

The Problem With The Destruction Of Art Is That It Preserves Too Much

I want to test a suspicion—not yet so much as a thesis—that has manifested in conversation and writing over the past few years, namely, that art and communism have something to do with each other, and that good-enoughness is the place of their meeting. What I mean by communism is nothing particularly well-defined: an activity, first of all, rather than a state-form or a mode of production; a placing- and keeping-in-common of things; necessarily, also, the destruction of a whole complex of mediations that together make up capitalist society (wage, rent, value itself, but also many forms of self-understanding, love, and intimacy, to the extent these serve the reproduction of the capital-labor relation). To think about communism in this way is to think of it as communization, about which there will be more to say. What matters now is to specify that I am not talking about a program to be realized (by whatever proxy of whatever Subject of History), nor an ontological substrate or desideratum. If communism is to mean anything in these pages it will designate only the destruction of the world as it exists, the destruction of capitalism, and not something to come “after.” Communism will be made by the concrete activity of human beings who no longer wish to remain as they are and who will thus take collective measures to ensure their survival without the exchange of labor power for wages. Communism does not exist—communization has not occurred—yet from the perspective of revolutionary theory we are able to take the contours of present events as indicating the limits of struggles as well as likely or at least possible breaks in the reproduction of capital and labor and thus of the class struggle itself. To lean on a formulation we will have to reason to discuss below, communization is the “swerve” or “rift” in the game of class war—a game most of us can only lose as soon as we are forced to play.

“Good-enoughness,” in turn, is a notion I take from the possibilities of getting by or trying to make things bearable that present themselves most readily in situations of precarity, disappearing futures, lack of a program. (Conditions we by no means ought to see as a fall from a prior state of grace: the Fordist age had its horrors, too. That things are bad does not mean they were once better.) Good-enoughness is the practical and at the same

time quasi-transcendental aim immanent to defensive struggles against the erosion of identities or patterns of experience—the “waning of genre,” as Lauren Berlant calls it—though it can also become offensive. Indeed its becoming-offensive is probably the *sine qua non* of radical practice today. It is practical because any real politics now is about care at the same time as it is about the totality; quasi-transcendental because it posits the horizon of a life we could all be okay with and hence constantly overturns whatever is not enough. Good-enoughness is a concept I am extrapolating from some lines in the poet Anne Boyer’s piece on a “provisional avant-garde,” in particular the following two sections (it is interesting and significant that these concepts emerge from a text at least nominally devoted to aesthetics):

6. It will organize itself around the notion of committing one’s life to soothing and assisting, but this art will soothe and assist in ways as yet unknown. It will not soothe like base sentimentality or luxury goods, which are not that soothing. Instead it will use art to find methods of delirious compensation for the twentieth century. It will be “extreme care.”

[...]

12. Ezra Pound said “make it new” and Gertrude Stein said “make it ugly” but I say “make it okay.”¹

“Make it okay” is the minimal praxis of a non-programmatic communism. We have not settled here for lack of ambition: to make it okay requires tremendous solidarity and violence—countless daggers to the heart of capital. Yet already we may seem to have betrayed this solidarity by slipping into the question of art, the third term of my hunch. Moreover we have stumbled upon the question of the avant-garde.

It may not be particularly interesting to speak of this. I have no wish to defend the necessity of art; however, for those of us who are in some sense interpolated by art, who care about it for reasons well or poorly articulated, these thoughts may be of use.

