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Butler Goes to Work: A Political Economy of the Subject

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This paper works to theorize Judith Butler's conception of subjectivity and subject formation in its historical relation to and role in political economy and the capitalist mode of production. I begin with industrial capitalism, where I read Marx through Butler, arguing that the norms by which the subject comes to be constituted as an autonomous and sovereign individual are fundamentally connected with industrial capitalist production. Next, I sketch the transition from industrial to immaterial capitalism focusing on Marx's concept of the 'general intellect' and the interactions between workers and machines, turning again to Butler to help understand this transition. After articulating what I mean by immaterial production I demonstrate how, as capitalism passes into the immaterial era, the norms that render the subject as an individual become challenged. I theorize a contingency between Butler's conception of the subject as radically dependent, relational, and opaque and the capitalist mode of production in the immaterial era. In addition to advancing theoretical engagements between Butler's work, materialism, and Marxism, I believe that this examination is helpful for understanding both contemporary subject formation and contemporary capitalist social and economic relations.

Introduction

Judith Butler has, for the last two decades, been troubling the ideal of the sovereign and autonomous subject by formulating a conception of the subject as radically dependent, relational, and opaque. In this respect, Butler has been working to articulate a being-in-common that is based on radical relationality, opacity, and mutual dependency. What is theoretically and politically necessary for this project, however, is to connect this subject with political economy and economic relations, as 'Subjectivity is inseparable from the ensemble of relations that make it possible' (Read 2003, p. 25). The subject, that

is, cannot be viewed apart from these relations, from the economic and other material conditions that enable the subject's materialization. While the subject is certainly intimately (and irretrievably) bound up with the discourse that renders it intelligible, there are economic relations that structure and may even prefigure the way in which this discourse circulates. Strictly speaking, therefore, the materiality of discourse and norms must be investigated.

While Butler (2000) has admittedly not, so to speak, conducted a proper 'critique of the market economy' (p. 277), she has at times engaged with and situated her work in relation to such critiques, primarily to clarify her work against Marxist (and other) charges of idealism (see in particular Butler 1997b, 2011). Through these engagements she has made important contributions to the relationship between poststructuralism, materialism, and Marxism. Of particular note here is her argument against the presupposition 'that the distinction between material and cultural life is a stable one' (1997b, p. 267) and her consequent reworking of the notion of materiality. For Butler, materiality is a never-ending socio-historical process of transformation, which disrupts the material/discursive binary, and means that we have to examine 'matter as a sign' (Butler 2011, p. 22) and, at the same time, sign as a matter. Nevertheless, Butler's conception of subjectivity has not been sufficiently theorized in its relation to and role in political economy and the capitalist mode of production. I believe that a more thorough examination can be helpful for understanding both contemporary subject formation and contemporary capitalist social and economic relations.

In this paper, I hope to advance the engagement between Butler's work, materialism, and Marxism by reading Butler in conjunction with theorists of political economy. By so doing, I affirm the importance of Butler's thought for understanding the history and functioning of capitalism and draw out latent possibilities in Butler's work for understanding contemporary and historic relations of production. I begin by elaborating the social and economic conditions of industrial capitalist accumulation. Then, reading Butler with Marx, I argue that the norms through which the subject comes to be constituted as an autonomous and sovereign individual in the modern era are fundamentally connected with industrial capitalism, which is to say that the norms of the individual are required for capitalist accumulation in the modern era. I then sketch the transition from the industrial to the immaterial era, focusing on Marx's concept of the 'general intellect' and the interaction between workers and machines and the subsequent breaking down of the boundaries between the two. After articulating what I mean by immaterial production with the help of Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Jason Read, and others, I show how as the mode of production passes to the immaterial era, the norms that render the subject as an individual become challenged. I theorize at this point a contingency between Butler's conception of the subject as marked by a permanent dependency and an inescapable opacity and the capitalist mode of production in the immaterial era. As I wish to avoid asserting the 'primacy' of the material over the discursive or vice

versa, I do not claim that either the subject or the economic is the motor here. What is important instead is that Butler's work can help us better grasp the subject that is integral to contemporary capitalist production and reproduction.

Subject constitution and industrial production

The norm of the subject as an individual, which I define as an autonomous and sovereign subject and body that is strictly delineated from the other socially, reigned in the modern era. Industrial capitalism was based on the accumulation of values via the production of commodities by this individual. Industrial capitalism, and really, modernity in general, insisted upon this individual agent for legitimation and production. This particular subject-form dominated modern political and philosophical thought to the extent that even today it is largely accepted as a natural fact. But the body or the subject cannot be taken for granted, nor can they be seen apart from the social norms that constitute them. I propose that we read the way in which this subject-form came to predominate as the natural form of the subject analogously to the way in which one's gender is viewed as innate and immutable.

