The Insistence of the Material: Theorizing Materiality and Biopolitics in the Era of Globalization

Globalization Working Papers 12/2

August 2012

WORKING PAPER SERIES

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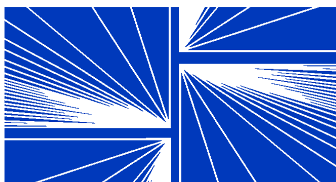

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> We are summoning a new materialism in response to a sense that the radicalism of the dominant discourses which have flourished under the cultural turn is now more or less exhausted. We share the feeling current among many researchers that the dominant constructivist orientation to social analysis is inadequate for the contemporary context of biopolitics and global political economy.
>
> ~ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010)

Thinking Materiality: A Necessary Contradiction

This essay takes materiality as its object.[1] In doing so, it is, by necessity, inadequate to this object. I begin from the premise that various forms of materiality in contemporary social existence—the materiality of the body, the object world of late-capitalist life, the material elements of political-economic production, the various forms of materiality we group under the signifier "nature"—cannot be adequately or completely accounted for by language. I take this contradiction as my fundamental preoccupation. My argument attempts to attend to what Diana Coole and Samantha Frost describe as the "restlessness and intransigence of materiality" and what Richard Terdiman posits as "the brute and often brutal difficulty of materiality," even as it recognizes the inability of language, representation, or theory to fully do so (Coole and Frost 2010, 1; Terdiman 2005, 14).

However, I do not take the inability of language to fully account to its object as a reason to turn away from the attempt at such an account. Instead, in an era in which economic and cultural production have become increasingly fascinated with the virtual, the immaterial, and the textual, I think it becomes crucial to theorize the material. It also is crucial to theorize the material in an age in which political and economic organization have taken on a decidedly biopolitical and thanatopolitical character.

To broadly summarize, for the moment, what are actually very distinct deployments of these

[1] I want to thank Robert O'Brien, Nancy Johnson, Rachel Zhou, Susie O'Brien, Tony Porter, Peter Walmsley, the two anonymous peer reviewers, and the rest of the Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition for their feedback on various drafts of this paper. The paper began as a presentation at the IGHC during my stay there in the fall of 2011. I also presented a version of the paper at Illinois State in the spring of 2012. Because of the wealth of generous feedback I re-ceived from both audiences, this is a much stronger paper than it would otherwise be. I also want to thank Nancy Johnson for doing a wonderful copy editing job on the final document. All remaining mistakes are my own. Finally, I want to thank the Institute for providing such a rich intellectual environment within which to pursue my research.

concepts by a range of theorists, biopolitics and its deathly double, thanatopolitics, describe the direct management of life and death by political and economic power.[2] My characterization of this era as simultaneously one preoccupied with immateriality and an one defined by biopolitics is not coincidental. Both the privileging of the so-called immaterial or virtual and the idea of complete biopolitical control imagine a material world that is a passive site of inscription and unproblematic manipulation. Undergirding both notions is a social logic that imagines signification to be coterminous with existence—that the way in which we represent or narrate the world is adequate to the world that is. My theorization of materiality, thus, tries to posit it as a limit and an outside to biopolitics, even as it also charts the way in which material life is shaped in ever more intimate ways by biopolitics, thanatopolitics, and biopolitical production. Materiality, in this formulation, can be likened to biopolitics' and virtuality's unconscious flipside, one that resists integration with the world of symbolic representation. For reasons bound up with the very dynamic I am describing, then, it is crucial to both theorize the material and keep in mind the way in which such theorizations are always inadequate to their objects. My project is thus organized around two imperatives: (i) theorize and attend to the material in the era of biopolitics and (ii) recognize language's limits in doing so.

As the epigraph from Coole and Frost indicates, I am not alone in wishing to tarry with the material. There has been widespread frustration at the limits of the cultural/linguistic turns in much recent theoretical writing. As Stacy Alaimo puts it: "What has been notably excluded by the 'primacy of the cultural' and the turn toward the linguistic and the discursive is the 'stuff' of matter" (2008, 242). In contrast, to the linguistic and cultural turns, Alaimo and Susan Hekman propose what they term the "material turn" in their ground-breaking collection*, Material Feminisms* (2008, 6). I too want to theorize the stuff of matter and thus ally myself with what Alaimo and Hekman call the material turn and what Frost and Coole (2010) term the "new materialisms." In doing so, however, I also want to indicate that it is important to retain certain concepts from the cultural and linguistic turns, specifically subjectivity, language, and culture, even as we transform these concepts in order to make them more materialist. It seems important that we retain aspects of the cultural and linguistic turns precisely to mark the differences and antagonisms between the cultural and the material even as we also chart their interlardings and interweavings. One of the dangers of a wholesale rejection of the cultural turn is that we merely invert its logic, rewriting the same set of theoretical moves that characterized the cultural turn onto the material. If we really want to be attentive to the challenge that the heterogeneity of materiality presents to cultural and critical theory, we need to think about how various forms of materiality differ from, intermix with, and place limits on the cultural and linguistic, rather than just merely supersede or replace them.