In a response to something I wrote, which was itself a response to an essay by Benjamin Noys, my friend Daniel Marcus (who like me is an art histo-

rian) pointed out certain errors in the way I had been thinking about these problems. I had rolled back from a concern with the actuality of communism—to borrow a title from Bruno Bosteels, though I mean something a bit different than he does²—to modernist aesthetics, specifically, a position “very much like a defense of Adorno’s modernism, but with an updated communist conscience.”³ What this means, in effect, is a conception of the artwork in capitalism as the receptacle of unresolved contradiction, non-identity, singularity, rendered into form, but now supplemented with a gesture to the “real movement that abolishes the present state of things” (Marx)—a mostly verbal suture to practice. In a way I do believe in all of this—I do believe we still need Adorno, if not everything he stands for—just as I believe that it is despicable to collapse the historical predicament of art (rather: historical predicaments, period) into verbal radicalism or ingenuity, a temptation any writer on art with the slightest interest in politics has to resist on a regular basis. And I can only agree that it is “a bit of a dodge to say that the political function of art should (again) be to attach itself to the contradictions implicit in the value-form, the commodity, etc.” Because: “What would prevent this aesthetic project from becoming a sort of negative aesthetic programmatism [a term we will define below], the artist immersing in contradiction, thriving on a lean diet of critique, waiting for the revolutionary moment to arrive?” Well, nothing. Hence the need to refine our analysis.

Marcus argues that modernism has become worse than superfluous. As much as the political movements with which it awkwardly danced, its models of autonomy as well as political engagement are now moot, moreover in proportion to their former world-burning ambition: “Like communism, modernism’s negativity required an equally strong positive structure or idea (something on the order of the grid, or the unmotivated sign, or the readymade) if it was to become something rather than nothing: it’s this something, this something-negative-made-positive, that must be put to rest, and the entire dialectic demolished, rather than simply abandoned.” Here, Marcus cites a recent lecture in which the art historian T.J. Clark stages a confrontation between, on the one hand, the



historical avant-gardes, together with the anti-modernist modernisms of the (supposedly postmodern) “anti-aesthetic” (a position that crystallized in the 1980s), and on the other hand those artists who retreated from battle in order to avoid modernism’s particular engagement with the future: the point being that a modernism bound at the hip to the modernity it opposed could never prevent the future from turning into a nightmare.⁴ (Pierre Bonnard is Clark’s most powerful example of the latter grouping, whom he now favors—let us pass over in silence his approval of Chagall.) Opposition to modernity, on modernism’s terms, preserves the object of its critique, sucking it vampire-like much as capital must continually suck living labor and hence—this is the sticky hinge—must always reproduce the proletariat. Art, too, maintains its place in class society to the extent it must paradoxically erect positivities in order to ground its negations. Modernism is unimaginable without its myths. If, however, most of the immediate reactions against modernism since the 1960s have turned out to be, in fact, either more modernism or something worse, we are left to consider what could be viable artistic practice today. One strategy might be exit, disappearance, perhaps made offensive, perhaps not: techniques of opacity that aim to slip beneath the radar of capitalism

but at the risk of not much disturbing its workings—the “Claire Fontaine doctrine,” Marcus calls it, referring to a fictitious artist who emerged in a rather literal sense from the impasses of insurrection.⁵ Nonetheless, insofar as it remains tied to the institution of art, and regardless of the disgust or cynicism it might display, practice on this model can at most “formalize evacuation” (Marcus)—that is, make it art again.⁶ To do so is to fall back on modernism’s paradoxically positive negativity. Leaving behind, with some regret on my part, his delicious suggestion to imagine a “Tiqqunist Bonnardism,” Marcus ultimately asks that we instead “openly attack this system of [capitalist] relations, rendering inoperative the forms and gestures of contemporary art and culture—and thereby enabling new forms to emerge.” Accordingly, the question (again in Marcus’s words) should be: “How do we do communism *now?*” rather than: “How do we make anti-capitalist art?” Making anti-capitalist art retains the primacy of art-making. At best it devolves into the endgame of art-against-art, rather than challenging the identities of makers and institutions. Against this, communism “decenters the aesthetic field, unburdening it of its vanguardist baggage.” Art’s abolition is as much a vanguardist fantasy—bound, therefore, to the identity of things-as-they-are in

the mirror of their negation—as *l’art pour l’art* is a fantasy of its immaculate self-sufficiency. So: no grids, no unmotivated signs, no readymades, if any of these are to be a program, if any of them are to keep the IV dripping.

