SIGNATURES OF THE POSSIBLE: WRITING AND POLITICAL RUPTURE IN
THE ARCHIVES OF INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

By

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To my parents, Janis and Anthony Vastola, and to my wife, Jessica Livingston
This would not be possible without their love and almost pathological generosity
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Signatures of the Possible: Writing and Political Rupture in the Archives of Industrial Unionism analyzes the archives of industrial unionism from the early twentieth century in order to demonstrate that they contain one of the United States’ most inventive political ideas. This dissertation is particularly interested in what those archival documents tell us about the relationship between historical research and critical theory. More specifically, it examines how historical narratives about industrial unionism can, and often do, subordinate the theoretical originality and significance of that politics to linear, progressive histories and to the authority of antithetical principles and ideas, without regard for the specificity of their object or the aptness of their comparisons.

Industrial unionism refers to industry-wide union organization and activism, which is contrasted with trade-specific unionism. The organizational form of the former emerged during the late nineteenth century in the U.S. Yet the theoretical underpinnings of that organizational ideal would find their most consequential and enduring expression in 1905, with the establishment of the Industrial Workers of the World. In order to comprehend the originality of the theories that led to the founding of the IWW, this
dissertation begins with a broad framework meant to distance its analysis from the approaches of the major histories of industrial unionism.

After elaborating a framework for the analysis to follow, chapters two, three, and four forward a new history for the archival documents of industrial unionism—one that demonstrates the importance and sophistication of their ideas. The primary lessons of those ideas are distilled to four categories in the final chapter—namely, the role of political prescriptions, discipline, organization, and “idea” of communism—which can help inform how we understand critical theory today. Ultimately, this dissertation is a critical theory project that is relevant to scholars interested in new ways of approaching labor history, archival research, composition studies, and political theory.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: PEDAGOGY OF THE STATEMENT

Situating the Intervention

A certain kind of interdisciplinarity can still represent a scandalous approach to scholarship in the humanities. Though research that effectively traverses various academic discourses, borrowing something from each, is widely valued, some semblance of specialization remains productive for establishing the expertise of authors, so as to ensure even their most experimental projects address a definite conversation within their respective field. To step outside of such enclosures makes it difficult to evaluate the quality of an author’s work, not mention its relevance to the institutional context from which it emerged. But the question of rigor is not central to interdisciplinarity’s capacity to scandalize. That capacity rests in the question of to what extent (and even whether) we need discrete “fields” of knowledge. In a *New York Times* op-ed that received scathing reviews from the academic blogosphere—in large part because of its opposition to tenure in favor of seven-year renewable contracts—Mark C. Taylor writes that “The division-of-labor model of separate departments is obsolete and must be replaced with a curriculum structured like a web or complex adaptive network”:

> Unfortunately [the existing] mass-production university model has led to separation where there ought to be collaboration and to ever-increasing specialization … And as departments fragment, research and publication become more and more about less and less. Each academic becomes the trustee not of a branch of the sciences, but of limited knowledge that all too often is irrelevant for genuinely important problems. (Taylor)

In Taylor’s schema, the traditional department is to be replaced with “problem-focused programs” that, like its employees’ contracts, will be reevaluated every seven years to determine whether or not they are still valuable to their respective institutions (Taylor). Likewise, the “traditional dissertation” must be fundamentally changed in order
to face the harsh economic reality that “there is no longer a market for books modeled on the medieval dissertation, with more footnotes than text” (ibid.). But perhaps the most significant claim in Taylor’s ambitious editorial holds an inconspicuous place within the larger argument—namely, his claim that “Responsible teaching and scholarship must become cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural” (ibid.).

Taylor’s claim is subtle, but he seems to suggest discipline-specific teaching and scholarship are, in effect, irresponsible. Implicit is the claim that, because there is potentially a great deal at stake in academic work, to fail to pursue that work in a manner that earnestly addresses the complexity of our world is tantamount to shirking one’s responsibilities in the name of a narrow, careerist scholasticism. Such a critique is surely vulnerable to the charge of instrumentalism, which is often the watchword of vulnerable English departments with little hope of demonstrating how anything new can be written about James Joyce or why anything at all should be written about highly sexualized Japanese comic books. In reality, English departments in research universities in the United States rarely lack “cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural” teaching and scholarship. Despite that reality, it is hard to imagine that what Taylor means by “genuinely important problems” and “Responsible teaching and scholarship” would apply to even the more sophisticated interdisciplinary analyses of comic book erotica. Even if Taylor personally approved of scholarship of that kind, when one frames “problems” in the discourse of instrumentalism—of what is actually useful—the immediate consequence is that many creative, rigorous intellectual experiments are potentially deemed useless by an institution’s arbiters of taste.
Yet, there is another way in which the concept of responsibility can be understood in Taylor’s argument. In this alternative conception, it is the responsibility of a scholar to pursue important ideas to their logical conclusions, irrespective of restrictive disciplinary standards and imperatives. This approach may answer, at least in part, Friedrich Nietzsche’s prickly critiques of the scholarly imperative to cultivate and defend a small plot of knowledge at the expense of an uninhibited pursuit of wisdom (Untimely Meditations 170-1). In the spirit of that sort of pursuit, this dissertation began by asking two related questions: What is the relationship between writing and novelty? And how does/can novelty emerge through acts of writing? The goal was to locate moments of transformation in written production, in the misguidedly baroque hopes of steering discourses on writing away from preoccupation with the meanings attached to cultural differences and negotiated identities, and toward something unapologetically radicalized and indifferent to those concerns. The initial attempts proved too general and ornamental; their lack of grounding in specific constructions of historical rupture—ironic, given the emphasis—meant the endeavor amounted to little more than a contemporized politicization of hermeneutics, without exactly shattering the classical Marxist mold.

The closest the early plan came to associating its vague references to “the New” with something like historical rupture was in its considerations of the archival documents of Eugene V. Debs, which offered a privileged window into the formation of industry-wide unionism as a political ideal. As this approach evolved, the early treatment of industrial unionism became more central to the exploration of the relationship between writing and novelty as such—which was ultimately divorced from the ontological presumptions of the “as such.” Given that the question was now directed away from
deliberation on an inherent nature, the major documents of industrial unionism, because they represent a specific historical construction pregnant with the possibilities of political rupture, forcefully ground the concepts of newness and writing in the specificity of a context out of which intellectually rich and varied statements emerged and developed their unique characters.

Before the transition to a fuller treatment of industrial unionism, the concerns that initiated this project were framed by the disciplinary interests of a loosely-defined disciplinary subcategory often referred to as “writing studies.” Over time, the questions that guided my investigation benefited less and less from the original framing, until it became intellectually “irresponsible” (in Taylor’s usage) to deter its trajectory by half-heartedly imposing discipline-specific sources on an argument that did not require them. Instead, I elaborated a theoretical framework largely informed by the work of Alain Badiou, Jacques Derrida, and Sylvain Lazarus, and deployed specific, sometimes opposing elements of their work in my analysis of written artifacts. But it was the archives and their aging texts—set against the problem of referring a composition back to the faded trace of a meaning that was never unequivocal—that ultimately furnished the theoretical approach, not the other way around. In other words, the theoretical framework expounded in the first chapter proceeds from a specific archival content—namely, the letters, speeches and other literature of industrial unionism. Different writings from Different archives would surely benefit from very different frameworks.

Yet, in our present circumstances in the United States—circumstances that cannot be dissociated from their global context—the writing of an excitable union activist from the early twentieth century can appear oddly timely to some. Indeed, the enduring
popularity of narratives about the Industrial Workers of the World may testify to a pronounced disillusionment with the opportunities of the present, which can in turn form the basis of an insidious nostalgia capable of undermining careful, creative appraisals of our current circumstances, finally leading to an intellectually stultifying melancholy and longing for missed opportunities (the final chapter addresses these circumstances at length). It is the key wager of the investigation to follow that you cannot hope to comprehend the significance of industrial unionism generally, and IWWism specifically, without first recognizing their singularity as a discrete political production I call (after Lazarus) a “sequence.”

To observe and describe this singularity, I begin with writing. I assume no other real or authenticating context outside of what the archives contain. I do not attempt to provide anything like a history of industrial unionism or a generalized theory of historical rupture and transformation. Instead of a discipline-specific approach, I draw freely upon the tools afforded by the various discourses of critical theory and close textual analysis; that is to say, I draw upon the investigative apparatuses of cultural studies, literary criticism, and social and political theories closely aligned with continental philosophy. And though it owes much to the popular theoretical discourses that attack global capitalism and the liberal democratic consensus under various militant banners, the scholarship on offer here is decidedly “text-driven” in the sense that it labors to remain within its readings and to stake its claim to scholarly rigor on the basis of having carefully attended to those documents in a manner recognizable to the reader of critical theories and radical histories, who will hopefully find much that is interesting and inventive in how those documents are treated.
While academic recognition is surely important, interdisciplinary research of a theoretical kind can hardly count on it. Because it seeks estrangement, critical theory must strive to be inopportune. The familiar, the contemporary, the relevant—all the potentially insipid categories of a complacent accord—are anathema to the creative capacities of estrangement, of the manner of confronting the familiar as something alien or strange. Within this conflict-ridden position, relevance concerns not only what is timely, but also what is distinctly untimely. Such strategies are of immediate political importance in a world governed by the tyranny of commonsense, which generally relates to the sense shared or held in common with the dominant modes of understanding something. What opponents of critical theory tend to miss is that all of this fancy reading is meant to reveal new opportunities for creatively recognizing what is supposed to be widely understood or even self-evident.

Along those lines, the archive is ripe for new modes of creative recognition. As a circumscribed institutional space, the archive compels us to consider questions of origination, authority and, perhaps above all, authenticity. Those concerns provide a rich context for the conflicts that attend theoretical strategies of estrangement. Unfortunately, it is too easy to get lost in the yellowed pages of decaying manuscripts. The creative virtue of confronting historical evidence with its conditions of possibility is amplified in a circumstance where debates are primarily centered on attribution and too rarely concern the reception of those statements we carefully combine in a narrative about what really occurred. But the dual, related virtues of conflict and invention are particularly productive in the context of the radical labor movement’s archives, which now seem so fanciful when compared to our global economic commonsense. It
becomes tempting to treat those documents nostalgically or dismissively, according to one’s preference, instead of as sources dense with theoretical insight. In what follows, I hope to demonstrate the error of those temptations through a research focus that obstinately refuses to concede we have even begun to exhaust the creative possibilities of those wide-eyed texts and the political moment they seek to express.

**The Pedagogy of the Statement**

If the story of unionism in the United States is ultimately about great expectations met with some modest—and now rapidly disappearing—successes, then the story of industrial unionism may concern gratuitous hopes met with total failure. Of course sympathetic histories of the latter will ask us to take inspiration from their struggles and naïve utopianism, while learning harsh lessons from their inevitable outcomes. Such histories miss the point. There is no rational, judicious way to project the immediacy of such inspiration onto our current socio-economic circumstances. And any attempt to do so is little more than a nostalgic imposition. Rather, it should be maintained that, within the discourses of all existing histories and discourses on radical unionism, industrial unionism is an irrecoverable failure, while simultaneously recognizing that failure itself is a wildly inadequate category for apprehending the political sequence in question. We must look elsewhere.

An extended quotation from Eugene V. Debs’s 1909 article “Industrial Unionism” is sufficient to make the main features and approximate periodization of the form clear:

> The term Industrial Unionism is used to express a modern form of labor organization whose jurisdiction is not confined to any particular trade or craft, but is co-extensive with the industrial development, and embraces the entire working class. Industrial unionism is the outgrowth of trade unionism and expresses the highest form of industrial organization the working class has yet attained. As its name implies, this form of unionism contemplates the organization of industries in their entirety, uniting all employees within
the same economic body, subdivided into a number of departments equal to and corresponding with the several trades or general occupations in which they are engaged…. In organizing the workers along the lines of their general industrial interests rather than their particular craft interests, it is claimed that the friction due to overlapping craft jurisdictions is obviated, and that a higher degree of solidarity and efficiency is thus secured in the interest of all…. The industrial union in its present form came but recently into existence, the trade union having preceded it, the latter dating back to a time near the beginning of industrial life in Great Britain about the middle of the 18th century. ("Industrial Unionism" 505)

Though many histories will recognize the importance of industrial unionism to the ideas, strategies and goals that informed arguably the most energetic and inventive era of the U.S. labor movement, the form and its theoretical underpinnings are always reduced to a characteristic of a broader politic—whether socialist or the immaculate aggregation of anarchist and syndicalist concerns deserving of the coinage IWWism. Far from a feature, however, what is here described as industrial unionism constitutes a singular instance of political rupture.

In the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, people believed there was a meaningful choice between trade unionism and its industry-wide rival. This choice was also a choice between the acceptance of capitalist social relations and the wholesale rejection of those relations. The very logic of the historical conjuncture compelled one to choose sides. In fact, that may be a useful way to describe the concept of a conjuncture: a historical circumstance whose actors are forced to choose sides, to participate in one or the other side of a determinate division. But this study is significantly less concerned with the historicity of such a division than with what its actors had to say about their circumstances. The guiding assumption is that what those actors have written demonstrates an important subjective commitment to an important subjective capacity—namely, the capacity of workers to identify themselves with work
as such, rather than the specific character of their labor. The egalitarian axiom that
necessarily supports such an identification is truly radical; it leaves no room for owners
or experts with distinct interests; it is procrustean in its unapologetic handling of social
difference. And it is this indifference or even intolerance to difference as difference—the
precious particulars of each individual’s social existence—that may strike some as a
retrograde socialist tendency of the antiquated party-form. However, it may be that sort
of dismissive gesture toward the grand projects of the past that is most deserving of
rebuke.

The logic of our own age makes it difficult to take such projects seriously. We have
learned hard lessons. In some ways it really is better to call industrial unionism a
failure—one of an extensive catalogue of failed radical intellectual experiments—and
then try to learn from that failure. Or, conversely, to catalogue that movement accurately
and without judgment; to pursue academic rigor and make the treatment of the question
of its relative successes and failures an incidental reflection on what the analysis
already reveals. Fortunately, good versions of both approaches have been written.¹
With those burdens distributed elsewhere, we can here generate a different type of
analysis methodologically based on archival research into the relevant written artifacts
from the sequence in question, and politically and intellectually motivated by the
perceived need to move away from the word failure and toward an understanding of
what it means for a political sequence to exhaust itself. Drawing primarily on the work of
Sylvain Lazarus, I will ultimately demonstrate that it is useful to consider industrial

¹ See, e.g., Renshaw, Dubofsky, Rosemont, Thompson, Carlson, Seretan and Salvatore. Numerous other
accounts exist, but taken together, the works of these authors represent, in my view, the most
comprehensive statement on industrial unionism currently available. Their disparate characters only
enhance their analytical reach.
unionism a determinate political sequence particular to the United States. This sequence constituted a real rupture in U.S. labor history at the beginning of the twentieth century, though its roots go back further. Like every radical political sequence of the century, this one eventually terminated once it ran up against its limits. There is little cause for nostalgia and even less for tactical condemnation—as though we can purify the sequence by pointing out its mistakes, making it clean enough to draw upon for rational support in our own political situation. The categories and proper names of such sequences are not exportable. They exist in their moments and are no respecters of external concepts driven by what is rationally possible or successful. If this approach is to bear fruit, the important thing is to understand the sequence and its tendencies in subjective terms—as understood “in interiority” by its subjects, without sacrificing what makes it unique by measuring it against foreign concepts.

Before beginning the long elaboration of why it is important to consider industrial unionism through a commitment to interiority and subjective capacity, it makes sense to pass briefly over the historical roots of the sequence in question. A first pass at that history, leaving aside its complex and often ambiguous relationship to European strains of utopian socialism and French syndicalism, will locate the germinal form in the Knights of Labor, the fraternal organization that grew into one of the late nineteenth century’s most important labor unions. There is nothing controversial about this link. The Knights were the loose organizational form of a popular response to Gilded Age inequalities at the end of the nineteenth century. As Robert E. Weir explains:

Knighthood’s central tenets came to be understood under the rubric of…secrecy, obedience, and mutual assistance—a noble, but vague set of ideals. Many of the order’s mottos—such as “An Injury to One is the Concern of All”—were specific enough to suggest the need for solidarity,
but flexible enough to attract men and women of various ideological stripes. "Knighthood" came to embody an array of visions for a better society, and what allowed contradictory viewpoints to coexist was the mutability of KOL culture. (16)

The Order’s popularity swelled following their successful 1885 strike against the Southwest Railway Conglomerate. The significance of that victory was lost on none of the authors studied here. The strike was a genuine turning point for radical politics in the United States, particularly along unionist lines, but the Knights of Labor was too riddled with internal contradictions to sustain its momentum. The contradictions were projected on an even larger screen when future strikes made evident the irreconcilable relationship between trade and industrial unionism. If it was the task of the latter to demonstrate that an injury to one is the concern of all, the former wanted to dilute those idealistic currents inherited from the Knights. Then as now, for trade-based political organizing, the State is a social fact. Interactions with the State should take the form of negotiations and plausible demands. Unionism is reconcilable with the State and the market forces it obliges. In contrast, to posit the irreconcilability of the worker’s demands with the existing form of the State is to commit a violence against the principle of social harmony so central to nineteenth-century American ideals. Rupture with the State is rupture with the Good and the just.

At this point it is necessary to begin what is here called “subtraction.” The relationship of the conception of labor organizing championed by the Knights to the eventual generation and circulation of the name industrial unionism is not decidable by reference to statements subtracted from the ordinary norms of evaluation. Such

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2 In addition to Weir’s study, Leon Fink’s Workingmen’s Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics does a commendable job making explicable the defiantly inconsistent organizational form called the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor.
statements are themselves undecidable, or subtracted from all existing categorizations and their attendant meanings. So in place of stages of unionization of which industrial unionism would be a single form, we can propose an absolute separation between the organizational forms and verify this distinction through the declarative statements associated with the name industrial unionism. This approach is indebted to the work of Alain Badiou, who prescribes a uniquely radical grammar subtracted from predicates. For Badiou, the subject is what carries a statement concerning an overbalancing. The grammatical form of the statement is declarative. The subject who carries the statement is not susceptible to predication—to qualification or classification—because to say, for example, political actor X is an anarchist industrial unionist rather than a Marxist is to sacrifice subjective capacity to description and classification. That is not to say that such descriptions or classifications are inferior or useless. That would be absurd. What is being described is not a hierarchy, but a distinction. And this distinction suggests that a conventional history or sociology of relations between actors and Ideas does not exhaust the variety of ways to receive the circulation of statements. Nor do such approaches encompass what I will call “the logic of situations” in their entirety.

Though the concept of situation that is of concern here is inspired by Badiou’s usage, the two are not identical. For now we can say that the logic of the situation that is important to the circulation of statements contains only three characteristics: The existence of a State, or classificatory/legal apparatus; the existence of a void, or what confronts the State’s consistent structuring as undecidable and thus heterogeneous to knowledge or what is knowable via classification; and, lastly, the statements and categories which emerge from, on the one hand, the State’s attempt to render the void
consistent; and, on the other, from the actors who seek to occupy, insist upon
acknowledging, and draw consequences from the point of inconsistency called a
situation’s “void.” To think the situation for Badiou means nothing more or less than to
always “go toward that which, in it, is the least covered or protected by the shelter of the
general regime of things provides” (Qtd. in Hallward 98).

To begin the clarification of these difficult points, we can look at the way, in the first
decade of the twenty-first century, the U.S. received its own object-lesson in the void.
The situation in question followed the successful reelection bid of George W. Bush in
2004. Once the Bush administration no longer required a more or less split Hispanic
electorate to secure its second term, it proceeded rapidly to initiate and systematically
mishandle a heated public debate about immigration reform. Under global capital, no
figure performs the excavation of the void better than the immigrant. This reality was
exemplified by the violent reaction from seemingly every Caucasian, law-
abiding corner, as though a great conversational liberation had occurred and we could finally throw off
the shackles of political correctness and begin to speak our hearts in unison: The
illegals must go!

The irrational vehemence of the outcry became so great that the most visible
representatives of the State—an administration that, in this case, must be counted
among the greatest in its capacity for shear demagoguery—were suddenly forced to
side with the capitulators against the law-abiding, gasoline-starved soccer moms and
pensionless male patriots. To confront this great outpouring of secret emotions, this
collective compensation formation for endless wars and a “mobile” economy, with guest
worker programs and sturdier fences was the highest expression of the State’s
impotence in the face of the unpresentable contingency on which it is founded. That economic health today should go hand-in-hand with the continued illegality of a substantial portion of a country’s workforce apparently only becomes a problem when representatives try to find solutions rather than quietly capitulate or gratuitously denounce this foreign threat to the otherwise unmentionable figure of the worker. Of course that figure is much more difficult to placate than the consumer and the representative is always free to invoke a patriotic identity divorced from its labor. But the immigrant is here to work, so the figure of the injured native worker will always threaten this discourse. You can feed the latter flags and wars but he may still wonder why you deal with this “immigration problem” in a way that suggests his consumption of inexpensive stuff is ultimately more important to society than adequate compensation for his productive capacities. If he (naively) begins to see himself as a worker in a sense that exceeds national boundaries, he may even wonder why the inviolable reign of the global market seems to feed off of inequality and social stratification. For many it has only ever required a touch of nationalism and understated racism, perhaps parading as “cultural differences,” to contain that cancerous line of questioning. For others, vague promises about renegotiating this or that trade agreement may suffice. But the State’s reliance on foreign workers is one of the very few scenes today with the power to produce, in even fleeting instances, the worker’s identification with his status as one who works in a world and for a State where the conditions of work are subordinate to the abstract numerical exigencies of global capital and its wise liberal democratic representatives who are always prepared to explain how lucky you really are in the grand scheme of things.
This grammar of situations and subtraction will open up numerous possibilities in the context of the documents relevant to industrial unionism in the United States. However, as we will see, such a project is not philosophical, and Badiou’s strictly philosophical concepts—like “truth” and “event”—while they can certainly inform the theories produced here, are not tailor-made for considering those finite productions we call writing. Jacques Derrida’s epochal project to confront philosophy with writing—it’s opposite, what it seeks to disavow in order to preserve the self-sufficiency of the relationship between the signifier and signified—introduces a general writing that is at once the general spatio-temporal distribution of marks, while also undermining the possibility of non-inscriptive signs. All meaning-effects are products of a general system of differences that is “writerly” in the sense that the non-spoken sign is never completely uncontaminated by the impurity of the mark.

Observing the “written” character of what this study gathers from archives and histories, may strike authors like Badiou as a smug detour symptomatic of its refusal to wager on a real that is irreducible to signification. But there is another possibility. If examining the writtenness of writing precludes access to the real, it is not in the form of a pure obstacle. It is also possible to find in Derrida the way writing introduces chance and possibility into what is too quickly associated with limitations. You begin with writing. You assume no other real, no authenticating context—whether in the transcript of a speech that cannot transmit its speaker’s expressive subtleties and emotive gesticulating conducted at the head of a smoky union hall, or the belligerent editorial that fails to speak its presence across our century of distance: both contexts already differ from and exceed themselves.
Of course the notion that self-difference, rather than self-identity, structures every identity is familiar enough to reader of contemporary literary theory. That reader will also be familiar enough with a critique of the fetish of origins, which is ready-made to keep us on our toes when the authenticating context is (often implicitly) invoked. But with this matter it is important to be on guard against lazy certainty. Yes, the meaning of a document may have been more constrained by its circumstances than representative of a timely intervention. And yes, the sovereignty of emotive rhetorical performances is surely not superior to their transcriptions, as though rendered mediocre through mere words. Such hierarchies seem ridiculous at the same time that one should concede that there was probably something emotionally significant about having “been there.” The problem with contexts—whether “originary” or derivative—is that they have limitations. To privilege one series of limitations over another is a scholar’s prerogative, but it should be grounded in the goals of one’s task. Describing “situations” and subtractive gestures toward historicity and hermeneutics will certainly work better in instances of retrospection that grant no sovereignty to original meaning, taking from psychoanalysis the idea that the past is ultimately heir to the present. Consequently, the rigorous historical contextualization of the written object is an option that seeks to bridge, as near as it is able, the necessary gap between meaning and expression, expression and the thought/intention of the speaker. If, on the other hand, we have only statements and names, places and situations, and we look for their generations in the written artifacts concerned with a specific political rupture—a formal reorganization of a political space that constitutes a rupture with the existing State form—these categories can transmit something of considerable interest. Without the ontological presence of the underlying
thought or authenticating emotion; without the hermeneutic drive to reveal hidden historical meanings in all their complexity; without conceding authority to the variety of positivist historicism that unwittingly plays handmaiden to the State’s more linear, commonsensical historiographies; and without privileging the narrativization of the slippages and negotiations that comprise a cultural signature—of all things “cultural,” particularly where these presume to be somehow identical with themselves—the pedagogy of the name is free to identify prescriptions, carried by subjects and deployed in their situations, which are not statements about what exists but about what is possible.

Yet all of this remains too obscure. After providing a framework for some of the terms involved, it will be feasible to differentiate this approach from qualities localizable in the aforementioned ontological, hermeneutic, positivist historical, and cultural tendencies. That labor will subsequently clear the ground for the challenges posed by several theoretical interventions found in Lazarus’s *The Anthropology of the Name*, a text that will remain a constant reference throughout the positive elaborations of what is here provisionally referred to as “the pedagogy of the statement.” But that phrase is ultimately expendable in the later elaborations of what is really only, in partial answer to the Hegelian patience of the concept, a sort of discipline of the category. However, in order to be valuable, such a discipline, as well as the broader investigation into a historical moment, of which it is a part, must be driven by and remain steadfast in the demand that it be informed by the intensities of the present. This intervention is not a passive exterior reflection on “what happened,” but a coterminous determination of the possibilities of the present and its possible futures.
Badiou and Derrida: Toward a Theoretical Framework

This study’s most immediate theoretical precursor is arguably Alain Badiou’s *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Badiou’s reading of Paul attends to germane passages of the Saint’s extant writing, which reveal “the connection that establishes a passage between a proposition concerning the subject and an interrogation concerning the law” (5). Paul declares the possibility and immediacy of an illegal event: a form of rupture that is not accounted for by or accountable to institutionalized legal abstractions. It is the possibility of a subject who carries, as a process, the Truth of an event, which is the most significant conceptual provocation this dissertation takes from Badiou’s philosophical system. Similarly, a partial example of the broad methodological dimensions of this dissertation can be found in Badiou’s description of his own method in *The Century*, which attempts to trace the subjectivities of the twentieth century through “a method of maximal interiority” that is not meant “to judge the century as an objective datum, but rather to ask how it has come to be subjectivated” (5). Our significant differences, however, result mainly from the fact that this study is not attempting to further what Badiou describes as philosophy.

Badiou’s intervention is philosophical. Though it is necessary to look more closely at what that concept requires, for now it will suffice to say that, for Badiou, philosophy contains specialized concepts like “Truth” and “event,” which draw on, elaborate, and ultimately defend an apparatus that is distinct from what is being attempted by the pedagogy of this framework. Where Badiou is compelled to defend his systematic treatment of novelty against the persistent echoes of ancient discourses, this intervention has only to define novelty in this or that moment of textual production which contains as a statement that something unique can occur or already has. But it is in
response to a question about the veracity of the statement where this approach and Badiou’s converge. This is the case because I take as a mandate supported by nothing more substantial than a personal subjective commitment, the absolute immediacy of Badiou’s claim that the truth of an event is the production of a subject that only has its support as a subject in its own fragile declaration of an event having occurred. In consequence, considering the production of certain texts in these terms can give them a similar immediacy. The problem becomes one of referring these productions back to a faded trace that was probably never univocal, and may have never—so to speak—risen to the level of a substantial concept.

The text that arguably goes furthest in demonstrating the political potential of Badiou’s philosophy is the small volume of essays titled *Metapolitics*. In his discussion of truth and justice, Badiou will explain: “To identify the rare sequences through which a political truth is constructed, without allowing oneself to become discouraged by capitalist-parliamentarian propaganda, is in itself a stringent intellectual discipline. What is even more difficult is to attempt, in the realm of ‘doing politics’, to be faithful to some axiom of equality by unearthing those statements that characterize our era” (101). Equality is axiomatic without being attainable as a real social condition. Such a condition of being in the world would require a kind and degree of totalization that is alien to Badiou’s schema. Nevertheless, the search for an egalitarian kernel in political prescription that would permit a universalizable signification, making the declaration available to all, is essentially how political militants are to understand their relationship to language. Badiou explains:

The fact is that in our situation there are, chiefly, either statements that imply the explicit negation of equality (let us call them ‘right-wing’
statements) or statements which claim to will equality programmatically (let us call them 'left-wing' statements). Both types of statement are opposed to whoever postulates equality and pursues, not the desire for equality, but the consequences of its axiom. (112)

The universalization of the postulate of equality requires the identification of non-egalitarian statements inscribed in various situations. Badiou pursues the consequences of an axiomatic politic in his work with L’Organisation Politique (OP), which attempts to expose the tyranny of the French government toward its immigrant population; a tyranny that is accomplished in large part by the suppression of the word “worker.” The OP, as Peter Hallward explains, “is adamant that only political organizations, not movements, can sustain prescriptions (which may then be presented or carried by movements)” —a contention that is Leninist in the sense that it maintains “the formulation of a true consciousness is a quite separate operation from the spontaneous development of a movement” (228-9). Alberto Toscano provides a valuable description of how political prescription works in opposition to the state:

In the practice of Badiou’s *Organisation politique,…* prescription can take the form of a political principle such as “everyone who works here is from here,” a principle that manifests (in the repression, reluctance or indifference of the state) the (often abyssal) space which separates the order of representation from the communist [or generic, egalitarian] demand that the subordination of thought and being to hierarchy and partition be suspended—a demand which in this case is anchored in the need to disqualify, once and for all, the so-called “problem of immigration” and its nefarious exclusion of the principle of equality. (147)

Forcing the French state to call its immigrant laborers “workers,” is one strategy that touches the real of economic division and class exploitation. Such strategies intervene in their respective situations. But we should be clear about Badiou's use of that term. Outside of a discourse on ontology—of being as being—there can be no rigid definition of the situation as such. This is the case because all thought belongs to a situation, the
place of its thinkability. The structure of the situation is what differentiates it, makes it a particular situation, and determines what elements and groups belong. Or, in Badiou’s ontological terminology: a situation is “any presented multiplicity…. Every situation admits its own particular operator of the count-as-one…. [I]t is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one” (Being and Event 24). The regime that counts is labeled the State. The real of the situation is the action or occurrence that cannot be accounted for by or within the situation—what is deemed impossible by the State. Furthermore, every situation contains a void that “exceeds the situation according to its own infinity” (74). 3 For example, in Karl Marx’s situation the emancipatory political activities of the proletariat occur on the edge of the void—the structured presentation of which is impossible within the bourgeois State. The proletariat occupies the impossible non-place of the real that threatens to undermine the ruling ideas of capitalist commonsense.

The importance of the real-as-exception to Badiou’s philosophy may distinguish his approach from numerous contemporary philosophical discourses. Likewise, the centrality of political statements as a condition of Badiou’s philosophy should not be conflated with an analytic or post-structural conception of the limitations imposed by language upon meaning. Badiou maintains a practiced insensitivity to those limitations, which have Ludwig Wittgenstein as their “anti-philosophical” exemplar. Badiou’s “anti-philosopher” is defined by the rejection of all categories of truth and frequent insistence upon a semantic horizon to thought that leaves access to the real a theoretical

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3 Part II of Badiou’s Being and Event further elaborates on this philosophical construction.
impossibility. They are a necessary and often useful enemy for the philosopher, but Badiou is very definite about their shortcomings:

To accept the universe of language as the absolute horizon of philosophical thought in fact amounts to accepting the fragmentation and the illusion of communication—for the truth of our world is that there are as many languages as there are communities, activities or kinds of knowledge. I agree that there is a multiplicity of language games. This, however, forces philosophy—if it wants to preserve the desire for universality—to establish itself elsewhere than within this multiplicity, so as not to be exclusively subordinated to it. If not, philosophy will become what in one way it mostly is, an infinite description of the multiplicity of language games. (Infinite Thought, 47)

Badiou’s criticisms of anti-philosophy’s treatment of language extend to what he sees as the Derridean preoccupation with commonsensical concepts like “undecidability,” which is already axiomatic in his mathematical mediations. Against the temptation to locate in signification a crucial limitation to programmatic philosophical inquiry, Badiou insists that philosophy is the means of seizing truths, and joins Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Lacan in a mathematical turn that can seem like a troublingly “post-ideological” way of communicating ontological verities or describing subjectivization. But this distinction should be precise: to claim that these forms of symbolic representation aspire to be post-ideological mediums of communication, one must situate the strong form of this tendency in “Signature Event Context” where Jacques Derrida rebukes Marshall McLuhan’s “ideological representation,” that is to say, his belief that modernity’s new technologies were creating the possibility of a greater immediacy to communication, that meaning would be less susceptible to deferral in the global village (329). Derrida sees this as “ideological” in the sense that it assumes the meaning of ideas can be communicated without acknowledging the limitations of all such transmissions.
McLuhan’s new writing is post-ideological in the strict sense that meaning is no longer mediated by medium.

However, this is not a criticism of Badiou; nor is it appropriate to place his set-theoretical approach into symmetrical orbit with Lacan and Deleuze’s specific mathematical interventions. Instead, what can be produced by the question of how something new emerges is a productive conceptual space that connects Badiou to Derrida on the terrain of language. This connection can be rendered thematic as the thinking of the event. This thinking must recognize that the event is accessible to thought; and the event must be understood as the unpredictable emergence of what is heterogeneous to repetition. Just as the signature in “Signature Event Context” is (re)marked by the need to repeat and the impossibility of repetition, which renders all contexts insufficient vessels for containing stable meanings, the event for both Badiou and Derrida cannot completely name itself. But this comparison will not contain formalizations of both thinkers’ positions. Rather, this brief comparison constructs an arguably unstable site. What this site articulates and what it must exclude to make certain articulations coherent constitutes the form of an intervention that cannot be accounted for by more faithful representations of the thinkers and ideas involved. A book that goes much further in its formalization of the relation between these thinkers and their ideas—which is also exemplary for demonstrating the limitations of that approach—is Antonio Calcagno’s Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and Their Time.

Calcagno begins his comparison by pointing out the centrality of the event in Badiou and Derrida’s conceptions of politics: “For Badiou, events make politics possible and thinkable. They give both a decidable and intelligible structure to politics while still
accounting for indeterminacy and multiplicity. Derrida, unlike Badiou, believes that events themselves are structured by the double bind of possibility and impossibility, radically calling into question the very naming of events or even giving them any definite or set meaning as does Badiou” (2). It is Calcagno’s contention that Badiou can overcome the undecidability of this double bind, “while still maintaining the possibility of events and the subjectivation that ensues from such interventions that are political.” This is possible because, “for Badiou, undecidability forces or pushes the subject to make a decisive political intervention. The Derrida who takes decisive political stances within the framework of undecidability can also be considered a Badiouean subject” (9).

There is a problem with these claims. When Calcagno claims that undecidability forces a subject to make a political decision, this seems to fly in the face of Badiou’s conviction that a subject is what decided, what already made a wager, and not something outside of a commitment that can choose one thing or another. Such exteriority is pre-subjective. Similarly, to claim that when Derrida gets his act together and commits to something political he has become a Badiouean subject, takes the event out of the process. If, instead, you wanted to point toward Derrida’s specific commitment to a specific, transformative event, we could describe his subjectivity in Badiouean terms.

Attempting to translate Derrida’s political ideas into a Badiouean grammar can lead to some sloppy misunderstandings. For example, Calcagno makes the strange claim that “Derrida has not accounted for this decisive and singular intervention of deconstruction and for his remaining faithful to deconstruction over another political way” (56). As Derrida patiently explained in his *Letters to a Japanese Friend*, “Deconstruction takes place…it is an event that does not await deliberation,
consciousness, or organization of a subject...." (274). Deconstruction is something that happens to a text. It surely has political consequences, but it is certainly not one "political way" among others. Like an event, it is something that takes place, but the discourse of fidelity is unique to Badiou’s conception of the event. Many things take place without rearranging the very logic of the situation from which they emerge. It is not clear why we need Derrida here.

The misunderstandings reach a critical juncture when, quite suddenly, the subject develops ovaries and can calculate the event. Calcagno explains that:

In a profound sense, Badiou is correct, the subject does act alone in making a temporal intervention. She alone can do this. But the temporal source of her motivation for doing so is not only her desire and does not only stem from her will. She is also motivated by the external or extra-subjective world. Badiou has to give some account of the temporal force of the multiplicity of the pre-political and the chronologies that are enfolded therein. (97)

Of course the event, by definition, cannot be calculated in this manner, and Calcagno’s next move, the introduction of kairos, not only takes him out of Badiou’s orbit, but undermines any value he or Derrida could conceivably have for the politics he is describing. In a strange crescendo, Calcagno writes, “In hindsight, post event, one can retroactively examine whether an intervention would have been more appropriate at another kairolological time. This kind of reflection can give us more experience and more practical wisdom, especially when it comes to future interventions” (99). Unfortunately for Calcagno, what he characterizes as the “ambiguity and incompleteness of Badiou’s thought” on the pre-political, entirely misses the deeper necessity of that absence (108). Badiou’s systematic occlusion of the form of pre-evental kairolological calculation described by Calcagno couldn’t be more intentional. Events happen in their rarified circumstances; by definition, they exhaust whatever potential they contain within the
sequence they initiate. The event’s subjects—again, by definition—wager on its veracity, which is conceptually identical to the process in which they participate. In other words, subjective commitment is always risky, and no amount of “practical wisdom” exterior to the course it constructs can guide its trajectory. One might say that Calcagno wants his Badiou without the risk, or, what is the same, he wants his Badiou without the Badiou. The same is largely true of his treatment of Derrida.

In fact, had Calcagno observed the linguistic/discursive composition of transformative political situations in Badiou, it may have troubled his rapid division of how the two thinkers conceive of the event, which he locates in the way Badiou points to historical and political events that have the capacity to rupture the Derridean iterable flow of communication. Sure. But there is no prescriptive capacity that stands completely outside the flow of iterable communicative experience. Rather, both thinkers conceive of events in relation to their signification, which contain real historical and political assumptions about the possibility of language informing rupture. Perhaps counter intuitively, then, it is the play of signification within political organization that establishes the site of this study’s comparison of Badiou and Derrida. But little can be said about that site before locating the moment of rupture as such.

To accomplish this task, it should be understood that, like Derrida, Badiou charges “political philosophy” with having constructed “the political” as some sort of “objective datum” that philosophy is expected to think (Metapolitics 10). For Badiou, the event’s inscription is only legible as/within an active fidelity. Parts IV and V of Being and Event provide the notional structure (or “site”) of the event and the parameters of a fidelity to its inscription. Within an abstract framework, concepts like “presentation” and the
“situation” allow Badiou to differentiate ontology as being-as-being from the possibility of an “intervention” and forms of rupture that cannot be accounted for by the encyclopedic categorizations, the regime of knowledge, which orders its situation. The question of belonging to a situation clears the way for Badiou’s rearticulation of prior claims, such as his post-Marxian insistence that “history does not exist.” The same idea is now found in the following, abstract form: “there are in situation evental sites, but there is no evental situation. We can think the historicity of certain multiples, but we cannot think a history” (176). Here the vocabulary of the event means a certain linguistic constellation that is able to articulate history as a series of singularities and ruptures. The proper name of any continuity (such as the signifier “Marxism”) that is not expressed as a fidelity—as the imperative to ‘keep going’—is an “absolutely inconsistent set” (Metapolitics, 58).

The question of belonging also introduces a conception of undecidability into the schema of Being and Event. As Badiou explains, “If there exists an event, its belonging to the situation of its site is undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself” (181). While the possibility of the impossible, or rupture, is consistent with Derrida’s less programmatic concerns, the undecidable in this context only relates to something like an initial wager, and that openness is only preliminary to the decision. Though both thinkers describe a wager, the problem of the decision is one of Badiou’s major philosophical concerns (Polemics 9). As Jason Barker explains, in Badiou’s thought “one never wagers on the possibility of the event itself, since one cannot anticipate what cannot happen. The intervention is the possibility of accepting or rejecting the event’s consequences, and it is on this that we wager while all the time recognizing that, once
the event has actually occurred, we are now entering into an entirely different world” (82).

Just as the event cannot be accounted for or decided within the situation of its site, the origin of the event is marked by finitude, which is contrasted with the infinite capacity of presentation (187). Needless to say, the political fetish of origins has participated in numerous political catastrophes, and so has the anticipation of an event’s identity. Anticipating the event is a form of decisionsim, of superimposing the form of a truth over the void that has been introduced into a situation. The actors literally decide what the event will mean, which should be contrasted with deciding to accept the event’s consequences which are negotiated through the subject’s active fidelity. Similarly, the fetish of origins locates a meaning and identity in the illusory moment of rupture: “In the first case, the essence of the event is lost because it is decided in an anticipatory manner that it will happen. In the second case, its essence is also lost, because ‘nothing will have taken place but place’” (193). One does not decide to remain faithful to the majestic commencement of the event, but rather to follow its consequences through the process of a fidelity: “There is no more an angelic herald of the event than there is a hero. Being does not commence” (211). And neither does it contain a guarantor of authenticity.

