

Public Relations, Biopolitics & Aestheticization
The Instrumentalizing of Identity in Relation to Sociopolitical Conflict

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Abstract:

Contemporary experiences and conceptions of sociopolitical conflict in the West are dominated by the notion of representative identity politics. However, how do Western perceptions of identity itself – particularly, against a cultural backdrop of consumer individualism – contribute toward this domination? Namely, in what ways does the Western perception and experience of identity result in the increasingly prevalent tendency of institutions and civic masses to position themselves in sociopolitical conflict via direct identity appeals and demands? This research aims to explore the ways in which the combined and constitutive effects of the public relations industry and the vast network of biopolitics (namely, continual processes of instrumentalizing identity) results in an aestheticized politics of identity that sees sociopolitical antagonism experienced and measured solely in spectral terms. Further, this research aims to identify the ways in which this ‘spectral materialism’ hinders constructive political thought and action in relation to sociopolitical conflict.

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Introduction

Introduction	3
Literature Review	5
Line of Inquiry & Pertinence	11
Methodology	13

Chapter 1 - Exploring the Rise & Success of the Public Relations Industry

Introduction	18
Edward Bernays: A Brief Resume	21
Twentieth Century Identity: Conceptual Transformation& Bernaysian Instrumentalizing	25
Defining Public Relations: Organizing Chaos & Engineering Consent	31
Instrumental Images – Bridges to the Masses	37
Contemporary Implications and Cumulative Questions	41

Chapter 2 – A Biopolitics of the Population: Identity as an Instrument of Governance

Introduction	48
Reconceptualizing Political Power	50
Disciplinary Power	51
Biopolitical Power	57
A Biopolitical “Art of Government”	67
Instrumentalizing Identity: Deployment and Commodification	70

Chapter 3 – Contextualizing the Antagonistic Gap

Introduction	76
The Antagonistic Gap – A Sociopolitical Battlefield	78
The Biopolitical Colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada	85

Chapter 4 - Specters in an Empty Space: The Aestheticization of Sociopolitical Conflict

Introduction	93
The Aestheticization of the Politics of Identity	95
The Spectacle: A Theatre for the Distorted Sociopolitical Struggle	105

Conclusion

Summative Findings & Pertinence	112
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Bibliography

117

Introduction

Contemporary conceptualizations of sociopolitical conflict are often characterized by division and strife between opposing identity groups. Indivisible from this polarization are a variety of sociopolitical appeals to identity. When analyzing and responding to sociopolitical conflict in the West, the concept of identity is an increasingly central theme. Rifts and incongruities between identity groups are continually cited – by scholars, practitioners, politicians, and civilians – as the causes and perpetrators of sociopolitical conflicts. As such, appeals to sociopolitical identity have become commonplace in a variety of institutional, social, and commercial forums. While the underlying motivations, supposedly at the root of these appeals to identity (i.e. the elimination of oppression, freedom from discrimination, socioeconomic equity) are critically important, the mobilization of these invaluable ideals increasingly manifest as performative commodities as opposed to effective avenues for sociopolitical transformation (Michaels, 2006).

While there is an immense amount of literature analyzing the intrinsic connections between identity and conflict (Redekop 2002, Sen 2006, Levi 2007, among countless others) there is groundwork to be done in understanding the ways in which identity has been continuously rendered an instrument of sociopolitical power. If identity is to be cited as both the catalyst for and potential solution to sociopolitical conflicts, mapping the ways in which Western political, economic, and socio-cultural realities shape both the formation and subsequent instrumentalizing of identity is central to the study of sociopolitical conflict. More specifically, exploring the relationship between Western conceptualizations of identity against a cultural backdrop of consumer individualism, allows one to explore how identity is shaped, shared, and instrumentalized in this socioeconomic context.

Debates surrounding the intent and effect of consumer industries – like advertising and public relations – are relatively commonplace in contemporary sociopolitical conversations. Public relations professionals and ad-men are largely understood as spin doctors – trained in the strategic manipulation of homogenous markets (Ewen 1976 & 1996). Existing literature on the influence of consumer industries attributes the diffusive implications of these industries to some shadowy capitalist overlord or elite group of “brand bullies” (Klein, 2000). Further, while this academic literature acknowledges the widespread sociopolitical influence of these industries, the extent and effect of this influence is often defined in vague and intangible terms. Encapsulating this influence, however, undoubtedly presents a significantly challenging task. After all, the pervasive influence of these industries can seemingly be observed in countless corners of sociopolitical life – in politician’s campaign offices, a job interview for a barkeep, a couple on a first date, amid the random passing-by of strangers in an alleyway, and countless other places in between.

How then, is the notion of individual and collective identity implicated by the influence of these industries? Inversely, how are popular perceptions and experiences of self-identity in the West connected to the very nature and pervasive success of these industries? How do the arenas of social, political, and economic ontology intersect in the Western conceptualization and experience of identity? Answering this question will offer an avenue through which we can better understand the diffusive success of consumer industries in the West, and better understand the ways in which identity is instrumentalized in the context of sociopolitical conflict.

This research will seek to demonstrate the ways in which identities are repeatedly and constitutively instrumentalized in the West; not unilaterally through consumer based industries like public relations, but rather, multi-laterally through a vast network of biopolitical apparatuses

of power. Further, we will explore the ways in which this repeated instrumentalization culminates in an aestheticized politics of identity. Ultimately, this research will demonstrate the ways in which identity-centered responses to sociopolitical conflict – at the civic and institutional levels – are depoliticized and rendered largely impotent as a direct result of these constitutive modes of instrumentalization and aestheticization.

Literature Review

A review of relevant literature on modern perceptions of self-identity in the West (and the social, political, and economic forces that constitute these conceptualizations) provides a useful point of departure for our current undertaking. An examination of relevant literature on Western conceptions and experiences of identity, illuminates three relatively simultaneous sociohistorical transformations; one social, one governmental, and one economic. First, since the early twentieth century, we have seen a significant shift in the social conception of identity and how individual identities function as parts of homogenous social groups. Second, modernity saw a shift in the way Western states governed their societies. In turn, the very notion of identity became a matter of political concern and identities become incited as biopolitical instruments. Finally, the twentieth-century rise of public relations as a professional industry was rooted in the continual reproduction and eventual commodification of identity itself. However, an analysis of the connections between these three sociopolitical and socioeconomic shifts, and their combined influence on sociopolitical conflict is lacking in existing literature.

Above all, there is a consensus among relevant literature that over the course of the twentieth century, a conceptual shift regarding identity gradually occurred. Whereas self-expression and representation of identity had once been linked to duty-based categorization, willingness, and the pursuit of realizing institutional standards, it slowly came to embody an

individual's personal truth (Davis, 2003, 43). Joseph Veroff further describes a shift "from a socially integrated paradigm to a more personal or individuated paradigm" (Ibid.). There is also a strong consensus in contemporary literature that in the West, one's perceived identity is constituted by a varied collection of social, political, and cultural affiliations. An individual's identity can rarely be understood as some all-encompassing membership or identification with a single group.

For instance, Redekop argues that ethnonational identity is derived from five component categories, including ancestry, religion, ethnicity, land and politics (2002, 125). Sen also asserts that identities are composite sketches of a large group of affiliations, rooted in history and background (Ibid., 24). However, Sen extrapolates past Redekop's five ethnonational categories, arguing that human identities are made up of "the variety of groups we belong to, including citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc." (Ibid.).

Both Redekop and Sen argue that identifications represent more than affiliations – they also represent value commitments and sources of meaning and belonging. Sen argues that affiliation with identity categories operates on a seemingly infinite loop of prioritization and reorganization. In trying to solidify a sociopolitical position, Sen contends that individuals, must constantly "decide what exact importance to attach to one identity category over another" (2006, 17). Levi echoes Sen's contention but argues that identification with a group *need not* be accompanied by an elaborate commitment to a corresponding value system (2007, 17). Levi argues that value commitments are organized into a network of "systematized beliefs" that help individuals prioritize their varying affiliations and identifications to make sense of value

judgements (Ibid., 33). Further, Levi contends that we must “not confuse value commitments with the performances that qualify as attempts to fulfill these commitments” (Ibid., 28).

Here there is an acknowledgement in existing literature that that social identity becomes simultaneously conceived of in both personal and social terms. Unlike the duty-based categorization of era’s past, an individual is now an active participant in the continual creation, recreation and representation of their identity within a larger community. What then, of the nature of this continual creation and recreation?

Foucault associates identity with networks of power through measures of sameness and difference (1965, 116). Revel delineates Foucault’s contention, explaining that “every identity is therefore prisoner of an identification that relates it to what it is not” (2009, 46). Redekop (2002), Sen (2006) and Levi (2007) also discuss the concept of self-other dynamics based on the interplay of conflicting value systems. Therefore, the Western conceptualization of identity itself, becomes marked by measures of truth and uniqueness, and is inscribed via composite representation, categorical differentiation and the dynamics of self and other. The literature is insufficient, however, in accounting for the larger sociopolitical significance of a transition from identity conceived in the context of duty-based societal organization to that of the authentic and deeply individualized identity.

This isn’t to say however, that existing literature doesn’t offer some clues regarding the extensive significance of this transition. For instance – the notion of identity as one’s true, and individualized self can undoubtedly be linked to the cumulative effects of what Foucault’s deems biopolitics. Foucault characterizes a shift in the ways in which states governed populations and defines biopolitics as the “administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (1978, 141).

Foucault argues that biopower is inseparable from the development of capitalism, a socio-economic system that “wouldn’t have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies” (142). However, Lazzarato (2006) specifies that Foucault’s notion of biopower is not merely a problem of economy, but rather one of ontology. Lazzarato argues that biopolitics “refers to a dynamic of forces that establishes a new relationship between ontology and politics” (11). Foucault argues that biopower is not simply deployed top-down by political, institutional, and/or economic elites. Rather, he argues that “techniques of power” can occur at all levels of social life through a network of apparatuses (1978, 142).¹

Lazzarato notes that biopower works in and through these apparatuses in a way that “coordinates and targets a power that does not properly belong to it” (12). In this description, Lazzarato emphasizes Foucault’s notion that there is no locus of power, but rather that apparatuses are biopolitical mechanisms that coordinate and dominate discursively created subjectivities (Ibid.). Revel adds that problematizing identity is not as significant as determining “how to prevent a subjective individuation from being immediately identified – that is – objectified and subjected to the system of knowledge and powers in which it is inscribed” (2009, 47). These processes of objectification and subjugation can be understood as the deployment of discursively created identities through Western structures of power and knowledge. Foucault contextualizes this deployment, by tracing the history of medicalization and the discursive creation of sexuality, though which categories of gender and sexual orientation are deployed through the apparatus of psychiatry (1978, 46-47).

¹ The notion of apparatus was originally conceptualized by Louis Althusser in his 1970 work *Ideology & Ideological State Apparatuses*. However, Foucault expands upon Althusser’s conceptualization and counters the idea that apparatuses only function at the level of the state. This distinction will be explored in greater detail in the second chapter.

However, what is the sociopolitical and ontological significance of identity experienced in biopolitical terms? While existing literature is effective in delineating the ways in which subjectivities are created, incited, and deployed biopolitically, it does not account for how the very logic of biopolitical subjugation comes to be absorbed and deployed by individuals themselves, in their own sociopolitical groupings, interactions, and conflicts. In short, there remains work to be done in mapping and analyzing the relationship between identity and sociopolitical conflict in a biopolitically organized society.

Further, identity perceived as one's true and unique self is also central to existing critiques of consumer industries. Davis argues that post-modern conceptualizations of identity manifest as a commodification of the self. This commodification manifests first, through the fact that "self-understanding is mediated by the consumption of goods and images" and second, through "the reorganization of our personal lives and relationships on the model of market relations" (2003, 41). Davis argues that identities in the West are formulated and represented through processes of "personal branding" through which one's composite identity becomes a clearly representable and deployable mosaic image (Ibid., 42). At the helm, navigating this shift, Davis argues, are capitalist patterns of consumerism and consumption. In the vein of successful corporate branding, the consumer themselves becomes commodified and a process of personal branding dominates one's conception and representation of their identity in larger society.

By looking to the pioneers and historians of consumer industries then, we can find attempts to define the ideological tenants and professional practicalities that culminate in what Davis coins the commodification of the self. Particularly, looking to the formative ideology and interdisciplinary success of the public relations industry, as partly pioneered by Edward Bernays, allows for a partial – but largely insufficient – explanation of the sociopolitical significance of

these theoretical and practical underpinnings. Bernays contends that the public relations profession was born out of a need to control the unconscious impulses of the masses through “conscious and intelligent manipulation of their organized habits and opinions” (1928, 37). Bernays argues that the fundamental and defining role of the public relations profession – in all its interdisciplinary deployments – is to “supply the needed ideas” for taming the unconscious drives of the masses, preventing social upheaval, and sustaining democracy (Ibid.).

Ewen elaborates on these ideas, noting that public relations and advertising strategies were based on “offering mass produced visions of individualism by which people could extricate themselves from the mass” (1976, 45). Herein, Ewen emphasizes the shift in appealing to individual sensibilities and desires as opposed to the advertising tactics of the past, which were based on class and pragmatism (Ibid., 43). Ewen notes that this shift was driven by the hope to “create an individual who could locate his needs and frustrations in terms of the consumption of goods, rather than the quality and content of his life work” (Ibid.). Ewen also discusses the civilizing impact of these avenues for appealing to individual consumers en masse, through which the “transforming of pockets of [sociopolitical/socioeconomic] resistance” was rendered possible (Ibid.).

While these critiques undoubtedly acknowledge that perceived identity is central to the formative ideology of these industries, it insufficiently accounts for the sociopolitical significance of this relationship. Authors acknowledge that public relations strategies are undoubtedly deployed as a means of sustaining hungry markets and preventing resistance to the status quo. However, they reduce the processes that result in the commodification of the self to elitist domination alone and fail to account for sociopolitical conditions that exist outside the economic realm. Particularly, and most importantly, the literature does not account for how these

processes of commodifying identity *implicate* and are *implicated by* processes of biopolitical identity deployment that were expanding just as pervasively over the same time-period. How and to what extent are these forces connected and what is the combined effect of these forces on sociopolitical conflict?

Upon exploring the social, cultural, political and economic processes through which identities are constituted and deployed, notions of neutral sociopolitical categorization become difficult to defend. The social shift that results in identity perceived as an individual's true and unique self is not some means of merely better organizing a population, but *systematically managing* that population. Further, this same conception of an individual's true self is not simply a means of selling products to consumers, but in fact, a means of having consumers come to *sell themselves*. The literature however, is insufficient in defining the fundamental connection between the increasingly constitutive nature of the biopolitical deployment of identity and the rapid rise and diffusive success of consumer industries like public relations. Subsequently, existing literature is unable to account for the combined effect of these supposedly separate means of instrumentalizing identity on the very nature of contemporary sociopolitical conflict in the West.

Line of Inquiry & Pertinence

The aim of this research is to contribute toward supplementing this insufficiency by examining the tense coalescence between processes of commodifying and biopolitically deploying identity, and the combined effects of these forces on civic and institutional participation in sociopolitical conflict. While there are clearly links between these methods of identity instrumentalization, the pervasive ontological manifestations of this relationship could be better explored and defined by examining their influence on sociopolitical conflict.

Particularly, how do civic and institutional responses to contemporary sociopolitical conflict demonstrate the cumulative and constitutive effects of the instrumentalization of identity? Put simply, how can we look at contemporary responses to sociopolitical conflict and better understand the combined ways in which identities are instrumentalized in the West?

The social pertinence of this exploration is crucial considering the increasingly prevalent social tendency to conceptualize of sociopolitical conflict as the inherent and stark division between social groups. Without coming to understand how the instrumentalization of identity implicates both the position of individuals and groups in sociopolitical conflicts, and their subsequent response to those conflicts, collective conceptualizations of sociopolitical conflict will remain circular and fatalistic. Coming to understand the nature of identity instrumentalization – namely, processes of deployment and commodification – will allow for the fostering of increased sociopolitical literacy. Without understanding the ways in which identities are deployed as weaponry in sociopolitical conflicts, it will remain incredibly difficult to foster strategic and subversive means of articulating and fulfilling civic demands.

Further, the scientific pertinence of this exploration is critical in the pursuit of supplementing the existing analyses of the biopolitical deployment of identity *and* the commodification of identity. While the reviewed literature offers separate analyses of both of these phenomena, there is an insufficient analytical understanding of how the two implicate and reinforce each other at the level of sociopolitical conflict. To undertake this analysis effectively, we first need more dynamic ways to account for how and why consumer industries – like that of public relations – rose to such pervasive and interdisciplinary success. This analysis must account for all the pre-existing sociopolitical conditions that allowed the public relations industry

to prosper and permeate social ontology as it did, particularly, those conditions outside the socioeconomic framework of capitalist production.

By coming to better understand the pervasive success of the public relations industry, we can begin to foster a more critical pedagogy regarding the relationship between instrumentalized identity and sociopolitical conflict in the west. Rooted in the formative work of Paulo Freire, the most important function of critical pedagogy is to offer “tools to unsettle common-sense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity” (Giroux, 2011, 3). Deconstructing the nature of identity instrumentalization as a constitutive sociopolitical force is critical to enriching academic conversations about identity and conflict and understanding the cumulative and complicating consequences of institutionalized identity politics.

Additionally, we need to account for the ways in which biopolitical mechanisms of incitement and deployment are consistently absorbed and reproduced in the sociopolitical field and ontological order. A stronger understanding of the nature and extent of identity experienced under biopolitical conditions is critical to more closely analyzing the implications of these conditions on the very nature of sociopolitical conflict. Pursuing a strengthened understanding of both identity commodification and biopolitical deployment is valuable because it will contribute toward a more critical pedagogy of the relationship between identity and sociopolitical conflict in the West.

Methodology

The methodological approach for analyzing the impact of identity instrumentalization on civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict will be rooted in spectral materialism. (Zizek, 2004, 22). Essentially, spectral materialism reorients the materialist perspective and

asserts that materialism “has nothing to do with damp, dense matter – its proper figures are rather constellations in which matter seems to ‘disappear’” (Zizek, 2004, 22). This seeming ‘disappearance of matter’ then, denotes that what constitutes materiality is an unrepresentable void. Further, the spectral materialist perspective is founded on the premise that there is no materiality without spectre – “what we experience as reality is not the ‘thing itself,’ it is always-already symbolized, constituted, structured, by symbolic mechanisms” (Zizek, 1994, 21). This is not to say that tangible matter *actually does* disappear. Rather, it indicates that this materiality is best understood as constituted and experienced in the form of symbolic specters.

The notion of spectrality is critical to this research primarily because it allows us to extend beyond the concept that conscious ideological forces are the primary drivers of political strife. Particularly, exploring the affective function of specters on the *unconscious mind* – which is definitive of the psychoanalytic underpinnings of both public relations and biopolitics – will allow us to more adequately understand civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict in the contemporary moment. In short, spectral materialism will offer an avenue through which we can explore the politically affective function of “the pre-ideological ‘kernel’ of ideology” which Zizek argues “consists of the *spectral apparition that fills up the hole of the real*” (Zizek, 1994, 21). As will be demonstrated, it is this pre-ideological kernel – namely, the spectral filling of a void – that best constitutes contemporary civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict.

Deploying spectral materialism methodologically then, will be useful in reorienting and supplementing existing conceptualizations regarding the relationship between identity and sociopolitical conflict in the West. A spectral materialist perspective will be useful primarily because it will allow us to reframe our conceptualization of sociopolitical conflict itself, and in

turn better explore the impact that the instrumentalization of identity has upon it. Particularly, it will be useful in coming to counter reductionist conceptualizations that conclude the nature of contemporary sociopolitical conflict can be defined by some tangible and inherent discord between identifiable social groups. These reductionist conclusions attempt to conceive of sociopolitical conflict “as the coexistence of two opposed positive entities” or, put simply, these conceptions represent “the reduction of antagonism to polarity” (Žižek, 1994, 23). By deploying spectral materialism, we will attempt to reorient these reductions and conceive of sociopolitical conflict outside the context of some material or identifiable polarity.

To forge this reconceptualization, sociopolitical conflict must be understood as being constituted by a gap. In the context of our research then, spectral materialism must be defined as “that which fills out the unrepresentable abyss of antagonism” – antagonism, of course, understood as sociopolitical conflict (Ibid., 26). In short, we can understand sociopolitical conflict as that part of reality that remains non-symbolized (Ibid., 21). In short, the non-symbolization of antagonism (sociopolitical conflict) is what prevents society from coming to be seen and symbolized as some harmonious and totalizing whole (Ibid.).

Deploying spectral materialism then in the context of sociopolitical conflict, will allow us to frame sociopolitical conflict in the context of an empty space within which attempts at symbolization – or attempts to close the gap in pursuit of some social totality – continually occur. Further, this methodological approach will allow us to explore the ways in which the spectral battle over filling the unrepresentable gap comes to be mistaken for the antagonistic battle itself. In the context of our research then, spectral materialism, then, must be understood as the processes through which specters (identity signifiers, in our case) come to command and

constitute collective experiences of sociopolitical conflict, more than the lived experiences of people themselves.