I have quibbles with elements of this. It does not follow to me that a “non-modernist” art would abjure the matter of capital’s contradictions as something basic to its procedures; in fact I have a difficult time imagining how things could be otherwise, since to a very large extent those contradictions are all we have. Of course to avoid the failures of modernism it will be necessary to abandon a certain style of negation. I have already suggested that “good-enoughness” is a start in this direction; an exit from the parasitism of “critical” art is clearly necessary, though it seems equally evident that critique, even artistic critique, could be reconstructed as immanent to emergent forms of struggle. (Struggle is practical critique, to begin with.) Beyond here, though, inquiries verge towards ontology. Whether there is a “beneath” or not to the world presented by the value-form and all the rest may be to pose the wrong question; value continually passes through otherness—produces difference, non-identity, for instance the contradiction between concrete labor

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, **The Beekeepers**, c. 1568.



and abstract labor-time—in the course of preserving and expanding its abstract sameness. Such is the essence of alienation. To take the most obvious example, we are almost all of us capital some of the time: when we sell our labor-power in order to survive. We are equally beings who love and feel pain and so forth. For our purposes it makes no sense to affirm one pole of the equation over the other; it is capitalism as a totality (a mode of production determined by the value-form) that has also produced the specific patterns by which we love and feel pain, perhaps as much as the ways we work or buy things. (Feminism points this out.) Until such time as the necessity dictated by the law of value wholly ceases to be operative, the terrain of everyday life will continue to be a minefield of capitalist forms. Attack is not immediately victory: we will have to deal with great monstrosities as we beat our path. Such a perspective in no way discourages resistance to work, to the commodity-form, to the atrophy of capitalist social relations, but it does counsel sensitivity to the lived thickness of mediations.

All the same, I completely agree with Marcus and Clark on at least one point: the present nullity of aesthetic as much as political vanguardism. (**Pace** Boyer, whose special use of the term exempts her in any case.) I am especially interested to refute its more annihilative strains. A century-long fantasy: the end of art, hence (in a second step always yet to be mediated, specified) the beginning of life—if only art could be twisted to bear witness against itself, to immolate itself, but as *art*. Yet why should the destruction of art first be realized as the affirmation of its outermost boundaries? And, especially, why now? Is there anything more artsy than the anti-art of Claire Fontaine? As a preliminary measure let us emphasize that what is at issue here is not moral disgust at the art world but rather a pragmatics of the political claims imputed to and actually effective in the existing institution of art—with a view, granted, to this institution's destruction along with all other institutions of class society.⁷ From the historian's perspective, the vanguardist phenomenon demands explanation; in the present it only needs to be fought. And finally it must be better explained that what we are talking about is not just another apocalyptic vanguardism, after all: “death to art, long live the commune!”

Daniel Marcus has already given the core of my argument. The problem with the destruction of art is that it preserves too much. The error of the historical avant-garde—though to be precise it was not an error but rath-

er the essential structure of an entire epoch—was to have valued art highly enough to desire its annihilation. What art was was meant to become the fabric of everyday life: De Stijl would make painting obsolete by universalizing it; Breton's Surrealism was to reconcile the unconscious with waking existence, while the Soviet avant-garde literally meant to build a new world. Or, failing all that, art was to preserve old values against the onslaught of kitsch and culture industry (the positions Greenberg and Adorno were to formalize a bit later). These two orientations are only apparently antagonistic: in fact, the opposition was modernism's lifeblood. The contradiction between a self-destructive avant-garde and formalist autonomy was the structure that sustained art as art in its contradiction with capitalist modernity. Art sustained itself by moving the limit of what counted as art and thus always moving towards another abstraction called “life”; this dialectic of self-preservation was mirrored in modern art's other program, in Greenberg's words, “to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself.”⁸

