

Worlding Justice/Commoning Matter

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ABSTRACT

The essay makes an argument for a form of transformative politics that is mainly concerned with the making and remaking of alternative material conditions of existence. This is a posthumanist starting point for thinking politics, one that focuses on the making of common material worlds (not just a common humanity), the embodiment—literally—of radical politics, and finally the enactment of a materialist, nonanthropocentric view of history. But coupling transformative politics and posthumanism defies much of posthumanism's current incarnations as a mere overcoming of the human/nonhuman dichotomy. It calls for a worldist viewpoint: a Left posthumanist politics starts, not from the quest to become a constituent force that changes the systemic balance of power (as some Left positions would assert), but from the immediate attempt to transform the very material substance and ecologies of existence. This engagement with altering ontology is driven by the question of justice as a material and practical issue before its regulation through political representation. Ultimately, justice is before the event of contemporary Left politics; it is about molding alternative forms of life.

EXTENDING THE WORLDING PROJECT

If worlding is about the making of social worlds that crisscross global space in divergent trajectories and variable speeds and defy the abstract universalisms of globalization,¹ I want to

KEYWORDS

Posthumanism, Left Politics, Worldism, Justice, Labor, Commons, Embodiment, Revolution, Event, Metropolitan Strike, Postanthropocentric History, Forms of Life, Alter-Ontologies

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Papadopoulos, Dimitris. "Worlding Justice/Commoning Matter." *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* v. 3 (March 1, 2012), <http://occasion.stanford.edu/node/79>.

extend its meaning to include the making of material worlds that create unique occasions of mundane existence beyond the abstract registers of “nature” and the nonhuman. If, as Chris Connery, Rob Wilson, and the work of the Center for Cultural Studies at the University of California in Santa Cruz suggest, worlding is about enacting an opening in our thinking and practice to other values, ideas, and ways of being, I want to think of worlding as an opening to material processes and practices and as a possibility for crafting—literally—common, alternative forms of life.² Extending the worlding project from society to matter is concomitant with introducing a posthumanist perspective into culture and politics. But this posthumanist move bears its own problems.

Posthumanism, at least in its most widespread and mainstream versions, challenges the dichotomy between humans and nonhuman others and the analysis of social processes based solely on the grounds of human action and intentionality.³ But is it possible to reduce the textured relations between humans to the universalizing category “human”? How is it, after so many decades of work trying to question humanist universalism, that we are now confronted with probably the worst universalism of all: all humans as one, as if there were no divisions and alliances, divergences and similarities, differences and conflicts between humans? And the problem seems even more acute when we consider the other pole: how is it possible to homogenize nonhumans to the extent of creating an otherness so vast and uniform that even the most dedicated Orientalists could not have conjured it up in their wildest dreams? In fact, the universalism and reductionism of the category “nonhuman” may be even more dubious than traditional humanist categorizations because it can so easily be presented as a progressive move of including the hitherto-expunged nonhuman others into human business.

Can we develop an alternative take on this mainstream version of posthumanism? Can we think of alternative forms of organization that challenge both humanism and the new universalisms of mainstream posthumanism? Can we think of an insurgent posthumanism, that is, of a posthumanism that is explicitly political and is grounded in current radical alternative political projects for global and ecological justice? If we try to connect posthumanism to radical transformational politics, we cannot avoid engaging with the Left, which in its many versions has been the bearer of radical social justice. But since the Left is as clear as the waters of the Ganges, we will need to question many of its fixations and certainties in order to be able to detect and strengthen posthumanist energies in it. What would it mean to organize a *radical Left posthumanism*?⁴

It is true that Left politics have largely ignored the complexity and unpredictability of the entanglement between a deeply divided society and a deeply divided nonhuman world. The principal avenue for social transformation, at least in the main conceptualizations of the politi-

¹ Worlding resembles, in the words of Bruce Robbins (“The Worlding of the American Novel,” 1–2), an event that “has created its own unique local surround, a restricted time/space that replaces and cancels out any abstract planetary coordinates.”

² Wilson and Connery, *Worldings*.

³ This essay will focus solely on posthumanism as a social-semiotic practice that challenges the humanist understanding of and split between society and nature. Posthuman positions and transhumanism (the discourse of overcoming the human condition and human body) touch only marginally (or not at all) upon debates and critiques of humanism and therefore will not be considered here. Regarding this important difference, see Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*

⁴ These questions are inspired by critical organizational studies, e.g., De Cock, Fleming, and Rehn, “Organizing Revolution?”; Parker, *Utopia and Organization*; Parker, Fournier, and Reedy, *Dictionary of Alternatives*.

cal Left,⁵ passes through seizing the centers of social and political power. The main drive of Left politics after the revolutions of 1848 (and definitely since 1871) has been to conquer institutional power and the state—especially in its capitalist formation. Within this matrix of radical Left thinking the posthumanist moment becomes invalidated, subsumed under a strategy focused solely on the political association of individuals as the locus of action that contests social power. But here I want to argue that a posthumanist gesture can already be found at the heart of Left political mobilizations that aimed mainly at creating and transforming institutions. This is the case even when such moves were distorted at the end, neutralized or finally appropriated into a form of Left politics solely concerned with social power, institutional representation, and the state. From Marx through anarchism to contemporary post-Marxist or poststructuralist Left positions, the state in its capitalist form is conceptualized both as the guarantor of existing social relations and as the main threat to justice. More precisely, the state cannot exist without cultivating the humanist subject, and at the same time the state is the humanist subject's main enemy.⁶ It is this characteristic of the state as humanist but not humanist enough that has been the main target of Left politics. The state and its humanism are the constitutive other defining what radical Left politics is. What such an appropriation conceals is that a significant part of the everyday realities put to work through radical Left politics has always had a strong posthumanist character through remaking the mundane material conditions of existence beyond and outside an immediate opposition to the state and other social institutions that protected the humanist political subject. If it is broadly assumed that justice can be achieved by changing social power through enhancing humanism, the fact is that this vision of politics neglects a catalytic element of Left practice: the material worlding of justice. Worlding justice is a form of Left posthumanism that evolves out of the long tradition of the Left by escaping its obsessions with social power and the humanist political subject, and that simultaneously avoids a mainstream posthumanism that is content with counting and recounting the connections between humans and nonhumans.

In what follows I will try to excavate this posthumanist gesture from the main narratives of radical Left political struggles along the following three fault lines. The first is about abandoning an alienated and highly regulated relation to the material, biological, and technological realms by making a self-organized common world—a move from enclosed and separated worlds governed by waged labor to the *making of ecological commons*. A second posthumanist move questions the practice of politics as a matter of ideas and institutions and rehabilitates

⁵ I am mainly referring here to the Left tradition emerging out of the working-class movement, including socialist, communist, and autonomist currents. The anarchist Left is of course very different in terms of its strategy regarding institutional power but has (as with other leftist thought) been equally plagued by the humanistic ideas that I will be discussing in this essay.