Butler (2006) has argued that gender (and sexuality), far from being natural or fixed, is a social construction that is performatively produced. 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler 2006b, p. 34). The way in which I dress, speak, touch, gesture, move and so on is not an expression of my gender but rather, as I am engaging in these actions I am performing my gender. For Butler, however, there is no 'I' apart from these acts. The 'I' is constituted through the doing; the subject is the effect, and not the cause, of action (Sullivan 2003). Performativity, then, is not performance, as if the subject were free each day to choose what form to take or what identity to perform. Instead, '[t]he one who acts ... acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor' (Butler 1997a, p. 16). To put it differently: 'we are at once acted upon and acting' (Butler 2006a, p. 16). Although Butler might recoil from the word, performativity is thus a dialectical process, as the subject is constrained by the very social norms that constitute it as a subject, and the subject is instituted by and through the (re)citing of existing norms, norms that are then subject to transformation.

Butler extends her critique of gender identity to all identity. It is not just the gendered self, but the self in general, that is not natural: 'There is no self that ... maintains "integrity" prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field' (Butler 2006b, p. 199). What Butler means here is that there is no pre-social or pre-discursive self that, upon birth, becomes socialized into ways of thinking, knowing, and seeing the world and self. Contrasting her position with that of Adorno, she writes:

It is one thing to say that a subject must be able to appropriate norms, but another to say that there must be norms that prepare a place within the ontological field for the subject. In the first instance, norms are there, at an exterior distance, and the task is to find a way of appropriating them. (Butler 2005, p. 9)

Because there is no 'I' prior to discourse and no self to serve as mediator, norms and power are not merely appropriated by, but act immediately upon, the subject.

Norms are not rules or laws (Butler 2004, p. 41), but are instead a form of power that 'governs intelligibility ... imposing a grid of legibility on the social' (p. 42). Normative schemas, that is, make the subject intelligible as a subject, and as a certain type or kind of subject. Yet, just as there is no subject prior to normative power, neither do norms exist outside of their social circulation, meaning that norms have 'no independent ontological status' (Butler 2004, p. 48).

Whereas Butler argues that the social construction of gender serves to legitimate and reproduce patriarchy and heteronormativity, I want to argue here that the social construction of the individual serves to legitimate and reproduce industrial, or modern, capitalism, and it is here where one must read Marx through a Butlerian lens. Capitalism in the industrial era required the individual to legitimate the contract and to produce surplus value. Industrial capitalist production, through the ideology of the marketplace, the contract, and the wage, provided the norms through which the subject came to be constituted as an individual.

As the basis of industrial capitalism was the rights-based contract, a landscape of equality as the grounds for consent was necessary for its functioning. This is in large part what set apart capitalism from feudalism and slavery. It did not matter, according to bourgeois ideology, whether one was a worker or a capitalist. In fact, as one surveyed the bodies in the modern marketplace, one noted that 'It is impossible to find any trace of distinction, not to speak of contradiction, between them; not even a difference' (Marx 1993b, p. 241). In addition to being equal, each subject had to be conceived of as autonomous and sovereign in order to enter into a contract to buy or sell labor-power. Equality, autonomy, and sovereignty are prerequisites for consent. The owners of commodities (money or labor-power) 'must therefore recognize each other as owners of private property' (Marx 1990, p. 178). If I am to sell my labor for a certain amount of time then I must be certain that it is really mine to sell and that the products that I produce have really been produced by me. The hegemony of private property, then, means that even the body must be conceived of as such, that is, as the private property of the (individual) worker. This, of course, is the ideological presentation, for in reality 'the worker belongs to capital before he has sold himself to the capitalist' (Marx 1990, p. 723).

There are two different times of labor under industrial capitalism: socially necessary labor-time and surplus labor-time, which are respectively the exchange-value and use-value of labor-power. Socially necessary labor-time is the time that it takes the worker to reproduce his or her wage so that the worker may show up at the factory gate again the next day. Socially necessary labor-time is the exchange-value of labor power. Surplus labor-time, contrarily, is the time that belongs solely to the capitalist; it is synonymous with surplus value, which is the impetus for production under capitalism. Marx was careful to point out that there is no temporal distinction between socially necessary labor-time and surplus labor-time, that both occur simultaneously. In order for the capitalist to calculate surplus value and in order for the worker to receive the wage, the individual worker must be the producer. The origins of each commodity, in other words, must be traced back to a mixture of means of production, raw and auxiliary material, and labor power.