After World War II, however, the dialectic of artistic vanguardism was stretched to its breaking point and perhaps for that very reason became directly expressible. It was only then, in the crisis in the modernist program, that its antinomies first became truly programmatic (read: petrified).⁹ From then on this structure became explanatory and retroactive. “Dadaism wanted to suppress art without realizing it; Surrealism wanted *to realize art without suppressing it*”: Guy Debord's one-liner sums up the problem with a concision only its belatedness made possible.¹⁰ Correct or not, Debord's formula of art's readymade *Aufhebung* is ill-suited to present exigencies. Suppression and realization alike are no longer our horizon. And this is because the very dynamic that finally managed to pose suppression and realization as the dual ends of art snatched them away in the next moment, in the failure of a program: the political failure, finally, to make a new world on the basis of the proletariat's triumph. From thenceforth there would be no (serious) artistic avant-gardism and no (organized) proletariat that had as its *tangible* aim the establishment of its own dictatorship. The suicide of art is meaningless in the absence of a totalizing praxis that could gather up its inheritance and make it into a world.

We have lived in this condition for some time now. The question that ought to impress us with its urgency is not “How can it be *destroyed?*” but rather: “Can anything be *saved?*” This

is the truly radical question because the destruction of art as posed at the limit of the vanguardist tradition is equivalent to its realization. Yet now we must be perfectly clear that art has no ideals to realize. Art has run aground on the same rock as every other project of emancipation founded upon existing values: the reproduction of these values has become inevitably the reproduction of capital. Accordingly, art that matters now has the courage not to care about art, but to care immensely about affect, or gender, or the value-form, or a thousand other things of vital importance to the making of a good-enough world, whether in their persistence or negation. (Art need not *think* of itself as concerned with these things and not art, of course: we can agree with Greenberg that art is generally better when it locks down on the intensity of its own procedures rather than looking to something external. But in good art this is exactly how meaning comes to saturate form.) If there are things in art that we wish to preserve in the struggles that are yet to come, we will preserve them because they are necessary to our sense of what life without capital can and should be, not because they belong to art. In these struggles Bruegel or Tiepolo might be of immediate use, far more so, I would imagine, than almost all of what fills our galleries. However, if there is art being made that lodges in the folds of everyday battle and joy and sadness it would by no means have to be instrumentalized “for the struggle.” Communism as it can be after the end of the cycle of class struggles that stretched through most of the last two centuries is the life of the commune itself, nothing separate from it; there is no part of it that is not a weapon. There is no sacrifice. Not even of art.

Here, however, we have crossed into speculation. Whatever the practice we know as art might become in the rift that opens an outside to capitalism, art as it really exists is only its history. Hence it will be useful to return to our historical account with the aid of sharper terminology, in effect to reveal some of the scaffolding behind what has already been said. First claim: with many of the characteristic works of modernism we have to do with instances, under extreme duress, of what the French collective Théorie Communiste defines as “programmatism.” For my argument a translation into the aesthetic realm will be necessary—one fraught with dangers, of course, but maybe interesting enough to risk failure.

For Théorie Communiste, “programmatism” is the name for a cycle of class struggle, roughly equivalent to the

workers' movement from 1848 to 1968. They explain the term as follows:

Generally speaking we could say that programmatism is defined as a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which become the *programme to be realised*. This revolution is thus the affirmation of the proletariat, whether as a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' councils, the liberation of work, a period of transition, the withering of the state, generalised self-management, or a "society of associated producers." Programmatism is not simply a theory — it is above all the practice of the proletariat, in which the rising strength of the class (in unions and parliaments, organisationally, in terms of the relations of social forces or of a certain level of consciousness regarding "the lessons of history") is positively conceived of as a stepping-stone toward revolution and communism. Programmatism is intrinsically linked to the contradiction between the proletariat and capital as it is constituted by the formal subsumption of labour under capital.¹¹

At this point capital, in its relation to labour, poses itself as an external force. For the proletariat, to liberate itself from capitalist domination is to turn labour into the basis of social relations between all individuals, to liberate productive labour, take up the means of production, and abolish the anarchy of capitalism and private property. The proletariat's liberation is to be founded in a mode of production based upon abstract labour, i.e. upon value.