The significance of the guarantor and its relation to language can be seen in the act of signing. In “Signature Even Context” (SEC) Derrida famously claims that the legibility of writing requires a general “iterability” or susceptibility to repetition. As noted earlier in his justified criticism of McLuhan, what Derrida calls “ideological” in SEC, and what is typical of the Western, “systematic philosophical tradition” is the notion that
there is the possibility of a pure presentation of ideas (314). This assumption ignores the structural possibility of every mark being severed from its signified—immediate and untainted access to which is in the binary structure of modern signification the de facto guarantor of the signifier’s meaning. Similarly, Derrida accuses J. L. Austin of using context and intention as guarantors of meaningful communication, without, however, accounting for the remainder that informs all such transmissions: “For a context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense demanded by Austin, it at least would be necessary for the conscious intention to be totally present and actually transparent for itself and others, since it is a determining focal point of the context” (327).

This problematic leads Derrida to conclude that in order for the “absolute singularity of the event of the signature” to retain the authority of its source, the “pure event” must be capable of a “pure reproducibility”:

The effects of signatures are the most ordinary thing in the world. The condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously…the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal. (328-9)

We have here, then—and to anticipate the second point—an articulation of a necessary incommensurability between a structure of guarantee and a structure of possibility. In other words, it is the very impossibility, illegality, unaccountability (within the situation) of the event that is the condition of its being possible. So if we maintain the terms of the next comparison in the abstract, for Derrida and Badiou, the undecidability of the event’s authorization is the essential precondition for its inscription. This is the case because, for Badiou, political truth does not exist outside of an active engagement with an event’s consequences, which are undecidable within its situation and illegible to spectators.
(Metapolitics 23); and for Derrida, though truth is not an important category, if there is anything like politics they must negotiate their grammar from within the aporetic parameters of the signature that lends every political and theological structure its legitimacy.

**Derrida, Writing, and the Metaphysics of Novelty**

For Derrida, all language is characterized by the quality of mediation. This is not a particularly controversial claim. Yet he will draw consequences from that characterization that may appear stifling to proponents of theoretical projects that proceed under a similar assumption. Arguably the best example of this is found in Jacques Lacan, who argues against psychoanalysts looking behind or beyond the surface complexities of language in order to find repressed experiences. Instead, the analyst must stick to the letter of the text—in this case, the patient’s speech—and faithfully pursue the endless movement of its meanings without expecting an ultimate truth or revelation that will achieve a full and pure presence. If this pursuit of the signifier is conducted earnestly and without interpretive impositions, the unconscious will inevitably reveal itself through the consistent chaos of its discursive shifts and contradictions. In other words, and to use Lacan’s famous postal metaphor, the letter will eventually arrive at its destination.

While Derrida largely agrees with Lacan’s characterization of an ever swerving signifier, he will argue that Lacan is not being faithful to his own insights about the relationship between the psyche and the letter. In fact, something always escapes the psychoanalyst’s reading of a text. Even what is (usually mislabeled) “deconstruction” cannot be exempted from the incapacity to stabilize meanings into discrete, discernible textual moments. “Deconstruction” is neither a definite methodology nor the name of
something we apply to a text, but rather a fundamental condition of every text. Every
text is based upon a shifting network of mediations, differences and traces.

Yet Derrida recognizes that his own critique of metaphysics must necessarily work
within the very system of ideas it wishes to contest even at the risk of simply replicating
it. As Arthur Bradley explains, “In Derrida’s account, any attempt to simply or
dogmatically invert the assumptions of metaphysics—as many anti-metaphysical
philosophers do, for example, when they try to argue the body is more present than the
soul, the empirical more present than the transcendental and so on—still remains
rooted within the logic of binary oppositions and the illusion of total presence” (Bradley
13). Regardless of whether or not a point of speculation desires to be rid of the
metaphysical taint, it is, no less than its supposed opposite, resting upon a conception
of presence that can never be pure, stable or self-identical because it is still an effect
derived from a prior series of differences. Even the metaphysical concepts themselves
do not exist outside of the “the textual work in which they are inscribed” (Positions 57).
These circumstances leave little room for authentic, originary identities. Self-difference
structures every identity. There is no culture or cultural identity that does not differ from
itself.

For its part, writing is not identical to its concept, but rather part of a more general
concept of writing. This more general writing is irreducible to the production and
distribution of marks that comprise the most familiar identity for what is called writing.
Derrida’s argument about the supplementary status of the latter is well known, as is its
most famous—and famously misunderstood—consequence; namely, that “There is
nothing outside of the text” (Of Grammatology 158). But this is not the call for
epistemological nihilism it is too often portrayed to be. For the earnest excavator of past meanings, Derrida’s infamous pronouncement describes the manner in which the historical facts that form the basis of our reconstructed origins and identities cannot be purified of the effects of supplementarity, of representation, or writing as a degraded substitution for self-present speech.

Given the focus of this investigation, perhaps the question to be asked is “What does this mean for the declaration, only discernable via its written traces, of something genuinely unique having emerged in the context of mass politics in the United States in the early twentieth century?” To be clear, this not a history of industrial unionism in general or the IWW in particular. Nor does this analysis stand or fall by its capacity to describe general historical transformations. There is no overarching disciplinary prescription here, nor is there an explicit appeal for a particular disciplinary identity that would foster the institutional validation of research into writing. This project only attempts to describe and demonstrate possibilities for receiving the intellectuality of a sequence without sacrificing its singularity by superimposing ready-made categories over its own productions. To do this, “maximal interiority” will be the primary methodological imperative. And this imperative is coextensive with a prescription derived from Jacques Derrida’s discussion of method in *Of Grammatology*: “Although it is not commentary, our reading must be intrinsic and remain within the text” (159). That said, the relationship between the perceived and inscribed newness of a situation and the historical context that gives rise to such archives, can substantially benefit from Derrida’s particular intervention into the question of novelty.
What passes for novelty within the rhetorical tradition is frequently associated with invention. For Derrida, “An invention always presupposes some illegality, the breaking of an implicit contract; it inserts disorder into the peaceful ordering of things, it disregards the proprieties” (“Psyche” 25). Is that the same invention Cicero relates to disposition, to the arrangement and organization of an argument? In that classical register and under the aegis of invention it may be worth inquiring about the genre of the event. What gestures characterize its inventive style? What subjectivities—or what we may call capacities—carry the signature of the New into the world? But to answer those questions it is necessary to create some separation from their classical inheritance. A new propriety emerges. Derrida’s hypothesis from “Psyche: Inventions of the Other” becomes critical for “placing” this new invention. He claims that, “Within an area of discourse that has been fairly well stabilized since the end of the seventeenth century in Europe, there are only two major types of authorized examples for invention. On the one hand, people invent stories (fictional or fabulous), and on the other hand they invent machines, technical devices or mechanisms, in the broadest sense of the word” (32).

One may ask the (perhaps naïve) question, “Is this true?” Derrida never tries to prove it. Instead, he shows what such a history—if we wish to call it that—gives us to consider. If it is history that is at stake here, then it is in the form of a division in the word truth, in a historical truth that may affirm the hypothesis. Crucially, this is the “place of decision, where the full weight of the ambivalence is gathered” (48). Or it could also be said that invention here requires the decision not to permit history to calculate, program, or decide as a datum what counts for invention. Yet it is not completely dissociable from
that sequence. Nor can it be said to purely exceed institution, its institutionalization as
invention. The movement of invention must be im-possible—not accountable to an
existing discourse of the possible—and a form of repetition that is somehow more than
the invention of the same. It is only the movement between institutional necessity and
incalculable chance that makes the event accessible to a sort of double writing. For the
moment, let’s locate whatever “invention” is accessible to writing in a style.

As Derrida’s explains in *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, “the question of style must be
measured against the larger question of the interpretation of Nietzsche’s text, of the
interpretation of interpretation—in short against the question of interpretation itself. In
such a confrontation either the question of style will be resolved, or its very statement
will be disqualified” (73). For Nietzsche, negation or reversal without the possibility of a
grand style will mean the construction of simple antitheses. Furthermore, the
heterogeneity of his texts defends him against easy oppositions (95). In other words,
what are characterized as inconsistencies and failures of logic in Nietzsche’s text should
not be read apart from their stylistic impulse, which is driven by the rejection of such
distantiations. Derrida’s study creates interesting problems for this investigation. In
attempting to locate in industrial unionism’s composed artifacts a unique attention to
what is to come and rejection of what there is (a strictly prescriptive opposition that will
be considered further), the Nietzschean preoccupation with destruction and what is
described as a “grand style” suggest that those foci already concern stylizations of one
kind or another, and must contend with the question of the text itself—of its
interpretation and what can in fact be written about it. Returning to Derrida’s “Psyche:
Inventions of the Other,” the economy of public invention, of a technical, institutional
creation, when confronted with the new of an event, marks the gestures, movements, and stylizations of a “deconstructive” process:

The very movement of the fabulous repetition can, through a merging of chance and necessity, produce the new of an event. Not only with a singular invention of a performative, since every performative presupposes conventions and institutional rules—but by bending these rules with respect for the rules themselves in order to allow the other to come or to announce its coming in the opening of dehiscence. That is perhaps what we call deconstruction. (59-60)

Such rules become the condition of the event in a move that “consists of defying and exhibiting the precarious structure of its rules, even while respecting them, and through the mark of respect that it invents” (60). Note that the “opening of a dehiscence”—the coming of a site of rupture—and what we might call “deconstruction,” both belong to a certain experience of the impossible which is the very condition of possibility for the new of the event, of the experience of the other (36). And the material expression of these conditions form, for example, a certain way of describing the structure of what binds a word to a meaning, a meaning to an institution, and, perhaps, an institution to a structure of possibility for writing. Let’s continue to call this relationship a “style.”

Yet we are to understand that style, with its traditional opposition to content, is one of the bad terms that obscure what eludes or exceeds easy categorizations in communicative interactions. For example, Marian Hobson insists that Derrida’s “mode of writing” should be seen as working against the form/content oppositions implied by style (3). Hobson’s claim is operating within a very specific context and in opposition to particular uses of Derrida’s work. But, for our purposes, she has moved too quickly. In her own words, Derrida “has an almost forensic drive to lead arguments back to their point of textual attachment, not to separate their style or their rhetoric from what they argue, nor their force from their sense” (5). Similarly, Hobson astutely describes the way
“all intellectual activity…is constituted by the intersubjective violence that is inscription and classification” (31). When taken together, the necessary violence of language (as several chapters in Derrida’s *Writing and Difference* labor to demonstrate) and the analytic division of form and content in popular conceptions of style, converge in the “modalities of the signature.” Here the “authentifying act,” “‘idiomatic’ style,” and the event of inscription (129)—exemplified in *The Ear of the Other* by the Declaration of Independence, which constitutes the American people through its reference to a nation that only exists after the document is signed—all belong to a creative gesture. And this gesture is also the inscriptive violence of the impossible reproducibility of the pure signature: the violence of God, of sovereignty, of the law, all begin and end “at the signature” (Derrida, *Acts* 293). Being “against” oppositions implied by style and revealing the aporias contained in their inscriptive opportunities does not grant us immunity from their necessity. They are already present in the act of writing. And those common gestures that parade as “deconstructive,” but which consist primarily of enforcing a program of enlightened disavowal of binaries and proper names, miss what is inescapable in the play of chance and necessity that inform writing. In other words, they could be accused of desiring the pure repetition (the pure repeatability of a form) of non-oppositions, of successfully policed articulations that have finally shed the dirty business of metaphysical speculation and the poverty of full presence.

In a related vein, there is no question of the death of the author, philosophy or even God. Rejecting authorial intent does not free the commentator from the very real constraints imposed on meaning by any text, just as insisting philosophy is no longer self-evidently guided by the goal of articulating the essential character of an
overarching, transcendental meaning does not free theoretical discourses of their
relationship to that tradition. Such discourses cannot be clearly outside of that tradition,
even if they seem to exist on its ample borders. As Derrida explain, “death yields a very
specific power” (Positions 6), and his own work approaches philosophy in a way that is
simultaneously faithful and violent. For example, on the question of subjectivity Derrida
is less interested in rejecting this fraught philosophical concept than in making evident
the extent to which subjectivity “is an effect of differance”:

This is why the a of differance also recalls that spacing is temporization, the
detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception,
consummation…are always deferred. Deferred by the very principle of
difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or
conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in an
economy of traces. This economic aspect of differance, which brings into
play a certain not conscious calculation in the field of forces, is inseparable
from the more narrowly semiotic aspect of differance. It confirms that the
subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon
the system of differences and the movement of differance, that the subject
is constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in
temporizing, in deferral…. (Positions 29)

The so-called “conscious and speaking subject’s” consciousness of itself is constituted
by a relation to something other than itself, a social content which makes the language
of consciousness possible. In other words, the subject is constituted by its relationship
to the Other. This relationship deprives subjectivity of an ontological position outside of
or beyond language. This non-ontological subject is the basis of the conception
developed below.

Badiou, Ontology, and Politics

Badiou’s ontology does not lend itself to a casual overview. Fortunately, a
comprehensive overview is not the goal here. In the context of this introductory chapter,
it is more interesting to understand Badiou’s ontology as it relates to his political theory,
which requires an entirely different mode of inquiry than the largely mathematical
approach through which Badiou claims being as being becomes accessible to thought.
Much of this relationship comes down to the status of the event. For Badiou, the event
is a philosophical term, and the great political thinkers—Mao and Lenin for example—
had no use for explicit references to such a dense and inherently ontology concept.
Understanding the evental character of the ruptures to which those proper names
coincide is the preoccupation of the philosopher, whose work is not only conditioned by
the political truth procedure, but also by the procedures situated in the scene of two
lovers, scientific discovery and artistic novelty.

Yet the status Badiou’s philosophy affords the event has been the source of rich
debate. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri explain, “Badiou has done a great service
by posing the event as the central question of contemporary philosophy, proposing it as the locus of truth” (60). Despite this bit of praise, Hardt and Negri’s characterization of
Badiou’s conception of the event is a clear testament to the enduring claim that the
history of philosophy is the history of a series of systematic misreadings inflicted on
each established philosopher by both his contemporaries and inheritors. In the case of
Hardt and Negri, this misreading may hinge on the relationship between politics and
ontology, or, what amount to the same within their grammar, the immanent character of
the political production. Drawing on their (arguably idiosyncratic) reading of Michel
Foucault’s concept of biopower, they champion a “Biopolitics,” which “has the character
of an event first of all in the sense that the ‘intransigence of freedom’ disrupts the
normative system. The biopolitical event comes from the outside insofar as it ruptures
the continuity of history and the existing order, but should be understood not only
negatively, as rupture, but also as innovation, which emerges…from the inside” (59). By contrast, the Badiouean event “acquires value and meaning primarily after it takes place. [Badiou] thus concentrates on the intervention that retrospectively gives meaning to the event and the fidelity and generic procedures that continually refer to it” whereas “Foucault…emphasizes the production and productivity of the event, which requires a forward- rather than backward-looking gaze” (60).

Leaving aside the odd and unfortunate inside/outside bifurcation that forms the foundation of their criticism, it should be noted that Hardt and Negri’s insistence that biopolitical rupture is not to be understood as only negative, but also as innovative, seems like an implicit critique of Badiou’s rather popular conception of the term. If this is in fact a critique, it is entirely misguided. For Badiou, rupture must necessarily describe the creation of new subjectivities. Any negative determination of a rupture would consist of describing what the unique production is not—i.e. homogeneous with the situation that preceded it. But, even in the unlikely event that no criticism of Badiou was intended where the innovative character of rupture was concerned, Hardt and Negri’s spurious claim that, in contrast with Badiou’s evental rupture, the immanence of the biopolitical event emphasizes a “forward-looking" productivity, strongly suggests that they do not take Badiou at his word when he frequently describes the event as “a perfect weakness,” “a sort of illumination” that exists only to disappear (Infinite Thought 187). The more important political question for Badiou concerns the consequences of the event, which it is up to its subject to observe, but never in the sense of a point of ideal fullness or an originary meaning. Rather, the subject is, so to speak, what the event means; and the subject is only another word for the active production, the creative
outpouring, which breaks with a previous state of affairs. For the Badiouean subject, to look backward is to see nothing.

That said, if ontology is, as Badiou claims, a discourse about being as being, then there is little to be said about ontology in the context of this project and its specific intervention. On the other hand, if ontology is something that lingers endlessly in the assumptions that underlie our most careful analyses, then it should be frankly admitted that the key ontological assumption that guides much of what follows consists of the arguable proposition that one of the few general things we can actually say about the being of an object is that, of necessity, it carries within itself the capacity for division, for rupture from its externally observable objectivity, or the qualities that make it a determinate object of knowledge. As Mao would say, “If you have an idea, one will have to divide into two.” In a Derridean vein, this assumption also contains an implicit critique of those claims about purity or contamination by ontological presuppositions—as though language were ever without some notion of what is essential to its varied objects, their essential being. By contrast, it is more sensible to insist on something like Derrida’s “Arche-writing” as whatever exceeds those traditional ontological ideas that have maintained the restricted economy of language and representation. In keeping with Derrida’s understanding of that term, it may be better to have no concept of ontology, a fixed idea of what it should be, but rather to happily accept the possibility that what can be said of being as being is of the domain of mathematical formulation—for what that’s worth—and, thus, within the strict purview of Badiou’s narrow definition of the philosophical enterprise, which largely consists of articulating the logic of and
relationships between universalities and their attendant truth procedures. A world away from such concerns, this investigation begins with the statement.

The statement, in the sense intended here, is very similar to Badiou’s description of “thinking.” Badiou calls thinking “the non-dialectical or inseparable unity of a theory and a practice” (Infinite Thought 78). The simplest example of this unity is science. Badiou explains that “in physics there are theories, concepts and mathematical formulas and there are also technical apparatuses and experiments. But physics as a thinking does not separate the two. A text by Galileo or Einstein circulates between concepts, mathematics and experiments, and this circulation is the movement of a unique thinking” (ibid.). Politics is also a thinking, and its major modern thinkers—“Robespierre, Saint-Just, Lenin, Che Guevara, Mao”—utilize various concepts and theories in their writings. In the “fundamental writings” of the major political sequences, you will find “directives, commands and decisions…designed to concentrate the immanent relation between concepts and action” (ibid.). Just as in the unity of theory of practice within science, political thinking “circulates between theoretical hypotheses, statements and singular situations” in a “unique movement” (79-80). But, far from an exemplary instance of the infamous philosophical bifurcation of writing and unmediated thought (expressed through the sovereign speaker), it should be made clear that, for Badiou, the moment of thinking is “the moment of writing and the moment of transformation or experience” (80).

Badiou’s concept of thinking is inseparable from its inscription as a writing. In the context of the difference between scientific and political thought, Badiou explains that:

[I]n the science of physics the experiment is an artificial construction which must be repeatable. Mathematical writing corresponds to experiments solely when the repetition of an experiment gives the same result…. In politics, however, the relationship between writing and experience is
completely different. A political situation is always singular; it is never repeated. Therefore political writings—directives or commands—are justified inasmuch as they inscribe, not a repetition, but, on the contrary, the unrepeatable. When the content of a political statement is a repetition, the statement is rhetorical and empty. It does not form part of a thinking.... The result is that political thinking is completely different to scientific thinking. Politics declares an irreducible and unrepeatable possibility. Science writes down a necessity and constructs apparatuses for a repetition. (80-1)

The immediate consequence of Badiou’s characterization of political thinking is that only the “true political activist” really thinks politics. The politician merely circulates opinions via an empty rhetoric that assumes the logical necessity of the State and its economico-juridical dispensations, whereas “True political activists think a singular situation” and announce its “unrepeatable possibility” (81). This decisive separation or declaration of an ineradicable non-rapport between the circulation of opinions and the thinking of situations can be most clearly located in the context of the question of meaning and its interpretation. Because Badiou’s philosophy is organized around the opposition between meaning (the empirical and interpretable content of a relation between objects and their “readers”) and truth (the classical operation that resides in those rare intervals between the ordinations of meaning) it is tempting to suggest that the statement, as that concept concerns political thought, is a strictly philosophical concept and not exportable to an analysis that wishes to distance itself from the exclusively philosophical pretensions of Badiou’s system. But the opposition between the “true political activist” and the “politician” already points toward an extra-philosophical content with something interesting to add to a non-philosophical critique of the hermeneutic evaluation of political sequences.

The central motivation of the figure of the politician is to determine the viability of a course of action based on an active negotiation between opinions, perspectives and,
above all, determinate communities and their interests. The goal of the politician’s non-political, managerial inquiry is the administration of immediate requests before they become unreasonable—i.e. actually political—demands. The mode of such an inquiry is interpretive in the sense that it seeks to locate and comprehend a definite meaning through which to orchestrate effective consensus. Conversely, the “true political activist” or militant recognizes that the singular situation that drives their nonnegotiable, unreasonable political demands is incommensurable with the State and its interpretive apparatus, which will be incapable of making sense of the militant’s declarations except as the Other or outside of meaningful consensus. Regardless of whether or not the militant’s statements take the form of demands, declarations, hypotheses, directives, or commands, they will constitute an active chronicle of intransigence in the face of those identifying categories and concomitant meanings that are external to the principles of the political thinking Badiou locates in “the moment of writing and the moment of transformation or experience” (*Infinite Thought* 80). The militant’s writing—as well as the militant’s (largely declarative) mode of inscription—has its foundation in the conscious privileging of truth, as the affirmation of a singular possibility, over facts, which in this bifurcation represent observation and judicious commentary in keeping with the standards and practices of a particular institution or the signature of a consensus. However, because “truth” is a hairy word that may be more distracting than productive in this context, it is better to focus on “possibility” as a concept. This is where Sylvain Lazarus comes in.

**Lazarus and the Rarity of Thought**

Within the framework of this introduction, it is neither feasible nor entirely useful to elaborate upon every aspect of Lazarus’ intellectual project. His theoretical apparatus is
complex and only a handful of its main ideas are pertinent here. First among those, it
should be understood that, for Lazarus, the subjective and the objective are necessarily
distinct. Subjectivity, which is also a “thought,” can declare something categorically
different from what exists. In people’s thought, the real is identified via the possible, so
any investigation of what exists is subordinate to the investigation of what could be.
Politics is the name for the active prescription of the possible, which is entirely within the
domain of the subjective, or what he labels “thought.” Like Badiou, who relies on him
heavily, Lazarus theorizes politics as a militant practice driven by a rational materialist
transformation of social relations, which proceeds through the category of the
subjective. But unlike Badiou’s self-described philosophical project, Lazarus refers to his
theory as an “Anthropology of the Name.” The association of a project to make politics
thinkable as a (subjective) thought with the field of anthropology may seem
counterintuitive at first. But anthropology has often studied the category of the
subjective through the cultural beliefs and attendant practices of its social object.
However, in order to think thought purely within thought, all scientific assumptions must
be dropped—or at least held at arm’s length—as these assume some correspondence
between thought and object, between subjective and objective; in which case the object
becomes a largely accurate representation of the real. In order to avoid such scientific
or objective correspondences, Lazarus pursues the axiom of a necessary distance
between subject and object through a series of carefully chosen names and categories
which help to identify the real as subjective determination.

In order to establish that one is actually investigating the relationship between the
real and its subjective determination, Lazarus holds as axiomatic the notion that “People
think” (les gens pensent) and that their “Thought is a relation of the real” (la pensée est rapport du réel). ⁴ To maintain that politics is subjective, is simply to say that it is “of the order of thought,” or that people “are capable...of prescribing a possible that is irreducible to the repetition or the continuation of what exists” (Metapolitics 32). A subjective—i.e., prescriptive—capacity of that kind is irreducible to the State, its economy, identities, and histories.

This commitment to an intractable distance between politics and the state may strike many as one dimensional to the point of triviality. While this is not the place to describe the practical ramifications of such a stance, it should be conceded that the one dimensional or, perhaps, overly simplistic character of this proposition stems, in part, from its formal character. Peter Hallward explains, in the context of the anti-hermeneutic foundations of Badiou’s philosophy, that Lenin sought “to ensure that politics remained a matter of real antagonism and subjective commitment pure and simple; the only vehicle of such commitment is the formal integrity of political organization itself (the party), in the absence of any fundamental reference to a particular policy agenda or social program” (247). Lenin’s species of formalization—what distinguishes it from its mathematical and artistic counterparts—is based on an encounter with the real of class antagonism, which “finds its exclusive address through the evacuation of all particularity (all interpretability)” (248). When one tears a statement away from the particularity of its cultural context and suspends the parallel desire to interpret its complex network of

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meanings, what you have left is a “formal univocity” at odds with the equivocal character of humanity:

The last decade of the twentieth century…witnessed the exhaustion of programmatic fidelity to such formal univocity. The present moment is almost entirely dominated by a reactionary denial of the real and a generalized suspicion of formalization. At every point we are urged to busy ourselves with the interpretation of reality, the thick description of cultures, the negotiation of identities, the articulation of discourses, the translation of differences, and so on. (ibid.)

This commitment to the real and formalization is simultaneous with the affirmation of what exceeds humanity. But it is not immediately clear to what extent such an affirmation can be non- or anti-hermeneutic. At one level, the subtraction of a statement from its discursive circulation within a “thick” cultural context is never outside of or beyond interpretation. That is to say, on the one hand, the subtractive gesture itself is already an interpretive intervention into the restless and shifting circulation of meanings. On the other hand, to make an encounter with a formal real the centerpiece of one’s political philosophy is certainly to distinguish it from the interests of a formidable theorist like Fredric Jameson, who would locate virtually all such theoretical gestures within the mode of their access—a hermeneutic horizon whose methodological dialectic concerns not the irreconcilable division between opinion and the radical subjective upsurge called “truth,” but rather representation as such .5 Of course Jameson’s intellectual project is in many respects distinct from Badiou’s, so it is a smug and specious commentary that would make their goals identical in order to weigh their relative merits. Instead, Jameson’s critical theory may be said to represent for radical political theories a consistently rigorous line of inquiry closer in its object to a Frankfurt School ancestry

5 This theme is examined at length in Jameson’s *Valences of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso, 2009.
than the classical inheritance claimed by Badiou. Yet, it is possible to point toward an example that would explain why Badiou is so central to the theoretical framework described by this introductory chapter, whereas the Jamesonian hermeneutic, despite its sophistication and radicalism, affords little more than a negative example. This example comes from the preface to Jameson’s bravura Marxism and Form. Contrasting his work with the sort of Marxist literary criticism that predominated in the United States in the 1930’s, Jameson describes that criticism as “of a relatively untheoretical, essentially didactic nature, destined more for use in the night school than in the graduate seminar…” (Marxism and Form ix). Whatever the merits of the criticism in question, the dismissive attitude on offer suggests that, despite the undeniable creativity of the radical politics of the era, the historical context of those writings adds little, if anything, to their intellectual significance as interpretations of texts. Conversely, for the framework on offer here, the seemingly “untheoretical” literature of night schools may provide an indispensible theoretical articulation of a rare, sequential politics.

For his part, Badiou—like his friend Sylvain Lazarus—rejects social analyses that “attempt to relate the subjective and objective through the mediation of something like class, disposition, behavior, consciousness, representation, or mentality [because to] dwell on the forms of such mediation is by Badiou’s criteria simply to depoliticize the situation in advance” (Hallward 279). Against the concept of “society” or “totality,” which seek to articulate “the subjective and objective together, as components of a single dialectic” (ibid.), Badiou posits an absolute separation between politics and history, the subjective and the state. Badiou and Lazarus conceive of politics as a thought—a thought that only exists to the extent that it constitutes an index of an overbalancing of
what exists into what can exist. In the absence of such an overbalancing, a positivist notion of knowledge would be sufficient to describe a political relation between history, the state and its subjects. In the register of overbalancing and possibility, thought (in the specialized way that word is being used) only relates to its "real." As Peter Hallward explains, Badiou’s Lacan-inspired conception of the real “is never real in itself. An element is always real for a situation; it is that which the situation’s normal supervision of possibilities is precisely designed to obscure or foreclose” (13). By contrast, the conception of the real derived from Bruno Latour and his acolytes primarily concerns the natural-biologism of networks and complexity, leading to the endless chronicling of its supple interactions between nature, discourse, and society. Similarly, Derrida would look doubtfully at any real that is supposedly accessible outside of or beyond interpretation. In other words, complexity and the epistemological limits of the differential trace leave little room for thinking the real as what is real for a situation—and precisely what that situation tries to foreclose.

Yet it is a thinly disguised positivist impulse in the major histories of industrial unionism that should be most sharply contrasted within the Badiouean real. Such histories locate the closest approximation of a real in the accumulation of positive knowledge about an objective world. Their historical objects are often wrenched from their context in order to serve as fodder for moralizing sermons or support for excessively sanguine interpretations of contemporary principles and practices. Their regime of hermeneutic sovereignty insists that a rational, judicious interpretation is the

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6 For particularly rich examples of this interaction, see Latour’s *We Have Never been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
right interpretation and, thus, the most moral. 7 Theirs is a self-satisfied and stilted discourse, even when it is accompanied by a formidable historical narrative. As mentioned above, such histories are indispensible, but their underlying theories cannot grasp the singularity of the situations they describe.

Though Badiou and Lazarus denounce mediating concepts like class for undermining the singularity of situations, categories such as the “subjective” and distinct “modes of politics” will draw fire for similar reasons. In response to the so-called “anthropology of the name,” the sensitive, ethical postmodern ethnographer may insist that the cultural object should narrate its own categories, rather than fit local narrations into global conceptual containers for the purpose of superimposing an external regime of value and sense. “Remove the overlay!” is the battle cry of this opponent.

Consequently, if the first question—which is directed at the objective analyses of historical positivist interpreters of industrial unionism—consists of “How are we to receive unique historic instances of political creativity without lapsing into nostalgia or sententiousness?” then the second asks “How do we remove those seemingly external overlays without lapsing into the equally insipid notion that by simply recording the complex networks of meaning—perhaps in our own creative reception of the creative productions of the varied situation—we have a more ethical or immediate comprehension of what occurred?” The response to the first question is to begin a subtractive history that will gradually unfurl itself over the next three chapters. In response to the second, one can only assume responsibility for the intervention made

7 It is no exaggeration to claim that all of the major histories that deal with industrial unionism, which were identified at the beginning of this chapter—i.e., Renshaw, Dubofsky, Rosemont, Thompson, Carlson, Seretan and Salvatore—assume this disposition at various points of their respective narratives. But arguably the archetypal examples of this approach belong to the catalogues of those famous radical moralists, Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn.
into the circumstances of an artifact’s production, without the pretense of purity or guarantees about authenticity. There is always an overlay, a mode of reception. Some are simply more interesting or productive.

The general form of my intervention is simple. There is first a statement. This is not a small thing. As defined here, a statement arises from a sequence and asserts a possibility, often in contradistinction to or irrespective of a reality. When subtracted from the particulars of its historical context—it’s rich, intricate, variegated historicity and contextualized meaning—a slogan, demand, command, etc., can provide new intellectual nourishment for the reception of a sequence. Similarly, every (what is here called) subject represents a material process reflected in a statement and every statement is a singularity that circulates within a distinctive relation to other singularities called places, categories and proper names. Together, this aggregation is called a sequence, but only if referring to them under that category reveals the extent to which their relation constituted a unique instance of political rupture irreducible to the objectivity and hermeneutic sovereignty of positivist historicism. But, with apologies to Badiou, the well-circulated Derridean claim that reality has the structure of a differential trace is not only accurate but significant. The reception of a sequence and its constitutive statements is interpretive and, in a sense, contextual. Indeed, the immediate context of the industrial unionist sequence and its statements is the archive.

The Cultural Pedagogy of the Archive

For the self-described “Derridean,” the philosophical idea of history would generally rely on the threefold, interrelated assumptions of linearity, teleology, and tradition—where history is understood as the gradual stockpiling or accumulation of knowledge—which are each metaphysical in origin. However, based on what has been
said above it should be evident that Derrida, in harsh contrast to his more ham-handed interpreters, is not interested in disqualifying metaphysical origins, nor statements based on such origins, as he is to frame them in “deconstructive” terms—i.e., “deconstructive” in the sense, and to the extent, that what such statements and assumptions are supposed to mean are confronted with what they must necessarily exclude, denude, or even actively deny in order to be intelligible as an object of knowledge. Gestures of that kind are often uneasily subsumed beneath the conflicted banner of “critical theory,” which, if it means anything at all, would certainly refer to strategies, tactics, or even dispositions of estrangement, of critical distance from the meaning of the object—the manner of seeking to contrast a statement or assumption’s context/frame of intelligibility with its seemingly stable, self-evident, self-identical meaning.

Derrida’s approach to estranging the concept of the archive begins with the observation that such spaces where the public is confronted by the depositories of accumulated knowledge have, first of all, “to do with the question of the future, the archive as being not simply a recording of the past, but also something which is shaped by a certain power, a selective power, and shaped by the future, by the future anterior” (“Archive” 40). The archivist is the arbiter of a value that is expressed through accumulation and preservation. That expression conforms not only to the valuation of the past, but also to what in that past is of value to the present and the future. The archivist’s question is “What will that past mean to/in the future?” The answer to that question—which should be called its “determination,” or the actualization of an idea in a material process—is rendered as the construction, or lack thereof, of a location. That is,
in part, what Derrida means by the claim that “there is no private archive. An archive has to be public, even if it’s hidden provisionally or appropriated by someone. It belongs to the concept of the archive that it be public, precisely because it is located” (48). In a related vein, the determination of an archive is not based on “living memory” but “the exteriority of [its] place”—i.e., the “inscribing [of] a trace in some external location” because “there is no archive without some location…some space outside” (42).

The public, located character of the archive cannot be dissociated from its “privileged topology”—its “uncommon place,” the “place of election where law and singularity intersect”—in the “institutional passage from the private to the public” (Archive Fever 2-3). Likewise, the institutional relationship between the archive’s documents and its institutional context extend to the authority of the archivist. As Derrida explains, “[T]here is no archivist without the signature of the archivist,” which is not “the individual signature of the person in charge, but the signature of the apparatus, the people, and the instruction, which produces the archive” (“Archive” 64). Given that the located character of the archive and the signature of the archivist both signify an institutional relation, “A science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionalization, that is to say, the theory both of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it” (Archive Fever 4). Yet Derrida refuses to see the concepts of law and authorization as the products of a purely conservative, traditional systemic. The institutional context of the archive, its laws and the “violence” of its self-determination as an identity, are pregnant with their anarchic, “revolutionary” Other (Archive Fever 7).
Derrida’s ingenious conceptualization of the archive culminates in the observation that, “There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside” (11). To translate this insight into the grammar of this analysis—while accepting responsibility for the necessary violence such a translation implies—it should be asked, “How do the archives explored in this investigation stand vis-à-vis the State?” After all, their repetition as signatures, as authorities over the meaning of a tradition, marks the spaces of a presiding institutional authority that determined they were valuable enough to maintain.

In answer to the previous question, this is the logical place to clarify that, despite what has been concluded by Badiou and Lazarus in the philosophical grammar of the former and the anthropological grammar of the latter, the investigative framework being constructed here maintains that the State is never univocal in its determination of an identity or meaning. That is not to suggest that the division between the State and politics is to be abandoned in favor of something like the consideration of “networks” that privilege complexity over subtraction and that tend toward points of infinite nuance where what is permitted to eternally return amounts to little more than the incessant recomposition of local identities. No, subtraction is an important analytic for distancing the determination of a sequence from both a narrow empiricism based on the historicity of accumulated meanings and the similarly self-satisfied narration of the simultaneous formation and dispersal of localized discourses that parade beneath the aegis of “postmodern ethnography.” But the inventive quality of the proposition that “politics are not of the State” does not disqualify the prospect that the immediate mode of their access as documents is largely concentrated through and within their statist
consignation to the institutional authority of the archive and its archivists. In these specific circumstances, what is valuable enough to the State can very well be a tradition that seeks to undermine its authority, which suggests that, strictly speaking, the State and its institutions are not entirely distinct from their supposed opposites.

To further explore the implications of this relation between the archive and the State, Susan Miller’s culture-driven approach to the investigation of the archive provides a useful counterweight. Miller advocates a new disciplinary attention to “the production of texts over their interpretation,” and defines “culture as a conjunction of specific acts of composition and their resulting texts” (“Writing Studies” 41, 42). The relationship between her concept of culture and a refocusing of attention on the production of texts informs her work in *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing*, which is explicitly concerned with the critical possibilities of rigorous archival research in its extensive analysis of the nineteenth-century commonplace writings of elite Virginians. Part of what may be described as the rigorous methodology of *Assuming the Positions* stems from its commitment to a nuance that makes acts of writing always fleeting moments of textual agency. Contrasting her approach to big theories that are tied to nineteenth-century “high literacy,” Miller praises the postmodern and new historical responses to master narratives and makes the case that:

Archival research into historical practices in rhetoric and composition, as well as localized empirical descriptions of writers in specific, differentiated settings, demonstrate that the big picture has been painted with too broad a brush to detail the interplay of circumstances, privilege, local interests, and limited perspective that actually constitute an object of description or a researcher’s claims to truth. (“Writing Theory” 64)
Miller is operating within a cultural studies milieu indebted to various Foucauldian and New Historicism-inflected genres of discourse analysis. Along similar lines, she looks “for particular social circumstances that authorize ideas, allowing their production and their widespread (or perhaps only marginal) availability and recognition at particular times” (64). These concerns lead Miller to the concept of a “cultural pedagogy” and her goal to “make a new material on which the identical productivity of material and discursive culture is visible” (Assuming 8). That “new material” seeks to weave together rhetorical analyses, localized cultural signatures, theoretical concepts derived from cultural studies, and the identification of specific economies of meaning that simultaneously refer to available tools for articulation—the privileged and marginal systems of discourse—and material property relations. The inventiveness with which these dual economies are deployed is exemplified in the concept of “cultural pedagogy,” which similarly describes the often informal cultural schooling of the subject within its social system, as well as the concrete pedagogical practices intended to reproduce social ideals within that system.\(^8\) Referring to the commonplace writing of wealthy nineteenth-century residents of Virginia, Miller explains:

Social contacts at school also extended the biological family, appropriating into its genetic economy all of the content, many of the events, and some of the people encountered in actual schooling and its discursive representations. These extensions worked through the identification between propriety and property…. An entire social system was hereby constituted as an educational project, just as educational projects were imagined as social systems. Affiliation, not credential, assured the collective improvement of a propertied class throughout a discursive era that

\(^8\) Miller has continued to develop the concept of pedagogy along similar lines. In Trust in Texts: A Different History of Rhetoric, she explains that “when we treat rhetorics as pedagogies, we more easily notice how they form, inflect, and disseminate their content in ways that connect it to local circumstances” (5).
collapsed its demarcated chronological periods into an always present tense of material and graphic “keeping.” (95)

Approaching texts in this manner “invites us to imagine a radically textualized writing subject, the writer who acts in the context of discursive limits and opportunities that include, but are not limited to, fictionalizing its own core as a unified and coherent identity” (6). This means, among other things, taking writing seriously as the site of concepts like subjectivity that a more traditional hermeneutic disposition indebted to the study of cultural signs once made written communication a means to explore, but never deigned to locate in the text itself as its own production. Miller’s intervention reveals that the masking of social directives is really a matter of available tools for articulation within a given frame of intelligibility. This focus may resemble the Foucauldian definition of discourse as the things that can be said and understood in a particular time and place, but Miller’s “new humanism” is arguably more concerned with agency in its descriptions of how “students of culture” make sense of the world they live in through acts of writing (Assuming 3). Consequently, Miller’s “radically textualized writing subject” circumscribes dynamic yet constraining discourse formations that contain both their own limits and the provisions necessary to exceed or subvert those limits.