Of course, it was also imperative for ensuring the continued exploitation of labor under capitalism that workers be posited as individuals, lest they be presented as a class. This was particularly important because of the fact that, in large-scale industry characteristic of industrial capitalism, "the ability to set the means of production to work... only belongs to a "collective labourer"" (p. 282). This is one way in which to view the contradiction between private ownership and socialized production, a fundamental contradiction of capitalist accumulation elaborated by Marx whereby, on the one hand, commodities are produced socially (through cooperation) but, on the other hand, they are owned privately by the capitalist. In any case, the concept of the individual and the philosophy of individualism that followed from it remain integral in preventing workers from uniting and confronting capital as a class.

The individual, presented by capital as the innate and natural form of the subject, is really an abstraction produced through the norms of private property, the contract, and the wage. This performatively constituted individual, in turn, legitimates capitalism in dialectical fashion. It is here where Butler's understanding of how the subject is produced by and through norms is helpful in articulating the processes whereby the boundaries between individuals are produced in industrial capitalism and consequently how today those boundaries are in crisis. The contract, which is a norm that takes the form of a juridical relation, is not exterior to the subject; instead, it comprises in part the subject's appearance within the ontological domain. The norms and discourse available for me to understand, explain, or express myself are not mine (Butler 2005), they are the language and presuppositions of the contract, which declare me an individual. Similarly, the wage that enables me to reproduce myself daily so that I may return to the factory or office gates again in the morning reproduces me as an individual. It traces the production of the commodity back to each individual worker. With this in mind, perhaps it would make sense to reverse Althusser's (2001) famous thesis and

write that instead of interpellating individuals as subjects, (industrial) ideology interpellates subjects as individuals.

It does not follow from this view of subject constitution that the subject is determined finally or fully by norms (a point which Butler has to repeatedly clarify for her critics) because norms, like subjects, are not cohesive or closed. They do not stand above society as the state does in Marxist theory. Norms operate through subjects, discourse, and the economic genre, and through this operation they are subject to reiteration and, consequently, transformation:

And when we do act and speak, we not only disclose ourselves but act on the schemes of intelligibility that govern who will be a speaking being, subjecting them to rupture or revision, consolidating their norms, or contesting their hegemony. (Butler 2005, p. 132)

One of the ways that we can think about the subject's relation to norms, then, is through struggle. 'The subject is a battlefield,' as Paolo Virno (2004, p. 78) says. There are struggles within each norm, struggles between norms, and struggles between the subject and the norms by which the subject is constituted. Norms conceal as much as they reveal. Norms are not homogenous; they clash with one another and struggle with the outsides, or remainders, that they create. The subject as individual, then, is one norm, a dominant norm in the modern era, whose hegemony is progressively challenged as the mode of production is transformed. Marx (1993b) was able to anticipate this back in the 1850s, when he told us that 'Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand' (p. 265).

Before proceeding, I should make it clear that it is not as if there is some natural or egalitarian configuration of bodies and subjects that the capitalist mode of production disrupts, and the task at hand is to figure out a way back to the origins. 'The function of the concept of origin, as in original sin,' Althusser (2009) writes, 'is to summarize in one word what has not to be thought in order to be able to think what one wants to think' (p. 68). Marx (1993b) himself called such a desire 'ridiculous' (p. 162) and, following Butler (2005; 2006), I believe it to be an epistemological impossibility. There is no 'outside' from which to conduct an inquiry into any originary state of society, and any inquiry would, like the 'state of nature' story told by the enlightenment philosophers, already be constrained and predetermined by existing social relations.

The idea of the origin as a mystification is a driving force in Butler's work and also an area of widespread misunderstanding. What Butler has done, according to Annika Thiem (2008), is reevaluated 'the relation between language and matter by asking us to think of them as both irreducible to each other and at the same time as not absolutely ontologically distinct from each other' (p. 28). It is not the case, as some claim (see Ebert 1995), that for Butler and other

