of a certain primary scene and moves towards a certain universal, with obvious echoes in Readings' modern university. The multiversity, by contrast has no single origin or mission. It works only insofar as it "keep[s] technol-

ogy dynamic within the context of the continental state capitalist structure." Innovation and excellence have to be thought within this structure.

An essential component of Grant's argument is that "keeping technology dynamic" or fulfilling the mandate of the dominant class is only rarely itself contested within the multiversity. By and large, he argues, whether on the left or the right, those within the multiversity accept without question the technification of the university. This is easy enough to argue for the natural sciences, medicine, law, economics, mathematics, and business faculties, but it appears counterintuitive for the humanities and social sciences. But it is precisely here that Grant argues the greatest problems emerge. The self-evidence of "keeping technology dynamic" within the natural sciences, the fact that natural sciences are understood as fulfilling a specific social function, makes many in the natural sciences resistant to the mandate. Research for its own sake and theoretical pursuits offer an obvious counter position to those who would endorse the mandate of the dominant class. But in the humanities and the social sciences, health sciences, criminology and social work being obvious exceptions, the idea that one is self-evidently teaching and learning in the interests of "keeping technology dynamic" appears far-fetched. The non-self-evidence, however, generates precisely the conditions of ideological blindness. Self-evidence breeds resistance; non-self-evidence breeds blind complicity. This complicity is manifest in a number of ways. Emphasis on method, quantitative analysis, statistics, data collection and surveys are more or less obvious ways in which the social sciences and humanities begin to manifest a fetishistic acceptance of the mandate. If this were the end of the story, Grant's argument would not have the peculiar power it still has today.

Grant's argument concerning the ways in which the humanities and social sciences fulfill the mandate of the techno-capitalist state is, however, somewhat anti-climactic. This may have had something to do with the conditions within which he was working; perhaps the goal of fulfilling the mandate was not as entrenched as it is today. According to Grant, the humanities and social sciences fulfill the mandate of the dominant classes by enticing those engaged

in these disciplines to engage in research and non-evaluative analysis. The key to Grant's argument rests on his understanding of the traditional role of the humanities (1969:120). Grant argues that traditionally, and here he goes back to the ancient Greeks, the humanities were concerned with "the search through free insight for what constituted the best life for men in their cities" (121). Clearly such a search cannot be non-evaluative. Non-evaluative research and analysis emerges within the context of techno-capitalism as a means by which the humanities take on some of the characteristics of the natural sciences. A value neutral approach to the subject matter, to literature for example, results in a continual stream of standard editions, commentaries and lives of even minor figures in the history of literature, on the one hand, and the production of various "classificatory sciences" (125) for the objective analysis of literary production, on the other. Grant refers here to Northrop Frye, but structuralist, Marxist, psychoanalytic approaches could all equally be incorporated under the general heading of classificatory sciences.

While Grant identifies two basic tendencies within the humanities and social sciences, research and data collection and non-evaluative analysis, it seems to me that two other features have today become apparent. Together, these constitute a kind of false consciousness with respect to the mandate of the dominant class. The first is the most obvious: to legitimate study in the humanities and social sciences by reference to skills acquired. My sense is that when most of us make these kinds of arguments we feel a kind of dis-ease, we sense a kind of betrayal. This does not mean that we think of what we are doing as useless, but that we are suspicious of the form/content distinction that skills appears to imply. We want to say, we feel, that the content should matter, but formal legitimation is an easy sell and it is true more or less. The skills acquired will or at least should contribute to one's fitting into the "dominant state capitalist structure" and there are ample studies to indicate that it does. The second point is less obvious, but is perhaps more important. Far too often when we teach, perhaps out of laziness or insufficient time and resources, we transform theory into method to be applied to certain kinds of objects. Theory itself is

transformed into technique. Here, of course, we get a repetition of the form/content distinction, but more importantly we establish a relation to theory, which could also mean a relation to social, cultural and political issues, which undermines the very nature of theoretical activity. Of course, Grant speaks of philosophy and religion, but the point is the same: the teaching of skills and methods, regardless of content, works in the interests of techno-capitalism. Here it will be worthwhile to consider the relation between theory and method.

How often do we ask our students or expect our students to apply a theory? We demand that a theory be transformed into a practice, technique, a way of doing things. But what if this were a misunderstanding of what constitutes theory, a misunderstanding moreover that is promoted by even some of the most respected theorists? Moreover, what if this understanding of the relation between theory and method were at the heart of the assumed parallel between theory and practice? Grant's claim that techno-capitalism informs even the social sciences and humanities demands that theory be understood as not being something that is or can be applied, that does not have an essential relation to practice. But then how is theory to be understood?