Because Derrida maintains that self-difference structures every identity, there is logically no cultural identity that does not differ with itself, just as there is no pure, stable or self-identical presence irreducible to an effect generated by a previous succession of such differences. Derrida is of course concerned with the context of a cultural transmission. But it is not self-evident to what extent he would accept Miller’s definition of culture—“as a conjunction of specific acts of composition and their resulting texts”—when this conjunction seems to express itself as the discursive sovereignty of a local
identity. Under the circumstances, Derrida’s approach to the related concepts of culture and identity may stimulate a healthy amount of theoretical anxiety with regard to using culture as the catchword for an analysis of the production of text. That is not to say there is a problem with focusing an analysis in that way, but it could certainly exclude ambitious concepts that seek to exceed cultural contexts. As Derrida explains of the messiah figure and its “relationship to the future”:

[I]t’s not reserved to cultures in which the Messiah appeared as a determined name or figure. So for that reason there is a messianic, a messianicity, implied in the very experience of the archive…. It’s always possible to re-interpret an archive [because we could never fully saturate a context with all of the necessary contextual elements]. And this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility, an ethical and political responsibility. (“Archive” 46)

Where is the space for messianicity in the chronicling of local cultural identities and their attendant productions? There is no clear answer, but the potential debate bears some resemblance to previous treatments of discourse analysis centered around the work of Michel Foucault. Specifically, Foucault’s analysis in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, as well as his more general analysis of discourse and discursive formations, may be implicit here. For instance, *Archeology* renders as “a certain style” the form and connection between groups of statements (33). Foucault also explains that “Rather than founding a theory” of the relationship between statements and discursive formations, his concern through much of *Archeology* “is to establish a possibility” (114-5)—an approach with which this investigation has enormous sympathy. But that sympathy must be simultaneous with a vitalization of the category/possibility of rupture. Foucault claims that “rupture is not for archeology the prop of its analyses, the limit that it indicates from afar, without being able either to determine it or to give it specificity; rupture is the name given to transformations that bear on the general rules of one of
several discursive formations” (176-7). This rupture’s association with the “general rules" of Foucault’s privileged category seems to deprive it of a certain illegality in order to describe what counts for knowledge within a formation. Given the modest status of the concept of rupture, it should come as no surprise that, for Badiou, Foucault was the exemplary theorist of a rigorous intellectuality devoid of truth. This is the case because truth, as subjective capacity, is frequently no respecter of the mere facts of the situation—of the encyclopedia of knowledges that provides access to the complexity and presented finitude of the situation. As Badiou explains:

Foucault is a theoretician of encyclopedias. He was never really interested in the question of knowing whether, within situations, anything existed that might deserve to be called a “truth”…. He wasn’t interested in the protocol of either the appearance or the disappearance of a given epistemic organization. As long as you don’t have an immanent doctrine of what in the situation exceeds the situation, you can’t be concerned about answering the question of how we pass from one system to another. (quoted in Hallward 378)

Yet Badiou is not alone in his criticisms of Foucault’s “encyclopedias.” Coming from a very different direction, Derrida, in his now famous criticism of The History of Madness, claims that Foucault is attempting to write a history of madness from the position of reason, from a position that can claim to know what madness is. Derrida’s withering attack can arguably extend beyond Foucault’s oeuvre from the sixties, but not all of Derrida’s criticisms of The History could be generalized in that way; Foucault is also very critical of his early book. With that in mind, Foucault’s rebuttal stages some indispensable oppositions:

Derrida is today the most decisive representative [of a classical system of thought] in its waning light: the reduction of discursive practices to textual traces; the elision of the events that are produced there, leaving only marks for a reading; the invention of voices behind the text, so as not to have to examine the modes of implication of the subject in discourses; the assignation of the originary as said and not-said in the text in order to avoid
situating discursive practices in the field of transformation where they are carried out…. [I]t is a historically well-determined little pedagogy, which manifests itself here in a very visible manner. A pedagogy that teaches the student that there is nothing outside the text, but that in it, in its interstices, in its blanks and silences, the reserve of the origin reigns; that it is never necessary to look beyond it, but that here, not in the words of course, but in words as crossing-out, in their *lattice*, what is said is “the meaning of being.” A pedagogy that inversely gives to the voice of the masters that unlimited sovereignty that allows it to indefinitely re-say the text. (*History of Madness* 573)

Without constructing theoretical cheering sections—the richest soil for growing a reductive caricature—it is worth taking Foucault’s challenge seriously. Let’s say that all of his claims are correct. Are their consequences so clear? For instance, Derrida is firmly within a classical, Enlightenment tradition—but in the space of its implosion where it finally puts its own logic at stake in a double move that confronts it with its own limit. An example of this confrontation can be located in Derrida’s typical treatment of the term *aporia*, which is not exclusively pejorative; rather, the insoluble character of a text’s meaning constitutes a challenge and an opportunity for invention. Such limits, challenges, spaces of risk and uncertainty, are constitutive of signification. There is thus little reason to confidently define oneself in opposition to a classical disposition because you have wisely attended to the subject’s “modes of implication” in discourse. That wisdom does not grant you exteriority. And to label the deconstructive stylization—as Foucault would clearly wish to pejoratively label it a “certain style”—or to nominate the series of statements that surround deconstruction a pedagogy only suggests Derrida’s greater awareness of and willingness to assume responsibility for the violence of the pedagogical interaction. Foucault, on the other hand, appears to want to teach us about sovereignty without assuming responsibility for the masterly position of the teacher.
Keeping that position in mind, it is finally possible to describe the pedagogy of the statement referred to in the title of this introductory chapter. The phrase “pedagogy of the statement” is provisional and only operates as a negative marker of what it is not—namely, a largely ontological, hermeneutic, positivist historical, or cultural tendency. A pedagogy of this kind is not an ontology because it does not presume to describe being, essence, or totality; only the mode of appearing of statements. The treatment of those statements is not strictly hermeneutic because they do not merely represent, but actively constitute, the sequence to which they belong. This pedagogy is not only a reading, but also a producing and an affirming. Because the pedagogy of the statements in question affirms a capacity for rare, subjective, sequential instances of political rupture, I must agree with Terry Eagleton’s somewhat polemical insistence that culture “is too much a matter of affirming what you are or have been, rather than what you might become” (165). Cultural theory can tell us quite a lot about a discourse and its network of rules for determining what is meaningful. But it is difficult to imagine that the analysis of discursive opportunities and chains of utterances will preserve the singularity of a historic instance of political rupture. Likewise, the break with a positivist historicism is not intended to dismiss the importance of the accumulation of knowledge about a historical object, only to affirm what exceeds the description of those facts.

**On Naming, Subjectivity, and the Structure of the Dissertation (Notes Toward an Investigation)**

In “The Communist Hypothesis,” Alain Badiou claims that while contemporary forms of political organization and experimentation can learn from earlier modes of the communist hypothesis—namely, “The (19th-century) movement and the (20th-century) party”—we are currently operating within a distinct third sequence and “it is not possible
to say with certainly what the character of the third sequence will be” (37). The hypothesis in question consists of “the proposition that the subordination of labour to the dominant class is not inevitable” and it is “our task…to bring the communist hypothesis into existence in another mode, to help it emerge within new forms of political experience” (ibid.).

In partial answer to what Badiou describes as “our task,” I have offered the subject and the statement as the primary forms of access to the intellectuality of the sequence here labeled “industrial unionist.” As I explained above, such points of access by no means exhaust, invalidate, or render subordinate the range of other possible styles of access. But neither is it content to share space at the table with an activist appropriation of the sequence’s archive that would, in the popular vein of authors like Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, call upon its texts for confirmation of a continuous, subjectively undifferentiated yearning for collective anarcho-socialist ethical ideals. Industrial unionism is neither an example of an intellectually realized, but historically foiled, ideal (Chomsky), nor another inspiring instance of populist reason within a generalized people’s history (Zinn).⁹ The concept of subjectivity I link to statements derived from the archives of industrial unionism exists within the singularity of its sequential mode. The communist hypothesis expressed by and within that mode resulted from the political experiences of its actors. Those experiences, which represent a unique subjective upsurge, reference their own unique ideation, not a generalized realization or coming-into-full-presence of the socialist ethical Idea.

⁹ See, e.g., Chapter 13 of Zinn’s infamous A People’s History of the United States, and the collection Chomsky on Anarchism. Chomsky, a self-described “anarcho-syndicalist,” is still regarded as an active member of the Industrial Workers of the World.
Likewise, the subjectivity in question is not another identity category. It is subtracted from the multiplicity of positive identities. Even class is alien to this gesture. Class was the central term for a nineteenth-century Marxian mode of politics that gave the world what it had to give before ultimately terminating. There is much to learn from that mode, but its major categories are not exportable. To declare the virtues of class analysis over identity politics is to have a more virtuous corpse in your mouth. Why not let the dead bury their dead? After all, identity is the lifeblood of the compassionate humanist, and there is nothing particularly “Marxist” about insisting on its “place at the table,” or greater disciplinary attention to its analysis. Demanding more attention to class stinks of lobbying, and radical politics has nothing to do with special interest groups. This attitude is particularly important if we wish to analyze the singularity of the industrial unionist political sequence. Against the imposition of positive identities, one should wager that the categories of that sequence emerge from investigations into its statements.

To remain consistent with that wager, each chapter in this dissertation contemplates one or more proper names—names that are meant to represent unique, independent articulations of a process they share. This approach is not meant to point toward legitimate authorities for ascribing meaning to the process. They are not the arbiters of that meaning. Rather, the names provide the local constructions of a relation to a process that is not their own, but which is only comprehensible through the categories derived from those relations. Given the disparate character of these ways of relating to the process, one can expect periodically mottled descriptions of personal

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irresolution and ambivalence. Though not inconsequential, the vacillations of authors should not distract us from the task of assigning, when appropriate, their proper names to the industrial unionist mode of politics. The object is to open up a field of possibility for thinking the singularity of that mode; not to reveal the ideological consistency of particular authors and their respective oeuvres.

My subtraction of the proper name from its authorship of a variegated body of a work begins in the second chapter with Eugene V. Debs. This starting place is not accidental. For many, the name Debs is synonymous with supposed ideological inconsistency and shallow thinking. His saintliness in the eyes of the radical left is deceptive. In this context, a saint inspires by his brave actions and stirring oratory, but rarely has an original thought of his own. As we will see, the historians are virtually unanimous on this point. For the anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists, and Communists alike, Debs was not smart enough to recognize the necessity of their respective politics. None doubt his virtue and capacities as a popularizer; none respect his grasp of the theoretical underpinnings of the socialism he espoused with flailing fists from the caboose of a bright red train. Under the circumstances, Debs is a logical foil for highlighting the relative superficiality of those dismissive narratives, making him an ideal starting place for applying the main features of the approach described in this introductory chapter.

In the second chapter, many of those features are reiterated and expanded upon for the benefit of the reader, while the figure of the “New Man” becomes the conceptual basis for the statements cultivated by and contrived within the analysis. By the third chapter, however, the affirmation of the name Debs and its attendant statements are
confronted with a negative example in the form of Daniel DeLeon. The DeLeon in question is an industrious reader of Marx, yet I will demonstrate that while he is certainly not a theorist of industrial unionism, his name cannot be excluded—as many clearly prefer—from the unique circulation of statements that comprise that sequence. In fact, I will conclude that consideration of DeLeon’s subjective path is indispensible for recognizing the strategic character and attitude toward democracy of the IWW, the major organizational form of the industrial unionist sequence. In short, I conclude that the affirmation of a necessary non-rapport between the political organization and the mechanisms of the state it uses as mediums of agitation, coupled with an indifference to the results of the electoral processes those mechanisms direct, is the foundation of DeLeon’s contribution to the industrial unionist concept of democracy. But the reality that DeLeon believed democracy was only possible in relation to the party and, moreover, that the Socialist Labor Party represented the historical realization of that relation, creates an opportunity for a second foil—this time in contrast to Debs, whose perceived quixotian impracticality and small-mindedness is highlighted by DeLeon, a sort of intellectual Sancho Panza, too practical and theoretically savvy to fully embrace industrial unionism as something entirely new in the field of politics, but only as a new tool for sharpening the edge of a party politics that precedes it and constitutes its logical ending point.

For its part, the fourth chapter begins with a description of and commentary on the founding documents of the IWW. Ordinarily this would be introductory material for the analysis of industrial unionism, which is too frequently rendered synonymous with IWWism. The IWW is certainly the largest and most significant organization to adopt the
ideal of industry-wide unionism; but no extensive treatment of its founding documents, nor analyses of the corrections and compromises that went into their democratic composition, get us any closer to understanding what makes industrial unionism unique than would detaching a simple, crucial statement from the broad, varied circulation of slogans, admonishments, demands, and commands that attended that composition process. In this case—and to preface the approach I will use in the following chapters—the primary statement of industrial unionism is derived from the Knights of Labor, an organization that once rallied beneath a banner that read, “An injury to one is the concern of all.” Radicalized and popularized under IWWism, this slogan becomes “An injury to one is an injury to all.” The original form contains a vague prescription of “concern,” which is a call to deliberate on the injury in question—to determine a course of action based on its nature and severity. Concern is an irreparably social term; one that ascribes an essential fullness to its social context; its guiding belief is that society exists and that we must base our determinations on that essential existence. By contrast, the statement “An injury to one is an injury to all” takes as its guiding assumption that society, the social, social relations, etc., are not themselves necessary, but necessarily constructed around a void or caesura in their own logic. To prescribe the impossibility of violence against one individual, to make all violence an act directed at the collective, is to demand that this void be revealed and its capacity for transformation embraced. A world where exploitation is possible is unacceptable, and no amount of wise deliberation will result in its correction.

After considering the landmark documents of the emerging IWW, then establishing the convention hall and picket line as the “places” where its statements are deployed,
the fourth chapter focuses on the figure of Bill Haywood in order to prescribe an immutable non-rapport between IWW industrial unionism and anarchism. These are undoubtedly the two most controversial aspects of the narrative of IWWism presented in the chapter. American anarchists have long claimed the IWW as their (often naughty) baby brother. They are mistaken. Likewise, to demarcate a populist outpouring—what I label a “subjective upsurge”—around a few prominent authors will strike many as a prohibitively clumsy gesture tailor-made to occlude any real understanding of the IWW’s political meaning.

A few points: First, in Lazarus’s grammar, if you want to talk about the Cultural Revolution without Mao, then you don’t really want to talk about the Cultural Revolution as a political sequence. The same is true of Lenin and Bolshevism. Following Lazarus’s grammar, I will demonstrate that if you want to talk about industrial unionism without acknowledging Haywood and Debs as its chief theorists, then you are not really talking about the unique political production they both informed. Second, the assignation of proper names is an undeniably political choice in the sense that it makes the extant writings of an intellectual leadership the main point of access to the intellectuality of the industrial unionist politics. Because this approach is directly at odds with the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist appropriation of IWWism, it will surely turn all the right stomachs. As will be declared forcefully in the fourth chapter, despite what industrial unionism shares with anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, it is neither anarchist nor syndicalist. Any attempt to reduce or even relate the major organizational form of industrial unionism to those political theories is, in effect, an intellectually tame attempt to stave off the more difficult activity of recognizing the singularity of that form.
Consequently, if anarchism appears to receive too harsh a treatment in the chapter committed to delineating the main features of the sequence, that outcome is the regrettable but largely justifiable result of anarchism’s onerous effect on the contemporary reception of IWWism, which—to put it in brutal terms—amounts to little more than a series of syrupy, nostalgic remonstrations aimed at capitalism and framed in humanistic and socio-legalistic terms that one imagines Mikhail Bakunin would have loved to clandestinely insert into the Charter of the United Nations alongside the liberal platitudes that have long represented their secret kissing cousin. But more on that later.

As a third point, we should recall from the previous section Foucault’s decision to dismissively nominate the various statements that surround deconstruction a “pedagogy.” I claimed that Foucault’s gesture suggests that Derrida, for his part, shows greater awareness of and willingness to assume responsibility for the violence of the pedagogical interaction. In his analysis of Claude Levi-Strauss in Of Grammatology, Derrida extends that willingness to the status of the proper name. Levi-Strauss’s well-known characterization of the Amazonian Nambikwara tribe as essentially devoid of writing—as exemplified in the tribe’s prohibition against revealing one’s proper name outside of the close-knit family unit—strikes Derrida as based on a superficial presumption of the self-evidence of the concept of a “proper name,” as well as of “writing” more generally: “If writing is no longer understood in the narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation, it should be possible to say that all societies capable of producing, that is to say obliterating, their proper names, and of bringing classificatory difference into play, practice writing in general” (109). Levi-Strauss’s anxieties about the cultural violence of writing, which his presence as an anthropologist presumably inflicts,
are thus entirely misplaced. The act of naming—even where the public pronouncement of the proper name is forbidden—contains an originary violence because the very structure of language itself violates the supposed propriety and unique status of the proper name.

Extending Derrida’s analysis to my treatment of proper names in this investigation, it should be clear that any statement that gathers around the name of a theorist is not the self-evident product of an existing sovereign or propriety. In particular, the statements that guide the analyses of the second and third chapters are not the untroubled property of their authors, who would then represent the arbiters and guarantors of their full, self-evident meaning. Rather, the treatment of each statement mirrors in microcosm the broader treatment of its author, which is submitted to a sort of double reading; one that acknowledges that, on the one hand, authorial intentionality and the careful description and juxtapositions of historical narratives demands an indispensable intellectual rigor and discipline. But, on the other hand, it is just as important to go beyond such narratives about “what really occurred and what the actors meant to mean” and identify those complex forces within every text that exceed authorial intention and the privileged status of a historical “outside”—the real basis of a writing, out of which writing proceeds as less authentic representations of an original and actual object.

But, ultimately, my decision to largely structure the determination of the industrial unionist sequence around the shifting identities of its theorists is—like all decisions—strategic and provisional rather than absolute. Ultimately, I am less interested in seeing “Debs” or “Haywood” as the names of historical individuals or even as bodies of ideas
so much as privileged instances of local, textual struggles to make sense of the perceived uniqueness of their moment and its possibilities for political rupture with capitalism. This approach is excessive in the sense that it is not strictly based on a necessary or even compelling rationale that would justify—prior to what it produces—having focused the analysis in that way and not another. Instead, it accepts that the weight of the decision drags behind itself the multitude of empirical and rational alternatives that it will never be. If, despite its encumbrance, the decision produces inventive new readings of the contexts and relations it describes, then it will have succeeded; and demanding that it verify its outcomes against the rational or empirical criteria of a different approach, and then to dismiss it based on the criteria of that different approach, is every bit as intellectually lazy as insisting an apple makes a very poor orange. It does not take a produce vendor to know you have missed the point.

Having lent the name Debs the theoretical depth and significance in relation to industrial unionism it has long deserved; having revealed the significance of DeLeon’s understanding of democracy to the conception pursued under IWWism; and having established as a singularity the industrial unionist sequence at an irreducible distance to the anarcho-syndicalist appropriation of IWWism—the gravity of the task this dissertation would still like to tackle can be summarized in this way: To create a theoretical framework adequate to the task of demonstrating the redoubtable claim that industrial unionism is the name of the United States’ most radical and original political idea, in comparison to which American federal constitutional republicanism is little more than a derivative Statist expression of elite administration over popular sympathy. Unfortunately, federal republicanism cannot be dismissed so easily, and there is
insufficient space to rigorously describe its character and history. Instead, the task in question is displaced onto the contemporary scene of political struggle under the latest manifestation of the federalist system of administration in the United States. This fifth and final chapter represents an extended meditation on the consequences of the previous analysis for our present circumstances. By scrutinizing political prescriptions derived from the investigation into the militant statements of industrial unionism, the concluding chapter indicates ways in which the theoretical underpinnings of current political debates and activist strategies might be informed by the lessons of that investigation.

This leads me to a final point about what some would surely wish to call “my methodology.” Though what I have labeled “an investigation” draws its methodology or mode of engagement from the specificity of the archival context it describes, a project of this kind contains more than a passing kinship with that unparalleled analysis of the capitalist mode of production found in the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*, which has informed the structure of this dissertation in a few ways. To briefly summarize the broad features of that project, the critical method employed by Marx in *Capital* takes British political economy, German classical critical philosophy, and utopian socialism together in one ambitious framework. With this framework in mind, his method of inquiry begins with reality as it is experienced, before descending past the surface in order to discover fundamental concepts, then returning to the surface with a cache of concepts in tow. Marx rarely writes “this causes that.” Instead, he will explain that something is “dialectically related” to something else—often something outwardly unrelated. This dialectical relation is internal as opposed to a causative, external relation. The dialectic,
as Marx understands it, tries to get at the way motion and movement are central to the capitalist mode of production—whereas a positivist approach would try to impose a causative structure on Marx’s analysis, which would deprive it of its crucial capacity to describe capital as value in motion. Capital belongs to a process; it must be in motion, in circulation. It is the product of a movement (Capital 252). Similarly, ideas have to change as circumstances change. What makes a commodity exchangeable cannot be located within the commodity by an analysis; it can only be observed in motion—as it actively expresses something about exchangeability. What is expressed is not inside the commodity—after all, it is a relation, not a material thing—but is born of it. Everything is, in principle, exchangeable with everything else because it can always continue moving. The thing being exchanged is a representation of the process; the process is objectified in a thing.

In a similar vein, the second and third chapters replicate a descent from appearances—IWWism as the arbiter of industrial unionism specifically, and radical unionism more generally—to a counterintuitive level that locates the logic of that appearance in the concepts of supposed bit players; only to return again in the fourth chapter to a starting place that has been irrevocably altered by the movement of the analysis. Guiding this journey is the related valorization of the circulation of statements, the process of their rendering a political context intelligible, over their static meanings. The identities of authors and the concept of subjectivity are treated similarly, always in the spirit of establishing a critical distance from a positivist analysis of the object in question; an analysis that would have us “make it plain,” rather than prescribe creative possibilities. Today, the plain-speaking presentist, who is always looking to interpret the
past through the rosy lens of contemporary liberal rationalism, is arguably the greatest enemy of critical analysis. I will explore this sonorous contagion in greater depth in the final chapter; for now, it suffices to explain that, when we consider how to receive the phantasmal afterlives of industrial unionism, we may look at Marx’s contributions and insist that their intervention is specific to nineteenth-century Western Europe during the heights of industrial capitalist development and production. But his invitations to revolution, despite their definite context, and when received as projects rather than lifeless artifacts or ageless guarantors, may contribute to a more general resistance to the self-satisfied presentist, for whom the past and the modes of its reception are very easy things to determine and, as such, infinitely susceptible to our experience-wizened ethical pronouncements—as though the intellectual equivalent of a slight, commonsensical radicalization of the Charter of the United Nations could somehow tell us how to feel about those mean old revolutionists and their big scary Ideas.
I am for Socialism because I am for humanity.
--Eugene V. Debs, 1897

I would not be a Capitalist; I would be a man; you cannot be both at the same time.
--Eugene V. Debs, 1905

Taken together, the epigraphs above can be seen to prefigure a more precise statement that is implied in both: Only the Socialist is a Man. The gendered character of that prescription is not vital. In fact, Debs has few reservations about making certain women exemplars of manliness. The important characteristic of the above composite is the way it seeks to authorize an absolute division between Socialist humanity and what is only a sort of bare life under capitalism. This division is grounded in the perception that man is changing. The New Man as a unique production without precedent is the idea that will make Debs the major theorist of a political sequence that expresses those changes in man’s capacities through the way production is organized under industrial unionism.

As we are constantly reminded in contemporary scholarship on the U.S. Socialist and radical labor movements, Eugene V. Debs is a wonderful, well-meaning intellectual middleweight, long on virtue and charisma, short on theoretical depth and coherence. The self-described American radical can today bemoan Debs’s occasional naiveté; those sympathetic to liberalism and anarchism can jointly regret his failure to fully appreciate the corrosive, totalitarian qualities of the state; and the unapologetic Marxist-Leninist may lament his lack of theoretical commitment to the Communist International. But in the same breath each will usually claim him as a crucial—though misguided—early exemplar of the values that inform their respective politic. We may ask which
tendency is worse: the one that makes his ideas mediocre but his example indispensible? Or the one that is done with him altogether? As Lenin is famous for having remarked, “In our opinion both are worse.”

A quote by Melvyn Dubofsky is typical of the political and scholarly reception of Debs’s legacy:

For a quarter of a century Debs personified American Socialism and radicalism. Not because he was socialism’s best theorist or most creative organizer; quite the contrary. Although a great orator and a stirring personality, Debs had a shallow intellect and proved a poor party organizer. Too often at Socialist Party conventions, or when sectarianism threatened to split the party, Debs was at home, sick or drunk. But he had unusual credentials for an American socialist. In a party dominated by German immigrants and Jewish Lawyers and dentists, Debs was American born and, though a professed nonbeliever, a Christian almost by instinct. Debs Americanized and Christianized the socialist movement. By doing so he made it acceptable, respectable, almost popular. (63-4)

Dubofsky has created a comfortable and plausible historical narrative about Debs, and one in broad agreement with much IWW and socialist literature of the last century. Note the manner in which Debs’s obvious intellectual and theoretical shortcomings are compensated for by his “credentials” and capacities as an inspiration and popularizer. Dubofsky is a studious collector of facts, which he uses to determine the essential character and consequence of IWW history. Where Debs is concerned, the facts are clear: His impact on Wobbly history can be boiled down to his virtues as a beloved symbol. One might argue—and it is tempting—that such a circumscription of his role is far too narrow. I will not argue that here, nor will I entertain arguments about his true character or capacities as an organizer. Instead, I wish to boldly insist, in contradistinction to claims about his intellectual impact, that Debs is indeed one of the major theorists of the industrial unionist political sequence, and that, consequently, to comprehend what was at stake in the ideas and attendant practices of said sequence
will require recognizing Debs as one of the proper names for the attempt to actualize revolution in the industrial unionist mode.

In support of that statement, I will frame some of Debs’s writing as instances of an early twentieth-century figuration of the socialist “New Man”—the revolutionary figure of collective praxis and social transformation. Debs interprets this figure through a uniquely American rhetoric of individualism and masculinity, while his odd and occasionally remarkable rhetoric labors to establish a consistency with the transformative dimensions of the Bolshevik Revolution. I will describe how part of that project consists of forging a masculine identity and a paradoxically individualistic, “self-made” subjectivity for his conception of the New Man, which everywhere expresses a very American concern for the individualist spirit and the masculine ideal in a grammar of collectivity and change.

Yet, those descriptions are located in the context of a political sequence that is industrial unionist in character. The approximate period of this sequence—which will be more rigorously and extensively determined in the fourth chapter—begins with what will later be called the “First Annual Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World” in 1905, and is terminated around 1920 amidst government repression, infighting over centralization, and the Communist Party’s attempts to dominate the organization. During that period, Debs’s direct influence on and participation in IWW debates varies greatly. His commitments to the Socialist Party of America may strike some as irreconcilable with the IWW’s generally antithetical attitude toward electoral politics. But a closer examination of Debs’s reasons for embracing the possibilities of the electoral arena will quickly demonstrate that whatever differences exist are strategic in character, and the importance of the industrial unionist organizational form is never in question. To the
contrary, what might be labeled the “industrial unionist Idea” in the United States during
the period in question, will remain inaccessible without reference to the name Debs.

To further this argument, it is useful to begin by creating a simple opposition
between two rigorous and productive ways to receive Debs’s ideas through his writing.
First, one can make them historical instances of this or that claim, position, or idea and
judge them alongside one another, perhaps examining the consistency of the positions
taken or claims made and constructing something like a historical window into their
author’s socio-political circumstances. The historian Nick Salvatore’s biography does an
excellent job of this, particularly as it frames its description of Debs’s life and thought
through the tension between his earliest conceptions of the worker as citizen-producer
and later understandings of labor and community under Socialism. Similarly, James
Darsey spends a chapter in *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*
teasing out the evangelical and eschatological elements in Debs’s rhetoric. The
outcome of both studies—though ultimately sympathetic to Debs’s character—is to
demonstrate large blind spots and numerous contradictions in his intellectual treatment
of major themes. I think the term failure is implicit throughout both treatments, and their
authors’ largely shared criteria for success are the conventional standards of
argumentation: consistency, coherence, logical support for the claims involved, et
cetera.

To similarly treat the theme of identity in Debs’s writing would result in a
cataloguing of contradictions and incoherencies. But there is another way to treat this
theme. This second approach—again, within the simple opposition described above—
would be to pursue a path of maximal interiority, which means, in abstract terms, to
direct my descriptions toward the possibility of a unique subjective relation, rather than an encyclopedic reconstruction of a well-meant, but ultimately inadequate, historical conception of identity. Indeed, to simplify the opposition further, the first task here is to understand the singularity of statements and their corresponding subjectivities; not to describe the endless variety of particular differences that comprise a local identity. As I explained in the previous chapter, this task is driven, in part, by an engagement with certain ideas and concerns from Sylvain Lazarus’s *Anthropologie du nom*. Lazarus’s complex book gives this investigation several additional goals which, like the first, are maintained in his grammar. The first of these is to “think”—which I will ultimately label “receive”—industrial unionism as a determinate political sequence. Access to that determination is granted by its statement, which are thinkable through their respective categories. Such categories are themselves derived from simple names, like “politics,” which open up a field for thought, but are not defined independently of their sequence or mode. Debs will be the proper name assigned to the industrial unionist sequence, which is thinkable “in interiority,” or subjectively, whereas those modes which are homogeneous to the ordinations of the State are qualified as “exterior” to such thinking. The sequence given Debs’s name is eventually terminated. But Lazarus’s schema (crucially) lacks any justification for using the term failure to express what occurs when a sequence is terminated. This is the case because such “facts” do not have sovereignty over the singularity of a sequence, or what it opens up in thought. Lazarus makes failure literally unthinkable. This move should be posed in direct contrast to the beloved leftist positivization of the figure of the failed martyr—the subjectivity coincident with the radical left’s attraction to tragic conclusions. In a discourse that admits failure
as one of its categories—which virtually all histories of industrial unionism do prominently—such a figure arguably becomes morbid compensation for their own failure to think what is singular in a politics. Now we have a new discipline for receiving the intellectuality of a terminated politics.

Yet, like the broader framework described in the introductory chapter, this specific investigation is only inspired by the intellectual discipline Lazarus calls “the anthropology of the name.” This is not an anthropology; its major resource is the archive, and it is pleased to provide historical contexts for Debs and industrial unionism. This groundwork investigation will even treat themes like masculinity and Bolshevism in a manner similar to many cultural histories. Unfortunately, there is really only space here to unfold some tantalizing tidbits of Lazarus’s formidable project, which are juxtaposed with other approaches. In fact, more than its complexity and austerity, one could argue that the greatest barrier to mainstream adoption of the anthropology of the name as a sort of method and field of research would be the potential terseness of its written records. Can we imagine in academic publishing the coexistence of thorough cultural histories and sophisticated theoretical critiques with a few pages about a regional struggle painted in deliberately concise categories, statements, proper names, and places? If not, then the thinking of politics as singularities, in interiority, may require various strategies of stylistic embellishment before it receives the mixed blessing of mainstream attention.

Debs and the Road to Industrial Unionism

Before saying more about method I will attend to some relevant documents. Some of Debs’s earliest extant writings come from correspondences with his family in the beginning of the 1870s. These letters reveal the teenage Debs’s intuition that in Terre
Haute, Indiana, one’s conception of self was indissociable from one’s position within society. This was no secret in his social context, nor was the role of work as the guarantor of manhood. In fact, proving that he “can act manly” when necessary was Debs’s professed reason for leaving Terre Haute temporarily to pursue railroad work in East St. Louis (“EVD to Louise Debs” 3). This perceived connection between manhood and work was typical enough in the decades following the Civil War, but the ideal of social harmony related to that connection was certainly more prevalent in a modest-sized Midwestern town like Terre Haute than cities with major industry where what some might characterize as “social contradictions” emerged more rapidly and definitively. Consequently, as a young labor leader in the early eighties, Debs consistently associates a worker’s manhood with his morality, a discourse that has little to do with terms like justice and distribution.

But by the mid-eighties the first of these terms would emerge in response to antagonistic behavior by American monopolists. In an article from May, 1885 entitled “Art though a Man?” Debs finally describes economic monopoly as incompatible with manhood. At last, social position was no longer a guarantor of manliness. In this redefinition, “A MAN will not rob directly or indirectly. A MAN despises a lie, prevarication or subterfuge. A man is true to wife and home, to obligation and trust. A man will recognize probity without reference to position or artificial surroundings. He will estimate other men by character rather than cash or coat, by head rather than hat” (quoted in Salvatore 64). We find here an early example of what will become a radicalization of the theme of manhood—a radicalization coincident with Debs’s work as a labor leader and his adoption of socialist and industrial unionist principles.
It is notable that Debs adopts the principles of industrial unionism—and roundly rejects craft unionism—many years before he begins calling himself a Socialist. This is significant for understanding his brand of Socialism—which is, in a sense, largely the political expression of industrial unionist organizing principles. Debs explains,

I was made to realize long ago that the old trade union was utterly incompetent to deal successfully with the exploiting corporations in this struggle. I was made to see that in craft unionism the capitalist class have it within their power to keep the workers divided, to use one part of them to conquer and crush another part of them. Indeed, I was made to see that the old form of unionism separates the workers and keeps them helpless at the mercy of their masters. ("Craft Unionism")

To say that, for Debs, socialism is the political expression of principles predicated on industrial unionism means that the categories of Socialism open up a field or new terrain for thinking about the problems of social organization. They are distinct from the habitual dispensations of the status quo, making them radical “non-parts” of such orderings. Consequently, we should read from the previous quote less about the practical difficulties of organizing according to trades, and more that affirms something that simply will not fit within the structured coherence of late industrial capitalist society. In other words, the industrial unionist, like Marx’s nineteenth-century Western European proletariat, simply cannot have its demands satisfied by or within existing social relations. Not fitting, as opposed to the wise strategies and moralizing sermons of reform-minded Socialists, is the key ingredient for any radicalization capable of granting weight to the category of Socialism.

Yet, Debs’s radicalization was an uneven process. He was a staunch believer in the millennial promise of America. Here was a country where any hardworking man could easily utilize endless land and resources to further his standing and the prosperity of his family. But once the addendum about the tyranny of monopolists enters the
picture, the narrative becomes more complicated. After all, if a coal monopoly can stifle the legitimate goals of hardworking people in a region, certain distinctly (and even pejoratively) European narratives become helpful for describing these new circumstances. I am referring to the story of Socialism, and Debs’s conversion to this narrative was not at all St. Paul-like, requiring years of agonizing over alien ideas and concepts before a sort of total devotion emerges.

By devotion we mean to suggest Debs’s unwavering use of the Socialist story as a means to comprehending the circumstances of the American worker. We have a document based on a 1908 speech Debs gave to a Kansas trade union audience that makes this commitment evident. Debs claims that under capitalism the worker only has his labor and, because capital owns the means of production, the hopelessly dependent worker must find a buyer for that labor. In these circumstances, no man can claim to be a “man among men” because “No man can rightly claim to be a man unless he is free. There is something godlike about manhood. Manhood doesn’t admit of ownership. Manhood scorns to be regarded as private property” ( “Unity and Victory” 27-8).

The question logically arises: what about Debs’s views on womanhood? How “godlike” is that? On the one hand, suffrage and an equal voice in the home are essential. Social subordination is unconscionable and Debs was never shy about supporting ambitious, talented female organizers and activists. On the other hand, womanly virtue is placed on a pedestal which has its foundation in natural differences between the sexes. The woman is in almost every way more virtuous, but her role is distinctly circumscribed.1 Of course the male’s role is no less restricted and if one were

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1 In Debs’s attitude toward women’s suffrage, you can see the tension between this circumscribed role—which is a product of his perception of “womanly” characteristics—and his
looking for coherence it would be difficult to reconcile Debs’s open admiration for female socialists in largely manly public positions, like Gurley Flynn and Rosa Luxemburg, with his understanding of natural female roles. In a moment I will try to briefly understand these contradictions in terms of a subjective capacity, but it should be noted that his conception of the Socialist New Man—a category left entirely implicit in Debs’s writing—does not exclude a female biology.

My use of the term “Socialist New Man” is meant to provide a concept for the species of manliness capable of bringing about total social revolution. Debs’s political work with the Socialist Party of America, including his five attempts to become president of the United States, was strictly educational. According to Nick Salvatore,

In rejecting the mere accumulation of votes, Debs understood that the key to ultimate Socialist success was the profound transformation of individual voters. He repeatedly claimed that he desired no votes that resulted either from attractions to individual Socialist personalities or from a partial commitment to the Socialist program. The heart of his political work lay in demonstrating to the individual voter the necessity of transcending previous political and cultural consciousness, and he understood that no party functionary or political machine could substitute for that critical process. (187)

I call that process the public pedagogy of the Socialist New Man. By pedagogy, I mean what—if anything—can be said to subtract itself from the cultural situation from which it emerges or of which it constitutes a part. This subtraction is a rupture from complex cultural variations; without a thinking of rupture, we have situational multiplicities of cultures and identities. There is a logic of cultural situations, but there is also something that exceeds situations according to their own logics. Debs’s electoral pedagogy is belief in “equality” between the sexes. Explaining that, in a social democracy, women would be “at least the equal of men,” Debs concludes that “When women vote, 10,000 ills disappear. You can’t buy a woman’s vote with whiskey” (“Milwaukee Enthused” 4).
primarily concerned with what is in excess of situations. For example, electoral
discrimination is based on a “previous political and cultural consciousness”; thus, the
voters as discriminating consumers of political-cultural opinions will likely choose the
personality that speaks most convincingly to their ideological priorities. In order to make
those individual priorities constitute a real rupture with the calculations of their cultural
situations, a public pedagogy will have to construct a site for new discriminations that
are incommensurable with the logic of previous priorities. The figure of the New Man is
the result of the critical process initiated by the public pedagogy of the electoral process.

When we understand the pedagogical and strategic dimensions of Debs’s
Socialism, we are in a better position to recognize the extent to which it relies on
industrial unionist organizational principles for the realization of a Socialist Republic in
the United States. As Debs explains, “Industrial evolution has made industrial unionism
possible and revolutionary education and agitation must now make it inevitable” (“A
Letter to Tom Mann”). Educational work by industrial unionists will aid in “laying the
foundation and erecting the superstructure of the new revolutionary economic
organization, the embryonic industrial democracy” (ibid.). The “radical and revolutionary”
goal of such education and agitation, in stark contrast with trade unionism’s objective to
ameliorate the conditions of workers, is the “ultimate abolition of the existing productive
system, and the total extinction of wage-servitude”:

In contradistinction to this conciliatory and non-political attitude of the trade
unions toward the existing wage-system and the capitalist class, it is the
declared principle of industrial unionism that the wage-workers have no
interests in common with capitalists; that, in fact, their material interests are
in conflict, and it is its declared purpose to abolish the wage-system, and
supplant it by a system of industrial co-operation in which the workers
themselves shall have full control for their own benefit, and to this end they
recognize the necessity of organizing the political as well as the economic
power of the working class, and of the harmonious exercise of both by such means as will make industrial unionism the medium of attaining industrial democracy. ("Industrial Unionism" 506)

The public pedagogy of the Socialist New Man can occur at the point of production, as in organization along industrial lines instead of craft specializations, or with the ballot box, one strategy for producing revolutionary organizations along broad industrial lines. One could even say that it is really only in the form of the latter that something worth calling “democracy” can be said to exist. In a sense, the New Man emerges within a ‘system of industrial co-operation’ as the first true democrat.

The reference to the figure of this pedagogy may recall Lev Vygotsky’s claim that socialist relations of production lead to a higher level of human personality, or a New Man. But Vygotsky is only one popularizer of a discourse that has a long history in radical leftwing thought. From the early Marx’s claims about alienated labor to Peter Kropotkin’s naturalist-anarchist descriptions of social organization, human consciousness has long been intimately tied to the ownership of the means of production. But Debs never wavered in his insistence that a New Man must precede the seizure of power or else catastrophe would ensue. As late as 1910, he claimed that if Socialists could actually seize power at that time, they would have to refuse it in order not to “precipitate a catastrophe” because “the people are not yet ready. They must be further educated. They would not know what to do with freedom if they had it” (Quoted in Salvatore 231). However, I hope to show that “the people” should refer not so much to a human potential as a subjective capacity.

The Many Faces of the New Man

The broad features of the twentieth-century’s pervasive figurations of the New Man rest upon at least two familiar oppositions. The first is between humanism and anti-
humanism, which is rendered here as an opposition between human consciousness and subjective capacity. The second concerns the division between idealism and materialism, or, what is critical (in exteriority) from what is subtractive (traces the interior trajectory of the subject). Framed in this way, the New Man concept is critical in the sense that it confronts the subjective path with its external conceptualization within the varied contexts of the twentieth century. Alain Badiou's analysis of this concept in *The Century* is the main reference here. For Badiou, the key to understanding the century lies in its passion for the real. Today, the most productive way of receiving that passion is by attempting “to hold onto” it “without falling into the paroxysmal charms of terror” (65). This subtractive path aims to “exhibit as a real point, not the destruction of reality, but minimal difference. To purify reality, not in order to annihilate it at its surface, but to subtract it from its apparent unity so as to detect within it the miniscule difference, the vanishing term that constitutes it. What takes place barely differs from the place where it takes place. It is in the ‘barely,’ in this immanent exception, that all the affect lies” (ibid.).

The century’s passion for the real is inextricably bound to the question of the new. The question of what is new is likewise inextricable with the figure of the New Man, which has two opposite meanings. The first, which is found in the work of Heidegger and fascist thought, concerns “the restitution of the man of old, of the man who had been eradicated, had disappeared, had been corrupted. Purification is actually the more or less violent process of the return of a vanished origin. The new is a production of authenticity” (ibid.). From the Marxian tradition (Debs included) a very different figure emerges. The New Man “is a real creation, something that has never existed before, because he emerges from the destruction of historical antagonisms…. The new man is
thereby either restored or produced” (ibid.). When restored, this figure is “rooted in
mythic totalities such as race, nation, earth, blood and soil” and consists of a “collection
of predicates” like “Nordic, Aryan, warrior, and so on” (65-6). Conversely, the productive
figure “is envisioned in opposition to all enveloping forms as well as to all predicates, in
particular against family, property and the nation-state” (66). The former is a definition of
authentic fullness; the latter is primarily subtractive because the trajectory of its subject
is only traceable through the categories it creates—those interior to the process of its
subjectivation.