poststructuralists all that is material dissipates into discourse, or that discourse makes the material world possible. It is rather that 'matter comes to matter ... as social practices and institutions render matter intelligible' (Thiem 2008, pp. 36-37). In other words, the only way in which we have access to ontology is epistemologically, the two modes of inquiry and their respective, common objects are irretrievably tethered together. This is why in one of Butler's (1997b) engagements with Marxism she cites Marx's argument 'that pre-capitalist economic formations could not be fully extricated from the cultural and symbolic worlds in which they were embedded' (p. 274). On the one hand, we cannot say that all discourse is materially determined or privilege ontology over epistemology. Frederick Engels (1972) himself, in an oft-referenced personal correspondence, wrote that 'The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure ... also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form'. On the other hand, however, we cannot theoretically strip ontology of history, and any attempt to do so results in mystifications like Giorgio Agamben's (1998) figure of 'bare' or 'naked' life. Ontology can never be naked, for that which 'precedes us in time, in history, always already presents itself as ontological condition' (Negri 2008a, p. 208). The task at hand, then, for theory and praxis, is to always hold the material and the discursive, the economic and the ideological, in constant and inextricable tension, to recognize that both are sites of power, of oppression and resistance.

Marx's 'general intellect' and the disembodiment of the subject

In order to understand the normative production of subjects we have to connect norms with the economic arena, as discursive production and circulation do not exist apart from the mode of production. With this in mind, let us consider the conditions and forces of production under industrial capitalism and how those conditions and forces led to a transformation within the mode of production and, at the same time, a transformation in the ontology of the subject.

The conditions of production in industrial capitalism begin with 'a large number of workers working together, at the same time, in one place' (Marx 1990, p. 484). While capitalism requires the individual worker, it simultaneously brings those bodies together, assembling them in the factory (and the city). The commodity moves from being an individual to a social product. There are two antagonistic forms of cooperation that result from this movement: the cooperation of workers in their own exploitation and the cooperation of workers in resistance to their exploitation. The convergence of working bodies into concentrated areas facilitates the distribution of propaganda and the organization of resistance. The industrial-capitalist organization of labor produces an organizational excess that the boundaries and disciplinary mechanisms of the factory cannot contain.

Along with the socialization of labor there is the socialization of the forces of production (although they are still held privately). Marx foretold this movement in the section of his *Grundrisse* notebooks collectively known as 'The Fragment on Machines.' In these pages, Marx writes that it is machinery (objectified labor), and not the worker (living labor), which takes center stage in the production process as machinery progressively incorporates the 'knowledge' and 'skill' of the worker and the 'general productive forces of the social brain' (Marx 1993b, p. 694). '[G]eneral social knowledge,' Marx (1993b) writes, 'has become a direct force of production' (p. 706). Social knowledge, which Marx refers to as the 'general intellect,' a term that he uses in English in the original notebooks (Virno 2004), becomes objectified in machinery and is put to work. Virno (1993) extrapolates on the 'general intellect' and writes that it also includes 'the epistemic models that structure social communication,' and 'artificial languages, theorems of formal logic, theories of information and systems, epistemological paradigms, certain segments of the metaphysical tradition, "linguistic games," and images of the world' (p. 22).

For Marx, machinery stands opposite the worker; it confronts living labor as objectified labor, as capital. What ended up happening instead, I submit, was the breaking down of the boundaries between the worker and the machine. Indeed, as we have witnessed over the last century in particular, it has become difficult to distinguish between the human and the machine. On the one hand, there is the physical hybridization of the worker, or subject, with machinery, whereby machinery is added to the worker's body to either make it more productive, discipline it socially, enhance pleasure, etc. Humans have become enmeshed with machinery to the extent that, as of the end of the twentieth century, cyborgs technically composed about 10 percent of the U.S. population (Hayles 1999, p. 115). Donna Haraway (1991) elaborates the contemporary subject succinctly: 'The cyborg is our ontology' (p. 150).

On the other hand, viewing machinery through a Butlerian lens, it becomes clear that the temporality, mode, and logic of the machine have altered the frameworks of intelligibility that govern subject constitution. It is certainly the case that within the factory the 'worker's activity ... is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery and not the opposite' (Marx 1993b p. 693). But the impact that machinery, and techno-scientific developments in general, have on subjectivity is even deeper and more complex than Marx was able to anticipate. They transform the way in which we understand and interact with ourselves and the world around us. 'Do we not see the world differently,' asks David Harvey (2010), elaborating on his favorite of the many footnotes in Marx's *Capital*, 'once we have microscopes, telescopes and satellites, X-rays and CAT scans?' (p. 195). It is important to remember, and Harvey points this out, that there is a dialectical relationship between technology and subjectivity—one does not ultimately determine the other. To say that all of society has become an autopoietic machine, then, is neither to

offer a metaphor nor to imply that all of society has been subsumed under the rule of machinery.