⁶ The next section of this essay discusses the emergence of the humanist subject through the formation of the capitalist system of wage labor. More broadly, however, one can find many factors that had an impact on the making of the humanist subject and contributed to its articulation in two interconnected forms. The first form is the self-assertive secular subject. In the words of Charles Taylor (*Secular Age*, 18), “the coming of modern secularity . . . has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true.” The second form is the subject endowed with the capacity to autonomously negotiate his or her individual morality and interiority. This is the “cult of inwardness” at the core of the liberal humanist subject; see Renaud, *Era of the Individual*. See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. However, liberal secular humanism, although it is concomitant with the capitalist state, is also in continuous tension with it, especially because of the inherent illiberal tendencies of the capitalist state to delimit and restrict the autonomy and rights of the humanist subject.

politics as an embodied and everyday practice—a move from the representational mind to the *embodiment of politics*. Finally, the third involves the decentering of the human subject as the main actor of history making. History is a human affair but it is not made (only) by certain groups of humans—a move toward a *postanthropocentric history*.

ECO-COMMONING

“The Socialist Party is the anti-State, not a party.” This is not Lenin. It is Gramsci in 1918.⁷ There is a fundamental assumption behind the politics of the Left up to World War II: the state is a totalizing form of power that the Socialist Party, if it wants to be successful in its political struggle, needs to destroy. A classless society is possible only through the destruction of the state. The mantra of Marx and Engels’s refutation of Hegel’s idealism of the state is well known.⁸ But Marx and Engels’ materialist reinterpretation of Hegel’s idealist take on the state is an unfinished story. They challenged Hegel’s understanding of the state as an ethical universal but preserved the idea that the state is a totality emerging in the real social world. For Marx and Engels the purported universality of the state is what hides its particular social function of domination.⁹ The rationality of the state—which was a substantial element for Hegel’s understanding of the state—is always actualized in the real life of society as a unity between the objective and universal will and the subjective will of each citizen. Marx and Engels exposed this unity as the ideological function of the state but kept the idea that the state is deeply ingrained in the social world.¹⁰ This understanding was decisive for much of Left politics throughout the past 150 years.

The state is immanent in the world but it is not a rational universal; it is rather a totality immanent in the antagonisms that sweep the plains of society.¹¹ Against Hegel’s idealism that the state embodies the infinite ability to resolve any social contradictions within it, Marx and

⁷ “The Socialist Party is fundamentally different from other political parties. It is not even a party in the organic and classical sense of the word. Political parties are spokesmen for social groups, not for a class. It is only in their entirety that they represent a class which has its executive organ in the State. The Socialist Party is the anti-State, not a party. Bourgeois groups want to change the state marginally through their parties, merely by giving it one particular direction rather than another. The Socialist Party wants to remould the State not to improve it. It wants to change all of its values. It wants to re-organise it, founding it upon social forces and ethical principles totally different from the present ones” (Pozzolini, *Antonio Gramsci*, 76).

⁸ “The state is therefore by no means a power imposed on society from without; just as little is it ‘the reality of the moral idea,’ ‘the image and the reality of reason,’ as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a particular stage of development; it is the admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, a power, apparently standing above society, has become necessary to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state” (Engels, “Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,” chap. 9).

⁹ This ideological appearance of the state is believed to be grounded in what Lukács (*History and Class Consciousness*) described as the process of reification where social relations attain a ghostly objectivity as if they are untouchable and existed always.

¹⁰ “And this means that the *transcendent* Universal (God), who recognizes the Particular, must be replaced by a Universal that is immanent in the World. And for Hegel this immanent Universal can only be the State. What is supposed to be realized by God in the Kingdom of Heaven must be realized in and by State, in the earthly kingdom” (Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 67). See also Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, 177.

¹¹ By opposing Hegel’s conception of the state as the sublation of pervasive social dichotomies, Marx and Engels see the state as a tool for governing antagonisms that is controlled by the interests of the ruling classes, the “Master-State” in the words of Kojève; see Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 57.

Engels believed that the resolution will be the result of an act that seizes the state just in order to destroy it. The departure from Hegel was never completed. By keeping the state at the center of society, even if only as a materialist, immanent entity, Marxists opened the possibility for modeling any struggle for the emancipation of labor as one that must pass through the state or at least address it.¹² The name of this path is revolution—which seizes the state in order to organize the move to a stateless society.¹³ Every other possibility for radical social transformation disappears from the horizon of radical political action.

But the effects of the revolution that Marx and, forty years later, Lenin had envisioned never took place. The nonstate stage never came; instead, a new incarnation of the state emerged, state socialism. The fact is that Left revolutions, at least historically, have strengthened the state as a totality instead of putting an end to it. But how is this possible? How did the “science of revolution” get things so wrong? A change of perspective could help to illuminate this paradox. Rather than look at the state in terms of the control it engenders, we can instead examine it from the perspective of struggles. In other words, instead of focusing on how the state governs society, we could explore the particular social struggles to which the state in the age of revolutions is responding.

If we investigate the capitalist state from the perspective of struggles, we find something more important in its resilience than its rough persistence against the revolutions spreading across the globe, from 1848 up to the 1950s with the Chinese and the Cuban revolutions. It is its capacity to embody and to guarantee a form of humanist freedom that was equally central to the formation of the working classes and of capital: the freedom to sell one's labor power. The supposed ideological power of the state is considered to be multifarious, but at its very core what the state does is to appear to unite the freedom of labor and the freedom of capital under the banner of humanism. In fact, what the (capitalist) state does is to appropriate the productivity of the working classes by guaranteeing that the workers can be free and autonomous individual sellers of their labor power in an open market. This particular freedom and the market system that it brings with it are the bedrock of a (liberal and secular) *humanist* understanding of social relations and of everyday individual existence. The capitalist state is the main guarantor of humanism. And Left politics usually attack the state not because of this humanist appropriation of the workers' freedom but because it is not humanist enough (i.e., it does not do enough to protect and expand the autonomy of the workers as individual sellers of labor power).

12 The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat was Marx's answer to the political dilemmas between anarcho-syndicalism, on the one hand, and reformist democratic politics, on the other. These dilemmas became widespread after 1848. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, it was necessary to overcome a fixation with spontaneous revolt and to form a new kind of organization, the Marxist Parties, with the Social Democratic Party of Germany as one of the first. “The question then arises: What transformation will the state undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence that are analogous to present state functions? This question can only be answered scientifically, and one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousand-fold combination of the word ‘people’ with the word ‘state.’ Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” (Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” chap. 4, emphasis in original).

13 “Revolution” here means overthrowing the existing relations of production by replacing the old state with a new one, one that will initiate the fading away of the state itself. Lenin, faithful to this militant action program, gradually replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat as such with the leading role of the party in this stage of transition. Revolution is the creation of an antistate, the dictatorship of the proletariat in the “transition from state to non-state” under the leadership of the working-class party. See Lenin, “The State and Revolution,” chap. 3.