Theory does inform practice and vice versa, but they are not parallel activities. Method by contrast is meaningless outside of practice. Method refers to how something is to be done, it indicates the way to do something and periodically the best way to do something. Nonetheless, at some point during the 17th century, the terms theory and method started to be used as synonyms. Perhaps the most famous indication of this is Kant's attempt to respond to the claim that what is true in theory may not be true in practice. But even Kant understood that there is no immediate relation between theory and practice: theory and practice are mediated by judgement. Despite this mediation, however, there remains a relation: a true theory, correctly applied through the guidance of judgement, will result in true or correct practice.

This understanding of theory, though dominant in social theory is not the only understanding operative in modernity. The second, and in many ways more important, understanding can be traced

back to Descartes. For Descartes, the relation is between theory and reality which is itself mediated by, precisely, method. A true theory, in other words, should both correctly represent reality or nature or society and be capable of making true predictions about reality, nature or society when the correct method is applied.

The distinction between Descartes and Kant should allow us to begin to see the outlines of a genealogy of the terms theory, method, reality, nature, practice within the modern period. But this genealogy would also have to reveal the fact that prior to Descartes the concept of theory was quite different although Aristotle would be a difficult case. For most of the ancient Greeks and indeed for Plotinus and Augustine, *theoria* meant something more like contemplation than method or description. *Theoria* as contemplation indicates the etymology of the term meaning something like “to look at” and was used to refer to both the spectacle on the stage and to the watching of that spectacle. *Theoria*, in other words, was related to seeing, to ways of seeing, and to what was seen, but also contained within it the idea of distinct ways of seeing. This is most evident in Plato whose allegory of the cave indicates that a continued transformation of ways of seeing also brings about a transformation of what is seen.

I have no desire here to simply return to an original meaning as if it were the true meaning, but it does seem to me that the equation of theory and method has brought about a loss of something profoundly more substantial: that the transformation of the object of our experience is brought about in part by the transformation of our ways of looking. And this is precisely what most of the best theory in fact does, regardless of what it says it is doing. The best theory transforms how we look at the world and in the process transforms what we see. This transformation reveals possibilities that were precisely impossible under the old ways of seeing. Marx does not provide us with a method for bringing about a communist revolution, but he does transform how we experience capitalism and capitalist social relations. Adorno does not provide recipes for generating serious art, but he does transform how we experience the products of the culture industry,

so-called “popular” culture. Indeed, I would suggest that as soon as theory turns to prescriptions or techniques it becomes imbricated with techno-capitalism and loses its revolutionary potential. More than this, theory which prescribes is no longer theory.

But again this does not mean that there is no relation between theory and practice. The transformation of modes of experience brings about the transformation of not only the world, but more importantly of possibility. Insofar as the world is transformed in relation to experience, new possibilities emerge with respect to action or creativity in general. Transformation of experience brings about the possibility of the new, just as the new, the unanticipated, the unpredictable has the potential to bring about transformations in modes of experience. These changes where they in fact occur prevent action or practice from becoming stagnant, from being incorporated into the technological. Importantly too this way of understanding theory allows us to see the relation between theory and ideology. Ideology, at least in part, is what works to incorporate into techno-capitalism, while theory reveals the processes of this incorporation.

Nonetheless, the university of excellence and innovation has as rather precise mandates the prevention of theory or the transformation of experience. Its desire is to manage education in the interest of producing workers, to determine in advance where resources are to be allocated, to reward those whose “research” or “teaching” promotes the pre-established mandate of the university, to manage down to the last detail the university as if it were a vast machine with determinable inputs and outputs. That this is neither in the interests of transforming politics nor in the interests of the capitalist state should be self-evident, but the more important point is that it is not in the interests of the university.

It is enormously difficult to know how such a situation could be transformed, but it is easy to see how it is self-perpetuating. The teaching of skills and methods results in the production of students trained in the conditions of techno-capitalism and thus trained to reproduce the conditions of techno-capitalism. Nonetheless, it is clear that Grant’s solution to the problem is unacceptable. There is no

reactivation of the Graeco-Christian tradition that could undermine present conditions. But Readings's solution seems like resignation. Relinquishing the universalist mission of the university and then engaging in local struggles within the institution or within the community seems like capitulation. Both sides of this debate, in fact, appear ideological albeit in powerfully different ways. But if this is the case then Readings's understanding of ideology has to be rejected. While the state does appear to be an intrinsic reference point in some analyses of ideology, it cannot be an essential reference under conditions of global techno-capitalism. Ideology must persist beyond the demise or at any rate transformation of the nation state.