I also want to echo Sara Ahmed (2010) and Sonia Kruks (2010) in suggesting that the new theoretical work of the material turn needs to be brought into dialogue with older forms of materialist

[2] The texts I have in mind in thinking about biopolitics, biopolitical production, and thanatopolitics are: Foucault (1978; 2003; 2010), Agamben (1997), Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004; 2009), Mbembe (2003), Esposito (2008), and Clarke, Mamo, Fosket et al. (2010).

scholarship. Thus, while I will draw upon much of the new materialist work in areas as diverse as biopolitics, feminist theory, critical science studies, thing studies, object studies, and political-ecology, I will put it in dialogue with the rich materialist traditions associated with Marxism and psychoanalytic theory in order to theorize the relationship of materiality to subjectivity and subjective embodiment on the one hand and political-economy and globalization on the other.

In what follows, then, I will first provide a brief account of the value and limits of the cultural turn. I will then map out some of the trajectories of the recent material turn, putting it in dialogue with older materialist approaches and suggesting the ways in which we can draw on both older and newer approaches to the question of materiality in order to theorize the bodies, objects, biopolitics, political ecology, and political economy in our globalizing present.

The Insistence of a Question

My engagement with materiality has its genesis in a sometimes frustrated, sometimes excited, and sometimes quizzical response to many of the dominant trends of literary and cultural studies in the last thirty years, to the way in which these trends shaped the dominant readings of contemporary literature as organized around a practice of metafiction, and to the boosterish rhetoric around contemporary technology, new media, the internet, and all things virtual. In the Preface to *Bodies that Matter* (1993, ix), Judith Butler recounts hearing an oft-repeated question directed to her as she presented sections from her ground-breaking queer theory text, *Gender Trouble*: "What about the materiality of the body, Judy?" While reading many of the foundational texts of what is alternately termed the cultural or linguistic turn, the question that kept repeating in my head was a version of the question she kept hearing: "what about materiality, Chris?"

Similarly, when reading some of the inflated claims made for cyberspace and the forms of what Hardt and Negri provocatively term "immaterial production" (2004, 187), I found the same question repeating in my head. The materiality of images on the computer screen or alternately what Pierre Lévy (1998) describes as the materiality of the virtual in our present moment are not the kind of materiality I have in mind when asking this question. Instead, what I have in mind are forms of materiality that are simultaneously more substantive and more vulnerable: the vulnerable, changing, yet recalcitrant materiality of my body and other bodies subjected to violence, various forms of social and medical discipline, political-economic exploitation, and the processes of aging and death; the obdurate yet dynamic materiality of our late-capitalist built environments; the complex and at-risk materialities of the nonhuman world of plants and animals; and the material substances and waste products that are intimately tied to the forms of political-economic production we associate with the capitalist world-system.

As with so much contemporary work in the humanities and the social sciences—including my own—the limitations of the cultural and linguistic turns are everywhere still visible. They are also visible in much of the work that has emerged in the last ten to fifteen years to challenge these very

limitations—work that can be described as part of the "material turn." In sum, for both better and worse, the central axioms of the linguistic and cultural turns have become part of the scholarly preconscious of literary and cultural studies. In Freud's first topography of the psyche (1955, 349-50), the preconscious consists of those elements that, while technically unconscious, are easily retrievable to the conscious mind. In this sense they form the archive from which consciousness draws much of its material in contrast to the psychoanalytic unconscious proper, which is the locus of those materials that are repressed or disavowed and thus not easily retrievable for consciousness. The positions associated with the cultural and linguistic turns thus can be likened to such a preconscious. Even when we attempt to speak otherwise, these preconscious assumptions emerge in our metaphors, models, and theoretical formulations. How did our scholarly preconscious become so in thrall to language and culture? It is to a quick account of that history that I will next turn.

Beyond the Cultural and Linguistic Turns

Culture and language: these are the totemic words around which literary and cultural studies have circled for much of the last thirty years. Even as the critique of the linguistic and cultural turns has become more forceful in recent years, it is still not uncommon in contemporary scholarship and pedagogy to find each of these terms elevated to the position of a placeholder for social life itself.[3] Indeed, in the moment of their greatest ascendency, the 1980s and 1990s, it was common to hear each of these concepts evoked in ways that refused the ability to posit their limits or theorize that which resided outside of or in tension with them. Instead, each term became part of a self-contained "language-game" (to use the Wittgenstein-derived rhetoric of the time) that allowed, for all the attention to otherness, no space for the radically heterodox to be understood, or even posited.

This is far from what was intended by these epistemological "turns" and by the forms of social constructivism associated with them. Indeed, each of these turns emerged around the same time for reasons both political and epistemological. They emerged as a way of challenging ideological habits of thought associated with earlier moments of cultural or political *doxa*.