Within normative social regimes there is a 'compulsion to repeat,' and agency is to be 'located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition' (Butler 2006b p. 198). The same holds true, I argue, for the mode of production, and we should read the relationship between the subject and machinery to help explain in part the process by which knowledge becomes 'a direct force of production' (Marx 1993b, p. 706). Workers act not only on individual machines but on the mode of production in general and it is in part the variation of these actions that ushers in the era of immaterial production. It is both the working class and the productive forces, through interaction and antagonism, which create a rupture within the industrial paradigm and push capitalist production into the immaterial era. But we should also take into account other, primarily economic determinants. The transition from the industrial to the immaterial (or, if you prefer, from the modern to the postmodern) also flows from the crisis of overproduction and the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, both of which are, unfortunately, largely ignored or dismissed within much of the literature on immaterial production.

Both of these contradictions, overproduction and the falling rate of profit, result from the anarchy and secrecy of capitalist production. Individual capitalists, eager to capture their share of market demand and in search of high profit margins, expand their productive capacities. Eventually, the collective productive capacities of the capitalists surpass society's demand for or capacity to consume the produced goods. The 2008 subprime mortgage crisis in the U.S., which set off the most recent global capitalist economic crisis, is a prime example of the absurdity of overproduction, whereby people are homeless not because there exist too few homes but because, on the contrary, there exist too many homes, more than can be sold at a profit. This crisis is, in part, why capitalism was from the beginning destined to be a global system, as the saturation of the national market creates the need for new markets (Bukharin 2010). When the world market becomes glutted, the production of demand for new goods and services becomes necessary, new types of commodities need to be produced, and material commodities need to take on new qualities, all of which demand and intimate new subjectivities and social relations.

The tendency for the rate of profit to fall (Marx 1993a) should also be seen as a motor for the transition to the immaterial era. Marx (1993b) referred to this tendency as 'the most important law of modern political economy' (p. 748). The quest for short-term profits (relative surplus value) leads individual capitalists to make labor-saving advances in machinery in order to increase productivity. The problem, however, is that 'robots do not produce surplus value' (Marcy 2009, p. 48). Machines are constant capital, meaning that their value is merely transferred to the finished product. Surplus value is equal to surplus

labor-time. What happens is that, at some point in time, the labor-saving technology becomes adopted across an industry or service, which leads to workers becoming 'redundant' (i.e., unemployed) therefore causing the rate of profit to fall. Capital's solution to this contradiction, as in the crisis of overproduction, is to produce a new type of labor. We should view immaterial labor as a solution, however temporary it may be, to the contradictions of capitalism. As machines are not productive of profit and technological advances cause a rise in unemployment, capital searches for profit elsewhere, and all of society is put to work. It is not merely the cooperation of individual workers that is consumed in the production process, but all of sociality. In fact, in the immaterial era 'expropriation no longer simply consists in the expropriation of the producer, but, in the most immediate sense, in the expropriation of the producers' community' (Negri 2005, p. 116). Immaterial production moves the contradiction between the socialized nature of production and the private nature of the accumulation of capital to an even higher level.

Immaterial production

Before connecting the immaterial economy with Butler's conception of the subject we have to grasp immaterial production. Whereas industrial production was concerned primarily with the physicality of the commodity (steel, wool, linen, rubber, etc.), immaterial production is characterized first by the production of 'the informational and cultural content of the commodity' (Lazzarato 1996, p. 133). Immaterial production refers both to the production of immaterial products such as knowledges, images, ideas, affects, performances, and data, and to the immaterial character of the physical commodity: 'Every commodity produced must have an image, a lifestyle, and an immaterial "halo" that accompanies it to the market' (Read 2003, p. 127). Immaterial production is thus biopolitical. The immaterial 'halo' of the commodity often subordinates its physical character and it increasingly determines its value. T-shirts, for example, are produced not merely to protect the skin from the elements but, perhaps more importantly, for the image that is conveyed on or through them. As Hardt (2010) explains:

From the standpoint of biopolitical production we can see that the production of the refrigerator and the automobile are only midpoints for the creation of the labour and gender relations of the nuclear family around the refrigerator and the mass society of individuals isolated together in their cars on the freeway. (p. 142)

Similarly, regarding what is called 'cultural capitalism,' which should really be seen as a component of the immaterial paradigm, Slavoj Žižek (2004) has written that 'material objects are increasingly there simply to serve as props for ... experience' (p. 286). The problem with the concept of cultural capitalism is that, by placing too much emphasis on consumption and not enough on production, it makes it seem as though experience is somehow just magically presented by

capital for consumption, as if it is capital itself that produced culture or experience.