What I am trying to suggest here is that while excellence and innovation do not legitimate existing conditions in the manner of truth and progress, they do nonetheless function as place markers for an ideology that has yet to formulate itself. Indeed, what is most striking about these examples, like those of Vimy Ridge or Canada-USSR hockey games, is that any critical gesture towards them is as empty as they are themselves. They are, in a peculiar way, self-legitimizing, not because anything could be raised by way of justification, but because nothing can be raised against them. The self-legitimizing character of excellence and innovation, like the government's commemoration ads, despite their ultimate meaninglessness, is presented in a manner that evokes positivity as in any state bureaucratic or corporate managerial structure. Meaninglessness is never presented as such. The positivity of meaninglessness and the arbitrariness of language are celebrated as if negativity had been banished from the conceptual scheme. And yet, the whole process is negativity itself. What is being negated through the emptiness of the corporate language and the bureaucratic proliferation is the very idea of the state or the university, but they are negated in such a way that their persistence is assured. Ideology here lies far more in the welcoming-come-what-may tone of official jargon, than it does in the emptiness of what is said. But it is the emptiness that gives to the tone its celebratory character. "Partying" goes on at every level!

But let's return to the question of changing the present condition. The main problem with critiques of the present day university is that they tend to repeat albeit in a variety of different ways the gestures of either Grant or Readings. Either we return to one of the many traditions that have constituted the modern university, including the techno-capitalist progressive tradition, or we resign ourselves to working within the postmodern university while attempting to bring about those changes on a micro-level that are within our capacity without however generating illusions of a transcendental or universalist function. Neither of the critiques are satisfactory or effective. Ultimately, one would want to enumerate all the possible permutations of the above arguments to indicate the ways they themselves may be complicit in the persistence of the techno-capitalist bureaucratic university.

Those of us who persist in our critique of the university as it exists today would need first and foremost to engage in a reflection on the ways in which our critiques themselves work to maintain the present structures. Part of this would require a recognition that the bureaucratization of the university is not limited to the expansion of the administration, but includes both the active and often unacknowledged support of the faculty both inside and outside the classroom. Indeed, I would suggest that it is inside the classroom that the greatest threat of the persistence of present conditions is created and reinforced. Opposition to present tendencies is not enough: the ideological function of opposition and the proposed alternatives needs to be investigated. But this also means that the concept of ideology needs reinvigorating within a context in which meaninglessness functions as ideology. Opposition itself too often manifests itself as part of the mechanism of the techno-capitalist world reinforcing the powers that are to be opposed. I am not suggesting that opposition is never the response, but that perhaps at this stage we cannot know what form that opposition should take. We can neither go back, nor at this stage see how we are supposed to go forward, and yet we must go forward. We need to learn to see differently. Finally, the time has come for theory.

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Book Review

PROFITING WITHOUT PRODUCING: HOW FINANCE EXPLOITS US ALL
By Costas Lapavitsas. New York: Verso, 2014.

Amid the continued flowering of financial profitability and with the specter of crisis-induced austerity and record breaking bank bailouts still looming, Lapavitsas' latest book presents a timely analysis of the financial restructuring of contemporary capitalism. Drawing strictly on the conceptual properties handed down by Marx and early theorists of finance and imperialism, Lapavitsas argues that the process of financialization has been driven by the internal tendencies of capitalist accumulation and, in particular, by the post-World War II evolution of money. Thus financialization evolves not as a consequence of declining US hegemony or the ascendance of monied capital, but as an outgrowth of the evolution of pure credit money systems in the 1970s.

The book starts by distinguishing three components of capitalist financialization: (1) the movement of nonfinancial firms into financial patterns of accumulation; (2) the modification of commercial banking operations away from corporate lending and towards financial trading; and (3) the increasing financial invasion of households. Nonetheless, Lapavitsas is careful to show that financialization has to be understood contextually. One of the great strengths of the book is that it invites understanding of the important patterns of differentiation that

persist within the hegemony of neoliberalism. In Chapter 8 Lapavitsas penetrates his understanding of financialization with rich institutional detail, showing that the global extension of financial rationalities has been mediated at the national level by different historically informed patterns of rule.