But what this humanism in fact hides is that it is a response to a long history of nonhumanist struggles that were equally but differently appropriated by the state in capitalism as well as by formalized Left politics. The freedom to choose and to change your employer is not a fake freedom or an ideological liberty, as classical working-class Marxism suggests, but a historical compromise designed to integrate the released, disorganized, and wandering workforce emerging from the fifteenth century onward into a new regime of productivity. In fact, what we have here is a mass of workers exiting indentured, forced, or slave work and re-investing their capacities in new entanglements with the social and material world. The Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* and the *German Ideology* (unlike the later Marx of the *Gotha Program*) captures some of these tight interdependences between people's action and the creativity of the material world (of "nature" in Marx's words) and investigates how alienation from the capacity for self-organized development is imposed on them by separating people into classes (and genders and races) and alienating them from "nature." Against this background Marx talks of "species being," a term that, despite its essentialist connotations, is as close as possible to a radical understanding of a form of self-instituted collective emancipation in which cooperation and interaction among people and between them and the environment are crucial.¹⁴

The singularities that composed the escaping, wandering mob were very far from the humanist individuals emerging at the same moment across Europe and were much closer to the nonhumanist plebs traversing the countryside and the disorderly mobs populating the streets after the eighteenth century.¹⁵ It is exactly these despised and dangerous nonhumanist collectivities that defined the core of radical struggles for emancipation (long before they could be called Left). This nonhumanist gesture inserts a gradual displacement of the previous regime of feudal and indentured labor into a world in which the relation to surrounding materiality takes a different shape than it did in the feudal order. This exit from the feudal labor regime into a multitude of work patterns and into a creative relation to matter gives rise to new, shared, common worlds. It is only in the name of the humanist ideal of "man mastering nature" that the emerging disciplinary mechanisms and enclosures after the eighteenth century destroyed these diverse ways of relating to others and to nature—as Carolyn Merchant and Starhawk remind us.¹⁶ Thus, many of the scattered, disorganized, ephemeral, insurgent movements of people exiting feudal labor in so many different locales and geographies did *not* enter into the capitalist humanist regime of the labor market but embarked on a journey that allowed them to create common worlds. Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, Yann Moulier Boutang's *De l'esclavage au salariat*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, A. L. Beier's *Masterless Men*, Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden's *Free and Unfree Labour*, Robert Steinfeld's *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century*, all—among many others, of course¹⁷—describe various incidents and occasions, dispersed in historical time and geography, in which multiple modalities of labor and divergent forms of so-

¹⁴ Dyer-Witheford, "Species-Being and the New Commonism."

¹⁵ Hindle, "Crime and Popular Protest"; Shoemaker, *London Mob*.

¹⁶ See Merchant, *Death of Nature*; Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*. This process continues today with the multiplication of enclosures in the eco-commons; see, e.g., Bollier, *Silent Theft*; Shiva, *Earth Democracy*.

¹⁷ For a further discussion of these sources, see Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, *Escape Routes*, section 2. See also De Angelis, *Beginning of History*.

cial organization emerge. It is in these fluid conditions that self-organized relations between escaping people and land, plants, and animals gave birth to forms of exit from oppression and to different social-material relations of liberty.¹⁸ These are moments of making a common nonproprietary and nonenclosed world, the making of the commons, or “commoning” as Linebaugh calls it.¹⁹ The continuation of life through “commoning” the immediate sociality and materiality of everyday existence is a truly nonhumanist flight into a world where the primary condition of existence is the immersion into the worlds one inhabits and shares with other people and with animals, plants, and the soil.²⁰ This is not only the social commons but a worldly commons, an ecological commons that emerges out of the process of commoning matter. And then this world is collective, shared by definition, a culture mixed with nature, a material order that facilitates the sharing of different commons. It is only afterward that the question of formal social organization is asked. And this question is about labor, about how work should be organized in order to maintain the commons.

Thus, just before the emergence of the modern Left and of humanism, we could say that the first *radical “Left” nonhumanist moment* is the moment of worlding justice and achieving freedom through a flight to the self-organized world of the commoning of matter: eco-commoning—a socioecological world that of course existed long before this flight from the feudal order happened but now provided the ground for the articulation of a new form of freedom. This is a form of freedom that—as many of the books mentioned in the previous paragraph discuss—is less concerned with compensation and productivity and more with remaking the immediate social and material conditions of existence outside the existing regime of feudal control. It is this form of escaping into a nonhumanist natural-cultural and sociomaterial regime that needed to be recaptured and was in fact recaptured into a new order of organization that formed into the capitalist social relationship. The key function of wage labor is not first and foremost to oppress or control people's productive capacities but to manage workers' surplus of nonhumanist freedom. Wage labor was the device that made capitalist social organization possible, and it was a device that aimed at controlling the liberties proliferating in the eco-commons. The long process of the historical formation of capitalist relations of production relied on the long process of the transformation of the commoning of matter to wage labor. “Labour as dressage”: discipline, taming, and performance lie at the heart of the process of transforming work through Protestant humanism to the center of the markets and busy(i)ness.²¹ Thus, capitalist social relations gradually trans-

¹⁸ The position described here is directly connected to Nick Dyer-Witheford's understanding of the commons; see <http://commonism.wordpress.com/>; and Peuter and Dyer-Witheford, “Commons and Cooperatives.” It also corresponds to Stefano Harney's approach to the history of living labor and its capitalist capture; see Harney, “Governance, State, and Living Labor”; Harney, “Governance and the Undercommons.” See also De Angelis, *Beginning of History*.

¹⁹ Linebaugh, *Magna Carta Manifesto*.

²⁰ “So common rights differ from human rights. First, common rights are embedded in a particular ecology with its local husbandry. For commoners, the expression ‘law of the land’ from chapter 39 [of the Magna Carta] does not refer to the will of the sovereign. Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds: how will this land be tilled? Does it require manuring? What grows there? They begin to explore. You might call it a natural attitude. Second, commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast. Common rights are entered into by labor. Third, commoning is collective. Fourth, being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state. Magna Carta does not list rights, it grants perpetuities. It goes deep into human history” (ibid., 44–45).

²¹ For a critical analysis, see Jackson and Carter, “Labour as Dressage”; Carter and Jackson, “Laziness.”

form the worker's nonhumanist liberty of commoning, of making eco-commons, into a fixed and stable labor market that operates through enclosing labor into (the management of) individual performance, efficiency, precision, and the work ethos of the humanist subject. So, there are many factors that contributed to the birth of the liberal humanist subject,²² but probably there was only one source of energy that made this birth possible: the nonhumanist energies of freedom transgressing pre- and protocapitalist societies.

