

**Toward an Emancipatory Understanding of Global Being
An Ideological, Ontological Critique of Globality**

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Abstract;

This Masters thesis conducts an ideological critique of the way 'the global' is constructed conceptually, particularly by transformative politics and the anti/alter global left. In addition it attempts to foreground the importance of ontological inquiry as an essential component of effective ideological critique.

It has four chapters(plus an intro and conclusion);

The first chapter looks at the ways that globality is currently constructed conceptually, both as an object of study by academia, and as an object of intervention by the global left. The analysis and critique in this chapter will establish the need for an ontologically informed approach to globality.

The second chapter explores the precise meaning of the term 'ontology' as well as some of its common misuses by social science. It will focus on examining the ways that ontology is inherently political, and can be infiltrated by ideology.

The third chapter draws heavily from the work of Zizek to develop a theoretical model for understanding the ontological production of globality, and how ideology is implicated.

The fourth chapter attempts to take the conclusions from the theoretical model and use them to suggest alternative approaches to globality which might better the prospects for an effective transformative `global` politics. In particular this chapter draws heavily upon the Deleuzean notion of Immanence.

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Introduction

“...we must resist the populist temptation to act out our anger and thus wound ourselves. Instead of such impotent acting-out, we should control our fury and transform it into an icy determination to think – to think things through in a really radical way...” (Žižek, 2009, p17)

Since the early 1990s, much attention has been paid¹ to the rise of globally networked resistance to the present constitution of global power and its various effects on local political, social and cultural life. Paradigmatic examples often associated with this phenomenon include the Zapatista uprising in Mexico following NAFTA protests in 1994, the annual World Social Forums, and of course the famous protests at summits and meetings of international institutions in (to name but a few) Seattle (1999), Prague (2000), Genoa (2001), Quebec City (2001) and, more recently Toronto (2010).

While diverse in character, method, and grievances, the various actors who make up this ‘Movement of Movements’ (Mertes, 2004) are often characterized together as part of the same broad struggle – which is sometimes referred to as ‘anti’ or ‘alter’ globalization (Pleyers, 2010).

These increasingly frequent, often celebratory discussions, however, tend to fall short of critical engagement with the complex theoretical and ideological underpinnings of this most prominent current expression of radical, transformative politics. Such critical

¹ At least among academics (ie; Gills, 2001; Johnston & Smith, 2002; Held & McGrew, 2002), journalists (ie; Klein 2000), and members of civil society (Barlow & Clarke 2002). State agencies have also been obliged to pay increasing attention to the phenomenon as well, if only as a perceived threat to security. An excellent example of this is a recent publication by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) entitled ‘Anti-Globalization: A Spreading Phenomenon’ (2000)

engagement is crucial in ensuring that the forms of political and social practice associated with ‘the left’² are theoretically sound and as effective as they could be.

One major obstacle to this effectiveness is the inadvertent internalization of antithetical ideology. Slavoj Žižek has frequently argued that ideology is at its most powerful when it appears invisible – as non-ideology (for example; Žižek, 2009, p39). It distorts and conditions the behaviours and choices of political actors, often without their direct knowledge. A major premise of this thesis is that ideology is often internalized at the level of our fundamental philosophical interface with existence – ontology³.

There is, in particular, one concept which, I argue, has been inadequately theorized by transformative politics; a concept which, if thought and addressed properly could provide a much-needed conceptual tool for those working toward emancipatory change. This concept, (and the subject of this thesis) is the ideological nature of ‘the global’/globality itself.⁴

² For ease of discussion, this thesis will often refer collectively to transformative, emancipatory approaches to politics as belonging to ‘the left’. This follows the example of Žižek (2006, 2008, 2009), Harvey (2000) and numerous others. It could be rightly argued (and indeed has been well illustrated by the work of Anthony Giddens (1994)) that the left/right spectrum which is frequently abused in order to lazily characterize political debate is both overly dichotomous and robs analyses of the nuance and richness they merit. It would, of course, be inappropriate and misleading to group the multitude of voices comprising the social movements in question under a simplistic ideological signifier. While this is an important pitfall to be avoided, I maintain that the shorthand ‘global left’ may still be a useful rhetorical device for discussing a self-consciously diverse set of positions defined broadly by “shared anti-capitalist commitments” (Rupert, 2003, p189). In particular, this approach will allow us to address ourselves to transformative politics generally without becoming bogged down in lengthy discussions of which particular group or position counts as a representative example of ‘left-ness’. In short, even if we are skeptical of the precision of the old spectrum, the term ‘left’ is still a signifier which conjures the general coordinates of emancipatory, transformative politics.

³ Since, as I will argue, ontology is a term which is frequently misappropriated, I intend to be very precise about its usage in this thesis. This introduction will give a short idea of the type of critical ontological approach being advocated here. The notion of ontology itself will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁴ Despite bearing specific terminological meaning among certain authors (see, for instance; Stanislaw & Yergin, 1998) the term ‘globality’ will be used more broadly throughout this project to refer to the symbolic construction of a symbolic social entity called ‘the global’. As such it is more-or-less interchangeable with the phrase “the concept of the global” or simply, ‘the global’ (in single-quotations to designate its use as a conceptual term of reference). In particular, its usage in this paper should not be confused with its employment by Thomas Friedmann as a sort of material end-point for processes of globalization.

With this in mind, this thesis aims to provide an ideological critique of the concept of ‘the global’, particularly as it is conceptualized by transformative politics. It does so in order to assess (and provide one or two modest suggestions for the betterment of) the prospects for an effective, emancipatory engagement with globality.

In particular this thesis aims to address two major questions; How does ideology operate at the level of conceptualizing the global? and how might this affect the prospects for transformative politics?

To address these questions, I will propose a model for understanding how ideology infiltrates approaches to globality at a fundamental, *ontological* level. I will then suggest alternative approaches which may be less susceptible to such ideological infiltration.

Before we begin to draw out our approach to building this model let us first examine in greater detail why it is necessary to examine the ‘global left’ in a more theoretically rigorous way.

My Motivation; The Stagnant Theoretical ‘Left’.

In typically provocative fashion, Žižek recently suggested in an interview that perhaps the 2008 financial collapse and subsequent global recession was manufactured by agents of global capitalism for the sole purpose of illustrating that, more than twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, individual and collective voices on the left remain woefully incapable of articulating a credible alternative to the present global order (Democracy Now, 2009). All this despite being presented with ostensible evidence of the (self)destructive material realization of some of ‘pure’ capitalism’s inherent contradictions. Despite marshaling an accurate diagnosis of the systemic flaws of present-day capitalism, the left proved themselves no more able to look beyond it than its apologists.

The conspiracy theory is, of course, a characteristic joke. Žižek would be among the last to agree that present-day capitalism operates according to some sort of centralized, conspiratorial logic. Behind every joke, goes the cliché, is a kernel of truth, and the central point behind this punchline remains extremely salient. In his recent book *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Žižek elaborates on his assessment of this state of theoretical impotence among the contemporary left with a series of pointed questions;

In a famous confrontation at the university of Salamanca in 1936, Miguel de Unamuno quipped at the Francoists: “*Venceréis, pero no convenceréis*” (“You will win, but you will not convince”) – is this all that today’s Left can say to triumphant global capitalism? Is the Left predestined to continue to play the role of those who, on the contrary, convince but nevertheless still lose (and are especially convincing in retroactively explaining the reasons for their own failure)? (Žižek, 2009, p7)

Žižek is not alone in his disappointment, other important theorists such as Berardi (Cited in Bozzi, 2011), and Badiou (2008) have also publically lamented the inability of the left to conceptualize alternatives that are capable of articulating a credible response to Thatcher’s now-infamous claim that “there is no alternative” to global capitalism. Mark Fisher recently published an excellent work which explores the paralyzing effect of this type of ‘Capitalist Realism’ upon emancipatory politics (Fisher, 2009).

It is a sense of frustration similar to that of the authors mentioned above which motivates this attempt to examine the theoretical foundations of prominent transformative approaches to globality.

As laudable as some of the achievements of early twenty-first century social movements have been – they are frequently elusive to a thorough and carefully executed theoretical inventory⁵.

⁵ The major notable exception to this point are Hardt & Negri’s theories of Empire (2000) and Multitude (2004) – which, while far from perfect, have managed to bring a new set of theoretical tools to bear upon the contemporary struggles of the emancipatory left. Their works will be discussed in greater depth below, in relation to the central claims of this paper.

Among academics sympathetic to the aims of these movements (perhaps motivated by a reflexive partisan desire to cheer on 'their side' and defy the stifling orthodoxy of Capitalist Realism (Ibid.)) inconsistencies and theoretical paucity are often conveniently overlooked.

Perhaps most telling is the fact that the default treatment of the anti/alter 'global left' by social scientists is, at present, not a theoretical engagement at a conceptual level⁶. It is rather the summary anthology of primary sources which gather together a survey of primary sources from various social movements which, taken together, supposedly give a mosaic image of a 'global' whole of resistance practices (ie, Fisher & Ponniah, 2003; Solnit, 2004; Goodman, 2002; Starr, 2005). While this approach is certainly helpful in understanding the way that social movements currently view themselves and their adversaries, it does not go very far towards building a stronger theoretical base for these movements.

In sum, The aim of this project is to engage with the notion of 'globality' – and to ask the following central question; How can the 'the global' – as it is presently constructed conceptually – be useful as a tool for revitalizing the stagnant theoretical left and building a more effective transformative political practice based upon critical emancipatory theory.

Let us now look briefly at how exactly this thesis will go about addressing the problems just described. How, exactly, will we attempt to make a contribution to strengthening the theoretical base of the global left?

Methodology; Ideological and Ontological Critique

As this thesis does not deal with empirical 'hard data,' the following short section on my intended methodology should help to provide the reader with a sense of how this thesis will attempt to achieve its aims. Before beginning, however, it should be borne in mind

⁶ Indeed such conceptual engagement seems to have been left almost entirely to the humanities disciplines, (with a few notable exceptions, particularly in the field of geography (see, Gregory 1994))

by the reader that a primary goal of this project is to stimulate greater communication and unexpected resonances between critical theory, continental philosophy and transformative politics. For this reason, it occasionally pursues theoretical digressions rather beyond the point that a strict adherence to a given methodology would dictate. This certainly entails the not insignificant limitation of making the paper rather far-reaching, and loose with regards to method. However, the creative space which this methodological ‘looseness’ opens for fresh, transdisciplinary theoretical discussion justifies itself, particularly given my hope that this paper will help to stimulate further discussion on these issues. While there are undoubtedly areas of a certain ‘overreach’ due to necessary constraints on length– it is hoped that the presentation of these problematic in creative ways here will contribute towards the development of more precise theoretical engagements as well as more effective methodologies for posing such problems in the future.

In the broadest sense, this project's methodology is meta-theoretical critique. It seeks to challenge the ground upon which theoretical constructions of reality rest. More specifically this project takes an approach which is similar in many ways to the critique of ideology as practiced by Slavoj Žižek. In particular, by illustrating that social scientific treatments of the nature of ideology don't often operate at the level of ontology, I hope to highlight the often neglected ontological dimension of ideology throughout this project. The modest contribution that this project hopes to make to the practice of ideological critique is to assert that, in order to be effective, it must be concerned with the way the Being is understood. In this sense, it could also be said that this thesis is fundamentally concerned with the relationship(s) between philosophy and practical social theory.

First, however, let us characterize the methodology of ideological critique more generally, in both its traditional Marxian form, as well as the version defended by Žižek.

Ideological Critique

“Since the end of the Cold War... few care to conceive of alternative forms of production to capitalism, although most people are gravely preoccupied with the potentially apocalyptic exploitation of nature itself. The result of this change is, as Žižek argues, that 'it seems easier to imagine “the end of the world” than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the “real” that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe’... For Žižek, the prevalence of this paradox (the fact that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than a change to it) attests to the work of ideology.” (Myers, 2003, p63)

For Žižek, this perceived inevitability of capitalist triumph - Fisher’s ‘Capitalist Realism’ (2009) - is due to the operation of ideology. His response (and much of his philosophical project) has been to present a very particular notion of ideological critique. It is Žižek’s contemporary adaptation of ideological critique that most inspires the methodology of this project. Before we explain Žižek's notion of ideological critique more thoroughly, however, let us first look at the classical Marxian version of the concept, as well as the major (especially Foucauldian) critiques which have led to it being all but abandoned as a methodology. From here we will move to show how Žižek's formulation restores relevance to ideological critique by changing a few key aspects of the Marxian approach.

According to Myers Marx's classical formulation of the concept of ideology was the following; “They don't know they are doing it, but still they are doing it.” (Cited in Myers 2003, p63).

Under Marx’s view of ideology, reality is distorted and represented in deliberately manipulative ways which normalize and perpetuate a given set of contingent sociopolitical relations (see, Marx & Engels, 1970). It thus serves the function of mystifying certain aspects of objective economic reality, in order to naturalize contingent exploitative social relations and/or forestall the development of revolutionary consciousness. In other words, For Marx and Engels, ideology was chiefly used in order to mask the inherently unequal nature of capitalist production and exchange.

The most famous example of the operation of ideology in Marx is his notion of commodity fetishism, by which the process of market exchange obscures the fact that the exchange value of goods is a representation of the labour-time that they embody (De Angelis, 1996, p6). This mystification allows for an exploitative accumulation of wealth by the owners of the means of production⁷.

Crucially, for Marx, the basic problem at the heart of ideology is imperfect knowledge and false beliefs, constructed or manipulated such that they reinforce given power dynamics. Myers, explaining Marx, summarizes this point well;

“[For Classical Marxism] On the one hand there is reality and, on the other hand, there is our understanding of that reality which is in some way distorted. Ideology is precisely that distortion, that skewing of our understanding. Ideology, in this sense, is an epistemological problem – a problem of knowledge”. (Myers, 2003, p64)

The practice of ideological critique, which consisted of identifying the various untruths and alienations produced by capitalist society, was at one point a staple of post-Marxist critical theory (Daly, 2006, pp 28-42). It was thought that by identifying the nature of ideological mystifications, it might be possible to loosen their grip on collective psychologies, helping to pave the way towards alternative ways of conceptualizing social relations outside of the capitalist paradigm.

Since Marx, the notion of ideology, and its role in the continued prevalence of capitalist economic and social relations has been the subject of intense debate (see; Hall, 1986 for an excellent characterization of this debate). Frankfurt School authors like Adorno and Marcuse (Daly, 2006, pp31-35) retained the concept of ideology as central to their work – despite being skeptical that we would ever be able to see around it. In the latter half of the 20th century, theorists like Debord (1994) and Althusser (1984) explored new dimensions of ideological critique, bringing greater depth to the notion and applying it in novel ways.

⁷ For a more thorough explanation of the concept of commodity fetishism, see (De Angelis, 1996)

As a methodology, however, ideological critique steadily lost popularity throughout the 20th century, due to several strong sustained criticisms and challenges. As a result, popular Marxian analyses tended (and tend now) to focus on Gramscian notions of Hegemony – particularly the social forces which generate consent for powerful ideas - rather than the language of ideology, truth and untruth. An excellent example of this is Chomsky & Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent* (2002).

Foremost among the challenges to the currency once enjoyed by ideological critique was the ascendancy of (Foucauldian) discourse analysis in social science. Feldner and Vighi argue; “Fifteen years on, Foucauldian discourse analyses are at home in practically all fields of critical inquiry. Their ubiquity coincides with the belief, fostered by Foucault himself, that they provide compelling alternatives to the Marxist paradigm of ideology critique.” (2007, p141). Thus, Foucauldian approaches became the default methodology in progressive social science.

Foucault’s analytical approach focused on illustrating the conflictual histories which construct the institutions, material and conceptual, that populate and determine our interaction in daily life (see; Foucault, 2003). As such, they were not quite as susceptible to the charges of economic reductionism as many mainstream Marxist analysis tended to be⁸. Moreover, the Foucauldian/discourses approach, centered as it is upon the idea that reality consists of “historically contingent symbolic fiction[s]”(Feldner & Vighi, 2007, p142), rejects the notion of a central objective standard of truth against which we could measure any sort of ideological distortion in worldview. There is no detached point from which it is possible to judge any one discursive/symbolic construction of reality as more ideological (or less True) than any other. This abandonment of grand narratives of Truth is, for some, what characterizes the Postmodern turn in social theory (Hutcheon, 2006, pp 115-126).

⁸ Although it is worth noting, in this regard that Hardt and Negri (2000) have successfully integrated a kind of Marxist orthodoxy with many aspects of Foucauldian institutional critique, showing the two to be not incompatible. Furthermore the charge of economic reductionism has been the source of anxiety within Marxian circles for some time – post-Marxist critical theory of various types has advanced numerous distinct approaches to reconciling Marxian economic critique with an analysis of the social dimensions of capitalist relations (Wyn Jones, 2001, pp1-19).

As it turns out, this final point – unappealing though it has made ideological critique for many theorists – has not been entirely fatal to the practice. Slavoj Žižek acknowledges that various approaches to reality are so many ‘historically contingent symbolic fictions,’ but is unwilling to concede that this makes ideological critique valueless. Indeed, he argues that the critique of ideology is still an essential tool in combating the ‘non-political’ nature of contemporary social theory and politics (Myers, 2003, p76).

According to Feldner and Vighi;

Žižek identifies as the ‘fatal weakness of Foucault’s theory’ his ‘abandoning of the problematic of ideology’. This is compounded by the fact that the now pandemic repudiation of ideology critique has lent legitimacy to an intellectual attitude which ‘translates antagonism into difference’ and extols the ‘horizontal logic [of] mutual recognition among different identities’ without due attention to the antagonistic nature of existing power relations and the ‘peculiar logic of class struggle’. Against this overwhelming trend towards the depoliticization of social life in the name of identity politics and a number of theories of globalization, Žižek emphasizes the undiminished importance of ‘keep[ing] the critique of ideology alive’. (Feldner & Vighi, 2007, p142)

For our purposes, what is important is that Žižek’s model of ideological critique seeks to rehabilitate the notion and reposition it as an effective methodology of the critical left. (Myers, 2003, pp63-77). Let us now look at how Žižek has attempted to reformulate ideological critique.

Žižek constructs his philosophical system largely around his (somewhat idiosyncratic) interpretation of the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Numerous works have been written detailing the similarities and differences between Žižek and Lacan, including one by Žižek himself (2007). It is not the intent of this project to venture too deeply into this interesting but complex topic. It is, however, necessary to give a short, superficial explanation of Žižek’s reading of Lacan in order to properly understand his approach to ideological critique.

According to Lacan, via Žižek, there are three ‘orders’ of reality – three distinct elements of the structure we perceive; the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic. For our purposes here, and for brevity’s sake, it should only necessary be to discuss the Symbolic and the Real orders.

The Symbolic is the order through which we encounter reality most of the time. For Žižek, it is also the inevitable location of ideology. Essentially the Symbolic is the location of situated subjective accounts of reality, shaped by the entirely contingent, historically particularities of their construction⁹. Put in other terms, it is the particular manner in which reality is ‘carved up’ and represented (Myers, 2003, pp22-24)

An important point to note about the Symbolic order, which will be echoed later in chapter 3 of this thesis, is that no one Symbolic representation can ever fully represent reality. Rather, each contains a central, unresolved tension – at the point of its encounter with the Real. Each Symbolic representation is thus insufficient in and of itself, and must be supplemented by other, equally incomplete Symbolic representations. This point will take on greater significance later on in this thesis with respect to the ontological model proposed in chapter 3. For now let us continue by introducing the Lacanian Order of the Real.

The Real is the location of the ineffable, unapproachable coordinates of ‘objective’ reality. This order is entirely inaccessible to us, since we experience reality only through the Symbolic order. We can, however, come to know things about the Real by analyzing the way our Symbolic fictions hang together and are made to make sense.

The Real is the location of the fundamental tension between all of the various Symbolic attempts to represent reality. In fact we can push this further and say that the Real exists only as this purely formal location of overlap and tension between the various Symbolic

⁹ Interestingly, because of this one would think the Symbolic order can be confronted most critically through something like a Foucauldian genealogy, which takes into account the various subjective, contingent elements that conditioned its historical construction. It is for this reason that I am unsure of the value of posing a hostile dichotomy between Žižek’s defense of ideology and the undeniable lessons of Foucault’s approach to social theory, however this discussion is clearly beyond the scope of our inquiry.

representations. It is thus the irreducible ‘space between’ competing depictions of reality that contains their fundamental conflict; the central tension around which a particular social analogy hangs. (Ibid, pp25-29)

It is thus not some sort of noumenal, or Platonic sublimated realm, but rather the central unresolved, unsymbolized terrain that knits together various Symbolic representations of reality.