The power of the constructivist interventions is nowhere more palpable than in the theoretical impetus they have provided in the last thirty years for the theoretical critiques of racism, sexism, homophobia, and class habitus.[4] Many of these interventions have turned around the critique of the ideological production of cultural difference as natural difference and the ways in which a reified or essentialized conception of nature was used to justify various forms of social inequality. This critique of various processes of "naturalization" remains an invaluable and very necessary contribution made by social construction to theoretical critique. And indeed, social construction continues to remind us,

[3] For some of the more compelling critiques of the linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical turns see: Hekman (2008), Hacking (1999), Latour (2004a), and Hennessy (2000).

[4] To name just a few examples, think how impoverished contemporary theories of gender and sexuality would be without the work of Judith Butler (1990), or contemporary work on race would be without the work of Omi and Winant (1994), or social class without the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1987).

as do theorists of discursive productivity such as Foucault and Butler, that we should posit that which is outside of culture and language with the utmost care, lest we reproduce the forms of essentialism that the critique of the process of naturalization was designed to undo.

The Material Turn

One of the ways to know that a concept has become part of a problematic orthodoxy is when it can no longer theorize its limits. This is precisely what has happened to the terms, culture and language as they are typically invoked and metaphorized in literary and cultural studies. However, more recently, interdisciplinary work in the humanities, the social sciences, and critical science studies has pushed against this orthodoxy, attending to that which cannot be understood as fully cultural or discursively-constituted.

The recent material turn in scholarship holds a great deal of promise. As a corrective to the cultural and linguistic turns that preceded it, the recent turn to theorizing and tarrying with various forms of materiality has been salutary, working to demonstrate the limits of both textual- and social-constructivism as dominant paradigms for work in the humanities. This materialist turn has taken many forms, from the object worlds traced by Bill Brown (2004) and Ian Bogost (2012), through the engagement with the agency of things in the ecotheoretical work of Bruno Latour (2004b) and Jane Bennett (2010), the emphasis on biological life in much recent work in biopolitics, feminist theory, and animal studies, to the emphasis on geopolitics and political economy in globalization theory and Marxist accounts of neoliberalism.

The Material and Biological Body

It is in the context of the cultural and linguistic turns that preceded it that the materialist turn has made its important interventions. Thus social-constructivist accounts of the body have been complicated by the emphasis on the biological and material body in the writings of Rosi Braidotti (2002), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), and Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) and in the work collected in *Material Feminisms* (Alaimo and Hekman 2008). Elizabeth Grosz initiates this line of inquiry, with her watershed text, *Volatile Bodies*, with its emphasis on producing a theory that can account for "some sort of articulation, or even disarticulation, between the biological and the psychological" (1994, 23). Working in a similar vein as Grosz, Braidotti (2002) has produced a vitalist theory of feminist embodiment, one that draws on the work of Luce Irigaray (1993) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), in order to emphasize the intertwining of the biological and the subjective as they are bound up in a process of becoming. Perhaps most compellingly for the work I am undertaking, Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) presents an account of intersex that demonstrates the way in which the material and biological body of the intersex individual disrupts and challenges the sexed meanings projected and often violently inscribed on this body by the medical establishment. The essays collected in *Material Feminisms* work in different ways to theorize the materiality of the body and of biological processes, often in relationship to other forms of materiality, including the material dimensions of

ecosystems.

All of these theorists push our understanding of embodiment beyond the parameters of either cultural or discursive construction. Indeed, each of them asks us to reckon with the materiality of a body that resists as well as conforms to cultural scripts. Moreover, what is particularly notable about the work of Fausto-Sterling and other theorists of intersex and trans-sex such as Alice Dreger (2000) and C. Jacob Hale (1998; 2008) is that they produce an account of the materiality of the biological body that does not reproduce the binary of sex. Thus, their work maintains the necessary critique of sexual binarism that is central to Butler's work, while also insisting on the materiality of the body as that which can and often does resist or exceed discursive construction. My own, psychoanalytic account of the body is deeply indebted to the materialist line of inquiry opened up by Grosz, Braidotti, Fausto-Sterling and the essayists in *Material Feminisms*.

Many of these theorists emphasize the way in which the opposition between language and the material body can be deconstructed or seen as part of a material continuum. Such an emphasis is important, demonstrating the ways in which the linguistic and the material, subjects and objects interpenetrate. What Grosz describes, drawing on Lacan's category of the imaginary and reworking Freud's notion of the body ego, as an "imaginary anatomy," represents one particularly fruitful account of such an intermixing. As she articulates it, this imaginary anatomy is an also necessary locus where the biological and the subjective intersect (1994, 37). It is in the imaginary where the biological body becomes encoded with subjective meanings, even as it is crucial to recognize the often radical discontinuity between the body ego as a map of the body and the material body itself. The body ego's image of the body is shaped and refigured by desire and by the erotogenic mapping of the body—thus certain organs and surfaces are emphasized, while others are deemphasized, if not altogether occluded.