But this description of the rise and fall of nonhumanist struggles is not yet the whole background story for what we understand by Left politics today. Yann Moulier Boutang, in his book *De l'esclavage au salariat*, highlights the fact that there is absolutely no historical necessity to move to the capitalist form of wage relations: patronage, forced labor, different forms of serfdom, indenture, and plantation slavery all exist even today.²³ If one thinks through the perspective of the capitalist state, there is absolutely no economic necessity to change the state in its feudal form. The transformation into capitalist organization was the effect of the struggles of the working classes and most importantly of the slaves,²⁴ seeking to escape into new forms of nonhumanist liberty: this form of liberty is a move to a tighter, more intimate relation between human action and material force. The move from forced or bonded labor to *free* working practices is a step toward increasing freedom so as to enter into more immediate entanglements with material processes. It is people reclaiming their relation to the material world—it is this commoning of the world and of matter, not only the social world but the world as such—that becomes the transformative drive to which the capitalist social relation is a response. In analytical terms, struggles have primacy over the formation of power. However elusive and neglected they are, it is these nonhumanist struggles that fuel *history making on the ground*. And they drive these transformations by creating new possibilities that cannot be ignored. Capitalist power reforms itself as a response to these nonhumanist struggles by slowly moving to an organization of production that appropriates most of these liberties by preserving a small part of them: this small part is that work can no longer be regulated through noneconomic violence but only by contractual means. But even at this stage, as Steinfeld shows,²⁵ free wage labor was not really free since there existed a series of nonpecuniary pressures that made free labor closer to coerced contractual work. It was only the efforts of organized labor that slowly eliminated the violent enforcement of contracts and labor agreements in Northern European countries and the United States. So, it was organized labor building on the previous nonhumanist struggles that effectuated the slow move toward free wage labor at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Thus, not only is free wage labor *not* a historical necessity but wherever it happened it

²² See n. 7 above for a brief discussion of some of these factors.

²³ For an extended discussion of examples, see O'Connell Davidson, "Human Trafficking"; O'Connell Davidson, "Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?"; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, *Escape Routes*.

²⁴ "Haiti, the island that produced half the sugar in the world, initiated a decolonization that lasted two centuries, got rid of the whites, and abolished the slave economy. Between 1791 and 1796, it was done: Toussaint L'Ouverture defeated Napoleon Bonaparte. The plantation economy was undoubtedly efficient; the problem was that it was unstable. If capitalism abandoned slavery as a strategic perspective, it is because its own existence was menaced by the instability of the market that it put into place: if there had not been the Jamaican insurrection of 1833, the English Parliament would never have abolished slavery. The struggles of the slaves in the two centuries of modern slavery are worth ten times more than the struggles of the working class: they were more violent, more virulent, more destabilizing than the workers movement" (Moulier Boutang, "Art of Flight," 228–29).

²⁵ Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century*.

was not the result of a top-down structural introduction of the capitalist labor market but the result of a long process of struggles from below. Furthermore, free and coerced labor coincide: they have occupied the same geographical spaces throughout the whole process of capitalist development up until today. Free labor—that is, the freedom to choose your employer and to exit a contract without any nonpecuniary sanctions—becomes the elusive ideal that governs capitalist economy and, most importantly, capitalist culture. Thus, “striving for freedom” in employment relations is the fundamental element of the capital-labor relation if it is to succeed in appropriating and canalizing the nonhumanist liberties of the eco-commons and the later struggles of organized labor. The freedom to choose your employer becomes so central in the organization of capitalist labor that it simultaneously becomes the main focus of control and coercion.

It is exactly this kind of control of workers' and slaves' exit that modern free wage labor embodies and engenders.²⁶ We can read this as the moment of the formation of control against the unfolding of the slaves' and workers' cultures of freedom established on a non-humanist relation to their own bodies, tools, the environment, physical space, animals, and plants. The capitalist state is neither a superstructure nor an ideology nor a strict tool of domination. It is an organization that simultaneously guarantees the freedom of employees to sell their labor power but facilitates the translation of this freedom into capitalist profit. This schizophrenic mix of freedom and exploitation is the most crucial ingredient of the sentiment that still dominates our lives in global North Atlantic societies. The capitalist state is an organic blend of society and materiality; it makes exploitation out of freedom without falling so far back as to cancel freedom itself completely. And it does not even try to mask this mix of exploitation and freedom. It is not mere ideology or illusion that a shared interest in the way the state organizes society exists.²⁷ Out of relative nonhumanist freedom, the capi-

²⁶ “As the state arose from the need to keep class antagonisms in check, but also arose in the thick of the fight between the classes, it is normally the state of the most powerful, economically ruling class, which by its means becomes also the politically ruling class, and so acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. The ancient state was, above all, the state of the slave-owners for holding down the slaves, just as the feudal state was the organ of the nobility for holding down the peasant serfs and bondsmen, and the modern representative state is the instrument for exploiting wage-labor by capital” (Engels, “Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,” chap. 9).

²⁷ Even Marx would accept this position: “Out of the act of exchange itself, the individual, each one of them, is reflected in himself as its exclusive and dominant (determinant) subject. With that, then, the complete freedom of the individual is posited: voluntary transaction; no force on either side; positing of the self as means, or as serving, only as means, in order to posit the self as end in itself, as dominant and primary [*übergreifend*]; finally, the self-seeking interest which brings nothing of a higher order to realization; the other is also recognized and acknowledged as one who likewise realizes his self-seeking interest, so that both know that the common interest exists only in the duality, many-sidedness, and autonomous development of the exchanges between self-seeking interests. The general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interests. Therefore, when the economic form, exchange, posits the all-sided equality of its subjects, then the content, the individual as well as the objective material which drives towards the exchange, is *freedom*. Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas they are merely the idealized expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power. And so it has been in history. Equality and freedom as developed to this extent are exactly the opposite of the freedom and equality in the world of antiquity, where developed exchange value was not their basis, but where, rather, the development of that basis destroyed them. Equality and freedom presuppose relations of production as yet unrealized in the ancient world and in the Middle Ages. Direct forced labour is the foundation of the ancient world; the community rests on this as its foundation; labour itself as a ‘privilege,’ as still particularized, not yet generally producing exchange values, is the

talist state forges a relative humanist unfreedom. The capitalist state takes this nonsubjective freedom of experimentation with the social and material world as the raw material for fabricating the secular, humanist, disembodied, autonomous individual subject.

Any attempt to overcome this situation by eliminating this freedom, however relative and limited it might be, is doomed to fail. And it is doomed to fail not because it will be opposed by capital but because in the long run it will not be supported by labor.²⁸ This is what happened with most of the revolutions since 1871. The progress achieved after seizing power soon transformed into a form of control that blocked any new nonhumanist experimentations with commoning matter and attempted to diminish the minimal humanist freedoms of workers that even capital relations try to preserve. “The so-called socialist societies” became “backward capitalist societies.”²⁹ By making the totality of the state both the main target and simultaneously the path for social transformation and radical change the revolutions ended up reinforcing the logic of the humanist state rather than supporting a radical nonhumanist intensification of workers’ freedom. Instead of betraying the state and its order, the revolutions, one after the other, ended up betraying the people. And while this was happening, the capitalist state kept reorganizing itself in response to the threat of the new cultures of freedom emerging in the post-World War II period. As Wallerstein says, “the revolutions never worked the way their proponents hoped or the way their opponents feared.”³⁰

THE POSTHUMANIST EMBODIMENT OF POLITICS

What the revolutions could not establish was achieved in a series of uprisings and social movements that, beginning in the 1960s, erupted across the globe.³¹ Common to these is the attempt to challenge a relatively stable form of regulation manifesting after World War II. In a moment when the “withering away of the state” seems almost impossible, new social movements, social mobilizations, and the cultural uprisings after the 1960s challenged the conditions of the organization of the state in a deep and radical way.