Tony Myers gives an excellent distillation of the complex interplay between the Symbolic and the Real in his book on Žižek’s philosophy;

“We have no access to the Real because our world is always mediated by the Symbolic. Reality, as we know it, therefore, is always Symbolic. However... Symbolization of the Real is, and *cannot* be, complete. The Symbolic can never saturate the Real and so, consequently, there is always some part of the Real which remains unSymbolized. What cannot be accommodated in the Symbolic produces a fundamental antagonism. It is this part of the Real that returns to haunt reality in the guise of the spectral supplement. The spectre conceals the piece of the Real which has to be forsaken if reality (in the guise of the Symbolic) is to exist. And it is here, in the spectral supplement, that Žižek locates the foundation or kernel of all ideologies. All of which is another way of saying that reality and ideology are mutually implicated in each other. One cannot exist without the other.” (Ibid, pp74-5)

Thus, for Žižek, it is the interaction between the Real and the Symbolic that allows us to identify the operation of ideology;

“The only non-ideological position available is, in fact, the Real – the Real of the antagonism. As was noted earlier, this is not a position we can actually occupy; it is rather ‘the extra-ideological point of reference that authorizes us to denounce the content of our immediate experience as “ideological” (MI: 25). In other words, the antagonism of the Real is a constant that has to be assumed given the existence of social reality (the Symbolic Order). “ (Ibid, p76)

The irreducible conflict between different incomplete attempts to disclose reality, along with a mechanism (the spectral supplement) for determining the necessary ideological exclusion of each symbolic representation is the foundation for Žižek’s critique of

ideology. This is an improvement over the Marxian concept since, this version does not require grounding in the notion of our ability to access objective Truth, or our capacity to ‘get beyond’ ideology. Because of this unique constellation between the Symbolic and Real, Žižek is able to critique ideology on the basis of continual unresolved conflict between competing accounts of reality (ideologies). One major implication of this is that, for this model, every approach to reality is Symbolic, and thus ideological. Despite the fact that we can not occupy a space of objective truth, we are still able to critique the obvious distortions and exclusions of each Symbolic account as it comes into tension with the Real. In fact, For Žižek, doing so is crucial in understanding the present function of ideology.

As we have seen, For Žižek, every Symbolic representation of reality is ideological and structured by the nature of the Real (the central unresolved problematic) that it is trying to disclose. Each situated, contingent attempt to represent reality is the embodiment of a by-nature subjective and ‘distorted’ view. Furthermore, and of crucial importance to Žižek’s theory of ideology, *we all know that this is the case*;

“... as Žižek points out, today we already know that we are receiving a distorted version of reality. We already know that when we go to college we are being groomed to keep the system going, we know that when we go to a polling station our vote will not substantially alter the political system. We know that going to church helps keep us as pliable citizens. In other words, we are all, as Žižek avers, following the German theorist Peter Sloterdijk... cynical subjects. As cynical subjects, we know full well that our understanding of reality is distorted, but we nevertheless stick to that falsehood and do not reject it. Instead of Marx's formula for ideology, then... Sloterdijk proposes a cynical variation of it – ‘they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it.’” (Ibid, p65)

As we saw above, for Marx, ideology was the result of inaccurate understandings of the objective conditions of reality. For Žižek, the concept of ideology is premised on what he argues to be a gulf between knowledge and behaviour in contemporary life. He frequently likens this separation between knowledge and action to the psychological concept of disavowal. (ie; Žižek 2008, p297; 2009, p61). For instance, although we are increasingly aware of impending ecological catastrophes, international food crises,

widening gaps between the wealthy and the poor, cyclical worsening crises of financial markets etc., when it comes to our own personal habits and choices we often disavow this knowledge.

So although we do not possess an objective, non-ideological point of reference (Myers, 2003, p77), Žižek still argues for the importance of continuing to pursue ideological critique;

“He does not claim that he can offer any access to the 'objective' truth of things but that ideology must be assumed to exist if we grant that reality is structured upon a constitutive antagonism. And if ideology exists we must be able to subject it to critique. This, then, is ultimately the aim of Žižek's theory of ideology – it is an attempt to keep the project of ideological critique alive at all in an era in which we are said to have left ideology behind. As he emphasizes time and again, the problem with contemporary politics is that it is non-political, that it accepts as natural the existing capitalist structure of society. The first step towards changing this structure is to recognize its 'naturalness' as an ideological formation ripe for critique. The first step towards establishing such a critique is to establish the viability of that critique, and that, finally, is what Žižek's model attempts to do.” (Ibid, p76)

It is only by developing a theory of ideology, he argues, that we can account for the fact that most people, despite knowing that the present constitution of global order is unfair, unsustainable, unethical, etc. continue to act in ways that, contrary to their immediate interests, perpetuate the status quo.

Much of Žižek's work is then devoted to understanding how these ubiquitous ideological Symbolic orders of reality are quilted together, and how they are made to sustain challenges from other, rival ideologies. As briefly evidenced above, one way that powerful ideologies remain firmly ensconced, according to Žižek, is by transposing the inherently conflictual encounter between incompatible Symbolic orders into a depoliticized postmodern vocabulary of 'difference' and multiplicity. A similar notion to this will be explored in the first chapter of this thesis with respect to academic and 'leftist' treatments of the phenomenon of globality'.

I hope to appropriate a model of ideological critique broadly similar to Žižek's at several other points during my thesis as well. For instance, following Žižek's Lacanian division of reality, in order to locate ideology in discussions of globality, we should look for, and examine the 'piece of the Real which has to be forsaken if reality (in the guise of the symbolic) is to exist'. I agree upon this notion and will argue that we must analyze exactly where this unsymbolizable blind-spot – the central fundamental antagonism – resides. Although it doesn't depend as heavily upon Lacan's language, Chapter 3 of this thesis attempts to do this by articulating a model for understanding the interaction between various symbolic representations of globality.

Despite these similarities in approach, and being careful to preserve the premise that the identification of ideology is crucial for critical thought to prevail, this thesis also departs from Žižek's critique of ideology in certain ways. In addition to pointing out the way that symbolic representations of reality are themselves ideological, I intend to illustrate that ideology penetrates to a level that is not often explored in social theory treating global social movements. In order to address this, I hope to bring the vocabulary of the philosophical field of ontology to bear upon critical discussions of globality and ideology.

If, as Myers argued, ideology was an epistemological problem for Marx, this thesis suggests that it should be thought of now not simply in epistemological terms, but in ontological ones.

Ontological¹⁰ Critique

At this point it is important to establish another major premise of this project: that globality – the notion of 'the global' – is the reflection of an ontological operation; a

¹⁰ In order to abbreviate a much longer discussion which takes place in chapter 2 of this thesis, I will simply say here that, in this thesis, 'ontology' is used in a very particular manner. Roughly, it should be understood as inquiry into (implicit and explicit) understandings of the meaning of being-as-such.

(perhaps only tacit) comprehension of being and temporality. As such, it contains an often unexamined basic philosophical commitment to points of reference that will be argued to correspond to entirely contingent historical/political/geographical coordinates. For our purposes, this will be called the *ontological production of globality*. It does not stretch the imagination to see how ideology could be seen to infiltrate thought at this level, and this notion will be further explored in chapters 2 and 3.

A major parallel task of this thesis is to assert that in order to be effective, ideological critique *must also be ontological*. Insofar as globality requires at least an implicit understanding of the nature of being, any thorough accounting of it as a concept must begin at the fundamental level of ontology.

The central position of this thesis is that what is urgently needed to restore vitality to the idea of an international transformative politics is an 'ontological turn' in critical approaches to globality. In order to determine the best way to bring about this critical ontological turn toward the concept of globality among theorists of the left, we will explore the literature of contemporary ontological and critical post-marxist theory.

As the discussion in chapter 2 will reveal, the study of ontology is inherently connected to ideological critique at a fundamental level. I will argue that it is at this most basic level, where our understanding of the coordinates of existence takes shape, that the seeds of ideology first take hold. In order to be effective, then, ideological critique must focus upon the basic understandings of being that inform Symbolic constructions of reality.

Forms of social-science which do not reflect upon their ontological constitution provide indispensable hard data but nevertheless reveal only part of the total picture. They thus come at an opportunity cost. This project hopes to serve as a modest reminder of this opportunity cost, identify the value of ontological inquiry for critical, transformative politics, and encourage greater discussion of recent and future examples along these lines.

Ultimately I will suggest that traditional approaches to social science may not be the most appropriate model for an ontological, ideologically informed understanding of globality. Instead, my final chapter will suggest that performative/aesthetic/creative/poetic approaches are fundamentally less likely to reproduce static or conservative understandings of Being and are thus better poised to *enact* globality in radical new ways.

Why is the ontological turn necessary? To answer this we need to say what is missed in non-ontological accounts of globality. Also we need to establish why we should go to the trouble of conducting an ontological survey of globality. How might it help us understand global social reality any better? Why should it be seen as useful to the Left in particular? What does it tell us about how ideology is articulated at various levels? Finally what would an ontologically informed approach to global social theory look like? These are the primary questions that this paper hopes to address. They form the themes that string together the various sections of the paper. However, rather than trying to provide definitive 'answers' to these questions, I here hope to explore certain avenues of address to the problems that show, more than anything, the importance and value of *pursuing these questions*. Therefore, even if the ontological model for understanding globality that is proposed in chapter three proves unconvincing, my approach will be at least partially vindicated by the basic premise that ideology and ontology are fundamentally intertwined, and that any thorough account of globality should take this into account.

Structure

The paper will be divided into four chapters; Chapter 1 will attempt to lay down the conceptual foundation and discuss how current approaches to them are often ideological. To do this it will conduct a critique of the concept of 'the global' as it is presently constructed, both as an object of knowledge, and an object of desired intervention by transformative politics. In particular the chapter will focus upon a dominant interpretation of the contemporary notion of 'the global'; that it is a concept constructed from a heterogeneous plurality of competing perspectives.

Building out of the conceptual critique of the left's approaches to globality, this section will begin to articulate in more detail the need for an ontological turn in theory.

Chapter 2 will look closely at precisely what is meant by the term ontology. In particular, this chapter will draw heavily from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. It will illustrate how ontology is a practice that is inherently *situated* in material reality, and that as a result it should also be seen as inherently political. It will also look at a common way the concept is misused and various non-ontological methods of analysis often employed by social science, as well as why these are inadequate for the tasks of transformative politics.

Chapter 3 will attempt to apply contemporary ontological critical theory in order to propose an analytical model for understanding the ideological/political nature of the present ontological production of globality. This aims to show the ideological nature of the ontological construction of the very notion of globality, and thus the proper avenues of attack for thoughtful, emancipatory politics. My theoretical model in this chapter will draw upon the Heideggerean notion of finitude defined in chapter 2, and will use the theories of Žižek, Badiou, Nancy and others to show how it can be used to understand the articulation of ideology through global 'world-formation'. In particular the section will illustrate that the consensus global-as-multiple-perspectives paradigm operates comfortably within a larger model of ontological production that favours a political status quo. It will then be argued that it will take a very particular kind of approach to subvert the dominant means of ideological world-formation. Such an approach will be suggested in my fourth and final chapter.

Chapter 4, the final part of this paper, will build upon the model of world-formation articulated in the previous section and suggest an alternative approach to theorizing globality which would be more ontologically aware and capable of challenging the dominant modes of world-formation. In this section, I will make use of the Deleuzean notion of the 'plane of immanence' to suggest that the left ought to build upon an understanding of the inherent movement and energy of ontological world-formation. This will open out to the conclusion that the best way for the left to avoid the problems of

ideological ontological production discussed in part three is to engage in performative theory which actively *creates* globality in novel ways. This practice of *enacting liberation*, rather than *describing oppression* seeks to highlight one way in which transformative, emancipatory politics might better realize ‘another world’.

The ‘conceptual’ treatment of globality is not simply an epistemological exercise, but also an ontological one: the function of this paper.

Before embarking upon the next section of this paper, I should briefly justify my choice of an unapologetically ‘theoretical’ approach to such concrete, material, political questions.

At the outset, it is important to state a central position of this paper; approaches to globality as an object-of-knowledge/concept *are themselves* simultaneously processes of constructing a manner of social and political being. These discussions are therefore not simply ‘metaphysical’ abstraction from the political but are intended to engender more effective ways to conceive (and thus materialize) political engagement. This is in the spirit of (Neufeld, 2001, p143-4) which claims that metatheoretical critical engagement is crucial in developing effective politics.

Put another way, this ‘conceptual’ treatment of globality is not simply an epistemological exercise, but also an ontological one. The *practice* of ‘world-forming’ is *theory*; the well-worn dichotomy between these two poles breaks down. For this reason, this project is as much about assessing the practical prospects for meaningful resistance to- or re-shaping of- contemporary social structures as it is about addressing a ‘meta-physical’ unease about the way we talk about globalization.

The notion that the practice of social/political relations is heavily determined by the conceptual framework upon which it rests was recently articulated by Heikki Patomäki;

“...since actions and practices are dependent on and informed by concepts, theoretical innovations are potentially efficacious in changing

realities. Practices can be constituted or guided by misleading or partially false or contradictory understandings. More adequate concepts – if given a chance – should therefore enable and also encourage changes of practices, institutions and deep-seated social relations. It is certainly true that achieving well-founded conceptual changes require [sic] no less hard work than practical political activities.” (Patomäki, 2005, P5)

To abbreviate further discussion conducted later in this paper, I will simply say here that the study and practice of ontology is always deeply situated within material reality. Far from metaphysical abstraction, then, its pursuit as an object of inquiry represents a fundamental (if often neglected) type of materialism.

Now let us begin this project in earnest by looking at how globality is often conceptualized, in order to begin to identify how ideology might operate at this level.

+++CHAPTER ONE+++

“Billions upon billions...”

Carl Sagan.

Global as Multiple; Introduction to this chapter;

Before beginning with a conceptual critique like the one proposed here, we need a solid understanding of how the concept in question is commonly used and approached. To this end, this chapter is to be a survey of how globality, the concept of the global, and the associated processes of ‘globalization’ are frequently treated as objects of knowledge.

A quick survey of the field indicates that there appear to be a multitude of competing theories of ‘the global,’ ‘globality,’ ‘globalism,’ and ‘globalization’. What could be said definitively of the various approaches to globality except that there is no definitive view that spans across the divergent perspectives? Voices from the activist left (ie; Solnit, 2004) to more mainstream popular academic approaches (ie; Stiglitz, 2002) mostly seem to be in agreement that the global is simply too heterogeneous and contested to draw a fixed definitional circle around.

It is therefore this apparent diversity of positions on the global that will be the subject of this chapter’s inquiry. This chapter intends to be a survey of the notion of the global treated as a contested concept, spanning multiple political perspectives. It will serve as a starting point from which I will eventually develop a critique of the ideological underpinning of the common means of ontological production: the system of world-formation that generates consent for this widely acknowledged and supported paradigm of competing perspectives.

We will begin by examining the pedagogical treatment of the ‘global-as-competing perspectives’ paradigm. This will later lead us to ask questions about the type of knowledge this paradigm produces, and how that knowledge is employed in reproducing and reinforcing power relations.

After the ‘multiple competing perspectives’ paradigm has been shown to be ubiquitous – a fixed disciplinary bit of ‘common sense,’ we will look at some of the effects that treating globality as multiple have had, including some debates that this has provoked. Ultimately these debates will point the way forward, toward the approach taken by this paper.

Pedagogical Presentation of the ‘Contested Concept’ (Plurality) Model of Globality

For all the ink that has been spilled on the various debates regarding the nature of the global, globality and globalization, perhaps only one broad consensus has emerged; the

concept of the global is largely up for grabs. Most seem willing to admit that no single totalized description has succeeded in hegemonizing the concept. For a field so rich in disagreement and debate, there is a surprising near-uniformity as to the nature of the backdrop upon which the various postulations of globality play out.

Before we begin the difficult task of examining whether this consensus is well-founded, and what its broader effects might be, let us look at a few representative examples of global-as-contested-concept in pedagogical literature.

It seems an unwritten (but nevertheless seldom defied) rule that every textbook or anthology seeking to provide a broad overview of anything ‘global’ (ie, Global Studies, Global Politics, Globalization, the Global Left, Global civil society, Global political economy, etc) *must* include at least a brief introductory section acknowledging the perceived condition of heterogeneity and saying something to the effect of; ‘there are nearly as many theoretical perspectives as there are theorists’. (ie, Scholte, 2000; Boli & Lechner, 2004; Jones, 2010)

Steger in his *Globalization: A very short introduction* presents us with a famous analogy from Buddhist folklore to capture what he calls “the fundamentally *indeterminate* character of globality.” (Steger, 2009, p9). Steger’s analogy is worth quoting at length here;

“The ancient Buddhist parable of the blind scholars and their encounter with the elephant helps to illustrate the academic controversy over the nature and various dimensions of globalization... Since the blind scholars did not know what the elephant looked like, they resolved to obtain a mental picture, and thus the knowledge they desired, by touching the animal. Feeling its trunk, one blind man argued that the elephant was like a lively snake. Another man, rubbing along its enormous leg, likened the animal to a rough column of massive proportions. The third person took hold of its tail and insisted that the elephant resembled a large, flexible brush. A fourth man felt its sharp tusks and declared it to be like a great spear. Each of the blind scholars held firmly to his own idea of what constituted an elephant. Since their scholarly reputation was riding on the veracity of their respective findings, the blind men eventually ended up arguing over the true nature of the elephant.” (Ibid, p11)

Steger goes on to argue that academic approaches to globality are very much like the proverbial group of blind men in their encounter with the elephant. Each seizes upon an element of the *true referent object* and interprets it according to the limits of his/her phenomenal experience.

According to Steger, even those who are skeptical, or dismiss globality entirely as an empty or unoriginal concept have a spot in this analogy; between the legs of the elephant grasping air and ignorantly declaring “there’s no such thing!” (Ibid, p12)

We might criticize the analogy in the following way; The concept ‘elephant’ has a real-world, material and/or social referent whose finite character and approximate structure a sufficiently careful and thorough investigation – even by a blind man - will eventually determine to within a fairly narrow margin of error. The concept of the global is arguably rather different in this respect. No matter how meticulous the analyst, s/he will never bump up against the finite limits of the global in the same way as s/he would an elephant.

Moreover, it is clear that the part of an elephant grabbed at random by a blind man is arbitrary in a way that a given theorist’s proposed notion of globality is not. Indeed, the character of the definition proposed is wholly dependent upon which variables a theorist chooses to treat as most relevant. It is precisely the politics of this choice that should be of greatest interest to critical theory. Unfortunately these politics are erased by this imperfect analogy, and most ‘common-sense’ approaches to globality’s alleged heterogeneity.

In sum, not only does Steger’s analogy presume a material, real-world referent for the concept of the global, but it ignores the all-important politics behind the variety of perspectives on globality. It is here that we catch our first glimpse of the ideological nature of this consensus on the constitution of globality. The politics central to the choice of symbolic frame are made to seem almost arbitrary, and certainly non-political. Here

we should recall Žižek's dictum; "On account of its all-pervasiveness, ideology appears as its own opposite, as *non-ideology*, as the core of our human identity underneath all the ideological labels." (Žižek, 2009, p39)

Problematic though Steger's analogy may be in this respect, it nevertheless contains a very important element; the notion that each of the 'blind men' is, in a way, speaking truth. Each constructs a model of reality that accords with their finitude and the situated limits of their perception. Judging their assessments to be false requires a point of detached observation that, in the case of globality, will be shown to be impossible. Let us, for now, set this point aside, and return to it in greater depth in a later chapter with reference to the notion of ontological finitude, and Slavoj Žižek's concept of the 'Parallax View'. For now it suffices to say that we do not need to agree with each of the premises of the elephant analogy to find it compelling, and deserving of further inquiry.

Moving along in this survey chapter, let us now look at another pedagogical presentation of globality, which under careful analysis reveals another key theoretical issue which will receive further treatment later in this project.