This disjunction between the imaginary and the material body suggests the importance of not just theorizing their overlap or interpenetration but also theorizing the ways in which signification and the more obdurate materialities of the body are importantly distinct and sometimes form in opposition to each other. While much of the materialist work on embodiment emphasizes the way in which the opposition between language and the material body can be undone, I want to lay stress in the other direction: that in order for us to fully attend to the materiality of our bodies, we need to insist on the ways in which the materiality of language and the materiality of the body not only interpenetrate and merge (particularly in the construction of our imaginary bodies), but are also importantly distinct and sometimes form in opposition to each other.

In order to theorize the material body that is in tension with, even as it is also bound up with, the imaginary body, I deploy a version of Lacan's (1988, 97-98; 1992, 43-70; 1993, 190-1) concept of the real. In contradistinction to the imaginary and symbolic, the real is one of the most elusive and controversial concepts in Lacan as well as one of the categories that underwent the most revision during the course of his teaching. It is elusive in part because that it is nature. It is easier to define it negatively, in terms of what it is not rather than in terms of what it is: the real is everything that

remains outside of the symbolic and the imaginary, even as it haunts and disrupts the logics of both. Thus the real can be used to talk about trauma, death, the fetishistic status of what Lacan calls the *objet petit a* (or little bit of the other), and about uncoded materiality itself. While Slavoj Žižek, in his more recent writings, has emphasized the real's nonmaterial nature, as a gap, hole, or excess around which the symbolic is organized (2006, 26), I want to emphasize a materialist understanding of the term.

This latter understanding of the real comes out of developmentalist accounts of Lacan. Thus the child begins, as a "fragmented body," in the locus of the real, a realm of uncoded materiality in which the line between inside and outside, self and other is not yet formed (Lacan 2006, 78). Bruce Fink helpfully entitles this first version of the real as uncoded materiality Real1 or R1, and contrasts it with the functioning of the real with the advent of the symbolic (what he terms Real2 or R2) (1995, 26 -8), in which its status becomes closer to what Žižek (2006, 26) describes as the gap or what Lacan describes as the *objet a*, or the little piece of the real—of the body of the other or an object—that functions as a fetish. Yet there is always a relationship between R2 and R1—the various avatars of R2, such as the *objet a*, but also trauma, and the gap in the symbolic, point to those forms of materiality that have not been fully coded by the symbolic and thus recall the undifferentiated state that preceded symbolization.

I use this notion of the real as uncoded materiality in order to talk about the aspects of the body that exceed or refuse our symbolic and imaginary constructions of it. In theorizing this real body (which should be understood as distinct from any naïve empirical understanding of the "reality" of the body—the real is always a relational term), it enables me to articulate the resistance that the body has, for example to gendered, sexual, and cultural scripts as well as to contemporary scientific, philosophical, and theoretical accounts and mappings of the body. My use of this concept of the real body, then allows me to attend to what Anne Fausto-Sterling has theorized as the resistance of bodies—particularly intersex bodies—to the sexual scripts placed on them by culture, by the medical establishment, and even sometimes by the subject herself (2000, 60-3). In emphasizing this real body, I am not trying to maintain a Cartesian mind/body split. Our thinking selves and our speaking selves are always embodied and this embodiment shapes the knowledge and speech we produce. Yet, I think it is dangerous (and still a legacy of the linguistic turn) to imagine that all forms of materiality are continuous with language and can be understood in terms of linguistic models.

Objects, Things, and Political-Ecology

Another strain of recent materialist work can be grouped under the banner of object studies or thing studies. This work encompasses both the material culture studies championed by Bill Brown in his accounts of the centrality of material objects in American culture (2004), the queer phenomenological work of Sara Ahmed (2006), the alien phenomenology of Ian Bogost (2012), and the eco-theoretical work of Bruno Latour (2004b; 2007, 63-86) and Jane Bennett (2010) on the agency enacted by matter and material objects. Each of these theorists has disrupted the cultural turn's central preoccupation

with subjectivity by pointing out the material objects and entities that are obscured by this focus. If the cultural and linguistic turns decentered the subject, it was still the subject who was the focus of this decentering. Ahmed, Bogost, Brown, Bennett and Latour have each, in different ways, pushed us to attend to the objects and forms of matter that lie outside of this exclusive focus on subjectivity. These material things are central to culture yet irreducible to it. Both Latour and Bennett, moreover, have demonstrated the ways in which objects and materiality are not merely recalcitrant, but exert a force—what Bennett terms "agency" and what Latour calls "speech"—in relationship to culture and its constructions (Bennett 2010, 1 & 21; Latour 2004b, 67). As Latour and Bennett's use of terminology such as voice and agency to describe this force suggests, their construction of the material world is still filtered, to a greater extent than I think they realize, through the paradigms of the cultural and linguistic turns.