Using these insights as methodological tools will allow us to better conceive of sociopolitical conflict as conceptualized and experienced in spectral terms. In order to explore the combined effects of the commodification and biopolitical deployment of identity on this representative struggle, we will draw upon Walter Benjamin's 1935 work on the aestheticization of politics. Particularly, Benjamin's work will allow us to draw conclusions about the nature of both civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict when the politics of identity are aestheticized through continued processes of instrumentalization.

Benjamin's 1935 work *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* can undoubtedly be read a case study in spectral materialism. Benjamin argues that the potentiality of the mass-reproduction of art sees art no longer based on ritual, but instead based on politics (1935, 6). As a result, Benjamin argues that politics are rendered aesthetic – namely, politics come to be ordered in aesthetic terms, and political acts come to be judged only by their aesthetic value. In the context of our research, we can understand this as the processes through which sociopolitical antagonisms come to be aestheticized via political attempts to symbolize identities. In short, Benjamin's work on aestheticization will be useful in coming to understand the tense mutual reinforcement that constitutes the relationship between civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict.

Using Žižek's notions of the antagonistic gap and the pre-ideological specter, and Benjamin's aestheticization thesis as methodological surveyors, this research will first draw connections between the historical development of the public relations industry and the evolution of the biopolitical deployment of identity. We will look at the ways in which these combined

forces of instrumentalizing identity are the constitutive elements of attempts to fill the “unrepresentable abyss of antagonism” and the ways in which these attempts constitute and reproduce the aestheticization of the politics of identity. By coming to understand the ways in which sociopolitical antagonisms become aestheticized – primarily through processes of identity instrumentalization – we can then more adequately explore the combined effect of these forces on civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict.

In doing so, the constitutive nature of the instrumentalization of identity in relation to sociopolitical conflict can be more accurately and explicitly explored and demonstrated. Further, the mechanisms of mutual reinforcement that exist between processes of commodification and biopolitical deployment can be more effectively outlined. Overall, this methodology will allow for a closer examination and exploration of why contemporary sociopolitical discourse and conflict have become seemingly entirely dominated by the notion of identity. More importantly, it will help to demonstrate the manifest nature of this domination.

However, we must first trace two important historical timelines. We will begin our exploration by analyzing the formative ideology of the public relations industry – particularly by looking at the life’s work and ideological underpinnings of one of its forefathers, Edward Bernays. By looking to the Bernays’ ideological roots, the practical application of his work, and more adequately delineating the commonly held explanations for its success we can more clearly understand the processes that culminate in the commodification of the self. Further, we can more adequately address insufficient theoretical conclusions about the success and subsequent sociopolitical implications of the public relations industry.

The second chapter will make a direct attempt to supplement these insufficient conclusions. Upon building an understanding of the public relations industry and the

commodification of identity, we will explore the nature of biopolitical identity deployment as a means of supplementing the political analyses regarding the diffusive success and sociopolitical impact of identity commodification explored in the first chapter. Exploring Foucault's notion of biopolitics will allow us to more adequately explain the ways in which political power operates and permeates sociopolitical ontology. This reconceptualization will lay the groundwork for better understanding the success and sociopolitical implications of the public relations industry. Further looking to Foucault's work on governmentality – or “an art of government” – will help us draw connections with Benjamin's aestheticization thesis and understand the ways in which the instrumentalization of identity is fundamental to the process of sociopolitical aestheticization.

In the third chapter, we will use the theoretical roadmap created in the second chapter to conceptualize of sociopolitical conflict in a biopolitical society – namely, we will attempt to characterize the antagonistic gap. This characterization of the antagonistic gap will frame sociopolitical conflict as an ongoing struggle that is intimately connected to the discursive creation of subjectivities. Doing so will allow for the development of a solid ground upon which we can map and analyze the nature of civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict. Primarily, creating a theoretical sketch of the antagonistic gap in this context, will be useful in coming to better understand and separate the antagonist gap itself, from the representative struggle to fill it.

Finally, the fourth chapter will directly explore the ways in which the politics of identity have been aestheticized through the instrumentalization of identity, and the impact of this aestheticization on civic and institutional experiences of and responses to sociopolitical conflict (the gap). Doing so will be beneficial in two key ways – it will first allow us to examine the ways in which the instrumentalization of identity constitutes the very process of aestheticization.

Second, it will allow us to examine the ways in which the cumulative effects of identity instrumentalization distort collective conceptualizations of sociopolitical conflict and reduce collective responses to a struggle over representative specters.

Chapter 1 – The Rise of Public Relations as a Profession

As we have briefly explored, public relations professionals are largely conceptualized as the intelligent manipulators of capitalist, democratic societies. The public relations profession itself then, is conceptualized as a means of necessarily sustaining capitalist markets and the democratic order required to do so. However, can the diffusive success of the public relations industry be sufficiently explained by capitalist domination or the calculated manipulation of the masses by shadowy totalitarian elites? In order to more sufficiently explore the sociopolitical implications of an industry like public relations and better understand its widespread and interdisciplinary success, we must first trace the rise of this industry throughout modernity and analyze its ideological underpinnings.

Doing so will allow us to more adequately explore and analyze the existing conclusions about the success and sociopolitical influence of public relations – namely, conclusions that seek to identify some locus of power or manipulative dominance. Further, by coming to better understand both the industry itself and the existing justifications for its success and influence, insufficiencies in the sociopolitical analysis of public relations will be identified and subsequently explored in further chapters. Particularly, this initial exploration will allow us to demonstrate that existing analyses fail to analyze the relationship between the rise of the public and shifts in the very nature of sociopolitical governance at the dawn of and throughout modernity. Namely, shifts in the style and form of governance that saw states increasingly invested in coming to know, order, and manage populations.

In order to address these insufficiencies adequately and create an avenue for analytical supplementation, this chapter will focus closely on the ideological craftsmanship of Edward Bernays, widely credited as the one of the founding fathers of the public relations industry.² Particularly, it is useful to examine the rapid pace at which Bernays rose to sociopolitical relevance. In 1919, Edward Bernays – the 28-year old Austrian-American nephew of Sigmund Freud – found himself summoned to the Paris Peace Conference. Bernays served as part of a 16-person consultative committee that would offer insights on how to disseminate propaganda in pursuit of international peace and promotion of American ideals post-war. Bernays – a savvy and strategic writer and press agent –gathered with countless international diplomats to offer consultation on the development of international peacekeeping. Further, the extent of Bernays’ work as a sociopolitical consultant expanded immensely after the Paris Peace Conference.

Looking to the narrative of Edward Bernays himself, characterized as an elite and intelligent prodigy of sociopolitical spin, will allow us to demonstrate the very nature of public relations and lay the groundwork for analyzing its sociopolitical influence. It is largely this narrative, we will see, that leads theoreticians to conclude that Bernays had cracked some Freudian code and realized its sociopolitical value at a convenient historical moment. But how can we more adequately explore how the narrative of a savvy press agent rising to interdisciplinary sociopolitical relevance and demand at the start of a new century, implicate the existing conclusions drawn about the success and influence of public relations? More importantly, how can we more adequately account for how the work of Edward Bernays, and his

² It must be noted that some academics and historians of consumer culture credit Ivy Lee as the founder of the public relations profession (Russell & Bishop, 2009, Zoch, Tupa, & VanTuyll, 2014).

Counsel on Public Relations comes to implicate the sociopolitical progression of the century following the Paris Peace Conference?

By coming to more carefully analyze the ideological underpinnings and interdisciplinary success of the professionalization of public relations, the story Bernays himself tells about it, and the subsequent conclusions that are drawn about the sociopolitical influence of his work, its success and influence can be more adequately accounted for. Ultimately, this exploration will allow for the opening-up of alternative explanations for the widespread success of modern public relations – namely, the ontological permeation of biopolitics, which, while not directly linked to Bernays’ work in existing literature, is inseparable from its expansion and flourishing. As such, we will begin by briefly tracing the trajectory upon which Bernays’ work rose to the occasion of interdisciplinary relevance and application.

Edward Bernays: A Brief Resume

In 1892 Bernays and his family migrated to New York City from Vienna, just one year after his birth. By 1912, Bernays graduated from Cornell University and despite an academic background in agriculture, Bernays quickly took up work as a journalist upon graduation. His early career included writing and editing positions at a variety of medical publications. It was during these early work opportunities that Bernays developed a knack for editorial writing and campaign execution that deployed persuasive propaganda to shape social policy.

His contributions to these medical publications included fiery positions on public cleanliness and a multidimensional campaign to support a theatrical production of *Damaged Goods* – the English translation of a play by Eugene Brieux, challenging the deeply ingrained social taboos associated with prostitution and venereal disease. Positioning himself as a facilitator of discussions on public health, Bernays began garnering investments from elite

financial giants of his era through the *Medical Review of Reviews Fund Committee* (Tye, 1998, 8).

Bernays' work in the public sphere expanded when he took on the role of a press agent to promote a variety of thespians, singers, and dancers. The style that would come to be considered Bernays' trademark developed consistently as he continued to link the arts to larger social causes and conversations (Ibid., 10-16). He promoted ballet and opera productions as high-brow arts that any civilized American should be educated and well-versed about. Continually, under the guidance of Bernays, the creative arts became repositioned as vehicles for social awareness and education as opposed to mere subversive escapes from social obligation. By the time America had entered the first World War, Bernays had already begun carving out his position as a curator and master of the public domain and its fickle sentiments.

Bernays' first official role in a political capacity came in 1917, during the first World War, when he was asked to serve on President Woodrow Wilson's Committee on Public Information (CPI) – commonly known as the Creel Commission (Ibid., 19). Bernays was hired in an effort to engender support for the war out of the Bureau of Latin-American Affairs. Bernays was responsible for maintaining active and positive support for the war domestically and internationally, particularly by focusing on American businesses in Latin America. Bernays was tasked with heading the Latin News Service and maintaining a continually positive spin on American involvement in the war (Ibid., Cultip, 1994, 165). It was after the war concluded and the Paris Peace Conference was convened, that Bernays was identified and called upon to serve on a consultative committee, facilitated by the CPI. As such, prior to his thirtieth birthday, Bernays had positioned himself as a commissioned state consultant –both in and out of wartime.

It was in these initial political consultative positions that the Bernaysian understanding and deployment of propaganda becomes more clearly delineated. Bernays himself referred to his work in the Bureau of Latin-American Affairs as “psychological warfare” (Ewen, 1996, 162). Further, his involvement in the Paris Peace Conference would lead Bernays to release a press release on the CPI’s commitment to sustain “a worldwide propaganda to disseminate American accomplishments and ideals” (Tye, 1998, 19). In short, Bernays quickly adopted the adage that the strategies he’d developed as a press agent, and deployed while working for the CPI during wartime, could undoubtedly be recycled and modified to implicate public opinion in peacetime as well (Cultip, 1994, 168). For Bernays, the word propaganda was not associated with oppression, but rather, with democratic necessity.

In the years following the Paris Peace Conference, Bernays founded the public relations counsel – namely, he launched the professionalization of his approach. To this day, he is among those credited for founding the public relations industry. Bernays very much believed that a group of intelligent manipulators must be bestowed the varying responsibilities of shaping and guiding public opinion. In 1923, Bernays published his first book on these themes, titled *Crystallizing Public Opinion*. His second book *Propaganda* came out in 1928. Bernays went on to write numerous books throughout the course of his career, however, his work as an author in no means drew him away from his work as a chief public relations counsellor in countless economic, social, and political domains.

Bernays’ strategy of linking social causes to corporate sales became his trademark. He positioned Ivory soap as the market leader by having doctors endorse its superiority and curating soap sculpting competitions where well known artists and students used bars of Ivory to carve out their masterpieces (Bernays, 1928, 80). He drove boxed cake mix sales through the roof for

Betty Crocker after advising them to add an egg to their cake's recipe to eliminate the guilt housewives associated with using a pre-made cake mix (Curtis, 2002). He founded the Middle America Information Bureau as a means to transmit positively promote bananas to journalists and news agencies in order to drive sales for *United Fruit*, a Guatemalan corporation (Tye, 1998, 162). He was the publicity coordinator for the World's Fair in 1939 (Bernays, 1937). However, despite his undoubted relevance as a strategist in the corporate world, Bernays' role as a consultant became increasingly located in sociopolitical spheres.

The laundry list of Bernays' sociopolitical involvement is immense. He was a critical force behind the first NAACP convention in 1920, in Atlanta. He served in varying capacities for a myriad of non-profit groups including: The Committee for Consumer Legislation, The Committee on Publicity Methods in Social Work, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Citywide Citizens' Committee on Harlem Legislation, among countless others. He provided direct campaign consultation to Presidents Coolidge and Hoover and provided counsel for smaller election campaigns as well, particularly for New York City mayoral candidate William O'Dwyer (Tye, 1998, 82). He named the *President's Emergency Committee for Employment* and served as a consultant on the board (Ibid., 84).

Bernays was an active political consultant during World War II, offering insight to the United States Information Agency, as well as the Army and Navy. He also served on a variety of wartime committees including the National Advisory Committee of the Third US War Loan, the New York State Defense Council, and the Victory Book campaign (Ibid., 85). Internationally, he consulted the People's Congress of India to promote a democratic image of the state. Among all of those he did work with, Bernays contends that many requests for his services were rejected on

moral grounds, including those from Richard Nixon, Francisco Franco, the Somoza family, and the SS (Ibid., 89).

It is this account of rapid-fire, international, and interdisciplinary success that seemingly prompts conclusions about Bernays as steering some ship of intelligent and elite manipulators. However, this account, at the moment, seems riddled with mystery, or mystified by magician's smoke. Upon first glance, the story reads as folklore about some prodigy – a self-made spin doctor. However, the story of Edward Bernays is not some organic legend of an intelligent manipulator finding his place in society. The story, in fact, is a production of Bernays himself. This story, we will come to see, is a public relations exercise par excellence. Bernays consistently and throughout his life clung to this narrative – and as such, continually solidified collective perceptions of his work.

However, by looking to the ideological and strategic work of Bernays himself, as well as his industry's timeliness, existing conclusions about its sociopolitical success and influence can be substantiated to a certain degree. Before delving into the ideological work of Bernays himself, we can partially substantiate existing theoretical explanations regarding the success of the public relations industry by looking first to its timeliness. The turn of the twentieth century brought about new ways of communicating about and perceiving of identity. Popular conceptions of self-identity were gradually shifting and becoming reformulated, reflective of the emergence of a new era. These conceptual shifts, it will be seen, primed a persistent Bernays seamlessly for the forging of public relations as a professional industry.

Twentieth Century Identity: Conceptual Transformation & Bernaysian instrumentalization

Prior to the twentieth century, the common conceptualization of one's identity was anchored in notions of hardline societal organization. For instance, categories of race and sex

were explicitly relied upon as a means of hierarchical division. Racial differences were used as biologically rooted justifications for enslavement and sexual differences as means of sustaining the social roles of men and women. Much of this biological justification was deployed using scientific and intellectual frameworks that measured human groups via their closeness to and distance from animals. Theories of an overarching “great chain of being” long located functional white men as superior to all animals, while white women were considered as in a stunted evolutionary phase and blacks considered closer to apes on the evolutionary spectrum (Nicholson, 2008, 14-16). As such, the physical and cultural characteristics of blacks and the physical and emotional traits of women were consistently deployed as justifications for hierarchical divisions in society. Society, it was believed, is not organized by superiority or inferiority randomly, but rather due to innate biological differences which justify the division.

However, at the turn of the century, these naturalistic explanations began to be challenged by rising conceptual interest in environmentalism. The notion that an individual’s identity was less contingent upon biological hereditary and more contingent upon their social environment grabbed hold of collective consciousness. The nature and extent of this shift can be explored in a multitude of terms, however, for the purposes of this research, the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis offers a constructive and relevant bridge for connecting the monumentally successful work of Edward Bernays with a conceptual shift regarding social identity.³

³ The shift from biological determinism to environmentalism can also be explored outside the context of psychoanalysis, in anthropological terms – particularly by looking to the work of anthropologists like Franz Boas, who countered traditional anthropological positions that rooted cultural differences in biologically inherited contingencies. This anthropological shift saw cultural differences start to be explained in the context of “reasonable adaptations to environmental conditions” (Nicholson, 2008, 37).

Bernays was an avid reader and proponent of his Uncle Sigmund's work. Particularly, Bernays was fascinated by his uncle's work on the human unconscious and the libidinal, irrational compulsions that Freud contends dwell within it. Further, Bernays was intrigued by how his uncle's work emphasized the implications of these forces on social action and interaction. As such, much of the Freudian influence on Bernays' public relations industry originates in Freud's reconceptualization of the self, and in turn, a reimagining and redefining of the notion of social identity. Further, Freud's contention that the collective behaviour of the masses operated similarly to the individual psyche allowed Bernays the space to extrapolate his uncle's psychoanalytic triad of the human psyche, and apply it to the collective psyche of the masses.

Freud's work was informally introduced to North America in 1909 (Freud, 1935, 102). However, after having made a name for himself in New York City, Bernays arranged to have much of his uncle's work translated into English for the first time in 1920 (Tye, 1998, 185). Freud's work is central to the reconceptualization of identity and the promotion of environmentalism in America primarily because his work removes the divisive distance between the perverse and the mundane (Nicholson, 2008, 44). Freud does this by normalizing sexual desire and inscribing it as a constitutive part of the psyche of all humans.

Freud exemplified this normalization by rooting sexual desire as something innate, even rooted in the unconscious drives of children (Ibid.). This theoretical shift made sexual drives a much less effective measure of normality and abnormality, and a less convincing justification for divisions between races and the sexes. It should be noted that Freud didn't completely abandon instinct theory entirely (Ibid., 42). However, Freud's work did represent a new way of conceptualizing about the motivations and justifications for human behaviour. Under the

influence of Freudian psychoanalysis, human character and consciousness become less determined by biological factors, and as such, more determined by a much less predictable and accessible dynamism.

Of course, it must be noted, that Freud's work was wrought with anachronisms. Further, any and all 'liberation' promised by Freudian psychoanalysis is questionable at best. However, Freud's work serves both as a useful case study in contextualizing the early twentieth century reconceptualization of identity, and in linking this reconceptualization to the success of public relations. Particularly, Freud's conceptual triad, comprised of the id, ego, and superego – represents a dynamic psychic apparatus, that for Bernays, offered a means through which the mental processes and impulses of the masses could be better mapped and necessarily manipulated.⁴

According to Freud, the human unconscious can be theorized and understood as a mental network or apparatus upon which behavioral motivations, justifications, and limitations reside. The three component parts, namely, the Id, Ego, and Superego – while distinct from one another, are intimately connected in Freud's theoretical model of the human unconscious. As will be seen, the Freudian conceptual triad became central to the work of Edward Bernays during his work as a public relations consultant. However, in order to sufficiently grasp the function of each component in the Bernaysian context, it is constructive to explore each in greater depth.

The Id represents the libidinal and animalistic drives that have been repressed in all humans. The Id is driven by instinctual urges and Freud claims that this component of the psychic apparatus is the only one that is innate in humans since birth (Freud, 1915, 86). This

⁴ Freud distinguishes between neurophysiology and neuroanatomy in defining his concept of this psychic apparatus. When Freud refers to this psychic apparatus he is *not* speaking of a neuroanatomical structure of the brain. Instead, he is conceptualizing an abstract, neurophysiological apparatus upon which human behaviour could be mapped (Freud, 1915).

disorganized and urge-driven component of Freud's mental triad is motivated by the innate pursuit of bodily needs, desires, and pleasures. As such, the actions of the Id are not easily subdued by the pressures of social convention alone (Carlson, N. R., 1999, 453). For Freud, the Id is at play in the psyche of all humans, however, the repression of the Id's irrational drives into the unconscious is essential to prevent their potentially dangerous manifestation.

The Ego represents a mediator between the Id and social reality. The Ego attempts to fulfill the desire-drives of the Id in ways that offer long-term benefit, as determined by rationalizing cost-benefit analyses (Freud, 1915, 88). The Ego represents a mechanism of perception and judgement, that aids in the delaying of immediate gratification and functionality in one's social world. Finally, the Superego represents the supervisory function of what we consider human 'conscience' (Freud, 1915, 89). The Superego works in opposition of libidinal Id drives and enacts punishment in the form of guilt and shame for behaviour that falls outside social norms. The Superego acts as the warden of perfectionism, ensuring that Id drives are suppressed and socially accepted behaviour is sustained.

For Freud, this psychoanalytic triad represents the network of the human unconscious. The most important contribution in this regard, is Freud's contention that the unconscious mind represents the most important part of the human psyche and has the strongest influence on human emotion, judgement, and behaviour (Freud, 1915, 92). Subsequently, Freud argues, human behaviour cannot always be simply be explained by an individual them self. Human beings are never fully aware of the contents of their unconscious mind and thus, are unable to determine the influence of these contents on their behaviour and lived experiences. As such, Freud contends that human behaviour is influenced by the unconscious mind in an innumerable

variety of ways and that attempts to understand and mitigate certain human behaviours must be cognizant of this fact.

Freud's notion of the unconscious represented a new understanding of the self in early twentieth century America. Contrary to hardline biological claims and naturalistic justifications for societal hierarchies, individuals were no longer understood in the context of static identities, chained unfailingly to biological realities. Instead, individuals become reconceptualized as complex and dynamic entities, whose identities are more determined by their unconscious drives rather than inherited contingencies. Bernays understood that if Freud's work on the unconscious psyche of the individual could be extrapolated in pursuit of understanding mass psychology, he could undoubtedly use his uncle's ideas as a conceptual framework for taming and manipulating the unconscious drives of the masses.