Attempting to characterize the process of globalization in their designed-for-MA-Students textbook, Schirato and Webb write;

It seems everyone has a stake in [globalization's] meaning, and is affected by its discourses and practices, though there is no straightforward or widely accepted definition of the term, either in general use or in academic writings. (Schirato & Webb, 2003, p2)

This seems to proceed according to the model laid out above. In objectivist awe of the vast quantity of different approaches to globality, Schirato and Webb carry on for a large section about the diversity of approaches before taking a tact that is quite common, and reveals a key theoretical point. The tact is revealed in the following passage;

"Despite the obvious difficulties in understanding what is meant by 'globalization', we can identify a number of positions that seek to explain and describe it. The many definitions in the literature range from the purely economic... and the rate of human movement... to the effects of power... But the many ways of thinking and writing about globalization

can be collapsed into a small number of categories, which we will outline in a very broad brushstroke approach here.”(Ibid, p7)

As exemplified here, a popular treatment of the unmanageable heterogeneity of globality, especially popular among those devoted to disciplinary academic approaches such as International Relations, is to attempt to take stock of the variety of divergent perspectives by grouping them into measurable categories. These categories correspond to, and cross-cut, an equally vast range of variables chosen to suit the argumentative needs of the author. The variables may include (but are, of course not limited to) relevant actors, ideology, degree of skepticism regarding the phenomenon of globalization, relative roles of the state, institutions, and civil society, etc.). Again we should take note of the operation of ideology here, embedded deep in the disciplinary method of carving up reality. Political choices are made to seem clinically apolitical.

Usually the operation works in the following way; ‘Globality is too vast to define, but we can group the various attempts to define it into neat categories that serve to prove my point.’ The point made, however, corresponds to the attempted resolution of a problematic that occurs as such because of the author’s particular situated *political* disposition.

The net result has been the addition of ever more dissonant voices to an already deafening rabble. With no clear mechanism for prioritizing one ontology over another, any one theorist’s choice inevitably boils down to pre-existing political dispositions often couched in objectivist terms. This lends a sort of relativistic arbitrariness to claims and counterclaims as to the nature of global being. In this environment, globality is far from a useful theoretical device – it is simply a projector which magnifies entrenched ideological dogma.

For Schirato & Webb the categories were the (somewhat anachronistic) standards; ‘Liberal’, ‘Realist’ and ‘Neo-Marxist.’ For another famous approach by Held & McGrew (2002), the categories were ‘Globalist’ and ‘Anti-Globalist’. Here we could continue to enumerate the various ways globality has been conceptually grouped and

regrouped *ad infinitum*. The point is, they are all projected onto a background which is nearly universally believed to be defined by its depoliticized heterogeneity.

Disciplinary and purely ideological approaches are thus populated with all manner of inventories, appraisals and stock-takings. It appears as a friendly competition to generate the most accurate census of the heterogeneous mass of different conceptualizations. Aside from the fact that generating an accurate and complete appraisal of the transcendent whole of globality seems a Sisyphean¹¹ endeavour, there is another significant problem with this state of affairs. There is precious little critical work that touches this supposedly neutral background of heterogeneity, or is able to address how the various perspectives are related *inter alia*, and communicate with one another. In other words, what is lacking is *an ideologically sensitive theory of the medium in which these perspectives come into existence and compete with one another*. This is what is offered by the critical ontological approach advocated here. Particularly by exploring the central tensions which animate various ontological constructions of globality, we hope to at least suggest directions for future research into developing such a ‘theory of the medium’. We shall return to this issue in greater detail below, but for the moment let us simply remember it as a key motivating impulse behind this our advocacy of the critical ontological turn.

To summarize, this chapter has so far identified two key theoretical areas of concern in the common pedagogical treatment of globality as heterogeneous;

- 1) The need for a theoretical mechanism to deal with the fact that each ‘blind-man’ who registers a cogent perspective on the question ‘what is globality’, can make claims to disclosing ‘truth’.
- 2) The need for a theory of the depoliticized medium in which each of the various perspectives exists and relates to others.

Let us now address ourselves to a couple of key debates that have been opened up by the “fundamentally indeterminate” nature of globality (Steger, 2009, p9). To begin, in the

¹¹ The Sisyphus fable, a paragon of futility, describes a king damned by the Gods to forever struggle in vain to push a heavy boulder up a steep hill. It inspired the title of one of the most famous works of existential philosophy of the 20th century, Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*. (1973)

face of this indeterminate nature and multiple simultaneous claims to truth comprising different sets of evaluation criteria, how can we still make critical claims about any particular perspective?

Anxiety over ‘Postmodern Relativism’

“In the 1980s social science was permeated by a new brand of relativism best described as the doctrine of competing perspectives.” (McGrew, 1992, p17)

This quotation from McGrew’s anthology on global politics from the mid 90s illustrates that the condition it describes has been in gestation for at least 30 years now.

Within social science broadly, including disciplinary treatments of globality, there came a gradual acceptance of this background condition of fundamental heterogeneity. With this recognition came the well-rehearsed criticism of a drift toward “judgmental relativism” (Wight, 1996, p294).

A well-cited literature was spawned debating whether the social-sciences’ embrace of heterogeneity represents the demise of the historical meta-narratives and attempts at universal normativity associated with Western Europe’s ‘Modernity’ (For instance see the interesting field of Science Studies as an example of such critique; ie, (Latour, 1999)). This has opened the door for critiques of the universality of the position of Western Modernity from within Western Academia¹². Perhaps more importantly, however, it also given greater prominence to post-colonial critiques emerging from countries that were subjected to the sweeping historical projects of European colonialism. Authors like Gayatri Spivak (1994), Homi Bhabha(2004), and Arturo Escobar (2008) all argue in various ways against the privileged centrality of the Western subject position.

Mainstream disciplinary treatments of social science in general (and, for our purposes, globality in particular) had long been predicated upon empirical falsifiability of truth-claims, and tied to epistemologies and ontologies rooted in the Western tradition (see; Wallerstein et al. 1997). It is thus perhaps unsurprising that the major disciplinary

¹² For a good summary of the theory of ‘multiple modernities’, see; Eisenstadt, 2000.

response to the idea of a horizontally organized heterogeneity of perspectives was to pose an irresolvable dilemma between epistemic certainty, and relativistic arbitrariness (see; Smith, 1992).

The dualism between objectivism and arbitrariness which created social scientific anxiety over relativism persists in some forms today, although it has lessened in intensity as many have recognized that the debate is something of a red-herring, distracting from the important lessons arising from a model which recognizes multiple competing truths.

To borrow the final words from noted empiricist philosopher John Searle's recent book; "The fact that... justification will be relative to a set of criteria that are not universally shared does not make those criteria arbitrary or invalid."¹³ (Searle, 2010, p198). Instead it causes us to apply greater perspective to the notion of truth, as well as our mechanisms for verification and dissemination of truth-claims. Thus the recognition of multiple, incompatible criteria for verification brings social science to inspect its basic presuppositions about the capacity of theory to articulate objective truth.

In this vein, the question of relativism led to some particularly interesting discussions in the field of International Relations (IR), which will foreshadow some of the theoretical discussions later in this project.

Incommensurability in IR

Against the backdrop of concerns over so-called 'postmodern relativism' and the alleged inability of any particular vision of globality to seize upon universal Truth, IR theorists began to question the relationship between the various competing theories of globality. in the early 90s, a certain strain of IR theorists became preoccupied with relating Thomas Kuhn's theory of incommensurability to their home discipline (Wight, 1996).

¹³ Searle was using this passage to discuss the idea that universal human rights are not ethically neutral, but neither are they arbitrary expressions of human will to be dismissed by an easy claim of relativism. Although the context differs, the quotation is useful against similar charges of relativism in our case.

Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigmatic incommensurability states that different scientific models of reality propose irreconcilably different world-formations (Kuhn, 1970). These world-formations were different not simply in the content of their truth-claims, but in the *ontological and epistemological edifices upon which truth and knowledge are given meaning*. The important difference here is that we are no longer talking simply about competing perspectives with respect to globality but rather *mutually untranslatable worlds* (Ibid.)

This should give us pause; how could such a multiplicity of voices describing irreducibly private, inaccessible worlds help us to make sense of the mutually shared and mutually discernible phenomenon of globality? It seems to open the field up to an angle of critical interrogation seldom pursued.

Since it peaked in the early 90s, the Kuhnian preoccupation in IR has become less fashionable. Nevertheless, the concept of incommensurability has entered the critical lexicon of those concerned with the nature of global being. When looked at in combination with the consensus 'global-as-multiple-competing-perspectives' model seen above, it becomes ever more clear that what is needed is a conceptual mechanism for dealing with the depoliticized medium in which descriptions of globality occur.

The concept of incommensurability implores us to move beyond a simple comparison of the various perspectives on what constitutes globality. Incommensurability holds that the competing positions aren't simply at odds with one another's content – but that they describe incompatible *worlds*. It is from this fundamental premise that I will depart in suggesting a critical ontological approach to examining the ideological coordinates and conditions of possibility for contemporary world-formation.

As mentioned above, much of the disciplinary work to date on globality is stock-taking and structural surveying. This 'accounting' approach is insufficient because the variety of positions regarding the nature of globality are not simply 'theoretical lenses' which can be roughly categorized according to ideological affiliation. They are indicative of

much broader, deeper ontological underpinning and, I will argue, an attendant infiltration of ideology. As such, the customary tools of social scientific inquiry will not suffice. This hints that what is needed is a creative approach capable of identifying structures of ideology within underlying modes of subject and world formation. Ideally such an approach would not be limited by the ideological, and technical constraints of the disciplinary structure from which social scientific analysis has often come. These constraints, and their conservative political repercussions have been well documented in the excellent anthology *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies* (Gaonkar & Nelson, 1996). The final chapter of this thesis will point to a method of approach to globality which, it hoped, will be able to transcend the inherent limitations of disciplinarity.

Now, to return the focus to the theoretical grounds of transformative politics, I will discuss in some detail how theoretical writers located within the ‘global left’ have approached the heterogeneous global. I will then suggest how their critiques sometimes mischaracterize the global articulation of ideology and how they could be improved by the integration of critical ontological theory.

In subsequent chapters, I will begin to develop a critical ontological account of world-formation which will attempt to highlight the role of ideology and politics in ontological construction. In so doing, I will illustrate that the apparent diversity of theoretical opinions on globality discussed in this chapter may not be all that it seems.

Globality and the Left

Since this project is primarily concerned with the prospects for transformative political action, let us now turn our attention to how the left¹⁴ in particular has approached the concept of globality.

¹⁴ Of course, reliance on an overly generalized orientation on the political compass is not without its drawbacks. The ‘left’ as I broadly group it, comprises many groups pulling in many different directions. Although some effort is made to disaggregate different schools of thought within emancipatory politics in this section, more could be done if space permitted. By no means should this section be taken to mean that ‘the left’ represents anything like a unitary body of thought.

Emancipatory politics have largely given an easy embrace to the consensus plurality of perspectives regarding globality – imagining a heterogeneous “carnival” (Langman & Ryan, 2009) of dissent emerging from the rabble of different voices. This heterogeneity is not automatically liberatory, however, and must be thought properly in order for transformative potential to be extracted from the multitude of approaches. This section will look at a few ways that the global left has seized with great enthusiasm upon the notion of ‘globality-as-multiple’. It will then provide a brief critique of the notion that a global plurality of world-formations should be seen as a salutary ‘end in itself’. Finally this section will further strengthen our call for greater ontological depth in critical approaches.

Before embarking, however, we should note that not all voices among the left have eagerly embraced the notion of globality. Some see the emerging importance of the concept as coterminous with the internationalization of vocabularies and logics associated with capitalism. David Harvey, for instance has argued that the concept of globality (more specifically globalization) has been detrimental to transformative politics;

“By the mid-1980s “globalization” helped create a heady atmosphere of entrepreneurial optimism around the theme of the liberation of markets (and the artifacts of culture) from state control. It became a central concept, in short, associated with the brave new world of globalizing neoliberalism. The term helped make it seem as if we were entering upon a new era (with a touch of teleological inevitability thrown in) and thereby became part of that package of concepts that distinguished between then and now in terms of political possibilities. The more the left accepted this discourse as a description of the state of the world (even if it was a state to be criticized and rebelled against), the more it circumscribed its own political possibilities. That so many of us took the concept on board so uncritically in the 1980s and 1990s, allowing it to displace the far more politically charged concepts of imperialism and neocolonialism, should give us pause. The passage from Marxian understandings to those based on notions of globalization was disempowering for the left.” (Harvey, 2000, P 33)

Harvey may be correct to a certain degree in temporally correlating the rise to prominence of the term ‘globalization’ with an intensification, not only of transnational flows of capital, but also the perceived inevitability of such outcomes (as described by

Fisher's (2009) concept of 'Capitalist Realism'). Nevertheless, Harvey's approach feels somewhat reactionary. Surely the appropriate corrective to the emergence of a new and ideologically suspect conceptual apparatus for dealing with social reality is not to turn our backs and retreat into the familiar tropes of revolutionaries past (ie, 'imperialism'). It ought to be a question of *how*, not *if* the left should appropriate the concept of globality.

Put another way, it is not simply because the left adopted the notion of globality that it was 'disempowered' – but perhaps rather because this was done without critical scrutiny of the term's implicit ontology and ideological formation. It is essential that the left remain fluent in the language of its time, without surrendering the capacity to employ this vocabulary in subversive ways. In this spirit, let us now look at ways that the left has appropriated the pluralistic conception of globality.

The left & globality-as-multiple; Beyond the Carnival

The various social movements which are now often grouped together under the titles "anti-" or "alter-" globalization are frequently characterized by reference to their celebration of heterogeneity (Whitaker, 2006; Hardt & Negri 2000, 2004; Solnit, 2004 ; Mertes, 2004; CSIS, 2000; etc.). It has become an item of 'common knowledge' that the new 'global' left, is defined by its embrace of a multiplicity of worlds, the promotion/celebration of different epistemologies/rationalities, non-linearity, horizontality and the quilting together of various particularist critiques of structural oppressions (Chesters & Welsh, 2004).

Nowhere is this better typified than in the organizational logic of the World Social Forum (WSF). Initially organized as a counter-summit to the yearly World Economic Forum in Davos, WSF has since achieved great recognition as a 'movement of movements'

(Mertes, 2004) under the slogan ‘Another World is Possible.’ The WSF seeks to remain an open “forum” (Whitaker, 2009) for a variety of marginalized groups that seek to challenge some (or all) aspects of the present world-system. Many participant groups characterize their enemy as globalized, neoliberal capitalism, however rather than producing a single, defining manifesto or mission statement, WSF founders have fought to maintain the forum only as a place of encounter for different voices (Ibid).

While in the past other such groups have become weakened by attempts to essentialize, unify or simply ignore difference¹⁵ the WSF hopes to harness its constitutive alterity as a creative force for change. In a recent speech at Ottawa University, Brazilian writer and WSF founder Francisco 'Chico' Whitaker spoke passionately about the need for the WSF to remain an open 'space' for encounter between particular movements and not become attached to any one movement for change. (Whitaker, 2009) He was convinced that only by refusing to unify and direct the diverse interests that encountered one another at WSF meetings, could the Forums continue to be a meaningful force for alternative politics. By organizing in this way it is argued that unexpected ‘resonances’ (Khasnabish, 2008) and linkages can continue to occur, while differences of opinion or strategy will serve to challenge ideological dogma and strengthen justification for positions.

Resistance/solidarity movements such as Via Campesina, and the EZLN as well as countless other local initiatives and web forums have organized themselves according to similar horizontal structures, aimed at maximizing the capacity of radically different worldviews to engage in dialogue aimed at systemic transformation.

Mark Rupert characterized the logic animating many of these movements as broadly ‘Neo-Gramscian’; seeking to construct a “counter-hegemonic bloc” out of shared rejection of capitalist values;

“Whatever else they may be or become (that is, “history in all its infinite variety and multiplicity”), transformative politics from within a capitalist context must necessarily entail shared anti-capitalist

¹⁵ See, for instance, the eventual ‘spectacular’ end to the French Situationist movement, which is well documented in McDonough, 2002.

commitments in order to open up future possible worlds which are obscured by the social identities of abstract individualism and disabling ideologies of fetishism and reification produced by capitalism.” (Rupert, 2003, p189).

Thus the Neo-Gramscian ideal is to build broad and wide-reaching coalitions of a diversity of voices which are homogenous only in a shared rejection of ‘capitalist values’.

Branwen Gruffydd Jones has provided convincing criticism that the ‘Neo-Gramscian’ logic of diffused solidarity amongst a plurality of different perspectives based on ‘shared anti-capitalist commitments’ may not prove, in itself, sufficient as a theoretical basis for emancipatory action. “There are flaws,” She claims,

“in a pluralist approach guided by political sentiment rather than objective social analysis... *The requirements for, and constraints on, critical social inquiry arise not from our own values and motivations, but from the properties of what we are trying to understand and, ultimately, to change.*” (Gruffydd Jones, 2008, p211. Emphasis mine)

The problem, she argues, is not ‘capitalist values’ and whether they are collectively accepted or rejected, so much as the material conditions of oppression that an over-attention to organizational structures, however pluralistic, does little to address.

According to Gruffydd Jones;

“Rather than embracing a diversity of groups, interests, positions, and ideas, on the basis that all seek some sort of alternative to or in the current capitalist order, it is necessary to consider questions of social base, political consciousness, strategy and organization. This is a political imperative that arises not from dogmatic adherence to political doctrine, but from the objective properties of capitalist social relations. This can be clarified by outlining the deeper social ontology defended by critical realism.” (Ibid, p212)

Then later; “It is not shared anti-capitalist commitments, but the transformation of property relations that would enable alternative social orders.”(Ibid, p 214)

Thus for Gruffydd-Jones’ position, multiplicity should not be seen as an end in itself for the left, but rather secondary to a tactical problematic grounded in highlighting and challenging the objective contradictions of capitalist order.

While such commentary is useful in questioning the not-always-terribly-critical exuberance of the carnival crowd, it is not clear that her advocacy of critical realism points the way out either. Gruffydd Jones' phrase "the objective properties of capitalist social relations", encapsulates a potential weakness of her 'Critical Realist'¹⁶ approach.

It would be a colossal arrogance to presume that the Western academic establishment, poised as it sees itself upon the knife edge of history, could cleanse its operation of 'political sentiment', and generate objective social analysis from a detached Archimedean point. A mere glance at the field of post-colonial studies over the past century would suffice to bring this approach back to earth by illustrating its non-acknowledgement of the irreducible particularity of non-western histories, subjectivities and social relations which are not easily translated into Western master-narratives¹⁷. Such difference is left unresolved by the objectivism presumed by Gruffydd Jones' Critical Realism.

It is clear that 'capitalist social relations' is a term that comprises much greater complexity than is glossed over in such a simple formulation. A quick glance at any anthology of post-Marxist critical theory since the earlier 20th Century would serve to illustrate that Capitalism can no longer be approached clinically as a set of simple economic rules governing production (See, for instance, Hardt & Negri, 2000; Wyn Jones, 2001). Much work by Critical Theorists has been done trying to understand the mutually reinforcing, and subtly interrelated economic, social, political and psychological dimensions of contemporary capitalist society (Ibid). In addition, authors like Foucault (1972) and more recently Hardt and Negri (2000) have illustrated the ways that values and desires are generated non-coercively through interaction with social structures and institutions.

¹⁶ Although I mention and very briefly critique Critical Realist approaches to social theory advocated by such authors as Gruffydd Jones, Roy Bhaskar, and Heiki Patomaki (See; (Latsis, Lawson & Martins, 2007) for an excellent overview), I do not have the space here to engage as thoroughly as I would like with the paradigm. While I believe Critical Realism to be a valuable engagement with important questions relating to the nature of being, as I briefly suggest in Chapter 2, my sense is that it is still too ontic, or enumerative, in its approach to social reality to represent a genuine ontological turn in critical social theory. This is certainly an avenue that requires further research on my behalf, and may provide much future insight into the questions approached in this thesis.

¹⁷ This notion is very well captured by John Rutherford's excellent interview with Homi Bhabha on the notion of translation and Bhabha's concept of 'The Third Space' . (Rutherford, 1990).

If we are to embrace something like a realist approach with respect to resistance (and I think we should) it must be a realism that does not presume a detached Archimedean point of knowledge, and does not reduce all social relations to the economy.

With respect to Gruffydd-Jones' phrase quoted above, this paper is only in half-agreement; The "requirements for, and constraints on, critical social inquiry arise" BOTH from "our own values and motivations" *as well as* "from the properties of what we are trying to understand and, ultimately, to change". Most importantly, critical inquiry on the left should be directed towards understanding the way that these two elements are two mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin.