Only ten to fifteen years after referring to the socialist party as the “anti-state,” Gramsci questioned the fidelity to the strategy that focused on the state as the main avenue to change existing social relations. Such a strategy would be just a defensive action in response to existing and congealed relations of power and would be unable to achieve the hegemony that could facilitate radical social transformation. Gramsci’s work on seeing the state as a balance of forces that is not only sustained through economic power and class antagonism but also through cultural relations was an important example of a conceptualization of the state that conceives it as an amalgam of singularities and subjectivities. This corresponds to a new cycle of nonhumanist struggles: embodied subjectivities become the site for the making of a poli-

basis of the world of the Middle Ages. Labour is neither forced labour; nor, as in the second case, does it take place with respect to a common, higher unit (the guild)” (Marx, *Grundrisse*, chapter on capital, notebook 2).

²⁸ Of course, here it is important to say again that this pertains only to certain segments of the labor market in the societies of the global North and to even more limited segments in other societies. The fantasy of free wage labor across the globe does not take into account that free labor still coincides with types of labor that are used to extract labor (volunteer work, informal or unprotected domestic labor, unregulated labor of illegal migrants, contract labor, just to name a few forms of labor prevalent in contemporary societies of the global North and global South).

²⁹ Negri, *Politics of Subversion*, 179.

³⁰ Wallerstein, *Utopistics*, 13.

³¹ See Connery, “The World Sixties.”

tics as a means of radically challenging an existing balance of power. Since these struggles come long after humanism has vanquished the previous cycle of nonhumanist struggles described in the previous section, they can now be called *posthumanist*: they attempt to depart from and challenge the by now long-established domination of humanism.

The centrality of embodied subjectivity for politics is manifested in the centrality that the human body achieves as a site of control in humanist culture: co-option and training, subjugation and usefulness, are inseparable for the operation of the modern political rationalities of state government. For Foucault, in his later lectures, there is no external relation between the modern state and the subject; government is what connects practices of the body and practices of social organization.³² The capitalist state is understood as a totalizing form of power only because it individualizes its members and is increasingly fragmented. Following but also criticizing Foucault, Nicos Poulantzas highlights how the modern state evolves as a permanent but unstable equilibrium of compromises between different social subjectivities and classes.³³ The state does not have the *resolution* of social conflicts—by absorbing or terminating them—as its ultimate aim. Rather, it attempts to regulate and ultimately control conflicts by developing multiple ways to *include* subaltern social subjectivities and working classes and therefore to claim itself as a representing body. This form of government emerged after the 1960s. And it emerged as a response to the new social movements' mobilizations and uprisings, which forced the capitalist state to reorganize itself. What the so-called new social movements in fact did was to challenge both the total state of the previous period and the orthodox Left revolutionary practices (described in the previous section) that were trying to respond to this total state.

The struggles of the new social movements were not solely organized around and against the state and its institutions. Rather the opposite is the case: subversion is performed by practices that negotiate their embeddedness in state power under the signature of a posthumanist escape, not under the imperative of inclusion. They escape into the reorganization of embodied ways of existing and relating, mutating the meanings of what social and human relationality is; they escape into novel embodied material practices that put their subjectivities at the forefront of doing politics (feminist movements, environmental movements, antiracist movements, cultural mobilizations, sexual revolutions, to name just a few). The rise of neoliberalism is how the state attempted to capture these escaping and subversive embodied subjectivities. Luhmann's vision of "non-society"³⁴ is the most brilliant and apt description of the workings and intricate relationalities dwelling in the social worlds emerging in these conditions.³⁵ The social and material space is seen as fragmented, discontinuous, undecided, interconnected, relational: as network. The imagination of neoliberalism and of transnational sovereignty is dominated by one banal picture: nodes and lines, no beginning or end. You can constantly withdraw or add new nodes. Some of them are more powerful than others and manage a certain region of the network. A thinker like Bruno Latour³⁶ appears as the

³² Foucault, *Geschichte der Gouvernementalität*, vols. 1–2.

³³ Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*.

³⁴ Luhmann, *Social Systems*.

³⁵ For an extended discussion of this, see Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, *Escape Routes*, chaps. 2–3; and Stephenson and Papadopoulos, *Analysing Everyday Experience*.

³⁶ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

prototypical intellectual of the new networked and plural “assembling” state propelled by the concerned crusade against the structuralist totalitarian state of the Marxist orthodoxy.³⁷

The crucial moment here is when the posthumanist exodus to an embodied form of politics was gradually appropriated into the networked neoliberal function of society. And with it, a large current of the Left privileged a new way of understanding social transformation: it is no longer the revolution against the state that dominates the Left’s imagination but a fidelity to the event to come that will overcome the new plural networked capitalism. Alain Badiou seems to express this kind of thinking in an exemplary manner. In *Metapolitics* he says that every real politics can be evaluated first and foremost on what it says about the state. A central idea of Badiou’s political ontology is “that what the State strives to foreclose through its power of counting is the void of the situation, while the event always reveals it.”³⁸ Here again freedom is derived from the situation of control, more specifically from its absent center, the void that is determining constituted power but cannot be adequately represented within it. The very possibility of the event, as conceived by Badiou, relies on the fidelity to something that eludes the logic of the situation but comes to oppose it. This seems to capture a crucial turn in developing the new metaphysics of many currents of the Left in the neoliberal transnational networked state: a duality of the plural state versus the event. Faithful to the Left’s obsession with revealing the chosen radical historical subject in each particular period and, simultaneously, succumbing to the weight of the social and political realities of networked neoliberal capitalism that defies the existence of any such historical subject, much of the contemporary Left (especially the academic Left) sees in the event the possibility of sustaining a new radical vision of change after the demise of revolution. But this continuation of the model of revolution that dominated Left politics up to the 1960s and that was revived in a new incarnation of the event accords primacy, again, to state power and humanist subjectivity and signals the end of the posthumanist exit to embodied politics.

This conceptualization of the event seems to have overshadowed another way of conceiving its nature that was crucial for the development of new social movements in the past decades and in particular of different segments of the alter-globalization movement after the mid-1990s: a tradition that with Deleuze and Guattari (and with Whitehead and James) attempted to think the event as a unique mundane and nonintentional occasion that comes to

³⁷ The logic of the network not only implies a specific way of ordering and making society but also reorganizes the very concept of the “subject.” Bruno Latour is not alone here. Nikolas Rose and other theorists of governmentality, for example, attempt to grasp how postmodern and neoliberal conditions of existence work upon the individual’s sense of the self and of conduct: the production of subjectivities in networks of power. See Barry, Osborne, and Rose, *Foucault and Political Reason*.