Bernays absorbed and interpreted these aspects of his uncle's work. As his professional career continued to flourish, Bernays remained consistently clear about his hierarchical view of society (Ewen, 1996, 9). The masses, he believed, were innately irrational. His daughter notes that her father only thought about people in large groups, and he often referred to these herds as stupid (Curtis, 2002). To Bernays, the masses were victims to their own irrational and subconscious desires, and as such, they must be guided, in the name of sustaining order.

Herein lies the theoretical premise of the public relations industry – a premise that is undoubtedly linked to a shift in the psychological and popular perception of identity. Further, the characteristically psychoanalytic nature of Bernays' work does lend some explanation for its massively successful launch at the start of the twentieth century. However, Bernays wasn't simply trying to advance the work of his uncle or make some grand psychoanalytic introduction

to North America. He interpreted parts of his uncle's work and formulated its applicability to sociopolitical pursuits like sustaining a capitalist democracy and subduing chaos.

Therefore, it is necessary to clearly delineate and dissect Bernays' view and definition of public relations. This is necessary not in the hopes of epitomizing some strategic pinnacle, but rather to better understand how he interpreted the ideological roots of the profession, the functional application of these ideas, and the corresponding justifications and explanations Bernays himself offers for his style, success, and influence. This will allow us to further substantiate existing theoretical analyses of the sociopolitical influence of public relations. Further, by clearly defining public relations from the perspective of Bernays, and the closest followers of his work, we can better identify the insufficiencies in existing analyses and position ourselves for the juxtaposing of these conclusions with biopolitical hypotheses in subsequent chapters.

Defining Public Relations: Organizing Chaos & Engineering Consent

In early twentieth century America, the reconceptualization of identity wasn't the only transformation unfolding. The Industrial Revolution of the century past had solidified an entirely new kind of production capacity. With the ability to create a more expansive supply of product than ever before, a new and corresponding demand had to be manufactured in the form of consumers. Gone were the days of straight forward advertising, based on the premises of reason, logic, and need. In order to maintain a profitable supply to demand relationship, reason and logic would prove inadequate. Consequently, the advertising industry – also influenced by the proliferation of Freudian psychoanalysis – transformed and skyrocketed during the preliminary decades of the twentieth century.

The advertising industry, much like Bernays' public relations, was rooted in new ways of thinking about the unconscious motivations of the self. Stuart Ewen, a historian of consumer culture, emphasizes that advertising increasingly became focused on producing a civilizing effect (Ewen, 1976, 41). Ewen notes that advertising functioned primarily through the leveraging of fear and frustration. The growing masses in an industrial society were to be sold "visions of individualism" that would help them carve out and represent their own uniqueness within societal experience at large (Ibid., 43). However, despite an effort to satiate the unconscious desires of the masses, advertising also prioritized the goal of continually tapping into and reproducing a consumer's dissatisfaction. It was only through maintaining a balance between immediate gratification and suspended dissatisfaction that advertising would sustain the demand required to meet the needs of mass production.

It's important to note that the relevance of the advertising industry is seemingly inseparable from the rise and professionalization of public relations. However, despite the two industries exploding and expanding on the scene at the same historical moment, and despite the obvious connection and congruency between the two industries, Bernays persistently differentiated the work of public relations counsellors, from that pursued by ad-men. In defining public relations as a profession, it is useful to think of advertising as one of many channels for communicating influence – namely, one of the various pipelines that protrude from the apparatus of public relations.

It is also important to note that late in life, Bernays clearly differentiated his conceptualization of public relations from the contemporary all-encompassing notion of 'PR'. Bernays died in 1995, but even long before then, public relations representatives had become par for the course – a dime a dozen in countless socioeconomic and sociopolitical forums. This

overconcentration, Bernays argued, manifested as a convolution or amalgamation of his initial work, with that of those in advertising, marketing, or publicity sectors (Ewen, 1996, 11). Bernays insists his work is rooted in more specific, covert, and precise applications of Freudian psychoanalysis in a larger context – the manufacturing of transformative events, as opposed to mere image-management. To sufficiently define public relations in Bernaysian terms, then, it's constructive to turn to his own work.

It is (even admittedly for Bernays) difficult to define the public relations profession with immaculate precision or clarity. In 1923, amid the profession's blossoming period, Bernays set out to define the nature and scope of the public relations counsel – both for practical clarity and theoretical enrichment. In the opening chapter of *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, Bernays notes that the new profession had perplexed the many who tried to concretely categorize or define the work. He notes that even citing a singular name for the profession proves difficult as some members of the public would label PR professionals as 'propagandists' – leaning on collectively held impressions and understandings of historical propaganda (1923, 12-13). Others, felt it more appropriate to label public relations professionals as press or publicity agents, choosing instead to lean on preexisting definitions associated with the benign facilitation of communication between institutions and larger society (Ibid.). Further, Bernays argues that at the time, some organizations failed to specify a name or position for a public relations professionals at all, having a member of existing leadership take on the responsibilities of the public relations counsel. Some, he argues, dismissed or condemned the profession entirely.

Bernays explains that even public relations professionals had difficulty labeling or defining their work, particularly due to the new and quick success of the industry. It was, in fact, only a year after Bernays published *Crystallizing of Public Opinion*, that the first post-secondary

course on public relations was taught at New York University (Ibid., 219). So, while Bernays does concede that outlining the public relations profession in concrete definitional terms is far from easy, his collective body of work does offer more precise insights into the nature and extent of his approach.

Above all, Bernays defines public relations as the management of relationships between a given entity and its corresponding public. This management of relationships was a task only to be bestowed upon the “intelligent few who have been charged the responsibility of contemplating and influencing the tide of history” (Ewen, 1996, 9). This management of relationships would involve strategic sociological, psychological, social psychological and economic considerations and would ultimately serve the function of directing and shaping the opinions and attitudes of the public via propagandist manipulation. But Bernays doesn’t conceive of propaganda as an inherently negative word. In fact, his life’s work is based on the premise that propaganda can and should be used as a tool for the maintenance of democratic order and peace.

It was only through the constructive and concealed manipulation of the masses, by the intelligent few, that the unconscious Freudian impulses of individuals en masse could be safely suppressed. Bernays believed that by applying his uncle’s psychoanalytic theory, he and others could effectively shape and guide public opinion on a variety of topics, and that this manipulation must be understood as a pillar of democratic maintenance. Particularly, Bernays believed that without the guided manipulation of the masses, societal chaos would ensue. As such, public relations can be understood, according to Bernays, as a means of organizing this inevitable chaos (Bernays, 1928, 37). Bernays speaks with the confidence of fact and is not speculative when he argues that consciously and strategically manipulating the “organized opinions and habits of the masses” is the “logical result” of a democratically organized society

(Ibid.). For Bernays, the fact that these avenues for persuasion and manipulation may be used in pursuit of negative ends is inconsequential – their existence is fundamental in ensuring the continual reorganization of society to keep chaos at bay.

According to Bernays, the masses must be presented with carefully constructed choices and supplied with “needed ideas” to mitigate the chaotic unravelling of society (Ibid.). The function of this organization, is primarily, to identify, connect, and mobilize the innumerable cleavages or groupings within a given society. These cleavages are manifested in countless racial, religious, social, political, economic, and/or ideological contexts, and Bernays contends that for every divided group, there are “hundreds of subdivisions within each” (Ibid., 41). Impending societal chaos, Bernays contends, can and must be mitigated by coming to clearly understand how groups of likeminded individuals come to think and act in unison on the societal stage. Only then can the relationships between social groups and the institutions that govern them be strategically managed.

For Bernays, a social group is akin to a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle. Common experiences, lifestyles, values, and opinions connect individuals, and the result is the atomization of popular opinion into identifiable factions. These groups represent the various loci through which manufactured ideas, images, and events can be funneled to the masses. Because Bernays believed in the interdisciplinary applicability of public relations strategies, he emphasized the need for effective appeals to different kinds of people, in different kinds of contexts. For instance, consider his explanation from *Crystalizing Public Opinion*, regarding the necessarily varied approaches to public relations strategy:

“Cases as diverse as the following are the daily work of the public relations counsel. One client is advised to give up a Rolls-Royce car and to buy a Ford, because the public has definite concepts of what ownership of each represents; another man may be given the contrary advice. One client is advised to withdraw the hat-check privilege because it causes unfavorable public to

comment. Another is advised to change the facade of his building to conform to a certain public taste. One client is advised to announce changes of price policy to the public by telegraph, another by circular, another by advertising” (Bernays, 1923, 32).

Bernays understood that a one-size-fits all approach to public relations strategy, in all contexts was not only insufficient, but could be massively counterproductive. This of course speaks to the level of difficulty involved in trying to clearly delineate the singular professional structure of a public relations professional, not to mention their concrete professional obligations. It also speaks to the necessity of understanding how different individuals – and in turn, how different groups – think, speak, and operate within social groups and society at large. Bernays was not focused only on the opinions and values that *unified* individuals, however. He also recognized the inherent antagonisms *between* social groups and emphasized the need for public relations strategies that accounted for and instrumentalized these various oppositions efficiently.

Bernays contends that the belief systems of twentieth century Americans reflect the rigidity of medieval townspeople who believed staunchly in the existence of witches and supported the necessity of burning them at the stake to protect larger society. (Ibid., 64) Bernays uses this analogy to emphasize the tendency of individuals to form rigid judgements – even those based patently on disinformation. Bernays draws this comparison to demonstrate the hard lines that individuals will draw between or within social groups, based on the incongruence of varying value judgments. Bernays notes that these social antagonisms have concrete implications on social relationships:

“The bitterness that has been brought about by arguments on public questions is proverbial. Lovers have been parted by bitter quarrels on theories of pacifism or militarism; and when an argument upon an abstract question engages opponents, they often desert the main line of argument in order to abuse each other. How often this is true can be seen from the confessional records of controversies in which the personal attack supersedes logic” (Ibid., 65).

Here lies the complex and dynamic responsibility of managing relationships. With a rigid network of interpersonal complexities at play, Bernays emphasized the need to create events

through which these public antagonisms could be either overridden or put to work. The driving motivation and function of public relations was to create an understated ruckus, so to speak. For Bernays, masterful public relations work involves the creation of news, the manufacturing of events, so as to mobilize the unconscious drives at play among and between groups. The subtlety lies in the fact that this manufactured news must indeed be something that juts out of the ordinary, however it must still seem rooted or produced naturally in social reality (Ewen, 1996, 23). This pursuit required reflexive thinking about the ways in which different kinds of people absorbed the messaging presented to them. Doing so, Bernays argued, allowed public relations professionals the space to deploy strategies that would serve as mechanisms of engineering public consent for desired ends.⁵

How then can one contextualize or envision the ways in which Bernays would engineer such consent from the atomized social masses? The leading strategy for Bernays and those who followed in his footsteps was the fabrication and deployment of images – in the form of photography, cinematography, and real-time observation. The function of images, Ewen argues, is related to the manufacturing of an attentive audience. Roy Sheldon and Egmont Arens identify this process as the engineering of consumers, in their aptly named *Consumer Engineering*, published in 1929. In order to engineer consent – in pursuit of economic, social, or political ends – the masses must be harnessed, and situated with wide eyes, as the audience for carefully crafted images. For Bernays, presenting the masses with the right images, would set the stage for the engineering of consent, no matter the sociopolitical or socioeconomic context.

⁵ It is worthwhile to note that Bernays was influenced significantly by the political writings of Walter Lippmann on propaganda. Particularly, the concept of engineering public consent is rooted in Lippmann's 1922 work, *Public Opinion*, published only one year after Bernays' *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (Ewen, 1996, 60-64).

Instrumental Images: Visual Bridges to the Masses

Alongside the aforementioned shifts in social conceptions of identity and the nature of consumerism, the dawn of the twentieth century also saw the expansion of avenues for communicating with the masses. Benjamin traces the history of the mechanical reproduction of art and the ways in which these processes transform societal interaction with images. As works of art gradually became reproduced, the potential audience to interact with these images expanded and evolved greatly. Namely, Benjamin notes that whereas art used to be about an individual being absorbed by a work of art, contrarily, in a state of visual overconcentration, contrarily “the distracted mass absorbs the work of art” (1935, 20).

Further Benjamin notes that the advent of cinema, allowed individuals to explore an optical terrain not accessible by the eye alone. This visual landscape, created by the camera, “introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses” (Ibid., 16). The optic scenery afforded by the camera is essential to understanding the ways in which the use of image within consumer industries quickly became the status quo for reaching the masses and having them absorb carefully constructed motivations.

For Bernays and his followers, the use of image was primarily about the reconstruction of perceptions. In strictly economic terms, this reconstruction was based on a reconceptualization of the resources available to the masses – namely, a re-imagining of the very purposes for consuming goods and services. Much of the use of image in corporate contexts was centered on the development of a clear and consistent visual style to ensure brands became easily identified with certain types of images. In an effort to demonstrate the broad mandate of this corporate adoption of visual style, Ewen cites Peter Behrens, an early twentieth century architect and

designer, who noted that it was “necessary to erect an imagistic panorama: a new symbolic totality, constituted by an interconnected, cross-referenced, visible world” (Ibid., 42). Behrens sentiments speak to the transformative nature of fabricating and constituting what Ewen refers to as an individuals malleable mental scenery (Ibid.).

Ewen argues that for public relations professionals, the rise of photography and cinematography, was a direct path to the masses, a channel of influence that could evoke emotional responses and “stoke the depths of longing” like never before (Ibid., 205). In the Bernaysian use of image, there is unsurprisingly, links to the Freudian notions of repressed desire. Constructed images should evoke, enhance, or speak to the unconscious desires of the masses. More specifically, images should safely mobilize the deep, unconscious drives of individuals en-masse. It was through this visual mobilization, that products and services would be reconstructed in the mind as being linked innately to an individual’s identity.

However, the development of a ‘visual brand’ was not limited to products alone. Aesthetic style became understood as one of the most effective tools available to corporations, institutions, and individuals alike. A tool that could be used not only in the pursuit of corporate profit, but in pursuit of sociopolitical permission as well. It was Walter Lippmann, in fact, who emphasized the necessity of using image to manufacture sociopolitical consent and uphold democracy. Using a comparison to Plato’s cave parable, Lippmann emphasized that humans progressively had come to experience the world “not in immediate proximity to its events, but primarily through “pictures in our heads” (Ibid., 147). The expansion of the modern world and the magnetism of a newly established mass media, Lippmann argued, created the foundation through which the command of public commentary using images became not only influential, but ubiquitous.

How then can Freud's psychoanalytic influence be contextualized by looking at the way Bernays manufactured and deployed the power of image? In what ways has Bernays' approach institutionalized not only the transmission of communicative image to the masses, but the calculated crafting of images that prompt transformative social action? Consider the instrumental role Bernays played in opening the market of cigarette sales to women. By fabricating the image of a suffragette smoking a cigarette in the street, the floodgates opened, and cigarettes were no longer conceptualized as a product for men only.

For Bernays, the cigarette served as a Freudian symbol of phallic male power – a mechanism through which sentiments of female empowerment could be linked to the Lucky Strike's marketing efforts. Bernays adorned the images with the caption "*Torches of Freedom*" and following their broadcast, the sale of cigarettes to women skyrocketed (Ibid., 4, Curtis 2002). More importantly, the image of suffragette women smoking these *Torches of Freedom*, symbolically inscribed the rightful and equal democratic place that women of the time were so adamantly and radically pursuing.

Alternatively, consider the way Bernays facilitated the coverage of a pancake breakfast, promoting a new, and less rigid image of Republican presidential candidate Calvin Coolidge in 1924. Coolidge, whose reputation was reading stiffly with the public, needed a way to make himself appear more relatable and approachable as the election loomed. Bernays facilitated the pancake breakfast and invited famous musicians to entertain the attendees. The event was a massive success and was covered by countless local and national media outlets. Bernays proudly contends newspaper headlines following the event read "*President Coolidge Nearly Laughs*" (Curtis, 2002). Coolidge went on to be re-elected as President less than a month later.

These contextual examples offer some initial insight into the ways in which Bernays tapped into a means of tailoring and transforming public opinion, particularly through the engineering and broadcasting of strategic imagery. There is no doubt that his approach has proved successful – his corporate and political resume alone attest, at the very least, to its sociopolitical attractiveness. However, the diffusive success of the public relations industry can't be understood by looking to the work and strategy of Bernays alone. The foundational elements of the public relations industry aren't simply used to sell cigarettes and presidential candidates in the contemporary historical moment.

Here it becomes important to invert our line of inquiry. We have understood the ways in which modern conceptualizations of “the self” influenced the very formation of public relations strategies. The popular perception of one's identity is the primary ingredient in Bernays' recipe for manipulation. Coming to understand all the component parts of an individual or group's perceived identity allowed Bernays to think reflexively about how to sell resonant and instrumental ideas and images. However, if Bernays' work was largely founded on a new conceptualization of identity and a new means of communicating with a growing consumer public, how has a century of symbolic communications implicated the current sociopolitical conception and experience of identity?

Contemporary Implications & Cumulative Questions

With the historical groundwork laid, how can one theorize about the cumulative impact of public relations forces on contemporary conceptions of identity? If public relations flourished and thrived during a time when the concept of identity was transforming, where now does the collective conception of identity lay? How have Bernays' fundamental strategies – those of creating circumstances and facilitating the manufacture of instrumental images – come to

implicate our conception and experience of identity in the present historical moment? A constructive starting point can be found in Davis' work on the commodification of the self.

As we know, Davis argues that the overreaching impact of consumer-driven industries on the Western conceptualization of identity is a commodification of the self. Davis attributes this reconceptualization represents a transition from "institution to impulse" that became especially solidified late in the twentieth century (Davis, 2003, 42). Referencing a study conducted by Ralph Turner in the late nineteen seventies, Davis describes a shift in "the feelings and actions that we identify as expressions of our 'real self'" (Ibid.). Through this shift, Davis argues that "social identities remain" however, they take a back seat to the realization of one's true, self-defined identity (Ibid., 46). Through consumerism, an individual's 'true self' becomes commodified and their conception and representation of their identity becomes defined by a continual process of self-branding.

This branding process offers "the emotional context people need to locate themselves in a larger experience" (Ibid., 45). Therefore, the concepts of a true-self, self-representation and self-transformation are presented as a "powerful moral idea" (Ibid.). In short, products become instruments of revolution and individuals become self-revolutionaries in the pursuit of self-actualization. An individual's true self becomes a collection of "images, fashions and lifestyles available in the market, and these in turn become the vehicles by which we perceive others and they us" (Ibid., 46). We must be clear, however, in delineating how we can understand the commodification of identity in the context of our research.

To do so, it is helpful to visit the Marxist definition of commodity, and in turn, processes of commodification. Marx first defines commodity as objects – external to individuals – that provide the utilitarian satisfaction of some human need. Commodities are first characterized by

their use-value – namely, the utility and subsequent value of that utility. However, Marx emphasizes that a commodity cannot simply be defined as any object of utility or value. Marx recognizes the use-value of natural objects like air and untouched land, but concludes that it doesn't have value *as such* because these objects are not “due to human labour” (Marx, 1887, 30). Additionally, Marx emphasizes that a use-value object that *is* the product of human labour does not – in and of itself – constitute a commodity. While an individual can produce an object of use-value to satisfy their own needs, that object only becomes commodified when it comes to “produce use values for others, social use values” (Ibid.).

However, if the self has come to be conceptualized and experienced on a capitalist market model, then we must also account for what Marx defines as a commodities exchange-value. Marx defines exchange value as the relative value of a commodity as measured against other commodities on a market (Ibid., 27). However, in order for a commodities exchange value to be determined, there must be an equivalential measure of that value – one that Marx defines in monetary terms (Ibid.). Marx notes clearly, however, that an item's exchange value can not be understood in terms of money alone. Money – as a universal measure of value – is directly connected to the amount of labour that is required to produce a given commodity. As such, it becomes clear that a commodities exchange value – unlike its use-value – is not intrinsic or inherent to the commodity itself – it contains a social dimension (Ibid., 28). This social dimension can be understood as the “concealed labour” – which becomes translated into a market price – and is inextricably connected to the fused social and economic systems that constitute the capitalist market (Ibid.).

In short, Marx explains the relationship between a commodity's exchange-value and this socio-economic interdependence. Marx argues that the logic of the capitalist market obscures the

social dimension and sees commodities valued based solely on their monetary price.

Commodities come to be seen predominantly as objects of exchange-value, and that exchange-value is conceived of only in monetary terms – the social component of an object's exchange value – namely, the labour exerted to produce it – is conveniently omitted from conclusions drawn about its value. For Marx, this is concealment of a commodity's labour value, represents the function through which the exploitative nature of the capitalist means of production remains ignored.

If we consider the classical conception of commodification with Davis conceptualization of the commodified self, it becomes easy to understand the contemporary perception of self-identity in the West. An individual's identity – which is continually constructed and reconstructed – is understood not only as an object of use, but exchange value. The carving out of one's identity – in all its mosaic and intersectional shades – is not merely some useful or liberating exercise in self-exploration and self-actualization. The presentation and representation of one's identity – as a cohesive but dynamic 'brand' – is a means of communicating the exchange-value of one's identity as such.