In sum, bearing in mind Gruffydd Jones' warning that multiplicity and shared values do not, themselves, constitute a sufficient theoretical edifice, we need an approach which is able to better appreciate the complex articulations of contemporary power in order to begin to imagine alternatives.

In order to further assert the value of such undertakings, let us now briefly return our attention to the famous WSF slogan 'Another World is Possible'. Examining the logic behind it should convincingly express the need for a strong commitment to critical ontological theory on the left. Specifically, if we create 'another world' as the WSF slogan encourages, we must first soberly reflect upon what we must do to ensure that it is ideologically different from the 'old world' it suggests.

Another World is Possible, but (in what way) is it desirable?

The idea of creating alternative experiences of the world can indeed be a powerful tool for transformative politics. It is not, however, necessarily incompatible with the operation of basic capitalist ideology either. It would therefore be a mistake to exclude it from careful critical scrutiny.

Consider for a moment the following passage from Zygmunt Bauman;

Andrzej Stasiuk, an outstanding Polish novelist and particularly perceptive analyst of the contemporary human condition, suggests that the ‘possibility of becoming someone else’ is the present-day substitute for the now largely discarded and uncared-for salvation or redemption. Applying various techniques, we may change our bodies and re-shape them according to different patters... When browsing through glossy magazines, one gets the impression that *they tell mostly one story* – about the ways in which one can re-make one’s personality, starting from diets, surroundings, homes, and up to rebuilding of psychical structure, often code-named a proposition to ‘be yourself’. (Bauman, 2008, p 321)

All manner of possible re-shapings and inventions of self within the world appear here as entirely compatible with the smooth functioning, and self-reproduction of the present world-system. Indeed, the therapeutic aspect of being able to choose one’s own configuration and thus authentically ‘be yourself’, seems to head off emancipatory politics at the pass, anticipating and preemptively diffusing the desire for resistance before it becomes acute. The ‘possibility of becoming someone else’ described by Stasiuk, which has come to replace the notion of redemptive change, is not a genuine *becoming-different*, so much as a reorganization of elements within an existing ontology that ‘tells mostly one story’.

Can we not recognize in Stasiuk’s concept something which resonates with the WSF’s slogan, uncritically applied? From its limitless creativity in approaches, it seems that the left’s *ability* to simply imagine ‘another world’ is uncontroversial. Whether ‘browsing through glossy magazines’ as in Stasiuk’s example, or looking over a catalogue of the various participants at Porto Alegre, do we not see a specter of the same therapeutic invitation to just ‘be yourself’? The configuration of resistance strategy (and thus the desired re-making of the world) is, of course, not sparked by such vain conceits (diets, homes, etc.) as is Bauman’s re-making of the capitalist self. It is unsettling to consider that it may be just as integral a part of the maintenance of the “one story,” the stable whole it means to challenge.

To participate in the act of ontological production and world-formation¹⁸ that is responsible for the plurality of perspectives on ‘What is the Global’ seems both easy, and *permitted*. Another world (and another and another) is not, however, an emancipatory proposition if the coordinates of world-formation do not challenge the stability of the system as a whole. Here the left must be very vigilant that what underlies the embrace of plurality and multiple worlds is not in fact an embrace of the present coordinates of ontological production which reinforce present constellations of power and ideology.

The notion of choice, if such choice is inconsequential, is dangerous indeed for the left. As Žižek, Citing Alain Badiou has put it;

I am therefore tempted to cite Badiou’s provocative thesis: “It is better to do nothing than to contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible that which Empire already recognizes as existent.” Better to do nothing than to engage in localized acts whose ultimate function is to make the system run more smoothly (acts like providing space for the multitude of new subjectivities, and so on). *The threat today is not passivity but pseudo-activity...* (Žižek, 2006, p334)

Instead of a destabilization of present order, false-choice and pseudo-activity achieves the opposite by occupying the energy of the left with unproductive preoccupations.

Given this, the central question should be; under present conditions of world-formation, is the creation of another such world really desirable for those aiming for radical emancipatory alternatives? Is it even possible, under the present model of ontological production/world-formation that we should be able to create a world not founded upon fundamental ideological premises that reinforce a political status quo. If not, how might we alter the coordinates of world-formation in such a way as to challenge dominant ideologies?

A truly critical approach which asks these questions is absolutely necessary. This is why it is essential that transformative politics have a clear notion of ontology – so that it can understand the operation of ideology at its most fundamental levels. Engaged, as it well should be in the question of the possibility of forming another world, the global left ought

¹⁸ See Chapter 3 below.

to devote careful attention to the fundamental processes whereby we disclose and comprehend the concept of world.

In addition to this, critique must be theoretically informed if it wants to properly understand its ideological adversary. Without a strong a strong understanding of the articulation of its counter-ideology, the left cannot help but reproduce straw-men. This is evident in the easy, but somehow hollow sloganeering characterization of ‘the enemy’ common in the manifestos (ie; Starr, 2005) and protest banners associated with the anti/alter globalization movement.

Cathartic though it may be, it is surely unproductive to simply villify ‘Capitalism!’ ‘Globalization!’ or ‘Neoliberalism!’ without a well-reasoned sense of how each of these terms corresponds to the material realities and ideologies which are the true source of antagonism.

Hardt & Negri’s Empire and Multitude

Theoretically speaking, perhaps the best (or at least best-known) recent engagement with the pluralistic-heterogeneous conception of globality is by Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004).

These works characterize the new organization of political control under a decentralized, diffuse, self-disciplining, networked whole that they call ‘Empire’. They also point to “a new political subjectivity” known as the ‘Multitude’.

Hardt and Negri introduce the concept of ‘Empire’ to explain the way that power is exercised in the contemporary world-system. According to them, Empire, distinct from imperialism, refers to the decentralized, networked exercise of sovereignty in ways that transcend territorialized social institutions (ie State, factory, family etc.). (2000, p.xiv) Under imperialism and other state-centric expressions of sovereignty, power was expressed primarily through certain distinct external institutions. As argued by Foucault (2003), these institutions ossify given hierarchical power relationships and effectively

naturalize what are, in reality, the contested outcomes of conflicts. Different institutions were/are perceived to exercise various types of power in different ways, performing diverse societal functions. The factory, for instance, institutionalized certain types of economic power relations, as did the labour union. Political, social, and cultural power each had various apparently separate institutionalized means of reproducing hegemonic power relations in their manner of organization and operation.

While for Hardt and Negri, institutions still figure prominently in contemporary power relations, under Empire power is no longer *only* (nor perhaps even mostly) exercised from identifiable external loci. Instead, according to the authors, individuals under Empire have internalized, and continue to reproduce, hegemonic economic, social, and political power structures *within themselves*. That these relations are then reproduced in institutionalized social hierarchies might be seen as an inevitable byproduct or perhaps a secondary symptom of the conditions of Empire. As the authors put it, “The object of [Empire's] rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower.” (2000, p.xv) The notion of 'biopower' is here taken to its extreme, as hegemonic forms of social, economic and cultural production come to be located at least as much within the direct subjects of power relations as in external institutions.

A typical example of the exercise of power under Empire may help to clarify the concept: Hardt and Negri frequently refer to the new importance of “affective” and/or “immaterial” labour (for example, Ibid, p293). This is work whose product is a particular subjective state. Familiar instances of this are most commonly found in hospitality, care-giving or service industries. In this type of 'production' of affective states, the traditionally neat lines between spheres such as work, leisure, production and consumption are blurred. Along with these obscured boundaries comes the inseparability of one domain of power-exercise from any other. The affective labourer's duties are as much social as they are economic. Insofar as they reproduce the conditions of affective labour and a particular articulation of biopower, *they are also political*.

Here we can immediately see the decentralization of power and its colonization of the individual mind. Empire thus poses itself as a means of power transcending social institutions, to affect individuals directly and without mediation. What this means is that power is no longer broadcast solely from key external locations, but functions rather like a network permeating all aspects of human interaction. Since all facets of life are inextricably interwoven in the networked fabric of Empire, and the structures reproducing the exercise of power are continually encountered by individuals, it seems as though daily life may be imbued with tremendous latent political potential. Understanding why this potential does not often actualize is thus a key task of emancipatory theory in general, and ideological critique in particular.

According to Hardt and Negri, Contesting power relations under Empire is initially next to impossible because of hyper-fragmentation and perceived political alienation. Individuals may find themselves in struggles against specific manifestations of power in particular situations, however the authors point to the difficulties in translating these struggles into a common language of political motivation;

“Consider the most radical and powerful struggles of the final years of the twentieth century... Each of these struggles was specific and based on immediate regional concerns in such a way that they could in no respect be linked together as a globally expanding chain of revolt.... This is certainly one of the central and most urgent political paradoxes of our time: in our much celebrated age of communication, *struggles have become all but incommunicable.*” (2000, p54)

This has resulted in a vastly fragmented web of diversity and particularity, with individual actors united perhaps only by common immersion in Empire's network fabric of multifaceted power relations.

Initially, this would seem to be cause to despair of the potential for mobilization of far-reaching, or long-lasting alternatives, however the authors argue that there is some reason to be optimistic. It is exactly the irreducible diversity of the social field that, they believe, gives rise to the Multitude as a political subjectivity - one that has greater emancipatory potential than any realized to date. Unlike previous political subjectivities

such as class or ethnicity, the Multitude is a product of a globalization of cross-cutting, overlapping and even contradictory identities which render essentializing discourse inefficient at best. As Hardt and Negri, again, express; “A multitude is an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference.” (2004, p105).

The authors claim that Multitude may be able to use the means provided to it by the networked power structures of Empire to construct networks of commonality out of particular struggles (micro or macro) – and to create open, rhizomatic spaces in which new forms of resistance may take shape. Even if the content of particular struggles can not necessarily be shared, the enhanced interconnectedness with diverse resistances may be enough to begin to bring political consciousness into individuals' own daily encounters with power. An enlightening example can be found in Alex Khasnabish's characterization of the two faces of the international appeal of the Zapatista movement (Khasnabish, 2008). On one hand, the movement was (and still is) embedded in the particularities of the Chiapas rebellion against the Mexican Government's specific policies. On the other hand, the international phenomenon of 'Zapatismo' has relied on diverse actors finding points of resonance with aspects of the Zapatistas' struggles, or within Subcommandante Marcos' eloquent communiqués and perceiving new potential struggles at home (Vodovnik, 2004).

According to Hardt and Negri, the global Multitude is thus poised to affect the potential reclamation of biopolitics by subjects of dominant expressions of biopower. The sole commonality of the totality of these subjects is that they exist in the same networked expression of power. If this commonality is perceived directly, it is conceivable for Hardt and Negri that individuals could be empowered to translate any particular micro-level struggle into a political struggle against the system of power relations expressed across the entire Multitude.

At this point, a valid question might be raised; How is such a celebration of the Multitude different than the easy embrace of plurality critiqued above? For this thesis, *Empire's* analysis is noteworthy because, for Hardt and Negri, the pluralism of the subjectivity of the Multitude does not arise spontaneously as an end in itself.

Multitude, for Hardt and Negri, is constituted by the operation of Empire – it is not the result of organizational choices designed to promote a plurality of voices. It is the nature of Empire's being that causes Multitude to become an expressive, potentially politically transformative subject. Hardt and Negri's work thus attempts an ontological examination of the operation of present-day power, *not* a normative prescription for how the left *should* organize in order to maximize its effectiveness.

The extent to which it succeeds in this regard, however, is the source of some of the works' strongest critiques (see, for instance; Žižek, 1996, pp263-4). It might, for instance, be argued that although we should expect new subjectivities to emerge out of the interconnected nature of contemporary power, the emancipatory politics which the authors ascribe to the Multitude might represent a certain degree of 'wishful thinking'. If anything, Hardt and Negri's approach in *Empire* seems to illustrate that plurality and a decentralized diversity of voices is not automatically liberatory. Power is at least as likely to be distributed in favour of the continual reproduction of Empire as it is to favor the emergence of a politicized Multitude, especially given the fact that the ideological strategies that maintain popular support for the status quo are not strongly addressed by the authors. It remains a somewhat mystified process by which the multitude overcomes the paralyzing operations of ideology at fundamental levels in order to gather a critical mass and effect systemic change (Ibid, p264).

Hardt and Negri's approach, though flawed¹⁹ is nevertheless remarkable both as a theoretical engagement with the globality-as-multiple paradigm and as an ontological approach to emancipatory critical theory. What *Empire* and *Multitude* clearly show is

¹⁹ See Dean & Passavant, 2004 for an excellent collection of reverent, but critical responses to Hardt & Negri's important works.

that an ontological engagement with the nature of global power and ideology is necessary in order to properly assess the articulation of the present world-system, and the prospects for material change.

Call For Ontological turn among the Global Left

What has often been neglected and what this paper seeks to bring to light is that the ideological function of conceptualizing 'globalization,' comes not merely at the level of the *content* of definitions of globality, but in the underlying ontological frameworks which support the *type* of conceptualization proposed. That is to say; ontology, our fundamental understanding of the structures of existence and therefore discussion of social phenomena (such as globalization) bearing generally upon 'the human condition', is both historically contingent and deeply political. Because of this, ideology is often embedded in the most purportedly 'objective' analytical approaches to globalization before 'politics' can even be discussed - simply by means of chosen methodology, relevant units and timeframes of analysis, conceptions of spatiality, and epistemological bases.

Even critical approaches which seek an alternate or anti-capitalist unfolding of globalization often share significant ontological presuppositions with the positions they seek to supplant. In so doing they handicap themselves at the very outset by internalizing a basic theoretical orientation contradictory to their project. Such approaches non-critically embed an ideology antithetical to their espoused positions at arguably the most fundamental philosophical level – the first available opportunity to inject politics into thought²⁰.

Beyond the uneasiness that such inconsistency causes philosophers and social theorists, it should also be of serious concern for proponents of transformative social politics for the paralyzing effects it may have on our capacity to imagine and embark upon alternative paths.

²⁰ See Chapter 2 Below.

Given that many 'theoretical' conceptualizations of-, and 'practical' approaches to-globalization equip themselves with non-critical (or arguably conservative) ontological lenses, it is hardly surprising that even those defending transformative, emancipatory politics have a very difficult time articulating an imaginable 'outside' to the contemporary world order.

It is thus essential for the left to develop, alongside its various critiques of material oppression, a critical understanding of how ontological production may be ideological.

Currently, however, the left's relationship with ontological theory could perhaps be well described as *uneasy*. An initial obstacle is a prejudice which persists in certain critical approaches to social reality. This is the notion that the ivory-tower metaphysical speculation of philosophers is a world apart from the hard work of understanding messy material reality. Perhaps this ought to be considered as a factor contributing to the present theoretical weaknesses of emancipatory politics, as discussed in the introductory chapter.

There has been a certain notion among some theorists of the left that "Marxism and ontology are ideologically opposed forms of analysis and activity."(Murphy, 2003, p163). The most famous contemporary ontologist, Martin Heidegger was certainly no hero of the left, given his now infamous 'experiment' in fascist politics (See; Zuckert, 1990).

There is a lingering sort of dogma that holds that "Ontology, the theory of being, its logic and categories, is a form of thought that is not generally compatible with Marxism, at least not in an affirmative mode." (Opening sentence of Murphy, 2003, p163). Heidegger's own disastrous politics aside, there is little in the actual content of ontological theory to suggest that it could not be, at very least, a useful corollary to critical, emancipatory theory. Herbert Marcuse, an important figure of the left often associated with both the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and the May 1968 uprising

in Paris, was convinced that Heidegger's theory could be of substantial use for transformative politics. (Abromeit & Wolin, 2005).

Perhaps the tension comes from Marx himself, whose famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach reads; "The philosophers have merely *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is, to *change* it." (Marx, 1994, p101). As Norman Swazo points out, however, Heidegger did not buy this dualism;

One [who adheres dogmatically to Marx's thesis] overlooks the fact that a world change presupposes a change of *world idea* and that a world idea is only to be obtained by a sufficient *interpretation* of the world. That means Marx rests on a specific interpretation of the world to claim his "change" and thereby he shows that this statement is not established. He gives the impression that he has decidedly spoken against philosophy, while, in the second part of the statement, the unspoken demand for a philosophy is tacitly assumed.

(from an interview with Heidegger by Richard Wisser published in 1977, and cited at length in (Swazo, 2002, p 93))

As argued above, it must be understood that capitalism's control extends far beyond the sphere of the economy. It is clear, with the benefit of over a century of historical knowledge since Marx, that the purely economic logic of capital developed alongside individual psychologies and social/political realities in ways that distorted and repositioned each making them now virtually inseparable. It would thus be a grave error to think that we could accurately characterize the effects of capitalism without a careful examination of the ways that its systems of meaning are produced and reproduced right down to the most fundamental strata of perception and consciousness.

Given this fact, theorists like Hardt and Negri (2000) have begun to explore the usefulness of ontology for emancipatory theory;

"*Capitalism has become the horizon of existence*, the dominant reality that encircles and subsumes all other powers. It is not a mere discursive hegemony but a material one, based in practices of exploitation, repression and incarceration. In *Empire* Negri and Michael Hardt note that they ``have generally dealt with Empire (the contemporary form of global capitalist subsumption) in terms of a critique of what is and what exists, and thus in ontological terms``.(Hardt and Negri 2000 p353)" (Murphy, 2003, p167. First emphasis mine.)

While Murphy (Ibid.) notes that there has been some more recent attention to the study of ontology, particularly given the recent popularity of *Empire* (2001), the examples he gives (Hardt and Negri and Georg Lukacs) are more notable as exceptions rather than the general rule. Particularly among the ‘global left’ very little attention has been given to questions of the meaning of Being, at any scale.

Given the criticisms above, and in the hopes of addressing the ‘theoretical weakness of the left’ mentioned in the introduction, I here reassert my call for an ontological turn in critical approaches to globality. To be effective, transformative political programs must develop tools that can start to identify and disentangle the ideological strands which have become quietly woven into the fabric of our understanding of Being.

In the following, second chapter of this paper, we will continue to examine the operation of ideology with respect to globality. In particular, the following chapter will explore ontological inquiry and the role it can play in ideological critique. It does so first by looking carefully at what, precisely, is the scope of ontological inquiry in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. This will provide further evidence of ontology’s role as a crucial (perhaps foundational) location of politics.

I will then (in chapter 3) draw upon the theories of Žižek (among several others) to argue a model for interpreting the present ‘means of ontological production’ as inherently ideological and conservative. Finally, in chapter 4 I will suggest an alternative, ontologically aware approach which may provide better prospects for transformative politics both in theory and in practice.

+++CHAPTER TWO+++

Never have I not existed,
nor you, nor these kings;
and never in the future
shall we cease to exist

...

Nothing of nonbeing comes to be,
nor does being cease to exist;
the boundary between these two
is seen by men who see reality

‘The Second Teaching: Philosophy and Spiritual Discipline.’ *The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War*. (Translation; Miller, 2004, pp33-4)

What is ontology?²¹

This project takes as its starting point the vocabulary of the contemporary philosophical project of ontology. As it is a term central to this thesis, and one that is frequently (mis)used in a specialized, limited way, let us now discuss what is here meant by ‘ontology’.

In the simplest of terms, ontology is inquiry regarding the meaning and nature of being-as-such. In particular, since it is the most immediate example of being-as-such and the only one to which we have unmediated, clear and distinct access, ontology is inquiry regarding our own, human form of being, and our means of understanding it. As will be further discussed below, it is *not* exhausted by inquiry into what presently exists, although this is the nature of its frequent misuse, particularly among social scientists.

²¹The meaning of Being-as-such *is* not in the way that other things *are*, therefore we can not describe or *define* it in the same way. The mammoth task of unpacking the question of ‘what is ontology’ was arguably Heidegger’s entire project and is still a subject of debate (See; Le Poidevin, 2008). Obviously, this is not what I set out to do, so let us here simply illustrate the contours of this field of study and suggest ways that it might be useful in approaching global political reality.

For a clearer understanding of the concept, let us look to the central and founding work of contemporary ontology; Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (2007²²).