Lev Vygotsky, however, may be accused of actively connecting a potentially
subtractive definition of the New Man to a Statist restoration. He is certainly not a rare
case. If we accept the Althusserian epistemological break between Marx’s early,
humanist, and thus ideological writing and his later work, the accusation gains
immediacy. Let’s say that the conception of a Marx who is interested in an authentic
proletarian consciousness and the realization of man’s potential becomes a restorative
conception in the twentieth century. After all, isn’t Marxist humanism a common thread
found throughout the long intellectual retreat from Stalinism in the century? According to
this narrative, if we must return to communism and Marxism after the cult of personality,
it will be in the spirit (and only the spirit) of raising humanity out of oppression and
exploitation. Althusser was right to reject this Krushchevite mediocrity. But Vygotsky is a
more complicated case. For one thing, he was working under Stalinism, not during the
period of reaction. Though he was “primarily interested in the development of language
in its relation to thought, and, in a more general sense, in the relationship between
human language and consciousness” (Kozulin 151), this interest was linked to the
emergence of a new consciousness and that emergence was linked to a change in existing relations of production. As Alex Kozulin explains, for Vygotsky, “The new structures of social life—including the industrialization of work activity, compulsory schooling and collective forms of everyday life—became seen as determinants of the nascent forms of behavior and cognition of a ‘new man’” (Kozulin 277).

What stinks of restoration in Vygotsky’s psychology is its emphasis on human personality. The New Man has never existed before, but supposedly the idea of the New Man was perfected nearly a hundred years earlier, in very different historical circumstances. By invoking the authority of this distant conception, Vygotsky implicitly suggests we can bring to fullness and purity our understanding of (what were then) contemporary psychological types. Assuredly, the State would have its hand in assigning the predicates and, by the time a Soviet New Man is established, it will be little more than a gutless human type without the creativity and adventurousness of its revolutionary counterpart. Something of this becomes evident in Vygotsky’s claim that:

If in the beginning the individual was transformed into a fraction, into the executor of a fractional function, into a live extension of the machine, then at the end of it, the very requirements of manufacturing require an all-round developed, flexible person, who would be capable of changing the forms of work, and of organizing the production process and controlling it. (Socialist Alteration)

This description of a flexible and adaptive individual parallels, in a fundamental way, the triumphant model of the apologists for our contemporary global economy. In this example, what Vygotsky shares with a Thomas Friedman is the role of an implicit State in assigning virtues to its workers, who obey the inevitable economic processes the State must embrace if it is to keep pace with History. This connection becomes apparent when Vygotsky makes state-sanctioned polytechnic education the motor of
transformation: “It is education which should play the central role in the transformation of man [on] this road of conscious social formation of new generations, the basic form to alter the historical human type. New generations and new forms of their education represent the main route which history will follow whilst creating the new type of man” (ibid.). In other words, the smooth ordering of the State can generate a New Man, who will function better under the exigencies of Historical progress. Subjective capacity is thus rendered as human cognitive aptitude that has an educational apparatus as its arbiter. But using the State as the judge of human authenticity is an obvious intellectual dead end. When Marx claims that “the germ of the education of the future is present in the factory system” and that it will “combine productive labor with instructions and gymnastics…as the only method of producing fully developed human beings” (Capital 614), his is a polytechnic education without state mediation or administration. Consequently, it makes sense to prescribe the difference between two irreducible conceptions of the New Man as a production. Both concern a man that does not yet exist, but one locates the creation of that man within the processes of a State. In Vygotsky’s case, the idea of the New Man is exported from the early Marx and juxtaposed alongside the Soviet State—a sort of ideological restoration. The exterior character of this relation will be addressed below. But for now it suffices to say that in the century a New Man divorced from revolutionary upheaval is an agent of preservation, not change.

Even if it possible to locate some important consequences in that division of the New Man, both sides hold greater potential for change than “the spontaneous philosophy of our ‘modernizing’ propaganda,” which, according to Badiou, insists that
we let “the nature of things manifest its proper ends. We must not do, but let be: laissez-faire” (99). Badiou is clear about what is at stake in this distinction: “If you think the world can and must change absolutely; that there is neither a nature of things to be respected nor pre-formed subjects to be maintained, you thereby admit that the individual may be sacrificial. Meaning that the individual is not independently endowed with any intrinsic nature that would deserve our striving to perpetuate it” (ibid.). The revolutionary knows that the “individual, truth be told, is nothing. The subject is the new man, emerging at the point of self-lack” (101). It is from nothing that the new is able to emerge as an immortal collective subject.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s work acts as a philosophical accompaniment to that possibility. In response to the question “What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence?” Sartre provides his well-known justification for seeing man as a project:

We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its “subjectivity,” using the word as a reproach against us…. Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower. (“Existentialism”)

For Sartre, “the word humanism has two very different meanings. One may understand by humanism a theory which upholds man as the end-in-itself and as the supreme value” (ibid.). But a humanism that takes man as an end is anathema to the existentialist because “man is still to be determined” (ibid.). In contrast, an existentialist humanism claims that “Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing
himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist” (ibid.). To be “truly human” in this latter humanism is coincident with a project of liberation driven by man’s commitment to seek beyond himself. Man has no arbiter but himself and is fully responsible for what he wills in this commitment. Sartre’s conception coincides with the New Man as a production, but history does not precede this production. The production of the Sartrean man proceeds from a human situation, a situation that is “mine because it is the image of my free choice of myself, and everything which it presents to me is mine in that this represents me and symbolizes me” (*Being and Nothingness* 708).

Yet we find in Lenin a New Man that is not only produced, but directly tied to the existing mode of production. The state of armed workers will be necessary until the classical socialist adage—“From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”—is realized under a higher level of labor productivity “unlike the present and a person *unlike the present* man in the street” (*Essential Works* 344-5). The New Man is not only a special kind of producer, but also presides over a special kind of production. These two conditions for the withering away of the State are indivisible. The descriptions of worker political consciousness aided by the actions of professional revolutionaries in *What is to be Done?* is an interaction external to economic processes. Such interactions are necessary preludes to the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat with its pedagogy of the fundamental rules of social life and its capacity to develop higher levels of productivity. This is where Lenin’s conception can be seen to differ from Badiou’s insistence that “fraternity is the real manifestation of the new world, and hence of the new man”:
What is experienced here—in the party, in action, in the subversive artistic group, in the egalitarian couple—is the real violence of fraternity. And what is the content of fraternity, if not the acceptance that the infinite “we” prevails over the finitude of the individual? This is what is named by the word “comrade,” now largely fallen into desuetude. My comrade is one who, like myself, is only a subject by belonging to a process of truth that authorizes him to say “we.” (The Century 102)

It is important to note, however, that Lenin’s New Man is tied to processes and realized forms that render the party and its fraternal bond anachronistic. His New Man is not the professional revolutionary he calls “comrade,” but a worker who does not yet exist. We can take from Badiou the notion that the Bolshevik fraternity prefigures the subjective logic of this form. But in Lenin the two are not identical. The New Man is only a concept for the revolutionist; its realization will follow the dissolution of the party and its existing forms of fraternity. And this distinction between the New Man as a fraternal consciousness and as a production conditioned by historical and economic processes may recall Althusser’s contributions to the humanist debate in Marxist theory.

For Althusser, the subject is an ideological notion. He barrows this idea from his reading of Hegel (through Marx), which reveals that “history is a process without a subject” (Politics and History 183). Where Althusser and Marx definitively part ways with Hegel is in answer to the question “What are the conditions of the process of history?” (185). According to Althusser, Marx’s answer is that “There is no such thing as a process except in relations…: the relations of production (to which Capital is restricted) and other (political, ideological) relations” (186).

Althusser is one of Sylvain Lazarus’s major theoretical references due in large part to the former’s skillful reinvention of Marx’s philosophy. By subtracting (in his own way) politics from the ordinations of the (party) State, Althusser initiates a potential new thinking of political processes that are not chained to historicism. For Lazarus,
historicism cannot think the singularity of a political sequence. Instead, historicism will want to know what came before and after the event; it will want to construct a (Statist) chronology and index around the event, which breaks from the order of the State. The method for understanding the particular character of the break will consist in a general regime of comparisons and the chronicling of differences. The chronicle seeks coherence and ignores the consequences of the event. Such consequences are necessarily subjective and thus largely illegible to the historicity of the State. Unfortunately, Lazarus claims that by relegating subjectivity to an ideological notion, Althusser has effectively relinquished this indispensable category to historicism. The historicist vision of politics treats “the event as paradigm rather than subjectivity,” which “has the consequence of centering politics on the question of the state and its power…considering that the field of politics is state power” (“Lenin” 262).

To break with historicism and the complex unity of its descriptions, requires a prescriptive discipline of categories, which concern subjective singularities inaccessible to historicist objectivity. One of the categories of this subjective path is the “historical mode of politics”:

I propose the category of mode of politics, maintaining that non-statist politics, that is, non-historicist politics, is uncommon, sequential, and identified by what I call its mode: a mode of politics is the relation of a politics to its thought, the bringing to light of its specific categories that permit an identification of the subjective on its own basis. (267)

Returning to an example from the first chapter of this dissertation, the Bolshevik historical mode of politics has its privileged text in What is to be Done?, which opposes the spontaneous consciousness of the proletariat (as in Marx) to the Social Democratic revolutionary consciousness of the professional revolutionary. The latter consciousness requires a party (258-9). But the October Revolution will signal not the triumph of this
party, but the closure of its sequence. After 1917 the category of party no longer "disposed the conditions of revolutionary politics"; rather, "it would become an attribute of the state, or even its center" (260). In this new era of state parties, the category of politics no longer contains a content of its own—is no longer "charged with assuming its own thought, internal to itself"—but must circulate between notions like history and philosophy under the aegis of the party. Meaning, based on the criteria of the disjunction between the category of politics and its circulation between disparate notions, all parties in this era are "state parties, which means that in the strict sense, these parties are not political organizations but state organizations" (ibid.). For Lazarus, the State is opposed to the subject and its capacities. For the former, politics is bound to the party. For the latter, politics is the simple name of an opening onto something unique that is only intelligible through recognition of the creativity of subjects within a determinate mode or sequence. This is the subjectivity I am attempting to trace here.

**Man and Revolution**

The Bolshevik Revolution, by providing revolutionary figures who embody Socialist manhood, will significantly inform Debs’s conception of the New Man. Foreshadowing the significance of those exemplary figures, I can draw a second statement from a 1907 issue of the *New York Worker* where Debs claims that “The most heroic word in all languages is revolution” ("Revolution" 5-6). Like the first—“only the socialist is a man”—the second statement is consciously, even conspicuously, simple. Its profundity is not a product of its capacity to descriptively render intelligible complex interactions at various levels and within the interstices of what some might call social structures or frame in terms of broad narrative networks and specific conceptual formations. No, what is significant enough about the statement to justify detaching it from such a varied
circumstance as its broader framework of intelligibility is its association of revolutionary heroism with language. Recall that the most significant characteristic of the first, composite statement was the way it sought to authorize an absolute division between socialist humanity and what is only a sort of bare life under capitalism. That division was grounded in the perception that man is changing. I have been trying to show that the New Man as a unique production without precedent is the idea that will make Debs the major theorist of a political sequence that expresses those changes in man’s capacities through the way production is organized under industrial unionism and expressed politically (or pedagogically) through Socialism. The second statement, which presages the revolutionary enthusiasms of the Bolshevik Revolution, should be read alongside the first. When stripped of its conceptual independence, the second statement’s association of revolution and heroism at the level of language can also suggest that the highest expression of heroism is only within the rhetorical purview of the socialist New Man. It is then only a short step toward the recognition that this saying of revolution is already an action, an activity, a project. The revolutionary project begins with a word from the figurative lips of an emerging figure without precedent in the long history of human social relations.

Given that there has been no shortage of ambitious narratives about revolutionary socialism and industrial unionism in the United States, adding anything unique is a serious challenge. But the narrative that emerges from this investigation will be the first non-hagiography to give Debs his intellectual due for helping to define those radical projects. Bolshevism becomes a critical historical realization of his definition. Though Debs remains committed to political tactics consistent with his understanding of
America’s specific circumstances—foregrounding the concept of democracy, trumpeting the relationship between collective action and the social integrity of the individual, associating Christ with socialist virtue, to name a few—his understanding of manliness receives important support from the successes of European revolutionaries. As he once famously exclaimed, “From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am a Bolshevik and proud of it” (“The Day of the People” 3-4). This enthusiasm is evident when, in October of 1918, while facing his second conviction and jail term—this time under the infamous Espionage Act—Debs writes to a friend:

I am wondering constantly as dear comrades write to me in such loving and sympathetic terms what on earth I have done to merit such lavish praise and commendation. As I see it I did my simple duty to the party, and that in a small way, almost contemptible (sic.) compared to the heroic services rendered by Lenin (sic.), Trotsky, Liebknecht, [and] Rosa Luxemburg and numerous others, not overlooking those here among us who have been lynched, tarred and feathered, manhandled, deported and outraged in every other conceivable manner. (Letters, Volume 2 454)

The body of the revolutionary is important in that statement, which is echoed in Debs’s irritated response to an emerging popular tendency to refer to him as “the grand old man” of the movement. In a speech that year he insists “I am trying to be a man, but I am neither grand nor old…. The spirit within me and the soul of me, the spirit and soul of socialism, are a sure guarantee against ‘old age’” (Fight for Liberty 4). If we only take this remark as the defensive rebuke of a self-conscious man in his sixties, we miss too much. Instead, let’s take seriously the notion that Socialism—particularly now that it has been actualized in Russia—is no respecter of human limitations; that the soul of man under socialism (as Oscar Wilde might say) is no respecter of certain human concerns like fear for one’s life, physical imprisonment, or aging.
Even while suffering through the third year of a miserable imprisonment in Atlanta, Debs remains confident that “The real me, the man within, they can’t touch” (“EVD to Theodore Debs”). This is a logical enough sentiment for a man who once insisted that Socialists be willing to give “our lives freely, if necessary,” in “support of the first Socialist Republic in history” (Letters, Volume 3 385). These sentiments suggest much about the trajectory of Debs’s subjective path. First, they suggest that it labors to be consistent with the consequences of the Bolshevik Revolution’s historical actualization of the Worker State, which is a sort of perfect weakness—something that exists only to disappear, or to make the possibility of such an unprecedented disappearance possible, by avoiding (as Lenin is obsessively aware) the mistakes of the Paris Commune. For the purposes of this analysis, and following Lazarus, the establishment of the mechanisms of Bolshevik State administration should be seen as coming after the point where the political sequence that produced them is exhausted. Lazarus locates the beginning of the Bolshevik political mode in 1902, with the publication of What is to be Done?, and its termination in 1917, with the disappearance of the Soviets. After that point, different principles and political exigencies emerge that are irreducible to the previous mode. But for an American observer like Debs, the changing role of the Bolshevik party-form is less evident than the subjective upsurge that made it possible. It is with the latter that he labors to be consistent in his pre-revolutionary circumstances.

The second characteristic of Debs’s subjective path following the Revolution is his awareness that the conditions of the American worker are unique. There is no inconsistency in his trumpeting of the accomplishments in Russia and his insistence that the consequences for his country are still unclear. It is here that I want to create some
distance from Nick Salvatore’s popular impression of Debs’s attitude toward the events in Russia:

[Debs] never led in any consistent fashion the Socialist minority, but he had symbolized for many a commitment to a democratic, egalitarian movement. From that perspective his infatuation with the Russian Revolution and his advocacy, during 1918 and 1919, of the imminence of American soviets, contradicted the beliefs of a lifetime. While many nuances of Marxist theory remained incomprehensible and seemingly unimportant to Debs and other comrades in those heady years, Debs did find himself unequivocally aligned with some rather odd bedmates. In the call for armed insurrection and massive direct action, Debs supported for this moment the very position he had so forcefully rejected in 1912. The Russian tonic proved quite powerful, especially as few American Socialists ever thought their comrades would come to power anywhere in the world. After years of adjusting to the wilderness, the riches of the banquet table overwhelmed them. (324)

Salvatore’s quote exemplifies the usual characterization of Debs as an inconsistent theorist and mediocre intellectual. Debs’s vacillations are not theoretical but emotional responses to a powerful tonic. But one could just as easily see such changes in position as fully consistent with an appropriate response to what the Revolution meant for the consciousness of the American worker. After all, it isn’t clear how that consciousness was supposed to apprehend the establishment of “the first Socialist Republic in history”.

For Debs, however, the answer seems clear: Unprecedented opportunities for liberation have emerged; it is time to experiment. Consequently, Debs can be seen as the proper name for a lucid theoretical tendency driven by a specifically American understanding of the production of a New Man because—in contradistinction to Vygotsky, who was interested in the nuances of Marxist theory—Debs does not seize on the New Man as a restoration. Instead, the New Man is a unique production and Debs’s attendant commitment to the Socialist narrative is similarly driven by its capacity to make things fit—to devise a cogent emerging social form for those pieces that were left out. Of course his narrative of this dislocation will sound less consistent than the analyses of
certain famous European intellectuals, but one should understand that precisely as
Debs did: as a product of the ever changing real political circumstances in the United
States of his day.

This leads me to the final major characteristic of Debs’s subjective path after the
Revolution. To describe this feature, let’s take a popular version of Debs’s famous
conversion to Socialism. This conversion narrative refers to the time he spent reading
Marx and Socialist authors while imprisoned in Woodstock, Illinois in 1895. References
to “the road to Woodstock” make the religious character of that narrative clear. But,
recalling the simple opposition created at the beginning of this chapter between two
rigorous and productive ways to receive Debs’s ideas through his writing, a
comprehensive historical recounting of Debs’s conversion to socialism (as opposed to a
path of “maximal interiority”) reveals an uneven, ongoing process that does not reach
anything like a climax while he’s in Woodstock. What is left more or less underexplored
in that crucial historical account, with its extensive marshalling of facts and evidence in
support of its conclusion, is what I want to call the agony of subjective destitution. This
rather formal concept is intended to emphasize the traumatic dimensions of Debs’s
experience—but not only at the level of a hesitant emotional and intellectual state.
Rather, his documents represent a chronicling of the dissolution of a subject’s support in
the ordering of his social world. Like in Debs’s early contrasting of monopoly and
manhood, things fail to fit together and he eventually finds that the structure of society is
to blame. Something new will have to appear for the pieces to fit. But a new manliness
is a prerequisite for realizing this totally new Socialist order.
At this point it should be emphasized that tracing Debs’s subjective path following the Revolution is neither intended as an apologia for his inconsistencies or naïveté nor a dismissal of the historical characteristics of that path. Rather, the importance it is tempting to attach to those things is out of place in the context of the picture being painted. And that picture is of an early twentieth-century theoretical figuration of humanism that places man somewhere between the later “radical humanism” and anti-humanisms of the century. But pinning down the location is difficult. As Badiou explains, the “radical humanism” he associates with Sartre almost “raises to the absolute, or transforms into metaphysics, the programmatic dimension of revolutionary politics, especially in its communist version.” In the absence of a divine guarantor of human destiny, “Man is what man must invent. This is the content of what offers itself less as a personal morality than as a hypothesis of emancipation. The only duty of man is to make himself arise as a unique absolute” (The Century 170). By contrast, but still in response to the absence of God, a radical anti-humanism that emerges in the 1950s—and is perhaps most distinguished in the work of Foucault—insists that it is impossible to think without recognition of the void left by the disappearance of man. Yet, these two orientations “agree on the theme of Godless man as opening, possibility, programme of thought” (171).

For Debs, Man is certainly a project and a possibility. Only Socialism makes Man—as the opening onto real humanity—thinkable. Capitalism is inhumanity; it is the economic and social basis for the corrupt calculations of an emasculated human animal. But it is foolish to conflate the Debsean Man-as-project with the platitudes of a Socialist humanism that, for the last fifty years, has given theory a toothless social gospel, free
from continental abstractions, and thus made palatable to Anglo-Saxon empiricism, with its extreme intellectual dietary restrictions that rarely exceed the bland affirmation of human dignity. Such decidedly post-revolutionary contexts do not begin to match in immediacy or scope the revolutionary possibilities invoked by Debs’s considerations of human dignity, which would certainly come much closer to Sartre’s insistence (as Badiou frames it) that “if man does not have communism, integral equality, as his project, then he is an animal species of no more interest than ants or pigs” (The Century 175). Badiou believes that is the humanism we have today: “After Sartre and Foucault, a bad Darwin. With an ‘ethical’ touch of course, since if we’re dealing with a species what should be worried about, save for its survival? Ecology and bioethics will provide for our ‘correct’ development as pigs or ants” (175).

If we understand the radicalism of the Debsean New Man, it is easy to forge an agreement between his figuration and Badiou’s provocation that “a species is, above all, what can be domesticated”; a claim he takes even further by observing, “If I wished to scandalize, I would say that my conviction is that this domestication, which subtends the project-less humanism that is inflicted upon us, is already at work in the promotion, as spectacle and norm, of the victimized body” (175). We could even say that “what contemporary ‘democracies’ wish to impose upon the planet is an animal humanism. In it man only exists as worthy of pity. Man is a pitiable animal” (ibid.). Let us say, then, that the proper name Debs, which is understood here as the source of certain statements that arise out of a determinate political sequence, expresses the Idea of a Socialist Man-as-project in contradistinction to the “fundamental imperative” of our contemporary animal humanism, which is to “‘Live without Ideas’” (177).
To frame this distinction, I return once again to Lenin. As a faithful observer of the consequences of the Paris Commune, Lenin compels us to ask ourselves, “Which tendency is (intellectually) worse”: the naïve recitation of a catechism of past possibilities; or the dissolution of all possibilities and attendant projects and programs into a tepid pragmatism? Surely, both are worse, because neither provides the impetus to really think through our unique circumstances. Take, for example, Lenin who, like Debs, is often labeled an intellectual middleweight—though, unlike Debs, some apologists rank him above everyone else as a visionary and secular prophet. Fortunately for Lenin, his supposedly irredeemable penchant for terrorism makes his ideas less likely victims of humanist praise. This divisive relationship is particularly fortunate where Lenin’s understanding of the consequences of the Paris Commune is concerned. The popular story that Lenin danced in the snow once the October Revolution surpassed the duration of the Commune, speaks plainly to the relationship he saw between the two: the former was to be the simultaneous redemption of the potentials of the former, while overcoming its organizational limitations. Thus, failure would be a funny word to use to describe the Commune. Instead of merely commemorating the events of 1871, Lenin is still observing the subjective upsurge they initiated. Obviously the form of organizational discipline Lenin will extract from his commitment to the Commune’s memory—namely, the Party form—will be ultimately subordinated to the State. But it is easy to agree with Badiou, in the context of industrial unionism, when he claims, “Today, the Commune’s political visibility must be restored by a process of dis-incorporation: born of rupture with the Left, it must be extracted from the leftist hermeneutics that have overwhelmed it for so long” (Polemics 273).
Likewise, Debs’s name and its association with industrial unionism should be wrenched from the sovereign leftist historicisms that everywhere interpret both through the contradictory but equally insipid lenses of revolutionary nostalgia on the one hand, and failure with some modest (ethical) lessons on the other. This small step should help us move away from the word failure and toward an understanding of what it means for a political sequence to terminate. This sequence constituted a real rupture in U.S. labor history at the beginning of the twentieth century (though its roots go back further). Like every radical political sequence of the century, it eventually terminated once it ran up against its limits. There is little cause for nostalgia and even less for tactical condemnation—as though we can purify the sequence by pointing out its mistakes, making it clean enough to draw upon for rational support in our own political situation. The categories and proper names of such sequences are not exportable. They exist in their moments and are no respecters of external concepts driven by what is rationally possible or successful. If this approach is to bear fruit, the important thing is to understand the sequence and its tendencies in subjective terms—as understood “in interiority” by its subjects, without sacrificing what makes it unique by measuring it against foreign concepts. It is here that Debs is one of the proper names for a subjective upsurge and outpouring the theoretical dimensions of which are ours to observe. But to do that faithfully requires a commitment to interiority worthy of the unique political sequence its actors once experienced as creative subjects.
CHAPTER 3
INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM WILL NOT BE COUNTED: DANIEL DELEON

Democracy does not always express itself through the ballot. Democracy is most emphatic, when, at times, it refrains from registering its will at the polls, and silently, nay, ominously THINKS.

--Daniel DeLeon, 1905

Make no mistake: The organization of the working class must be both economic and political. The capitalist is organized upon both lines. You must attack him on both.

--Daniel DeLeon, 1896

There are few biographical sketches of Daniel DeLeon, and most are brief. None exceed in scope or depth L. Glen Seretan’s Daniel DeLeon: The Odyssey of an American Marxist. Seretan’s intellectual biography seeks, as no “summaries and surface analyses of his life and career” had then attempted, to “understand motivation and causation, and more generally, an interpretive scheme that renders comprehensible a very complex and enigmatic figure” despite an acute lack of primary sources to work with (2). Structurally, this leads to the juxtaposition of DeLeon’s ideas, attitudes and actions with the Legend of the Wandering Jew. Leaving aside the question of that metaphor’s value to Seretan’s interpretive schema, I can say that what is on offer in this chapter has little to do with rendering DeLeon “comprehensible.” Rather, my DeLeon is the proper name of a series of propositions, each of which is to be considered in relation to an industrial unionist political sequence in order to determine the viability of his inclusion as one of its theorists. I will demonstrate sufficient reason to claim that he is not. But this investigation will also reveal the way DeLeon cannot be excluded from the unique circulation of statements that comprise that sequence. In fact, it will be concluded that consideration of DeLeon’s subjective path is indispensible for recognizing the strategic character and attitude toward democracy of the actualized
form of the industrial unionist sequence, which finds its location and dates in the next chapter.

Unlike the epigraphs that informed our initial analysis of Debs in the previous chapter, the epigraphs above will be treated separately. Rather than have them inform a single statement at the beginning, this investigation will bring them together gradually. The method of gradually working through their distinct qualities is intended to emphasize the ways they operate within a strategic register that is itself distinct from, but closely related to, the general form of our sequence. As explained in the introduction, the frontloaded juxtaposition and contrast of Debs and DeLeon, before actually settling on the determination of the sequence they are supposed to inform, derives a small methodological kinship with Marx’s approach to the determination of the commodity-form. The approach to the epigraphs above is inspired along similar lines.

**DeLeon: An American Marxist**

DeLeon’s roots are reformist, but this hardly concerns us. Our DeLeon is a reader of Marx. He is the thinker who, disillusioned, once stumbled out of the academy in search of real politics and finally stumbled upon socialism and Marxism. Rather than draw out the “complexity” of his character and ideas, let’s reduce his history to its two most fundamental components: Intransigence and commitment. For the first of these we only need to mention his attitude toward his own accomplished academic career.

Seretan describes the origins of a discontented academic thus:

As the 1885-86 academic year ended, it appeared that Daniel DeLeon was well on his way to a successful academic career. However, the year 1886 in America saw a swelling tide of vibrant, mass-based, labor-oriented movements contesting local elections, and the city of New York witnessed one of the more serious of such campaigns, as… Henry George… sought to capture the mayor’s office on a broad reform platform. In response to this reform activity, DeLeon was beginning to perceive the contemplative life,
which he had so assiduously pursued, in a different light: as itself a type of isolation, a genteel cloister in a raw world where the abstract study of the political was but a pale surrogate for the real stuff of politics. (14)

Seretan’s origin story matches well with DeLeon’s conception of his personal *disincorporation* of thought and the capacity to think from the academic institutional apparatus. Seretan notes that as Deleon’s “identification with socialism emerged, his doubts about the academic community hardened into an implacable hostility, and when writing or lecturing for the movement he rarely missed an opportunity to assail academe and academicians” (17). Similarly, the “revolutionary youth of America” could not be found in the colleges and universities, but only among “America’s revolutionary class—the workingmen,” whose “real colleges and universities” consist of “the classconscious Trade Union and the Socialist Labor Party” (“America’s Universities” 15).

In contrast to the vanities of academic life, Marx’s historical materialism gave his system a temporal dimension that allowed DeLeon to logically incorporate himself into the collective movement of history. He believed his convictions reflected the law of human progress, which abhorred individualistic arrangements, and evolved into social structures where democracy prevails, where the view of all found expression, and where the social instinct approaches nearer and nearer to a realization of the maxim that the endeavors of man must have a social bearing, and that everything not done for the public—the entire public—is only transitory, and because selfish, reactionary. As a result, “The masses of the people have themselves stepped upon the stage of history, as stars, not ‘stupes’ in the performance…. The center of gravity now rests with the people… mastership resides with the mass” (*Socialism vs. Anarchism* 4).

DeLeon’s commitment to Marxist theory led to his joining the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) in 1890. The SLP was a direct descendant of the first international workers’
movement organized by Karl Max, who infamously directed the transfer of the movement’s headquarters from London to New York in 1872, in order to effectively drown the organization in America’s intellectual backwaters, rather than submit to its eventual domination by growing anarchist—and specifically Bakuninist—factionalism. Predictably, the ailing organization would all but disappear within a few years of the transfer, leading its largely German émigré membership to reconstitute itself soon after as the American-based Socialist Labor Party, which was later to become the American branch of the Second International. The SLP, then, seemed an authentic representative of the second, class-conscious phase of the proletarian community, and DeLeon’s talents and single-minded approach to party work precipitated his rapid rise within its ranks. From the date of DeLeon’s enrollment until his death in 1914, his fortunes and those of the Party were inextricably linked.

Like all radical political organizations of the period, the SLP was openly hostile toward the Samuel Gompers-run American Federation of Labor, with its emphasis on organizing skilled workers and its refusal to associate itself with political parties or party politics. But during the 1890s, the threat represented by the AFL in the economic sphere had, in DeLeon’s estimation, its political counterpart in Populism. The People’s Party “emerged out of the agrarian protest that shook the nation’s South and Great Plains in those years. Small, independent farmers and their communities were plagued by tight credit, high transportation charges, land monopoly, low commodity prices, and associated ills that were making life based on the ‘yeoman’ farmer ideal increasingly untenable” (Seretan, 108). DeLeon’s view of this petit-bourgeois movement was unambiguous:
The middle class finds itself ground between the upper millstone of the large capitalists and the nether millstone of the workingmen. The workingman wants to have higher wages;... he wants to have more of what he produces. But the middle class finds that in proportion as the workingmen demands this, on the one hand, the middle class is driven back, on the other, by the large capitalists whose tools of production enable them to produce so much more cheaply, and then there develops a special middle class economics. Hence...the present movement of the small farmers. ("Reply to Bryan and Cockran")

By 1901, the Populist menace had sharply declined, but a new political adversary had emerged. The Socialist Party of America (SPA) was composed partially of the Midwest-based Social Democratic Party, and partially of a dissident SLP faction that left the Party a couple years earlier. DeLeon felt, unequivocally, that the rival SPA represented an anti-revolutionary, reformist bastardization of Marxist theory and Socialist politics. His reasons were several. First, the party was “a genuine breath” of the AFL, its stand on the union question exposing it as an organization “that dances to the fiddle of the Labor-dividing pure and simpledon” of Gompers and his cohorts. The SPA “throws discipline to the dogs as ‘narrow,’ preaches different tenets in different latitudes and longitudes as ‘autonomy,’ fuses with capitalist parties as an evidence of its ‘tolerance’ and tolerates an irresponsibly privately owned press as proof of its ‘freedom’” (“Mission of the Trades Union” 3). Moreover, the bourgeois party of “socialism” had a marked proclivity for palliatives, for “getting something now,” which, in all likelihood, would eventually cause it to “be interred with the other rainbow-chasers, upon whose headstones is to be read the inscription, ‘I tried to get “something now” and got here.’” Consequently, and in conformity with the fate of all reform organizations, the SPA would fall prey to its own inadequacies and was therefore to be regarded as only “a transitory affair,” a negative example of the authentic socialist party (“Getting Something Now” 178).
It is debatable how much of DeLeon’s characteristic hyperbole is really justified here. In fact, he was willing to concede that the SPA’s tainted ideological admixture may contain a “solid sentiment” worthy of integrating into the SLP’s ranks. Nowhere was this addendum more prominent that in his treatment of Eugene V. Debs, who, as the SPA’s perennial presidential candidate and most visible, well-liked representative, was as inextricably linked in the public mind to his Party as DeLeon was to the SLP. DeLeon’s instinctive affinity for Debs was manifested even before Debs began calling himself a socialist. Though Debs’s perceived political naiveté and romanticism received pointed criticisms in DeLeon’s editorial commentary, “he was ordinarily spared the blasts directed at other non-SLP trade union leaders. While Debs might falter, he, unlike the others, seemed to be moving in the ‘right directions’ and was thus gently chided for errors that would, if committed by almost anyone else, have drawn a torrent of SLP abuse” (Seretan 121). DeLeon’s sanguine perception of Debs was fueled by the latter’s embrace of industrial unionist principle in his American Railway Union during the mid-nineties, as well as by the former’s hope that Debs’s pre-socialist conviction that trade unionism was not radical enough might pull him toward the political expression of those ideas in the form of the SLP. DeLeon’s hopes were partially repaid later in the decade, when a steadily radicalizing Debs began seriously considering the idea of establishing a cooperative commonwealth under the aegis of the Social Democracy of America (SDA). The colonization idea would even lead Debs, in 1897, to advise his supporters to vote for the SLP as “the only anti-capitalist party in the field,” and envisioned that in the national election of 1900 the SDA would espouse the same principles as the SLP,
adding that the SDA’s “political battles will, doubtless, be fought under the banner of that party” (qtd. in *The American Socialist Movement* 54).

Unfortunately for DeLeon and the SLP, the SDA’s split in 1898 over whether to emphasize the political or colonization aspects of their program led to Debs joining the political wing in founding the Socialist Democratic Party. DeLeon would go on the attack and relations with Debs were at best cool until the rivals put aside their differences, for a time, to help found the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905. The first IWW convention provided the opportunity for a public reconciliation—or, perhaps, a polite détente based on coinciding purposes—that would demonstrate the extent to which DeLeon still considered Debs a part of the “solid sediment” that was almost never beyond redemption. The honeymoon would end painfully, but not before the intellectual character of a common purpose was established under the (for DeLeon) somewhat precarious aegis of industrial unionism.

**The Party and Revolution**

Before I can deal with the specifics of DeLeon’s eventually strained détente with the IWW, I will turn to the elements of the common purpose he forged with Debs—one of the most avowedly political founders of that organization—as they manifest themselves in the party form and revolutionary demands. The latter, because it concerns the expression of the subjective commitments of a revolutionary collective, may strike some as a particularly odd topic to address through the singularity of a proper name that acts as the bearer of certain statements. This oddness is compounded by DeLeon’s unambiguous attitude toward individualism, which frequently manifested itself in his public condemnation of applause during his celebrated platform performances. DeLeon’s attitude toward celebrity and individualism matches up well
with Debs’s, who once famously insisted, “Too long have the workers of the world waited for some Moses to lead them out of bondage. I would not lead you out if I could; for if you could be led out, you could be led back again. I would have you make up your minds that there is nothing that you cannot do for yourselves.”¹

DeLeon was particularly hostile to those forms of individualism common amongst radicals and reformers. The prospect of personal aspirations threatening the socialist cause led to DeLeon’s insistence that “labor ‘celebrities’” were “more dangerous” than the capitalists, and to warn against “the man with a private grudge in the Labor or Socialist Movement. He will ever be ready to sacrifice the interests of the workers to the gratification of this private malice” (qtd. in Socialist Labor Party 33).

Another form of individualism DeLeon considered worthy of contempt was anarchism, which he perceived as celebrating the individual act over and above popular participation and collective action. Similarly, DeLeon attributed the anarchist spirit of individualism to many of his syndicalist opponents in the IWW. They were castigated for “their glorification of individual theft as expropriation by installments” and generally for “seeking to identify…individual crimes with the legitimate measures of mass warfare” (Industrial Unionism: Selected Editorials 29, 42). Even the much beloved Big Bill Haywood was maligned for being “Unresponsive to the sharp distinction between individual and collective, private and public, single and mass action, Haywoodism advocates by preachment and example acts of petty and private mischief, such as ‘sabotage,’ theft, and even worse” (48).

¹ From an address on Industrial Unionism delivered at Grand Central Palace, New York City, Dec. 18, 1905. Located in New York University’s Tamiment Library and Wagner Labor Archives.
DeLeon likely exceeds leaders like Debs in the extent to which he unapologetically harnesses the individualist menace to a deterministic conception of human historical progress. In a debate with an anarchist opponent, DeLeon attempts to demonstrate that Anarchism is not the latest, but, so far from being the latest, is the very oldest conception of a revolutionary movement. I shall show you that it is old, stale, and played out. I shall show you that it is the child of infant social organization. I shall show you that whatever manifestation of it we have today is purely atavistic revival of an old, old idea…. I shall show you how [previous] individualist outbreaks have accomplished wonderful revolutions in their time, but in days gone by. I shall show that, as humanity progresses, individual acts wane in strength, and I shall show why, to-day, they are simply flashes in the pan…. (Socialism versus Anarchism 8-9)

Similarly, DeLeon’s view of the party-form clearly drains the organization of any lingering Debsean sentiments about human rationality. As the cold, impassive embodiment of historical progress, each member is obliged to submit to a rationality that exceeds their private judgments. Of course such a rationality is reached through internal debates and is fitted to changing historical circumstances—the opportunities and events at hand—but such debates and calculations are driven by principles and policies set by the Party; once a line was adopted, all members without exception were expected to support it. According to DeLeon,

The modern revolutionist knows full well that man is not superior to principle, that principle is superior to man, but he does not fly off the handle of the maxim, and thus turn the maxim into absurdity. He firmly couples the maxim with this other that no principle is superior to the movement or organization that puts it and upholds it in the field…. He knows that in the revolution demanded by our age, Organization must be the incarnation of Principle…the revolutionist will not make a distinction between the Organization and the Principle…. [T]he modern revolutionist knows that in order to accomplish results or promote principle, there must be unity of action. He knows that, if we do not go in a body and hang together, we are bound to hang separate. Hence, you will ever see the revolutionist submit to the will of the majority; you will always see him readiest to obey; he recognizes that obedience is the badge of civilized man. The savage does not know the word. The word “obedience” does not exist in the vocabulary of any language until its people got beyond the stage of savagery. Hence,
also, you will never find the revolutionist putting himself above the organization. The opposite conduct is an unmistakable earmark of reformers. ("Reform or Revolution?"

Because the Party is the germ of the socialist republic, and its members entered voluntarily into association with the body, “party discipline” becomes one of its major categories. Such discipline consisted of observance of its rules, regulations and principles, as well as willingness to endure punishment in the form of censure or expulsion when your actions are deemed contrary to existing policy. The revolutionist and loyal Party member must ultimately recognize “that the present machinery and methods of production render impossible—and well it is they do—the individual freedom of man such as our savage ancestors knew the thing; that, to-day, the highest individual freedom must go hand in hand with collective freedom; and none such is possible without a central directing authority” (ibid.).

DeLeon’s antipathy toward reformers had a great deal to do with their seeming incapacity to maintain party discipline or a lasting, substantive solidarity of any kind. Instead, they largely devote their time and energies to the purpose of making the work of revolution incalculably more difficult. DeLeon’s loathing of his predicament in the U.S. perhaps leads him to too sanguine an evaluation of Europe’s circumstances when he asserts in 1896 that “to-day, when the apostle of Socialism goes before our people, he cannot do what his compeers in Europe do, take a pencil and draw upon the minds of his hearers the letters of science; no, he must first clutch a sponge…and wipe clean the pot-hooks that the charlatans have left there. Not until he has done that can he begin to preach and teach successfully” (ibid). Given the enormity of these difficulties and the fundamental differences between the attitudes and goals of revolutionists and reformers, tactical fusion was inconceivable to DeLeon. Then again, what may have
made such rapprochements inconceivable were his concurrent difficulties establishing a coherent definition of reform. As Seretan notes in the context of DeLeon’s support for the otherwise “contemptible” Victor Berger and his call for reforms to the U.S. Constitution, “The abstruseness of this rendering of doctrine on reform derived from the fact that DeLeon never firmly settled in his own mind what constituted that worthless, counterproductive quantity he stigmatized as reform and what did not, and his definitions and distinctions where wont to break down when he endeavored to apply them in discrete instances” (118).