This is not to suggest that the many component parts that comprise this mosaic identity are meaningless and without value to individuals. It merely emphasizes that when identity is conceptualized in commodified terms, an inevitable focus is drawn to the *exchange-value* of one's 'unified and real self.' That is, the value of coming to know, express, and represent one's true self exists beyond the confines of the individual. An individual's identity comes to be understood predominantly as an object of exchange. As such, identity becomes conceptualized as a sort of cultural currency that not only represents an individual coming to know themselves and

align themselves with others like them, but a means of continually sketching a narrative of one's place in the larger society.

To contextualize this notion, let us return briefly to the life story of Edward Bernays. What is the narrative of Bernays, as an elite and intelligent manipulator, if not a case-study in the commodification of his own identity? Bernays' continual positioning and presenting of himself as a behind-the-curtains, sustainer of democratic order via manipulation of the masses, is undoubtedly a case study in coming to transform one's identity and present it incessantly and predominantly in terms of concrete exchange-value. Bernays positioned his ideas and the subsequent profession born out of them, not only as a useful addition to understanding the masses, but also – and most importantly – as a critical sociopolitical necessity. This necessity, Bernays argued, could and would enrich the capacity of countless social, economic, and political forces to better harness the fickle whims and antagonisms of the masses.

Here it must be reiterated that Marx argues that the exchange-value of a commodity comes to distort the social dimension of that commodity. In the context of Bernays' consistent deployment of his commodified identity in terms of its exchange-value, the social dimension of this commodified identity is obscured. However, unlike commodities such as corn or oil, the concealed social dimension of commodified identity cannot be understood in terms of concealed labour. Instead, identity conceived of in terms of exchange-value, distorts and conceals *some other* social dimension. However, before we are able to explore in greater detail that which is distorted and concealed via the commodification of identity – we must first briefly reexamine what existing analyses conclude about the success of public relations and then attempt to supplement them.

What then, does the commodification of the self say about the sustainable success of public relations? On paper, the Bernaysian formula seems to check out. In fact, it would seem as if Bernays' strategies are not only effective, but have become constitutively absorbed by the supposedly irrational and unintelligent masses. The commodification of the self involves the incessant promotion of one's preferences and positions – individuals are constantly identifying themselves as affiliated with certain causes, groups, opinions, and ideologies in an effort to present a clear image of their personal brand.

This promotion occurs not only in the language of association, but also in the language of disassociation. As such, the collectively held opinions among social factions, and the antagonisms or points of contention between groups, become more clearly pronounced, more easily identifiable, and in turn, more easily manipulated. As though the result of some psychoanalytic slight-of-hand, the masses somehow internalized the very strategies being deployed upon their unconscious, minimizing the guesswork for the behind-the-curtain manipulators.

However, has the entire puzzle been put together correctly? Why does the final image still seem blurry? Does the notion of the commodified self truly exemplify the Bernaysian swan song, through which the masses unwittingly but willingly streamline the manipulation of their Freudian unconscious? Do innately guilty housewives and symbols of phallic male power actually represent the primary ingredients in this recipe? Bernays, and those who herald his work are likely inclined to say yes. It would only make sense – to the champions of the profession – that the repeated use of these strategies would eventually result in the regimentation of the public's active participation in their own manipulation.

If one were to entertain this presumption as true or valid, a variety of contrasting conclusions can and have been drawn. Bernays, would, undoubtedly revel in the fact that public relations has served as an innovative, behind-the-scenes locus of ‘democratic organization.’ The masses have been accustomed to serve their ‘truths’ (read: identifiers) willingly to those tasked with necessarily manipulating them in pursuit of sustaining order. Critics, on the other hand may of course argue the opposite, that the commodification of the self undermines democracy and is merely the result of institutionalized and professionalized propaganda. Davis, of course, attributes the commodification of the self to an absorption and internalization of the very economic processes of capitalism. However, all of these conclusions ring patently insufficient. Championing public relations as a democratic tenant, demonizing it as a mere channel for abuse, or dismissing it as a malignant tumor protruding from a limb of the capitalist economy, convolutes and disregards the larger political significance at play.

While the nature of public relations is inherently political, there is little work that deconstructs public relations precisely, in strictly political terms. There is much discussion of the impact of public relations on political life and social change, however there is more limited discussion on the ways in which public relations has sustained and reproduced the formative structures of modern Western governance. Theoretical frameworks have been put forth that demonstrate the multitude of ways in which public relations could be studied – in sociological, historical, or political terms, or some combination of these domains (L’Etang, 2013).

However, attempting to root public relations in some precise, intersectional, and identifiable framework theoretical framework dismisses the larger question. Despite much consensus that the public relations industry has been instrumental in the shaping of public opinion and the regimenting of the sociopolitical masses, an outstanding analysis remains. How

is Foucault's notion of biopolitics connected to the constitutive absorption of public relations strategies by the masses? More importantly, how has public relations aided in the sustaining and reproduction of biopolitical realities?

The massive and long-tenured success of Bernays and his public relations strategies have appropriately garnered a multitude of contradictory attention and analyses. Ironically, questions of identification and categorization haunt our analysis – which pole do these conclusions on Bernays lead us to? Can Bernays' simply be credited as taking advantage of the sociopolitical transitions of modernity – namely, a reconceptualization of social identity, the necessity of creating industrial demand, and the potentiality of mass communication? Further, should Bernays be heralded for his influential success in shaping the nature of public discourse throughout the twentieth century? Should he be condemned for institutionalizing propaganda and ensuring its widespread applicability? The focus of the analysis must be reoriented.

There is no doubt that Bernaysian tactics can and have been used for social good and social malice. The dismissal of these conclusions is not an outright denial of their truth, but rather a dismissal of their insufficiency, misdirection, and reductionism. Relying on such perspectives serves the function of glossing over the more dynamic role public relations has played in facilitating and reproducing and expanding pervasive manifestations of biopolitical power. Further, it prevents an active understanding of how the commodification of identity is connected to the confessional and representational tenants of a biopolitics.

Finally, existing conclusions prevent us from understanding how these biopolitical tenants are concealed when identity becomes understood solely in terms of its *exchange-value*. The following chapter will closely explore the ways in which public relations served as an apparatus through which new forms of biopolitical governance became increasingly constitutive

of sociopolitical life and how the commodification of identity actively conceals the disciplinary and regulatory control mechanisms of these forms of governance.

Chapter 2 – A Biopolitics of the Population: Identity as an Instrument of Governance

How can both the success and effects of the commodification of identity be examined more closely in political terms? As mentioned, there is no denying that public relations – as a professional industry – has been examined and analyzed in the realm of the political. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Bernays' work, as has been demonstrated, has included numerous explicitly political professional responsibilities over the course of the twentieth century. In light of his occupational resume, denying the political significance of his work is simply not possible.

Second, as Ewen (and Bernays himself) have noted, the influence of Walter Lippmann's political writings on propaganda and public opinion were formative in the practical application of public relations as a profession. Why then, even with these obvious political connections, do explanations regarding the political significance and widespread implications of public relations seem inadequate? Why does the industry's pervasive and intense success in the realm of the political, remain somewhat mystifying?

In this chapter, we will attempt to address these insufficiencies by broadening the scope of the analysis. First, we must address the reductionism of existing conclusions by countering a conception of political power that reduces sociopolitical struggle to polarization between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As a result, the notion of demographic identity is misunderstood as a tool that only the powerfully privileged engineers of consent use in various social, economic, and political domains.

For instance, Ewen closes his historical account of *PR! A Brief History of Spin*, by arguing that in order to subvert the manipulators behind the curtain and sustain a true democracy,

we must overcome the identity categories that define and separate us, so as to ensure their instrumentalization by the powerful and intelligent few may be avoided (1996, 414). On the contrary, Bernays died believing that the intelligent and powerful few must cling to public relations strategies in order to sustain democratic society and ensure societal chaos is kept at bay. Others are content to make more benign conclusions – that Bernays was simply in the right place, at the right time, to take advantage of certain social and economic conceptual shifts.

However, these conclusions fail to account for the ways in which political power is positioned to operate. There is little explicit exploration of the very form and nature of political governance that is definitive of modernity. As such, these conclusive analyses lack adequate substance for two reasons. First, they subscribe to an outmoded conception of political power that inappropriately assigns political power as something held and exercised only by some elite, institutional few.

Second, they fail to adequately explore changes in the very nature of political governance that were expanding and solidifying over the course of the twentieth century. Bernays and his public relations strategies are deemed as psychoanalytic or propagandist tools, deployed upon the bewildered masses. However, the characteristic nature of these strategies has not been sufficiently linked to the way the governance of populations had changed by the turn of the twentieth century. In order to supplement these conclusions and undertake such an analysis, we must first explore political power in alternate terms – terms that locate political power in forms and locations outside the places we are accustomed to looking for it.

To do so, it's first helpful to draw upon Michel Foucault's historical analysis and definition of political power in its various forms. We will begin by analyzing a historical shift from traditional sovereign power to disciplinary power. Then, we will examine the ways in

which techniques of disciplinary power laid the groundwork for the widespread dispersion of biopolitical power – rooted in regulation and discipline, as opposed to acquisition and retribution. Doing so will help us supplement the insufficiency of existing analyses about the success and influence of the public relations industry. By reconceptualizing political power outside the realm of some all-encompassing oppression-submission polarity, we can better understand the relationship between biopolitics and public relations and draw more adequate conclusions about the nature of identity instrumentalization as a mode of cultural currency.

Reconceptualizing Political Power

Foucault spent much of his academic career historically analyzing modes of power and attempting to define them and their application. Foucault's theory of power – though he was reluctant to call it a theory, per se – aimed to more clearly capture the nature of political power in and through the ways it is exercised and experienced. For Foucault, the ability to act politically is not inscribed in some top-down structure, upon which those in institutionally privileged positions are the holders of power. Foucault disrupts commonly held notions of power by eradicating the idea that power relations exist only between a ruler (or ruling institution, or class) and its subjects. Instead, Foucault argues that power is better defined in terms of the ability to act. As such, all individuals, regardless of their position in society, have the capacity to act upon the actions of others, and thus, exercise political power.

It must be stipulated, however, that Foucault does not aim to dismiss the fact that ruling institutions and individuals *can and do* exercise power over subjects. However, his aim is to categorize these acts as simply one form of political power, among many. For Foucault, the network upon which political power operates and commands individuals and populations is far more complex. This particular style and form of governance evolved over time and can be best

explained by a brief retracing of Foucault's historicizing about power. The multitude of these various segments is immense and is best delineated by first turning to Foucault's work on disciplinary power.

An exploration of Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is critical in the vein of this research, first and foremost, because Foucault argues that disciplinary power "makes individuals" (Foucault, 1979, 170). In trying to understand the notion of identity and its intersection with political power and conflict, we must first recognize that the creation of individuals (read: the inscribing of identity) is fundamental element in the evolving relationship between state and subject. The creation of individuals serves as both the object and instrument of disciplinary power.

Disciplinary Power

In *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault traces the gradual transformation of styles and modes of punishment exerted by states on their subjects. In order to launch a theoretical exploration of disciplinary power, Foucault starts by examining the nature of punishment under traditional sovereign rule – namely, that of unforgiving public torture and execution. Subjects found to have committed a crime would be made an example of, in the public square, while townspeople gathered to watch the carnage. However, as time passed and the age of modernity and enlightenment took hold, modes of punishment began to change.

Foucault cites the creation of the prison as fundamental to this shift. No longer were criminals to be subjected to public torture as punishment. They would instead be incarcerated, their existence confined in time and space, so as to pay penance for their wrongdoing. No longer would the crime itself be the sole subject of punishment. Now, a detailed inventory of a criminal's identity and behavioral motivation would be the task of disciplinary institutions

(Taylor, 2011, 44). The birth of the prison, Foucault argues, represents the dawning of a new mode of power – rooted in routine and structured discipline, and standing in stark contrast to the retributive violence of public torture and execution. Instead, the conduct of criminals would be disciplined continuously and under rigid conditions of organization and control. As such, for Foucault, it is not simply the advent of the prison, but rather the composition of its forces and the influence of its structure that solidify the institutionalization of disciplinary power.

The prison and its composite forces first serves the purpose of forging individualization through a series of processes. While under traditional sovereign rule, the criminal would often pay his life for his crime, under disciplinary power, submission to the *rigorous control* of his life would be the debt he paid to the state. This rigorous control was to be exerted in a variety of temporal, observatory, and analytic terms. Modeled off the regimented and regimenting routines of religious sects and military barracks, these disciplinary mechanisms aim to forge and solidify forces of individualization – forces that document regimented inventories about the behaviour of individuals and their interactions within a larger group (Hoffman, 2011, 28-29).

The control of bodily gestures and movements, the imposition of schedule and routine, the heavy awareness of continual observation serve as important functions of disciplinary power. These regimented subtleties incite and inscribe a new kind of punishment and in turn, a different understanding of the relationship between state and subject. Take for instance, Foucault's description of the 'normalizing gaze' – an essential feature of the examination of subjects in disciplinary power. Through this normalizing gaze, an individual is subject to observation and judgement that "manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected" (Foucault, 1979, 184). In other words, whereas traditional sovereign rule was founded in its right to take life, disciplinary power sought to

carefully allow life, in and through the meticulous and regimented organization of individuals within time and space.

How can we contextualize the ways in which individuals experience this imposition – defined most succinctly by Foucault as a “composition of forces” (Ibid., 167)? These combined forces take many forms and include mechanisms of spatial and temporal organization, control, observation, and continual analytic judgement. First, there must be a designated and enclosed space in which subjected individuals must not only be constantly visible to those subjecting them, they must also be aware that they are infinitely visible. Next, these spaces – and the individuals in them – are organized by categories of function and rank, further inscribing individuality among those subjected. Temporal enclosure is ensured using the use of schedules, time cards, and the calculated apportioning of activities down to the second. However, not only the activities of individuals, but also the very movements and gestures of their bodies would be accounted for and controlled.

This continuous physical and temporal enclosure, as well as the omnipresent potentiality of observation and imposed evaluation serves two key functions in the exercise of disciplinary power. First, and most obviously, it serves as a mechanism for carefully controlling behaviour. Second, and more interestingly, it serves as a mechanism of continually regulating and normalizing judgement (Ibid., 170). Not only are the schedules and actions of individual bodies carefully controlled. The very structure of disciplinary power allows for the continued examination of those subjected, and the accumulation of documentable knowledge and information about their behaviour. The cumulative effect of this “composition of forces” is the ability to continually judge, discipline, and punish behaviours that fall outside the regulatory and normative sanctions of the institution. This mode of judgement however, stands in stark contrast

to the juridical notion of a courtroom decision. This mode of judgment sought to micromanage behaviour, incite and reproduce hierarchies, and use norms as mechanisms of coercive enforcement (Ibid., 184).

Let us briefly return to a consideration of the power and role of the image. How can disciplinary power be expressed or delineated in spectral terms? Namely, where in the shadows of institutional architecture can the specters of disciplinary power be observed? Foucault uses Bentham's Panopticon model as an illuminating and constructive example. Bentham's model for the perfect prison, Foucault argues, has all the composite forces of disciplinary power built into its very infrastructure (Ibid., 203). Individualization is inscribed through the division of enclosed space into cells on the periphery of a circle. Prison bars and a combination of natural and artificial light infinitely prevent the invisibility of subjects. A central observation tower is situated to ensure the possibility of constant observation, and in turn the potentiality for building accumulative documentation (read: knowledge) on subjects.

The most interesting feature of the Panopticon, however, is the way in which it disrupts the "see/being seen dyad" (Ibid, 202). Foucault describes this disruption as those on the periphery being rendered to a state of constantly being observed, without the capacity to observe it. Contrarily, those in the watchtower can constantly observe without ever being witnessed. In and through the architectural expression of the Panopticon, Foucault argues that subjects come to discipline themselves – to subjugate and regulate their own existence acknowledging their inevitable and continual role as that of the observed.

Further the spectral significance of this transition to disciplinary power can be delineated by more closely examining the ways in which it was exercised. Foucault argues that a constitutive tenant of disciplinary power is that at its point of peak effectiveness, it need only be

exercised through signals and symbols – verbal or physical coercion are not essential features of this mode of punishment (Hoffman, 2011, 30). Herein we can begin to see the essential function of the image – the specter – in the realm of political power. Rules, codified as laws – while still essential – take a back seat to rules infused and enforced through exposure to symbol and signal. Built into the very infrastructure of disciplinary institutions – their architecture and the uniforms, gestures, gazes, and movements of their various keepers – represent the most permeating, normalizing, and effective specters (read: mechanisms) of disciplinary power.

It is important to note that Foucault doesn't limit his analysis of disciplinary institutions to the advent of the prison. He acknowledges that these modes of disciplinary power are rooted in the organization of military factions and evident in certain eighteenth-century religious sects (Hoffman, 2011, 33). Further, Foucault goes on to explain the ways in which disciplinary power began to be dispersed outside the confines of disciplinary institutions in the eighteenth century. Foucault describes how asylums and eventually psychiatric hospitals come to deploy a composition of forces that is characteristic of disciplinary power. Schools and factories organize, observe, rank, and collect information on students and workers. The advent of policing sees these composite forces “bear on society as a whole” (Ibid.). We can understand these processes of diffusion and adoption as the generalization of disciplinary power (Ibid.).

What then is the rationale for a transition to this kind of power? Foucault argues that the ultimate aim of this meticulously regimented mode of punishment was to foster both docility and utility among disciplined bodies (1979, 25). Normalizing the behaviour and ensuring the docility of individual subjects was matched only by the effort to extract from individual bodies their maximum utility. Doing so required the careful and calculated accumulation of information on subjects. By documenting how individuals behaved, moved, and interacted throughout their

existence, as well as documenting the ways in which they deviated from normal or acceptable modes of behaviour, the rendering of these of bodies docile and utilitarian was facilitated more effectively.

It can be seen then, that, more than anything, the transition to and adoption of disciplinary power represent a new way of thinking about the relationship between knowledge & power. The development of this relationship was driven primarily by the growing problem of populations that became an increasingly poignant motivator of political life by the eighteenth century. The amalgamation of knowledge and power is best defined using Foucault's notion of biopolitical power. Foucault distinguishes biopower from traditional sovereign or juridico-legal conceptions of power by emphasizing the nature of biopower to capture and orient life itself. Foucault's notes the aforementioned transition from traditional sovereign rule, to that of the positive administration of life and the voluntary participation of subjects.

Biopolitical Power

The final chapter of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, is titled *Right of Death and Power over Life* and begins by revisiting the concept of power as deduction; namely, the mode of power under traditional sovereign rule or the concept of 'prélèvement'. Power was understood as the sovereign right of seizure – seizure of things, time or bodies. This right of seizure culminates as an ultimate and discretionary control over the life and death of subjects. The sovereign held the power to either take life or spare it. However, as populations grew and evolved Foucault explains how deduction came to be simply one function of power amid a variety of others. There is a shift to a power that is "bent on generating forces, making them grow and ordering them, rather than on impeding them, making them submit or destroying them" (Foucault, 1978, 136). As we have

explored, disciplinary mechanisms of incitement, control, organization and surveillance are the driving forces behind this optimizing power.

It is through this shift to biopolitics, Foucault argues, that power becomes situated at the level of life; how people live and how they *ought* to live became a matter of deep public interest. Regimes no longer relied solely on the threat of death to exert dominance and in turn became deeply invested in the *lives* of subjects. This exertion of power could now also be understood as a positive influence on life where there are incessant efforts to optimize, multiply, regulate and control populations of bodies. Wars are no longer waged to defend the all-powerful sovereign, but are “waged on behalf of the existence of *everyone*” (Ibid.).

Biopower conceptualizes the human body as a machine in terms of its capacity to sustain and propel the existing order. Bodies become conceptualized as a collection of forces to be exploited and capabilities to be optimized. The machine body can be disciplined and rendered as efficient and docile as necessary. On the other hand, the function of the species body is to be a reproducer and sustainer of biological populations. National statistics are collected on reproductive trends, birth, mortality and life expectancy rates and the general health trends of entire populations. Employers are paid by insurance companies to implement the promotion of healthy habits and stress-minimization. Women’s bodies and reproductive rights continue to be debated and contested in international legislatures and congresses. Every aspect of the species body is monitored and regulated through a series of interventions and controls that Foucault defines as a “biopolitics of the population” (Foucault, 1978, 139).

Biopolitical power is exerted through mechanisms of discipline and regulation – namely, the “composition of forces” that together constitute Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power (Ibid.). Manifestations of biopolitical power, however, exist not only in and through the easily

recognizable disciplinary institutions of the state – namely, the prison and the judicial system. Foucault adds that even the more distant institutions of the state like schools and hospitals, do not adequately reflect the extensive network upon which biopolitical strategies are deployed. Instead, Foucault articulates a network of apparatuses through which biopolitical power manifests.

Foucault draws upon the notion of apparatus from Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses. However, Foucault extends and enriches this notion – countering Althusser's contention that apparatuses only function in recognizable forms like the state or the family. Giorgio Agamben clearly delineates Foucault's conception of an apparatus as “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings” (2009, 14). Herein, Agamben emphasizes that even “writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself” hold the capacity to function as biopolitical apparatuses (Ibid.). It is through these ideological apparatuses that individual identities are consistently called upon and their representation demanded and deployed. Apparatuses represent and emanate their own ideologies and individuals are interpellated through their interaction with them (Ibid.).