Yet their visions are powerful ones and help us to imagine a social and ecological world outside of the cultural and linguistic conceived either as absolute limits or the total sum of what is. I draw on their insights in order to theorize the material and the work it does as an actant (to use the term that Latour and Bogost derive from literary theory and which I like, in spite of its linguistic resonances, because of its emphasis on action). I will also employ Latour and Bennett's powerful conception of "political-ecology" as a way of talking about the political and economic stakes between the human and the nonhuman and as a way of conceptualizing what Latour describes as "the collective" (which he defines as a "procedure for collecting associations of humans and nonhumans") (Latour 2004b, 238 & 246; Bennett 2010, 94). In contrast to Latour, however, I will use political ecology alongside of the more established term, political economy, because I think it is essential to maintain the economic critique advanced by Marxist and neomarxist theories and because this critique much too quickly falls out of the work of both Bennett and Latour.

If Bennett willfully errors on the side of anthropomorphism in her argument, I want to error towards the opposite, towards the radically nonhuman dimensions of the material, including, at points, the materialities and material prostheses of our own bodies. I am thus more interested in theorizing the resistance and recalcitrance of the object, as well as to its heterogeneity to (as well as intersections with) human motivation and action. In emphasizing the recalcitrance and heterogeneity of objects, I draw on Bogost's reworking of Graham Harmon's and Levi Bryant's object-oriented ontology to "embrace the multifarious complexity of being among all things" as it "exceeds our own grasp of the being of the world" (Bogost 2012, 5, 30). Yet, since I am still interested in theorizing the relationship between subject and object, even as I want to place more emphasis on the object side of the pole, I also draw on Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology, which emphasizes the way in which subjects are "oriented" to specific objects (2006, 58). One alternative or "queer" orientation would be to recognize and respect, rather than try to master, the heterogeneity of the object or objects (Ibid., 161). Such an orientation would begin to give the material its due, to attend to what Theodor Adorno describes as the "object's preponderance" (1973, 183).

While writing in an earlier moment of materialist critique, Adorno presents an account of the

negative relationship between subject and object that can be quite valuable for the work undertaken by the (current) material turn. For Adorno, the pressing question of the moment in which he was writing, a moment defined by what he described as the administered society and which can also be understood as a Keynesian version of biopolitics, is that of the status of the object. For Adorno, as he and Max Horkheimer articulate it in the co-authored *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the heterogeneity of the object was threatened by instrumental rationality and the logics of identity and equivalence that it underwrites. The qualitative dimensions of objects were effaced in a political economic and scientific logic in which "equivalence itself has become a fetish" (1999, 17). Adorno also saw this same logic at work in language, especially as it was being reshaped by the dictates of instrumental rationality. For him, it was "the concept" itself, as it was used by the subject to appropriate the object, that inevitably did a form of epistemological violence to this self-same object: "The prevailing trend in epistemological reflection was to reduce objectivity more and more to the subject. This very tendency needs to be reversed" (1973, 176). His positing of what he termed negative dialectics becomes his way of reversing this tendency. Negative dialectics insist on the object's preponderance by refusing to posit its full negation via the subject in the movement of the dialectic. This is a radicalization of the Hegelian or Marxian dialectic, in the sense that it theorizes an aspect of the object that is not transformed or sublated in the movement of the dialectic, but remains resistant to the dialectic's movement.

Such a negative dialectics, then, allows us to attend to subject's orientations (in Ahmad's terms) toward the object and the way in which objects are transformed via their encounter with subjects, while still emphasizing the irreducibility and heterogeneity of objects (their alien qualities in Bogost's terms) to human fantasies of mastery. Such a negative dialectics also suggests the theoretical limitations of many accounts of biopolitics in not theorizing the resistance and intransigence of objects, and of subjects for that matter, to the direct political and economic management of life. It is the engagement with biopolitics as part of the recent material turn that I will address next.

Biopolitics and Thanatopolitics

The recent theoretical engagement with biopower and biopolitics, as well as its ghastly inversion, thanatopolitics, holds much promise for the material turn. Both biopolitics and thanatopolitics present versions of politics in which biological life itself and its cessation in death are directly invested and managed by political and economic forms of power. Thus it is an understanding of power that attends directly to the shaping and management of biological life. As such, its relevance to the material turn should be obvious. It also, as Adele Clarke et al., Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri differently articulate it, a growing form of power in the neoliberal and globalizing present. Yet as powerful as biopolitics and thanatopolitics are as concepts, I think they need to be theorized more fully in relationship to both materiality and political economy. Before doing so, however, I will provide a brief overview of the different theories of biopolitics and how they theorize the relationship between power and biological life.

As Michel Foucault posits in *The History of Sexuality Volume One* (1978, 135-59) and in three different volumes of his recently published lectures at the Collège de France, biopolitics is a form of power that takes life itself as its focus, particularly as it is regulated and ordered by the workings of governmentality in terms of technologies of population, statistics, public health, and eugenics. While Foucault's accounts of biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality V.1* and *"Society Must Be Defended"* (2003) are his most commonly cited and have exerted the most influence on scholars such as Agamben, Mbembe, and Esposito, his account in *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010) presents a crucial development of his thesis, one that ties it directly to economics and specifically to the growth of neoliberalism in the second half of the twentieth century (and which continues apace into the twenty-first century).[5]

While Foucault never fully theorizes the connection, he suggests that the relationship between biopolitics and neoliberalism can be adduced in connection to the neoliberal concept of "human capital" as the means by which human life and biology are regulated under neoliberalism (2010, 226-9). Human capital assumes that all aspects of human existence can be quantified and thus regulated by the market. Thus, all aspects of what formerly were understood to be civil society and the public trust (such as healthcare, education, childcare, social wellbeing, etc.) under Keynesianism should be privatized in order to maximize the production of human capital. Moreover, the maximization of human capital is the responsibility of individuals; it should be a competitive system, so that there is an impetus to maximize one's share of capital.