Culture, however, is not produced but expropriated by capitalism. The immaterial quality of the commodity, its 'halo,' is an expropriation of sociality. 'These images are not simply produced by the dictates of advertising executives; rather, they draw from existing cultural practices and ways of life,' writes Read (2003, p. 128). The immaterial character is produced by the 'general intellect.' It is not just the labor that transforms cotton into the t-shirt, but the 'general intellect' that is incorporated, or congealed, in the immaterial 'halo' of the t-shirt, which tends to determine its value.

The production of subjectivity, or forms of life, is not necessarily unique to the immaterial era. 'Production thus not only creates an object for the subject,' writes Marx (1993b), 'but also a subject for the object' (p. 92). There is, however, a qualitative change in the role that subjectivity and social relations play in production and consumption. Wherewith industrial production social relations were mediated by the commodity and the production process, immaterial production 'tends to create not the means of social life but social life itself' (Hardt & Negri 2004, p. 146). We could say that one of the products of immaterial production is the social norm, for the extent to which the immaterial commodity succeeds in producing social life or modes of subjectivity is the real extent to which it has economic value, both use-value and exchange-value (Lazzarato 1996).

We can define immaterial production by an intensified struggle between the borders of capital (specifically, the private property relation) and the social. This struggle plays itself out on the battlefield of private property and, as I hope to show later, the battlefield of the subject via a transformation in the norms by which the subject is constituted. Private property, while still juridically and politically sacrosanct, is continuously rendered absurd and obsolete in the immaterial economy. First, who can own the 'general intellect,' the ideas and languages that it produces, and how can that ownership be regulated? In sharp contrast with material property, the intangibility of information products, the ease with which they are duplicated (Marazzi 2008) antagonizes private property. Immaterial products tend to escape the boundaries of the corporation and the nation as music, literature, and software, for instance, are endlessly transmitted both legally and clandestinely across the globe.

Second, the economic value of the immaterial commodity is of a strictly social, and not private, character. If I purchase and wear a t-shirt in order to convey an image or participate in a lifestyle, then I am necessarily dependent upon others to determine if that expression is successful or not. The utility of the immaterial commodity is actually enhanced upon its being shared in that it helps to produce the cultural context of the consumer (Lazzarato 1996). 'In fact,' writes Hardt (2010), 'in order to realize their maximum productivity, ideas, images

and affects must be common and shared' (p. 136). In particular, affective production, which includes the production of feelings, sentiments, and emotions, is by definition dependent upon encounters with others. Affects cannot be produced, distributed, or consumed in isolation or on an assembly line.

Third, and as a result of the first two challenges to the rule of private property, is that privatization under the immaterial paradigm prohibits productivity (Hardt 2010; Hardt & Negri 2004; 2009). Information and knowledge are both more productive when they are shared. When pharmaceutical companies patent medicines, for example, they restrict their productivity by preventing other institutions and researchers from accessing the medicines and associated data.

Immaterial subjects: Butler goes to work

As the hegemony of private property is challenged, so too are the social norms and forms of life associated with it. Sociality, what Marx (1993b) earlier called 'the sum of interrelations' (p. 265), and the 'general intellect' definitively escape the factory walls. The producer as autonomous and sovereign individual is consequently thrown into crisis, confronted on the one hand by a legal and political regime that prescribes the subject as sovereign and on the other hand by a social and economic system that is productive precisely insofar as the subject is dependent upon others. This dependency, which stands in direct conflict with the norms of autonomy, sovereignty, and self-containment, is produced by, at the same time as it is productive of, the capitalist mode of production in the immaterial era.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler (2005) articulates in a rich way what I will refer to in this context as the immaterial subject. For Butler, the subject is defined by a fundamental contingency and an inescapable opacity. Whereas Butler utilizes moral philosophy and psychoanalysis to articulate this subject, I maintain that it must also be connected with contemporary economic relations. Of course, economic relations do not exhaustively determine social norms, but norms do not appear out of thin air; they are instead rooted in materiality and in the production and reproduction of life. It is also not that the subject was never fundamentally relational or opaque, but rather that these characteristics are becoming more and more explicit and harder to deny precisely because of their role in the production process. The norms of sovereignty and autonomy are being relegated to the margins. It may actually be that the relations associated with immaterial production are what enable Butler to articulate her subject in the first place.