³⁸ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 119. Peter Hallward, who has spent so much of his time working on Badiou, must surely know: “Over the course of the last forty years Badiou has never compromised on his essential revolutionary commitment, but the development of his philosophy suggests a qualification of its expectations. In his early work the eruption of inconsistency (in the form of mass insurrection) figured as an evanescent but directly historical force, and the project to make the state ‘wither away’ had a literal and immediate objective. In *Being and Event* he developed an ontology which accepted the state as an irreducible dimension of being itself: consistency is imposed at both the structural and ‘meta-structural’ levels of a situation, and a truth evades but cannot eliminate the authority of the state. In *Logics of Worlds* he has gone a little further still, by admitting that the very process of being’s appearing ensures that it must always appear as consistent. The upshot is that ‘inappearance’ comes to serve as a de facto criterion of commitment and truth. In a world structured by compromise and betrayal, Badiou’s motto has in effect become: trust only in what you cannot see” (Hallward, “Order and Event,” 120–21).

organize an existing state of affairs differently by acting inside it.³⁹ The event here is not about historical subjects and revolutions or about a rupture with the capitalist state; it is a pure materialist process that effectuates a different form of ordinary organization. Alternative political events such as those in Genoa in 2001, in Athens in 2008, and in Tunisia, Cairo, and London in 2011, to name just a few, are movements that exist and live through the immediate everyday reorganization of bodies, spaces, and things and create novel compounds of sensitivity, affect, and practice. For example, what happened in Seattle in 1999 was an event for alternative Left politics not because it revealed a new radical historical subject but because it produced novel ordinary ways for bringing together and recombining different existing political forces and groups on the ground. This event reintroduced a posthumanist gesture in alternative politics by reorganizing the relations of all these different groups to urban spaces and applied political tactics.⁴⁰ Revolutions are made. Events need to be designated in retrospect; they exist as such in the past; they come after the fact. Only after they happen can they be designated as events that are carried by new historical actors targeting social power. The Seattle event's powerful effect was not the result of the constitution of a new subjectivity or of a deep historical rupture or even of its easy replicability in other locations and contexts; rather, it enacted a novel way to embody politics. In this sense the very practice of thinking of Left alternatives to the event shifts the focus from the posthumanist embodiment of politics to the question of the constitution of a subject of power and the making of new subjectivities. And it is in the unbreakable fixation on detecting the next possible historical subject to come that we can see a peculiar rehabilitation of the abstract humanist logic of historical change that much of the posthumanist Left struggles of the past decades tried to challenge.

The cultural logic of Left politics that is associated with the event is one that searches for a pure structural historical action at the expense of the dirty practices of social and material actors that make politics through their very bodies. The mainstream Left conceptualization of the event described in the previous paragraphs neglects the immediate everyday practices that are employed to navigate daily life, to sustain relations, to negotiate and remake the composition of our bodies and the ecologies we are part of—all those practices that are at the heart of social and material transformation long before we are able to name them as such. The event is retroactive; the power of distinction between what is and what is not is post hoc. At the end it is marked by sadness and fear toward designating a political mobilization

³⁹ “No doubt, the event is not only made up from inseparable variations, it is itself inseparable from the state of affairs, bodies, and lived reality in which it is actualized or brought about. But we can also say the converse: the state of affairs is no more separable from the event that nonetheless goes beyond its actualization in every respect. It is necessary to go back up to the event that gives its virtual consistency to the concept, just as it is necessary to come down to the actual state of affairs that provides the function with its references. From everything that a subject may live, from its own body, from other bodies and objects distinct from it, and from the state of affairs or physico-mathematical field that determines them, the event releases a vapor that does not resemble them and that takes the battlefield, the battle, and the wound as components or variations of a pure event in which there remains only an allusion to what concerns our states. The event is actualized or effectuated whenever it is inserted, willynilly, into a state of affairs; but it is *counter-effectuated* whenever it is abstracted from states of affairs so as to isolate its concept. There is a dignity of the event that has always been inseparable from philosophy as *amor fati*: being equal to the event, or becoming the offspring of one's own events—‘my wound existed before me; I was born to embody it.’ I was born to embody it as event because I was able to disembody it as state of affairs or lived situation” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 159).

⁴⁰ For a description, see Starhawk, *Webs of Power*.

as being an event because it has not happened yet.⁴¹ But an event is not a question about choice or the morality of choice but about the ethos of practice that is by definition undecidable⁴² and comes to craft new ecologies of being and new forms of life.⁴³ From a radical posthumanist feminist perspective we could say with Starhawk that practice is not about retroactive choice but about the “power to act with” in the remaking and reclaiming of the material realities of life.⁴⁴ Actualization exists because “the ghost of the undecidable”⁴⁵ dwells in every step, in every practice, in every occasion. There is no promise, no guarantee, no fidelity. The event as the reincarnation of the fantasy of revolution seems to be irrelevant from the perspective of innocuous, imperceptible, everyday material transformations that initiate social change.

Probably the best remedy against the sadness that emerges when we do not know if our practices of social experimentation will contribute to an event or not is to refuse repeating endlessly the fidelity to the coming event, to the new truth, or to the new historical subject to come. But the path is not a fidelity to the present either, but the joy of embodying and betraying it. This is the joy of the second posthumanist moment of the Left that was absorbed and effaced in the intricacies of the networked cultures of transnational neoliberal capitalism. Instead of the pretentious and concerned waiting for the event, one could think with Bakhtin about a form of joy that defies seriousness and makes truth erupt out of the present. This is the joy of bringing together and assembling a whole cosmos around everyday radical material practices that are events that might never be named as such.⁴⁶ In the same way that Bakhtin is searching in Rabelais’s grotesque images of the lower stratum of the body (food, drink, urination, defecation, sexual life) for the forces escaping ecclesiastical and political censorship and coercion, I am searching in the posthumanist embodiment of politics—the joy of changing bodily practices and of fusing the body with new ingredients and processes of this world—for the forces that defy both the cognitivist Left fixation with events and historical subjects to come and the circulation of class privileges in the aseptic circuits of contemporary networked neoliberal capitalism. This is the joy of bringing together and assembling a whole cosmos around radical practices that are events that might never be named as such. The laughter and joy of those who partake in the world through remaking their embodied existences defy seriousness, disperse fear, liberate the word, and reveal a truth escaping the injustices of the present. This is a cosmic constellation, not an individual act. It is in this feast of symbiotic eating, drinking, defecating, and having sex that the body becomes posthuman and retraces within itself elements common to the entire cosmos, as Bakhtin says: common to the earth, sea, air, fire, and all the cosmic matter and manifestations.⁴⁷

⁴¹ And with Spinoza we know: the mob inspires fear when it acts, but it acts only when it is unafraid; therefore, it has to be tamed by the state and religion; see Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4.54. From an activist perspective, see also the discussion of sadness in Colectivo Situaciones, “Politicising Sadness.”

⁴² Derrida attacked this logic of choice by assuming that undecidability is a permanent ingredient of any decision; the final undecidability of any process of making and actualization should not be the ground for “sad passions” but the necessity of *practice*. See Derrida, “Force of Law.”

⁴³ Puig de la Bellacasa, “Ethical Doings in Naturecultures.”