The effects of this form of privatization are manifold and have a direct impact on embodiment and the construction of materiality. The body is shaped and reshaped via the demands of human capital, from the violence done to the working body in an economy that no longer protects workers to the uneven forms of what Adele Clarke et al. have termed biomedicalization (2010, 1-87). Under the regime of biomedicalization, medicine is defined as a process of the maximization and normitivization of health, while it is further privatized and individuals are increasingly interpellated by a moral discourse of wellness (in which the maintenance of our health becomes entirely our own responsibility). What is crucial to grasp, though, for other accounts of the biopolitical is that what were once defined as the rights of citizens and thus were tied to notions of national and democratic sovereignty are now defined products of the market or of governmentality. Circumventing earlier, if radically imperfect, forms of mediation via notions of citizenship and sovereignty, biopolitics directly shapes and invests life itself.

Drawing on Giorgio Agamben (1998) and Foucault's accounts (2003), Achille Mbembe has theorized the application of biopolitics to the context of colonialism and neocolonialism, arguing compellingly that colonialism exerts direct control over human life, "dictating who may live and who must die" (2003, 11). Thus, Mbembe crucially adds the element of negativity to what Foucault (1978) theorizes in terms of positive power. Roberto Esposito develops this notion of the politics of death

[5] My understanding of neoliberalism comes primarily from David Harvey (2005), Henry Giroux (2008), and Foucault (2010).

even further with his conception of thanatopolitics. Esposito turns to the context of the Holocaust to theorize the way in which biopolitics turns into its deathly opposite, thanatopolitics. He argues that this transformation from a positive (if still violent) form of governmentality into its negative double takes place around the logic of immunity. For him, biopolitics is always split or double—privileging one community, or nation, or group as immune while marking another segment of the population as outside the *cordon sanitaire*. Esposito argues that in the name of immunity biopolitics turns around into thanatopolitics, justifying violence against those who are outside the sphere of protection. Thus in the name of maximizing the health and vitality of all of those who are immunized in the body politic, biopolitics becomes a ceaseless campaign of death (since health itself can never be guaranteed) (Esposito 2008, 44-77).

Esposito's and Mbembe's different accounts of thanatopolitics (or necropolitics in Mbembe's terms) add a crucial dimension of negativity to theorizing the effects of contemporary biopolitics. They also push beyond the limits of social constructivism by theorizing death, something that was never really fully possible within the sphere of the cultural and linguistic turns (one could theorize the representations of death or discourses around death, but not the material finality of death itself for organic beings). It is no accident that death, for Lacan (1977, 79-90), is one of the dimensions of the real; it is a phenomenon that as a material process refuses full representation in the space of the symbolic.

While neither Esposito nor Mbembe really theorize this, I want to suggest that thanatopolitics can be theorized in political-economic terms as well: the way in which maximizing profit or human capital on one scene or in one locus around the globe often produces death (in the form of starvation, reduced life expectancy, economic neglect) on another. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri are the theorists who articulate most fully an economic understanding of biopolitics. They articulate what they term "biopolitical production" as the core component of economic production in the neoliberal present (2000, 30). Hardt and Negri's elaboration of the political economic to the category of biopolitics is both necessary and extremely valuable. Indeed, given the centrality of economic power in our globalizing present, the exclusive emphasis on governmentality in most accounts of biopolitics feels, at best, inadequate. For this reason, Hardt and Negri's economic reconceptualization of the term is both timely and necessary for thinking about life in a world in which, as Adele Clarke et al. demonstrate , the economic and the bodily are becoming ever more complexly and intimately intertwined (2010, 1-44).

Yet even as Hardt and Negri link biopolitics to economics with their conception of biopolitical production they do so in the name of what they term "immaterial production" or the forms of financial, service, and affective labour that represent the leading sectors of the global economy (2004, 114-115). While they are right to emphasize the importance of these sites of production, their conceptualization of such form of production as "immaterial" becomes easily complicit with the fantasies of dematerialization that form one of the central ideologies of our digitalizing present. Hardt and Negri are careful to argue that immaterial production is intimately tied to material production. Yet

they stake their whole revolutionary vision on the forms of autonomous productivity that are central to the relatively high-end and high-pay work associated with immaterial production. Thus the material is finally backgrounded by their account, not just the recalcitrant materiality of bodies, which they theorize like Foucault, Agamben, Mbembe, and Esposito, as passive sites upon which biopolitical and thanatopolitical forms of power inscribe themselves, but also many of the recalcitrantly material processes of late capitalist production itself.