Leaving aside the question of the consistency of DeLeon’s approach to general reformist tendencies, we can locate in his attitude toward the American Federation of Labor (AFL) a comparatively reliable critique. Do to that organization’s complete lack of class consciousness, “A.F. of L. unionism has become a fraud on the word union. Etymologically it is false—it disunites the working class; sociologically it is an obscene monstrosity…—clad with the trappings of labor, it is the bulwark of Capital” (“Editorial: Three S.P. Figures” 3). Structurally speaking, “A Trade Union that doesn’t recognize the class struggle” will, almost of necessity, “find itself arrayed against the workingmen of different trades, sometimes of their own trade, according to the temporary interests of their employer.” Without class consciousness, trade unions will internalize and defend the bourgeois precept “that competition, and not cooperation, is the source of human progress,” instead of recognizing that “competition amongst capitalists spells scabbing amongst workingmen” (Report to the Stuttgart International 12). Given the necessarily flawed foundations of unionism along craft lines, DeLeon will conclude that industrial unionism is the economic organizational form best suited for developing class
consciousness in working men at the point of production. It is that critical assumption that will propel a single-minded advocate of political socialism onto alien ground, and make him a key player in the staging of one of the most unique political projects in U.S. history.

**Unionism and Industrialism: Socialist Strategies**

At first glance, DeLeon's statement is clear enough: “Make no mistake: The organization of the working class must be both economic and political. The capitalist is organized upon both lines. You must attack him on both” (“Reform or Revolution?”). But this statement from 1896 only reveals its logic in the context of an emerging industrial unionism. Traditional trade unionism is antithetical to DeLeon's political socialism. The new (industry-wide) trade unionism, on the other hand, “has a supreme mission. That mission is nothing short of organizing by uniting, and uniting by organizing, the whole working class industrially…not merely those for whom there are jobs, accordingly, not only those who can pay dues” (“The Burning Question”). Because “union formation, with its possibility for good,” is “natural” and “instinctive,” it is “bound to appear, and reappear, and keep on reappearing, forever offering to the intelligent, serious and honest men in the labor or Socialist movement the opportunity to utilize that instinctive move by equipping it with the proper knowledge, the proper weapon, that shall save it from [the AFL reformist] quagmire so beloved, and develop into the new trades union so hated of capitalism” (ibid.). In other words, DeLeon considered union formation natural and necessary. But he was unambiguous about the need to politicize the formation. As he explains the relationship,

The increasing Socialist Labor Party vote alone would not quite give that temporary protection in the shop that such an increasing vote would afford if, in the shop also, the workers were intelligently organized, and honestly,
because intelligently, led.... Without organization in the shop, the capitalist could outrage at least individuals.... Shop organization alone, unbacked by that political force that threatens the capitalist class with extinction, the working class, being the overwhelming majority, leaves the workers wholly unprotected.... But the shop organization that combines in its warfare the annually recurring classconscious ballot can stem capitalist encroachment from day to day. ("What Means this Strike?")

Yet we can detect a certain degree of disingenuousness in the manner DeLeon posses the relationship between political and economic organizations. Specifically, the latter appears to be a staging area at the point of production for the infiltration of the former. As DeLeon recognizes, workers instinctively gathered into unions, making it necessary for a party of labor to reach them in the workplace where the unions offered a continuous forum for propaganda that could otherwise only be fully realized during periodic political campaigns. On the other hand, this species of educational infiltration was not an opportunity to seize power. Early in his political career, DeLeon had been frustrated in his attempt to “bore from within” the Knights of Labor. This failure would forever color his perception of those well-worn socialist strategies geared toward taking over existing, established labor organizations. It may have been essential to work within the economic organizations of the proletariat wherever they emerged, but such work could only go so far. The strategy of “boring from within” ultimately ignores the logic of institutions, which have their own conservative inertia—the means through which they preserve and reproduce their very logic within the field of existing social relations. Individual attitudes may differ within these organizations—we sometimes call this “agency”—but such internal differences can easily participate in and reinforce the very pervasive logic they supposedly confront as exceptions. Consequently, the only logical alternative was to build a new union federation in strict accordance with the
specifications of the “New Trade Unionism” and under the stern direction of the political movement. Speaking of his experiences with the Knights, in 1895 DeLeon observes that

the wreck that is left of the [Knights of Labor] is in itself good work, the work of reconstruction must follow, else that destruction is fruitless. The A. F. of L. has become the football of…political crooks. Its fate and that of the [Knights] is the fate that ever awaits pure and simpedom. The workers will no longer see-saw backwards and forwards from the Knights to the Federation, and back again. The two have now become a stench in the nostrils of the American proletariat. They have been the buffers of capitalism against which every move of progressive organization has spent its forces. Let us re-organize upon that higher plane that sooner or later the labor organizations are to take[,] the plane of identity of economical and political efforts, consolidated, inspired, guided and purified by the class consciousness of the wage-slave, who, having nothing to lose but his chains and a world to win, is ready to devote himself to nothing less than to his complete emancipation, in the unflagging and unterrified pursuit of which no chance can be given for the labor barnacle to fasten upon, sell him out and nullify his efforts. (“Editorial” 10)

This quote constitutes a turning point in DeLeon’s thinking about trade unionism. As far as he is concerned, class-conscious unionism was fundamentally incommensurable with those dominant institutions of organized labor. A decade later, this assessment would inform the embryonic construction of an organization that would eventually identify itself as the “Industrial Workers of the World.” In June of 1905, DeLeon was effusive in his characterization of the conference then being held in Chicago:

Today, a great portion of the working class of this country is turning its gaze in the direction of Chicago. In the Great Lake city of the West there opens today a convention of workingmen, which, judging from the manifesto calling it, is destined to mark an important change in the history of labor in this country. This convention promises to launch an economic organization of the working class on the lines of the conflicting interests of capital and labor, in direct contradistinction to the prevailing organization, that is based on the principle of the mutual interest of capital and labor. (“The Chicago Convention” 1)

At this point in his relationship with the emerging organization, DeLeon was insisting that “never before in the history of the American labor movement” were the prospects
for class-conscious unionism as “favorable and worthy of support” (ibid.). Even his ideas about using unions as outlets for acquiring SLP voters were tempered by his enthusiasm, which now led him to describe the role of the political movement as a sort of battering ram. “Socialist economics,” on the other hand, was seen as constructive when it “translates itself into the industrial organization of the working class” (Socialist Reconstruction 26). Consequently, “the economic arm” would become “the more important” line of attack, and to disagree with that assessment left one open to the charge of “pure and simple politicianism” (“The IWW Convention” 1). Reversing his previous formulation of the party-union nexus, he maintained that “at the stage reached by the labor movement in America, the political unity of the working class can only be the reflex of economic utility,” making “the political movement…absolutely the reflex of the economic organization” (Socialist Reconstruction 26). And that economic organization, the new source of working class solidarity, was to be structured exclusively along industrial lines.

Crucially, this feature of the organization was absolutely central to DeLeon’s theory. What he called “Industrialism” or “Industrial Unionism” is “banked upon the principle that, for the same reason that loyalty is demanded of every individual member towards all others in any craft organization, loyalty is likewise demanded of every individual craft towards all others in the industrial world” (Industrial Unionism: Selected Editorials 30). The “Form or Structure” of “Industrialism is a physical crystallization of the sociologic principle that the proletariat is ONE” (32). As the embodiment of class unity, Industrial Unionism is the “most potent weapon” that “Social Evolution places
within the grasp of the proletariat as the means for their emancipation” from the “capitalist despot” (ibid.).

With the inception of the IWW, craft unionism and pure-and-simple (AFL) unionism became interchangeable terms for DeLeon. He now breathlessly argued that, “Whatever the craft lines, the separate crafts are but fractions of the whole Proletariat. Consequently, however different the nature of the occupation, the work done, and the conditions of work, the useful labor of the land is ONE NATION, hence, must be organized as ONE UNION” (Industrial Unionism 32). This resulted from the belief that “the organized useful occupations of the land… [are] something vastly greater than the mere sum of all the individual Crafts put together” (46). The superiority of the industrial structure flowed from the very nature of the socio-economic system in which the labor movement was trying to operate. Huge, complex, concentrated industrial combines were the order of the day, their advancing technology increasingly diminishing differences between the skills of workers. Unions built around discrete crafts were no obstacle to the organizational imperatives of the ascendant corporate juggernaut. Only an organization equipped to respond to those modern industrial imperatives could still hold the field.

Despite the fact that DeLeon had embraced Debs’s industrial American Railway Union more than a decade before he began to speak passionately about “Industrialism,” he had never devoted serious theoretical reflection to the manner in which unions organized themselves. DeLeon was a devotee of Marxism. Capitalism would produce the conditions of its own overcoming. What he had previously referred to as the “New Trade Unionism” consisted of little more than a Marxist’s earnest attempt to create
radical unions that—as an organizational form—would remain dutifully subordinate to the broader Socialist Political Movement. But, by 1905, DeLeon’s Marxist understanding of the limits to capitalist production went beyond the political arena into the now pivotal consideration of how industrial structure could finally unite the economic and political fields. The previous disunity—with its propensity for "scabbery," which DeLeon never missed the opportunity to denounce—had proved intractable in the face of political propaganda. Now an organizational form with the ability to overcome the contradictions inherent to craft unionism had emerged from the forces of capitalist production.

Yet, as crucial as the industrial union form was to DeLeon’s theory, at no point did he consider it to be of value outside of its logical relation to politics. In 1906 he explains that industrial unionism “does not consist of the clubbing together of a few closely kindred trades into one industry” (“Industrialism”). Rather, it was either the organizational expression of class struggle at the point of production, or it was nothing at all. Despite its numerous advantages, DeLeon still saw the industrial union as a limited defensive weapon, just as its main strategy—the strike—was too caught up in the exigencies of “getting something now” to be of a directly revolutionary character. DeLeon explains that such “Steps in the right direction,” or “so-called ‘immediate demands,’”—the lifeblood of pure-and-simple reformism—“are among the most precarious. They are precarious because they are subject and prone to the lure of the ‘sop’ or the ‘palliative’ that the foes of labor’s redemption are ever ready to dangle before the eyes of the working class, and at which, aided by the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class, the unwary are apt to snap..and be hooked” (“The Burning Question”). Along those lines:
The strike against an employer, or even against the employing class, is not a method of revolution; it is a method of warfare within existing conditions. It is a tacit recognition of an existing social order. It is more, it is in the nature of a declaration of loyalty to the system in force. The workingman who goes out on strike does first of all leave in the hands of the capitalist the plant of production. By that mere fact he admits that the employer is the rightful owner, at least as much is implied. The revolutionary act of the working class—should that act become necessary by the attempt of the Capitalist Class of America to thwart the fiat of the ballot—will not be a strike. (“Still in Forming” 1)

However, a theoretical détente with such strategies was still necessary—necessary, that is, until the economic organization of the working class takes on more class-conscious, industrial form. For DeLeon, in the first years of the twentieth century, even if the working class “were to sweep the political field on a class-conscious…labor or Socialist ticket, they would find the capitalist able to throw the country into the chaos of a panic and to famine unless they, THE WORKINGMEN, WERE SO WELL ORGANIZED IN THE SHOPS THAT THEY COULD LAUGH AT ALL SHUT-DOWN ORDERS, AND CARRY ON PRODUCTION” (“The Burning Question”). Under the circumstances, the class-conscious economic organization was “essential in order to save the eventual and possible victory from bankruptcy, by enabling the working class to assume and conduct production the moment the guns of the public powers fall into its hands” (ibid.).

Such sentiments, when paired with his consistent insistence on the party as the necessary political “reflex” of the economic arm, did not endear DeLeon to the less politically-minded membership of the IWW. Three years after helping to found the organization, and despite committing tremendous time and energy writing on its behalf, DeLeon’s credentials were rejected at the 1908 convention. This outcome should hardly seem surprising. DeLeon was a party man; history would be written by that form.
Industrial unionism, on the other hand, would require recognition of an irreducible distance between party politics and organization at the point of production. Debs, for example, could keep these spheres separate and continue to see politics as mass pedagogy. It will become clear that DeLeon had something different in mind.

The manifesto genre: Vision, Division, Strategy

DeLeon was devoted to his understanding of the Marxist narrative of class struggle. Like most self-identified Marxists of his day, he was also a devotee of the manifesto genre. Every editorial served as a unique opportunity to breathe fire on his opponents. Those fiery salvos could then be gathered into discretely organized pamphlets for circulation amongst the curious and initiated. According to Teresa L. Ebert, “the manifesto is the genre of change-writing, of transformative textuality and the textuality of transformation” (553). This is a productive definition, but one could go a step further. The manifesto genre is also always concerned with the prescription of forms of life: specifically of community and subjectivity. Because these categories are prescriptive rather than descriptive, they are typically accompanied by simplifications, casual distinctions and, above all, forms of closure to difference and undecidability. Manifesto writing is a risky enterprise.

If Ebert’s characterization of the manifesto genre is correct, then Marx and Engels have undoubtedly provided a singularly important example of such writing. The Communist Manifesto’s subjects are the industrial working class and the strata of capitalist owners. We are aware of their roles and relationship to each other. The bourgeoisie’s agency is exploitive; the proletariat’s is revolutionary. The bourgeoisie revolutionized previous modes of production in the spirit of individualism; the proletariat will revolutionize capitalist relations of production under the aegis of egalitarian
collectivity. That’s the rough form. Described in that way, documents as disparate as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and Theodore Kaczynski’s *Industrial Society and its Future* (aka, “The Unabomber’s Manifesto”) both belong to a genre of change-writing concerned with the prescription of possible worlds and the subjectivities and collectivities that attend such transformations. The former simultaneously describes and constructs an American subject imbued with the ability to recognize propriety and oppression—indeed, to know “what must be done”—while the latter considers a revolutionary libertarian cadre meant to awaken the industrial-technological system’s oversocialized citizens. The themes of freedom, social contradictions, strategy, human behavior, and historical necessity pervade both. It is my claim that the *Communist Manifesto*’s chief strength, which deviates sharply from the other manifestos in question, would be the refusal of the reduction of subjective capacity to the behavior and desires of the human animal. Thematically this means that consciousness is subordinate to the convulsions and constructions affirmed by historical materialism. Let us not, then, anthropomorphize subjective capacities by relating them to the dispensations of human animals. In fact, as Slavoj Zizek astutely observes, we should probably even dispense with the characterization of the bourgeoisie as an exploitive subjectivity because that identity rests on a definite substance:

[F]or Marx[,] in the antagonism between capitalist and proletarians it is…the proletarian who is subject in capitalism. Marx is very precise; in the Hegelian way[,] subject means being deprived of substance. The capitalist can be the master but the capitalist is not subject in a strict sense. So, any vulgar parallel which makes it seem as if in capitalism the capitalist is the subject who objectivises, exploits, instrumentalises workers misses the point. Which is why I reproach these Judith Butler feminists who play this game, the game of making it seem as if becoming subject means controlling the situation or becoming active. No, for Marx becoming subject
means being reduced to zero, to utter nothingness, this is the only way the subject operates. (Zizek, “Conversation” 2)

Zizek’s reading of the Marxist subject is not as idiosyncratic as it may first appear. As Etienne Balibar explains, “the constitution of the world is not, for [Marx], the work of a subject, but a genesis of subjectivity (a form of determinate historical subjectivity) as part (and counterpart) of the social world of objectivity” (Balibar 67). For thinkers like DeLeon and Lenin, we can say that the party form represents the subjectivity of the class-conscious working class expressed as substance. By contrast, Sylvain Lazarus provides sufficient justification to characterize Marx as a thinker of the movement—of the insubstantial, more or less spontaneous subjectivity of the proletariat. In that mode, organization is less formal, and the linkage between the consciousness of the proletariat and the philosophical debates of workingman’s committees—which include some sympathetic intellectuals and petit-bourgeois like Marx and Engels—were subservient to the prospects of economic crisis: the real motor of organization. DeLeon, on the other hand, was trying to make revolution in a relative economic backwater; a situation that bears some resemblance to Lenin’s, who blamed the failure of the Paris Commune on a lack of discipline and, consequently, proceeded to dedicate the bulk of his theoretical labors to organizational questions.

Due to his period and geography, DeLeon was not a reader of Lenin. Though this fact is neither a strength nor a deficiency, it does have interesting consequences for describing his attitude toward strategy. Independently of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, DeLeon develops concepts of SLP organization that strongly mirror certain of Lenin’s specific concerns as articulated through the publication of What is to be Done? in 1902. For example, Lenin’s famously vitriolic attack on the “'new critical' tendency in
socialism”—whose call for “‘freedom of criticism’ means freedom for an opportunistic tendency in Social-Democracy, the freedom to convert Social-Democracy into a democratic reformist party, the freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into socialism” (56)—is remarkably contemporary with DeLeon’s own criticisms of the SPA, which (as mentioned above) supposedly “throws discipline to the dogs as ‘narrow,’ preaches different tenets in different latitudes and longitudes as ‘autonomy,’ fuses with capitalist parties as an evidence of its ‘tolerance’ and tolerates an irresponsibly privately owned press as proof of its ‘freedom’” (“Mission of the Trades Union” 3). Similarly, with regard to DeLeon’s statement about the organization of the working class along economic and political lines, we can observe his distance from a reductionist Economism and theoretical similarities with Lenin in the latter’s climactic description of “What must be done” to develop the political consciousness of the working class:

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside of the economic struggle, outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of the relationships between all the various classes and strata and the state and the government—the sphere of the interrelations between all the various classes. For that reason, the reply to the question: what must be done in order to bring political knowledge to the workers? cannot be merely the one which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those who are inclined towards Economism, usually content themselves with, i.e., “go among the workers.” To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social-Democrats must go among all classes of the population, must dispatch units of their army in all directions. (What is to be Done? 112-3)

It should be noted that, for Lenin, in his circumstances in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, economic organization means workers carrying on economic struggle within trade union organizations. Organization along industrial unionist lines is not a viable prospect when he explains that “every Social-Democratic worker should, as far
as possible, support and actively work inside these organizations” (138-9). We should note similarly important differences between Lenin’s situation and DeLeon’s when political education in Russia, under autocratic rule, must take on a more clandestine role than the American public pedagogy of the electoral arena. Regarding political education, and in response to the question “Is it sufficient to confine oneself to the propaganda of working class hostility to autocracy?” Lenin explains, “Of course not. It is not enough to explain to the workers that they are politically oppressed (no more than it was to explain to them that their interests were antagonistic to the interests of the employers). Advantage must be taken of every concrete example of this oppression for the purpose of agitation….” (95). But to effectively implement this strategy as a means to “the consolidation and development of a Social-Democratic trade union movement,” will require “A small, compact core, consisting of reliable, experienced and hardened workers, with responsible agents in principal districts and connected by all the rules of strict secrecy with the organizations of revolutionaries… [and] with the wide support of the masses and without an elaborate organization” (143). The importance of secrecy makes an elaborate organization with voting procedures and membership reports virtually impossible. Yet highlighting the differences between DeLeon’s and Lenin’s respective circumstances is not meant emphasize the resulting practical strategies. Rather, it is the theoretical elaboration of political education vis-à-vis economic organization that is of interest here.

Lenin believes that, “The consciousness of the masses of the workers cannot be genuine class consciousness, unless the workers learn to observe from concrete, and above all from topical, political facts and events, every other social class and all the
manifestations of the intellectual, ethical and political life of these classes….“ (104). This means that “a workingman must have a clear picture in his mind” of not only the economic, but also the social and political context out of which their exploitation emerges (105). These “universal political exposures,” which are an “essential and fundamental condition for training the masses in revolutionary activity” (ibid.), bear some resemblance to Fredric Jameson’s conception of cognitive mapping. Lenin is operating under the assumption that there are essentially two forms of consciousness or ideology: revolutionary consciousness, or its mystified, bourgeois alternative. Jameson’s cognitive mapping compares the process through which individuals are oriented within a cityscape to “the great Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as ‘the representation of the subject’s Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence’” (Postmodernism 51). Jameson claims that “this is exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole” (ibid.). Because Jameson describes such mapping as a methodological imperative, it may shed some light on Lenin’s claim that the “Social-Democrat’s ideal” is a “tribune of the people…able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place… [to] be able to group all these manifestations into a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation” (113). In other words, the Leninist ideal is a pedagogy capable of linking, through concrete examples, the economic, social and political in a single determination. The revolutionizing of consciousness along those lines is the necessary precondition for accurately
“interpreting” events in a manner that will allow their situation to be transformed. Without a “tribune” of properly trained interpreters and educators standing by, economic crisis cannot be turned against the economic conditions from which it arises; political volatility cannot be represented as a product of its own organizational logic; social relations cannot be linked to existing modes of production and exploitation. The professional revolutionary must consistently make connections before the revolutionary picture becomes clear.

Writing in the long wake of Lenin’s revolutionary ideals, Louis Althusser asserts that, “Philosophy represents the people’s class struggle in theory” (“Lenin” 8). He takes from Lenin what he calls “a ‘practice’ of philosophy, and the consciousness of the ruthless, primary fact that philosophy divides” (13). As Lenin recognizes, “Philosophy strictly speaking has no object, in the sense that science has an object” (34). Consequently, the principles of materialism and idealism cannot be proven, “because they cannot be the objects of a knowledge, meaning by that a knowledge comparable with that of science, which does prove the properties of its objects” (ibid.). But philosophy does contain hierarchies of categories. Installing certain categories in positions of power and others in subordinate positions becomes the key gesture of its practice. According to Althusser, “A seizure of power (or an installation in power) is political, it does not have an object, it has a stake, precisely the power, and an aim: the effect of power” (35). More to the point, Lenin’s definition of the essential character of philosophical practice is “as an intervention in the theoretical domain” which ultimately “consists of ‘drawing a dividing line’ inside the theoretical domain” between ideological and scientific ideas (37).
One major lesson for philosophy derived from Lenin’s “‘practice’ of philosophy” boils down to the claim that, “The philosophical fight over words is a part of the political fight” (Althusser, “Philosophy” 9). Lenin expresses this most forcefully in What is to be Done?: “‘Only short-sighted people can consider factional disputes and strict differentiation between shades of opinion inopportune or superfluous. The fate of Russian Social-Democracy for very many years to come may depend on the strengthening of one or the other ‘shade’” (Qtd. in ibid.). The short-sightedness in question describes an egregious unwillingness to see the very terms of a dispute as inseparable from the immediate organizational and ideological work they necessarily represent. A mode of expression is inseparable from what it describes as a goal or possibility. The capacities of that mode will determine what Lenin’s hypothetical “tribune of the people” is capable of intelligibly linking to the revolutionary struggle. In the adjoining theoretical domain, framing the philosophical fight over words as part of the political fight is to reiterate the claim that “philosophy represents the people’s class struggle in theory.” Given its lack of an object in the sense of a shared, progressive body of knowledge comparable to science, philosophy concerns itself with hierarchies of categories that it uses to seize power from other hierarchies with their own privileged terms.

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2 It should be recognized that the identity of this object has frequently been in dispute throughout the self-described sciences, and this dispute has arguably intensified in recent decades over the future of theoretical physics, which now often turns to speculative considerations about “membranes” and the existence of “parallel universes” without widely-accepted corresponding mathematical or empirical evidence. There are even some reasons to believe that existing modes of verification will be unable to prove or disprove some of the theories on offer, which raises the terrifying specter of an unscientific science closer in methods and outcomes to critical theory than to a worthwhile intellectual pursuit. One is reminded by such grave prospects of Nietzsche’s warning about looking long into the abyss…
For Althusser, the class struggle in theory results in the decisive division—an “epistemological break”—between the early, humanist, idealist, ideological Marx, and the scientific, materialist Marx of *Capital*. Though Althusser’s anti-humanist periodization contains much that is productive—particularly in its Cold War context—I am less sanguine about the analytical association of his work with a “structuralist Marxism” or any other disposable concept that fails to observe the singularity of his interpretive break. There is even a sense in which it is absurd to speak of an Althusserian “Marxism” at all. As Badiou explains:

I believe, to put it quite bluntly, that *Marxism doesn’t exist* .... Sylvain Lazarus has established that between Marx and Lenin there is rupture and foundation rather than continuity and development. Equally, there is rupture between Stalin and Lenin, and between Mao and Stalin. Althusser represents yet another attempt at rupture. And what complicates the picture even more is that all of these ruptures are themselves different in kind. All of which makes “Marxism” the (void) name of an absolutely inconsistent set, once it is referred back, as it must be, to the history of political singularities. (*Metapolitics* 58)

If, as Badiou and Lazarus would have you believe, Lenin’s true fidelity is to the Paris Commune, and not to Marx’s movement politics, what he calls his “Marxism” is certainly cognizant of rupture; which is also to say “Marxism,” as a theory and a practice, receives an irrefutable supplement in the spring of 1871. After that date, discipline becomes a primary category of its thinking, which supports the logic of a “tribune of the people” and the professional revolutionary, before its creative force is ultimately dissolved in the corrosive context of the establishment of the party state.

By contrast, DeLeon was unaware of any such supplementation. His history was almost as linear and teleological as the bourgeois ideology he critiqued. Almost, that is, until the emergence of industrial unionism, which reconstitutes the party as the necessary political “reflex” of the economic arm. This means, among other things, that
DeLeon developed the category of party discipline without reference to a rupture in Marxism, and in remarkably dissimilar circumstances to Lenin’s. Unfortunately, DeLeon’s category was incommensurable with the industrial unionist recognition of an irreducible distance between party politics and organization at the point of production. Whereas Lenin’s understanding of the political capacities of his situation could never be reconciled with the aims of those who would make the union the main vehicle for organizing workers, DeLeon, for a time, found the industrial union radical enough to carry the message he previously insisted only the party could coherently relate. But even as DeLeon refers to the industrial unionist form as the “most potent weapon” that “Social Evolution place[d] within the grasp of the proletariat as the means for their emancipation” from the “capitalist despot” (Industrial Unionism: Selected Editorials 32)—he is referring to the form not as a distinct rupture capable of fundamentally reorienting his progressive Marxist narrative; but as a new pedagogical opportunity at the economic level.

Put differently, for DeLeon, industrial unionism neither constitutes a new sequence in Marxism, nor forces him to significantly alter his hierarchy of categories. Instead of a new “installation” or “seizure” of power at the theoretical level, industrial unionism represents a new category among others, with only “trade unionism”—which already carries a largely discredited, bourgeois content—being displaced to make room. This theoretical reform is accompanied by a comparably judicious displacement at the level of organization. Far from calling for a new discipline distinct from the party, the inventive character of industrial unionism generally, and IWWism specifically, becomes another means for educating the American “tribune of the people,” or the Socialist Labor Party's
democratic vanguard: those properly trained interpreters and educators who are able to connect social relations to existing modes of production and exploitation, now equally at the ballot or on the shop floor.

**Democracy and the State: A Conclusion through Separation**

To return to a previous comparison, Debs did not believe in superimposing a rationality or meaning over new political ruptures. In fact, as we saw in the previous chapter, it was his earnest attempts to adapt his understanding of politics to such changes that often made him appear theoretically inept. Just as the Debsean new man—in stark contrast to its Stalinist version—is an entirely new figure that emerges from a shifting, volatile context, Debs’ recognition of industrial unionism, like his recognition of the Russian Revolution, is of something entirely new. It is up to his socialist narrative to observe the consequences of these subjective upsurges and to change accordingly. The competence of that narrative at capturing those consequences is an entirely different issue; the willingness to submit the intellectuality of that narrative to something distinct from itself is the gesture that make Debs’ name inseparable from the intellectuality of the industrial unionist sequence. Conversely, DeLeon’s opposite gesture renders his name obscure.

Because it represents the privileging of continuity over rupture in its narrative of industrial unionism, the proper name “DeLeon” does not give us access to what makes that sequence unique. But DeLeon’s understanding of the category of democracy makes him a uniquely important contributor to the logic of that sequence. More than Debs, DeLeon understood that, “Democracy does not always express itself through the ballot. Democracy is most emphatic, when, at times, it refrains from registering its will at the polls, and silently, nay, ominously THINKS” (Triumphant Democracy). This claim
reflects DeLeon’s belief that “no bunch of office holders will emancipate the proletariat” (Socialist Reconstruction 39-40). Like Debs, DeLeon saw electoral politics as an opportunity for agitation and education; unlike Debs, DeLeon rarely measured the success of that agitation through reference to the vote count. Therefore, DeLeon’s political “reflex” most closely informs the industrial unionist category of democracy where it recognizes the power of the state and its count, while simultaneously declaring democratic agitation as irreducibly distinct from and, thus, indifferent to the results of the count.

The affirmation of a necessary non-rapport between the political organization and the mechanisms of the state it uses as mediums of agitation, coupled with an indifference to the state-sanctified results of the processes those mechanisms preside over, is the foundation of DeLeon’s contribution to the industrial unionist concept of democracy. Yet, ironically, the site of DeLeon’s greatest contribution to the sequence is also the site of his own exclusion as one of its major theorists. This is the case because he believed democracy was only possible in relation to the party and, moreover, the SLP represented the indispensable determination—defined as an idea actualized in a process—of that relation. DeLeon would claim that, “In a country like ours, where, in keeping with full-fledged capitalism, the suffrage is universal, the inevitable political character of the labor movement is rendered all the more marked” (“1905: Socialist Reconstruction”). In other words:

The institution is so bred in the bones of the people that, notwithstanding it has become a gravel in the shoe of the capitalist, he, powerful though he is, dare not abolish it outright. Among such a people, chimerical is the idea of expecting to conduct a great movement, whose palpable aim is a Socialist revolution, to the slogan of “Abstinence from the ballot-box.” The proposition cannot choose but brand its supporters as freaks. (ibid.)
Given these assumptions it should come as no surprise that histories of the IWW, which are largely sympathetic to an anarcho-syndicalist identity for that organization, almost uniformly downplay the influence of DeLeon on its formation.\(^3\) Yet, in contradistinction to such convenient dismissals, it is now possible to return to the epigraphs that inaugurated this chapter—which, rather than have them inform a single statement at the beginning, have been treated separately—and bring them together in a way that will reveal something fundamental about industrial unionism. From the statement “Democracy does not always express itself through the ballot. Democracy is most emphatic, when, at times, it refrains from registering its will at the polls, and silently, nay, ominously THINKS”—let us take the relationship between democracy and thought to mean a democracy at a distance from the state that does not subordinate the creative capacities of the militant to the results of the ballot. From the statement “Make no mistake: The organization of the working class must be both economic and political. The capitalist is organized upon both lines. You must attack him on both”—let us recognize, as DeLeon does, the simultaneous necessity of organization at the point of production and an extra- or non-economic public pedagogy. Taken together, these concerns suggest that “democracy and discipline have less to do with a relation to the state and the party than a mode of solidarity that organizes itself at the point of production and agitates at all levels of social relations.”

If the statement above is reminiscent of Lenin’s answer to the question, “what is to be done?” its intervention is distinctly American and inseparable from industrial unionism as the organizational basis of a unique subjective upsurge. As for the

\(^3\) See, e.g., Rosemont and Thompson.
character of the solidarity it invokes, Debs provides a useful supplement: “Solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic elements, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results.” Put bluntly, Debs trumps DeLeon here because the latter associates such cold and impassive foundations to the party-form, which is entirely divergent from the real character of the sequence in question. DeLeon is a Bolshevik in the wrong country, organizing for the wrong political mode. However, the lesson of the distinction being formed here, which will gain greater force in the next chapter, is that the determination of a sequences is not self-sufficient but, rather, everywhere haunted by the traces of what it is not—that which it is defined against for the purpose of affirming the unique character of its coordinates. Ultimately, I unapologetically take there to be more and less productive ways to describe industrial unionism as a sequential mode of politics. Because many of his guiding categories are alien to what characterizes that sequence, DeLeon’s intervention is simply less inventive and more derivative than Debs’.

On that point, I return to Seretan’s climactic description of DeLeon:

It is difficult not to admire the selfless, courageous dedication, the steadfast commitment, the indomitability of this man who voluntarily made the cause of the world’s dispossessed his own and who, unlike so many of his contemporaries on the left who scorned him, persevered in the face of personal hardship and continual disappointment to the end of his life, never recanting, never admitting defeat. (218)

In response to this emotive reminiscence, I can only insist that we do not honor DeLeon’s memory through sentimental apologias, but only through investigations—ones as cold and impassive as the solidarities they describe. The next chapter attempts just
such an investigation with the goal of revealing the characteristics of the mode of solidarity referred to in the statement we’ve derived from DeLeon. Nothing else about him will be of continuing interest.
CHAPTER 4
THE FORMATION OF ONE BIG UNION

Instead of the conservative motto, “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work,” we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, “Abolition of the wage system.”
--From the Preamble to the IWW Constitution

Industrial Unionism is Socialism with its working clothes on.
--Bill Haywood

In most histories of the Industrial Workers of the World, industrial unionism has been sublated within IWWism, its supposed organizational realization. But Eugene Debs’ American Railway Union represented a more spontaneous organizational realization of the industrialist ideal. In the case of the ARU, the form the union assumed resulted from the exigencies of its moment rather than a formal decision-making process. Put simply, the ARU emerged in response to the failures of existing trade union activism, with its pronounced segregation according to specialization, which made scabbing not only feasible but virtually inevitable. By contrast, the IWW emerged in response to a long history of trade union capitulation to the tyranny of big industrialists, for whom “divide and conquer” became the primary recipe for maintaining power. Less spontaneous by far, IWWism is the carefully devised theoretical result of a series of furious debates based on the tactical-ideological ideals of organizations like the Western Federation of the Miners and the Socialist Labor Party. That fact certainly entitles the IWW to a privileged position in the determination of industrial unionism as a sequential politics, but does not authorize the sublation of the industrial unionist concept within its capacious authority.

1 See, e.g., Renshaw, Dubofsky, Rosemont, Thompson, Carlson, and Lynd.

2 See Salvatore for a comprehensive account.
Despite the important distinction between the industrial unionist ideal and its organizational consummation, the dates of the sequence, which will be established in this chapter’s concluding section, substantially overlap with the formation and dissolution of the IWW. Fred Thompson’s (perhaps too) highly touted account of that formation, registers his ambivalence—speaking as a torch-bearing second generation Wobbly—about its earliest agreements and alliances from the 1905 convention in Chicago:

With great oratory and repeated assurances by Debs and De Leon that there was common grounds for all socialists to meet, they launched the Industrial Workers of the World, with little more actual backing than at that November conference of six men…. There would be no blindness to the difficulties ahead; it was started because there was obvious need for a union of, by, and for the working class, and hopes that it might so conduct its affairs that locals and internationals would join, and great masses of unorganized workers become organized through its efforts. (21)

But that narrative of the inception doesn’t sit particularly well with a “true” Wobbly activist like Thompson, who is no great fan of the socialist leadership represented by the large, competing personalities of Debs and DeLeon. For Thompson, the first few years of the nascent organization were more like a stillbirth than a healthy delivery. Instead of doctrinal solidarity, there was factionalism and heated debate. Instead of a coherent identity, there were ideologically incompatible positions locked in an uneasy cease fire. It wasn’t until the 1908 convention that the IWW assumed a character that, for Thompson, was the equal of its ideals:

In one sense this is the launching of the IWW. It is from here on that it exists as an organization with its own distinctive character. The Brewery workers were not in it or likely to be; the Sherman tendency was out; the Western Federation was gone, and now [so were] the De Leon forces that had alienated so many unionists. The five thousand members it had after this 1908 convention were no longer divergent groups trying to live together but a compact organization of men attached to the IWW rather than to something else, largely rebels who had been organized by the new union,
but who had long experience in the struggle with the employer, and many of whom were very familiar with all the fine points that radicals argue about. This was the IWW that was to add something new to the American labor movement. (40)

As incommensurable as Thompson’s two formation narratives appear they’re both describing an organization motivated by the principles of workers’ autonomy from the trade unions, the ballots, and the state for which trade unionism and elections act as depoliticized handmaidens (Rosemont 24). For the purpose of this investigation, the question of when the IWW’s membership became sufficiently homogenous to justify calling it a union is beside the point. To gain access to the intellectuality of IWW industrial unionism will require an examination of the founding documents that emerged from the 1905 convention. Despite Thompson’s contention, and regardless of existing ideological disparities, those documents already “add something new” to the theoretical foundations of labor organizing in the United States. An example of that claim can be found in Melvyn Dubofsky’s account of the 1905 convention, which clearly links the idea of an inception to the formal adoption of principles—a move that puts him at odds with the ideological purists:

For three days this motley assortment of radicals thrashed out their differences, at last agreeing upon eleven principles for reforming the labor movement. Of these the following were the most significant: (1) creation of a general industrial union embracing all industries; (2) the new organization to be founded on recognition of class struggle and administered on the basis of an irrepressible conflict between capital and labor; (3) all power to reside in the collective membership; (4) universal free transfer of union cards; and (5) a call for a general convention to form a national labor organization in accordance with the conference’s basic principles. (Dubofsky 78)

As we will see below, the importance of the fourth principle cannot be overstated when contrasted with the central principle of Gompers and the AFL, whose statement is “For your politics, look no further than your union card.” The decision to emphasize
seemingly mundane principles of that kind is crucial. In Dubofsky’s formation narrative, whatever we can say about the early IWW’s theoretical underpinnings rests in the adoption of its principles, not in the convictions or lack thereof of its members. In the context of determining a sequence based on certain principles, Dubofsky’s approach trumps Thompson’s for two reasons. First, it does not rely on the impractical and intellectually suspect presumption of ideological purity, which can never be the basis of something as intricate and conflict-ridden as political novelty. Second, it follows the documents and principles rather than separating the authentic actors from the intellectual grounding of their actions. In order to determine what was theoretically significant about industrial unionism, I claim we must identify the major organizational expression of those ideas in IWWism. Chapters two and three actively sought to replicate a descent from appearances—IWWism as the arbiter of industrial unionism specifically, and radical unionism more generally—to a counterintuitive level that locates the logic of that appearance in the concepts of the supposed bit players, Debs and DeLeon respectively. As I explained in the introduction, having lent the name Debs the theoretical depth and significance in relation to industrial unionism it has long deserved, then revealing the significance of DeLeon’s understanding of democracy to the conception pursued under IWWism, the current chapter returns to a starting place—the regime of appearances that anoint IWWism ideological arbiter of industrial unionism—only now the place has been irrevocably altered by the movement of the analysis.

Let’s say the locations of the IWW, which matches industrial unionism generally, is the convention hall and picket line. Our slogans, documents, and the statements derived from both emerge from the creative interactions centered on those places of
Likewise, the politics of both IWWism and industrial unionism are effectively indistinguishable in their conception of trade unionism, electoral politics, and the capitalist-parliamentary State. After considering the landmark documents of the emerging IWW, considering the relationship between the manifesto as a genre and the concept of an event, then thoroughly examining the ideological foundation of collectivist anarchism, this chapter uses the figure of Bill Haywood as a means to prescribe an immutable non-rapport between IWW industrial unionism and anarchism. Despite what industrial unionism shares with anarchism and, to a far greater extent, revolutionary syndicalism, it is neither anarchist nor syndicalist. Any attempt to reduce or relate the major organizational expression of industrial unionism to those political theories is, in effect, an intellectually tame attempt to stave off the more difficult activity of recognizing the singularity of that expression. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to the assignation of specific dates to that form for the purpose of establishing what made its duration unique.

**The Founding Documents**

The significance of a founding document here rests in its capacity to constitute the formal inscription of an emerging solidarity. The solidarity in question is the One Big Union ideal, which informed the drafting of a manifesto in January of 1905. According to the manifesto spearheaded by representatives of the Western Federation of Miners that winter in Chicago, “Social relations and groupings only reflect mechanical and industrial conditions. The great facts of present industry are the displacement of human skill by machines and the increase of capitalist power through concentration in the possession
of the tools with which wealth is produced and distributed” (*Minutes*).³ Due to the character of those “great facts,” divisions between trades and capitalists were rapidly disappearing, and with them so was the efficiency of organizing along trade lines. Though many of the sentiments expressed in this document would be repeated in the Constitution of the IWW in June, the emphasis on mechanical development would be less central to the latter. For example, you would search in vain for an equivalent expression of the opinion that, “As human beings and human skill are displaced by mechanical progress, the capitalists need use the workers only during that brief period when muscles and nerves respond most intensely” (*Minutes*). Whatever the merits of this eventual omission, the manifesto’s next claim suggests the extent to which new mechanical instruments of production must be met with new modes of class solidarity “Laborers are no longer classified by differences in trade skill, but the employer assigns them according to the machines to which they are attached” (*Minutes*). In stark contrast to the division of the working class along ever more mechanistic lines, the capitalists “carefully adjust themselves to the new conditions” by strategically presenting a “united front in their war upon labor” (*Minutes*).

Having hinted at the radicalism of the manifesto’s solution to growing class divisions, that radicalism becomes clear with the anti-reformist declaration that, “This worn-out and corrupt system offers no promise of improvement and adaptation…. This system offers only a perpetual struggle for slight relief within wage slavery” (*Minutes*).

The organizational solution to the divide and conquer strategy was a “universal working

³ As Patrick Renshaw notes, “The federal government raid on IWW headquarters in September 1917 was a serious blow not just to the IWW but to historians. All the IWW’s documents were seized, held during the Chicago trial, and then burned in 1923” (239). Fortunately, the IWW, in conjunction with the invaluable Marxist Internet Archive, has made most of its extant documents available through its Internet archive.
class movement” organized into “one great industrial union embracing all industries, providing for craft autonomy locally, industrial autonomy internationally, and working class unity generally.” This union “must be founded on the class struggle” and “It should be established as the economic organization of the working class, without affiliation with any political party. All power should rest in a collective membership” (ibid.).