Heidegger's ontological project

Heidegger's central project in *Being and Time* was to thoroughly and carefully describe the meaning and nature of the particular kind of Being unique to Humans, which he called *Dasein*. (Ibid, p27). For Heidegger, the compelling particularity of *Dasein*, is the contingent "ontical²³" fact that we (humans) are the only beings for whom Being is an issue;

"Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being – a relationship which itself is one of Being. And this means further that there is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being*. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is ontological*." (Ibid, p 32, emphasis in original)

Humans happen to possess both the means and the natural inclination to reflect upon themselves as existing-things, and further upon the character of existence generally. By nature, we happen to have the tools of introspection and conceptualization which allow us to approach existence as a matter of deliberate reflection. More precisely, our very existence is characterized by the constant performance of ontology; of *Dasein's* 'understanding itself in its Being'. In other words, our manner of Being *is ontological* by nature.

Ontology, as described by Heidegger, is the attempt to disclose the meaning of Being at the most fundamental level possible; to generate and understand the basic vocabulary of concepts which make possible the famous Cartesian idiom *cogito ergo sum*. Heidegger's

²² First English edition 1962.

²³ The distinction, in Heidegger's work, between between the ontic and the ontological is crucial for the purposes of this project and will be explored in greater depth below. Roughly, for now, the 'ontic' refers to matters of factual real-world existence rather than questions pertaining to Being *as-such*.

work built upon Husserl's challenge to the conventional wisdom that Descartes started at the very bedrock foundation of philosophy (see; Ibid, p44; Husserl, 1967). If my being consists primarily in thinking the world (ie, if *I am* insofar as *I think*), Heidegger's ontological inquiry demands what are the frontiers of my capacity for thinking and being. It seeks to conceptualize, in this way, the conditions of possibility for thought - and by extension things like 'truth' or 'meaning' (although importantly, not necessarily the *content* of each of these terms.) An ontology plots coordinates of primary spatial and temporal reference and outlines relevant epistemologies and methodologies necessary to acquire 'True Knowledge' (Heidegger, 2007, pp85-90). Following Badiou (1990), It should thus be seen as the necessary precondition for the various 'truths' of philosophy, science, love and art.

It also plots, by its exclusions, the coordinates of non-existence. A recent work by De Sousa Santos (2006), argues that the coordinates of these exclusions are often political and/or ideological in character. This notion will be discussed in greater depth below.

Despite its fundamentally ontological nature, Dasein does not always understand itself ontologically. Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, made careful note of how easily our appreciation for the nature of Being as-such, gets disguised by its *facticity*, the contingent material characteristics/coordinates of our present being (Ibid, p82, 264-265). Frequently, Dasein 'loses itself' in the 'everydayness' of its existence; a result of its immersion in the world. The desired foregrounding of ontology will thus not be easy to accomplish.

According to Heidegger, Dasein exists simultaneously as truth and untruth (Ibid, p265). It exists as Truth insofar as it exists always in (and as) a certain disclosedness of the world; Untruth in that it always misinterprets its being – distorting and concealing its essence by reading itself as *merely* another fact of existence; another being among beings.

Let us try and clarify; Dasein attempts to understand itself via other 'objects' of subjective experience. So devoted are we to the paradigm of discrete subjects and objects

that we often seek to understand and disclose ‘world’ as a detached separate thing *out there*; hence the perpetuation of a basic dualism between an active, knowing self, and a passive ‘known’ world full of objects of experience (Ibid, pp85-87).

For Heidegger, it was problematic that our primary tendency since Descartes has usually been to conceive the world that Dasein constantly interprets and discloses as an *object* of knowledge fundamentally divorced from our subjective phenomenological experience. He argued that this comes from a tendency to conceive the ‘in-the-world’ of being-in-the-world as a spatial relationship, in the same way, for example, that water may be in a glass (Ibid, pp81-83). For him, this was not an adequate approach for philosophical reflection.

His response challenged the persistent myth within social theory of a subject/object binary (thus anticipating and influencing a major direction in contemporary critical social theory). Heidegger was quite clear that we will make no headway in understanding worldhood by recourse to this basic dualism since “...subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and the world” (Ibid, p87). As long as we see ‘the world’ as a detached object, we will identify it solely with the ensemble of those material objects we encounter. Since Dasein is constituted in the act of comprehending its world, then we must understand ‘world’ as not separate from our Being, but rather as an integral part of how our Being *is* through disclosure (Ibid, p271). Ontology, indeed all philosophy, must be conducted with conscious regard to its embedded, situated nature.

The Situatedness of Being/ontology

For Heidegger, ontology is a means of comprehending Being, but not through detached acts of pure intellectualism. Rather it should be understood as a means of comprehending Being instrumentally, or relationally; a way of “being-in-the-world.” The crucial point here is that ontology is a form of knowledge, and simultaneously, an active mode of existing.

Importantly, ontology is not a prior – fundamental act which then defines the conditions under which we encounter existing things. Rather, it is always ‘done’ *in the world*. It is an immersed interpretation and disclosure of worldhood. Thus no ontology ‘starts from scratch’, but is always already “thrown” into the world, (to use Heidegger’s terms (Ibid, p174-5); it makes sense of the world in which it is already an active part.

Hardt & Negri also make a version of this point in *Labour of Dionysus* where they say; “Ontology is not a theory of foundation. It is a theory about our immersion in being and about being’s continuous construction.” (Hardt & Negri, 1994, p287)

From this point it is a short leap to the following, bolder claim from one of Heidegger’s contemporaries (and later, one of his sharpest, most influential critics), Emmanuel Levinas;

“From now on the comprehension of being does not presuppose a merely theoretical attitude, but the whole of human comportment. *The whole of humanity is ontology.*” (Levinas, 1951, p3. Emphasis mine).

We can sensibly make this claim because of what might perhaps be seen as the greatest and most lasting legacy of Heideggerean philosophy. To quote a useful summary from Levinas; “To comprehend the tool is not to look at it, but to know how to handle it. To comprehend our situation in reality is not to define it, but to find ourselves in an affective disposition. To comprehend being is to exist [and more importantly, to exist in relationship to other existing things – and to understand this relationship in some way]. All this indicates, it would seem a rupture with the theoretical structure of Western thought. To think is no longer to contemplate, but to commit oneself. It is to be engulfed by that which one thinks, to be involved. This is the dramatic event of being in the world.” (Ibid, p4).

Thus, according to Heidegger’s theory of knowledge, to understand an object is to know what it may be used for, to place it in a relationship with other objects and concepts similarly understood. The ontological understanding that underlies action is not something that can be done in isolation, but is rather a holistic disclosure of an entire

‘environment’ or ‘world’. (Heidegger, 2007, pp93-107) To act upon objects in the world is to espouse an understanding of being. Ontology is understood in this comprehensive Heideggerean way not simply as detached contemplation of an external world, but as active participation which blurs the subject/object distinction. This means that every comportment towards the world, *not only reflects but is itself an ontology*.

A consequence of this is that ontology is not a static, once-and-for-all decision, but a continually reforming, reconstituting movement (Hardt & Negri, 1994, p287). As such, it may influence and be influenced by the contingent ethico-political climate in which it originates. It is here that the political role of ontology starts to become evident.

Ontology as Political

Ontology really only becomes relevant when you are not satisfied with knowledge, when what passes for knowledge is patently wrong or absurd. Thus when I came to argue for ontology *explicitly* and to revindicate it as a subject, it was because I was then very dissatisfied with the *implicit* ontologies in social science and in the philosophy of science. (Bhaskar, 2007, pp192-3)

Despite philosophers’ assertions that ontology is always embedded/situated within a given material context, few have spent much time considering how this ‘situatedness’ might be politically noteworthy. It seems an unfortunate oversight, to say the least, to identify ontology as perhaps the most fundamental field of inquiry into the human condition, but then to ignore its potential ethical and political significance.

Recently however, more attention has been paid to ontological questions and their political significance. Authors like Deleuze & Guattari (1972, 1980), Hardt & Negri (1994, 2000, 2004), Alain Badiou (2007), Slavoj Žižek (2002, 2006, 2008, 2009) and Norman Swazo (2002) (to name just a few) have started to effectuate an ontological turn in political theory. As briefly mentioned above, the field of Critical Realism represents an interesting series of contributions in this regard as well (See; Lawson, Latsis & Martins, 2007). Such authors have shown us that the ontological model used to interpret the world conceptually acts to trace linguistically implicit, historically conditioned,

highly political dispositions, and therefore shape the available horizon of possibilities for thought and action in any given situation. If, therefore, the ideological/political underpinning of our ontological model is not scrutinized critically, we risk attenuating this horizon unnecessarily, thus limiting the prospects for alternative political realities.

Since, as above, we are to understand ontology as deeply embedded within material reality, we must not ignore the real-world impact of ideology at this most fundamental theoretical level. It is for this reason that we need to ontologize critical approaches in order to interrogate the meaning of 'global' being, and properly understand the way that ideology works on the level of thinking the global social. Doing so will allow us to map alternative ways of thinking, and *new ways of creating the world*.

Temporality, Spatiality and Political Ontology

At this point it is worth briefly noting that the political dimension of ontology comprises both spatial and temporal reference points in everyday thought. Without delving too deeply into the (nevertheless interesting) various ways that these different facets of ontology can be political, let us devote a short section here to at least identifying several works by other authors who have done so.

Spatiality:

In this dimension, particularly with respect to globality, the political role of ontology can be drawn very clearly.

In Deleuze and Guattari's most famous work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), the authors identify a spatial metaphor which pervades the organization of western thought and serves a political function. This pervasive metaphor which precipitates the hierarchical organization of ideas, social structures and institution is that of the root and tree (Ibid, pp1-25) This structure, by its very treatment of knowledge, serves an inherently anti-progressive political function by promoting the organization of thought according to fundamental, hierarchical binaries.

Deleuze and Guattari's response to the root/tree metaphor is the concept of the rhizome;

“... any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances, relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles.” (Ibid, p7)

Thus the authors intended for the rhizomatic organization of thought to subvert the linear hierarchical schematic of the root/tree. The rhizomatic model has been seized with great enthusiasm by the theorists of the left in recent years (particularly since it was popularized by Hardt and Negri (2000)). It has become an important tool for spatially conceptualizing complex, dispersed social phenomenon in non-deterministic, non-hierarchical ways.

Jean-Luc Nancy's recent work *The Creation of the World, or, Globalisation* (2007) contains an essay entitled 'Urbi and Orbi' which, among other things, highlights an important difference between the spatial metaphors behind globalization and the French 'mondialisation'. At stake behind these spatial metaphors is an important difference between whether we conceptualize a global collective as an undetermined collective social phenomenon which thrives on the preservation of alterity and difference, or whether we conceptualize 'the global' as a sort of homogenized unified totality which aims to assimilate everything under a broad, ideological image. It is easy to see here the political character that Nancy's spatial ontology takes.

It is no accident that much of the progressive work that is done in social theory currently emanates from the domain of geography. Leading this charge is Derek Gregory, whose work *Geographical Imaginations* (1994) discusses, among other things, the spatial articulation of western modernity in a chapter entitled; 'Modernity and the Production of Space' (pp348-416).

A final example which directly touches the field of global studies is a recent article by Jens Bartelson (2010). Bartelson argues that the notion of the global contains certain implicit spatial signifiers which are not carefully scrutinized, and as such “The concept of globality risks becoming but another tool in the hands of those who wish to relocate political authority to institutions beyond the purview of popular sovereignty.” (Ibid, p219)

Temporality:

The political dimension of the temporal reference points that accompany any given ontology is perhaps not as easy to identify as that of their spatial counterparts. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to ignore this key component of what makes ontology political.

Antonio Negri’s collection of essays entitled *Time for Revolution* (2003) addresses the idea that the conception of temporality which underpins a society bear immense political and ideological significance. In particular, he argues that a certain conception of time which has taken hold in western society since the industrial revolution serves an ideological function in forestalling revolutionary consciousness.

Alain Badiou’s transformative politics rely heavily upon foregrounding a certain temporal frame of reference which contains emancipatory promise. His temporal concepts of ‘the event’ and ‘evental sites’(2007) each revolve around the notion that the moment of rupture, discontinuity, and dischord should be highlighted as a moment of immense, although indeterminate (and potentially ambivalent) unactualized revolutionary potential. This brings to mind Foucault’s (1976) lecture wherein he discusses his desire to focus on ‘ruptural’, ‘discontinuous’ knowledges (pp78-83).

Finally, Hakim Bey’s *Immediatism* (1994) is an excellent example of the importance placed by contemporary anarchist theory on the temporal coordinates of thought. Bey argues that rather than existing in anticipation of some future unfolding of a better society, a truly revolutionary ontology sheds its burdensome attachment to the future and

past, and exists, insofar as it is possible, at the frontier of unfolding events, where possibilities are limited only by imagination.

Without the benefit of being able to explore each of these authors in greater detail here, it is difficult to say much that will encompass the various ontico-political points they each make. Nevertheless, it is hoped this brief diversion into some political spatio-temporal theory will have served to further convince the reader of the deeply political nature of ontology.

As conveyed in the Bhaskar quotation which began the previous section, the need for an ontological turn in theorizing globality comes in part from the inadequacies of traditional approaches. To properly convey the nature of these inadequacies let us now explore a crucial Heideggerian distinction that was briefly mentioned above; the distinction between the ontic and the ontological.

Ontology vs. Accounting

We shall not get a genuine knowledge of essences simply by the syncretistic activity of universal comparison and classification. Subjecting the manifold to tabulation does not ensure any actual understanding of what lies there before us as thus set in order. (Heidegger, 2007, p 77)

As was hinted earlier, ontology is not simply the study of the contingent limited class of what presently exists. This is, however the basis of a specialized sense in which the term is frequently employed, particularly in the social sciences²⁴. Let us, then, be very precise and particular about the manner in which we use the term.

The ontological undertaking so highly valued by Heidegger and those who followed him is not simply an empirical (or even hypothetical, or predictive) account of what happens to exist at a given moment. Heidegger called this latter type of existential inquiry ‘ontic’, and asserted that while it is importantly related to ontology, it is ultimately possible only

²⁴ An excellent example of this is the otherwise excellent work of Robert Cox, which uses the term in the more limited way just described; See, for instance; (Cox, 2001)

by virtue of a previously established (although possibly only tacit, and unexamined) understanding of the meaning and nature of existence. While undeniably useful for practical purposes, painting a portrait of everything which exists in a given environment – no matter how complete the portrait – leaves us with only a limited exemplar class of existing-things from which alone, we do not necessarily comprehend the meaning of being – either generally, or even in a localized way within that particular world.

We have so far argued that in order to understand the politics of the global critically, social inquiry must consciously operate at the level of ontology. Unfortunately, however, social scientific inquiry is too often content to remain at the level of ontic evaluation. Traditional disciplinary approaches to globality, including many canonical works in IR have often seen their task as an enumeration of actors, institutions and the ways they interact. The nominally ontological focus of Dessler (1989) and Wendt (1999), for instance, are typical of enumerative disciplinary ‘ontic-ology’.

Even the more recent Critical Realist school is quite enumerative in its approach, which largely seeks to improve present understandings by including immaterial, abstract concepts, in existing empirical models and then mapping the ways they causally interact with other elements and variables in the model (Patomaki, 2002, p8).

With respect to globality it is crucial that we not make the error of confusing ontology with ‘ontic’ology and accounting. In this case, ‘Global Studies’ risks becoming simply “one science among others” (Heidegger, 2007) rather than the rich trans (post?)(meta?) disciplinary forum it could be. This would be devastating to the prospects for critical theory since we cannot hope to properly understand the implications of concepts like globality and worldhood simply by enumerating the “limited case of the Being of possible entities within-the-world. (Ibid, p94).

While globality is frequently treated ontically by both conservatives and progressives, the consequences of the ontic approach for progressive theory are of particular interest for us here.

For ontology to contain the political and theoretical potential described in the previous sections, it is not enough that we should merely *account* for the existence of things in the present order of things. A model of social science that does only this is conservative by its very nature. This is because its basic temporal frame of reference is that of the static ‘snapshot’ image. The reality described by this snapshot, and thus the understanding of the world it imparts expires almost immediately. As a basic condition, the forms of action it recommends must always be premised upon the reconstitution of a previous order-of-things- the world according to the snapshot image– in order to translate its basic prescriptions into the reality of the present. It is thus inherently backwards-looking.

This is particularly concerning for theory which aims at social transformation and emancipation. To quote Chesters and Welsh;

This welling up of innovative engagement with ‘the system’ has been predominantly appropriated through a backward looking lens, encapsulating one of the key paradoxes of complexity – how to recognize ‘emergence’ – an outcome where properties of the whole are greater than the sum of the parts. This paradox increasingly confronts all sciences through the tendency to incorporate the new via the familiar, leading to the over-extension of established concepts and methods.²⁵ (Chesters & Welsh, 2005, p192)

Herbert Marcuse was convinced that the inherent backwards-looking, accounting approach – which for him corresponded exactly with positivism in social science – served a deliberately conservative political function. In *Reason and Revolution* (Marcuse, 1968) he proposes a short history of the role of social-scientific disciplinarity in supporting established power and the political status-quo. In a particularly brilliant section, he cites numerous writings by Auguste Comte, one of the founders of social scientific positivism, illustrating the deeply political, conservative intent behind the ‘objectivist’ methodology. (Ibid, pp340-360)

²⁵ Perhaps this notion could go a long ways toward explaining why ‘marquis’ social sciences such as economics and political science have been famously unable to anticipate major watershed events in their domains (ie, Fall of the Berlin wall, recurring financial crises, the recent ‘Arab Spring’).

For theory to be truly progressive, it must be able to ‘recognize emergence’ (as Chesters & Welsh put it); to show us the way the world becomes – as it is becoming. In order to do this, it must be attuned to the nature of existence and temporality. It is for this reason that what is necessary is an approach to the question of the conditions of being itself.

Unfortunately on the left, there have been few voices from within the current ‘alter/anti’ movement calling for critical ontological approaches. It is instead the case that most of the work currently goes into describing the nuts-and-bolts of particular forms of oppression. Insufficient time is spent attempting to understand the ways that ‘oppression’ may be built into our fundamental models for Being-in-the-world.

A common manner in which progressive theory proceeds is in cataloguing forms of structural exclusion, as perceived through the lens of a particular ontology. Every theoretical encapsulation of worldhood, and thus each attempt at theoretically ‘enclosing’ reality, will invariably exclude in a fundamental way a particular actor or element of social ontology and thereby arguably contribute to their continued oppression. Perhaps, for a particular analyst, the relevant excluded unit of analysis is gender, or race, or class. Boaventura de Sousa Santos recently characterized this type of oppression-by-exclusion as a type of ‘epistemicide’ (2006, p14).

The character of this central exclusion will be the subject of a lengthy discussion later in this paper, for now, however, it suffices to say that it is a shockingly uncritical approach which holds that oppression exists because we simply haven’t yet managed to stuff every possible perspective into a (counter)hegemonic discourse or discussion forum. The idea that one day, perhaps, we will design a critical apparatus which misses no angle, and excludes no struggle is not only a fanciful utopian flight, but dangerously off-course for post-positivistic emancipatory theory. In fact, it seems to veer quite close to the modernist/positivist search for a ‘grand scientific theory of everything’.

Perhaps this ‘ever-more-epicycles’²⁶ approach is partially responsible for the global left's recent embrace of a plurality of voices; the notion that maybe if we embrace the deafening rabble of various voices describing the conditions of their structural oppression, we will leave no one out, and finally articulate a comprehensive counterhegemonic totality. Judith Butler has recently critiqued this tendency among the left, mocking the “embarrassed ‘etc.’” which is frequently tacked on to lists of excluded and oppressed lenses of analysis. The ‘etc’, she argues, hints at a potentially informative frustration at the inability to *account for* each form structural oppression;

[theories which] elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed ‘etc.’ at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. This failure, however, is instructive: what political impetus is to be derived from the exasperated ‘etc.’ that so often occurs at the end of such lines? (Butler, 1999, p143)

Rather than critically dwelling on the incompleteness of any each particular ‘worldly’ description of globality, and then trying to remedy this lack (as does the gender-critique of Marx), the left should be interrogating what it is about the concept of the global *as-such* that seems to make it impossible for a single ontology to effectively render symbolically.