Far from being autonomous or sovereign, the subject for Butler owes its existence to the other; it is formed in relation to and exists in a fundamental dependency on the other. Alterity is prior to the emergence of the subject: 'The infant enters the world given over from the start to a language and to a series of signs, broadly construed,

that begin to structure an already operative mode of receptivity and demand' (Butler 2005, p. 77). This constitutes in part what Butler calls the subject's partial opacity to itself, for I am not the author of the words, gestures, and movements available for me to communicate ('express myself'), nor can I determine their signification.

The subject's dependence on the other should not be conceived of primarily as the infant's dependence on the adult for food or shelter. There is certainly a founding dependency, whereby the one is dependent upon an other for one's own name so that one may enter the social arena in the first place. More importantly, however, there is a permanent dependency. Drawing on Adriana Cavarero, Butler (2005) writes that 'I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no "you" to address, then I have lost "myself"' (p. 32). There is a dependency, in other words, that escapes the bounds of temporality. There is, too, a corporeal element to this dependency that Butler does not mention but which must be stressed. Is it even possible, after all, to consider a body in complete isolation? (Negri 2008b). We could ask a similar question about production today: is it even possible to imagine data, language, or affect being produced by an isolated subject?

The subject's radical relationality troubles the conjectured borders that delineate individuals, intimating a disembodied subject. Using language as both metaphor and example, Butler (2005) writes that for the 'I' to exist there must first be a 'you' to address. Indeed, 'the "I" that I am is nothing without this "you," ... 'I am mired, given over, and even the word dependency cannot do the job here' (p. 82). My life, as such, is unendingly and irrecoverably bound up with yours. It is here where the hegemony of the norm of the subject as sovereign is challenged, where it becomes difficult to finally declare where one ends and the other begins.

This indeterminacy between the self and the other follows in part from the self's own incoherence. When Butler (2005) is writing about Hegelian recognition, she concedes that 'I am, as it were, always other to myself, and there is no final moment in which my return to myself takes place' (p. 27). The self is constituted by an internal alterity. The idea that one can fully know oneself is an illusion, a mystification, for one exists in a permanent state of becoming through the unfolding and antagonistic production of social norms. Subject constitution is a process without end; the solidified, permanent identity is eternally deferred.

Immaterial production, I propose, in its utilization of sociality and reliance on the public sphere, provides norms that challenge those associated with industrial production. The employment of the 'general intellect,' in particular the communicative and affective powers of society, requires the relationality of the subject; it 'fosters personal dependence' (Virno 2004, p. 41). Surplus value today is actually accumulated from the expropriation of the fundamental dependency

articulated by Butler. Because of its social basis, surplus value largely lacks its characteristic linearity. It is not thoroughly calculable because it has been socialized (Negri 1991). As a consequence, the wage-form that reproduced the subject as an individual in industrial capitalism is in crisis.

Likewise, because of their social quality, immaterial products resist and exceed all quantitative and qualitative forms of measurement (Hardt & Negri 2009; Negri 2008c). Again, this is especially true of linguistic and affective production. Who can be the author of an emotion or a language? All linguistic and affective acts animate the general intellect; 'speaking is rather like a borrowing, a citing, from an already existing vocabulary' (Vasterling 1999, p. 27). The idea of the author and the reality of private property lose their legitimacy with respect to the production of literature, music, information, art, and affect. This serves to illustrate the crisis of the calculation of surplus value well, for if the words or music produced, or the feeling elicited, cannot be traced solely to one individual or group of individuals, how is the wage to be distributed? Each immaterial commodity refers to, or cites, a convention, what Read (2003) labels an 'archive.' The city, Read argues, is a principle example of a social space that serves as an archive for immaterial production. The reliance on 'archives,' or spaces and forms of the 'general intellect' and relationality, has led some to argue that we need not measures of value but cartographies of value (Negri 2005).

The boundaries between production time and work time and between work time and free time become progressively blurred in the immaterial era. Languages, ideas, and images are constantly circulating through society and there is really no way to confine this circulation to a certain portion of the day. It is not possible to turn one's brain off when one leaves the office for the day. Christian Marazzi (2008) writes that today the distinction between work and the worker has been overcome and that what he refers to as the 'new economy' has 'put to work the entire lives of workers' (p. 50). When work demands emotional attachments, for example, it is difficult to turn a switch and shut off those attachments. Consider the example of surrogate labor, where a woman carries and births a child for a contracting couple. Is the surrogate laborer supposed to be able to immediately disengage from the situation upon completion of delivery? Additionally, developments in mobile communication technologies, particularly in advanced capitalist countries, have allowed capital a new entrance point into the home and the social. One of the consequences of this shift is that the contract becomes difficult to enforce. Instead of work time and free time, socially necessary labor-time and surplus labor-time, we have compensated time and non-compensated time.