The revolutionary process of the affirmation of the class is two-fold. It is on the one hand conceived of as the rising strength of the proletariat in the capitalist mode of production and, on the other hand, its affirmation as a particular class and thus the preservation of its autonomy. In the necessity of its own mediations (parties, unions, cooperatives, societies, parliaments), the revolution as autonomous affirmation of the class (as a particular existence for itself in relation to capital) loses its way,

not so much in relation to revolution per se, but in relation to this very affirmation. The proletariat's rising strength is confused with the development of capital, and comes to contradict that which was nevertheless its own specific purpose: its autonomous affirmation.

Note: programmatism does not necessarily mean that the end of class society—hence the dissolution of the proletariat as a class—has been abandoned as a conscious goal (the term encompasses *both* reform and revolution), but rather that it is put off until the time of the proletariat's triumph *as it is*; as a result programmatism ends up reproducing the proletariat as a class of capital even in its moments of boldest radicalism. It will be evident that the apparatus of affirmation, autonomy, and self-abolition sketched in these paragraphs bears more than a fortuitous resemblance to artistic vanguardism as described above. I mean to indicate that the connection is real and structural rather than coincidental, and to argue that the failure of both cycles (their failure *together*, it has to be emphasized: their conditioning of one another up to the very last desperate moment) constitutes the basis from which communism and art can be known and practiced in the present.¹²

The objective and subjective grounds of the proletariat's unification have been destroyed by forty years of capitalist reaction.¹³ Art has burnt in the same fire. In our present era of capitalist crisis and restructuring it will be imperative to take the lessons of programmatism's failure and to face the possibilities—truly, the impossibilities—presented to us: in criticism and the writing of history as much as in political action. You will have to take this on faith for now. Art history does not yet have an account of modernism in terms informed by communication theory, which is the somewhat imprecise name for what Théorie Communiste has been doing for the past few decades. (Among other authors and groups: the "communication current" has its own internal tensions.)¹⁴ I believe that only such an account will now permit us to address the problems belonging to what was formerly the avant-garde without falling into bland repetition. We have nothing to lose but a thousand dissertations.

It would be presumptuous, however, to scare up directives for artistic practice based on the above analysis. Indeed to do so could not fail to inaugurate another program, even if under the banner of anti-programmatism. Only adroit improvisation will avoid

bad faith. That said, we may have to (conditionally) approve a policy of insurrectionary intimism (shades of Bonnard again), an art, in other words, that is pointedly not vanguardist in either of the twentieth century's dual modes, but which rather modulates between experience and epic, everyday life and the totality of capitalism, on the grounds of capitalism's very contradictions, its contradictory forms and weird phenomena and failures and excesses of matter and meaning. An art that knows its predicament and lives in it alongside forms of life struggling for something good enough, an art that makes zones of form and feeling in the midst of its predicament and delivers them to common appropriation. Such an art would be "autonomous" in that it would not subordinate itself to external directives, but its autonomy would be, in a sense, accidental rather than programmatic (our ultimate horizon would still be an end to autonomous spheres altogether). This would eliminate a good deal of anxiety about the "politics of art." Though it would eliminate nothing of capitalism itself. This will only happen by means of a practice that far exceeds the powers of art alone.