Interpellation is a concept originally coined by Louis Althusser in his 1971 work, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. To be interpellated is to be hailed or identified as a subject. Humans are individually interpellated through a vast variety of institutional forces from birth and continually throughout one's life. Interpellation is the continual assignment and mutual recognition of one's role within the social context. Perhaps the initial moment of interpellation comes with hailing a child as a specific gender. Referring to a child as a boy or a girl

interpellates them into a socio-political position before they are even capable of fully grasping its meaning.

These patterns of assignment and identification are reiterated further throughout socialization, in educational, religious, legal, political and employment institutions (Zizek, 1994, 110). For instance, if a police officer addresses a young woman walking down the street by saying ‘Excuse me’, the woman, if participating in the ideological interpellation, would respond politely and promptly – her response underlined with trepidation, perhaps. She responds this way because she has been socially and institutionally hailed and is expected to respond as such. Her reaction is almost immediate, seemingly automatic. It is through these encounters – a succession of interpellations – that biopolitical power is permeated and reproduced.

Foucault argues that the dawning of an era of bio-political power represents a “threshold of modernity” after which a man is no longer the Aristotelian animal merely capable of constituting a political reality, but rather “an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (1978, 143). As power comes to be focused on the masterful optimization and control of life, biological and political existence are solidified in a relationship of reflective dependence. In the context of this life-centered power, institutions of law come to function in a way that “is for the most part regulatory” (Ibid., 144). No longer can the exertion of power be associated only with some juridico-sovereign center seeking vengeance at the guillotine. Biopolitical power aimed to “foster life or disallow it to the point of death” and must be associated with a vast network of normalizing apparatuses (Foucault, 1978, 138).

The exertion of biopolitical power can be observed far beyond the confines of the traditional juridical or sovereign models. Biopolitical power works in and through countless apparatuses so that standards of normalcy and discipline can be continually enforced and

reproduced. The flurry of legislative revision that followed the French Revolution created the space for the acceptability of this normalizing power. Individual rights to life, happiness and health are the very tenants that created space for biopolitical power to become engrained in societal functioning, for “it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death that gave power its access to the body” (Ibid., 142-143).

How can Foucault’s notion of biopolitical power – as deployed through apparatus – be connected with our task at hand, namely, better understanding the notion and experience of identity in political terms? Namely, how can we further explore the ways in which identity is biopolitically deployed through a network of apparatuses? The example of the creation of a ‘criminal identity’ have been made apparent. Foucault adequately explains the ways in which disciplinary institutions created individuals and reproduced their individualization within a larger network of individual units. How then, does this process occur outside the disciplinary institution? How do the disciplinary and regulatory functions of biopolitical power operate in and through a vast network of apparatuses? How can we further explore the notion of identity in the context of the disciplinary and regulatory power of biopolitics?

Foucault’s work in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* allows for a useful point of departure in expanding the implications of biopolitical forces on the concept and experience of identity. Again, Foucault emphasizes the biopolitical *creation of identities*, in this case, based on gender and sexual orientation through the apparatus of psychiatry and psychology. In the pursuit of controlling these bodies – both as species and machines – biopower finds access through sex. Sex is tied not only to the perpetuation of the biological species but is also tied to the disciplining of the body as a machine.

With connected access to both the species and machine body, the deployment of sexuality becomes solidified as a mechanism of biopolitical control. The construct of sex becomes both a marker of identity and a standard of politically correct normalcy. Sex is sought out everywhere and in everything – even the most minute behaviours, utterances or dreams become potential reservoirs for deeply repressed sex. Priests and then psychologists take on the role of biopolitical detectives, mining through memories and mannerisms, persistently extracting confessions to free individuals from truths anchored deep in their sexuality. Through this obsessive analysis of an individual's sex came the biopolitical possibility “to master it” (Ibid., 146).

Political institutions become surveyors and wardens of even the most subtle sexual deviances. Disciplinary strategies and functions of regulatory control become utilized collaboratively to target and dominate sex within the grid of biopower. Children become sexualized – their behaviours obsessively monitored, their secrets prodded out with moral intimidation. Women who stray from their supposed natural purpose of familial reproduction and service are labeled hysterical – their ‘flawed sex’ medicalized incessantly. Individuals deemed sexually perverse are dragged through processes of medicalization.

All of these examples are functions of a biopolitical power that is “organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death” (Ibid., 43). Whereas power once made itself known through necessary bloodshed, this new biopower permeated social consciousness through sex. Contemporary examples of this are a dime a dozen. For context, consider how governmental institutions and universities host campaigns that incite a policing of the population by the

population itself; incessantly attempting to reiterate standards of decency and increased functions of civil responsibility in relation to sexual behaviour presumed abnormal.⁶

During the time that power was exercised predominantly through bloodshed – blood served as a rare necessity and a haunting symbol of sovereign decision. Biopolitical power on the other hand, first treats sexuality not as a symbol, but as a target; a malleable force with manipulative capacity. Whereas blood's significance was in its scarcity – only spilling over in times of transgression– sexuality, on the other hand, is significant due to its seeming omnipresence. Sex, unlike blood, was insistently prevalent, hiding everywhere as “an object of excitement and fear at the same time” (Ibid., 148). In the post-Victorian period, a transition from “a symbolics of blood to an analytics of sexuality” occurred in so far that sex was not only ‘liberated’ from repression but in fact became incessantly and obsessively aroused⁷ (Ibid.).

Where bloodshed had served the function of fostering a power that punished transgression, sexuality now served as an avenue for permeating an administrative and regulatory power over life. However, the transition from bloodshed to sexuality did not occur without intersection. Instances of overlap are evident in historical examples of racism and eugenics. The historical attempts at racial segregation we have discussed previously aimed to protect the purity of bloodlines combined the concept of blood and the incessant desire to warrant the biological victory of a race (read: population). Foucault also references the way in which the biopolitical and eugenically driven power of Hitler's Germany ironically became “the greatest bloodbath in recent memory” (Ibid., 150).

⁶ Consider for example the *Draw the Line* campaign, funded by the Ontario government that saw posters created and posted in universities as a means of inciting the institutional masses to monitor interactions in hopes of identifying and micromanaging sexual ‘improprieties’ (Government of Ontario, 2015).

⁷ It is this incessant arousal that leads Foucault to title the introductory chapter of *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, “We ‘Other Victorians.’” This is Foucault's attempt to challenge the notions of liberation and freedom from oppression that were often associated with Freudian psychoanalysis at the time.

Foucault argues, however, that the concept of sexuality is not actually some deep truth that is lying dormant in individuals, waiting for identification and liberation. Sexuality, he argues is both a mechanism – an avenue through which biopolitical power takes hold of bodies. However, he is sure to frame a juxtaposition for the sake of clarity. Foucault claims that perhaps he will be interpreted as relying on abstract ideas and “evading the biologically established existence of sexual functions” (Ibid., 151). Perhaps, Foucault argues, people will assume he frames a conversation about sexuality in the context of a sex that doesn’t exist. Foucault is poised to answer the question: “what is this if not castration once again” (Ibid.)? Foucault responds to this hypothetical critique by asserting that sex is not the root of sexuality, but rather an ‘other’ – an intricate and abstract idea fostered through a variety of biopolitical deployments of sexuality.

Through deployments of sexuality like the sexualisation of children, the hystericization of women and the medicalization of perversions, sex comes to be understood in the context of “function and instinct, finality and signification” (Ibid., 154). Sex was either present or absent; visible or hidden. It held meaning and could either be sufficient, overly-abundant or lacking. Through the deployment of sexuality, sex becomes solidified as a measure of both the reproductive capacity and potential for docility within individual bodies. Foucault describes a divided sex that is “caught between a law of reality (economic necessity being it’s most abrupt and immediate form) and an economy of pleasure which was always attempting to circumvent the law” (Ibid.). Foucault argues that the implantation of the four major perversions: hysteria, onanism, fetishism and interrupted coition are representative of the ways in which sex was interpreted in the context of normality and abnormality or right and wrong.

This deployment of sexuality fostered the capability to conjoin body parts and biological functions with physical sensations and pleasures in an “artificial unity” (Ibid., 150). This collaboration made possible an inversion of the relationship between power and sexuality. Sexuality manifests not as an essential function of power, but rather as a force “rooted in a specific and irreducible urgency” that power is incessantly pursuing dominion over (Ibid., 155). This result is a certain sense of ambiguity or elusiveness making it difficult to distinguish power from sex and in turn makes it nearly impossible to recognize the ways in which biopower is derived from sex.

Sex is not some individual, autonomous force or repressed element of individual being, lying in wait of liberation. “Sex” in this sense is a construct of calculated and incessant deployments of sexuality and in turn the need to know it becomes incessant as well. Because biopolitical power relies on sex as an assessor of the productive normalcy of individual bodies, the need to understand and reconcile one’s deep sexual roots becomes an obsession. Foucault argues that while love had long been the force most worthy dying for, sex now “claimed this equivalence, the highest of all” (Ibid., 156). Under biopolitical conditions, that are incessantly focused on the reproduction and regulation of life, sex and the need to know it, becomes so significant it’s worth dying for. In fact, the process of making a conscious and articulate realization of our sex becomes “more important than the act itself” (Ibid., 157).

The extraction and revelation of our deep sexual truths, through the deployment of sexuality, bestows populations with a false sense of liberating revolution. In coming to name and know and speak our sex, we feel as if we are exercising our will in the face of power. However, Foucault argues that we are merely trapped in the deployment of sexuality which creates a “mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected in the dark shimmer of sex” (Ibid., 157).

Rather than a function of personal revolution, sex is a by-product of biopower, “historically subordinate to sexuality” (Ibid.). The concept of sex offered an additional channel to regulate, control, and exploit populations using an intimately established and subtly forceful “grip on bodies” (Ibid., 151). It must also be noted that we mustn’t fall prey to the assumption that sex is a law of reality while sexuality is an obtuse conceptualization. The deployment of sexuality embeds ‘deep sexual truths’ through a variety of social, educational and medical apparatuses of biopower.

With the example of sex, Foucault outlines a clear example of the ways in which biopolitical identities are implanted, incited, and consistently deployed. However, as has been mentioned, Foucault contends that the exercise of biopolitical power doesn’t only occur through formal institutions. How then, can the nature of biopolitical power be examined outside the confines of the family, the school, the hospital? Here, it becomes important to understand Foucault’s differentiation of biopolitical power from that of traditional sovereign rule. For Foucault, biopower is effective because “it functions through norms rather than laws, because it is internalized by subjects rather than exercised from above through acts of threats of violence, and because it is dispersed throughout society rather than located at a single individual or government body” (Taylor, 2011, 43). How then, can we explore the manifestation of biopolitical power as situated and exercised in everyday life?

Let us envision a brief variety of illustrative examples. Imagine, for instance, a black man knowing to give up his seat to a white man prior to the civil rights movement. Or a young student answering quickly and dutifully when a professor asks if she is paying attention. The labelling of bathrooms by gender or separation of quarters by race. The membership requirements of certain social clubs and organizations. The expectation of men to be chivalrous in holding doors. The

expectation of women to bake cakes from scratch. A conversation about welfare programs at a family picnic. The endorsement of a cause by a friend, politician, celebrity, or corporation. The advent of a neighbourhood watch brigade. All of these instances – though not entirely, nor exclusively – represent some of the various anchorage points of biopolitical power. These anchorage points represent the avenues through which identities are instrumentalized as mechanisms of unity, division, judgment, and biopolitical reproduction.

In trying to map the way institutions and the societies they govern respond to sociopolitical conflict, it becomes critical to more closely trace the ways in which the very mode and style of governance shifted with the dawning and expansion of biopolitics. If the relationship of power between ruler and ruled shifted so dramatically – namely, through the abandonment of the mere right to take or spare life, and an adoption of the calculated administration of life, how did modes of governance change? What became the driving force and founding justification for the state's role in sociopolitical life?

It has been clearly demonstrated that the primary function of biopolitics involves the creation of individuals (read: identities) through forces of discipline and regulation. How then, did this task come to shape and transform the very act of governing populations? To answer this question, it becomes helpful to turn to Foucault's work on governmentality – through which he demonstrates how a biopolitics of the population allowed for the grounding of a long-pursued 'art of government.'

A Biopolitical Art of Government

In *Governmentality*, Foucault traces a more general transition in the means deployed to optimize the form and style of governance⁸ of populations by states. Starting in the sixteenth century and intensifying in the eighteenth, Foucault contends that the problem of government becomes a more explicit matter of consideration. No longer are Kings only interested in sustaining the justification of their rule with the sword. At this moment, they also develop a vested interest in the notion of governance. This shift, Foucault argues was driven by the aforementioned and increasingly poignant problem of populations. With larger and larger pools of subjects to be governed, the means, style, and effectiveness of that governance increasingly became the focus of political science. Foucault contends, this represents the formative stages of the crafting of an ‘art of government’.

How then can this ‘art of government’ be characterized? Above all Foucault stresses the importance of the notion of economy. Economy, prior to the eighteenth century, was largely understood in terms of the family and the proper management of its members and material resources. The purpose of an ‘art of government’ was to infuse the governance of the state with this same “meticulous attention” (Foucault, 1978(2), 92). This was contrary to and didn’t mesh well with forms of governance from eras recently passed – ones understood on the model of traditional sovereignty and focused on the protection of territory. The role of the state would no longer be limited to the defense of the territorial state, but would instead be focused on the continual and governance of “all the various things that comprise a territory” (Ibid, 93). Foucault

⁸ It is important to distinguish here that the notion of governmentality, in and of itself, is not synonymous with the notion of governance. Rather, governmentality entails the “how” of governance, meaning that governmentality involves “the reasoned way of governing best, and at the same time, reflection on the best possible way of governing” (Foucault, 1979, 2).

contends that these things include not only human beings, but their relations with each other, their relation to natural maladies like death and disease, their relation to material resources, and their relation to various “customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking” (Ibid., 93).

By the eighteenth century, the art of government began to overcome some of the obstacles that had stunted its development. Populations continued to grow rapidly alongside steady rises in wealth and agriculture. The enlightenment brought about new ways of thinking about freedom and the relationship between a state and its public. Writers like Rousseau and Hobbes theorized about this relationship in terms of contractual agreement. Through these shifts, Foucault argues, the notion of economy – as based on the model of family – would no longer be a sufficient model for economy at the level of the state (Ibid., 92). Further, traditional models of sovereignty were far too limiting and intangible to cite as the state’s reason and purpose. It’s at this historical moment, Foucault contends, that an art of government can ground itself more concretely at the circular intersection between a new understanding of economy and the conundrum of ever-increasing populations.

Increasingly this art of government emphasized, for heads of state, the value of the statistician’s word over the sword. Whereas states had long founded their legitimacy and power in their right to take the life of subjects, this new kind of power was far more interested in the careful and calculated organization and regulation of the lives of subjects. This transition sees the model of the family dissipate in the realm of state governance, instead, the family becomes one of many segments of which the government is to be concerned (Ibid., 94). This new art of government operates not only in and through the traditional institutions of sovereignty, but through a vast network of channels (read: apparatuses) through which the calculated management of populations can be administered.

Foucault references Guiliaume de La Perriere, explaining governmentality as “the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end” (Ibid., 94). Foucault elaborates by noting that this art of government is not forged in the pursuit of some juridical or moral common good, but that it operates “to an end which is ‘convenient’ for each of the things that are to be governed” (Ibid., 95). Here, Foucault’s work provides useful tools for understanding the political transition from governance rooted in rule of law to that of governance “employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics” (Ibid., 95). The cumulative result of this transition is what Foucault defines as governmentality, namely, “the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power” (Ibid., 102). In short, governmentality can be summarized as the techniques of administration through which a biopolitics of the population is continually regenerated.

In totality then, Foucault’s series of theoretical tools allow for a vastly different conception of power and governance than those relied upon in examining the political significance and implications of Bernaysian public relations. Bernays, and those who study his work, conceive of political power in reductionist terms. Bernays sees political power as bestowed to an intelligent and elite minority. Further, those who study his work defer to this conceptualization of power.

Even those who challenge Bernays’ notion of necessary manipulation as a preservation of democracy still subscribe to the idea that we must overcome these intelligent manipulators – these holders of political power. However, having explored Foucault’s vast series of insights about the actual functioning of political power, it seems no longer possible to conclude that power exists in the context of bestowal and possession. We can no longer conclude that power is

bestowed and held only by politicians or police officers. Nor is it sufficient to merely add that elite spin-doctors, actual doctors, school teachers, or the heads of families and factories represent the extent of the biopolitical network.

Consistent throughout Foucault's historicizing of power – in its disciplinary and biopolitical forms – is the notion of imposing self-subjugation and facilitating the active participation of subjects in their own discipline and governance. Further the roll of accumulating knowledge and information – systematically – about populations is fundamental to both the enduring functionality of and justification for this mode of governance. With this Foucauldian biopolitical framework laid out, the political analysis of the work of Edward Bernays' – and the pervasive success of public relations– can be supplemented.

Instrumentalizing Identity: Deployment & Commodification

The parallels between Foucault's notion of biopolitical power and Bernays' approach to the meticulous and reflexive understanding of populations is difficult to miss. Both speak of populations as those organized in identifiable groups. For Bernays, populations can be more effectively appealed to by imagining and approaching them in subsections. For Foucault, this form of societal organization is a natural result of governments increasingly bent on creating subjectivities and meticulously amassing knowledge about them in pursuit of the calculated management of life.

Further, Bernays' understands that a multitude of channels of influence exist, particularly those beyond the institutions easily recognized as serving that purpose. This strongly resembles Foucault's notion of the biopolitical network of apparatuses through which normalizing power is continually dispersed. Additionally, the functional role of psychoanalytic strategies is explicit in both. Bernays relies on his uncle's psychoanalytic work to 'necessarily manipulate' the masses.

Foucault emphasizes the tactics deployed by psychoanalysis – namely, processes of implantation, incitement, confession, and knowledge production. As such it becomes clear to see that the inner-workings of biopolitics – namely, the atomization of populations, a will to truth, and the accumulative relationship between knowledge and power, are evident within the very ideological structure of public relations.

What is the significance of this correlation? How can the relationship between these two – supposedly separate – forces be examined? First it must be noted that there is no essentially causal relationship between the two. Public relations did not occur as some conscious or direct result of the rise and institutionalization of biopolitics. Biopolitical governmentality is merely one of the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociohistorical launching pads for the success of public relations –albeit, a seemingly fundamental one. However, it must be reiterated that the examination of the relationship between these forces does not intend to imply that they are consciously or deliberately connected. Rather, this exploration seeks to deconstruct the ways in which these forces coalesce and reinforce one another.

Public relations is driven by the accumulation of reflexive knowledge about the whims, desires, compulsions, needs, and antagonisms of populations. As such, a shift and rise in tactics of governance focused on the problem of populations is undoubtedly connected to the success of public relations as an interdisciplinary profession. This first helps us to supplement the analysis of the industry's political significance explored in the first chapter. Bernays had not merely cracked some Freudian code. Nor did he merely institutionalize propaganda by uncovering a tool that the elite could use to sustain the status quo. Bernays, in all his reflexive glory, had tapped into the expansive and reproductive power of biopolitics.

In the development of public relations as an industry, Bernays recognized – consciously or not – the biopolitical power of coming to intimately and meticulously know the individuals and groups that comprise a population. Further, the commodification of the self can be better understood in biopolitical terms, as opposed to exclusive victory of public relations. Individuals and social groups coming to automatically and voluntarily server their identity up as a brand is not simply the result of spin-doctors colluding behind the curtain of capitalism. Individuals are already hailed to be as they say they are through a complex network of biopolitical apparatuses. However, it must be noted that the relationship between public relations and biopolitics is circular.

Biopolitics sees the deployment and interpellation of manufactured subjectivities through a network of apparatuses. However, the professionalization of public relations sees the systematic manufacture of news, events, stories, and crises through which social lines of unity and division are drawn and re-drawn. Further, there is no doubt that individuals themselves coming to see their identities as commodities only aided in the continual creation and reproduction of avenues through which utilitarian of identity signifiers could be ‘voluntarily’ expressed. No longer could identities only be called upon, inscribed and reproduced via the interaction of individuals with institutions. Identities could now be called upon and instrumentalized in the pursuit of selling products, stoking public discussion, garnering a crowd.

However, upon second glance – and after recounting Foucault’s notion of biopolitical power and governmentality, Bernays’ ideas seem better explored and their success explained in this biopolitical context. Here it becomes important to revisit Bernays, specifically. How can the biopolitical connections outlined above be linked contextually and specifically with Bernays’ work? Initially of note is Bernays’ recognition of the importance of social factions or cleavages.

His mere acknowledgement of these groups is important. More significant still, however, is his ability to understand the ways in which *influence* could be channeled through the representative entities of these various factions.

Bernays recognizes the powerful influence not just of formal institutions and organizations, but their informal counterparts as well – very similar to Foucault’s expansion of Althusser’s notion of apparatus. Bernays notes, in 1928, that “ideas are sifted and opinions are stereotyped in the neighborhood bridge club. Leaders assert their authority through community drives and amateur theatricals” (43). This recognition can undoubtedly be connected to Foucault’s assertion that law and formal institutions of governance come to play a largely regulatory role in comparison to their informal counterparts, infused into everyday life, which disperse the normalizing function of biopower.