The changing economic relations brought about by the transition to the immaterial economy produce new norms through which the subject is constituted. The norms that established the subject as an

individual, which is to say an autonomous, sovereign, and self-contained subject and body, are increasingly contested by norms that establish the subject as opaque, contingent, and disembodied. The immaterial subject and immaterial production are categorically contingent upon encounters with the other. The encounter, and the many forms that it takes, lays the foundation for use-value and for the realization of exchange-value. Immaterial economic relations tend to rely on social networks.

Both the immaterial commodity and the immaterial subject are haunted by opacity. For Butler, the subject's opacity is the result of 'how none of us can ever fully tell the story of our own origination and so can never account accurately for all factors that form us from a distance' (Thiem 2008, p. 96). The other that is the fundamental condition for the subject's emergence and the norms that render the subject intelligible compose the subject's prehistory and can never be fully or adequately accounted for. Any attempt to provide an account of oneself necessarily fails because of this radical unknowability (Butler 2005). Likewise, the immaterial commodity cannot be traced back to its 'originators' or 'inventors.' As opposed to the industrial commodity, whose origins could be exhaustively divided into variable and constant capital, the origins of the immaterial commodity are social, linguistic, and irrecoverable.

The norm by which the subject comes to be seen as an individual strictly delineated from the other is also being challenged by the economic relations and productive forces of society. The development of machinery and the 'general intellect' deterritorializes knowledge (Read 2003), defying the notion that knowledge is held within the body or the brain. The collective composition of knowledge is today increasingly difficult to contest, a reality that the traditional sites for the production of knowledge such as the school and the university are having difficulty reconciling, as evidenced by their being mired in contentions over intellectual property rights and plagiarism. The proliferation of computer and virtual technologies, too, are contesting the hegemony of the individual subject-form: 'Merely communicating by email or participating in a text-based MUD (multi-user dungeon) already problematizes thinking of the body as a self-evident physicality' (Hayles 1999, p. 27). While the majority of the world may not have daily access to computers or the internet, my point is that the norms engendered by the new technologies are beginning to play a hegemonic role in the experience of subjectivity. The task for political theory, after all, is to anticipate.

I certainly do not mean to imply that the social, political, or anatomic differences between bodies are no longer important. On the contrary, the development of the productive forces has meant an increase in the exploitation and oppression of certain bodies, those rendered unintelligible, deviant, unproductive, or undisciplinable. There is still a drive by capital, for example, to super-exploit the labor of nationally-oppressed peoples. This is, perhaps, one of the greatest paradoxes of

the immaterial era: as the productive process today takes on a progressively social character, sociality is progressively stratified along the lines of class, race, gender, nationality, and ability.

Conclusion

Annika Thiem (2008) suggests that the idea of the sovereign subject is challenged not only by theory, but that 'Much more mundanely, our daily experiences often make us—sometimes painfully—aware of the limits of our knowledge of and control over ourselves, others, and the situations in which we have to act' (p. 51). These daily experiences, these 'encounters with alterity' in which social norms are reinforced, challenged, and transformed, cannot be seen apart from the production process. The theory of the subject is only useful politically if it is theorized with a critique of the mode of production, because bound with normative violence is the violence of capitalist exploitation, the expropriation of society's productive powers and their ownership as private property. These two forms of oppression operate materially; even the immaterial is corporeal and cannot circulate on its own and it follows from this that the materiality of discourse must be interrogated. It is here, within the productive networks of society, that political theory and action has to be oriented.

Butler focuses on the subject as dependent, relational, and opaque in order to elaborate a common condition that is based not on identity, but on being-together in vulnerability and a common alterity. There is perhaps nothing more common, however, than the thoroughly socialized production which characterizes the immaterial era. And because the 'general intellect' and its attendant norms of relationality, dependency, and opacity are increasingly hegemonic within the production process, the hegemony of private property and its norms are being confronted in various aspects of daily life. Capital today tends to be external to production, although it still exercises violent control over the production and reproduction of life and subjectivity. Nonetheless, the process of the decomposition of the borders between the subject and the other, private property and public property, and work time and free time continues by way of social and political struggles. In order to understand this process from the point of view of the subject, theory aimed against exploitation and normative violence must be rooted within the production and reproduction of daily—material and discursive—life.

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