Théorie Communiste argues that this practice is "communication": the form of revolution proper to the "swerve" (*l'écart*) in class struggle that occurs when the class confronts its existence as a class, as an external constraint, a limit that must be overcome if the struggle is to continue at all. A revolution within the revolution, in other words: communication will occur when residual organs of class affirmation become directly counterrevolutionary (to the extent they attempt to preserve the proletariat *within capitalism*), and communities of struggle must turn to unmediated expropriation and an exit from wage labor in order to reproduce themselves, or else face repression, annihilation. Whether we would like to hold on to old representational structures or not is beside the point. History calls the tune.¹⁵

This would be an ominous place to stop, so we will return for a moment to art. I believe communication theory suggests a horizon beyond what seems to be an intractable impasse. If there is a resolution to the seesaw between one's hatred of art and one's love of it—need of it, maybe, for those of us too fucked, too convoluted for the world of work—it will now be found in doing communism and nowhere else; revolutions, unfortunately, are rare, and so the need of art like the need of a paycheck persists in the long twilight of the forms and programs that might have lent it significance, or even the semblance of a totality-in-the-making:



the utopia of labor or the utopia of aesthetic play, Proudhon or Schiller. Twilight is when the specters come out. If I am constrained here to offer a “defense of art,” against the exhausted radicalism of the anti-aesthetic, it will only be to say that art sometimes grants its viewers (and makers) ways to know, to feel, or to speculate at a diagonal to the orders of capitalist society. Being attentive to art is being attentive to its oddness and connecting this oddness to other structures and places in society: understanding that art is odd because it is a strange kind of ideology and can materialize contradictions—between the concrete and the abstract, for instance—that capitalism’s forms of appearance otherwise smooth over.

Being attentive to art is a technique of nomad science. Everything is in the details. The division between highly mediated symptomatic reading and “more shitty poetry about love, family life (and its dissolution)—the sentimental crap of the everyday”¹⁶ (of which Daniel Marcus approves over more modernism) is produced by capitalism’s fundamental scission of theory from practice, mental from manual labor. It would be delusional to maintain that the separation could be abolished by will; yet, I think, there are ways in particular instances to keep one’s ear to the ground of struggle and in fidelity to this to make communism’s “swerve” a fact of the aesthetic. Try it and see. But nothing will happen except with extreme care. To my mind, it makes sense to go to Isa Genzken for an account of the subject-object relation, or to Amy Sillman for the squishiness of bodies. Add your own examples. And when we argue about matters of taste let us trust that we are also arguing about everything else.

1
<http://htmlgiant.com/author-spotlight/anne-boyer-on-a-provisional-avant-garde/>

2
 Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, London and New York: Verso, 2011.

3
 Daniel Marcus, “On Art and Communication: A Reply to Noyes and Spaulding,” <http://primaporta.tumblr.com/post/50825251903>.

4
 Clark, “The End of the Anti-Aesthetic,” *Texte Zur Kunst* 81 (March 2011), 163-165.

5
 I am more sympathetic to aspects of this model than is Marcus; see especially Claire Fontaine, “Ready-Made Artist and Human Strike: A few Clarifications,” http://www.clairefontaine.ws/pdf/ready-made_eng.pdf. However I am likewise certain that the practice (and preservation) of gallery art is the lynchpin of a whole set of highly problematic undertakings over the last decade or so, among which Bernadette Corporation and Reena Spaulings also ought to be mentioned.

6
 Perhaps this is only a radicalization of the antinomies of institutional critique, which is by now widely acknowledged to have been (or to have become) complicit with its institutions.

7
 I am purposefully abstracting from problems of the art market, labor conditions in the art world, class positions of artists, and so forth, on the assumption that they are mostly not fundamentally different from analogous problems in other economic sectors and do not require any special attention here.

8
 Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 4, Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986-1993). Note that Greenberg is here talking about the mission of each separate artistic medium, not art in general. Nonetheless the logical form of the argument is continuous with his earlier thinking on art’s autonomization as a whole in “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” and “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” both in ibid., vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*.

9
 The paradigm’s starker account is found in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans.

Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984; originally published in 1974). For the sake of brevity I am neglecting art historical debates over the post-WWII neo-avant-garde, which have absorbed a great deal of energy at the expense of a more thorough materialist grounding of the problem. To anticipate myself, I will only say that the failure of the neo-avant-garde is closely bound to, if not exactly identical with, the failure of working class “programmatism.” I am also passing over “postmodernism” and its theorists in silence; if I can be yet more gnomic, I would say that they mostly addressed themselves to the right questions but at the wrong level.