In order for biopolitics, thanatopolitics, and biopolitical production to realize their full critical potential as analytic categories, then, I want to suggest that they need to be rethought in relationship to the insistent and resistant materiality of bodies and of large sectors of the production process itself. This is not to situate the body or materiality as fully outside the sphere of culture. Indeed, as much biopolitical thought has demonstrated, the history of the last half century can be productively thought of in terms of the increasing ability of culture to shape and discipline the body and for it to socialize and commodify ever more fully different aspects of everyday life. Rather, it is to refuse to make the material and the cultural coincident. For even as the cultural and the discursive shape our bodies in ever more intimate and subtle ways, the materiality of our bodies resists and interacts with such dynamics in ways neither fully controllable nor predictable. Moreover, the bodily and the biological, even as they are transformed by biopolitical and economic processes, also form sites of limit and resistance to those very same processes (limits and resistances that are historically specific and changing but partially determining nonetheless). Such an emphasis resists the fantasies of bodily transcendence that are increasingly central, as N. Katherine Hayles (1999, 1-25; 2010, 23-41) has so cogently pointed out, to our digital age, particularly in a psycho-geographical space of the global North which is fully immersed in the transformations produced by "immaterial production." In an era in which the dominant ideology of digitalization is the virtual imagined as a process of dematerialization, it becomes especially important for reasons both political-economic and ecological to attend to the material resources and still very material forms of production that underpin these fantasies of virtuality.

Political Economy and Globalization

The emergence of globalization theory and the resurgence of work in political economy can also be considered part of the material turn. While globalization theory has both cultural and a political-economic components (not to mention ecological, political, and environmental components), in almost all its guises it has placed an emphasis on the limits of the cultural by emphasizing it as only one dynamic in the process of globalization. Thus even as culturally oriented a theorist as Arjun Appadurai (1997, 27-47) presents the cultural aspects of globalization (what fall under the category of ideascapes, mediascapes, and ethnoscapes in his theory) as being linked to the political-economic (financescapes) and the technological (technoscapes). While Appadurai might categorize all of these developments as broadly cultural (and certainly there is a cultural dimension to all of them) and while I might find his notion of financescapes an inadequate substitute for a more thoroughgoing account of

the political-economic, his positioning them as different scapes that come into disjunctive relationship with each other pushes this work outside of the often undifferentiated notion of culture that undergirds the cultural turn. This break with the limits of the cultural turn is even more evident in much of the other work done in globalization theory, from Arif Dirlik and David Harvey's different meditations (Dirlik 2001; Harvey 2005; 2010) on the relationship between neoliberalism, post-Fordism and the ideology of the cultural turn to the large-scale political-economic interpretations of the capitalist world system in the work of world-systems theorists such as Aníbal Quijano (2008), Immanuel Wallerstein (2000; Wallerstein and Quijano 1992) and Giovanni Arrighi (2010). It is also evident in the impressively integrative work of Saskia Sassen on global cities (1999; 2001), which attends to the political-economic without giving the sphere of culture a short shrift.

I use world-systems theory and Sassen's and Harvey's social-geographical understandings of globalization in order to provide a longer and more complex account of the spatial and temporal dynamics of globalization than is usually present in contemporary-oriented accounts of the phenomenon. While the dynamics of globalization have accelerated greatly in the last thirty years (what has been termed "the era of globalization"), the process as both Paul Jay (2010, 33-53) and the world-systems theorists argue, needs to be understood as part of a much longer dynamic, one that has its roots in what Immanuel Wallerstein terms "the 'long' sixteenth century" and which takes the history of European imperialism, which in this account is bound up with the history of capitalism, as part of its purview (2000, 93). As Ian Baucom (2005, 27-8) has also noticed, this long-view of globalization enables us to theorize the dynamics of capitalist development in a more spatially and temporally complex and recursive way. Thus, as Aníbal Quijano (2008) argues, so-called primitive accumulation (or what Harvey nicely renames "accumulation by dispossession"), in which resources and land are appropriated wholesale by the capitalist (and often the colonialist) class does not just occur at the beginning of capitalism but instead represents a recurring dynamic within all phases of capitalism. This understanding of accumulation by dispossession enables us to attend to the appropriation of the material (of the minerals and resources of the earth, of the land, of bodies themselves as they are defined as possessions) that subtend the exploitation of wage labour and the production of commodities within capitalist production. For Quijano, even wage labour itself is the exception rather than the rule in Latin America (and I would add Africa)—one that is tied to whiteness. While the industrial proletariat as well as the new service proletariat are exploited via wage labour, this labour is often dependent upon unwaged labour (or directly biopolitical and often thanatopolitical) labour on another scene. Thus, the dynamics of accumulation by dispossession, and the forms of imperialism to which they are bound, form what Slavoj Žižek terms the obscene underside to the dynamics of capitalist wage labour (1994, 57).