Theoretical approaches which rely solely upon descriptive 'accounting' models renounce the possibility of harnessing the potentially transformative movement and energy of ontological thought (to be explored in greater detail below). This would be truly tragic for the global left. Transformative politics should not be solely interested in cataloguing struggles against various structural oppressions. This is work for those who codify order through history after the fact of victory or defeat. Instead, the important task lies in creatively directing this constant movement; to paraphrase George Bataille, to bring

²⁶ Rather than accept the major paradigmatic shift which would accompany Johannes Kepler's then controversial theories of a heliocentric solar system, and that planetary orbits are elliptical and not circular, the mainstream establishment of astronomy (notoriously under the conservative influence of the Catholic church) spent decades attempting to explain occasional retrograde motion of planetary bodies against the night sky by generating increasingly complex, inelegant orbital models replete with small internal sub-orbits called epicycles. One wonders whether attempts to inelegantly force more and more variables into ontic treatments of social reality similarly amounts to the proliferation of 'epicycles' within a fundamentally inadequate model.

about in our own way that which would we would otherwise simply *undergo* (Bataille, 1991, p23). How can this be accomplished? It is first imperative that we understand the present coordinates of ontological production and 'world-formation' and how these are underpinned and 'captured' at fundamental levels by ideology.

To this end, the following section proposes a theoretical model for the ideological, ontological construction of perspectives on globality.

+++CHAPTER THREE+++

“Shall I Project a World?”

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* p87

Analytical Model; The Present Coordinates of World-Formation

This chapter sketches a model for how ideology penetrates the ontological production of globality. In order to do this I introduce the concept of world-formation – along with a model for how it occurs. Ultimately, this model will allow us to understand the operation of ideology at the level at which globality is constructed conceptually.

Once the model has been developed, I will argue that the present model of ontological production does not allow us to fully harness the transformative energy present in the process of world-formation. Further, I will show that the ideology of plurality which the left has too easily adopted²⁷ may work against the building of a credible alternative model.

In order to get there, first let us use this next section to introduce some of the conceptual terminology employed.

Introduction to Terminology; World-Formation and Ontological Production

The central concept in ontological literature which ought to convince us that the discussion on globality could profit from its integration is that of ‘world’. While this is a term whose potential ambiguity rivals that of globality itself, we shall here focus on its invocation in the specific, technical sense employed by Heidegger in Section 3 of *Being and Time* (2007). It is there that Heidegger develops his notion of worldhood as a constitutive part of Dasein and a central part of his theory.

As seen in the previous section on ontology, one of the most basic concepts of Post-Heideggerean ontological theory is that we actively create our world in understanding it.

²⁷ See Chapter 1

This is the exercise – the *doing* - of ontological thought. Ontological concern is always inextricably embedded within specific material conditions.

It is therefore the case that our concept of our being is always integrated with a notion of the world it describes and understands. Our being is thus always being-in-the-world. As we argued earlier with respect to Levinas' claim that 'the whole of humanity is ontology' (1951, p3.); every comportment towards the world is itself an ontological disposition.

Each person who thinks or writes about the nature of 'the global' articulates (discloses) the world in a particular way. S/he thus engages in an ontological practice of *creating the world*. For our purposes this practice will be referred to as the process of ontological production. The model created in this chapter will attempt to investigate the conditions under which ontological production occurs. Doing so will allow us to explore the manner in which ideology affects the ontological production of the concept of the global.

In order to emphasize the ontological work they perform, This thesis will use the term 'world-formation' to describe the results of ontological production; approaches to, or conceptualizations of, globality. In each case, the term should be replaceable with the word 'ontology'²⁸. The compound construction of the term 'world-formation' is more precise, imparts less danger of equivocation with the many current uses of the term 'ontology', and most importantly; it emphasizes the temporal nature of ontology, that it is always a process under way.

The next few sections will begin to sketch the outline of the proposed analytical model for comprehending present-day world-formation and exploring the role of ideology within it.

²⁸ At this point I should also further clarify that a world-formation is *an* ontology (in the sense that it is an embedded understanding of Being), but that it is not necessarily ontologically self-aware (ie, has not necessarily submitted itself to ontological scrutiny. This may seem like a small semantic distinction, but the danger of equivocation with the term 'ontology' has been made quite severe by its frequent misappropriations.

Overview: What is world-formation?

The following section will be a broad overview²⁹ of the world-formation model proposed in this chapter; briefly introducing how ontological postulations of globality (termed ‘world-formations’ here) come into being, how they interact, and the role they play in the operation of ideology. Subsequent sections will explore these themes individually in greater depth, however it is first helpful to introduce the model as a whole here.

The temporal-spatial coordinates, relevant actors, institutions, and meaningful ‘units of analysis’ that a theorist chooses to privilege in understanding ‘the global’ form a constellation of beings that, taken together constitutes a world-formation. As an ontology, it is a situated frame of reference unique to, and shaped by, the contingent historical context from which it emerged (Foucault, 1972).

A world-formation is neither absolute, nor fixed, nor the only one of its kind. Rather, it exists in (more or less conscious) relation to other world-formations. Indeed, the interaction between various world-formations creates the raw substance from which the relational³⁰ operation of ethical/political life takes shape. As an inter-ethically negotiated ontological understanding, is the ground upon which social/political reality is possible (Searle, 2010). Importantly, (and contrary to the view of reductive, static theories of ideological or cultural identity and difference (i.e. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* (1997))) such ontologies are not mutually exclusive or intractably held. We will discuss the complex interaction between different world-formations in greater detail in a subsequent section, but first let us look more closely at the process by which world-formation occurs.

Given the situated nature of ontology discussed in chapter 2, we shall see below that the process of ontological production of globality is premised upon human finitude. A central feature of each world-formation is its non-totality or *incompleteness*, which stems

²⁹ Some of the more technical concepts in this section are not as fully cited and supported as they are in the more detailed sections below. This was deliberate in order to give a quicker overview of the model up front.

³⁰ Some might here say ‘conflictual’, or perhaps ‘dialectical’.

ultimately from the finitude of the human mind which creates it and the particular historical and political climate in which it is created. Each ontology of the global is characterized by a simultaneous reference and internal commitment to a unified transcendental totality ('the global'), and an inability to capture or close such a totality (See; Nancy, 2007, 59-74). Thus, at this level ontology, or world-formation, is always a promise unfulfilled. It always leaves an *opening* despite hinting towards closure: This internal tension and reaction to the basic human condition of finitude is fertile territory for exploring the operation of ideology at the level of fundamental ontology. In particular, later sections in this chapter will be devoted to understanding the nature of this finitude; from the mechanisms by which it affects ontological production, to its implications for ideology and politics.

For the time being, it suffices to say that as a condition of the operation which creates it, each world-formation is unable to render all aspects of reality credibly. Some undeniable aspect of reality is always excluded from the account. This requires the individual to 'switch' world-formations: to suspend her ontological commitment and supplement it with another, perhaps incommensurable, world-formation. The crucial point here is that in order to render 'globality', every individual constructs multiple world-formations; multiple conceptual representations of reality with potentially incompatible coordinates³¹.

This – seen in a certain way – appears as a type of Sartrean 'Mauvaise-Foi' (1993, pp167-9). Much like Sartre's famous waiter, the world-forming individual must simultaneously hold incommensurable, perhaps contrary conceptualizations of reality in order to render meaningful the total experience of existence.

However, rather than view this fundamental tension negatively, as a sign of inauthentic consciousness, it is here argued that the very impulse which causes one to switch between worlds should be mined for its unbounded transformative ethical/political potential.

Because of the element of finitude built into the way that World-Formation occurs, each

³¹ As promised above, the notion of incommensurability has some resonance here. Different world-formations are not simply at odds with one another's content, but seem to represent a genuine example of Kuhnian incommensurability.

ontological construction is imparted not only with the ineluctable desire for disclosure of the contours of the world it encircles but also the central desire to transcend and reach its own *outside*. This is what conditions the desire to reach-out beyond stable ontological commitment and explore the simultaneous validity of other worlds. *The drive to transcend the finite horizons of a given world implicitly recognizes the inadequacy of a single ontological formation and the necessity for supplementation. I argue that this drive is the source of the movement and transformative energy at the heart of [an effective] emancipatory politics.*

Each world constantly demands supplementation, and thus, at least momentarily, the destruction and reconstitution of the present ontological order. Those committed to systemic change should consider whether that same drive could be used to reconstitute the material, ontic order as well.

It is here that the role of ideology starts to come into focus at this level. Ultimately, the stability of the present model of world-formation is assured by its perceived inevitability (ie, Fisher's Capitalist Realism (2009)). This perception is only strengthened by the uncritical celebration of plurality as an end in itself, as critiqued in chapter 1. This ideological operation neutralizes the tremendous transformative energy inherent in the necessary 'switch' between world-formations, when each bumps up against the limits of its finitude. Ultimately the assurance of the value of 'another world' to supplement an old, unsatisfactory one without meaningfully addressing the underlying coordinates of ontological production misses the truly radical potential latent in this movement. Admittedly this is a fairly condensed description, but it is hoped that further discussion below will clarify the point.

To summarize; The important fact is not simply that there are numerous ways of defining 'the global', but rather that the way that the whole is maintained depends upon the simultaneous unreconciled maintenance of a number of (potentially) irreconcilable positions by the same subject. The latent energy in this unreconciled tension may be the source of an effective transformative politics which could pose a legitimate, *ontologically*

distinct alternative. At present, however, the present model of ontological production is kept stable by an ideology of, to borrow a term from Deleuze and Guattari, “pseudomultiplicity” (1980, p8). This ideology therapeutically assures supplementarity while simultaneously missing the true engine of transformative thought and radical movement implicit in world-formation, waiting to be harnessed.

It is therefore crucial that we understand the mechanisms which constitute ontological production in order to be able to characterize the source of potential transformative movement, the nature of the ideology being reproduced to neutralize it, and to conceptualize potential alternatives.

Before we move on to discuss the details of this model more thoroughly, I want to briefly mention another important area for future study that this model suggests.

Determining The Master-Signifier

As I have argued³², ‘the global’ is a concept which requires numerous ontological shifts in order to conceptualize it as a cohesive phenomenon, and since disclosedness of world *is* Dasein (Heidegger, 2007, p171), each of these proposed world-formations designed to interpret globality correspond to different modal articulations of Dasein’s Being-as-disclosing. Importantly, what this means is that while the different world-formations may be mutually incompatible, they are also simply different sides of the same being; Dasein.

In much the same way that a shift in geographical location will cause a perceived shift in the relative positioning of celestial objects in the night sky that allows us to triangulate their coordinates with great accuracy, these ontological shifts should be seen as causing a similar sort of ‘parallax effect’. Following Slavoj Žižek’s insightful theorization of theoretical ‘parallax gaps’ (2006), a careful understanding of the nature of these gaps between world-formations will hold the key to a better understanding of the otherwise inaccessible conceptual core and master signifiers which animate our symbolic representation of globality. Although I won’t have the space to explore this in great

³² And will more thoroughly argue below.

depth, it is a promising avenue for determining the master-signifiers that inform the present model of ontological production³³.

Now let us begin to examine the elements of world-formation more closely, beginning with the consequences of ontological finitude.

Finitude

If the concept of the global is to be harnessed as a tool for material progress toward emancipation, we need a clear understanding of how the various competing ontological productions of globality interact – and the truths that may be articulated by their spaces of overlap and sites of incommensurability. Developing this requires a theory as to why every theory of the global seems to necessarily exclude – to leave unsymbolized and unsymbolizable – a “supernumerary element” (Žižek, 2006, p268), and thus invites the proliferation of a multitude of competitor-theories, each of which being similarly ‘incomplete’. In this section, therefore, let us now explore more deeply the nature of this fundamental incompleteness.

As mentioned above, there is a key reference in ontological thought that is of critical relevance to discussions of the global; the concept of finitude. Slavoj Žižek recently noted that Heidegger’s greatest contribution to philosophy may well be his “full elaboration of *finitude* as a positive constituent of being-human.”(Ibid, p273). As already discussed, an important consequence of the Heideggerean notion that our being is always already in-the-world is that we are never able to ‘get outside’ the ‘facticity’ (the situatedness in the present) of our being in order to perform a type of detached Archimedean ontology.

Other authors like Badiou (Cited in Toscano, 2003, pp1-2), Kant (Cited in Žižek, 2006, p273) and Nancy (2007) have also argued that world-formation, or as Badiou calls it ‘cognitive mapping’ is premised upon a finite horizon of perception. The basic condition

³³ This is, however, an angle which I would like to pursue in greater depth in future research.

of our ability to inquire is thus that our horizon of exploration is finite, insofar as it is, by definition, limited by the situated (human) materiality of the inquirer.

With respect to our model, the consequence is that no world-formation can ever enclose all the multitude of possibilities of being. Therefore the ontological disclosure of globality is also fundamentally premised upon the finite horizon of human inquiry³⁴.

Theorists of social phenomena isolate a particular plane of relevant data and define globality according to this. For instance, most economists refer to a ‘global’ defined by the flow of currency, labour, and goods and their various obstacles. Traditional IR theorists refer, in disciplinary terms and categories, to structures of global governance, and the state and non-state actors that interact with these structures. Social-movement theorists refer to the terrain upon which expressions of global political power are made visible and contested). In so doing they construct different world-formations which isolate one relevant plane of the global – one terrain of predominantly epistemological or political or economic or cultural (etc.) struggle - and seek to bring this terrain into sharper relief and resolution.

It is worth noting that, at this level, theorists will get criticized for the supposedly ideological nature of their choice of what plane is the most relevant – and which elements are excluded. Particularly noteworthy, for our purposes are examples from the popular anti-globalist left, which often complains, for instance, that globality is routinely treated in terms which ignore that there is more to globalization than economics. Here again, De Sousa Santos’ ‘sociology of absences’ is a useful specimen (2006, p15).

Such critiques do not limit their targets to mainstream disciplinary approaches however. Within the left itself, much ‘in-fighting’ occurs on similar grounds. A particularly noteworthy example of this is the branch of feminist theory, typified by (Nicholson,

³⁴ There is an important symmetry here with the Lacanian Symbolic order, discussed in the introduction with respect to Žižek’s ideological critique. As Myers put it, no Symbolic representation of reality is ever able to fully “saturate” the Real (2003, p74).

1987) which criticizes Marx' theoretical projects for systematically ignoring the topic of female oppression.

We can easily imagine a virtual infinite regress of such criticisms; Why has [x analysis] neglected race? Why gender? Why class? *etc.* Such criticisms, although not ill-conceived, miss the true theoretical richness of the problem of ontological finitude. Would the appropriate corrective be an all-encompassing theory-of-the-global which leaves no possible lens unsynthesized? How can exclusion of any potential 'variable' be justified? This seems an absurd and impossible standard for critical social theory to be expected to uphold given the aforementioned premise of finitude.

The decision of which elements populate any particular theorist's plane of relevance is not arbitrary, but rather determined by the character of a technical problem that the theorist sets out to address.³⁵ Otherwise, of course, it would be impossible for social theory to address issues of practical relevance and immediate material concern without first discussing the entirety of social reality³⁶. The exclusionary designation of non-existence is thus a function of practical necessity. Each world-formation bites off only as much as a given discussion can chew – narrowing the scope of inquiry for pragmatic reasons.

Here it is important to note ontology/philosophy's role in all of this. According to Heidegger;

The positive sciences neither 'can' nor should wait for the ontological labours of philosophy to be done, the further course of research will not take the form of an 'advance' but will be accomplished by *recapitulating* what has already been ontically discovered, and by purifying it in a way which is ontologically more transparent. (2007, p76)

³⁵ This is not to say that it is not ideological; Habermas has shown us that what counts as a technical 'problematic' is deeply coloured by ideological commitments (1987).

³⁶ Something along the lines of Carl Sagan's famous saying; "If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe!"

Thus while practical ‘scientific’ inquiry must, to some extent, unfold according to a logic of pragmatic exclusion, it is the equally necessary role of critical inquiry to return and examine the implications of the fundamentally finite horizon of inquiry.

The key point is that theorists should be less concerned that this or that particular ontology excludes this or that interesting ‘content,’ given that exclusion is built into our present model of ontological production and world-formation. Instead we should be more interested in the ontological operation which makes exclusion-as-such a permanent feature of the system, and somehow knits all of the various incomplete world-formations into something like a coherent transcendental whole.

Let us now look at the mechanics of the necessary central exclusion which distinguishes each world-formation, and its role in generating movement between various world-formations.

The ‘Supernumerary Element’

As noted above it is an analyst’s location within a precise spatial/temporal moment – their situatedness – that gives a finite reference point from which to address the world they seek to disclose. The situated, finite character of being ensures that every particular disclosure of world will contain at its core a sort of “blind-spot” (Žižek, 2006, p17) or *aporia*; an unresolved and unapproachable terrain of discussion.

In the case of globality, this *aporia* will correspond to the coordinates of those aspects of reality which were inconvenient or unnecessary in the resolution of the practical problematic addressed (Ibid, p268). Importantly, however, the material ‘content’ of the *aporia* (ie, the unrepresented exclusion) of any particular world-formation does not cease to be encountered in the phenomenal experience of reality despite its non-representation within that ontological order. For example, colonial inequalities of power and access to resources persist even if they often go unsymbolized and unrecognized by the ontology of

Realist IR theory. We might say the same thing with respect to the earlier example of gender oppression and Marxian economic theory.

Thus we inevitably encounter the limits of a particular world and are forced to conceptualize it in relation to other possible world-formations that allow access to the terrain made unapproachable by the present aporia. In this way each world is driven towards a 'reaching-out' by its fundamental exclusion; its 'supernumerary element' (to borrow a useful term from Žižek)(Ibid, 318-9).

This 'supernumerary element' takes on special significance in Žižek's political readings of Lacan. In order to further explore what this approach might illustrate, let us follow Žižek's lead, and call the site of this central aporia, '*objet petit a*'. This should ultimately allow us to understand more about the function of ontological finitude in the process of world-formation.

The *Objet Petit A* as the 'Impossible Hard Core' confronting a 'Multitude of Symbolic Fictions'

Up to here we have determined that each world-formation is characterized by a central exclusion – a supernumerary element that results from the basic premise of ontological finitude. We have called the location of this permanent exclusion '*objet petit a*' in order to draw parallels with a useful Lacanian concept and better understand this structural feature of each world-formation (and ontological production in general). In this section, we will now explore the character of the *objet petit a* in greater depth.

Slavoj Žižek's *Parallax View* (2006) shows us how the relationship between various incommensurable ontological formations can help us to examine the *objet petit a* and thus explore the driving source of competing disclosures of worldhood.

According to Žižek; "*Objet petit a* is the very cause of the parallax gap, that unfathomable X which forever eludes the symbolic grasp and thus causes the multiplicity of perspectives." (Ibid, p18). It might also be described as the ungraspable core of an

ontology or world-formation, which presses always outwards against its barriers and thus reaches out towards its exterior (Ibid, p18).

Importantly, for Žižek, the *objet petit a* marks the location of the Lacanian Real. As described earlier, the Real is not a transcendental, sublimated realm of objective reality, rather, it exists only as the location of a central, unresolved conflict that must persist in order for the various Symbolic representations of reality (in our case world-formations) that compose a particular social ‘whole’(in our case globality), to hang together. (Ibid, pp40, 152).

The *objet petit a* thus corresponds to tension itself; unresolved, irreducible conflict and contradiction embedded at the very centre of any given ontology. To be clear here, this means that the central *objet petit a* has no positive substance of its own. “This very hard core is purely virtual, actually non-existent, an X which can be reconstructed only retroactively, from the multitude of symbolic formations which are ‘all there actually is’.” (Ibid, p26).

An example may serve to make these important concepts clearer. Let us take Levi-Strauss' interpretation of Radin's study of Native American Winnebago tribes (1972). In it, Levi-Strauss discusses an interesting disparity that occurs between different tribe sub-groups regarding perceptions of the spatial organization of their village. If asked to draw the layout of the village, members of different sub-groups would routinely map entirely different territorial coordinates – completely different spatial representations – depicting almost unrecognizably different villages (Levi-Strauss, 1972). Žižek's analysis of this phenomenon is very helpful in understanding the notion of the finite horizon of perception, and the nature of the *objet petit a*.

According to Žižek's Lacanian reading of Levi-Strauss, the village cannot be symbolized by a mutual spatial vocabulary because of an underlying unresolved tension;

“The splitting into two ‘relative’ perceptions implies reference to a hidden constraint – a fundamental antagonism that the villagers were

unable to symbolize, internalize or otherwise account for and establish a harmonious whole.” (Ibid, p25-26)

Then later;

“The perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavours to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wounds via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure.” (Ibid, p26)

The central, ungraspable kernel – unrepresentable in a common symbolic order or language – is what ultimately necessitates the various irreconcilable village-representations. This is the *objet petit a* among the Winnebago.