Additionally, in the work of Bernays, one can clearly recognize the theme of abandoning the sword which is definitive of biopolitical governmentality. Bernays sides with Napoleon regarding the “impotence of force to accomplish anything” (Ibid., 44). He understands – in terms quite similar to those of Foucault’s ‘artists of government’ – that sustaining order (namely, sustaining the status quo and grounding justification for it) would require an “intertwining structure of groupings and associations” as a means of eradicating the potential for unexpectedly dissident strays from the norm (Ibid.). Bernays understood that the public had come to recognize its potential in responding to and rebelling against the state. More importantly though, he understood that this newly conscious public could be manipulated so as to have them “throw their newly gained strength in the desired direction” (Ibid., 46). Herein we see the crux of the connection between the commodification and the biopolitical deployment of identity.

This connection involves the creation of identities through the deployment of

biopolitical strategies, and also the consistent interpellation of those identities. Interpellation not only in and through a vast network of apparatuses, but also through the creation of circumstances and events – the definitive strategy of the public relations industry. The creation of these circumstances and events undoubtedly aim to orient the expression of one’s identity through “the consumptions of goods rather than the quality and content of his life’s work” (Ewen, 1976, 43). More importantly, however, these manufactured circumstances and events serve the purpose of “transforming pockets of resistance” (Ibid., 43). However, this transformation of resistance doesn’t only occur through a muddying of the waters via the manufacture of events.

Public relations professionals were primed with a biopolitical infrastructure that necessarily demands the continual deployment and reinscription of identity. Whereas biopolitics population seeks incessantly to implant, incite, hail, deploy, and reproduce identities, public relations seeks incessantly to implant, incite, deploy, and reproduce circumstances and events that call upon (interpellate) those identities to first, be as they claim they are, and second, act (or not act) accordingly.

Here we can revisit the notion of commodification and exchange-value that we discussed at the conclusion of the first chapter. We examined the ways in which a commodity’s exchange-value serves the function of concealing some larger social dimension via the logic of capitalism. However, we also noted, that in the context of a commodified identity, the concealed dimension of this commodity cannot be sufficiently explained by a concealment of labour and the means of production that exploits that labour. Having explored the biopolitical underpinnings of the instrumentalization of identity, it now becomes clear that it is this very biopolitical network of subjugation that is concealed in the exchange-value of a commodified (instrumented) identity. The instrumentalization of identity – through mechanisms of discursive creation, deployment,

interpellation – result in a commodification of identity that obscures the very processes that constitute it.

Having demonstrated the connections between biopolitics and public relations, we return to the more pressing task at hand: namely, how can we examine the impact of these combined forces on civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict? If the deployment and commodification of identity are definitive of the political, social, and economic realms of the twentieth century, how do these forces implicate the ways in which publics and institutions respond to sociopolitical conflict in the present sociohistorical moment? What is the combined effect of these forces on both the perception of sociopolitical conflict itself and the process through which sociopolitical conflict responses are formed and presented?

At the heart of biopolitical governmentality is the desire to maximize the docility and utility of the public in pursuit of sustaining and justifying the status quo. At the heart of public relations was the desire to minimize sociopolitical resistance by making strategic and incognito appeals to individual and group identities. Central to both of these forces is the obsession with preventing deviation from the norm and eradicating any breeding ground for sociopolitical or socioeconomic dissidence.

What is the effect of the instrumentalization of identity – both through its commodification and biopolitical deployment – on the nature of the public's response to and participation in sociopolitical conflict. Further, if these forces have become constitutive of the contemporary historical moment, how can the participation of institutions themselves in sociopolitical conflict be analyzed? Our final chapter will examine the ways in which these two forces feed each other and analyze how the instrumentalization of identity shapes the perception and experience of sociopolitical conflict and the nature of civic and institutional responses to it.

First however, we must try to conceive of sociopolitical conflict in a new way. At the start of our inquiry, we discussed the ways in which existing analyses of the public relations industry frame sociopolitical conflict in the context of an identifiable polarity. For Žižek, this reduction to polarity is constituted by fruitless attempts to fill the “unrepresentable abyss of antagonism.” However, despite its unrepresentable nature, how can we characterize this abyss of antagonism? If sociopolitical conflict must be understood as that which is not symbolized in our collective spectral reality, how can we – to the best of our ability – aim to understand this gap so as to better understand the representative struggle to fill it? In the third chapter, we will use the theoretical groundwork we have laid thus far to conceptualize the antagonistic gap and attempt to understand the ways in which sociopolitical conflict can be understood and characterized outside the realm of specter.

Chapter 3 – Contextualizing the Antagonistic Gap

In order to understand how the commodification and deployment of identity implicate civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict, it is first necessary that we attempt to delineate what is meant by sociopolitical conflict in the context of our research. In order to do so, it's critical to establish the field, so to speak, upon which the antagonistic gap resides. It is commonsensical to assert that conflict – in the purest sense of the term – involves a dispute – a quarrel or struggle – between two (or more) opposing sides. In the realm of sociopolitical conflict, it should be noted, that these sides – namely, the opposing forces in sociopolitical conflict – are numerous and their manifestations and motivations are varied. As will be seen, when trying to examine sociopolitical conflict in the context of our research, we must account for the enduring struggle against the imposition of biopolitical power.

In the context of our research, we have deployed Foucault's conception of power in hopes of understanding the ways in which identity is incited, implicated, and instrumentalized in and through Western networks of power and knowledge. As has been explored, Foucault's work seeks to challenge and elaborate on existing and widely accepted conceptualizations of a hierarchical top-down power. We know already that Foucault doesn't see power as something held or bestowed. Power is not merely repressive – it is productive – and operates in and through the capacity to act within a vast network of biopolitical apparatuses.

Further, we understand that political power conceived in this context is inseparable from the creation and accumulation of knowledge. For Foucault, this reconceptualization of power is an attempt to delineate the “how of power” namely, the mechanisms and interactions through which power is exercised (Foucault, 1997, 24). By studying these mechanisms and coming to understand how they operate, Foucault offers an analysis of two nodal points – first, “the rules of rights that delineate power” and, at the opposite end of the spectrum “the truth effects that power produces” (Ibid.).

As we've also covered, existing analyses on the political significance and implications of professionalized public relations seem limiting and insufficient. Deploying a series of Foucault's explorations has allowed us to examine the ways in which these existing analyses seek to understand the success of public relations – namely, in a way that ascribes an a priori powerful center – a somehow identifiable nucleus of political power. The pervasive sociopolitical diffusion of public relations methodologies is understood as an inside job; the monopolizing of dangerous and utilitarian tools by some elite and powerful few. The ruling individuals and institutions hold the recipe for manipulating the masses, and the masses are subject to a constant and manipulative struggle against the collective of their repressive rulers – or so the story goes.

We will come to see, however, that the conceptual framing of this struggle has been put together incorrectly.

It is at this point where Foucault's analysis of power becomes prescient and extends out in a way that will prove useful for our study of identity as instrumental in and through sociopolitical conflict. Particularly, it will help us to challenge outdated Marxist conceptions of sociopolitical conflict – ones that are steeped in economic determinism and are characteristic of existing analyses regarding the political significance and implications of professionalized public relations. This Marxist conception frames the struggle over political power between a group of haves and have nots. Foucault's very notion of political power, however, allows for a corresponding reconceptualization of the struggle to exercise it.

Upon reconceptualizing of political power in this sense, we will deploy an illustrative contextualization of the antagonistic gap by looking to the long-standing struggle between indigenous peoples in Canada and the enduring imposition of colonialism. This contextualization will again seek to avoid reducing the struggle to that of between indigenous peoples and colonial overlords. Instead, this contextualization will seek to examine the ways in which sociopolitical struggle must be defined by the continuous resistance of indigenous peoples to biopolitical *techniques of power*. The driving motivation for this chapter is not an attempt to arbitrarily assign a victim and villain, rather, it is to better understand the form and nature of sociopolitical conflict as an enduring gap. A gap, that as we will see in the final chapter, cannot be filled through incessant attempts at symbolization and representation.

The Antagonistic Gap: A Sociopolitical Battlefield

We will begin by attempting to characterize how Foucault contends that sociopolitical conflict exists and is experienced. Doing so will necessarily require us to conceptualize political

power as exercised through a multitude of biopolitical apparatuses. By shifting our focus to the “extremities” of power – namely, by coming to understand power from a multilateral perspective, our conceptual understanding of sociopolitical conflict can be more sufficiently explored (Ibid., 27). Unsurprisingly, Foucault frames sociopolitical conflict in the context of a battle, a war.

However, the way in which Foucault conceptualizes this battle offers some important tools that will aid in our continued analysis of identity as instrumentalized through sociopolitical conflict. First, it must be reasserted that Foucault acknowledges that political power can be found in all social relationships – it is not simply something exercised by ruling states, classes, or institutions. This isn’t to say that Foucault argues that elite institutions or people don’t exercise power. Rather, he attempts to better understand the ways in which power itself operates in all regards.

For instance, we know that Foucault believes that power and knowledge exist in a circular relationship through which they produce and reproduce each other. We know that networks of biopolitical apparatuses exist that create, sustain, and reproduce the very relation between knowledge and power. However, in trying to contextualize the struggle to exercise power, it becomes useful to introduce Foucault’s concept of discourse. Discourse cannot be understood as some neutral means of communication or some isolated attempt to ascribe meaning through thought and conversation.

Rather, Foucault argues that discourse involves the creation of knowledges – primarily through social practices that systematically form and constitute the things they discuss (Ibid., 27). Examples of the production of knowledge through the development of discourse are many in Foucault’s work. Take for instance the ways in which the very practices of psychiatry produced a

discourse of “the mentally ill”, the practices of psychoanalysis produced the discourse of “perversion”, and the practices of disciplinary institutions produced the discourse of “the delinquent.”

These discourses then become additional instruments of power – bodies of knowledge that – while deployed by states to exert control over populations in the name of utility and docility – more importantly serve the function of sustaining power relations as such. The exercise of this power extends beyond that of mere state coercion. The discourse of the mentally ill results in the creation of programs, services, even legislation regarding the mentally ill. Those deemed perverted or insane are – at some points in history – sterilized or forced into rehabilitation programs. The delinquent, upon being released from prison is slated to participate in diversion programs and identify him/herself on job applications as having a history with incarceration. These discourses, act as a connecting line, between apparatuses on the network of power and knowledge.

One might argue, however, that the effects of these discourses are not entirely bad. Programs and services designed for the mentally ill, the sexually perverted, and the delinquent can be understood as social goods – ways of facilitating a better way of life for those subjected. Here again, we must reassert Foucault’s aim. Foucault does not conclude that power is merely coercive. In fact, Foucault’s notion of power is one that operates optimally under relatively liberal sociopolitical conditions. What Foucault seeks to make clear is that these mechanisms – in this case, services and programs for people deemed ‘abnormal’ in some regard – represent avenues of continued regulatory coordination and discipline. Discourses – and the varied truth effects they produce – function primarily in the pursuit of harnessing bodies (populations) and arranging them in a way that sustains and reproduces relationships of biopolitical power.

How then can we forge an analysis of sociopolitical conflict with this series of insights in mind? Above all, Foucault's insights on the sociopolitical struggle represent an effort to critique and supplement the Marxist theory of sociopolitical struggle. Foucault's critique of the Marxist conception of sociopolitical conflict seeks to counter the notion that sociopolitical struggle can be conceived of in the context of the haves and the have nots – or, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this conceptualization of sociopolitical struggle, the bourgeoisie *has* power while the proletariat is *without* power.

For Marx, power is exercised coercively, but generally accepted due to what Marx defines as a false consciousness. Marx and Foucault seemingly align in their conceptualization of the pervasiveness of power – namely, that is exercised through a variety of fields. However, Foucault challenges Marx's notion that political power can be sufficiently defined in and through the oppression of one subordinate class by an oppressive one. So, for Marx, sociopolitical struggle is defined by the necessity of the have nots coming to overthrow the haves – a David and Goliath classic. The only way to overcome this oppressive and coercive relation requires the crossing of some revolutionary finish line – namely, the ousting of those with a powerful grip on the means of production.

Foucault's concept of sociopolitical struggle stands in stark contrast to this Marxist conception. Simply put, the Marxist conception of political power is rooted in the idea of exploitation while Foucault's conception of political power is rooted in the idea of control (Bidet, 2016, 26). For Foucault, coming to overcome the exploitation of the ruling class *is not* an addressing of power face to face. For Foucault, exploitation is a symptom of a society organized through reproductive mechanisms of biopolitical control. As such, attempting to overcome sociopolitical conflict by overthrowing the exploitative class or institution is insufficient. Here

again, Foucault attempts to not simply assign roles in sociopolitical conflict (namely, assign roles of those who *have* power and those *who don't*). Instead, as he does with power itself, Foucault seeks to analyze the ways in which sociopolitical conflict operates by exploring its nature and reproductive capacity.

To put it simply, Foucault comes to conceptualize power (and in turn, the sociopolitical struggle to exercise it) not in terms of the stratification between classes or groups, but rather in terms of “relationships of government” (Ibid.). While connections between Marx and Foucault are undeniable, the primary difference lies in the weight they attach to the capitalist mode of production. Marx, of course, views sociopolitical struggle as characterized by a capitalist society – a society that can be overthrown in and through the will of the people. Foucault, on the other hand, views sociopolitical struggle as characterized by a disciplinary society – within which, the will of the people is already recognized in formal, juridico-political terms.

However, this collective will, Foucault argues, is dominated by generalized mechanisms of discipline that “guarantee the submission and forces of bodies” (Foucault, 1979, 222). In this, Foucault efficiently sums up the ways in which the theoretical basis of the enlightenment undoubtedly “discovered the liberties” but “also invented the disciplines” (Ibid.). These mechanisms of discipline – which we have explored in detail – result in the forging of “a relation of constraints entirely different from contractual obligation” (Ibid.). The characteristic feature of this alternative relation of constraints is primarily the extent of its reach through the subjugation of “singular existences” (Ibid.).

In short, Foucault does not privilege the capitalist means of production as the locus and reproductive antagonist of the sociopolitical struggle. For Foucault, “class domination (the class structure) does not define ‘modern society’” however, it “nevertheless traverses it from end to

end” (Bidet, 2016, 44). As such, positioning the sociopolitical struggle with the class structure as the identifiable and omnipresent adversary is patently insufficient. This framing of sociopolitical antagonism fails to account for the ways in which isolated struggles (like that of class struggle) “revolve around ‘great apparatuses,’ which seize hold of the great juridical principles by which power is distributed” (Ibid.).

What are the implications then, of the institutionalization of biopolitical practices, in the context of sociopolitical conflict? This initial theoretical comparison of Marx and Foucault allows us to broaden our understanding and analysis of the parties involved in sociopolitical conflict. In short, one might be left wondering, if we cannot assign an enemy (namely: the bourgeois grip on the means of production, with whom is this struggle continually occurring? Foucault himself was posed this question and his answer offers key insights in the context of our research. Foucault argues that we are not fighting against some solely capitalist adversary. Instead, “we all fight against each other, in a bundle of temporary coalitions whose primary elements would be individuals, or even sub-individuals” (Foucault, 1981, 19).

As such, the effects of a biopolitical power cannot be addressed sufficiently by simply coming to overthrow the state, the law, or some hegemonic ruling class. These power effects are produced by disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms that facilitate the operation of power “on the underside of the law” and in a way that “undermines the limits that are traced around the law” (Ibid., 223). Consequently, when examining sociopolitical conflict our focus must be oriented outside the context of “state versus public”, or “bourgeoisie versus proletariat.” These reductions allow only for a limited and insufficient understanding of both what is at play and what is at stake on the sociopolitical battlefield.

How then can we conceptualize sociopolitical conflict in more sufficient terms, that account for a biopolitical power exercised not through, but under the law? First, we must clearly come to understand the connection Foucault draws between law and war. Foucault argues that law happens in and through defeats and victories on battle fields. However, this is not an implication that law puts an end to battle, rather, law facilitates the continued reproduction of the battle. The association of law with the cessation of war prevents a more significant analysis. Our focus must be shifted, instead to analyzing the “war that is going on beneath peace itself” (Foucault, 1976, 51). Our conceptualization of sociopolitical conflict must be characterized by the ways in which mechanisms of power facilitate a peace that is in fact “a coded war” (Ibid.). This is the basis upon which Foucault raises the inversion of the Clausewitzian principle: politics is not simply the continuation of war by other means, politics themselves continually sustain and reproduce war-like relations. How then can we contextualize this inversion in the context of our research?

Our analysis, at this point, requires contextual illustration. Pursuant to the goals of our current undertaking – coming to characterize the antagonistic gap – how can we contextualize the notion of an ongoing battle, raging quietly under the surface of juridical sovereignty? To draw upon a relevant contemporary example, we will examine the longstanding sociopolitical conflict between indigenous and settler societies in Canada. By briefly examining the dense historical relationship between the large network of indigenous tribes and the colonizing Canadian state, a variety of illustrative demonstrations can be formed.⁹ These illustrations will help contextualize Foucault’s notion of sociopolitical conflict and will prime us to juxtapose this

⁹ It should be noted that Canada’s indigenous population is by no means homogenous and is fact incredibly varied with over 600 identified tribes existing within Canadian borders (Assembly of First Nations, 2017).

conceptualization of sociopolitical conflict, with one reduced to a representative struggle to fill the antagonistic gap.

The Biopolitical Colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

First and foremost, our analysis must frame colonialism in biopolitical terms. To do so, we must reiterate that colonialism cannot be understood *only* as some top-down political act. We must understand the biopolitical power of colonization as the deployment of certain techniques of government – namely, those of regulation and discipline. Our isolated historical example will forge an analysis through which a collective notion of indigenous identity became explicitly inscribed in legislation and the formal sociopolitical framework. Our analysis will largely rely upon Canadian examples of legislation and policy in this regard, that were codified in the second half of the nineteenth century. Particularly, this brief historical analysis will focus on the long-standing administration of the Indian Act. Further, in order to contextualize the ways in which the battle is continually waged on “the underside of the law” we will look to the network of biopolitical apparatuses through which sociopolitical interactions take place.

It must be noted, however, that it may seem counterintuitive to examine a war that occurs on the underside of a law by examining an extensive and long-standing piece of legislation itself. However, this contextual example will allow us to explore a critical component of Foucault’s ‘how of power.’ Particularly, it will allow us to explore the ways in which an initial legislative move – namely, the inscribing of the Indian Act – serves as the base for a series of multi-lateral, non-legislative instrumentalizing reinforcements through a variety of biopolitical apparatuses. In this example, we contextualize the ways in which Foucault describes biopolitical power as occurring and being exerted via a variety of techniques – both explicitly legislative and not.

The Indian Act provides a valuable contextualization of the transition to biopolitical power in two ways. First, the document signaled the end of dealing with indigenous communities as independent nations and formulated the conceptualization of Indians as wards of the state. In short, the very notion of ‘the Indian’ was inscribed into the colonial framework with the enactment of the Indian Act. No longer were treaties to be signed among sovereign nations – indigenous tribes would now be sanctioned and organized under the colonial government.

Second, the Indian Act designated specific allotments of ‘inalienable’ land (the reserve system) for identifiable Indians as concessions for continued and widespread colonial encroachment. It is here we can identify the first way in which colonialism is best characterized as a biopolitical exercise. There is an abandonment of a relation of explicit struggle over territory and instead the creation and application of forces to meticulously control the bodies and activities that inhabit that territory. No longer did indigenous peoples represent sovereign nations, with whom battles over territory would rage on. Indigenous peoples were allotted designated sections of the territory, and the very lives lived on those reserved sections were subject to astonishing levels of meticulous administration.

Additionally, this legislative development (along with many that followed) sought to clearly define what constitutes an ‘identifiable Indian’. The Indian Act inscribed the very notion of the status Indian. The Indian Act is the source document of the Canadian reserve system, the Band Council system, and the Indian Residential School program. The administration of this legislation involved the direct and calculated organization, integration, and attempted assimilation of indigenous peoples into the colonial framework across the country. The Indian Act - while now heavily amended and largely contested – is still the primary legislation

governing the interaction between the Canadian government and indigenous tribes across the country.

The long line of amendments to the Indian Act are important to explore briefly in the context of our research. These amendments offer a brief historical timeline upon which we can trace the evolution of biopolitical techniques of government. The Indian Act was originally passed in 1867 and proposed codified instructions for managing the relationship between the Canadian colonial state and the hundreds of indigenous tribes that previously inhabited the new country. The legislation came as an attempt to codify rights guaranteed to indigenous Canadians under the Royal Proclamation of 1793 (RSC, 1985, c 1-5). However, the legislation, can retrospectively be understood as explicitly serving the function of imposed assimilation.

The scope of the Indian Act is vast, and includes detailed regulations for every aspect of indigenous life including land use, Band Council administration and governance, education, healthcare, and even marital and geographic parameters for Indian status. Additionally, the Act was conceived of in a way that would encourage indigenous Canadians to abandon their indigenous status through processes of enfranchisement. Upon learning French or English, demonstrating an industrious spirit and a basic educational foundation, adult Indians – and their families – could become enfranchised. They would be allotted a section of land and be considered colonial subjects, with the right to vote (Ibid.). They would also would lose their Indian status and the legal rights associated with it.