Unsurprisingly, the first sentence of the preamble to the constitution adopted in the First Convention of the IWW in Chicago that July, states, “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common” (Constitution). Consequently, “Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system” (ibid.). For such a struggle to have any hope of success required “an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all” (ibid.). The motto of this revolutionary union would be Marx’s “Abolition of the wage system,”” in sharp distinction to the prevailing “‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work,’” which was the milquetoast proclamation of the trade union wage slave (ibid.). What was at stake in that distinction is clearly presented in the preamble’s final paragraph:

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the every-day struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old. (ibid.)

The “historic mission” in question is a simplified rephrasing of Marx’s fuller claim about the subjectivity of the proletariat, which is the subjectivity of those who have been reduced to zero by the most sophisticated form of the exploitation of labor capacity ever
imagined. The reference to the “working class” as opposed to the “proletariat” is consistent with the reality that not all laborers indicated in the claim belong to an industrial working class. Many, in fact, make their living migrating in boxcars across the vast expanses of the American Midwest, accepting seasonal positions working overlarge fields for small change. The Wobbly hobo was no less a member of the “army of production” than a factory worker in the ascendant Rust Belt. Following the inevitable—but vaguely described—period in which capitalist relations of production are “overthrown,” the new situation will require hands in the fields every bit as much as in the factories. But if (I think wisely) the Preamble does not even hint at what it means to conquer capitalism, an industrial organization is the socio-economic substantiation of a system where an “an injury to one” really becomes “an injury to all” persons.

Though the Preamble, at least from the standpoint of its goals and methods, is rightfully considered the most interesting portion of the Constitution—which covers everything from the annual distribution of credential forms to the price of gavels imprinted with the union label—the document that takes as its heading “Labor is entitled to all it produces” contains several other notable features that help to provide a sense of its broad ideology. First, the section entitled “DUTIES OF GENERAL PRESIDENT” makes palpable the extent to which the IWW was a big union, and not an anarcho-syndicalist cell sustained more by the collective ideal of decentralization and the distrust of authority than a set of formalized procedures. As the Constitution explains, “All organizers shall at all times work under the instructions of the General President” (Constitution). For the anarchist who is still clinging to a romanticized notion of organization, the sixth article on “CONVENTION” should prove decisive in its
unapologetic drabness: “There must be a Universal Label for the entire organization. All unions, departments and individual members must procure supplies, such as membership books, official buttons, labels, badges and stamps from the General Secretary-Treasurer, all of which shall be of uniform design” (ibid.). In other words, convention participants dusted off their own union’s constitutional boilerplate for determining the chain of command and basic procedures within the organization. To the immense credit of the authors' of the Constitution, the IWW was conceived as exactly what it said it was: a big union. It was a capacity for bigness—its organizational and ideological capaciousness—that would set it apart from the narrow interests that fueled trade unionism, not quixotic notions about the evils of authority.

Even if much of the content was unquestionably prosaic, the Constitution included crucial innovations. The first example is in the next section of its sixth article, which states, “There shall be a free interchange of cards between all organizations subordinate to the INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD and any Local Union, or International Industrial Union, or Industrial Department shall accept, in lieu of initiation fee, the paid up membership card of any recognized labor union or organization” (Constitution). The universal free transfer of union cards was a direct challenge to Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor’s “trade unionism, pure and simple” philosophy. Their philosophy—which certainly did nothing to keep the AFL from boasting the largest membership of any union for the first half of the twentieth century—made it feasible, if not necessary, to ignore the privations of unskilled workers while concentrating “on the elites of the working class—skilled craftsmen like carpenters, plumbers, and butchers” (Carlson 80). Keeping wages high meant keeping
memberships low by “using high initiation fees and long apprenticeships as barriers to competition. Many AFL affiliates, moreover, barred black workers and foreigners from their rolls,” which “served to create a huge unorganized underclass” that became a rich source of potential strikebreakers (ibid.). The Constitution’s answer to those circumstances was simple. In article one, section one of its by-laws, the Constitution states, “No workingman or woman shall be excluded from membership in local unions because of creed or color” (Constitution). Race, sex, and country of origin could not constitute a barrier to the creation of One Big Union.

The intensity of the Constitution’s break with AFL trade unionism places it in the order of a subjective upsurge. There should be no ambiguity here: The AFL is founded on and organizes its efforts around the essential differences between male and female, white and black, citizen and foreigner, skilled and unskilled, and, perhaps above all, the interests of a trade and what holds no interest to a trade. Those distinctions give us conservative trade unionism in a nutshell. To complete the picture, those distinctions rest comfortably on the assumption that the capitalist-parliamentarian State is logical and necessary; one’s efforts should be directed at requesting things from the State. Though the AFL publicly disavows the notion that they are political, because their interests are directly and expressly linked with the composition of the State, those interests are similarly concerned with electoral outcomes.

In every major respect—both in its principles and how they were applied—the IWW could not be more diametrically opposed to its primary organizational enemy. The revolutionary subjectivity that declares “abolish the wage system,” then ties that abolition to organization along industrial lines, only holds to distinctions based on the
interests of two competing classes, the workers and the owners, and sees the State as unequivocally opposed to the interests of the former. The statement “abolish the wage system” becomes the inaugural declaration of a rare and theoretically productive sequence; a sequence that has as its subjectivity those actors who insist they have nothing in common with trade unionism; who contrast the dispensations of the State with their independence as a New Man devoid of racial, sexual, and national distinctions; who oppose to electoral politics (DeLeon’s) statement “Democracy and discipline have less to do with a relation to the State and the party than a mode of solidarity that organizes itself at the point of production and agitates at all levels of social relations.” This is what is called “industrial unionism.”

A Textual Event?

Recalling Teresa L. Ebert’s productive definition, “the manifesto is the genre of change-writing, of transformative textuality and the textuality of transformation” (553). As I explained in the third chapter, the manifesto genre is also always concerned with the prescription of forms of life—specifically of community and subjectivity. Those categories are meant to be prescriptions of what is possible or necessary, rather than judicious descriptions, making them often appear prohibitively reductive or narrow-minded. Furious polemical closures to nuance and difference are always risking the charge of absurdity in a world where complicated social interactions generally stimulate ambivalence.

Yet Ebert would like to see the advocates of a so-called “postmodern” theoretical current that is staunchly opposed to polemical closure as the real risk takers. After all, she contends, there is too much to be done for us to do nothing in the name of an ethical de-politicization that never goes beyond respecting the otherness of the other.
This is a familiar—and, I would argue, a largely anachronistic and desiccated—line of argumentation that we may supplement with Badiou’s description of the logic of resistance embodied in the late Georges Canguilhem, an influential philosopher and former participant in the French Resistance:

First it separates itself from the “by social necessity” that would dissolve choice into collective representations to be grasped through historical sociology. And second it separates itself from a pure moral imperative that would dissolve choice into doctrinal dispositions external to the situation concerned. In fact, choice has its intelligibility neither in the objective collective nor in a subjectivity of opinion. Its intelligibility is internal, in the sequential process of action, just as an axiom is intelligible only through the application of the theory that it supports. (Metapolitics 6-7)

Badiou goes on to insist that “All resistance is a rupture with what is,” and that rupture is always a rupture in thought (7). The philosopher of resistance is one who thinks the real of the situation and, consequently, is prepared to risk that there are risks (8). Like Ebert, Badiou certainly opposes this thinking the real of the situation to a contemporary sophistry that would rather point out the commonsensical complexity of any possible situation, while affirming ethical imperatives that exceed the very situations to which they claim to be sensitive responses. But what is “the situation” for Ebert? Her procedure in “Manifesto as Theory and Theory as Material Force: Toward a Red Polemic,” roughly consists of the following: Point out the contradictions inherent in the representative postmodern criticisms of the manifesto genre (the gesture of claiming, “No, you postmodernists are the ones who aren’t examining your own assumptions!”); use Foucault as an exemplar of postmodern anti-polemical de-politicization, then insist that he calls such critique unethical after installing himself as a “new Master of hegemonic knowledges”; then contrast Foucault’s anti-critical position with his call for permanent critique in his late article, “What is Enlightenment?” (559); claim that Marx’s
purpose in the first volume of Capital is “not simply a hermeneutic reading of labor or capital or class. Rather, he uses the polemic to produce the root knowledges needed for social change” (560); and, finally, end with a call for “red polemic,” which is the “root pedagogy of revolutionary collectivity” and the “condition of praxis for the ‘transcendence of private property’” (561).

Ebert’s description of Foucault’s inconsistent appraisal of critique rests on a symptomatic misunderstanding. We do not have to defend Foucault’s political assumptions in order to point out that we can see them as typically operating within a sort of permanent critique—even of critique itself—that attempts everywhere to comprehend the situation before bringing forth an ethical injunction. This radicalization of Enlightenment critique and valorization of a space for thought also explains his being in virtual political lockstep with the unfortunate Nouveaux Philosophes during much of the seventies and early eighties. One can reasonably hope that with the fall of Communism Foucault would have reevaluated the political situation and chosen better company. Ironically given Ebert’s tired insistence on his postermodernity, Foucault’s wise recognition of the situatedness of political action makes him relevant to a description of a manifesto genre that is not reducible to a particular content that can be handily divorced from its situation.

But things get somewhat worse for Ebert when she eventually calls for a revolutionary praxis that would transcend private property—which more or less confirms her theoretical subordination of thought to practical action. Of course, if we know what that action must be—apparently “transcending” private property—there is no problem

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4 For the details of this unfortunate relationship, see David Macey’s incisive The Lives of Michele Foucault: A Biography. New York: Pantheon, 1993.
here. But there is a problem because such declarations aren’t terribly helpful. In fact, if we allow that prescribing possible subjectivities and collectivities are central aims for manifesto writing, Ebert’s problem is that she is superimposing classical categories onto her conception of socio-political truth. Foucault, on the other hand, represents for Badiou (to recall the opposition posed in the first chapter) the exemplary theorist of a rigorous intellectuality devoid of truth. This is the case because truth, as subjective capacity, is frequently no respecter of the mere facts of the situation—of the encyclopedia of knowledges that provides access to the complexity and presented finitude of the situation. As far as Badiou is concerned, if “you don’t have an immanent doctrine of what in the situation exceeds the situation, you can’t be concerned about answering the question of how we pass from one system to another” (qtd. in Hallward 378). Strange as it may appear, the consideration of what exceeds a situation according to its own logic is a theoretical meeting place for both Ebert and Foucault. Because Ebert is primarily concerned with dusting off and circulating the positive content of more or less classical Marxist categories, she is, in effect, every bit as opposed to political rupture—in this case, a rupture from her ferociously guarded “red polemic” ideal. Consequently, it is difficult to believe Ebert really sees any need for writing new manifestos. We should probably just pay closer attention to the ones that already got it right, despite the unique circumstances of their inscription.

Of course those unique circumstances should be the primary consideration. Manifestos generally herald historical junctures, present or to come, out of which new creative subjectivities may emerge in the manner of Badiou’s event. Badiou, however, is by no means the only modern philosopher of events. Hegel’s dialectic of quantity and
quality is preoccupied with something very similar. For Hegel, as soon as we begin to recognize a relation between discrete events and we begin to describe a number of related events in a manner that suggests they cannot be considered independently of one another, we can say this numerical concentration is the basis of something new. This is what Hegel calls “quantity.” And when, for example, American born union activists across the U.S. begin deciding (in some cases independently of one another) that their interests as workers are inextricably linked with the treatment of foreign workers, these different events, different people, different groups, may now be said to more or less represent a certain “quality.” Although at this point we may not have anything worth calling a social movement, we do have a certain number of people or groups organizing around or being aroused by a certain issue, making these events of a certain kind or “quality.” For Hegel, despite the formal conception that separates “quality” and “quantity” as absolutely distinct concepts, when we recognize their relation in a series of events, and when we have a number of those relations, that is in itself something new. Then, after a certain point, after a certain number of events around the issue, something significant can be said to have emerged. This point is what Hegel calls “measure,” the point where quantities of qualities build up to make a new quality and there is finally a mutual recognition or substantial group formation.5

Despite terminological differences, there is some overlap between the Hegelian measure and the Badiouean event. In both cases, the evental character of the event means that it is singular. For Badiou, however, its truth only consists in its subjects’ declarations, so there can be no law or general logic of such a truth. It must also be

available to all because its subject cannot preexist his own declaration of the event (in the manner, for example, of the Fascist New Man, who is restored through revolution).

But the subjective truth of the event is not a brief “illumination”; truth, as a concept, describes an active process. Without fidelity to that process, there is no subjective truth and, thus, no subject (Badiou, *Saint Paul* 15). Yet arguably the least Hegelian aspect of Badiou’s event is its relationship to the State, to which it must remain indifferent. The State, in this case, corresponds with “people’s consciousness: the apparatus of opinion” (ibid.). Badiou believes “One must not argue about opinions…. A truth is a concentrated and serious procedure, which must never enter into competition with established opinion” (ibid.).

If Badiou’s event is, according to his own definition, philosophical, and this investigation is, according to its own definition, pursuing something distinct from Badiou’s concept of philosophy, what we are observing in the case of the IWW’s Constitution, then, may be called a textual event in the sense that we do not ask for nor require verification from anything more authentic than its textual remnants—those written proclamations of something remarkable having occurred, which then labor to remain consistent with the consequences of that occurrence. This analogy makes sense when we understand that the world we are describing through its documents is now gone forever. Our only access is textual and there is no logical reason to suppose that “really being there” would produce a more authentic understanding of what was being said, as though “there” was a place devoid of mediation, despite the complex, contradictory and rapidly-evolving context “there” describes.
Like Badiou’s event, a textual event describes the formation of a subjectivity, constitutes a rupture within its situation, and is no respecter of cultural particulars because it represents, in a sense, a new cultural arrangement, which is referred to as a “discipline” in the next chapter. But the next three sections of this chapter will be committed to the task of distancing the general character and ideals of the *Constitution* from anarchism’s consistently bland theoretical auspices. This task is necessary for three reasons. First, there is little historical justification for the relation, despite recent attempts at appropriation.⁶ Second, making IWWism an instance of anarchist experimentation deprives it of its capacity to represent the primary organizational form of a singular, sequential politics. And third, the theoretical foundations of its sequential politics, declared through its *Constitution*, will sacrifice those inventive qualities that make it worth close, patient analysis, to a theoretical tendency that deserves much less attention.

Insulated as it is with banalities about authority and freedom, anarchist theory rarely provides more than solemn, virtuous descriptions of how ossified organizations and governments are necessarily deleterious to social solidarity; sentiments that could have as easily been voiced by Ronald Reagan as by any political radical. Simon Critchley is one of the very few popular self-described philosophers to associate his political philosophy with this largely anti-philosophical tendency. But Critchley proves that he is not too drunk with intellectual experimentation to clearly articulate commonsensical commonplaces about those who are. Speaking of Badiou’s supposed

⁶ See, e.g., Lynd and Grubacic.
penchant “for dictatorship”—which is largely freed from any pesky context in his righteous characterization—Critchley explains:

My problem with Badiou’s politics is that behind his talk of discipline, even if it is no longer party discipline, there is an affectionate and, to my mind, misguided nostalgia for revolutionary violence. Seductive as it is, I find that Badiou’s conception of politics suffers from a heroism of the decision, a propaganda of the violent deed in all its deluded romance. It seems to me that in a world governed by the violence of military neoliberalism, resistance must not take the form of a counter-violence—such is the neo-Leninist logic of al-Qaeda—but should be devoted to the prosecution and cultivation of peace. But peace is not passivity or a state of rest. It is a process, an activity, a hugely difficult practice. (1933)

It is more than a little difficult to directly address Critchley’s suspicions about Badiou’s disguised “affectionate” and “misguided nostalgia” for death. One could just as easily claim that behind Critchley’s own call for the “cultivation of peace” is a similarly misguided unwillingness to recognize that politics are chaotic and their consequences are beyond our meager capacities to preprogram or anticipate. In fact, that claim would put Critchley in the very company he wishes to keep. After all, what is an anarchist but one who is always prepared to invalidate in advance any organizational form, any group discipline, any leadership worthy of the name, any solidarity not founded on the bland recitation of anti-authoritarian platitudes? Theirs is a radicalism without risk that can always retract impotently within itself at the moment of commitment and sagely bemoan the totalitarian impulses of other activists, which is the primary compensation for their practiced immobility amidst organized political activity. In this manner, and despite never having the benefit of being right, they can always explain of their relationship to history that at least they have never been wrong.
The Anarchist Consciousness

Noam Chomsky, in his now famous “Government in the Future” lecture from February 16, 1970, forwarded the thesis that the anarchist political philosophy was the appropriate system of governance for modern society, and that its broad realization would proceed logically from classical liberal thought from which it derives many of its central assumptions and concerns. Anarchism was simply a more rational form of liberalism for the corporate capitalist world. Chomsky, who had another task in mind, never clearly articulated the ideological boundaries that separate classical anarchism from classical liberalism. A close look at related literature demonstrates that a thorough description of those boundaries has been rarely attempted and almost always in a very broad way that leaves much that is relevant vaguely defined.

Anarchism, put simply, wears many hats, and most of them are not worn well or only barely worn at all. This creates interesting, though predictable, difficulties that can best be managed by authorizing the most prominent and coherent amalgam of theoretical positions. George Crowder’s *Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin*, provides extensive justification for focusing on the collectivist anarchist political theory that finds its most important advocates in Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin by the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Europe. This broad formulation is the one closest to our contemporary understanding of anarchism as a theory that seeks a communistic utopian arrangement of society without a passage through the socialist’s dictatorship of the proletariat or any comparably coercive governmental structure.7 Likewise, Crowder has argued that the classical

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7 George Woodcock’s enduring definition is also instructive: “A system of social thought, aiming at fundamental changes in the structure of society and particularly—for this is the common element uniting
tradition of anarchism “is united by a theory of freedom—an account of the nature, value, and social conditions of human liberty—the sophistication and coherence of which has not been fully appreciated” (4).

It should be understood that numerous variations have deep sympathies with collectivist anarchism’s single-minded desire for freedom as the sole organizing principle of a moral social relation. Take, for instance, the individualist anarchism that doctrinally surfaced in the United States during the nineteenth century and, due to its aversion to collectivism and reliance on market economies, is now virtually indistinguishable from what we call libertarianism. But collectivization of the means of production, which is so antithetical to freedom in the libertarian ideology, is of singular importance in classical anarchist thought. This is the case because the capitalist class that organically emerges from the competitive exigencies of the market economy is every bit as capable of coercive behavior as a centralized state apparatus. Where proponents of liberalism like T.H. Green took the position that, “The role of the state was to secure sufficient personal freedom for citizens to act as rational moral agents” (Bellamy 141)—anarchists of the day saw the proposition that the state could secure for its citizens anything other than their enslavement as contradictory to the structural logic of the state. The nature of the state, rather, was to transfer, through force if necessary, the personal freedoms of its subjects from the realm of their aggregate will, to the necessarily oppositional foci of state authority. This one-sided exchange, for Bakunin, one of the nineteenth century’s most important and enduring anarchist thinker, was true...

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8 Gary Kline’s *The Individualist Anarchist: a Critique of Liberalism*, is persuasive on this point.
of “All human societies,” which always “exercised two distinct forms of social authority over the individuals within them” (Saltman 31). The first form is the conventionally understood imposition by individuals or groups of various dictates that are frequently contrary to the will or interests of the subjugated. Bakunin conceived of this hegemonic function as a universal precondition for the dominance of one group over another. Though this form traverses the ideological territory of knowledge domains (i.e. the theological, political, economic, etc.), its statist materiality contrasts with the second form of social authority, which is the result of how the “physical and social worlds” of humankind contain specific tendencies and even exigencies and thus constrain action (God and the State 28). The latter is, of course, beyond the purview of Bakunin’s vision for social change. Just as it is natural for the state to suppress freedom it is also natural for certain varieties of authority to emerge through social relations and normal interaction with the physical world. But, for the Bakuninists, only the former can be abolished and that is their task.  

The individualist anarchist is quick to shower aspersions on their collectivist antipode for the presumed inconsistency of their thoughts when applied to the ownership of the means of production. Where the individualist sees unfettered market forces as natural and healthy, the collectivists, very much like their Marxist critics, feel that market freedom is a formal and superficial freedom that inherently precludes actual freedom. So when J.S. Mill, in On Liberty, begins his inquiry into the appropriate role of government by citing as the aim of his essay to explore “the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual,” the

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9 I refrain from capitalizing the word “state” in this section because, as an anarchist concept, it is different than the Badiouean distinction between the State and politics utilized throughout this investigation.
collectivist, who shares Mill’s skepticism toward most governmental powers, will understand Mill’s concept of liberty to consist in its formal variety (5). The realm of the actual, on the other hand, is prepared to recognize that a corporate tyranny can be every bit as tyrannical as a governmental one, and the former has always and everywhere—as Adam Smith remarked in *The Wealth of Nations*—been “different from, and even opposite to [the interests] of the public” (157). In an important respect the classical anarchist is little concerned with the theoretical principle of freedom, but rather with its application to social relations.

This is a problematical assertion. Marxists can easily extend a criticism of the anarchist’s understanding of freedom that sounds a lot like the popular anarchist critique of market liberalism. For that reason traditional Marxists such as Friedrich Engels often held the view that the anarchists had the revolution backwards. In the very moment of the state’s seizure, when the preservation of the revolution was most important, the anarchists wanted to simply relinquish the only viable mechanism for maintaining the proletariat’s power. It is only later, once the last, insidious vestiges of the bourgeois rationality are rendered ineffectual, that the stateless communist association can materialize. Here Engels and his intellectual cadre assume that a dictatorship of the proletariat is a means to eventual liberation from a powerful government. Anarchists’ abhorrence to this schema results from the way they conceptualize governmental structures. Where Engels envisions the populist authoritarian structure as dissolving or growing diffuse with the conceivably protracted passage into communism, anarchists see the authoritarian structure as immanently anti-populist and violently resistant to diffusion. Instead, the structure will always struggle to validate its existence, whether
through physical repression or indoctrination, and disseminate ideological and organizational mechanisms that will reproduce the possibilities of its continued existence. Within that schema we can see Lenin’s famous insistence in *The State and Revolution* that the state is a “special repressive force,” or a structural product of class antagonism that need not be abolished because it will eventually “whither away,” as perhaps the most famous twentieth-century misrecognition of the state form’s tendencies.

David Graeber, in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, remarks that, “Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy…. Anarchism has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice” (6). Parts of Graeber’s observation are arguable, but his notion of an “ethical discourse” is important for a generalized articulation of the anarchist ideology. The classical anarchist, unlike the traditional Marxist, who is not at all comfortable with discussions about morality, sees liberty as a moral force as well as a natural one. That is to say, for the anarchists the correct way to behave in the world consists of principles like unity and cooperation, which they are not afraid to associate with the idea of a moral order that emerges naturally from society. The parallels with the Western theological tradition are numerous and significant, in part requiring that the authoritarian creator is supplanted in favor of a natural order.

In an appropriate conceptual illustration, anarchists would locate ethical considerations in one of three social formations that must be present in a revolutionary seizure of power from the state. Right-ethics fits into the ideological portion of what I am referring to as an axis of emergence. The axis also contains educational and
organizational apparatuses and all three overlap at numerous points. The ideology of the stateless space is not based on a doctrine “concerned above all with securing the right to do as one pleases” (Crowder 8). As George Crowder insists, the amoral character of such a doctrine wouldn’t be at all consistent with classical anarchist thought, because, “Far from being ruthlessly individualistic or amoral, the anarchists are, without exception, highly moralistic in temper” (9). And neither are they convinced that the abolition of the state and the collectivization of the means of production will necessarily secure a greater degree of virtue amongst the liberated. Rather, these things are the preconditions for a process-orientated attainment “that must be completed by the efforts of individuals themselves” (Crowder 72). Private property and statism facilitate inequality, which is a violation of the natural order. The natural order is also a moral order. The importance of the natural to the anarchist worldview is stated explicitly by Bakunin when he remarks: “The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has himself recognized them as such” (God 30). Thus, freedom rests upon individual recognition of the natural and, in turn, the unnatural, socially harmful, consequences of unrestrained individualism. The individual is only free collectively, and one’s actions should be geared toward cooperation and consensus building because society is a fact of the human condition.

If one is naturally inclined to participate in the social, one must also learn the correct way of being in the world. This consists in the will to harmonious interaction and such concomitant notions as “autonomy, voluntary association, self-organization, mutual aid, direct democracy,” etc. proceed logically from that will (Graeber 2). As David Graeber notes, one of the nineteenth century’s most important anarchist thinkers, “Peter
Kropotkin…had thrown social Darwinism into a tumult from which it still has never quite recovered by documenting how the most successful species tend to be those which cooperate the most effectively” (16). This indicates that the ideological disposition of anarchists toward cooperation was in fact, by the end of the nineteenth century at least, grounded in their belief in certain natural organizational patterns. Likewise, voluntarism, so central to their thoughts, could only emerge from a virtuous life theory. But, contrary to charity in liberal thought, voluntary action was not meant to ameliorate social ills that economic systems inevitably produce—it was presumed that such ills would not appear under a cooperative system—instead, voluntary action was part of the process of being in the world as a naturally social individual. Charity implies compensation for a deficiency by those who have more than they need. In a moral system neither would one be deficient nor have more than one requires. Any economic arrangement of that kind would violate the harmony of the social space for the material benefit of individual spaces that are contrary to the natural order.\(^{10}\) Voluntarism is an acknowledgment that certain difficulties arise from the most perfect of systems and the ideal method for handling such difficulties is not to embrace the bureaucratic methodology of the state, but to inculcate values that will aid in the surmounting of unforeseen problems. Unfortunately for the anarchists, this inculcation (my term, but an appropriate one) has an authoritarian quality to it and, as such, brings up its own difficulties concerning the type of education that is most suitable to an authentic liberty.

\(^{10}\) Bakunin believed that “there should be no restrictions on what individuals could acquire by their own skill, energy, and thrift” (Oliver 3). I will be following most scholars on the subject of collectivist anarchism by treating this idea as an idiosyncratic and aberrant theoretical oversight on Bakunin’s part.
An anarchist pedagogy is an almost self-contradictory concept, but it properly belongs to the educational apparatus of my axis of emergence. If one considers that the classical anarchist’s unanimity in their contempt for organized religion rests in its traditionally authoritarian—and consequently immoral—character, one should rationally anticipate that a bourgeois liberal education would draw similar contempt for identical reasons. This is certainly the case. Nevertheless, wouldn’t the transmission of anarchist ideology to other, more skeptical or underage individuals, belong to a formal approach? The answer is no, and the approach that Bakunin prescribes, or, rather, fails to adequately prescribe, suggests that for the individual, “It is only by studying, and by making use, by means of his thought, of the external laws of…nature…that he succeeds in gradually shaking off the yoke of external nature…the yoke of an authoritarian social organization” (Science 351). The “integral education” Kropotkin and Bakunin both espouse a version of is articulated clearly by Kropotkin:

We maintain that in the interests of both science and industry, as well as of society as a whole, every human being, without distinction of birth, ought to receive such an education as would enable him, or her, to combine a thorough knowledge of science with a thorough knowledge of handicraft. …To the division of society into brain workers and manual workers we oppose the combination of both kinds of activities; and instead of “technical education,” which means the maintenance of the present division between brain work and manual work, we advocate the integral education, or complete education, which means the disappearance of that pernicious distinction. (Fields, Factories and Workshops 369)

Without attempting an exhaustive analysis of anarchist education, which is beyond the scope or inclination of this chapter, I must assert that the educational apparatus is, by the classical anarchists, the most loosely examined of the necessary social formations for the broad implementation and consolidation of the anarchist vision. So-called “integral education” describes an educational goal, viz. abandoning the division of
intellectual labor. It is consequently a strictly instrumentalist pedagogy: one that has as its only aim the inculcation of a revolutionary consciousness that will bring about the anti-state revolution. Presumably this is accomplished by providing the same scientific learning to the laborer that is offered to the middle class university student. But this says nothing about the transmission of knowledge from the educator, who is in a privileged position, to the students, whose position, in the conventional working class and bourgeois classroom, is one of passive receiver. Not quite a liberatory interaction.

Where organization is concerned, for Bakunin, freedom belongs to a particular space; liberty is constructed within a specific social framework. This means within a social collective. Without the appropriate environment human interaction will fail to constitute Bakunin’s ideal. Administrative authority, in this arrangement, will be fluid and never embedded in permanent offices, nor in a class or in the hands of career professionals (Saltman 49). In order to destroy power’s bourgeois form it needs to be diffused among the collective and never firmly situated in a position of authority, and privilege cannot be a viable means to attaining such a position. Richard B. Saltman says of Bakunin’s organizational vision that, “Within a fully formed system of collective self-discipline as within all systems of natural influence, [Bakunin] argued, such arbitrary authority based on privilege could not exist” (50). Needless to say, this is a redoubtable claim, but it must be understood that anarchists were often obsessed with what they saw as the natural desire for power contained in the individual. The popular contention amongst anarchist thinkers of the period was that a different organization of social life would reconstitute this urge into solidarity. Such a transubstantiation is expressed by Kropotkin when he insists, “Let us arrange matters so that each man may see his
interest bound up with the interests of others, then you will no longer have to fear his evil passions” (Place of Anarchism 16). Likewise, in contradistinction to the division of labor, the new social arrangement scoffs at Adam Smith’s acquiescent pin-makers, who are alienated slaves to a dispersed production apparatus, within the centralized authoritative apparatus of the state.\(^{11}\) The latter apparatus is necessary to keep the former in place and each would be reversed by the anti-state collective. People, when freed to do so, will develop their own organically dictated organizations; the exact shape and design must result from the exigencies of the process as molded by a shared vision for what is to be achieved. This vision must overcome the many obstacles in society that cling to antiquated notions of the individual and the logical governmental form.

As Graeber acknowledges, the conceptual limitations imposed on the anarchist organizational project of an anti-state utopia begin with the word “utopia” itself, which “first calls to mind the image of an ideal city…with perfect geometry—the image seems to harken back originally to the royal military camp: a geometrical space which is entirely the emanation of a single, individual will, a fantasy of total control” (65). Contrast that authoritative organizational model with the one that proceeded from the Spanish Civil War in 1936. In Myrna Margulies Breithart’s spatial and geographical analysis of the Spanish anarchist communities during the war, she points out that the late nineteenth century European-oriented anarcho-syndicalists in Spain sought “The replacement of government with an ‘administration’ of life through community and

\(^{11}\) See chapter 1, book 1, of Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations, which infamously deals with the division of labor.
workplace networks” (92). The Spanish anarcho-syndicalists were working toward a new conception of how the individual is expected to interact with the state in the absence of compulsion. This unique relation manifested itself decades later through “direct action,” which was “adopted as a method to initiate radical social change [by encouraging] people to explore their community and work environments; to examine how centralization dominates the spatial and temporal rhythms of their lives; and to begin to articulate alternatives” (Breithart 93). This is a process of self-radicalization intended to empower the masses so that they can foster the responsibility necessary to effectively administer to their new space in the absence of its authoritative, centralized administration. Cultural meeting centers, or ateneos, became important features of rural Spanish villages in order to accommodate the self-empowerment process (ibid.).

An anarchist ethos, given its loathing of ownership and inclination toward collective use, is necessarily antithetical to the territorial imperative that is a major source of aggressive tendencies in the Bourgeois subject (Manata 22). Because we are examining the collectivist anarchist model that predominated in Europe during the late Victorian period, we understand the classical anarchist to be categorically averse to private property ownership and personal acquisition beyond communally determined need. Therefore, both the physical space, the boundaries, and the social space, the idea of community, are shared by each recognized member of the group. Typical of social groups, the threshold for recognition is outward acceptance of collectivist

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12 Anarcho-syndicalism locates greater organizational and decision making power in the vast array of trade unions that would exist after the abolition of the state—i.e., power at the level of production within the collective. As Daniel Guerin in Anarchism, explains about Bakunin’s vision for trade unionism: “after the abolition of the wage system, trade unions would become the embryo of the administration of the future; government would be replaced by councils of workers’ organization” (57).

13 Again, Bakunin is the unaccountable exception.
ideology and willingness to participate in the practices of the group. In this context, it is necessary for rigor’s sake that we differentiate between the physical (tangible) world, and the social experience of the world (Kuper 247). It should be clear by now that both are conceived of interchangeably by the classical anarchist when they conflate the physical organization of resources and living space with the attitudes produced by these arrangements. The state, then, is not just a tangible, repressive bureaucracy with an army and a capitol. It is also an ethos of mis-organization that, as related in the Spanish “direct action” example, has a “spatial and temporal rhythm” that injects itself into the corrupted ideology of the peasant laborer or industrial proletarian. The state is a way of knowing the world that precludes ideal organization on both levels of being and which requires ideological (a certain way of knowing), educational (a certain way of transferring knowledge), and organizational (a certain way of arranging physical and social space to facilitate and sustain right-knowledge) counter-structures to contest its artificial imposition. This pervasive recognition of the authoritarian state is expressed by Bakunin when he remarks: “We revolutionary anarchists are proponents of universal popular education, liberation, and the broad development of social life, and hence are enemies of the state and of any form of statehood” (Statism and Anarchy 135). It may appear strange to conflate the absence of universal education with the function of the state, but for the anarchists it justifiably belongs to the anti-liberatory ontological rhythms of the state apparatus. The linking of learning to liberty is the logical consequence of a totalizing vision of the state structure versus its stateless antipode.

What ultimately proceeded from their belief in liberty was a philosophical system guided by praxis. In fact, liberty and its societal form were inseparable. Bakunin, often
considered the great theorist of anarchism, rejected any attempt to situate himself in what he perceived as the same passive philosophical echelon that philosophers like Marx supposedly inhabit.\(^{14}\) Of course, Bakunin’s perception of Marx is more hyperbole than fact and there is strong evidence to suggest that Bakunin did strive toward the same philosophical stature he claimed to hate, but his project was still guided by the “propaganda by the deed” tradition of anarchism: doing what needs to be done without overt philosophizing. As Saltman remarks, “the practical purpose for which the theoretical structure of collectivist anarchism was erected [was] to comprehend the contemporary condition of the working classes and to facilitate a liberatory socialist revolution” (97). For that reason classical anarchists took seriously the ways that our axis of emergence could be put into practice in society and used a language of strategy alongside many of their theoretical ruminations.

According to Crowder, “It was the Enlightenment and the [French] revolution that laid the foundations of the systematic social and political theory that became known as anarchism” (18). In the U.S. during the period of the IWW’s inception and organizational consolidation, those liberal Enlightenment foundations were frequently pronounced. In the case of Emma Goldman—arguably the era’s most influential exponent of collectivist anarchism in the U.S.—individual freedom was so important, she refused to distinguish between forms of state. Both undemocratic and parliamentary governments “subordinated the individual or minority to the will of the majority and required individuals to delegate decision-making power to a representative” (Wexler 90). Like most anarchists, Goldman similarly refused to distinguish between political parties and

mass organizations. Her open, consistent support for trade unions and relative lack of interest in the opportunities afforded by its industrial variant, keep her firmly outside the intellectuality of the industrial unionist sequence. Though her anarchism was overtly opposed to the popular values of her day, she was still very much a moralist, and that (typically anarchist) disposition did not lend itself to participation with mass organizations organized along economic line. According to Alice Wexler:

Goldman refused to accord economics a determining role in her social theory. Character, she insisted, had nothing to do with social class. In her eagerness to criticize what she regarded as the fatalism and economism of her Marxist contemporaries—and even of other anarchists—she sometimes went to extremes, insisting that individual moral character was the most important determinant of material life. (97)

For an anarchist like Goldman, consciousness, not material conditions, was primary. Hers was a moralizing discourse about martyrdom and spontaneous uprisings which, like many self-described anarchists of her day, had little room for something as unromantic as organizational niceties. But there is still much debate about the relationship between anarchist theory and IWWism. Franklin Rosemont provides a representative example of this confusion:

Few Wobs...thought of themselves as anarchists. Indeed, more than a few...tended to write off anarchists as "freaks" who did more harm than good to the workingclass movement. And yet, Marxists and anarchists alike have always recognized a strong anarchist element in IWW theory and practice: not only because of the union’s indifference to bourgeois electioneering, and its hostility toward the machinery of state, but also because of the Wobblies’ passionate insistence that “forming the new society” is not a project for the distant morrow, to be postponed “after the revolution,” but rather a project already in motion, and to be steadfastly pursued, non-stop, right now. (26)

As we will see below, Rosemont is unwittingly describing something closer to syndicalism than anarchism, and neither tendency encompasses the particularity of IWW industrial unionism. As for the implicit critique of Marxism for advocating the
postponement of the “new society” until after the revolution, this timeworn characterization has virtually nothing to do with Marx, who was continuously occupied with educational and organizational questions, to the point of regularly neglecting his “scientific” work. Most self-described “Marxists” from the era after his death followed suit; patiently locating and assisting those endeavors that led to education and effective agitation. Like their intellectual inspiration, they cared nothing for romantic displays and saw work as the guiding force of human affairs. Some in Europe and the United States decided electoral politics was the most effective mechanism for facilitating revolution; others chose various forms of unionism as a means to take a stand against exploitation. But all directed their efforts with a seriousness virtually alien to the proclivities of American anarchism, with its passion for spectacle. Unsurprisingly, those humdrum “Marxists” would find a happy home in the IWW, where leaders like Big Bill Haywood verbosely and often convincingly linked economic organization to revolutionary possibility.

**Bill Haywood and IWW Theory**

In brief: William “Big Bill” Haywood was born in Salt Lake City in 1869. He went to work in the mines at the age of nine and joined the Western Federation of Miners in 1896. He was active as an executive board member and as secretary-treasurer of the WFM until 1907, when differences among the leadership over the direction of the union and its relationship to the IWW became irresolvable. Haywood was one of the founders of the IWW and the best known of its leaders. He became the organization’s secretary-treasurer for 1916-18. In 1912, Haywood was elected to the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party of America. He was recalled the following year for his perceived advocacy of sabotage as a strike tactic. In September 1917 he was arrested
and convicted under the Federal Espionage Act. After serving a year at Leavenworth Penitentiary, he used a pending appeal to jump bond and flee to the Soviet Union where, for a couple year, he was a leader of the American Kuzbas Colony in Siberia and a labor advisor to the Bolshevik Government. He died in Moscow in 1928. Those are the basic details.

Haywood’s radicalization was coincident with the aftermath of the Panic of 1893, which led to widespread bank closures and unemployment. In response to a marked reduction in revenues, the Pullman Palace Car Company significantly cut wages the following year. Unfortunately for the workers who resided in the union town of Pullman, Illinois, the decrease in wages made living in Pullman—a necessity for employment with the company—unaffordable. Eugene Debs’s American Railway Union faced a situation where the workers, already angered by the severity of their twelve-hour workdays, faced the added insult of the corporation that owned the town refusing to reduce rents or prices in its stores. Finally outraged by George Pullman’s unwillingness to meet with union representatives, the ARU saw no other option than to help orchestrate an industry-wide strike. The strike ended in a bloody, desperate battle between the strikers and the four companies of soldiers sent by President Grover Cleveland. But the government’s terrified retaliation when faced by this early expression of industrial unionism only emboldened working men like Haywood to become labor radicals. In an era of extreme racial segregation, unrestrained xenophobia, and disenfranchisement along racial and sexual lines, this radicalism was so far-reaching that it made the idea of race, sex, and nationality no barriers to solidarity. A worker is a worker—period.
In the spirit of the solidarity that emerged—more or less out of necessity—from the economic turmoil of the early to mid 1890s, the Western Federation of Miners was a solidly radical organization from its inception in 1893. Unlike most industries, the relatively minor differences in skills between workers left mining with few alternatives to industry-wide unionism. Following years of violent struggle, and inspired by its leadership’s call to overthrow the profit-making system, Haywood became a charter member of the WFM in 1896. In his capacity as secretary-treasurer, and following a bitter defeat in Cripple Creek, Colorado, Haywood joined other union leaders in calling for an alternative to the AFL in 1904. In January 1905 the WFM leadership and a few other sympathetic comrades from within the labor movement organized a “secret conference” to discuss the prospects of creating a big union. Attendees spent three days drafting a manifesto calling for the creation of “one great industrial union embracing all industries” and requesting interested parties join them for a convention in Chicago that June (Minutes). Haywood was elected chairman of what would come to be called the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World.

By all accounts, Haywood was a peacemaker during the sometimes heated debates of the convention. A particularly contentious issue was the relationship between the nascent union and electoral politics. The delegates differed bitterly over the question of the new union’s political affiliation. Socialist Party of America members expected the IWW to affiliate with their organization, while DeLeon and his supporters hoped that the new union would join the Socialist Labor Party. A sizable minority of delegates—most of them westerners—opposed any form of political activity. Haywood, for his part, did not oppose electoral politics altogether, provided it remained secondary to the primary goal
of organizing workers into industrial unions. “When you get the working class organized economically,” he told the convention, “it will find its proper reflection at the polls” (Minutes). Taking Haywood’s suggestion, the convention voted to keep the IWW independent from affiliation with any political party.