If financialization has provoked a transition, although not a flattening, of capitalist social organization, it has also led to new irrevocable complications. As the book turns to the contradictions attending financialization, its originality comes fully into light. Instead of viewing financial profitability as a general crisis of underconsumption or overproduction, the book focuses on the specific fault lines stenciled into the operation of financial capitalism. As the accumulation system increasingly accommodates financial rationalities, the very texture of capitalist organization shifts: merchant and commercial banks take more risks, financial institutions increasingly participate in 'predatory practices' and new patterns of regulation designed only to manage financial crises become increasingly dominant (p. 167). What's more, the nature of financialization can be seen in the ascendance of non-democratic central banks and the growing precariousness and vulnerability of money value. It is in this respect that the book probes the

2008 subprime crisis and the US Federal Reserve's historic management of financial vulnerability, before exploring the ongoing crisis in the European Union and the European Central Bank's more precarious response. These twin crises relate especially to the failure of banking institutions to properly collect financial knowledge and the triumph of 'market-conforming regulation' (p. 306). For these reasons, Lapavitsas concludes his analysis by arguing not just for the development of new capital controls but for the nationalization of banking operations as part of a new socialist strategy.

Thus as the book demonstrates the form and limitations of contemporary capitalism, it spends considerable time exploring the very basic properties of the financial system, including, perhaps most importantly, the relationship between financial and productive accumulation. For Lapavitsas, the profit 'generated out of the process of circulation' in financial markets originates, ultimately, "in the flows of surplus value" created through the expropriation of unpaid labour time in the productive sphere (p. 168). In this sense, Lapavitsas resists identifying "a quantitative division among capitalists" (p. 165) – for him financial profit is grounded in the loanable funds deposited by productive enterprises (p. 118). The financial system simply functions to mobilize idle hoards of money for use in the eventual production of surplus value (p. 164).

This "hoards approach" to financial restructuring is key to understanding both the direction and content of the book as it diverts attention from the class and social relations underlying financialization (p. 118). The analysis rests on a relatively unified and non-differentiated interpretation of the capitalist power bloc. More importantly, it dedicates little attention to the contradictory relationships between capital and labour which help to inform not only the development of financialization but also its ongoing evolution. Accordingly the book misses on the connection between contemporary political struggle and the contradictions underlying the Bretton Woods system and takes the reader away from the social conflicts and patterns of power that inform and continuously shape institutional differentiation. Rather than explain how institutional properties are

constituted by and reflect class struggle, Lapavitsas therefore tends to reify institutions and deny their basis in human agency and political conflict.

As the book avoids a substantive discussion of the class contradictions ranging across the postwar period, so it overextends the separation between public policy and financialization. While acknowledging the political conditions which led to the expansion of financial relations, Lapavitsas contends that financialization is a "transformation of mature capitalism" and "is not the outcome of policy" (p. 323). This is to occlude the complex ways in which the state apparatus supports and facilitates the renovation of capitalist social relations and is itself transformed in the process. In this respect, Lapavitsas' distinction between neoliberalism and financialization, with the former being more political and the latter more economic, reflects a far too abrupt reading of Marxian state theory (Poulantzas 2008; Jessop 2013; Panitch 1981). The book's treatment of state management, moreover, makes it very difficult to tease out the historical complexities underwriting the hegemony of financialization. Lapavitsas recognizes the US Federal Reserve's unique role in managing financial capitalism, yet he never really accounts for why the US state takes on the 'burden' of this responsibility (Panitch and Gindin 2012). Instead of engaging with the literature on US informal empire, the book simply concludes that the imperial capacity of the US state declined in the neoliberal period alongside the breakdown of the Bretton Woods financial system.

A further conflict concerns the intricate inspection of contemporary financial markets and the intellectual framework developed to address these patterns of rule. While Lapavitsas acknowledges the rise of a pure credit money system following the collapse of Bretton Woods in 1971, his hoards approach inhibits recognition of the complex ways in which financial institutions, including central banks, influence the money supply chain within pure credit money systems. In understanding the genesis of financial profit, for example, it is very important that new hoards of money have been recently created not by the extraction of surplus value in the productive sphere, but by the activism of the Federal Reserve and other monetary authorities. Along the same lines,

it is not clear that the book's strict application of the labour theory of value adequately accounts for the contemporary process of commodity *production* (see pages 152-167). The point here is that financial instruments and products such as securitized debt obligations and credit default swaps can, in many respects, be viewed as commodities, even if their value cannot be satisfactorily measured in terms of labour input. Lapavistas' desire to restate Marx's insights holds him back, it seems, from engaging in a more comprehensive discussion of value theory in its relationship to financialized accumulation.

Overall, *Profiting Without Producing* presents an original analysis of financialized capitalism grounded in a doctrinaire understanding of Marxian political economy. But as the book accents important frames of understanding and offers great detail on the institutional dimensions of contemporary finance, its tapered application of Marxist theory leaves plenty of space for additional treatment.

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