These attempts at assimilation and incorporation of indigenous peoples into the colonial framework were continually administered in and through countless attempted and achieved amendments to the Act that span over a century. The Act has been subject to astonishing level of meticulously detailed amendments that seek to address all the many ways in which indigenous

identity could be subverted, alienated, starved-out. An 1884 amendment successfully legislated the banning of Indigenous potlatches and cultural dances (Ibid.). 1911 saw reserve lands become available for expropriation without surrender and their inhabitants subject to arbitrary relocation by a judge (Ibid.). A 1914 amendment required Western Indians to request explicit permission for dressing in traditional clothing at ceremonies and events (Ibid.).

In 1920, Indian Residential Schools were created and forced attendance was mandated for all status Indian children. Attendance at these schools – it is now well-known – involved the forced and prolonged separation of children from their families, harsh punishment for speaking their language, cutting of their hair, prohibition of cultural dress, imposed English and French education, along with physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at hands of caretakers (Ibid.). 1920 also saw the codification of involuntary enfranchisement, meaning the Department of Indian Affairs retained the authority to revoke the Indian status of and enfranchise any Indian they deemed fit (Ibid.). 1951 saw the banning of slaughtering and selling livestock with the proper Indian Agent permit and legislated the forced enfranchisement of a status Indian woman who married a non-status Indian man (Ibid.).

As can be seen, almost 100 years after the initial passing of the Indian Act, the document became consistently more focused and meticulous in its attempts to regulate and discipline indigenous peoples into assimilation. However, the 1960's saw a shift in North America. In Canada, Prime Minister Diefenbaker had begun drafting the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1958. The Civil Rights movement in the United States was also well under-way. In March of 1960, Section 14(2) of the *Canadian Elections Act* was repealed and status Indians were granted the right to participate in federal elections. Further, also in 1960, the Indian Act was amended to *disallow* involuntary enfranchisement of indigenous people (Ibid.). By 1985, the

enfranchisement process was rendered obsolete with an additional amendment to the Indian Act (Ibid.). The Canadian government, it would seem, was conceding the decision of Indian status to be the decision of Indians themselves.

However, with the voiding of the enfranchisement process in 1985, the Indian Act was also amended to include a variety of stipulations for determining status parameters. While Indians would no longer be forced to enfranchise, the determination of Indian status would be subject to a variety of rigid and formulaic limits. The continuation of a biopolitical will to know and regulate indigenous bodies is unmissable here, and throughout the long and storied administration of the Indian Act. It becomes clear that with this legislation intact – which it remains to be, even today – that the notion of a ‘status Indian’ is undeniably a biopolitical instrument. An anchorage point that first provided justification for the discipline of indigenous bodies, and now, provides the justification for the intimate regulation of simply being indigenous.

In short, the Indian Act has indirectly served as a continually transforming solution to the so defined “Indian problem.”¹⁰ In their long and tense historical interactions with indigenous peoples, the colonizing state slowly came to discursively create the very notion of the Indian – as defined in opposition to that of settler, or citizen. As states and institutions become more bureaucratic and biopolitical, the solving of the ‘Indian problem’ manifests as the discursive manufacture and subsequent management of ‘indigenous identity’ as such. Even when the focus shifts explicitly from disciplinary attempts at assimilation, the regulatory functions of biopolitical power maintain a grip on indigenous bodies – calculating their indigeneity, estimating their owed

¹⁰ The phrase ‘Indian Problem’ was originally coined by Duncan Campbell Scott, the head of the department of Indian Affairs in 1905 (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1978).

reparations in terms of dollars, acres and granted rights, proposing reconciliation for the irreconcilable.

The Indian Act is merely one –albeit, longstanding – legislative example in this biopolitical project. One that while codified by the Canadian state, was not unilaterally sustained and reproduced at the heart of some colonial headquarters of power. The Indian Act represents an initial legislative moment – or an isolated technique of power – that facilitated a multilateral hold on indigenous bodies through countless sociopolitical vessels – apparatuses of biopolitical power, that – to this day – objectify and instrumentalize indigenous existence.

It is these multilateral biopolitical anchorage points that sustain and reproduce the state's grip on indigenous bodies. A relationship that began as one of imposed assimilation has seemingly transformed to one of calculated appropriation. Whereas indigenous identity used to be a target for eradication, it now becomes the object of intense administrative focus. If indigeneity is to exist, then that indigeneity will be named, measured, defined, and allocated. Both the persecution and repossession of indigenous peoples will be carefully managed and administered by the state.

This contextual example does well in broadening our understanding of Foucault's conception of sociopolitical conflict. Foucault's conception of power and conflict are important in the case of indigenous-settler sociopolitical conflict in the west for two primary reasons. First, we see that power is not exerted top down by some colonial overlord or state – the Indian Act is not inscribed amended not only via the rule of law. Grounding justification for the long-standing Indian Act and its various amendments is intimately connected to a vast network of normalizing apparatuses including education, healthcare, and even cultural interaction. Second, Foucault's conception of the silent war being waged under peace is plainly evident in this example. As

colonial states grew and expanded through project of progress, civilization, and the rule of law, a quiet war was produced – a struggle that operated on the underside of those very projects.

Additionally, it must be noted that, Foucault's conception of conflict and political power is also important in this context because it doesn't negate the longstanding resistance of indigenous peoples to colonial imposition. Framing the sociopolitical conflict this way, ensures that the struggle between indigenous and settler communities is not reduced to some all-consuming colonial oppression. The consecutive shifts in the ways colonial governments attempted to reorganize, micromanage, and impose governance on indigenous peoples attests clearly to the continued resistance of indigenous peoples to these biopolitical impositions.

In fact, the contemporary moment in this long-standing conflict is one best characterized by calls for decolonization and reconciliation. The vast colonial injustices that indigenous people in the West have been subjected to are widely acknowledged and condemned. Mechanisms for moving forward, paying penance and doing justice are largely the features of these calls to decolonize and reconcile. The conflict, however, remains – the struggle is ongoing. Debates over the necessity and functionality of decolonization are rampant. The possible and appropriate means for reconciliation are points of high contention in the sociopolitical struggle. How then can this sociopolitical conflict be analyzed in contemporary terms – and what role does the deployment and commodification of identity play in the contemporary moment?

In short, how can we summarize this coded war in the context of our research? First, sociopolitical conflict – or the antagonistic gap – must be understood as a *continual* battle – an ongoing struggle. The vast sociopolitical field is the battleground for this struggle, and weaponry is deployed not only through the rule of law, but in and through a vast network of social relations, and the apparatuses and mechanisms of biopolitical power that constitute them. We

mustn't fall swoop to some conceptualization of political power that seeks to identify an oppressed class versus some elite oppressive institution or class. Doing so will only allow for the exploration of *features* of sociopolitical conflict – or, isolated *effects* of a biopolitically organized society.

Let us also, for a moment, explore this notion of a peace underlined by an ongoing struggle, to briefly revisit Edward Bernays. At this point in our exploration, we have made clear that Bernays viewed public relations as a democratic tool – a mechanism for keeping sociopolitical chaos at bay. We can recall an illuminating moment for Bernays, following the conclusion of the first world war. If propaganda could be used to furnish war, he concluded, it could undoubtedly be deployed in pursuit of furnishing peace as well. However, upon closer inspection – and again, in the context of Foucault's conception of sociopolitical conflict – it becomes clear to see that public relations strategies actually function as mechanisms for *sustaining* a war like relation and *reproducing* sociopolitical conflict.

The “peace” that Bernays believes public relations has the capacity to create and maintain, is merely a distortion of the sociopolitical battlefield, through which the battle itself becomes difficult to recognize. Bernays was not using public relations strategies to furnish peace through democratic order – he was in fact, participating in convoluting the terrain of this quiet, under-the-surface battle. In order to understand the nature of identity instrumentalization in relation to contemporary sociopolitical conflict then, we must conceptualize of sociopolitical struggle in a way that addresses this distortion.

How can we come to recognize the extensive number of ways in which the discursive creation, interpellation, and commodification of identity distorts and convolutes the collective understanding of this war occurring under peace. In what ways do mechanisms of identity

incitement, interpellation, deployment and commodification distort the collective perception of sociopolitical conflict? Coming to understand the ways in which the instrumentalization of identity distorts the collective perception and experience of sociopolitical antagonism will be crucial in coming to better civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict. Particularly, our concluding analysis will allow us to better delineate why collective contemporary responses to sociopolitical conflict are seemingly rooted in performative appeals to sociopolitical identity. In the final chapter we will examine the ways in which collective identities come to form and be misidentified as adversaries in the sociopolitical struggle.

Chapter 4 – Specters in an Empty Space: The Aestheticization of Sociopolitical Conflict

We have covered much theoretical ground thus far. We have explored the ways in which identity has been commodified in the West. We have reconceptualized political power in biopolitical terms – namely, as a power bent on the discursive creation and calculated instrumentalization of subjectivities. We have conceptualized sociopolitical conflict in terms outside the Marxist bourgeoisie-proletariat framework. Finally, we have begun to explore the ways in which the public relations industry contributes toward a convolution of sociopolitical struggle itself. Finally, we must explore the combined implications of these sociopolitical realities on the very nature of civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict. Namely, how can we explore the materiality of sociopolitical conflict experienced under these conditions?

The sociopolitical battle field is one best characterized by an ongoing struggle against biopolitical techniques of power – a struggle that cannot be represented by some all-encompassing adversarial symbol. However, we know that the instrumentalizing of identity – both in forms of public relations and biopolitical deployment – relies on the continual interpellation of identities through images and symbols – gazes and gestures. In this final

chapter, it is this deployment of identity symbolizations, that will guide our concluding analysis about the nature of civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict. Particularly, we will explore the ways in which the battle over representation and symbolization becomes mistaken for the antagonistic gap itself.

The result of this distortion on the sociopolitical battlefield, is that the collective responses of the institutions and the civic masses become largely characterized and experienced in the context of performance and spectacle. In this final chapter, we will examine the ways in which the public relations industry and the biopolitical infrastructure that primed its establishment and success, manifest in an aestheticized politics of identity that aids in the continual reproduction of a sociopolitical spectacle. Namely, an aestheticized politics of identity that consistently distorts the sociopolitical struggle and continually incites performances to reproduce this distortion. The manifest result is that responses to sociopolitical struggle come to be characterized by performance and judgement as opposed to critical reflection or strategic resistance.

To explore this process, we will return to the guiding methodological theories we deployed at the outset, and we will attempt to explore the spectral materiality of the instrumentalization of identity. Namely, we will examine the ways in which the instrumentalization of identity continually attempts to fill out the “unrepresentable abyss of antagonism”. Doing so will require an exploration of the underlying tenants of Benjamin’s aestheticized politics thesis, particularly in the context of the politics of identity that we have explored thus far. Finally, this concluding analysis will require an examination of the ways in which these aestheticized processes of instrumentalizing identity contribute toward the creation and sustainment of a sociopolitical struggle experienced as spectacle.

The Aestheticization of the Politics of Identity

We begin by first more deeply exploring Walter Benjamin's work on the aestheticization of politics. It is first critical to note that Benjamin links the aestheticization of politics to the potentiality of mass-produced art – a twentieth-century force that we have previously linked to the success of the public relations industry. The underlying tenant is that processes of mechanical reproduction sees art no longer based on ritual, but instead on politics (Benjamin, 1935, 6). The result, Benjamin argues, is that politics become ordered, structured and conceived of in purely aesthetic terms. In order to clearly delineate these ideas in relation to the instrumentalization of identity and sociopolitical conflict however, we must first try to characterize what is meant by a politics structured and conceived of in aesthetic terms – or an aestheticized politics.

Largely, the aestheticization of politics represents the “deadly consummation of l’art pour l’art’s credo, *fiat ars pereat mundus*” (Jay, 1992, 41). Benjamin links this consummation to Fascism as a means of explaining its “seductive fascination” (Ibid., 42). Benjamin argues that Nazism saw Hitler’s political project for Germany conceived of in purely aesthetic terms. Namely, “German consciousness treated its own reality – developed and lived its history – as though it were a work of art” (Ibid.). Hitler becomes conceived of us as a leader, working masterfully to fulfill some aesthetic political vision. The political project of fascist Germany becomes conceived of in solely aesthetic terms and ethical and critical reflections are rendered unimportant if not entirely absent from consideration. In short, aestheticization sees political acts understood as projects of beauty – politicians understood as the leaders facilitating the creation of a political masterpiece, regardless of the sociopolitical implications that constitute that masterpiece.

In short, political acts are not questioned or conceived of outside the realm of their aesthetic value. As such the only question asked regarding the sociopolitical implications of a political project is “what do the victims matter, if the gesture is beautiful” (Ibid., 44)? However, we must be sure to note that this aestheticization is not constituted by some willful forgetting of the political pursuit of ‘the common good’ – nor can it be characterized as some conscious political choice to eliminate or avoid the sentimental considerations that constitute that pursuit. Essentially, a politics conceived of and measured solely by its aesthetic value changes the entire way the political is structured and experienced. When the aesthetic criterion dominates, any and all “non-aesthetic criteria are deliberately and proactively excluded from consideration” via the affective (or anti-affective) function of the “callous apotheosis of art over life” in the realm of the political (Ibid.).

But how does this aestheticization occur? How do politics come to be conceived of only in the realm of aesthetics? In short, how can we contextualize the ways in which aestheticization changes the very structure of political thought and action (or inaction)? In order to more deeply explore the implications of the dominating aesthetic criterion on civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict, we can begin by exploring Benjamin’s insights on the impossibility of reproducing authenticity. Doing so will allow us to explore the ways in which, through aestheticization, the specters of instrumentalized identities can be *reproduced and redeployed* on the distorted sociopolitical battlefield.

Benjamin links the notion of authenticity and reproduction in his historical tracing of the mechanical reproduction of art. However, for the purposes of our research, we will be using the notion of perceived identity – that is, the dynamic mosaic image – through which Western individuals come to conceive of themselves and those around them. The foundational elements

of these mosaic images are undoubtedly linked to categories of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, however, as we have explored, also incorporate a much wider range of sociopolitical and cultural beliefs, ideologies, and tastes. For Benjamin, process of mechanical reproduction “substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence” (Benjamin, 1935, 4). In the context of our research then, we can understand the discursive creation and continual instrumentalization of identities as the mass spectral reproduction of a variety of unique sociohistorical/sociopolitical existences.

As we know, this instrumentalization occurs in and through a vast network of biopolitical apparatuses. Individual identities are continually interpellated and deployed, largely through signal and symbol. As these processes of instrumentalization become over-concentrated, identity symbolizations become continually reproduced and eventually crystalized as material elements all their own. These reproduced identity images (like, for instance, the black power fist, or the LGBTQ2 rainbow) can be understood as the “pre-ideological kernel” of the composite ideology that accompanies or is associated with a given identity.

The very process of reproduction (through continual instrumentalization) renders these specters of ideology constitutive of the perception and experience of sociopolitical antagonism. As such, the contemporary conception and experience of sociopolitical conflict is not reducible to some conscious ideological warfare between contrasting groups. Instead, it must be understood as being commanded and constituted by specters of ideology. Further, these specters operate at an unconscious level – and are constituted by the continual reproduction and redeployment of identity symbols.

However, much like the reproduction of a painting, the authenticity – or ‘aura’ (which Benjamin defines as a paintings unique place in time and history) is lost in and through the very

process of reproduction (Ibid., 5). In the context of our research then, we must understand that the mass spectral reproduction of identity as the processes through which the authenticity of that identity is lost or obscured. However, how can we characterize the ‘authentic character’ of identity as perceived in the West – namely, identity perceived as one’s true and intersectional self? Above all, this authentic character can be defined as the *personal* and *social* value that individuals find in their conception of their own identity.

As we have mentioned, despite the constitutive nature of identity instrumentalization across the ontological field, there is no denying that one’s perceived identity provides some degree of personal fulfillment and value to them. Therefore, the authentic character – or aura – of an identity can – in part – be understood as this personal and contingent value that one takes from their conception and understanding of themselves and those around them. This personal value can be defined as a sense of meaning and belonging in the world. Additionally, an identity’s authentic character can also be comprised of some contingent social value as well, which can be defined as the aligning of one’s self with a group in pursuit of unity, sociopolitical fairness and freedom from oppression.

Subsequently, as an identity is continually hailed and called upon – via a vast biopolitical network of apparatuses – the isolated personal and social value of that identity become increasingly separated from collective understandings and experiences of it. As such, the reproduced image of an identity *cannot* (for the most part) express the contingent authenticity or aura of that identity – namely, the fulfillment or value offered by one’s conceptualization of themselves and their position in the antagonistic struggle. The result of the mass spectral reproduction of identity then, is that the more a subjectivity is continually reproduced (read: instrumentalized), the more distanced it becomes from its ‘authentic character.’ As such, we

must explore the ways in which the spectral reproduction of perceived identities, produced via continual processes of instrumentalization, continually reproduces a distortion of the sociopolitical battle. A distortion that frames sociopolitical conflict in spectral terms and one that prevents a collective understanding of the gap as it is, due to the distracting attempts to aesthetically fill it.

However, as we have explored, this distortion (read: aestheticization) is more than a mere muddying of the waters – the effect of aesthetization constitutes an entirely different political logic. Particularly, a political logic that sees means transformed to ends. The aestheticization of the politics of identity sees attention paid only to the representation of reproduced identity symbols – any non-aesthetic criterion necessarily falls away. In short, as identities are continually reproduced via instrumentalization, the political representation and symbolization of those identities aren't considered the political means for promoting some political end, constituted by freedom from oppression or sociopolitical fairness; symbolic representation becomes the political end itself.

As such, we arrive at a critical – though seemingly common-sense-conclusion in our line of inquiry. The mere image or reproduced symbolization of an identity does not in any way constitute some all-encompassing representation of that necessarily composite and contingent identity. Nor does it guarantee the sociopolitical demands that identity groups lodge against the institutions that govern them. In short, the aestheticization of the politics of identity – via the reproductive capacity of instrumentalization – represents the necessary separation of that identity from its sociohistorical and sociopolitical actuality. However, considerations in this regard – namely, non-aesthetic considerations – are fundamentally eliminated as a result of the *very logic* of aestheticization. It follows then, that the aestheticization of sociopolitical conflict sees

sociopolitical antagonism understood and experienced as a battle over the inscribing and continual reorganization of representative specters on the sociopolitical battlefield.

To put it simply, we can conclude thus far that contemporary sociopolitical conflict is best characterized by aestheticization. This aestheticization must be understood as having a transformative effect on the ways in which the masses are affected by political gestures. In short – when the politics of identity are aestheticized sociopolitical antagonism becomes understood and experienced as the struggle to define the tastes and terms of some beautifully totalizing political project.¹¹ Further, we can conclude that nature of aestheticization is linked to the continual processes of reproducing (instrumentalizing) symbolizations of identity. Therefore, the joint instrumentalizing forces of biopolitical deployment and commodification see the representation of identity experienced as ends instead of means. The symbolic representation of identity comes to be assigned and continually reproduced as the primary aesthetic responsibility of political institutions and civic groups alike.

Here we can draw preliminary conclusions about the influence of aestheticization on collective civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict. In the institutional sense, Foucault's thesis on an art of government is brought to life. An art of government seeks to calculate and optimize the management of atomized populations as a means of continually founding and justifying sovereignty as such. In short, biopolitical governmentality seeks to reproduce and ground justification for the status quo. When politics are aestheticized then, this

¹¹ This notion of a spectral representation of some sociopolitical totality echoes Ernesto Laclau's interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis as applied to the realm of the political. Laclau uses Lacan's *objet petit a* to explore the political processes through which "a certain particularity assumes the role of an impossible universality" (Laclau, 2005, 115). Laclau argues that "the only possible totalizing horizon is given by a partiality (the hegemonic force) which assumes the representation of a mythical totality." As such, this 'fullness' via partiality functions not as an ambitious attempt to offer a "second best" to some "fully reconciled society" – rather, "it is simply the name that fullness receives, within a certain historical horizon" (Ibid., 116).

art of government seeks to incessantly absorb, inscribe, and represent the various identities that constitute the populations they meticulously administer in order to ensure the masses can see their reflection emanating from the juridico-political order. Subsequently, contemporary governmentality must be understood as an art of constant spectral reproduction and reorganization. The ultimate aim being some beautiful and totalizing image to fill the antagonistic gap. A well-constructed mirage, based in the notions of some sociopolitical totality.

It follows then, that when sociopolitical conflict is conceived of in aesthetic terms, the very *representation and symbolization of identity* becomes the demand of the civic masses against the institutions that govern them. The result then, is that when the politics of identity are rendered aesthetic, the grounding or ‘fulfillment’ of sociopolitical demands is predominantly sought out through the very processes of symbolic representation. Since the authentic character of perceived identities and the demands associated with them cannot be expressed via a reproduced symbolization, increased accuracy or prevalence of the *representative symbolization itself* becomes the demand. In short, as an art of government seeks to arrange the right order of symbolizations, the civic masses (atomized into identity groups) attempt to supplement the inauthenticity of the representative symbolization, by demanding the representative specters be improved or changed entirely.

This process is, of course, circular with the capacity for continual mutual reinforcement. First, it works in and through social crowds. Civic responses to sociopolitical conflict often call for increased or more accurate representation. The conditions for the inscribed representation of popular demands is believed to be located in, or at least begin with the right images – the right specters of representation, symbolized politically. Second, this process works in and through institutions. As the masses demand representational images – supposedly as a means of

grounding and fulfilling actual sociopolitical demands, institutions work quickly to streamline this representation and make the correct all-encompassing symbolization. The function of these images is an attempted filling of the antagonistic gap – a reorganization of the aestheticized politics of identity.