Haywood, like Debs, is frequently criticized for not being a systematic thinker (see, e.g., Carlson 194-5). But the course he steered at the First Convention tells us a lot about his theoretical understanding of the role of the IWW as an industrial union. This course is reflected in his favorite statement: “Industrial Unionism is Socialism with its working clothes on.” As far as Haywood was concerned, socialism represented an electoral pedagogy that was valuable only to the extent that it aided in the spread of industrial unionism. There should be no mistake about the reference to “working clothes.” Revolutions are led, and post-revolutionary societies consist of, people in working clothes. Despite eventually joining Debs’s Socialist Party of America—a relatively brief and tumultuous union—his claim that “When you get the working class organized economically, it will find its proper reflection at the polls”—was never contradicted. To embrace Socialist Party politics, even half-heartedly, meant two things: party politics could constitute an effective strategy for promoting workers’ autonomy, and a socialist leadership was not necessarily anathema to the constitution of that economic autonomy. On the second point, Haywood could not have been less anarchist. On the first, he effectively joins Debs and DeLeon in their dual recognition of the ballot as a means to a public pedagogy of a New, Socialist Man. Neither party intellectual would contradict the notion that industrial unionism is the most viable organizational form for constituting post-revolutionary social relations. And all three
were theoretically savvy enough to refuse to pretend they knew who would “clean the streets” under those social relations (Carlson 195)—a great sin to the anarchist theorist, who has already set aside an appropriate broom for his bi-monthly turn at the chore.

Haywood’s Public Lecture on the general strike from March 16, 1911 gives a fuller sense of how he perceived the relationship between industrial unionism and socialism. Referring to the Paris Commune as the “greatest general strike known in modern history,” Haywood tells his audience that he is “not here to theorize, not here to talk in the abstract, but to get down to the concrete subject whether or not the general strike is an effective weapon for the working class” (“The General Strike”). Though the connection between the Paris Commune as the apogee of the general strike and Haywood’s conception of abstract theorizing—which he claims to sometime lament he isn’t better at (ibid.)—is not immediately apparent, this ambiguity should not lead us to dismiss its theoretical significance. As Haywood observes, “all theory comes from practice,” which means that he has no theory of the general strike outside of his personal experiences with the tactic and dogged reverence for the model of the Paris Commune. He is implicitly labeling abstract any theory that does not emerge from the circumstances to which it claims a special understanding. This approach similarly relates to Haywood’s evaluation of socialism. When it is a practice of the liberation of the working class through tactics like the general strike, socialism is the public pedagogy of industrial unionism using the electoral mechanisms available to it for agitation. An anarchist theory of what the party structure must, of necessity, represent is misguided—or too abstract—because it hasn’t emerged from this party in these circumstances. If the goal is socialism with its working clothes on, its theories will have
largely emerged from a direct, participatory relationship to their unique circumstances.

More to the point, the theory’s immediate goal will be the spread of industrial unionism:

I as an Industrialist say that industrial unionism is the broadest possible political interpretation of the working-class political power, because by organizing the workers industrially you at once enfranchise the women in the shops, you at once give the black men who are disfranchised politically a voice in the operation of the industries; and the same would extend to every worker. That to my mind is the kind of political action that the working class wants. You must not be content to come to the ballot box on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, the ballot box erected by the capitalist class, guarded by capitalist henchmen, and deposit your ballot to be counted by black-handed thugs, and say, "That is political action." You must protect your ballot with an organization that will enforce the mandates of your class. I want political action that counts. I want a working class that can hold an election every day if they want to. ("The General Strike")

In this context, the general strike, as a tactic of industrial unionism, is “an incipient revolution” guided by the notion that “Many large revolutions have grown out of a small strike” (“The General Strike”). Therefore, because so much is at stake in the basic tactics of industrial unionism, Haywood’s second statement supports his first: “No socialist can be a law-abiding citizen. It is our purpose to overthrow the capitalist system by forcible means if necessary.” Outwardly, this second statement may seem like an invitation to principled anarchy. But Haywood’s insistence that laws must ultimately be broken logically proceeds from the goals of socialism. Though public statements like this one inevitably alienated him from the SPA, with its clear focus on electoral reforms, Haywood was simply embracing the reality that wherever and whenever it is tactically beneficial to break the law, the principles of socialism surely justify doing so. Legal questions must submit to questions of strategy and principle; and violence was to be treated in the same way as the law. Only here, Haywood was clearly converted to non-violence by his experiences in the Lawrence Strike.
The strike in question began on January 11, 1912 in Lawrence, Massachusetts. One of the largest strikes in U.S. history was the result of a law passed in Massachusetts the previous year that mandated the reduction of the maximum weekly work hours for women and children under eighteen from fifty-six to fifty-four hours, which took effect on January 1, 1912. Lawrence's mill owners, including the largest, the American Woolen Company, responded to the law by reducing workers' wages by three percent, arguing that if workers' hours were to be decreased, then wages would have to fall in order to keep competitive with mills in other parts of the U.S., where wages were even lower. Mill owners had assumed that workers would accept the pay reduction without protest. Instead, strikers demanded pay increases and reforms to factory conditions, including the continuation of the work hour reductions. The IWW sent its top organizers to help the strikers, and by the end of the ten-week strike, over 23,000 workers had left their jobs. To control those large crowds of strikers, the mayor of Lawrence called in state militiamen and police forces from nearby cities, resulting in numerous violent clashes, which in turn led to extensive press coverage and an enormous national outpouring of support for workers and their families. On March 12, 1912, American Woolen Company finally agreed to meet the strikers' demands, forcing the rest of the Lawrence textile companies to do the same.

The overwhelmingly successful use of non-violence in Lawrence led Haywood to proclaim, “I, for one, have turned my back on violence. It wins nothing. When we strike now, we strike with our hands in our pockets. We have a new kind of violence—the havoc we raise with money by laying down our tools. Our strength lies in the overwhelming power of our numbers” (qtd. in Carlson 193). Having spent years in the
Haywood was clearly aware of the limitations of open combat with Pinkerton agents and the State. Lawrence represented for him the nascent form of a distinctly American syndicalist utopia where gender, racial, and national distinction gave way to popular organization at the point of production. This would be real democracy; a hope that made Haywood less interested in politics than direct action, bringing his position closer to Dubofsky’s claim that: “By…refusing to endorse political parties, the IWW did not…divorce itself from the mainstream of the American labor movement. Quite the contrary. The IWW’s political position brought the organization closer to the masses to whom it appealed and more in harmony with the attitude of AFL members—those to whom the political party and the state always remained a distant and fearful enemy” (158). What should be added to that claim in the case of Bill Haywood is the recognition that the state is not political; the point of production is. Haywood’s attempts at organization through the SLP were tactical in nature. When Haywood later joined the Bolsheviks in Russia, that resulted from another recognition of how the Russian Revolution altered the strategic coordinates of socialist politics. The major issue with both anarchism and syndicalism is not the relative truth or falsity of those theories, but how they aggressively seek to impose their logic on situations that do not require them. This is precisely the gesture of the historian of IWWism.

**Histories of a Union**

When the IWW—and sometimes industrial unionism in general—are located within the syndicalist tradition, this typically means one of two things. Either IWWism is America’s version of French Revolutionary Syndicalism, or it represents a purely economic politics in the spirit of radical European trade unionism. What the two tendencies share is a decentralized, federated unionism capable of using direct action
to combat, and ultimately overthrow, the capitalist State. Where they differ is in the level of theoretical detail about what would take the State’s place. The revolutionary syndicalist, inspired by French authors like Georges Sorel and Emile Pouget, envisions cooperative confederations, mutual aid, and various forms of labor exchange. Though the preamble to the IWW Constitution expresses the possibility that “By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old”—the same document appeals to Marx’s dictum “Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,’ we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wage system.’” The contrast is simple: the revolutionary syndicalist, true to her anarchist roots, already knows (in Badiou’s grammar) what the event will be and what it will mean—that is, what consequences will be drawn—by its subjects. Marx, on the other hand, maintains a decidedly vague vision of how a revolution will proceed, what the passage to communism will consist of, and how “free associations” will express themselves under communist social relations. Even after the frustrating experience of the Paris Commune, Marx’s insistence that the institutions and mechanisms of the State must be smashed lacks practical details. Such absences are the rational result of Marx’s commitment to the notion that revolutions and broad social transformations are not tea parties to be planned down to the last detail, including the specific institutional guest list and seating arrangements. There is no way to program the event in advance, only to know that capitalism makes the event—in the form of economic crisis—inevitable, and therefore furnishes a productive negative example for the communist educator.
With respect to the attitude toward revolutionary outcomes, the IWW is at least as Marxist as it is syndicalist. Like the revolutionary syndicalist, their stated aim is industrial democracy. Like the Marxist, there is no attempt to doctrinally establish the eventual character of the revolution. This latter fact, however, has been seen as indicative of the organization's lack of theoretical coherence and sophistication. Such pronouncements—which are to be treated presently through an examination of the three most prominent current histories of the IWW—are profoundly beside the point. And, not only are they beside the point, the pronouncements suffer from precisely the malady they claim to recognize in IWWism.

To identify this malady, one can hardly do better than take an early passage from Melvyn Dubofsky's canonical *We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*:

[R]ecent studies all reveal that although IWW theory added little or nothing to Marxism and continental syndicalism, and while the organization admittedly failed to show much for its efforts in terms of membership rolls and abundant treasuries, it did have a dream of a better America where poverty—material and spiritual—would be erased and where all men, regardless of nationality or color, would walk free and equal. More than a half-century ago the Wobblies tried in their own ways to grapple with issues that still plague the nation in a more sophisticated, knowledgeable, and prosperous era. (xii)

Claims like this one have made Dubofsky arguably the least loved of the IWW’s major historians. The assumption is that an author like Dubofsky—as evidenced by his characterization of an alternately flimsy and ambivalent legacy for the IWW—sees the organization as an overly idealistic precursor to the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which formed in 1938 as a non-revolutionary, more government reform-friendly, version of the IWW. But the CIO’s less antagonistic attitude toward the State meant it was not a radical union in the same sense as the IWW. To compare the
respective theoretical coherence of those unions using similar standards is tantamount to making the State arbiter of what those positions really meant. A subjectivity—a concept I link to statements derived from the archives of industrial unionism and that only exists within the singularity of a sequence—is subtracted from the very mode of evaluation that would permit it to be measured against the interpretive apparatus Dubofsky is invoking. This irreducibility becomes painfully evident in his next description of the IWW’s legacy:

The IWW, it is true, produced no intellectual giants. It did not spawn a Karl Marx or a Georges Sorel, a Lenin or a Jean Jaures, or even an Edward Bellamy or a Henry George. It offered no genuinely original ideas, no sweeping explanations of social change, no fundamental theories of revolution. Wobblies instead took their basic concepts from others…. Hence, IWW beliefs became a peculiar amalgam of Marxism and Darwinism, anarchism and syndicalism—all overlaid with a singularly American patina. (147)

Dubofsky elaborates on this featherweight intellectual legacy by asserting that “European theoreticians explained in coherent, analytical, and learned terms what most Wobblies grasped instinctively”—while conceding that IWWism is without question a specifically American invention (147). In other words, the IWW’s mediocre ideas were distinctly American, in all of their inglorious mediocrity. Dubofsky’s is a misguided narrative that makes simplistic comparisons and comes to comfortable conclusions for the sake of demonstrating its own “coherence”—which, as a concept, seems to consist of tabulating the winners and losers effectively; a hermeneutic of success and failure, or a rational method to read the meaning of the revolutionary tea leaves. Franklin Rosemont—an unapologetic apologist for IWWism and Fred Thompson’s ideological
purist narrative of the organization\textsuperscript{15}—believes the decision of “academic historians” to accept Dubofsky’s history over Thompson’s has resulted in “a shelf of books and journal articles that repeat each other’s mistakes…and conclude with sickeningly similar sermons to the effect that the IWW was ‘too revolutionary’ for the U.S. and thus a ‘failure’—colorful, no doubt, and not without a certain charm, but most definitely a failure” (15-6). Unfortunately, we will have to be every bit as harsh with Rosemont’s rosy description of a “Wobbly theory and practice” that apparently “had ‘nothing in common’ with the cold, harsh, bureaucratic ‘lay-down-the-law’ monotone adopted by so many of those who then as now proclaim themselves revolutionary socialists or Marxists [because t]he ‘One Big Union’ always spoke in many voices” (8). Rosemont’s zeal gets the better of him here. To say that Wobbly theory is not Marxist is a far cry from the claim that it had “nothing in common” with the prevailing Marxism of its days. Rosemont is right to preserve the singularity of that theory against the likes of Dubofsky, but there is little justification for claiming, as Rosemont does:

\begin{quote}
It is a fact… that the most inspired and prolific IWW thinkers and pamphleteers…were much better Marxists, more rigorous, more radical, and more imaginative than the great majority of the pedantic ideologues who promulgated the dry-as-dust and frequently reactionary platitudes that passed for “theory” in the U.S. Socialist and Communist parties. (19)
\end{quote}

How that claim could be a “fact,” or why the discourse of fact and falsity is even useful to a characterization of theory-making, is difficult to comprehend. But even more incomprehensible is Rosemont’s decision, after seeming to posit a nearly total separation between Wobbly theory and Marxism, to affirm a theoretical relation between the two, only with an oddly anti-Marxist addendum:

\textsuperscript{15} Rosemont’s own history, \textit{Joe Hill: The IWW and the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture}, is unabashedly indebted to Thompson’s \textit{The I.W.W.: Its First Fifty Years (1905-1955)}. 
Wobbly Marxism was, in short, romantic through and through, and the colorful panorama of ideas that flourished around the union’s invariable first principle is reminiscent of Novalis’s dream of “the true philosophy” consisting of “freedom and infinitude, or…lack of system brought under a system.” (25)

It is not clear from claims like that what Rosemont expects theory to do. Instead of describing theory as a concerted intellectual effort to make sense of a situation through the estrangement of what is deemed natural and socially necessary within it, Rosemont is describing a sort of “‘understanding among men’” (Carlson 260)—which is certainly part of the IWW’s legacy, but does not exhaust the entirety of its written productions, many of which formed the ideological-institutional basis of that supposedly loosely-structured understanding. Furthermore, Rosemont’s rejection of the category of failure in connection with the legacy of the IWW has less to do with an intransigent assessment of how we receive the lessons of a terminated politics, and much more to do with an strangely belligerent nostalgia typical of contemporary Wobblies, who would surely agree with the claim that the union maintained its vitality long after the First World War (Rosemont 14).

Patrick Renshaw’s *The Wobblies: The Story of the IWW and Syndicalism in the United States* walks the fine line between the two previous histories. Renshaw relates IWWism to other European expressions of mass organization, while insisting on the unique character of its American expression:

The IWW planned to combine the American working class, and eventually wage earners all over the world, into one big labor union with an industrial basis, a syndicalist philosophy and a revolutionary aim. Its industrial departments were to act as syndicalist shadows of American capitalism, so that after the revolution they could quickly step in and help govern the workers’ commonwealth. The revolution was to be achieved by a series of
strikes, leading to a general strike which would force the capitalists to capitulate. Thus the IWW was to be both the embryo of the new society and the revolutionary instrument for achieving it. (1)

As the title of Renchaw’s book already suggests, Wobbly theory is syndicalism with an American twist. Even though a sizable portion of the organization at any given time consisted of immigrant factory workers from the Northeast, the IWW’s Western roots were the firm basis of its American character:

For them the class war was a self-evident fact which had little need for support from the works of Marx and Engels or the direct action tactics of European syndicalists. In the West men made their own laws. Even the few regulations governing industrial activity in the East were unknown. Hitting the boss hard on all possible occasions seemed the only practical means of curbing his otherwise almost absolute power over their life and labor. All this was a far cry from the “coffin society” activities of the AF of L—a term derived from the emphasis many unions placed on sickness and death benefits. (34)

If there appears to be a contradiction between Renshaw’s two quotes—the IWW is simultaneously syndicalist and a unique politics that requires “little support” from European syndicalist theory—the problem may stem from the superfluity of the category of syndicalism. The IWW is an industrial union. Industrial unionism, taken to its logical conclusion, is revolutionary. Its primary revolutionary assumption is that workers are workers, without distinction, and any tactic, organizational arrangement, or guiding theory that does not begin with that assumption must necessarily support the capitalist class which, by its very nature, can have nothing in common with the working class. If they could share some common ground, trade and identity-based unionism would suffice. But because these two classes can only exist at each other’s expense—a Marxist, materialist assumption at odds with the anarchist’s emphasis on consciousness—one must ultimately overthrow the other. The inevitability of this massive industrial union constituting “the embryo of the new society” was the rational
result of its size, which was meant to incorporate all workers everywhere in the industrialized world. Nothing else could possibly claim organizational precedent over an organization so large. Consequently, there was little need and even less theoretical justification for envisioning social relations after the revolution; the definite qualities of those relations emerge wherever and whenever workers take full possession of their productive capacities.

The debate over the meaning of IWWism staged in this section is the foundation of the earlier analogy to a “textual event”—an expression that is meant to do nothing else than to distance IWW theory from critiques that would characterize it as a failed or non-theory because it was incapable of envisioning what comes after the revolution or to account for its precise relationship to electoral politics. These perceived failures are the byproducts of a lack of clear distinctions. In the first case, the distinction is between theoretical coherence and subjectivity. Subjectivity relates to the circulation of statements within a unique context. Those statements, in a manner fully consistent with Lenin’s supposedly coherent theory in works like “On Slogans,” adapt to their volatile context as the actors who rally beneath them struggle to remain consistent with the possibilities they perceive. In the second case, the distinction is between politics and the State. The State primarily circulates opinions about what there is; conversely, statements about what is possible when the character of the State is fundamentally altered are political. In the case of both distinctions, the authors who crave “coherence” miss the novelty of the political sequence out of which the IWW’s documents emerged.

**Industrial Unionism: A Unique Duration**

The efforts of the IWW represent the last, best large scale attempts at revolutionary industrial unionism in the United States. The dates of the industrial
unionist sequence are roughly contiguous with the formal establishment and eventual
government suppression of that political theory’s major organizational form—i.e.,
approximately 1905 to 1920. This creative duration begins with the enthusiastic
meetings and conventions of 1905. The period terminates around 1920, as thousands
of Wobbly activists languish in prison for supposed anti-war activities, and in the midst
of the heated debates about the IWW’s relationship to the Bolshevik government that
reveal irreparable ideological fissures. To begin the duration before 1905—for example,
during the Pullman Strike of 1894—dilutes the non-party character of the sequence.
Given the large gap between the major organizational efforts of the American Railway
Union in 1894 and the establishment of the IWW—a gap that was largely filled with
propaganda through the polls—industrial unionism becomes largely the economic
expression of socialist electoral politics. If, however, we extend the dates further,
perhaps into the thirties, with its rich variety of New Deal activism, leading to the
establishment of the CIO, a self-described “industrial union,” at the end of the decade,
the character of the sequence would change dramatically. For one thing, it would more
centrally concern the relationship between the organized expression of industrial
unionism and state decisions. Under the auspices of that relationship, it would be
difficult to ignore the importance of the CIO and relative unimportance of the IWW,
which then comes to represent something like an overly radical false start.
Consequently, extending the dates in either or both ends of the period results is a less
creative duration.

The creativity of the industrial unionist sequence of politics in the United States
has very little to do with the ultimate success or failure of the IWW as a militant labor
union. In the first decade of its existence, the IWW had made a name for itself by winning a handful of victories. It had spearheaded free speech fights in several major cities along the West Coast. It had led unorganized immigrants to significant victories in Lawrence and Little Falls, New York. It even established some lasting organizations in places like the docks of Philadelphia. But its strikes were broken in places like Patterson, New Jersey and Akron, Ohio. By 1915, membership in Lawrence had dropped from a peak of sixteen thousand in the fall of 1912 to less than one hundred. These facts, taken together, make the historian’s verdict on the legacy of the organization clear. Renshaw, perhaps the most evenhanded popular commentator on the subject, puts it bluntly:

It sought to change capitalism, the conservative craft unionism of the American Federation of Labor, and the whole direction of the Progressive period. Ultimately if failed. But its example influenced the next generation of labor activists who established the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the 1930s and made it the spearhead of a powerful labor movement in the 1940s and 1950s. (ix)

Renshaw goes on to explain that the IWW might have been the permanent organizational outlet for unskilled workers were it not for the government’s oppressive strategies during the First World War (142). But its modest successes and eventual failure also taught the CIO important lessons, particularly to not be too revolutionary; lessons it would use to consolidate power and substantively influence American unions for decades (217). Though the successes of the CIO are heartwarming enough, they have almost nothing to do with industrial unionism as a political idea. Instead, those successes reference industry-wide organizing as a tactic for effective reforms—a different thing entirely.
The notion that militant industrial unionism failed because it didn’t achieve its stated goals is a dubious criteria by which to determine its legacy. What political project of any significance can be said to have achieved its goals? Only those that asked for too little. After all, who calls Roman Republicanism a failure with the same bold flippancy? It took nearly two thousand years to reactivate what was really an entirely corrupt system of elite patronage—and only then to lend its name to the private ownership of the vote by white, male landowners. But the industrial unionism of the IWW—a project of breathtaking scope and audacity—can be said to have failed simply because it never seized control of or subverted the mechanisms of the State.

What revolutionary industrial unionism did achieve during its fifteen years of vitality should be held at a distance from the calculations of its histories. The primary theorists of this sequence are Eugene Debs and Bill Haywood. The proper name Debs carries the statement “Only the socialist is a Man,” which means that the destiny of humanity is socialism constituted along industrial unionist lines. Haywood’s statement clarifies Debs’: “Industrial Unionism is Socialism with its working clothes on”—which is to be understood as the affirmation of an essential rapport between the goals of socialism and industrial unionism, while recognizing that the latter is the organizational form of the working class that must ultimately make history. While both names circulate in the sequence—a movement that becomes less intelligible after the Bolshevik Revolution—they take as their central assumption that only industrial unionism can be revolutionary.

As for the sequence’s attitude toward democracy, Daniel DeLeon explains that “Democracy and discipline have less to do with a relation to the State and the party than a mode of solidarity that organizes itself at the point of production and agitates at all
levels of social relations.” The location of that solidarity is the convention hall and picket line. The statements derived from both emerge from the creative interactions centered on those places of politics. Likewise, the politics of both IWWism and industrial unionism are effectively indistinguishable in their conception of trade unionism, electoral politics, and the capitalist-parliamentary State—i.e., the defining negative categories of the sequence.

From the Preamble to the IWW Constitution we find two theoretical kinships that take on a unique character under industrial unionism. First, there are the Marxist sentiments expressed through the statement: “Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,’ we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘'Abolition of the wage system.'” This statement locates the evolution of Marxism’s materialist economic analysis in the spread of revolutionary industrial unionism. That evolution is mirrored in the primary statement of industrial unionism, which is derived from the Knights of Labor, an organization that once rallied beneath a banner that read, “An injury to one is the concern of all.” Radicalized and popularized under IWWism, this slogan becomes “An injury to one is an injury to all.” The original form contains a vague prescription of “concern,” which is a call to deliberate on the injury in question—to determine a course of action based on its nature and severity. Concern is fundamentally a social term; its guiding belief is that there are social facts and that we must base our determinations on their essential existence. By contrast, the statement “An injury to one is an injury to all,” takes as its guiding assumption that social relations are necessarily constructed around a void or caesura in their own logic. To prescribe the impossibility of violence against one individual, to make all violence an act
directed at the collective, is to demand that this void be revealed and its capacity for transformation embraced. From 1905 to 1920, militant unionists came together around a shared vision of industrial unionism’s revolutionary potential. Many were imprisoned or died pursuing what they saw as the logical consequences of that unique political opportunity. Yet, long after that inventive subjective upsurge has ceased to generate new ideas, we can still draw our own consequences.
CHAPTER 5
EMANCIPATORY STATEMENTS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

Conclusions invariably come after investigation, and not before. Only a blockhead cudgels his brains on his own, or together with a group, to ‘find a solution’ or ‘evolve an idea’ without making any investigation. It must be stressed that this cannot possibly lead to any effective solution or any good idea.

--Mao Tse Tung

No investigation, no right to speak.

--Mao Tse Tung

As I explained in the first chapter, this investigation is animated by the imperative that it be informed by the intensities of the present. Rather than a passive reflection on “what happened,” in this chapter I will finally offer a coterminous determination of the possibilities of the present and its possible futures. Under the circumstances, the quotations of Mao Tse Tung are a strange point of departure. Some will surely locate in the privileged position of those epigraphs—not to mention the ubiquity of quotations from Lenin in this dissertation—a callous failure to appreciate the horror that resulted from their logic. By contrast, radical labor organizing in the United States is decidedly less enamored with the totalitarian impulse that informed Bolshevism and Chinese Communism and, as such, a less perverse source of political insight. Additionally, Maoism is widely considered a realized project, one with little left to offer an analysis of the present beyond whatever minor creative content emerged in fleeting moments amidst deplorable suffering. Comparatively speaking, IWWism and its ideological cohorts remain open and uncorrupted by the brutal exigencies of State power. Openness, in this case, represents not being intellectually saturated by mass violence.
To draw on a context saturated in that way for theoretical support would suggest, at best, an obstinate and selective nostalgia.

Though there is surely some basis for the contrast between the potentials of radical unionism and the degenerate cult of Maoism, they nevertheless miss the point. Recalling Debs’s quotation from the conclusion of the third chapter, we cannot locate emerging forms of political solidarity through moralizing sermons about totalitarian groupthink; but only through investigations—ones as cold and impassive as the solidarities they describe. This is where Mao’s concept of an investigation gains force.

In response to his well-known claim “No investigation, no right to speak,” Mao has long suffered the charge of narrow empiricism. There is some justification for this charge—Mao often describes the process of accumulating facts about a situation in much the same way one might describe picking up bones or bits of pottery in an archaeological dig. But there is far more justification for Mao’s dismissive characterization of views not grounded in a thorough understanding of a situation as “ignorant twaddle” (231). As Mao explains, “investigation may be likened to the long months of pregnancy, and solving a problem to the day of birth. To investigate a problem is, indeed, to solve it” (233-4). And unless one pursues such an investigation in earnest, one surely has nothing to say about the problem, which is rendered as “no right to speak” in the second epigraph above.

Yet, the legalistic reference to rights and the biological analogy of childbirth may muddle the force of Mao’s claims. In effect, the two previous quotes describe a creative process in which one must actively participate in order to fully understand. The assumption is that an investigation does not require expertise external to the
investigative process. Some very technical problems will, of course, require a certain technical background. But even the so-called expert must invent a solution grounded in a thorough investigation of the specific problem. The revolutionary substance of this conception of an investigation rests in the assumption that the intractable problems that existed before the revolution, can be reconsidered—often in a populist way, without need of previous expertise—through the creative capacities of a New Man, whose very existence is a testament to the possibility of what the learned bourgeois apologists for the status quo deem impossible.

It is that sense of investigation, as a creative intervention into the possibilities of those situations foreclosed by the ordinations of the liberal State, which compels me to imagine in this chapter a critical theory informed by the ambitious Ideas of industrial unionism as they were detailed in the previous chapters. To be clear: what follows does not presume to offer any solutions to our present predicament in the United States; only to frame our situation in a manner derived from the analysis of industrial unionism so as to further elucidate the creative character of that sequence. An investigation is not a politics, and nothing about the authors and documents studied in this dissertation can tell us how to act politically today. They can, however, offer lessons—specifically, lessons about political prescriptions, discipline, organization, and the communist Idea—that can aid our understanding of the present circumstances and inform a critical theory intransigent enough to resist the ethical presentism and smug, de facto anti-intellectualism of what I will describe as liberal rationalism. As I explained in the introduction, today, the plain-speaking presentist, who is always looking to interpret the past through the rosy lens of contemporary reason, is arguably the greatest enemy of
critical analysis. However, the chief lesson of the previous investigation, which is central to the critical theory in question, is to not import or impose, as timeless or true, categories from one investigation onto another; but, rather, to always trust that whatever problem is worth investigating will require a disciplined examination and excavation of its situation before relevant statements and categories can surface.

With that discipline of the category in mind, this chapter will use the current health care debate in the United States as a bare wall on which to project some of the opportunities and difficulties of our moment. Because that debate draws heavily on our deep-seated assumptions about what politics are supposed to be, it becomes a rich source for understanding how prescriptions are formed, the egalitarian and non-Statist foundations of their logic, and the disciplined, principle-driven theory-building they require.

**The Regime of Things Provided**

By August of 2009, the horrors of populism became apparent to the American left. The Obama Administration and its chief allies in the Senate and House had spent many months ensuring that the evolving debate about health care would be governed by rational, top-down decision making. The chastened but powerful insurance and pharmaceutical industries would get almost everything they wanted and, in return, they would agree to pull their punches in the public arena. Despite the insurance industry’s misgivings about the government running a competing plan, the discussions at the top appeared largely peaceful and productive.¹ Then popular democracy happened.

¹ Of course, it is hard not to suspect the industry counted on right-wing opposition groups to finance and facilitate public resistance to the “public option.” Under the circumstance, it was rather easy and to their advantage to keep the discussions outwardly amicable while reactionary ideologues did the dirty work of undermining competition in the name of Free Market Capitalism.
It is estimated that in the United States approximately 20,000 people die each year due to lack of access to timely health care.\(^2\) The premature deaths from lack of preventive care and services for major health conditions did not figure prominently in the Administration’s framing of the health care debate. And they were entirely absent in the rhetoric of the right-wing reaction, as well as the impartial, objective analyses of the mainstream press. Would it be too cynical to suggest that the lives of those 20,000 people simply do not count? No, in fact, it would be ridiculous to suggest anything else.

Borrowing from Jacques Ranciere the association of the concept of democracy with the ungovernability of the people on which it is based, it becomes clear that the arithmetic of the health care debate—of who actually counted within the situation that debate describes—was determined by a populist sentiment fully consistent with a conception of democracy as something much richer than the wise management decisions of elected State functionaries. The Administration’s noble attempt to make the debate about wise management was effectively undermined by those who refused to believe democracy was solely the domain of elected officials. Consequently, the absurd nonsense these reactionaries parroted in various public settings does not diminish the truly democratic character of their activism. Yes, it should be acknowledged that the press’s decision to remain impartial prevented them from rapidly identifying and discrediting the rather obvious systematic manipulation and falsification of information, which helped foster those protests.\(^3\) But protestors were largely disinterested in the

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\(^3\) It is sufficient to point out that the press rarely reported that the proposed legislation for reimbursing Medicare recipients who chose to use very popular end of life counseling services—the basis of widespread claims about government run “death panels”—was lobbied for by the American Association of Retired People. However, when the AARP ultimately supported a version of the evolving health care bill,
facts of the legislation. Most were instead driven by genuine fear that their Idea of America was being aggressively undermined by an oppressive State. In other words, despite lacking many facts, their demonstrations were driven by something the Administration’s approach to the situation lacked: Ideas.

Of course “Ideas,” in the strict sense the word is being used here, are not simply whatever we are thinking about or the most basic content of cognition. An Idea—in a Badiouean vein and capitalized to denote a concept—opens up the possibility for an individual to participate in a political process, whether reactionary or revolutionary. This decision is historical in the sense that it relates to a determinate political sequence, which relates to the global movement of history. For Debs, to be a militant Communist, a militant of the Idea of Communism, after the Russian Revolution meant nothing less than to be an agent of the historical becoming of Man—a new Communist humanity.

Ideas link our local political struggles to the concrete becoming of humanity. As we saw in the second chapter with the examination of the New Man concept, in a reactionary conception, this humanity has already existed but has been corrupted and suppressed by modern life. Conversely, in a revolutionary conception, this humanity will be entirely unique, having never existed before.

The protestors’ (undoubtedly lousy) Ideas were based on a series of propositions that arguably crystallized during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. The most impressive articulation of these propositions is from Reagan’s first inaugural address where he explains to a recession-weary America:

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it was widely attacked for its partisan political agenda, which was supposedly manifested in its (hysterically counterintuitive) willingness to profit off of the early deaths of its members.
In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. From time to time we’ve been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else? All of us together, in and out of government, must bear the burden. (Reagan)

The primary statement—namely, “Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem”—finds its echoes in the fears of the protestors. But their reliance on disinformation should not cause us to dismiss the consistency of their thinking. As conservative commentator George Neumayr explained in response to the allegation that he is spreading misinformation about the Democrats’ health care agenda, “I think a government-run plan that is administered by politicians and bureaucrats who support euthanasia is inevitably going to reflect that view, and I don’t think that’s a crazy leap” (qtd. in Rutenberg). There is something to that claim that many on the left in the United States are likely to miss. Having already forgotten their own popular characterizations of George W. Bush as a “Nazi” and “Hitler,” it is understandable that a self-described liberal might ignore the fundamental differences between their view of the world and those of many self-described conservatives who now call Barack Obama the same names for daring to try to get more people health insurance. Such nominations simply describe a latent capacity for evil that will express itself in a seemingly rational managerial discourse, which must be beaten back with the unconditional affirmation of what the world is supposed to be like. This affirmation will often take the form of a negative statement because it is easier to describe what we do not want than to imagine a positive content for the previous state of things that are now being violently molested.

There is nothing particularly problematic about affirming an inexistence. After all, when it is sophisticated—i.e. Nietzschean or Marxian—atheism expresses itself in a
similar manner. Far from a simple negation—“God does not exist”—the thesis of atheism is the much more compelling “God must not exist.” The latter formulation bypasses the rationalist dogma of the former—which usually amounts to little more than the self-satisfied sacralization of humanistic wisdom and commonsense—by constructing a strong imperative. In Marx, that imperative is based on the dialectical premise that history is pregnant with possibilities that are often manifested in their seeming opposites. When he famously explains that “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (“A Contribution”)—he is not simply claiming that religion is a tool to keep the exploited masses in their place. That might be the premise of the complacent polemicist, but the dialectician, who prefers to discern the rational kernel within each outward mystification, will feel compelled to note that religion serves a historically determined role within existing social relations. That means the popular atheist screeds from authors like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens largely miss the point. Insisting in sonorously moralizing tones that religion is the problem is a lot like not seeing the forest for the trees. The symptom is not the illness itself, but it does serve as a privileged window through which to see that something is most certainly sick. Consequently, to say that “God must not exist,” to effectively affirm a nonexistence, is to wager that, in order to realize the opportunities of the present, one must live without the illusions of a divine guarantor. Similarly, the simple statement “Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” is neither empirically verifiable, nor reducible to a discourse we can have “constructive,” “rational”

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4 An excellent example of that sort of Marxist analysis can be found in Mike Davis’s “Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat.” New Left Review 26 (2004): 5-34.
arguments about without sharing its central assumption. This is the case because what is actually being said is closer to the fuller claim that “We must insist that government is the problem, and devotedly follow the consequences of that insistence, or else we will have no Ideas powerful enough to link our actions to the historical becoming of humanity, and thus no capacity to realize the opportunities our divinely privileged nation contains.”

One should note that the faithful observation of the hypothesis “government is the problem” forms the basis of the less articulate drivel being spouted about Obama’s “socialist” and “Nazi” machinations. Indeed, such claims invite an addendum to Mao’s dictum to the effect of, “No intelligence, shut up!” But a sort of intelligence really is operating behind the thick veil of “ignorant twaddle” Mao so loathed. In *The Revolutionary Holocaust*, Glenn Beck follows a clip of Reagan saying “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” with the explanation “That’s modern conservatism in a nutshell” (*The Revolutionary Holocaust*). It is the stated goal of Beck’s unfortunate documentary to demonstrate that socialism and Nazism are basically one and the same. Though his scholarship is laughable, the relationship between Beck’s conflation of leftwing and rightwing radicalisms and his narrative of what America is supposed to be is nevertheless logically based on Reagan’s conservative principles:

The story of America is really one of self-reliance and optimism and profound faith—not only in the context of religious freedom, but also in the unprecedented faith in the ability of human beings to control their own destiny. And while the spirit of personal responsibility was extraordinarily strong with our founders, great patriots like Thomas Paine…argued for the redistribution of wealth right off the bat. Alexander Hamilton…wanted a central bank. Well, they wound up losing those battles, but there were plenty who kept…fighting. [The] Constitution kept those dogs at bay for the
better part of two hundred years, but eventually those seeking a different path than the ones the founders settled on, realized that the only way to really defeat the Constitution was for the people to stop reading it. Progressives realized victory required changing history; to defeat them, we have to correct that. (The Revolutionary Holocaust)

Beck’s high-minded documentary is meant to educate the public about the destiny of humanity. Progressivism has long deluded the public into believing that rightwing thought is compatible with Nazism, when in fact Nazism, as well as any totalitarian social experimentation, is another form of revolutionary leftism. The attempt by Beck and the hack authors he features on the documentary to translate, wholesale, the ideological perspectives of the past through the political categories of the present—namely, conservatism and progressivism—represents a cartoonish version of historico-ethical presentism. Boiling Teddy Roosevelt, Mao, Stalin and Hitler together in the same progressive cauldron may sit well with of those who suffer from severe thought aversions, but it makes it difficult for the less averse to take the intellectual foundations of Beck’s project seriously. That attitude is a mistake. Beck is articulating in a clear, effective way that, far from imposing the values of the present onto the past, his historical perspective comes from the founding document and attendant Ideas of a uniquely important country. The concept of modern conservatism is not a new production, but a necessary return to an original virtue contaminated by progressive hatred of human ability and the destiny of humanity.

Of course the distant origin Beck invokes as the arbiter of virtue and guarantor of human freedom is a contrivance of the present. Nonetheless, it remains consistent with the fuller claim about government carried by the current rightwing reaction—namely, that by insisting government is the problem while a supposed progressive is in charge, our Ideas will be powerful enough to inform a cultural revolution driven by the popular
desire to return to the path toward the realization of an authentic American humanity. Even if such a narrative is mired in pathetic historical lies, it may be credited with at least exceeding in scope of possibilities the banality of what Badiou calls the “animal humanism” of “contemporary ‘democracies,’” which rests on the claim that “man only exists as worthy of pity. Man is a pitiable animal” (The Century 175).

Let us recall that the proper name Debs, which in the second chapter was for us the source of certain statements that arose out of a determinate political sequence, expresses the Idea of a Socialist Man-as-project in contradistinction to the “fundamental imperative” of our contemporary animal humanism, which is to “‘Live without Ideas’” (177). Badiou understands this imperative is also a call to remain modest in one’s aims, even in the face of circumstances that require much more than judicious reforms can provide. The assumption is that big Ideas are, at best, anachronistic, or, at worst, necessarily totalitarian. One could hardly locate a more precise example of the first part of that assumption than in Noel Murray’s A.V. Club movie review of Michael Moore’s Capitalism: A Love Story. Murray explains that “the biggest problem with” Moore’s ambitious call for the democratization of the means of production “is that it feels oddly out of touch. In the current political climate, the kind of angry average American that Moore has spent a lifetime championing is more likely to be out in the streets yelling for the heads of liberals like himself, while the kind of people sympathetic to Moore’s causes are likely watching The Daily Show and reading The Daily Dish” (Murray). Given that the A.V. Club is a veritable bastion of popular, counter-cultural, progressive insight, it is unsurprising how right Murray gets it. Moore’s absurd belief that one can actually describe alternatives to capitalism—as opposed to simply critiquing its excesses in the
temperate vein of *The Daily Show*—makes his claims every bit as inarticulate as the rightwing “angry average American,” who represents the logical ideological counterpoint to the serious-minded left.⁵ In short, a progressivism devoid of anger is the highest expression of what it means to “Live without Ideas.”