⁴⁴ Starhawk, *Webs of Power*.

⁴⁵ Derrida, “Force of Law,” 24.

⁴⁶ See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 285; see also 94ff.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 318; see also 335ff.

The practice of alternative material embodiments is the heart of the erased second posthumanist gesture of the Left, which is nevertheless inscribed into our imagination of radical social change: with Anzaldúa (and I am thinking here also of Frantz Fanon and Jose Martí and Oswald de Andrade and many others) I see how radical change passes through the posthumanist transformation of the materiality and social relationality of the body when she says that “she is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes *nahual*, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person.”⁴⁸ Anzaldúa is nonhumanist in a very immediate materialist sense. The way in which she refers to becoming coyote is not the romantic vision of joining nature nor the becoming-animal of joining the idealized pack (such as Deleuze’s and Guattari’s wolf pack). Anzaldúa’s becoming coyote is rather ethopoietic: the boundary crossing of her coyote existence is that of an everyday transformation of ethos required by living as an “inappropriate” body on either side of a border (between Mexico and the United States in this case). She is refashioning the whole process of making her an “Other” on both sides of the border into an embodied strength that refuses to be appropriated. It is also a transformation that is required to account for all the changes that so many fellow travelers undergo as they cross the Mexico-U.S. border to live a clandestine life below the radar of surveillance.⁴⁹ This materialist embodiment of politics explored by a feminist, queer, migrant minoritarian body betrays representation—rather than claiming inclusion by the state, rather than asserting fidelity to a radical change to come. It creates a true event that challenges Left politics by undermining its fundamental ground: humanism.

WORLDING JUSTICE

The question is then: how can we think posthumanism and Left politics outside mainstream posthumanism as well as outside dominant Left traditions that focus solely on the humanist seizure of political power? All previous incarnations of posthumanist Left politics described earlier in this essay are not so much articulated through fidelity to a situation that supersedes the state but through betrayal of political thinking and everyday action regulated by the state. This is because the constituent force of Left politics seems to be vanishing, and the dialectic of constituent and constitutive power becomes the very ground on which control operates today. The constant focus on the state and on a historical subject that can destroy it has exhausted its radical political potential, leaving radical Left politics in a space of powerlessness and simultaneously in a space of possibility. What then is radical Left politics when it does not involve an antithetical subjectivity? Perhaps we can start with a speculation: the space of possibility for radical Left politics lies in crafting eco-commons and making alternative forms of life.

I borrow the term “forms of life” from Langdon Winner, who traces the term back to Wittgenstein as well as to Marx.⁵⁰ In forms of life we encounter a reweaving of the social and the material through the insertion of practices and technologies. But much can be said about this idea of insertion. A practice or a technical device is not just applied or used. It does not just enter into an existing organization of life. Rather, a form of life is remade through it; a

⁴⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La Frontera*, 104.

⁴⁹ Papadopoulos and Tsianos, “Autonomy of Migration.”

⁵⁰ Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor*, esp. chap. 1.

practice, a set of practices, a device, or a new form of relationality becomes part of a given form of life by changing it. There are no users, no tools, no disconnected actions, no individual actors (human or nonhuman), no subjects-objects. There are just forms of life, which set up the material constraints of what we are. According to Wittgenstein: “What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could *say*—*forms of life*.”⁵¹ Acting within such forms of life is the possibility for instigating justice in conditions where its deferral is promoted by both state power and much of the contemporary Left. Justice in this sense is the making of alternative forms of life—wherever this can happen, whenever this is possible. Every social context, every material arrangement, and every moment has enough space for conflicting forms of life: alter-ontologies.⁵² There are no closed spaces; there are no lost spaces. Reappropriation and reclaiming constitute the practice of liberating enclosed terrain. It is a practice that happens on the ground, through a form of politics that is beyond the existing coordinates of the representational politics of the Left. And this making of alter-ontologies (i.e., the acting within alternative forms of life) points again toward a posthumanist gesture, perhaps one more radical and deeply transformative than the previous ones discussed in this essay.

It is crucial here that these alter-ontologies are primarily engaging with matter. This is probably the most profound dislocation of Left politics that posthumanism has effected, a postanthropocentric politics. It is a moment that has been aptly described in recent attempts to discuss posthumanism as the coconstruction of life with other species and technical apparatuses.⁵³ What are the repercussions of these postanthropocentric world-making practices for Left politics? A postanthropocentric ecological view of history is the ability to participate in the transformation of the very material conditions of existence in a way that forces a new occasion of existence. In other words, it creates social and material conditions that cannot be neglected or bypassed. This is a politics of matter:⁵⁴ making politics and fostering justice by immersing into matter. But traditionally this power to create conditions that cannot be neglected or bypassed has always involved the question of violence. In much Left politics violence as destruction is the necessary ingredient for the making of the new. Against this tight articulation of violence and transformation (mainly in the form of violence against the state), dominant liberal humanist thinking exorcises violence and hypocritically asserts that violence starts where politics stops. Is it possible to escape the logic that opposes the violence of destruction to the oppression of the humanist state? Is it possible to avoid the perpetual recurrence of violence that is imposed by thinking radical politics as the other to the state's violence? How can postanthropocentric world-making practices escape this dichotomy, commit to the fundamental possibility of nonviolence, and simultaneously promote justice and create new forms of life and alternative worlds?

Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* explores the possibility of practices that can open political spaces outside the eternal cycle of law-making (constituent) and law-preserving (constituted) violence. There is a form of power/violence (the German word for both is

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 226.

⁵² Papadopoulos, “Alter-Ontologies.”

⁵³ See Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?*; Badmington, *Alien Chic*; Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

⁵⁴ “No science, but rather a politics of matter, since man is entrusted with matter itself” (Deleuze, “Pericles and Verdi,” 717). I think here of a politics of matter in a slightly different way. This is a politics of matter not because humans are in charge of matter but because human acts and practices, hopes and desires, thrive on the experimentation with matter's inherent movements. Matter is hope. Ontology is desire.

Gewalt)⁵⁵ that is neither law making nor law preserving and that through its existence addresses justice. Benjamin uses various terms to describe this form of *Gewalt*: revolutionary, pure, or divine. He asserts that *Gewalt*, “when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law.”⁵⁶ The reason for this is that this kind of *Gewalt* can “modify legal conditions”;⁵⁷ that is, it can be a form of *Gewalt* that breaks the monopoly of law over power and violence itself. When *Gewalt* is *outside* the law, it is a form of *Gewalt* that is induced in a situation rather than being given in it. *Gewalt* that is given in a situation is the *Gewalt* that the law can exercise, and this form of *Gewalt* appears as fate.⁵⁸ The *Gewalt* of the law calls for a political force against it that attempts to establish a political order that differs from the previous one but equally coercive: the *Gewalt* of the law appears as fate, as cyclical history, as something inescapable. The new form of *Gewalt* that Benjamin tries to introduce is non-fate. “Pure unmediated” *Gewalt* gets rid of the narrow sighted “dialectical rising and falling in the law-making and law-preserving” forms of *Gewalt*; it overthrows law altogether.⁵⁹ It is within this new space of *Gewalt* that a “new historical epoch is founded”⁶⁰ and justice can be realized. Justice is possible here because, following Benjamin, the new type of *Gewalt* that he announces and defends inserts a break in the normal social and political order that assigns standard roles to the involved actors: those who try to preserve existing law and those who need to challenge it and to make a new law if they want to improve their position in it. Benjamin advocates a form of *Gewalt* that allows the possibility of justice, not in occupying one of these two positions—this would only perpetuate violence and destruction and more conflict—but in exiting the field of these dual options offered by law altogether. That is, he advocates the opening of a certain situation to possibilities that lie outside it: true justice can happen when options are mobilized that bring us outside the dialectic between those forces that try to preserve existing law and those that attempt to make a new one. But how is it possible to materialize such a different type of *Gewalt* that installs true justice?