10
 Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), thesis 191.

11
 Théorie Communiste, “Much Ado About Nothing,” trans. Endnotes, *Endnotes 1* (October 2008), <http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/13>. For a critique of Théorie Communiste’s periodization in terms of real and formal subsumption (categories derived from Marx’s draft chapter on the “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” originally intended for the first volume of *Capital* and now available as an appendix to the Penguin edition of that work), see Endnotes, “The History of Subsumption,” *Endnotes 2* (April 2010), <http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/6>.

12
 Daniel Marcus goes perhaps a bit farther: drawing from some implications in the essay by Benjamin Noyes to which I had previously responded—a revised version of which is awaiting publication under the title “Communication and the End(s) of Art”—he says that “insofar as modernism and programmatism follow parallel tracks, both terms will have to be suppressed or overcome, in and as the revolutionary process.” Or, even more succinctly: “I would rather have communism than a million Black Squares.” (Marcus, “On Art and Communication.”)

13
 This point is extremely controversial. Any number of Théorie Communiste’s critics on the left have argued that newly proletarianized populations outside of the highly developed capitalist economies (in China, for instance) constitute the ground for an “affirmative” or programmatic politics with real chances of success. Others claim that the unification and agency that will overcome capitalism—perhaps no longer to be found in the proletariat but rather in the “multitude”—have been produced by new kinds of valorization and/or the spread of immaterial labor. Here is not the place to thoroughly refute either of these objections. Since the latter has little empirical basis on which it could be proven or disproven at all, I will only say with regard to the first that the increasing mobility and logistical sophistication of capital, and above all long-term trends in the organic composition of capital (the ratio of constant capital to variable capital, or, crudely, machines to people: that is, the tendency, intrinsic to capitalism, for ever-fewer workers to be needed to make ever-more stuff [or, what comes to the same, for the cost of the reproduction of labor power, in other words the value of necessary labor, to continually decline relative to surplus value] and thus by extension the tendency of capitalism to throw more and more of the world’s population into surplus, at least from the point of view of value-production) means that even massive labor struggles in Asia or Africa are unlikely to develop into anything resembling the labor movements of the past two centuries. When capital moves into a new part of the world it always does so on the basis of the level of development it has already reached elsewhere; capitalism is dynamic and directional and hence class struggle never repeats itself in any simple way.

On these matters, see especially Aaron Benavay and Endnotes, “Misery and Debt,” *Endnotes 2* (April 2010), <http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/1>. At any rate the above is only to suggest that the perspective represented here is more complex than catastrophism, a fetishism of immediacy, or an allergy to wage-based demands, and certainly does not imply sabotaging real struggles from a bastion in the ivory tower (though, as with any vaguely fashionable theory, it could). Furthermore, we have not even considered whether the unification of the working class would be desirable as a basis for revolutionary politics, even if it were possible. As Maya Andrea Gonzalez notes: “To re-imagine a workers’ movement that would not demote women, blacks, and homosexuals to a subordinate position is to think a workers’ movement that lacks precisely the unifying/excluding trait that once allowed it to move at all.” Gonzalez, “Communi-

zation and the Abolition of Gender,” in Benjamin Noyes, ed., *Communication and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles* (Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2011), 221.

14
 Gilles Dauvé and Bruno Astarian are among those within the French communication milieu who have strongly criticized Théorie Communiste; on an even more fundamental level there is a division between the analytic perspective represented here and the “voluntarist” or insurrectionary strain developed by the collective Tiqqun and related groups, which are sometimes also included under the label “communication theory.”

15
 For further contributions to communication theory, see especially the first issue of *Sic—International Journal for Communication* (November 2011), <http://sic.communication.net/>.

16
 Marcus, “On Art and Communization.” In another register, there has been said to be a division between critical and post-critical practice; see Hal Foster, “Post-Critical,” *October* 139 (Winter 2012), 3-8.