While there is certainly nothing new about political economy, with its genesis, according to the canonical narrative, in the eighteenth-century writings of Adam Smith, there has been a notable rehabilitation of it as a discipline in the last ten to fifteen years. During the peak of the cultural and linguistic turns, political economy appeared to be woefully out of step, a moribund discipline with an attenuated notion of culture as a mere reflection of an economic infrastructure. However the last ten to

fifteen years or so have seen a veritable resurgence of political economy as a tool for social analysis. Even fields in which the critique of political economy was sharpest, such as cultural studies and queer theory, have recently produced work in a political-economic vein. Thus writers like Robert Babe (2010) in cultural studies and Rosemary Hennessy (2000) and Kevin Floyd (2009) in queer theory have produced rich theorizations of the intersection of the political-economic and the cultural.

While political economy is often considered a materialism of the Marxist kind rather than the materialism of physical matter that I have generally been addressing, there is a relationship between the two forms of materialism, one that is sometimes obscured in the present by the emergence of various forms of immaterial production and by what David Harvey describes as financialization. Marx's notion of materialism is organized around the ability of humans to effectively use and control the forms of physical matter associated with the earth and its products. He links this notion of the physical transformation of the earth to the various modes of production and the development of the productive forces and the means of production each one enables. Where this gets complicated is when the products of the capitalist mode of production become increasingly dematerialized as in the affective, service, electronic and financial sectors. In the context of these newer political-economic developments, it becomes necessary to trace the material underpinnings and material forms of production upon which they rest.

One way of attending to the material underpinnings of ostensibly immaterial production is suggested by Immanuel Wallerstein in his book, *The Decline of American Power*. In it he presents Fordism and post-Fordism, usually periodized as radically distinct periods, as A and B phases of a single economic cycle, what he terms a Kondratieff cycle. In such a cycle material production is central to the A phase and financial accumulation is central to the B phase, yet the two phases have to be understood in relationship to each other and as dominant tendencies in what is an interconnected and interlarded process (2003, 49-52). Thus, elements that are subordinate, yet present, in the A phase become dominant in the B phase and vice versa. This allows for an understanding of the way in which post-Fordism and the forms of immaterial production usually associated with it are absolutely dependent upon the forms of material production and the built environment produced by Fordism and by forms of industrial and material production that continue into post-Fordism. This theorization, then, allows me to trace the material underpinnings and structures beneath the flickering images and seemingly insubstantial commodities of the era of immaterial production.

Conclusion: A Politics of Materiality

We need to attend to such material structures and economic processes as they intersect with our material bodies and the material parameters of our ecosystems. To my mind we have just begun to tarry with the material. It is my supposition that in such a tarrying we can begin to produce a thought more readily equipped to deal with the political, economic, ecological, and, yes, cultural challenges that face us in the twenty-first century. A more materialist conception of biopolitics and thanatopolitics, one that does not take matter as a passive site for inscription, appropriation, and

manipulation but instead understands it as exerting resistance and action in its own right would enable us to more effectively theorize the intersections of the political, the economic and the material. It would also enable us to theorize the limits of biopolitics and thanatopolitics as forms of power.

A reconceptualized understanding of subjectivity, one that situates it more fully in relationship to the material and biological body, will similarly help us to theorize the limits of biopolitical forms of power (which tend to treat subjectivity itself as fully subsumed within the workings of power). It will allow us to retain what is best about the cultural turn—the attention to human action and self-reflexivity—while situating these dynamics within the material strictures and insistences of the body. A non-reductive conception of the biological and material limits of the body and of other aspects of existence will thus enable us to combat the idealism that has inflected too much of the work in the cultural and linguistic turns.

Similarly, an attention to the insistence and resistance of the material would insure that our models of political economy and political ecology do not become caught up in the fetishization of the immaterial or in the seemingly inverse, yet related, fantasy that we can fully predict, control, or manipulate the material. Such an account of the material would not only theorize its positive qualities, but also mark its negative refusals: the way in which aspects of materiality exceed our intellectual grasp and physical manipulations. It is in attending to the work of the negative that I find Lacan's account of the real, Adorno's account of the preponderance object, and Bogost's insistence on the object's partial autonomy being crucial.

But of course we need to not just mark the refusals of the material, but also begin to think of a new materialist politics. Such a politics will involve what Sara Ahmed posits as a different "orientation" towards the material, one that is attentive to the experience of disorientation and queer or alternate orientations. Such a politics would also involve an ethics of what Stacy Alaimo (2008) describes as "transcorporality" in which we attend to the links and interconnections between our own corporeality and the corporeality and materialities of other beings and entities. Such a reconceptualized ethics would be part of a new understanding of the commons, one in which the actors are not only human but one in which all material beings and entities form a part. In such a conception of the commons, the material (including its negative resistances and refusals) would be central. It is for such a commons that we need to struggle in the neoliberal present.

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The Insistence of the Material: Theorizing Materiality and Biopolitics in the Era of Globalization

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