**The Inexcusable Banality of Liberal Reason**

Thus far, there has been no shortage of references to Alain Badiou in this dissertation. It should be clear that I have been substantially indebted to Badiou’s conception of politics as rare, sequential, prescriptive, and subjective—a conception heavily indebted to Sylvain Lazarus—even if we do not always draw the same consequences from that understanding. It should come as no surprise, then, that I find much of his analysis of our present political “situation” productive. As Badiou explains (with a clarity that is worth quoting at length):

> I think the problem is the following: what goes on when we are in the saturation or the end of a clearly determined political sequence? For instance, I think that the political sequence opened up by the Bolshevik Revolution is now saturated, and that we are not faithful to this event anymore, even though we still refer to it and that we do not reject it. What is going on here? I believe there are two orientations. The first way is that we remain faithful in an abstract, general way, since the event no longer has a generic reality. In sum, we seek to maintain its principle, which leads to some sort of dogmatic nostalgia. The other way is to seek a new activation in a way that is extraordinarily local, in extremely precise circumstances, hoping that this filter, that this localisation will allow us to work much more acutely within the perspective of novelty. We will not create novelty, but we will nevertheless disturb things by working locally. In other words, I truly

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⁵ As for the regular reader of *The Daily Dish*, Murray has ham-handedly stumbled onto an important point. Andrew Sullivan, the administrator of *The Daily Dish*, is a self-described conservative libertarian, which suggests that Murray, like so many counter-culture liberals, has a horrifyingly difficult time differentiating his views from those unfortunate individuals who really believe free market capitalism is the end point of human ethico-economic achievement. The latter are sometimes referred to (following Sullivan’s characterization) as “South Park Republicans” after the popular television program, *South Park*, which launches (sometimes very) humorous social critiques from a supposedly commonsensical libertarian perspective; while the former simply watch the same program and often agree with the same premises without recognizing its clear political implications for the figure of the worker—a somewhat less humorous monument to our so-called post-ideological age.
believe that when we are short of events, when we are short of what the events provide us with – during intermediary situations such as we are experiencing nowadays – it is necessary to focus our thoughts and efforts on local experiences, because really, at a global level, we have only lifeless, obsolete ideas; we have ideas that are not sufficiently activated. (“After the Event” 183)

Badiou’s understanding of a “new activation” is the basis for his related assertion “that, today especially, we need to focus our strength precisely on State decisions, because we can measure what is created in this way. At the level of the reformation of global capitalism [the primary target of anti-globalization protest], on the other hand, we have no real power” (190). In other words, Badiou is advocating investigations into local circumstances that will cultivate discipline and orient the thinking of militants in a manner that is neither so abstract—failing to embrace the experiences of the present or acknowledging the place of the State—nor so concrete—taking the ordinations and ubiquity of the State as its basic point of departure—that new activist experiences become purely theoretical or practical matters. Democracy, as a concept and formal process, must be submitted to similar conditions.

Badiou has drawn quite a bit of attention for his categorical rejection of democracy in the form of capitalist-parliamentarianism. As he explains, in our contemporary democracies “voting is a state operation. And it is only by assuming politics and the state are identical that voting can be conceived as a political procedure” (The Meaning 12). Badiou’s chief objection to that conception is that it precludes political novelty in the name of representing popular opinion. However, where democracy concerns the process through which militants make decisions, it is surely indispensible. But it is only one of numerous indispensible characteristics of such processes, and certainly not the central term as it would be in the case of authors like Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt,
Ernesto Laclau, or Jacques Ranciere. Any perception that Badiou’s antipathy toward electoral democracy aligns him with the totalitarian impulse that many believe emancipatory narratives necessarily promote is, therefore, based on a misunderstanding. Badiou is not a democrat or a conventional populist, but neither is he an advocate for the Party-State he locates in the termination of a political sequence, not within its inventive parameters. In that respect, he shares sympathies with the industrial unionist valuation of democracy.

We saw that Debs and DeLeon looked at electoral politics as an opportunity for agitation and education. DeLeon’s specific understanding most closely informs the industrial unionist category of democracy where it recognizes the power of the state and its count, while simultaneously declaring democratic agitation as irreducibly distinct from and, thus, indifferent to the results of the count. This led to the statement: “Democracy and discipline have less to do with a relation to the state and the party than a mode of solidarity that organizes itself at the point of production and agitates at all levels of social relations.” Of course Badiou is not interested in the pedagogy of the ballot, in large part because its results often effectively substitute for politics, rather than promote the “new activation” he wishes to see cultivated by political organizations. But, like Badiou’s view of Bolshevism, the industrial unionist political sequence is now saturated. Its treatment of democracy should not be imported and imposed upon our understanding of the opportunities and difficulties of contemporary electoral procedures.

Seeing politics as a rare but real possibility flies in the face of what is sometimes called “liberal rationalism.” Despite being a supposedly progressive and critical tendency—in the sense of not accepting existing social relations as necessarily right
and natural—liberal rationalism is a rather insidious opponent of the politics described here. Two of the tendency’s most popular representatives, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, have directed their bestselling books at religious ideology, suggesting that the manifestoes of this prim ideology have maintained their classical target, while still equally dismissing fundamental socio-economic questions. As J. Judd Owen explains in *Religion and the Demise of Liberal Rationalism*, “The liberal institutions concerning religion—the separation of church and state, religious pluralism, religious freedom—were originally justified on the basis of a revolutionary comprehensive philosophic doctrine, covering human nature, the purpose of political society, and the proper domain of religious faith” (1). This doctrine was a product of the Enlightenment’s political philosophy and projects. Yet, in the era of antifoundationalism, where comprehensive philosophy appears anachronistic, those doctrines from the Age of Reason have little hope of being replaced by a view capable of withstanding “a radical critique of reason as such” (ibid.). According to Owen, this Nietzsche-inspired critique of reason insists “there are no evident and certain principles in either natural, moral, or political science. The belief in the very possibility of science and of a life and society guided by rational norms must therefore be said to be rooted in a prejudice of faith. This critique may thus seem to cut to the heart of the Enlightenment” (ibid.). However, challenges of that kind are as old as liberalism itself, and can be easily incorporated into Owen’s framing of the liberal rationalist discourse. Accepting the socially constructed character of this or that aspect of social life does not commit the liberal to a specific valuation. In fact, a polite, largely pacified Nietzscheanism can aid
liberal critiques of religious dogma, which further fortifies its claims to contemporary relevance in the Age of Terror.

In the case of Hawkins' *The God Delusion* and Hitchens' *God is Not Great*, the social construct to be critiqued is not the liberal institutions that rest easily in the privileged corners of each continent while life outside the democratic suburbs continues to count for very little. No, religion is the problem, and Muslims are the worst of that lot. As Terry Eagleton describes this perspective in a withering critique, "Dawkins seems to nurture a positively Mao-like faith in faith itself—in the hopelessly idealist conception, for example, that religious ideology (as opposed, say, to material conditions or political injustice) is what fundamentally drives radical Islam…. In this inflation of the role of religion, Dawkins is close to many radical Islamists themselves. His belief in the power of religion is every bit as robust as the pope’s" (*Reason* 110). But Eagleton gets in his best shot when he locates the unwillingness of Hitchens and Dawkins to radicalize their critiques of the present social order in their perception that "[t]hings are just not desperate enough. In their opinion, it is just shoddy, self-indulgent leftist hyperbole to imagine that they are. Your average liberal rationalist does not need to believe that despite the tormented conditions of humanity there might still, implausibly enough, be hope, since they do not credit such a condition in the first place" (38).

While the contemporary liberal rationalist will certainly accept the notion that many aspects of our modern, liberal state have a largely contingent, socially constructed character, those characteristics only serve to reinforce the importance of liberal reason for making the whole thing work. Human rationality, then, becomes the basis for the possibility of these systems running smoothly. This is where Nietzsche can return with a
vengeance. As Eagleton reminds us, “In Nietzsche’s view, the death of God must also spell the death of Man—that is to say, the end of a certain lordly, overweening humanism—if absolute power is not simply to be transplanted from one to the other. Otherwise humanism will always be secretly theological” (16). Importantly, the humanist impulse at the heart of liberal rationalist thought can represent a dogmatic barrier to speculative insights—i.e., the kind of insights capable of imagining alternatives to existing social relations.

Ultimately, the liberal-rationalists make their claims about what is possible on the basis of a concrete determination of what there is. A determination, in this sense, is an idea actualized in a material process. In this case, human rationality is actualized in liberal institutions and electoral procedures. There is arguably much to recommend in those processes. For example, we critique the institutions of the liberal State because they permit—even, to a certain extent, encourage—us to do so. (Needless to say, that example is a pervasive ideological justification for not seriously exploring the issue further, which makes it simultaneously true and, as a form of vulgar reductionism, entirely beside the point.) But to make the wise dispensations of the State administrative apparatus the basis for a self-satisfied worldview represents a perverse irony for an ideology that just wants us all to be a little smarter.

Against the ironic intellectual complacence of Dawkins and Hitchens, the most elementary critical (some would say “dialectical”) determination is based on the proposition that all ideas and concomitant material processes are pregnant with their opposites. The classical examples are the way capitalist freedom confronts the worker as insecurity and servitude, the way democracy becomes the rule of an entrenched
elite, thus making popular sovereignty impossible, and so on. That is also to say that an
Idea contains contradictions, or, as Mao explained, “If you have an idea, one will have
to divide into two.” Mao’s claim is a good summation of everything that was at stake in
the Cultural Revolution he initiated. In Badiou’s explication of those events, around 1965
a significant philosophical debate was being staged within the Communist Party. The
majority of the Party leadership felt that the essence of dialectics was synthesis, or the
fusion of two into one, which meant that the revolution had already occurred and it was
now time to focus on security and stability. The minority, led by Mao, held that the
essence of dialectics rests in the proposition “one divides into two,” meaning that the
revolution must continue (The Century 60). According to the minority tendency, the
class struggle has barely begun, and those who, “under the cover of synthesis,” were
calling for the fusion of two into one, were really “calling for the old One” of pre-
revolutionary China (ibid.). In other words—and despite their outwardly scholastic
appearance—these debates were concrete attempts to actualize a proposition in the
field of politics. No less so than in the case of the liberal rationalist, the veracity of one’s
position is determined on the basis of its reflection in material processes. The State
(with its security, stability, and infinite rationality) ultimately won. But not before the
instantiation of a remarkably creative sequence—one that still attests (though often
through the memory of its violent excesses) to the capacities of subjective commitment
driven by the communist hypothesis that we need not forever labor beneath a ruling
class. As for the evil any good liberal would situate in the outcome of this struggle,
Badiou’s response is unflinching:

The theme of total emancipation, practiced in the present, in the
enthusiasm of the absolute present, is always situated beyond Good and
Evil. This is because in the circumstances of action, the only known Good is the one that the status quo turns into the precarious name for its own subsistence. Extreme violence is therefore the correlate of extreme enthusiasm, because it is in effect a question of the transvaluation of all values. The passion for the real is devoid of morality. Morality’s status, as Nietzsche observed, is merely genealogical. Morality is a residue of the old world. (The Century 63)

It is crucial to contrast this view of morality’s status with the virtuous clichés of the liberal presentist, for whom the history of Man has been progressing toward the moment when he can declare his age less barbaric than the rest, and his perspective less ideological. Ethico-historical presentism is a rather efficient means of not having to really think about what was unique and inventive in a political sequence, since it is so much easier to condemn what was “evil” or “barbaric.” Politically speaking, this means confronting Badiou’s “new activation” with a prohibitive ultimatum: reconcile your desires with the horrors of past projects; do not have thoughts that will offend our present morality; rather, always fear you will do evil. In terms of scholarship, the prohibitions of liberal presentism recalls Nietzsche’s “untimely mediation” about the peculiar tendencies of the scholar—specifically, his “sobriety and conventionality” in determining what is valuable, which

leads him to take an especial pleasure in history, insofar as he can trace the motives of men of the past in accordance with the motives he himself knows of. A mole-tunnel is the right place for a mole. He is secure against any extravagant hypotheses; if he sticks at it, he will dig out all the commonplace motives that inform the past, because he feels himself to be the same commonplace species. For precisely that reason, of course, he is usually incapable of understanding or appreciating what is rare, great or uncommon, that is to say what is essential and vital, in the past. (Untimely Mediations 171)

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6 See, e.g., the conclusion of Hitchens’ God is Not Great (pgs. 277-83).
The security “against any extravagant hypotheses” can also be applied to the historical understanding of Christianity. Just as Nietzsche was far too aware of the extent to which Pagan superstitions and mythological beliefs enriched Greek culture to assume their repression could somehow provide a satisfying solution to Man’s spiritual problems (Human 46-7), it would be bad faith to ignore the role of Christianity as the impetus for sweeping reconsiderations of social relations in various eras. Surely many of the wisest and most learned rationalists of every era would join the chorus in opposition to those wild-eyed Christian anarchists who are supposedly lashing out blindly and unreasonably against their social order—which, even if corrupt, has more about it to recommend than any chaotic alternative feverishly dreamt up by the masses. But from Gerrard Winstanley’s seventeenth-century Levellers to the more media-savvy social conscience of today’s New Monasticism, many of these movements were not driven by wise, rational determinations, but intransigent, genuinely creative propositions about what is possible due to Christ’s example.

If we find ourselves short of those sorts of propositions today, their absence may say more about our ability to recognized opportunities than about the actual lack of those opportunities. Incredible as it may sound, the most virulent and influential strain of economic liberal ideology was dealt an unambiguous death blow on October 23, 2008 when Alan Greenspan testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Greenspan had been the unquestioned high priest of market deregulation for the two decades (1987-2006) he spent as Chairman of the Federal Reserve. His ethico-economic devotion to Ayn Rand’s Objectivist philosophy meant that he held as gospel that the separation between the market and government must be
total. Even clear cases of fraud should be dealt with through the mechanism of the market without aid from regulatory bodies. But what the financial collapse of 2008 represented for any honest proponent of economic libertarianism was the unqualified realization of Marx’s fundamental hypothesis about the inherent limits of capitalism—namely, that a free market left to its own devices will of necessity lead to crisis and collapse. As Greenspan explained to the House Committee, “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief” (Andrews). With regard to his uncompromisingly laissez faire beliefs about government regulation, Greenspan conceded “I’ve found a flaw. I don’t know how significant or permanent it is. But I’ve been very distressed by that fact” (ibid.). What the economic crisis demonstrated to no less a true believer than “Saint Alan,” was that the fate of an unregulated market was the creation and circulation of continuously more exotic financial instruments. Despite his attempts to salvage the proposition that the market almost always knows best, the consequences of his testimony are clear: In the absence of a sacrosanct internal logic, there must be those who make decisions about those supposedly natural, self-regulating market processes.

It was in the dramatic context of this quiet—almost silent—revelation that the health care debate emerged with inglorious fury. The capitalist never really cared whether or not markets could correct themselves; theirs was a morality, not an economic theory. After all, any theory worthy of the appellation would surely question its very conditions of existence and immediately dismiss the necessity of the capitalist/socialist binary in which it was irrevocably sustained as an ethico-economic
ideal. Just as the socialist never saw any need to wait for the Big Crisis before setting state controls that would be, in principle, quite fragile island barriers amidst a vast ocean of market relations, the capitalist never requires permission from reality to decide capitalism is an infinitely productive social fact. Yet, for the purposes of addressing health care reform, the latter morality assumed the guise of an extreme free market ideology that had already died pathetically bleating on the floor of congress the previous October. Fear resurrected an American dogma; Ronald Reagan returned to the podium in various skin suits to remind his countrymen that questioning the brutal dominion of profit is un-American. The embattled "socialist" president sought to reassure the public that these were policy questions—questions about wise management—and that their country would still be there after his party’s watered-down legislation takes effect. Given the disparate ideological composition of his majority party, it is not at all evident he could have succeeded with a different approach, or that “success” would have been desirable given the extensive list of concessions that accompanied the various proposed bills.

On the face of things, the health care debate could only appear frustrating to those with even the slightest progressive sympathies. But the news wasn’t all bad. For those who see equality as the basis of all politics and refuse to relinquish the possibility of a new emancipatory mode for the sake of adapting to the exigencies of the Here and Now, the intellectual impact of the outcome of those debates should be regarded as simultaneously encouraging and every bit as impactful as the proverbial fart in a hurricane. Yes, it was a depressing scene for anyone who cares about sick people having to choose between their health and their home—arguably one of the more
socially unjust expressions of capitalist greed imaginable in the so-called “first world”—
but the failure of a strategically moderate president’s managerial ideology can only
benefit those who, as Badiou expresses it, believe that “equality has nothing to do
with...social justice, but with the regime of statements and prescriptions, and is
therefore the latent principle, not of simple scrawls on the parchment of proletarian
history, but of every politics of emancipation” (Metapolitics 113). In fact, Badiou goes on
the declare, “[T]here is, here and now, a politics of equality, one which it isn’t simply a
matter of realising but, having postulated its existence, of creating here or there, through
the rigorous pursuit of consequences, the conditions for a universalisation of its
postulate” (ibid.). Yet, Badiou’s reference to a “regime of statements and prescriptions,,”
particularly as they relate to the “rigorous pursuit” of a postulation’s “consequences,” is
not entirely clear. In order to elucidate Badiou’s distinction between the ordinary regime
of progressive equality and its emancipatory postulation, it will be necessary to examine
the life of certain discrete prescriptions as they circulate within the health care debate.

**Follow the Prescription: An Exercise in Sloganeering**

Whatever may be the real relationship between the historical juncture inhabited by
the activists of industrial unionism and the activism of the present, the goal of a
principled discipline based on essential, non-negotiable ideals should be maintained
over and against any consideration of those differences, which may prove to be
substantial. Treated as a process, the step-by-step pursuit of an intellectual/theoretical
consistency may demonstrate a creative capacity otherwise hidden in the description of
what the process produced. In this case, working through the process of prescription-
creation beneath the local lens of health care activism aids our recognition of the
rhetorical strategies that signify the constituent features of the eventual prescriptive
statement. The seeming occlusion of such features in the completed form of a statement like “An injury to one is an injury to all”—a statement I describe as foundational to the industrial unionist sequence—surely limits our capacity to appreciate the full extent of its creativity. The next step is to recreate the vital force of that foundational statement in the context of current activist struggle.

Here we may turn again to Lenin’s “On Slogans” for a polemical exemplar of what it means to maintain a principled discipline, while finding those necessary rhetorical strategies for intervening into an unpredictable situation. “On Slogans,” written during the heady, combustible month of July, 1917, concerns less the circulation of meanings and polyvocal discursive constructions than it does an intervention in language through a statement that detaches itself from the complexity of its linguistic situation and forces something new to emerge. This forcing is a great risk based on a concrete analysis of the situation, but it intervenes rather than objectively observes. The gesture that insists a slogan was previously correct but that its value has passed irrevocably is precisely the mentality to be rigorously observed by those who seek a decisive course in intellectual opposition to reformist irresolution. This section attempts to chart such a course through the discrete formulation of prescriptions aimed at transforming the market-based logic of the pervasive discourses on health care in the United States.

For starters, the realities of our health care system are incommensurable with the prescription to do no harm.7 Our situation seems ripe for a new prescription that insists that for a doctor to do no harm, to keep the good of the patient as the highest priority,  

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7 This refers to the classical phrasing of the Hippocratic Oath: “I will use those dietary regimens which will benefit my patients according to my greatest ability and judgment, and I will do no harm or injustice to them.”
means supporting a different health care system—one that makes insurance available
to all citizens without exception. Only when insurance becomes a right can we finally
take seriously the Hippocratic Oath’s injunction because only then will the crucial
problem of access be redressed. So our first prescription, what we could as easily call
an “axiom,” is a simple one: To do no harm means quality health care for all.\(^8\)

Problems with this axiom immediately emerge. How do we define “quality”? What
will extending health care to all do to those who already have insurance they are
pleased with? Is it ethical to diminish the quality of care some receive in order to ensure
that everybody receives at least some care? This first question is a very good one; the
next two are based on a viciously egoistic worldview that is no less disturbing for being
closer to the rule than the exception.

Let’s begin by dismissing the latter questions on the grounds that they cannot inform an egalitarian prescription. Instead, they take as their basis the intolerable notion
that some should be denied a basic right because to do otherwise might be detrimental
to those who benefit from existing circumstances. Needless to say, this logic already
serves as the silent basis for the popular segregationist mentality toward public schools:
It is fine for those young people to be treated as equals, but not if that means busing
them to my kid’s school. A pragmatic recognition that we must sometimes live at each
other’s expense is to be taken with a shoulder shrug because at the end of the day the
quality of the existing school system is at stake. A concerned parent must fight for the
realities of a situation from which they and their children benefit.

\(^8\) According to Peter Hallward, “A prescription applies what an axiom implies,” meaning in part that the former is a specific demand, while the latter is a principle like “health care is a right,” for example. Of course, to say that “health care is a right” is to already demand we perceive it in that way. For that reason, I’ve decided not to differentiate between the two concepts in this analysis. See Peter Hallward, “The Politics of Prescription,” South Atlantic Quarterly 2005 104(4): 772.
We must insist that such views are completely at odds with what is being described here. There can be no middle ground on this point. We must investigate and describe the situation in order to change it, not to adapt to its intolerable features. If compromises occur in response to a proactive commitment to an intransigent prescription, fine. But the goal of the prescription is to organize a new logic for the existing state of things; it prescribes a complete rupture with the pragmatic excuse-making that sustains a deficient order. The question of quality, however, directly addresses the character of that rupture.

Even if the last two questions are beside the point, the first is very serious. Our prescription suffers from the ambiguity of the word “quality.” Presumably some can pay for better insurance than the plan available to every citizen. But nothing in the prescription verifies that the widely-available plan will meet every citizen’s needs. What one may describe as “quality” another may consider deficient. Likewise, if we simply say “To do no harm means health care for all,” there is no standard against which to measure the care. Our new logic cannot emerge from either, so we should begin again.

A very common prescription insists that “Health care is a right.” Under the current non-system in the United States, health care is treated as a privilege, which one in six citizens do not have, and the rest do not enjoy on anything like equal terms. What to do with the sick is ultimately an economic question, not a matter of human rights. This reality leads to a perverse commonplace where millions of citizens with fulltime jobs have no policies, nor the means to purchase them. Market forces have simply decided that those people are not to be counted among the insured—a calculation that is as final as it is cruel. Were we looking to contradict the finality of that economic determination
on the grounds that its logic violates certain extra- or non-economic considerations—a heresy in some circles—we could easily accomplish this through recourse to our rights-based prescription. But we should not settle too soon.

The benefit of insisting that “Health care is a right” largely concerns the division it constructs between itself and omnipresent discourses of consumer freedom. With the aid of vast corporate funding, the latter discourse easily trumped the Clinton administration’s infamous attempt to produce an exasperating simulacrum of universal coverage in the early nineties. It took little more than a televised repetition of the word “choice” to sink their mediocre efforts, making it difficult for even some pragmatists to rest easy beneath the banner of rights.

This is where the Hippocratic Oath comes in. Strictly speaking, a prescription that insists maintaining the best interests of the patient is incommensurable with support for the private good vaunted in the current non-system, can mean two things for doctors who fail to resist: They are effectively victimized, at the level of principle, by the perversity of their circumstances, which prevent them from keeping their oath; or, conversely, their non-resistance is equivalent to complicity with the intolerable and an active denial of their oath. We could say, then, that the first describes those who sympathize with the resistance, a sort of potential ideological fifth column that has been silenced by their circumstances, which often includes massive debt from medical school and persistent overwork. The second describes those who, in whatever capacity, deny the veracity of the resistance and the applicability of its principle to their oath (if they even consider the oath important). The partisans of resistance will understand what “quality” means in the original prescription. They will also understand that even without
the word quality—which is really a very dense concept—“health care for all” still implies a certain level of quality. On the other hand, partisans of the status quo who—regardless of whether or not some sincerely want everybody to be covered—cannot perceive an important relation between their responsibilities as doctors and the existing level of access to care, may find it convenient to use the word quality to defend the level of care (in principle) extended even to the uninsured in the U.S.. They could comfortably repeat the myth that the perceived inequalities of our non-system are the necessary, market-based conditions that allow physicians and hospitals to provide the highest quality care in the world. Of course it may not be worth the time or effort to craft a prescription around such recklessly egocentric reasoning, but the inevitable protest should be analyzed.

The difficulties that arise from defining quality insurance and access to care may justify a third option: “To do no harm means equal access to health care.” At least at the conceptual level, this is the best version so far. It effectively reproaches the myth of equal access and ties shortcomings in access to an active denial of the Hippocratic Oath. Yet it does not explicitly establish the link between equal access and universal health insurance. Similarly, the discourse of the status quo already claims that access is, in principle, equal. In other words, it constructs a site for a conceptual tug of war over equal access. That is a worthy battle that can be linked more explicitly to universal insurance through the extended form: “To do no harm means equal access to health care and insurance for all.”

The extended statement could be a productive turn, but which group of physicians, the resistant or the partisans of the status quo, does it ultimately address? The latter will
probably find in any axiom of equality a tyrannically naïve ideal that may even produce its opposite. To put their relationship to axioms of equality in structural terms, the complicit occupy a place within the general social structure that rests easily upon the inequalities of that structure. Those inequalities simply express the necessarily absurd character of any egalitarian ideal. After all, if true equality is impossible, why would we waste time trying to achieve it? And doesn't reference to equality confirm what the status quo was always right to expect: That universal coverage means necessarily diminishing the quality of care provided to those who already have insurance? In other words, health care is a zero-sum game.

Thanks to the specter of socialist “shared misery,” equality is a tough concept to sell. It is, however, the basis of any rhetoric of rights over privilege. “Health care is a right” becomes an inconsistent assertion without support from the attendant axiom “Every citizen counts as one citizen.” Why else would you demand that each has the right to access on the basis of their belonging to a nation? A more logical discourse would take things one step further: Every person counts as one person. Though most activists for universal coverage would openly profess that such a count is true, even necessarily so, it is unlikely that all would see the actual consequences of that axiom as realistic in our present circumstances.\(^9\) Specifically, such a calculation cannot respect one’s status as a citizen, only the fact that one is in need of care—regardless of national boundaries and origins. Below I further explore that important shift in perspective and, as a result, radicalize our prescription. But for now we should merely note their

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significant differences. At the policy level, one is nearly inconceivable in our xenophobic
times. The other is so easy to conceive that it is much harder to understand why its
principles have not yet found a concrete policy expression from the State. In our era of
“human rights,” the fact that insurance is not a right for American citizens convincingly
demonstrates the radical conservatism that has infested the American political process
since Vietnam took the financial heart out of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society over forty
years ago.

Remaining in the strict purview of our national situation, let’s affirm as
unapologetically as possible that if access to health care is not a right, that attests to the
fact not every American citizen counts as one citizen. Some simply count as less, some
as more. Or, we could say, the non-system counts for much more than those it
excludes. This reality is every bit as intolerable as it appears. In order to construct a
logic capable of confronting this reality, we must maintain the prescription that health
care is a right and that every citizen counts, which is the foundation of that right. That
even at home we do not have a State willing or desirous of inscribing these principles in
its policies, testifies to the real insipidness of the discourse of human rights, which is the
infected lifeblood of our pervasive foreign policy rhetoric. Just as it is laughable to speak
of a “culture of life” that says nothing about health care, war, or the death penalty (not to
mention poverty and the prison industrial complex), it is truly obscene to speak of the
rights of citizens in “enemy” states when our indigenous calculations have so little
regard for our own. As our traveling companion Badiou puts it, “The refrain of ‘human
rights’ is nothing other than the ideology of modern liberal capitalism: We won’t
massacre you, we won’t torture you in caves, so keep quiet and worship the golden calf.
As for those who don't want to worship it, or who don't believe in our superiority, there's always the American army and its European minions to make them be quiet” (“On Evil”). In other words, the always self-evident violations of such rights authorize the related right to humanitarian intervention in the form of extensive bombing campaigns.

Despite the reality that the discourse of rights is fraught in a fundamental way, in our domestic context it certainly recalls fond memories of the civil rights movement. The relationship is believable and potentially useful to activists. But this exploration of prescription-building is not activism, and so we cannot measure our desire for a theoretically consistent prescription against the potentially stultifying needs of immediate efficacy. Even where real activism is concerned, activists should carry those prescriptions that will most faithfully inform the process of constructing a new intellectuality regarding health care in the United States. The question is how far along that path can the fraught rhetoric of rights take us?

The answer depends on the destination. As we noted, those who strongly identify with the status quo will have little sympathy for the egalitarian content of the prescription “To do no harm means equal access to health care and insurance for all.” Yet, the divisive character of equality as an ideal may be the prescription’s greatest strength. Without a foundation in equality, democracy is little more than a popular fiction. The reality that our electoral system (no longer ambivalently) recognizes money as speech speaks volumes about the real content of that foundation. But most will continue to argue that an imperfect equality exists as a basis for the process. What we would want our statement to affirm is the absurdity of an imperfect equality of access. Either access is equal or it is not. If it is not, then it constitutes a problem. As many Americans
witnessed in news reports about Canada in the nineties, when health care becomes a public good its problems often become a central public debate. Unfortunately, their debate over wait times, far from convincing Americans of the virtues of having a public health care system, instead confirmed many peoples’ fears about the shortcomings of “socialism” and its willingness to turn prosperity for most into shared misery for all.

Even public education, arguably the most closely related precedent for a rights-based health care system, is under attack by the voucher systems that express, in effect, that equality in access to education may be a nice idea, but it is a very poor standard against which to measure what is actually available. Failing schools are to be treated as sinking ships, not as a public problem that can be realistically redressed. And a failing system receives the same treatment while those who opt out stand by and bemoan their misspent tax dollars. How then, in such circumstances, can we expect a better fate for rights-based access to health care? Put simply, even those who pray for an end to the public education system—by no means a majority of citizens—would not publically insist that some children should go without access to schooling. Instead, advocates of broad school privatization claim to, in a sense, reinforce the right to a certain quality of education made impossible by the inefficiencies of the public model. Like Medicare and Social Security, the school systems need to be privatized in order to save them. This suggests that opponents of public education are able to maintain an axiom like “Every citizen has a right to a quality education,” while undermining the public character of the education system. Even if that claim is absurd in light of larger socio-economic barriers to ensuring quality and access, it has its very short, weak roots in the right soil. It actively maintains a linkage between equality and rights in a manner that
demonstrates the extent to which lack of access is virtually unthinkable to an oppositional discourse.

Equality is foundational to any progressive axiom worthy of the name. But, in an American context, some might argue it is better to leave the word implicit in our prescriptions. Were we to insist to do no harm means access to health care and insurance for all, what is sacrificed from the explicit characterization of that access is retained implicitly in the “for all” that punctuates the statement. According to one argument, far from a concession to a vapid political consciousness, that displacement retains the egalitarian core of the prescription without reference to an easily misinterpreted conception of equality. We can call that conception, which is typically “exposed” by the partisans of the status quo, a perfect or ideal equality. By framing all reference to equality in terms of a sort of absolute leveling, the opponent of change can dismiss ideas as too impractical for consideration. If, however, we understand equality to mean that the consequences of our prescriptions must be available to everyone in the situation into which they intervene—as is supposed to be the case in equality before the law—our conception becomes harder to dismiss and easier for those who uphold it to practice.

With that in mind, in our national situation, we should demand that to do no harm means access to health care and insurance for all American citizens. This prescription does four things well: First, it constructs a stark ideological dividing line between those who resist and those who comply. A good prescription always reduces the depoliticizing complexity of a situation to its essential, and essentially antagonistic, opposition. It must of course understand those complexities in order to formulate its intervention. Then, in
its next move, the logic of a prescription requires a choice of yes or no, for or against, to resist or to comply. Similarly, its third characteristic is a great capacity for generating ever more specific prescriptions that will circumscribe a very precise political course in line with that choice. And, finally, to be progressive, a prescription will be available to anybody who follows the course it constructs—without exception. I believe our current prescription does all of those things well in its treatment of the responsibilities of physicians in the United States. But what about the patient?

The punchy little slogan “patients, not profits” does an adequate job of divisively insisting that the profit motive is incommensurable with the best interests of patients. Like “health care is a right,” that popular slogan effectively communicates an invaluable truism. But it could similarly benefit from supplementation. In a longer study than we are attempting here, we could surely generate a positive demand from the priorities of that axiom; something with the capacity to make us rethink the essential character of the patient’s rights in a manner derived from our treatment of the responsibilities of physicians. For example, we may begin by insisting that nothing is more valuable than the health of the patient. And while few would disagree with that formulation, we can demonstrate that the existence of an insurance industry that can pick and choose its patients and prices undermines that principle.

Unfortunately for those self-described progressives who are more concerned with message and issue-framing than a prescriptive intervention with little sympathy for pragmatic calculations—something the partisans of the status quo already insist they represent—the question of the patient, when submitted to an egalitarian count, necessarily concerns the excluded immigrant. That we can “realistically” say so little
about that maligned figure should also compel us not to stop short of a broader intuition about the character of the very State that would make our current health care non-system possible. Equality must always exceed its national situation in order to remain consistent with the injunction that every person count as one person. As we have seen, situations generate their own prescriptions. Constructing prescriptions means little more than patiently observing the imperatives situations create, then casting these in terms that will open our thinking to the possibility of a unique logic—one that is not answerable to what counts for realism in our intolerable circumstances.

Given our ignominious state of affairs, the prescription aimed at doctors must be constituted along the same lines. There can be no question of citizen or alien— to do no harm means access to health care and insurance for all, period. And if that provision causes us to effectively abnegate politics as a statist-representative procedure, in this case at least, precious little is lost. Ultimately, the Hippocratic Oath must go well beyond the popular depiction of the phrase “to do no harm.” Instead, the full force of the Oath rests in the assertion—whatever the circumstance—that, “Any sick person who asks for a doctor to treat them should be examined and treated as well as possible, in the present conditions of medicine as the doctor understands these, and unconditionally with respect to age, nationality, ‘culture,’ administrative status or financial resources…” (Badiou, The Meaning 49). Based as it is on the principle of equality, this Greek maxim bears little resemblance to the discourse of managerial constraints that now determines what is economically feasible in the context of treating the sick. Speaking of France’s infinitely more humane health care system, Badiou notes:

Today, before treating a patient, it is first necessary to consider the state of the economy, the funds of the hospital, the hierarchy of services, the origin
of the patient... their resources, identity papers, and so on. The question of health and the medical function is in the process of being totally absorbed by budgetary considerations, the border police and social discrimination. This goes well beyond the very real threats that weigh on our national system of funding health-care services, which—to the great chagrin of the rats of all kinds—is considered the best in the world. It bears on the very definition of medicine. A very large number of practitioners today, especially in the hospital hierarchy, have turned themselves into agents or accomplices of a bureaucratic management that increasingly practices an intolerable segregation. This is why they must be reminded most energetically of the Hippocratic Oath. (50)

For doctors to act as agents of bureaucratic management represents nothing less than the abandonment of their professional oath. These are the circumstances in which many earnest, even idealistic, practitioners find themselves. It should come as little surprise, then, that the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.—the popular American embodiment of struggle against inequality—should have once claimed, “Of all forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.” Of course King’s claim would actually surprise some—specifically those who are only aware of his sanitized appropriation as a symbol of something that succeeded. But King believed too much in the egalitarian principle that informed his worldview to call his work a success. His most commendable characteristic was his unwillingness to amend his intuition about the destiny of Man for the sake of popularity. When King locates the cruelest of inequalities in how health care is administered, rather than in the more likely candidates of racial or economic inequality, he is clearly suggesting that the treatment of the ill and injured touches on something even more fundamental than poverty and discrimination based on skin color.

The patient is no more the bearer of a particular identity than the one who is injured in the foundational industrial unionist slogan “An injury to one is an injury to all.” The all and the one, the universal and the particular, are submitted to an egalitarian
count without regard for differences. Race and class are obvious social categories for recognizing concrete forms of inequality, but the faceless, economically indeterminate patient is only “the one who is in need,” and any failure to address that need with the same standards, guided by the identical principle, which apply to all patients and any need, constitutes “the most shocking and inhumane” expression of capitalist greed. King’s statement, far from another humanist platitude about suffering human bodies, must be read in the context of a vibrant social gospel unyielding in the face of pragmatic calculations and the determination of what is supposed to be possible. And it is exactly the injunction to persist in the impossible that makes King's example indispensible to this investigation.

**Consequences, not Conclusions**

The major problem with the humanist discourse of rights is its barely disguised assumption that totalitarianism—arguably the greatest affront to human bodies at the level of the formation of a State—lurks behind every pronouncement of the need for radical change. The contemporary champion of humanist ethics, here called the liberal humanist, will surely pronounce a double criticism on those preachers of a social gospel who would have us believe in the ignorant possibility of another world, both in this life and the next. Christopher Hitchens’, for his part, refers to the evolution of social gospel-based “liberation theology” as a “bizarre mutation” with an oxymoronic name, “where priests and even some bishops adopted ‘alternative’ liturgies enshrining the ludicrous notion that Jesus of Nazareth was really a dues-paying socialist. For a combination of good and bad reasons”—none of which Hitchens deigns to describe—“the papacy put this down as a heresy” (247). Fortunately, Dr. King was far from a wild-eyed radical, but
rather a “profound humanist” whose “legacy has very little to do with his professed theology” (180).

Hitchens’s liberal secularist version of King may have some substance; King has become, after all, more of a symbol than an actual individual, and symbols can represent many things. But his relationship to the Chicago Freedom Movement in the mid-sixties suggests, at least in part, the latent radicalism that underlay much of what his “professed theology” inspired. Take, for example, the 1966 “Program of the Chicago Freedom Movement.” The document in question is remarkably “systemic” in its orientation and aims. That is to say, it asks for nothing less than for Chicago to become a model for new form of social engagement in the United States—one that is completely dismissive of measured reform. Speaking of the difference between Southern, institutionalized segregation and its Northern variant, the text insists that “Realtors can justify their discrimination when white parents rightly fear that integrated schools eventually deteriorate because the school system considers them less important than white schools” (emphasis mine 99). I emphasize “rightfully fear” because the Program is very aware of the fact that racist policies and their attendant attitudes spring from the material basis of social relationships. In other words, economic production and allocation is at least part of the grounds on which discursive reproduction occurs; meaning that the white parent has everything to fear within the existing system. When the text insists that “Northern segregation resulted from policies, in particular the decision-making procedures, of the major economic and social institutions” (98), the passage is not intended to create awareness amongst white parents that what they’re doing is reproductive of a grave social inequality. No, the call for the radical, systemic
change of existing social relations was the unspoken assumption of the *Program*, which is most effectively illustrated by its rhetorical mapping of those relations:

The major lesson that the Negro community has learned is that racial change through [the] process [of measured reform] comes only gradually, usually too late, and only in small measures….In this rapidly changing world where technological changes may displace the unskilled workers, where affluence makes it possible to spend millions in waging wars in far away places like Vietnam, and where the elimination of poverty and racism have become national goals, Negroes no longer have the patience to abide by the old, unsuccessful gradualism of the respectable defenders of the status quo. (99)

It is a tempting mistake to quickly conflate that stirring call for change with the then emerging waves of revolutionary activities throughout the world. It is a mistake not because those activities are unrelated or that comparisons wouldn’t be productive. In fact, the *Program* shares the principle of equality and the emancipatory desires of its counterparts in places like China. But it is more interesting to recognize the work this document is expected to do in its own circumstances. Such an understanding requires nothing more than a brief reference to its content, where the *Program* reveals its utopian strivings: “The Chicago Freedom Movement commits itself to the struggle for freedom and justice in this metropolis and pledges our non-violent movement to the building of the beloved community where men will live as brothers and no group or class or nation will raise its hand against [its] brother” (102).

Given its historical moment, the *Program* could be seen as calling for a distinctly American cultural revolution—perhaps one based on a largely Judeo-Christian conception of brotherhood and community. In this case, culture is the intersection of those relationships and practices that comprise a community, but are neither specifically productive in an economic sense, nor administrative in the sense of the State’s electoral apparatus. The meaning of revolution would similarly eschew any deterministic
economism or reference to representational-managerial processes. A cultural revolution, whether in Wuhan or Chicago, calls for group discipline over electoral calculation; for popular education over contract negotiations; and for creative, principle-driven action over largely spontaneous or ossified vanguardist configurations. With respect to the organizational and ideological commitments that would best encompass our circumstances today, cultural revolution—or a revolution in “ideology” (Badiou, The Meaning 113)—appears closer than industrial unionism, with its emphasis on a mode of production that is now largely unrecognizable.

Yet, the concept of a cultural revolution refers here to an intellectual discipline and has little direct impact on the pragmatics of negotiating a contract or protesting a policy; both of which concern a different mode of solidarity that I am neither ambitious nor presumptuous enough to pretend this chapter could significantly inform. To identify cultural revolution as closer to the problems of the present situation in the United States means only that it is more relevant to those problems for and about theory-building. Critical theory, if it can be trusted to do anything at all, must patiently commit its efforts to the categories and statements of its investigations, irrespective of their application. That means, above all else, not meeting the desire for emancipatory experimentation with righteous solemnities about the corruption of power and the dangers of Big Ideas—the theoretical equivalent of the forces of civilization meeting the barbarians at the gates of Rome. The ethical assumption is that the empire may be imperfect at the best of times, but its virtues still far exceed those of its savage enemies.

Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, it has become increasingly difficult to pretend Rome is an actual Republic. The health care bill just passed by the House of
Representatives is tantamount to an elaborate bribe whose biggest beneficiary is a pitiless pharmaceutical industry that had finally become the victim of its own successful lobbying, as many of the same seniors who last year feared government death panels, lacked the financial wherewithal to fill their drug prescriptions (Abelson). In the wake of economic meltdown, corporate Caesarism remains undeterred. The capitol can burn from its abuses, and it is the ideology of “socialism” that is persecuted. The current health care legislation is a warning to its citizens, just as—in a more brutal era no less governed by the rule of law—the crucified bodies of Christians served to announce that Nero was still in charge. No Roman who witnessed that spectacle could have anticipated the empires that would be built beneath the symbol of its martyrs’ torture and execution. Despite the dubious character of most of that long history, it is hard not to sympathize with those idealistic early Christians, while Rome’s citizens, who were then keenly aware that they embodied the highest form of civilization in recorded history, may have looked on their limp corpses with contempt. It is tempting to assume, as arrogant pagans, most onlookers regarded the religious and social goals of those militants an irrecoverable failure.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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