This, of course begs the question; what is the *objet petit a* of globality?

While, for the Winnebago, the *objet petit a* is the location of an unsymbolizable traumatic antagonism in their society, if we apply this analogy to the apparently incommensurable narratives of global reality, what is the central, unresolved conflict, which knits together symbolic representations of ‘the global’?

What is the *objet petit a* of globality?

The answer to this question may ultimately be beyond the scope of this project, and requires its own focused research. We can, however hazard a sort of educated guess as to its general coordinates, based on our observations of the process of world-formation.

We argued briefly that the supernumerary blindspot of each world-formation was determined by a pragmatic desire to address a particular problematic, in the face of the basic, foundational premise of ontological finitude. On the other hand, the ontological process of world-formation is anchored in the notion that Dasein’s very Being is characterized by a fundamental and unlimited drive to *disclose* its world (Heidegger, 2007, p171) This same contradiction is also described by Jean-Luc Nancy; (Pettigrew & Raffoul, 2007, p2)

Thus we are confronted by a contradiction between an unlimited desire to disclose reality, but a fundamentally finite, limited horizon of exploration. This transposes into a desire to

make Universal claims about the nature of reality (globality), and the Particular constraints which limit any given representation.

The tension in this case is the unresolved, irreconcilable gulf between, on one hand, the sublimated transcendent 'globality' that each world-formation references and attempts to disclose, and on the other, the finite particular horizon that represents the condition of possibility for disclosure of world.

Žižek has argued that this same tension is responsible for the famous dichotomy in Kantian thought between the Universal and the Particular, The Immanent and the Transcendental (Žižek, 2006, pp9-10).

The following quotation from Žižek serves to clarify the point;

“The Universal is not the encompassing container of the particular content, the peaceful medium-background of the conflict of particularities; the Universal “as such” is the site of an unbearable antagonism, self-contradiction, and (the multitude of) its particular species are ultimately nothing but so many attempts to obfuscate/reconcile/master this antagonism. In other words, the Universal names the site of a Problem-Deadlock, of a burning Question, and the Particulars are the attempted but failed Answers to this Problem. The concept of State, for instance, names a certain problem: how to contain the class antagonism of a society? All particular forms of State are so many (failed) attempts to propose a solution to this problem.” (Žižek, 2006, 34)

As with the concept of statehood, For globality, the location of the *objet petit a* is perhaps the tension that theories of the global enact between a]transcendental unitary concept ('State' or 'Global') and the 'failed answers to this problem', constrained by particularity and finitude.

If this is true, then the implications of foregrounding finitude are larger than is immediately apparent. The global, which at first glance seems to be an overarching transcendent principle – is in fact constructed by reference to the localized particularity and finitude of particular 'worlds' and the perceptual 'movement' required to knit them

into something like a coherent whole. The methodology of Immanent Critique could be useful here for examining Universalizing theoretical claims to the Transcendental global realm and illustrating them to be so many immanent attempts to cope with finitude and situatedness. For an excellent explanation of the methodology of Immanent Critique – which seeks primarily to collapse sublimated references to the inaccessible transcendental into the realist immanent – see; (Antonio, 1981).

Although I believe this represents a good place to start a research into the exact character of globality's *objet petit a*, such an undertaking is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project. Further research in this direction may focus upon whether there are certain central 'master-signifiers' which knit together various world-formations and thereby reinforce internal ideological commitments³⁷.

Regardless of the exact character of the internal tension, the most important point that I wanted to draw out of an exploration of the conflictual, unresolved nature of the *objet petit a* is that the unstable, irreducible energy of the central conflict inherent to each world-formation (and the system of ontological production more generally) is the very force which animates the impulse behind transformative politics; to reconstitute the present order.

The following section will explore this claim in greater detail before the final section of this chapter places the final block in our analytical model, exploring the ideological

³⁷ To this end, Alain Badiou has suggested that the term 'democracy' is one such contemporary master-signifier (Cited in Žižek, 2008, p183-4) which is used to knit together all sorts of ideological operations and which is appropriated in order to drive a certain kind of world-formation. Indeed ad hoc justifications for recent military interventions by NATO and/or the United States (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Threats to Iran, North Korea) were all nominally undertaken in the promotion of democracy. Analysts debate the degree to which this central reference corresponds to the actual geopolitical motivations of the actors involved in each of these cases. Most agreed, however, that 'democracy' is the central object around which such discussions should turn (although it is likely that no two analysts could agree as to what constitutes the genuine referent of the term.) Here the signifier 'democracy' is at once the legitimizing core impulse that discursively justifies the reconstitution of the present order through (very material) world-formation, and simultaneously an unclosable, elusive placeholder, which in any particular case could be discursively substituted for whatever material motives (whatever desire) actually motivates the act.

operation whereby this inherent transformative energy is rerouted and captured in ways that reinforce the status quo.

The Transformative Potential of the *Objet Petit A*

As above, the *objet petit a* is the location of an unresolved tension implicit in every ontological formation of reality. This elusive, unspeakable traumatic core unsettles whatever order is imposed by different ontological formations attempting to stabilize the reality. It is in this sense that the *objet petit a* should be seen as an *engine of transformative movement*. It contains implicit acknowledgement that no formation is complete unto itself, and thus keeps each formation in a perpetual state of ‘reaching-out’ in order to attempt to impose order and stabilize reality. Further, it causes observers to constantly ‘switch’ between the incompatible worlds in order to properly render the social whole.

In the case of world-formations, as briefly described above, each eventually encounters the limits of its capacity to symbolize reality. As we have seen, this limit corresponds to the necessary exclusion of some aspect of material reality. It thus contains implicit recognition of the fact that the present model of ontological formation is premised upon inherent, ontological exclusion – and that therefore structural oppression, marginalization and so forth are built right in.

This causes a de-stabilization of the symbolic representation of reality; At once it is evident that the present world-formation is insufficient to fully disclose reality. It is in this precise moment, in the implicit acknowledgement of the failure of any one ontological formation to fully encapsulate reality, that we should perceive the creative engine of transformative politics. This recognition of the insufficiency of the present means of ontological production is potentially revolutionary – as it calls for a reconstruction not just of ontic, material order – but of our manner of interpreting Being as such. To borrow a phrase from Arturo Escobar, It calls for ‘The End of Ontology as We Know It’. Crucially, political symbolizations of reality which seek to highlight and

correct the exclusionary tendencies of dominant ontologies derive their energy from this basic moment.

At this critical moment of confrontation with the *objet petit a*, we are forced either to look inward, and attempt to confront the unresolved tension at the centre of our present ontological construction of reality/globality³⁸, or to look outwards, beyond its finite horizon, and imagine ‘another world’ which is able to account for the excluded element³⁹.

In sum, according to our model, the point at which we are forced to switch from one world-formation to another contains a momentary encounter with the central, unresolved and unstable *objet petit a*, a recognition of the insufficiency of any one transcendental formulation of the world, and thus the necessity of constantly confronting internal contradiction and reconstituting ontological (and perhaps material) orders.

The task of the transformative left should be to try and figure out how best to tap into and harness the latent potential of this encounter with the *objet petit a*. At present, however, such efforts are stunted by the operation of an ideology which neutralizes this radical potential and makes credible alternatives seem unrealistic and impossible. The following section describes this ideological operation in greater detail.

Ideology and Ontological Production:

We have said that a central feature of the present model of ontological production is a movement toward (and beyond) the horizon of a given world-formation driven by the *objet petit a* – and that this contains a vital potential for transformation and reconstitution of order.

³⁸ Which, if successful, according to this model, will only lead to a perhaps more nuanced, but still fundamentally incomplete ontological formation, since finitude is an inescapable basic condition

³⁹ Albeit at the expense of the inevitable exclusion of some other terrain, left untouched and untouchable.

So the question we begin with in this section is, given the vital potential inherent in the basic structure of each world-formation, how are we to account for the fact that this transformative energy has not often been successfully harnessed by the ‘global left’?

Our answer will be that it is at this level that ideology takes firm hold. In particular, the ‘Capitalist Realism’ (Fisher, 2009) discussed earlier - and embodied in Thatcher’s infamous claim that “There is no Alternative” - results from the manner in which world-formations are produced to supplement others.

This section will explore how the stability of the present model of world-formation is maintained by the ideological way in which the ‘shift’ between different, supplementary world-formations is perceived, neutralizing this potentially transformative energy.

As we have seen, the finite nature of each world-formation inevitably causes us to need to supplement it with others in order to properly render our experience of the excluded element(s).

Other than the basic condition of finitude, there is no limit to our capacity to generate new world-formations to supplement existing, incomplete ones. Boundless imagination dictates that we can carve up reality and label its constituent elements in countless ways, corresponding to whichever social, political or cultural problematic we wish to address. This process always takes place, however, within the structured model of ontological production described above.

Initially, the inability of each world-formation to fully represent the phenomenal experience of the social reality of the ‘global’ may seem to present a crisis for the present model of ontological production. The reality described by a given world-formation is destabilized by its encounter with its inherent limitation; finitude.

However, The inherent exclusion of a supernumerary element, destabilizing though it may be to any particular ontology, does not *feel* like a crisis since, to paraphrase the WSF slogan; another world(-formation) is always possible. The coherence of the global whole

as a transcendental ideal is maintained by the fact that each world-formation is itself insufficient **but** is *always* assured of being supplemented.

Moreover, the character of each supplementary world-formation is always determined *from within the present model of ontological formation*. They thus never feel capable of truly challenging the ontological coordinates of this order itself. It is here that the notion of Capitalist⁴⁰ Realism takes root. Each supplementary world-formation, different as it may be from the previous one, is still anchored in the same basic coordinates of ontological production.

While it would be nearly impossible to make an exhaustive list of the complaints of the numerous diverse groups constituting the ‘anti-globalist’ left, I would suggest that many of the more specific, localized grievances could ultimately be collapsed into two interconnected broader categories. These categories are **structural exclusion** in the form of various types of political and social oppression, (ie; The sociology of absences of De Sousa Santos (2006), among others) and **social antagonism** in the form of material inequalities and thus conflict between social classes (The more classical Marxist stance, taken up by such authors as Gruffydd Jones (2008)).

This certainly suggests a possible answer to why ‘it’s easier to imagine the end of the world, than the end of capitalism,’ (Fisher, 2009, p1) since all of the undesirable elements of the present order are build right into our model of ontological production. The objet petit a, as we argued, is the site of an inevitable social antagonism, and the supernumerary element is a fundamental exclusion. Every new ontological production, regardless of its particular content, will reproduce these two basic elements. Thus ‘worlds’ may end, and be replaced by others, but the antagonistic elements of capitalism opposed by the global left always remain. Under these conditions another world may indeed be possible, but seldom, if ever, will it be truly subversive. The destabilizing

⁴⁰ In fact, the term ‘Capitalist’ Realism may be overly reductive here. I’m using it because Fisher’s concept of a left paralyzed by the perceived inevitability of the present state-of-affairs is roughly what I want to convey. However, I think (as I’m sure Fisher did as well) that the perceived inevitability encompasses more than simply capitalist systems of exchange, but also the larger social and political institutions that sustain, reinforce and reproduce them.

movement of the encounter with the *objet petit a* has been organized in such a way as to reinforce the (perceived) stability of the systemic whole. It is perhaps here that the paralysis described by Fisher arises, whereby it seems impossible to all parties that a genuine alternative should present itself.

In addition, the ideology criticized in Chapter 1 which praises horizontal multiplicity in the global left as an end in itself⁴¹ also works against the realization of an effective, encounter with the *objet petit a*. The plurality model, in its complacent acceptance of the system of continued supplementarity, does not provide incentive to confront the impossible internal contradictions that we have argued to be the engine of transformative movement.

It would be misleading to think that an easy proliferation of a multitude of worlds which do nothing to challenge the reproduction of a stable ontological order could provide anything genuinely transformative.

With this in mind, it is worth considering that the apparent multiplicity of perspectives on ‘the global’ may, in fact, be much less diverse than it appears. The various perspectives instead should be seen as *parallaxic shifts* (2006, p153) that unwittingly serve to stabilize a more global, ideologically infused system of ontological production.

This chapter has proposed an analytical model for understanding the ontological production of globality and the operation of ideology within it. Ultimately the ontologically focused analysis has helped us to better understand the nature of ideology with respect to globality. It showed us how the transformative energy inherent in ontological production is currently directed in ways that are unlikely to bring about emancipatory change.

⁴¹ The global-as-multiple-competing-perspectives paradigm critiqued in Chapter 1

The final chapter of this thesis will move beyond this to consider ways that we might attempt to restore the prospects for a global transformative politics, in the face of the obstacles just described.

In order to properly set the stage for this let us now conclude this chapter by looking at what we have determined so far, and asking how we might improve the prospects for transformative politics by better exploiting the energy inherent in the *objet petit a* so as to harness its latent potential for ontological reconstitution.

What Next? Lessons for Emancipatory Politics

We said earlier that the basic antagonism posed by the *objet petit a* caused a fundamental choice; we could either look inward towards this inherent conflict, or look outward and attempt to constitute another ontological order. It appears, however, that the manner in which the ‘outward reach’ occurs tends to reproduce the Capitalist Realist ideology of inevitability, and thus neutralizes the vitality inherent in the encounter with the *objet petit a*. The response, then, must be to look inward, at the central contradiction itself. We have argued that this central tension can be an engine for movement, and destabilization of the present order.

By its nature, however, the *objet petit a* is open, undetermined and ultimately unresolved. In fact, it is this very openness that constitutes its transformative potential. We must, therefore be quite careful that in our theoretical approaches to it we aim not to ‘close’ it, by giving it a definite, resolved location. Instead we should approach it non-appropriatively, by way of something like a gentle Derridean ‘localization of the vanishing point’. (Badiou, 2009, p134)

In more material terms this means that rather than *defining* the central conflictual source of transformative energy, we should attempt to playfully, poetically, *enact* either the global tension between universal and particular or the smaller, localized tensions embedded in each world-formation.

By enacting these tensions (whatever they may be) we stage the uncodified, indeterminate *movement of thought* (that we will argue below corresponds to Deleuzian immanence). Doing so potentially creates an unstable point of discontinuity with the present order, what Alain Badiou refers to as an ‘evental site’ (2007). Transitive though they may be, such sites represent a location from which a radical break may occur.

Rather than thinking of more and more ways to supplement existing world-formations, the left should be staging and framing their internal contradictions in the hopes of identifying and activating potential evental sites.

Of course, the major question that remains is; what would such a playful enacting of the *objet petit a* look like? That question is what the final chapter now hopes to address.

To this end, the final chapter of this paper will explore the Deleuzian notion of Immanence as a means for conceptualizing alternative ways of directing the movement of ontological formation. It will then explore some creative, ontological approaches by other authors which represent constructive, ontologically aware engagements with the *objet petit a*. It will then end with a brief summary of the project as a whole, as well as questions and areas for future research.

+++ CHAPTER FOUR +++

“Oh but you who philosophize disgrace... take the rag away from your face, now aint the time for your tears.”

Bob Dylan, *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carol*

Perpetual Movement

La quête d'une nouvelle société ressemble à la recherche du mouvement perpétuel : pas de frottement, pas de violence, l'harmonie et un renouvellement sans fin. Mais les machines ont jusqu'ici été vaincues par les lois physiques comme les anarchistes par les lois des États. (Enckell, 1982, p 60)

The above quotation represents an excellent point from which to begin this chapter, because it shows the promise offered to emancipatory political projects by the notion of movement (such as that implicit in the process of world-formation). Unfortunately, what emerges from a careful ontological reading of globality is that transformative politics have been beaten to the proverbial punch in the attempt to create 'perpetual motion machines' of social reality. Instead, we saw in the previous chapter that the 'renouvellement sans fin' is most observable in the structure of ontological production which operates to preserve the status quo.

Badiou has argued that the ontological operation of global capitalism is to prevent cognitive mapping and create worldlessness (Toscano, 2003). This is done by creating a sense of infinity and perpetual movement (Žižek, 2008, p398). In response to this idea, this thesis argues that it is the job of transformative politics to build a 'better', more progressive sense of infinity and perpetual movement, if it means to offer a credible alternative. In this spirit, this chapter will focus on how the transformative energy of the movement of thought may be harnessed by progressive politics.

Until now we have argued that each 'version' of globality is a world-formation, reaching out towards its horizon. We also determined that the source of this reaching-out is the '*objet petit a*' of globality – the supernumerary element of each world-formation; a symptom of the finite, situated consciousness that constructs it. All of this is purely

academic, however, unless we can attach this model to a theory for improving the prospects for transformative politics by creating a model of infinity and perpetual motion that rivals the present means of ontological production.

Fortunately, the Deleuzian interpretation of the Spinozan concept of ‘immanence’ provides us with an excellent place to start building such an approach. This chapter will take the Deleuzian vocabulary of immanence and explore how it may be usefully applied in conceptualizing globality ontologically. It will be shown that Deleuzian immanence represents an opportunity with respect to poisoning the analyst upon the knife-edge of performative theory that doesn’t simply account for what is or has been – but engages actively with processes of becoming.

The Promise of Deleuzian Philosophy

Thanks largely to Hardt and Negri(1994, 2000, 2004), Deleuzian tropes, are becoming increasingly fashionable among progressive theorists of globalization⁴² (See, for instance; (Chesters and Welsh, 2005) and many of the articles contained within (Dean & Passavant, 2004)). The continual revolutionary outward push against conceptual and material frontiers that characterizes Deleuze’s work has been a particular source of inspiration for theorists seeking to understand, and perhaps change, the nature of contemporary capitalist society.

However, while the left often operates according to a general sympathy with Deleuzian notions such as immanence, theorists of transformative global politics are often ready to abandon their devotion to fluid and radically open images of thought when called upon to deliver pragmatic solutions to material issues. Indeed, the extent to which we can directly draw concrete political programmes from dense philosophical texts has been the subject of serious debate⁴³. Nevertheless, when the nuances of certain concepts are filed

⁴² In particular, as briefly mentioned in chapter 2, the Deleuzian image of the rhizome has been greatly popularized.

⁴³ Heidegger, in fact, was quite devoted to making ‘ontic’ material science more ontologically aware, although he eventually abandoned this quest, claiming that ‘sciences don’t think’ (Cited in Žižek, 2006, p275). A recently published debate between Žižek and Badiou (2009) on the topic of philosophy’s

down in order to directly inspire practical projects, the effectiveness of Deleuze's thought is hopelessly diluted.

Quickly, the global is reduced to the known; territorial analogy, temporal limits, and a diagnostic epistemology based in positivism and the European scientific method; an approach wholly dependent on hierarchical reasoning and Cartesian dualism (Bartelson, 2010). This limits the possibility of defining alternative political horizons, and results in gross misappropriations of Deleuzian philosophy. Michael E Gardiner, for instance, notes that readings from Deleuze on rhizomatic structure and organization have begun to pop up in the syllabi of European management schools (Gardiner, 2009, p226). It is worth noting that some authors (ie; Laclau, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2004) also argue that even Hardt & Negri's works represent a misuse of Deleuze's philosophy as well⁴⁴ (although to a much lesser extent).

The implications of a devoted reading of Deleuze are radical. In effect, his approach demands nothing short of a redesigning of the way that ontology and social theory are practiced and understood. Since, however, explore the revolutionary implications of Deleuze's work could easily justify its own entire project, I will here limit discussion to one (nevertheless extremely useful) concept; immanence. The following section introduces and explains the concept of immanence, and explores how it might be usefully applied to the results of chapter 3's theoretical model.

Immanence

Let us first clarify the usage of the term 'immanence'. The concept, frequently employed as a foil to the Kantian 'transcendent', has been a fixture in contemporary continental philosophy since its elaboration by Hegel (See; Antonio, 1981) and Spinoza (see;

potential political role suggests that both thinkers are also skeptical that philosophy can influence actual political realities in anything more than an indirect way. As is evidenced by the first three chapters of this thesis, I take a slightly more optimistic view towards this, although I admit that a lot is often 'lost in translation' between nuanced philosophical investigation, and political/practical implementation.

⁴⁴ Although this is certainly a matter for another discussion, it is worth noting that rather than a gross misappropriation of Deleuzian thought, Negri's work is probably closer to how Deleuze treated his own philosophic idols like Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche. As Deleuze himself put it, he did not so much interpret philosophers as 'bugger' them (Deleuze, 1995, p6)

Deleuze, 1988). Our explanation here will not take into account the ongoing discussion as to the essence of immanence, but will instead be focused entirely on its appropriation by Deleuze and Guattari.