This is largely the impact of the instrumentalization of identity on both collective institutional and civic responses to sociopolitical conflict. Not only does the instrumentalization of identity (culminating in an anesthetized politics) convolute the sociopolitical struggle and frame it in spectral terms, it also renders the civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict to a battle over representative specters – haunting images of represented identities that do nothing to address or acknowledge the constitutive sociopolitical demands and inherently political constitutions of those identities. However, the inherent emptiness of these symbolic representations matters not to the civic masses and institutions alike, since the very effect of aestheticization changes the very structure and logic of the political.

How can we contextualize the aestheticization of the politics of identity? We have covered in detail the ways in which identities are discursively created and consistently interpellated and instrumentalized via a biopolitical network of apparatuses *and* through the creation and deployment of strategic public relations images and ideas. However, how can we explore the ways in which specters of identity become crystallized and continually reproduced and redeployed in the context of sociopolitical conflict? To begin, we return to our illustrative example of the continual struggle of indigenous peoples against the biopolitical impositions of the Canadian state.

We have already briefly examined the ways in which this struggle has evolved over time. What began as an incessant attempt to create an Indian identity for the explicit purpose of

eradicating it, gradually transitioned to an incessant attempt to name, categorize, and manage indigeneity. In the contemporary moment, as we have mentioned, the relationship between the Canadian State and indigenous peoples is one best characterized by sociopolitical attempts at reconciliation and decolonization. However, with the aestheticization of the politics of identity now delineated, we can more closely examine these political projects as constituted largely by a reproductive series of spectacularized identity deployments.

For instance, the current Liberal government in Canada has undoubtedly absorbed and continually represents their collective commitment to decolonization and reconciliation. Their 2015 platform outlines this commitment as “a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples” (Liberal Party of Canada, 2015). Before taking a majority government in 2015, the Liberal party under the spokespersonship of Justin Trudeau, relentlessly campaigned to instill a relationship of “trust, respect, and a true spirit of cooperation” (Ibid.). Upon taking the roll of Prime Minister, Trudeau was celebrated for carving out a new way of doing politics – a marked departure from Harper’s conservative government. Trudeau appointed an indigenous woman as Minister of Justice and Attorney General. He held indigenous reconciliation ceremonies where members of certain indigenous communities cloaked him in ceremonial robes. He reiterated endlessly in speeches and appearances that he was committed to true and meaningful reconciliation. In short, he worked endlessly to ensure that indigenous identity was adequately represented in his political project.

Now however, as the next election looms, the situation has undoubtedly changed dramatically. Trudeau’s commitment to a renewed and reconciliatory relationship between the state and indigenous peoples has largely been exposed as performative. The direct policy initiatives that were linked to the Liberal platform’s commitment to reconciliation have

ultimately gone unfulfilled. Promises to protect indigenous lands from pipeline installations have gone unmet and the protest camps of indigenous peoples on unceded territory were arbitrarily encroached upon and cleared. Jody Wilson-Raybould, the female and indigenous face of Trudeau's Liberal project has been removed as Attorney General and ousted from caucus and identified as a traitor of the Liberal party after refusing to bend to or euphemize political interference.

How then can we examine the civic response to Trudeau's Liberal project and its apparent abject failure? Certain individuals cling to the Liberal project and in turn ostracize Jody Wilson-Raybould and conclude that *she* was never representative of the Liberal mission. Others denounce Trudeau as a fraud, and demand that Jody Wilson-Raybould *herself* would be the appropriate face (read: symbolization) of the Liberal brand – she has the potential to be the true facilitator of the decolonial masterpiece. Most interestingly, some denounce the Liberal political project altogether and re-identify themselves across partisan lines, in support of some alternative and even oppositional project. However, in all situations, the approach is the same: individuals attempt to rearrange the demanded representative symbolizations so as to align themselves with the correct or most representative aesthetic attempt to fill the antagonistic gap.

Herein we see the circular nature and reproductive capacity of an aestheticized politics of identity – driven largely by processes of instrumentalization. Frustrated by Stephen Harper's disregard for indigenous issues, the civic masses demanded better representation of indigenous peoples in government. Justin Trudeau ran a symbol-laden campaign and promised the exact opposite of Harper's disregard. The Liberal party he argued, would finally represent indigenous peoples in the way they deserved and in a way, that would facilitate tangible reconciliatory

change. However, as these proclamations became revealed as largely performative, the masses scramble to realign themselves and once again demand a more authentic representation.

However, to return to Benjamin, we have already examined the ways in which the symbolic reproduction of identity *cannot* express its contingent authenticity. As such, the sociopolitical struggle is reduced to a spectacle in which the civic masses demand impossibly authentic identity symbolizations and institutions respond by fervently trying to deploy an authentically representative aesthetic. The result is that the antagonistic gap – one which we know must be characterized as an ongoing struggle against biopolitical techniques of power – is reduced to a spectacularized struggle over individuals and symbolic representations.

In light of this spectacle then, it will prove useful to conceptualize of this aestheticized sociopolitical conflict as occurring in a theatre – in which the futile battle to fill the antagonist gap plays on. This theatre, however, is not some abstract force, floating above, below, or behind, some *actual* sociopolitical battlefield. This theatre of spectacles is the distorted sociopolitical battlefield itself and is experienced as such by publics and institutions alike. In order to explore the material nature of this spectacle, we turn to the work of Guy Debord.

The Spectacle: A Theatre for The Distorted Sociopolitical Struggle

In his 1967 work, *Society and the Spectacle*, Guy Debord explains that in modern societies – ones that are ruled by systems of production – “life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles” through which “everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation” (Debord, 1967, 10). However, and what is critical to note, is that this network of images is not merely some static collection of representative specters. This theatre of spectacles adopts an autonomous materiality all its own – a spectral materiality. Debord’s spectacle, then, can come to be understood as the very stage upon which the distorted sociopolitical struggle is

continually waged. Additionally, the process through which this theatre of spectacles is solidified and reproduced can be understood in Benjaminian terms as the aestheticization of politics.

If, as we have explored, the politics of identity have been aestheticized through continual instrumentalization, interpellation and incitement, how does this aestheticized politics culminate in a spectacle? To answer this question, we will look to Debord to delineate the ways in which that spectacle operates and identify its constitutive elements and dynamic implications on the sociopolitical battleground. First, however, it is important to reiterate – Debord argues that the theatre of spectacles is *not* merely some ornamental addition to the sociopolitical field – it is, in fact, “the very heart of this real society’s unreality” (Ibid., 11). For Debord, the spectacle represents the materialization of a “worldview” – a spectral materiality – that cannot be understood simply as some “visual excess produced by mass-media technologies” (Ibid.). How then, can we explain this materialization? How does the spectacle have material consequences on the sociopolitical battlefield? Namely, how can we understand the manifest consequences of sociopolitical conflict conceived of in spectrally material terms?

Debord argues that the spectacle is constituted by a linguistic of signs and is an “affirmation of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances” (Ibid., 12). In short, society becomes implicated by the very “contemplation of the spectacle, and ends up absorbing it and aligning itself with it” (Ibid., 12). Most importantly, Debord contends that the spectacle is situated and presented in sociopolitical life as an unquestionable, expansive and “inaccessible reality” (Ibid., 12). The all-encompassing function of the spectacle is to both demand and sustain the “passive acceptance” of those who occupy the sociopolitical field (Ibid., 12). This passivity is sustained, Debord argues, because the spectacle monopolizes appearances.

As such, sociopolitical conflict itself becomes reduced to a battle of signification – a war of representative specters that sustains and reproduces itself.

How then, can we explain the ways in which the spectacle has come to dominate and constitute sociopolitical conflict itself. Debord argues that individuals are subjected by the spectacle simply because they have already been “totally subjugated” by the economy (Ibid., 13). This allows for useful point of return to the notion of commodified identity. It follows then, that Debord seeks to characterize the spectacularization of society as a result of capitalist dispersion and dominance. The advent and expansion of capitalism, Debord argues, had already long-solved the perennial problem of human survival. In short, the widespread expansion of capitalism had made it so that the basic survival needs of those in the West (food, water, shelter, etc.) could generally be met without struggle.

As such, Debord argues, that capitalism – in the pursuit of ensuring an open stream of available markets – adapted and reformulated the problem of survival “at a higher level” (Ibid., 20). The problem of survival becomes restructured in the context of need as opposed to want. Consumer industries start positioning products as things individuals need, not want. This need, as we have explored, is intrinsically linked to the perceived identities of individuals in the West. In short, the new problem of ‘survival’ sees self-actualization situated on the level of acquiring things. As we have explored through our analysis of public relations, the realization of one’s identity was something to be acquired through goods and services, not organically experienced.

However, Debord takes this critique of capitalism in a deeper and more useful direction in the context of our current research. Debord, at the time of his writing, recognized that an additional shift had taken place in the context of capitalist expansion. This shift is one best characterized as the logic of *having* being replaced by the logic of *appearing*. While consumer

industries had initially situated the idea of self-actualization on a model of market relations, a spectacularized society propels this transition further. In the spectacular society, there is a shift from “having to appearing – all having must now derive its immediate prestige and its ultimate purpose from appearances” (Ibid., 13).

As such, products don’t simply function as mechanisms for fulfilling and realizing one’s true self – the consumption of goods and services become understood as mechanisms for optimizing the appearance of one’s self to others. The result is that an obsession with image and appearance come to dominate the social field. Consumer industries then – like advertising and public relations – begin to operate in a way that sells goods and services by emphasizing the potential effect they will have on our appearance – namely, the ways in which these products will help us perfect our mosaic brand.

Through an analysis of this shift to appearances, Debord recognizes the very nature of the spectacle by emphasizing its indifference regarding the nuanced heterogeneity of individuals themselves, and in turn, the social groups comprised by them. The function of the spectacular society is to provide streamlined and unified images, that, as we have discussed, possess a materiality all their own. At this point in our research, it goes without saying that these processes of spectacularization are not limited to the domain of consumerism and marketing.

The network of biopolitical apparatuses is vast and the notion of self-subjugation is the constitutive function of the instrumentalizing of identity. In short, the spectacle is not produced without the very processes of identity instrumentalization that we have explore. Representative identity symbolizations become inscribed in the distorted sociopolitical battlefield and seek to represent the *appearance* of something, not some concrete political will or specified political project.

Debord, however, argues that to understand the spectacle is to understand the culmination of the capitalist modes of commodification. In fact, Debord argues that “the spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in *totally* colonizing social life” (Ibid., 20). For Debord, processes of commodification represent an extension and expansion of the domination of capitalist means of production. No longer does the means of production simply subjugate workers, the very humanity and personal life of the worker is now commodified as well. As a result, for Debord, the immense accumulation of commodities furnished by the advent and expansion of capitalism, is transcribed in the ontological fabric as an immense accumulation of spectacles.

However, as we have explored via Foucault’s critique of Marx, the capitalist means of production *is not* the totalizing locus of commodification and self-subjugation. We now know that the commodification of the self that occurs through public relations cannot be sufficiently explained by the logic of the capitalist market. The commodification of the self is in fact streamlined by the pre-existing biopolitical conditions that discursively create and subjugate identities. Inversely, we know that these biopolitical realities are continually reproduced via the interpellation of these subjectivities via a network of apparatuses – including but not limited to public relations industry.

As such, the spectacular society is not the conscious brainchild of some specified regime or bourgeois class. Nor can it be sufficiently explained by purporting that the capitalist mode of production has been infused in and through social ontology. As Debord himself argues, all individuals and social groups participate in the spectacle and in turn, all individuals and social groups play a component part in its sustained regeneration. As such, we can conclude that aestheticization – resulting in a battle over spectacular representations – is the *perceived* function

of the political under relations of biopolitical power. Relations that discursively create subjectivities, and then render those subjectivities instrumental and symbolized on the distorted sociopolitical battlefield.

How then, can we draw conclusions about the transformative capacity of civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict, as experienced under these conditions? The primary conclusion is that the aestheticization of sociopolitical conflict cripples the transformative potential of civic responses. However, as we have mentioned, the aestheticized battle is perceived as the most important political project and in turn, the masses and institutions that struggle over representative symbolizations *believe* they are acting politically.

However, as we have explored, processes of instrumenalizing identity are the key ingredients that result in the aestheticization of sociopolitical antagonism. This means that the deployment and commodification of identity are the characteristic features of both the civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict in the present sociohistorical moment. In short, the instrumentalizing of identity becomes understood as the new way of waging sociopolitical warfare on the distorted spectacular battlefield.

The result is that the sociopolitical dissidence – and the institutional response to it – is largely reduced to spectacle. There is a constant effort to fill the gap of sociopolitical antagonism. A belief that if the right identity symbolizations are amalgamated to create some aesthetic vision of a totalized society, that the plebian masses will be liberated. In short, the aestheticization of the politics of identity sees the masses and institutions alike trying to fill the antagonistic gap via “a revolution without revolution” (Zizek, 2018, 186). Concrete measures to address the imposition of biopolitical techniques of power take a back seat to the performative

gestures deployed to reproduce those very relations of power. To reiterate the premise of aestheticization – “what do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful?”

We can conceive of the aestheticization of the politics of identity then as a reproduction of the war relation in purely spectral terms. Aestheticization seeks to eliminate the capacity of the masses to act politically and critically reflexively – namely, aestheticization prevents the masses from coming to see and grasp the actual nature and constitutive elements of the antagonistic gap in a biopolitical society. The aestheticization of the politics of identity sees the struggle continually framed in the context of representation alone. To return to Benjamin – if we are subjects of an era in which the politics of identity have become aestheticized, how can we strategically combat the forces that distort sociopolitical conflict and reduce it to that of mere representative performance?

There are two critical components of Benjamin’s thesis that are important here. First, is that Benjamin concedes that mass-produced art – or for our purposes, the mass spectral reproduction of identity – can retain a kernel of its aura. However, this fragment of aura can only be identified and recognized by countering the aestheticization of politics. As such, Benjamin does not deny the revolutionary potential that hides in the crevices of the mass reproduction of art. Particularly, he recognizes the ways in which communism responds to fascism by politicizing aesthetics (Benjamin, 1935, 20). In short, Benjamin describes the relationship between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics as a battle – an ongoing struggle.

In the context of our research therefore, in order to combat the aestheticization of the politics of identity we must politicize the aesthetics of sociopolitical identity. The aura of a spectrally reproduced identity – namely, by coming to see identity as politically instrumental –

necessarily requires that aesthetics of identity be politicized. In short, politicizing the aesthetics of identity is the first step in coming to reorient the collective conception of sociopolitical conflict. Politicizing the aesthetics of identity must foster the capacity for the civic masses to see sociopolitical struggle for what it is – a void, where an ongoing struggle against a vast network of biopolitical techniques of power takes place.

For the sake of clarity, however, we must define politicization to the best of our ability. As we have mentioned, Benjamin describes the relationship between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics is an ongoing struggle – a struggle similar to Foucault’s concept of sociopolitical conflict, in which a finish line does not exist and the battle is never over. If the aestheticization of politics eliminates the capacity for critical political thought and action via the domination of the aesthetic criterion, the politicization of aesthetics seeks to restore that capacity by making clear the political forces that culminate in aestheticization. In the context of our research then, politicizing the aesthetics of identity offers revolutionary potential in that the very aim of this process is to recognize the collective perception of identity as an instrument of subjugation. Only then can the collective conception of sociopolitical conflict be reoriented. By politicizing the aesthetics of identity, the space is created to reconceptualize of sociopolitical conflict as an ongoing struggle against biopolitical impositions, as opposed to a frenetic battle to aesthetically fill the void.

Conclusion

We have begun, with this research, to examine the ways in which the aesthetics of identity may be politicized. Namely, by delineating the biopolitical underpinnings that constitute the collective Western conception of identity as “one’s true self”, we have sought to counter notions of neutrality and polarity in relation to sociopolitical struggle. Popular perceptions of

identity in the West frame and reproduce a conceptualization of sociopolitical identity and antagonism in purely spectral terms. Coming to politicize the aesthetics of identity then, offers the potential to identify and examine the concealed dimension of the commodification of identity that occurs via continual aesthetic instrumentalization. In short, we have sought to politicize the aesthetics of identity by looking to the biopolitical processes and mechanisms that continually render identities instrumental. We can understand then, that the very subjugation of bodies is the concealed dimension of a commodified identity's exchange-value, and that this concealment can only be recognized by politicizing the aesthetics of sociopolitical identity.

To conclude our research we will briefly return our focus to the biopolitical apparatus at which we began our inquiry, namely, the public relations industry. What can we conclude about the implications of the pervasive adoption of public relations strategies on the nature of sociopolitical conflict? Primarily, we can conclude that the commodification of identity first – through aestheticization – sees the sociopolitical *use-value* of identity, predominantly understood in terms of its *exchange-value*. However, at the risk of repetition, we must reiterate that the implications of the commodification of identity are not some indication that the economic paradigm of capitalism is the hegemonic headquarters of these processes.

Use and exchange value in this sense, cannot be understood in the context of commodification alone. Namely, we have clearly demonstrated that public relations alone is not the driver of aestheticized identity instrumentalization. The *use-values* of sociopolitical identities are continually created, reproduced, and interpellated through a vast biopolitical network. Their *exchange-value*, through aestheticization, is continually determined, measured and deployed on the sociopolitical battlefield. The process of commodification then – as facilitated by public

relations strategies – represent merely one, albeit a critical one, of the necessary elements of the materialization of the spectacle in a biopolitically governed society.

Here lies the crux of our research – namely, the attempt to better understand the pervasive success of public relations and the implications of that success on sociopolitical conflict. While contemporary sociopolitical discussions tend to disqualify the public relations profession as an already-understood social malice rooted in capitalist exploitation or Fascist propaganda, this reductionist disregard allows us to miss the larger significance and functional implications of the commodification of identity. It should be clear that this is by no means an argument that Edward Bernays and his work should be in some way heralded as required reading in the political sphere. However, this paper has sought to argue that by looking in places long-dismissed as ‘understood’ or even ‘passé’, road maps can be discovered, that allow us to broaden our understanding of the very ways in which the contemporary West has arrived at the “historical moment we are caught in” (Debord, 12). Namely, one that sees sociopolitical struggle experienced as an aestheticized spectacle. A spectacle through which civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict are crippled by their reduction to mere performance.

However, and as has been made clear, we do not look to the success of public relations and the commodification of identity in hopes of identifying a capitalist adversary to overthrow. Rather, we look to public relations as one of the many biopolitical apparatuses through which the subjugation of bodies (read: relations of power) are expanded, sustained, and reproduced. By exploring the work of Edward Bernays and situating his work in the context of a biopolitical era, the justifications of his success have been more appropriately explored. Further, the political implications of public relations have been more adequately mapped and explained.

To conclude, our line of inquiry began with a curiosity about identity and sociopolitical conflict. Why, we asked, at our initial point of departure, do appeals to identity in the context of sociopolitical conflict, seem characterized by tokenistic performativity? Scholars, practitioners, and politicians rely heavily on the notion of identity as a means of forging explanations for and proposed solutions to sociopolitical conflict. The work that we have explored and the subsequent conclusions drawn have sought to better delineate the ways in which the relationship between identity and sociopolitical conflict is constituted. The findings of our theoretical exploration are clear. Identity and sociopolitical conflict in the West are undoubtedly intrinsically linked. However, the relationship between identity and sociopolitical conflict is undoubtedly one of continual instrumentalization and cumulative aestheticization.

However, it must be reiterated, one final time, that this relationship of instrumentalization and aestheticization, is not the conscious plot of some shadowy political figure(s), some institutional authoritarianism, or some unrelenting bourgeois grip on the means of production. In fact, the aesthetic relation between identity and sociopolitical conflict in the West is the result of widely-dispersed, productive and reproductive relations of biopolitical power. Relations that are concealed in and through the very process of instrumentalizing identity. This distinction is important to the study of sociopolitical conflict in two ways. First, it allows for a better understanding of civic and institutional responses to sociopolitical conflict, as well as the role of these responses in the very reproduction of the biopolitical power relationship as such.

Second, it allows for the space to create *different* approaches for responding to sociopolitical conflict that seek to subvert the processes of instrumentalization and subsequent spectacular representation which we have discussed. These approaches undoubtedly will ideally allow for a reorientation of the collective perception of identity understood as one's 'true self'.

However, and it must be noted, this popular perception of identity, and that these instrumentalizing processes that constitute it, have become deeply steeped in the ontological framework of the West. As such, finding enduring mechanisms for reorienting this perspective and subverting these processes of instrumentalization will not be a simple or straightforward project. There is hardly some theoretical framework through which the various forces of identity instrumentalization can be easily relegated to some omnipresent oppression of the past. The contributive aim of this research is much more modest and does not seek to outline some utopian or final solution.

The intention of this inquiry was – first and foremost – to offer a small contribution towards *expanding* the frame of sociopolitical discussion about the nature of identity in the Western context. If we are to continue exploring the relationship between identity and sociopolitical conflict in the West, we must broaden the theoretical toolkit we use to do so. This research has sought to create a road map that charts the relationship between processes of identity instrumentalization and sociopolitical conflict in the West. This map will hopefully contribute toward an enriched point of departure from which a more expansive understanding of this relationship can be forged and incremental strategies for unworking it can be developed.

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