The clearest exposition of immanence comes in Deleuze & Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* (1994). The authors explore the concept in a chapter entitled 'the Plane of Immanence.'

The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought... The image of thought retains only what thought can claim by right. Thought demands "only" movement that can be carried to infinity. What thought claims by right, what it selects, is infinite movement or the movement of the infinite. It is this that constitutes the image of thought (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p37)

Immanence is necessarily resistant to description because, according to Deleuze and Guattari, it is precisely the "prephilosophical," preconceptual *movement* of thought. It is the present-happening of thought that makes conceptualization (and consequently communication of definitions) next to impossible. For Deleuze 'immanence' indicates a direction of pure irreducible movement towards and beyond boundaries. It is the movement wherein thought occurs; the "absolute horizon" where thought, before being crystallized and ordered as concepts, reaches blindly, and infinitely outwards towards the uncharted in unpredictable, undetermined ways (Ibid, p38).

Immediately, here, we should recognize the same vital energy that characterizes the encounter with the *objet petit a* described in chapter 3. Confronting the unresolved tension at the center of each world-formation provides a glimpse of the force and 'perpetual motion' of unresolved, undetermined, *immanent* thought.

Immanence is characterized in *What is Philosophy* in reference to its counterpart, transcendence. While 'immanence' corresponds to the chaotic, unpredictable process of thought-formation, 'transcendence' refers to the ordering processes which name and codify thought. Transcendental concepts assign overarching meaning and causal

significance to the unpredictable eruptions of immanent thought (Ibid, p47). In order to comprehend the world and communicate with others we allow transcendental thought to crystallize the immanent. These are sublimated images of thought as ‘science-past’ (Latour, 1991), which necessarily reference a past material order (in the same way that ontic accounts of reality are inherently backward-looking). Transcendental thought thus refers to the movement of thought only in the past tense.

We depend upon transcendental concepts to form in order to be able to assign meaning and importance to concepts, BUT we require the radical production of immanent thought in order for concept formation to occur in the first place. Both immanence and transcendence are thus essential to some degree, but the motor of creativity, vitality and transformation of present ontological order is immanence. Immanence is thus the radical force; and should be understood as the transformative engine at the centre of ontological production.

When we encounter the unresolved tension, the *objet petit a* at the heart of a world-formation, what we are encountering is immanent thought which has yet to be codified into the present symbolic order (and which resists such codification). It is unstable, chaotic and undetermined and is thus capable of destabilizing the whole transcendental order which is built around it. By ‘playing’ with the central unresolved conflict – the only area that is not yet fixed and set in stone, we stoke this central fire and keep it in motion.

This is why the *objet petit a* represents such a compelling opportunity for transformative politics; it is here, at the location of the permanently excluded ‘supernumerary element’, that we encounter the only non-fixed, non-transcendentalized element of thought in a given ontological order.

As we have seen, there is a natural entropic tendency which, over time, destabilizes the ‘fixed coordinates’ of any particular ontology from within, and causes us to switch to another. It should be the role of progressive, transformative social theory to determine

the potential engine of immanent movement in a given social formation, and then work to ‘play’ with this; to stage and enact its agitated, immanent core, and thus accelerate its inherent entropy.

There is a tendency to try to ‘transcendentalize’ the global’ in order to act upon it as a fixed object of our (ideologically driven) material interventions (See Fitzpatrick’s excellent (2004) critique of Hardt & Negri along these lines). This is done by assigning fixed coordinates; temporal fixity, spatial boundedness, static ontology and units of analysis etc - In Heideggerean terms, treating it *ontically*. In so doing, however, we neutralize the vitality and potential latent in maintaining it as an unclosed source of radical becoming. The coordinates reference a particular spatio-temporal constellation and attempt to universalize and make transcendent this reference.

Critical theorists concerned with the prospects for transformative politics should fight strongly against this type of closure of globality and should rather strive to maintain the *indeterminate global* as a continued plane of immanence; a motor of irreducible potential energy for ontological contestation and reconstruction of worldhood. The best way to de-transcendentalize globality, is thus to maintain theory upon the uncloseable, inappropriable, inherently unstable plane of immanence.

As it turns out, the best way to do this may be to reorient our expectations of theory. Rather, than depending upon a descriptive, ontic model that, itself, is primarily committed to transcendentalizing emergent thought, transformative politics could best ‘open itself to the production of the discontinuous, to the unforeseeable, to the event’(Hardt & Negri, 1994, p287) by employing *performative* methods that actively engage with the unstable core of ontological formation. In this way theorists place themselves at the very point where globality is constructed ontologically and harness the boundless energy of the movement of thought in order to bring about in their own way what they would otherwise have to undergo. (Bataille, 1991, p23)

In the end, for progressive theory ‘the play’s the thing’ to engage with the engine of immanent, transformative energy, and hopefully harness it for the reconstitution of transcendental order. The left must eschew the position of the detached observer, and rather seize upon that of the engaged ontologist with access to the infinite horizon of possibilities granted by the indeterminacy of immanent becoming. Playful artistic engagement with globality that stages contradiction and keeps alive sites of immanence should be seen as powerful forms of this type of performative theory.

Deleuze, is of course aware that even his characterization of the *concept* of immanence does not, and cannot, do full justice to the ineffable nature of thought’s movement - all he can do is map the coordinates, and represent it conceptually. Undeterred by the difficulty of providing a static definition, however, the authors explore the notion of thought’s inherent ‘movement’ without attempting to pin the concept down to a definite universalizable concept. Their process of patiently, and poetically exploring immanence also contains an important lesson about interrogating a concept while resisting the urge to ‘close’ and statically define it.

Let us now look at a few other lessons we might learn from the form of this and other performative approaches to social reality. This next section will give us a few examples of ways that art and social theory have engaged performatively, in both form and content, with the engine of ontological production.

Examples of Performative/Creative Approaches to Ontology and Globality

“A book must be a place where things begin.” Robert Bringhurst (2007)

“We made the road, it wasn't there.” - Subcommandante Marcos (1996)

In the previous section we argued that the concept of immanence was a helpful one for conceptualizing the potential source of perpetual motion at the heart of the encounter with the *objet petit a* of globality. We argued that progressive politics should promote creative approaches which attempt to preserve the indeterminacy of immanent thought for as long as possible, rather than transcendental, nominative approaches to social

reality. In this manner, transformative politics has the ability to actively create globality in radical new ways.

In order to ground the more theoretical discussion of the past section a little more firmly, let us look at some authors who have adopted the kind of performative, creative approaches towards ontology and social theory that we are advocating.

Deleuze and Guattari

Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) operate according to a very particular structural/organizational logic. A superficial description of the books might classify them as collections of essays, however this description does not quite do justice to the importance of their structure. The authors' ambitious project is organized as a non-linear series of 'plateaus', all exploring different problematics, and areas of potential movement or 'intensity' within various discussions related to ontology and social reality.

By Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model, the process of comprehension, description and expression of an assemblage forms a sort of 'entry point' into that assemblage – becomes part of it. The book (or article) of social theory itself forms an assemblage with its referent (1980, p23). Therefore it is not possible (or desirable) to simply describe social assemblages at arms length. This is, of course, hostile to the subject-object dichotomy that pervades theory reliant on a purely descriptive ontological approach. Deleuze and Guattari see writing as a performative act, participating in and mapping out the network of rhizomatic relations between identities, objects and ideas.

Michel Foucault, famously described *Anti-Oedipus*, the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as a 'livre-evenement' (1972, preface). Deleuze and Guattari were not simply describing a method for subverting linear, causal paradigms for understanding the unfolding of history, nor merely advocating the deconstruction of rigid social ontology.

They were instead bringing about these things in their own way; authoring them, as it were, through the open social assemblages of their literary/theoretical works.

The authors boast in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* that “each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau” (1980, p22). This is perhaps the most vital part of Deleuze and Guattari's work; the books, by means of their rejection of the hegemonic means of theoretical articulation, are themselves acts of political and social defiance. Their work, through its poetic form, *actively constructs* the type of complex non-linear communication between social assemblages that they see as representing the maintenance of ethics in expressing social reality.

Chesters and Welsh (2005) recently provided an excellent summary of the potential uses of the plateau-form, developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, for understanding social movements. The non-linear plateau form is crucial in understanding these movements because it fights any sort of univocal, totalizing reading of globality.

Friedrich Nietzsche

It is worth briefly noting as well that Deleuze and Guattari drew much theoretical inspiration from the philosophical/literary works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is another excellent example of a philosopher ostensibly dedicated to framing the inherent contradictions within society (Few, in fact have done so with quite as much wit). This is also significant for our purposes since Nietzsche himself is another classic example of a philosopher whose means of expression was a crucial and subversive element of his overall approach. Bleiker & Chou (2010) recently wrote of how form and content were inseparable in Nietzsche's best works, enacting subjectivities in his readers rather than simply describing them;

The key, for Nietzsche, is to recognize that when we say something about the world we also inevitably say something about our conception of the world – something that is linked not to the facts and phenomena we try to comprehend but to the assumptions and conventions of knowing that we have acquired over time and that have become codified in language. (Bleiker & Chou, 2010, p9)

From these paradigmatic examples of the poetic/philosophic construction of social reality, let us now proceed in examining other ways that literature and poetics have been used in the creative construction of alternative approaches to globality (or at least social ontology).

We argued above that art should be treated as a potentially extremely significant source of the kind of performative theory which can effectively stage transformative encounters with the tensions inherent in ontological production. Let us now briefly turn our attention to several artists in different media who have been particularly effective at foregrounding immanent thought and inherent social tensions/contradictions, with varying social and political results⁴⁵.

William S. Burroughs

Burroughs is most famous (perhaps infamous) for his 1959 novel *Naked Lunch*. In this work and others, Burroughs is said to have pioneered the use of the 'cut-up' literary technique, in which he dissected his finished manuscripts and artificially repositioned segments of text, sometimes arbitrarily. In an editor's note to a restored edition, contemporaries James Grauerholz and Barry Miles claim; "By its very nature, *Naked Lunch* resists the idea of a fixed text." (Burroughs, 2001, p233). As with Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the reader is struck with a distinct impression that s/he may begin and end at any point and discover certain resonant elements scattered in non-causal fashion across the territorial 'space' of the book.

It may be argued that, in rejecting linear temporality in his literary style, Burroughs was not simply *describing* or *tracing* a reality that was present in front of him. Rather he was actively subverting the manner in which social reality was 'transcendentalized' and given meaning.

⁴⁵ While some of these authors were not directly dealing with globality, their significance as pioneers of performative theory which enacts social tensions justifies their mention here. From their methods of approach, lessons can be drawn that may apply more directly to discussions of 'the global'.

Meanwhile, his style, his language, and his vulgarity were being used as a conscious “antidote” to a “sickness” he saw as present in the interactions around him. (Ibid, p205). Burroughs, along with his contemporaries, enacted and performed the unresolved, immediate tensions in American society in a highly provocative way. The controversy surrounding the alleged vulgarity of the work of Beat era poets (and particularly the trial of Allen Ginsberg) staged many of the unspoken taboos and self-censorships that characterized the unexamined limitations to free speech in that era.

While in Burroughs' case the project remained at the level of his immediate social environs, the approach certainly has the subversive potential to be applied on a global scale. One author has recently explored the notion that Burroughs’ explorations of ineffable longing, isolation and fear strike at the same notions as Levinas’ theories of ethics and alterity (Nealon, 1998, pp53-72). Is it possible that Burroughs and Levinas were mining the same vein of unresolved immanent thought, latent in inter-ethical relation? Where Levinas’ social theory communicated the concepts well to a philosophical audience, Burroughs uniquely brought arguable similar conceptions of the social construction of reality to a more public hearing.

Thomas Pynchon

Speaking of surprising philosopher-to-author resonances, it should be noted as well that Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1974) also provides several excellent examples of how the Deleuzian notion of ‘aparallel evolution’ (1980, p11) may be put to good use in expressing rhizomatic global resonance of assemblages. Throughout the work, different characters come into relations of co-evolution with other social assemblages despite being dispersed in space and time. Indeed, one of the book's major recurring themes is an ambiguous metaphorical (and perhaps physical) link between the development of V-2 rocket technology by the German army, and the ‘self-discovery’ of one of the protagonists. The degree to which the link is purely symbolic is left for the reader to decide, along with the degree to which a non-causal coevolution of distant social

assemblages across a rhizomatic network is any less plausible than a strict teleological model for describing human 'becoming'.

By carefully fostering this ambiguity in his work, Pynchon constructs consciousness of a certain way of perceiving the global and local transmission of information between social assemblages. The effect is one of staging unresolved, nagging questions regarding our relationships to causality, space, history, and each other.

In another major work, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1990), Pynchon nurtures a similar ambiguity in describing the protagonist's evolving suspicions of a multi-layered global anarchist conspiracy. Upon completing the novel, the reader is left unsure as to whether the conspiracy was actually present at all, or whether it was simply the product of the protagonist's perceptions of inscrutably complex inter-subjective relations in an unfamiliar territory. This seems to speak on a 'meta' level about the tendency in both protagonist and reader to want to ascribe a transcendental, overarching theoretical unity to ethical complexity in order to bestow comprehensible meaning. In the case of the novel it is fascinating that the idea of a vast international conspiracy is far less unsettling than the notion that such a structure of meaning should be *entirely absent*. Again in this case, the author, by means of literary style, conveys a consciousness of the processes through which global social reality is comprehended and unwittingly constructed in a particular way. Furthermore, he stages the tension (familiar from our discussion in chapter 3) between the construction of symbolic, transcendental 'Universal', and the finite limits of each Particular perception of that symbolic whole.

Sample-Based Music

Alongside the often cited example of the poets, Plato also saw fit to banish certain types of musicians from his ideal Republic. In his mind, perhaps, there was a strong link between the capacity for creation of alternate social structures by means of poetry and music. This fact alone is enough to consider the potential transformative role of music, such as the album *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, by David Byrne and Brian Eno (1981). In a similar rhizomatic fashion to some of the authors looked at so far, the artists

pioneered the technique of sampling sounds from various diverse sources including American radio evangelists and political commentators, Algerian farmers chanting the Qur'an, a priest performing an exorcism and Lebanese mountain singers.

By arranging these sounds and adding heavily textured instrumentation the musicians succeeded in sonically expressing an image of the unexpected harmonies and frequent tensions resulting from exponentially increasing contact between uprooted, decontextualized social assemblages, particularly in urban North American settings. This work is, in its own way, subversive of the view of globalization as a causally determined process.

The sampling techniques used by Eno and Byrne have since become a major tool of electronic musicians, the political and post-colonial impact of which has been studied in depth by cultural theorists and artists like Jace Clayton (who himself produces music under the name DJ/Rupture) and Steve Goodman (Who also produces music as Kode9 and owns the record label Hyperdub). Artists like Goodman and Clayton illustrate the immanent, visceral tensions which result from the unspoken exclusions and unresolved conflicts in both their art⁴⁶ and their theory⁴⁷.

Jean-Michel Basquiat

While some artists (and theorists) choose to address the elements of society they wish to change in very descriptive, representational ways;

“Basquiat chose a different strategy. He sensed that hidden truths cannot be described in any of the languages commonly employed for the promotion of lies; he saw every official language as a code for conveying false messages. His strategy as a painter was to discredit and split open such codes and to let in some vibrant, invisible, clandestine truths – like a saboteur. His ploy as a painter was to spell out the world in a language that is deliberately broken – ontologically broken.” (Berger, 2011, p47)

⁴⁶ ie, the implicit postcolonial critique of Goodman's *Memories of the Future* (2006) and Clayton's *Uproot* (2008)

⁴⁷ Goodman has written a book on various repressive or warlike political uses of sound and noise (Goodman, 2010). Clayton maintains a weekly radio show and blog wherein he shares and discusses music from all over the world (Clayton, 2011).

Basquiat's strategy was thus a near-perfect example of the kind of approach that this section advocates. Rather than simply representing or describing the aspects of reality he saw as false and dishonest, Basquiat knew that by staging the play between the various incompatible elements of social reality in his 'ontologically broken' language, the stable order would gradually shake itself apart.

Basquiat's paintings are filled with conflicting, displaced signifiers which confront each other, sometimes awkwardly, and resist placement in an overarching, transcendental narrative. Issues of race and class inequality are viscerally felt, without ever being simply represented. The viewer is thus placed in a subjective position to experience the unstable, unresolved order that knits these chaotic elements together as well as the constant sense of immanent motion that animates their co-presence.

We could continue to explore various ways that artists and performative social theorists have engaged with immanent thought and ontological production, however, the central point should be clear enough by now. One of the strongest and most transformative means of ontological engagement with social reality is through active, creative engagement with inherent contradiction and tension. Now, if only our progressive social theorists could be as perceptive, and as dangerous to established order as our profane, reclusive, addicted, strung-out and scorned artists!

Let us now end by briefly summarizing this project, and assessing some of what this research has provided.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

At the risk of being anti-climactic, I must here say that there is not a single conclusion to be drawn from this exploration of the ontological and ideological construction of globality. It might be argued that this project has departed in a lot of directions, without drawing any particular line of flight to its resolution. Indeed, that was my aim. Rather

than proceed by enumerating all of the constituent elements of the ontological production of globality, I have here given a somewhat impressionistic image.

I wanted to show the value of pursuing an ontological approach with respect to globality. Since I ended up with more questions than when I began, I believe this validates my approach. Even if some of my attempts at theoretical engagement with primary sources were imperfect, it is hoped that the reader is convinced that in order to properly understand the operation of ideology in the construction of globality, discussion must take place at the level of ontology.

In the introduction I cited two questions;

How does ideology operate at the level of conceptualizing the global? and how might this affect the prospects for transformative politics?

This project, through its foregrounding of ontology, developed a means for understanding the ideological construction of the global, as well as several suggestions for improving the theoretical prospects of the transformative ‘global left’. While there is still much room for further research into this field, I am satisfied at having addressed the questions which motivated the project.

Let us now briefly summarize the work done in each chapter in order to see some of the major lessons learned.

Chapter 1 laid the conceptual foundation and discussed how current approaches to globality are often ideological. It conducted a critique of the concept of ‘the global’ as presently constructed, both as an object of knowledge, and an object of desired intervention by transformative politics. In particular the chapter focussed upon a dominant interpretation of the contemporary notion of ‘the global’; that it is a concept constructed from a heterogeneous plurality of competing perspectives. Building out of

the conceptual critique of the left's approaches to globality, this section then articulated in greater detail the need for an ontological turn in theory.

Chapter 2 looked closely at precisely what is meant by the term ontology. In particular, this chapter drew heavily from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. It argued that ontology is a practice that is inherently *situated* in material reality, and that as a result it should also be seen as inherently political. We also explored a common way the concept is misused and various non-ontological methods of analysis often employed by social science, as well as why these are inadequate for the tasks of transformative politics.

Chapter 3 proposed a theoretical model for understanding the present ontological construction of 'the global'. In particular we sought to understand how ideology infiltrates the process, and makes genuine transformative politics difficult to achieve. It also sought to highlight the proper avenues of attack for thoughtful, emancipatory politics

This final chapter has attempted to build upon the critiques of the previous chapters and suggest several means for harnessing the transformative potential inherent in the encounter with the central exclusion that characterizes present ontological production.

In sum, As we create world-formations — we always leave a space untouched. It is the central exclusion that causes movement outward. This unrepressed, unclosed, uncaptured space is the space of creative, life-affirming vitality —of pushing infinitely towards boundaries. This is the source of an effective transformative engagement with the world.

Contemporary emancipatory politics should thus be focused upon maintaining the conditions for emergence and immanence. A major task to this end is the encouragement of 'meditative' (Swazo, 2002, p34), ontological approaches to global social reality in place of the more technical ontic rationality that prevails in many social-scientific treatments of globality.

The embrace of radical immanence and ontological awareness as necessary tools for progressive theory requires changes to the way social theory is ‘practiced’. As we have argued above, a detached accounting approach to social reality is inherently conservative. Social theory should instead be promoting conceptual play in order to stage and maintain the furnace of indeterminacy that fuels radical creativity.

This brings us to the assertion that that the best way for the left to avoid the problems of ideological ontological production discussed in chapter 3 is to engage in performative theory which actively *creates* globality in novel ways. The proposed practice of *enacting liberation*, rather than *describing oppression* seeks to highlight one way in which transformative, emancipatory politics might better realize ‘another world’.

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