How can we populate this new space of *Gewalt*, fill it with acts of justice before and independent of the law of the state (or counteractions that exhaust themselves in contesting this law)? This is not a recourse to clichés such as “taking justice into one’s own hands” or a blank apology for violence but a reference to possibilities for creating spaces that are not dominated by an anthropocentric humanistic view that continuously restores one new coercive form of law after the other. It is not a coincidence that I turned earlier to Bakhtin’s *Rabelais* to evoke the ordinary materiality of existence as the space where justice can be enacted. In Benjamin this is further developed: the realization of this new form of *Gewalt* outside the law is the space of the ordinary, or better, it is a space that starts from the materiality of the ordinary. I want to link Benjamin’s “other type of *Gewalt*” to the ordinary, to see how and if radical Left politics can be grounded in the radical making of alternative forms of life and

⁵⁵ For a discussion of the ambiguity of the term *Gewalt*, see Balibar, “Violence.” In the quotations from the English translation of *Critique of Violence* I will keep the term “violence,” as this is the term used by the translator; see Benjamin, “Critique of Violence.”

⁵⁶ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 239.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 249, 251.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

everyday materialities that exist outside the law and outside the eternal cycle of state violence and Left destructive violence.⁶¹ Elsewhere I have discussed several examples of such alternative forms of life;⁶² here I want to focus on the conceptual coordinates of this “other type of *Gewalt*” as a possible alternative to the proliferation of destructive violence.

Against the perspective that sees radical Left politics as targeting the exceptionality of law, social power, and the state, we can trace with Benjamin the possibility of breaking cyclical historical time and the anthropocentric passing of history by mobilizing this other type of *Gewalt*: by enacting justice *independently* of law (i.e., by neither turning against the law nor following it). Benjamin exemplifies this in his discussion of the general strike: the general strike is simultaneously violent and nonviolent, legal and revolutionary;⁶³ it is not either/or, it is both. For Benjamin a general strike is something that is exceptional from the perspective of the state and ordinary from the perspective of the workers. The general strike is a very plain, everyday act, and at the same time it is a different form of *Gewalt*, revolutionary and divine *Gewalt*, because it is outside the law of the state. As Benjamin says, the reason for this ambivalence is that it “reveals an objective contraction in the legal situation”⁶⁴ that cannot accommodate an action such as the general strike that breaks so radically with the way the whole system of wage labor is or-

⁶¹ This focus on the ordinariness of divine *Gewalt* seem to run counter to many of the usual interpretations of Benjamin's short essay. These interpretations can be divided into two main groups. The most prominent example of the first interpretation is Agamben, *State of Exception*. Agamben is again, as in so many of his other writings, fascinated with the idea of catastrophe and disaster. His starting point is the moment of exception. Not least because of this he reads Benjamin in connection with Schmitt's state of exception. The legal vacuum that divine violence creates is, according to Agamben, a form of exception that opposes the legally imposed state of exception, that is, the law-created anomie. Agamben thus ends up misinterpreting Benjamin and reentering his idea of divine *Gewalt* into the dialectic of constituent and constituted power that is between a totalizing state and revolution, this time as a dialectic between their negations: as a law-created anomie against the anomie of the rebellious. Agamben's spectacle of power is the gigantomachy “between state of exception and revolutionary violence,” in which their relation is “so tight that the two players facing each other across the chessboard of history seem always to be moving a single pawn” (*State of Exception*, 62). We can find a good example of the second common interpretation of Benjamin's essay in Žižek's *Violence*. Žižek here popularizes and moralizes divine *Gewalt* in an attempt to see it as a sign of an injustice emanating as a life force—typical Žižek you might say: it sounds critical and lefty and it is, on top of that, soapy, as it shows how good reasons, benign sentiments, and cruel deeds can all coexist in one. Benjamin's concept of violence is a pure drive of life (Žižek, *Violence*, 198) that signifies a world that is “ethically ‘out of joint’” (*Violence*, 200). Žižek, who is so keen to make clear that Benjamin's divine *Gewalt* is not to be confused with either “terrorist acts” committed by religious fundamentalists or organized revolutionary terror (*Violence*, 185), sees this violence as an event: “There are no ‘objective’ criteria enabling us to identify an act of violence as divine; the same act that, to an external observer, is merely an outburst of violence can be divine for those engaged in it . . . ; the risk of reading and assuming it as divine is fully the subject's own” (*Violence*, 200). Žižek delivers the other side of Agamben: for the latter, divine *Gewalt* is always linked to the violence of state power, while for Žižek, divine violence is “when those outside the structured social field strike ‘blindly’” (*Violence*, 202). Žižek again reinforces the never-ending dialectic of constituent and constituted power in the form of exclusion and inclusion. Those who are outside the social field have the right to institute justice through divine violence. Here Žižek misinterprets Benjamin, whose main task was to break this vicious circle of defining violence by judging it in terms of the justice of the ends. Agamben's and Žižek's otherworldly readings of Benjamin's concept of divine *Gewalt* as something that “strikes out of nowhere” (Žižek, *Violence*, 202) are based on their understanding of divine *Gewalt* as an exceptional form. The main argument developed in this essay points in the opposite direction: divine *Gewalt* is a radical everyday practice; the more radical it is, the less violent it is.

⁶² See Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, *Escape Routes*, esp. chaps. 4, 9, 12; Papadopoulos, “Activist Materialism”; Papadopoulos, “Alter-Ontologies”; Stephenson and Papadopoulos, “Exit from the Regime of Life Control”; Papadopoulos, “The Imaginary of Plasticity.”

⁶³ Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” 239.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 240.

ganized. A protracted general strike is unthinkable from the perspective of the law because it destroys the ordinary life of society since the workers exit from the role assigned to them by the law. They become a *nonsubject*. They do not oppose anything (they do not in fact do something spectacular apart from not going to work); they just withdraw from the position assigned to them. They silently and nonviolently refuse the symbolic order of the law. And they do this immediately, now: the general strike as a form of divine and revolutionary *Gewalt* is ordinary and exists now, in *der Jetztzeit*.⁶⁵

I am not interested here in the general strike as such. Its political applicability and meaning are perhaps limited today, but one could think of the mutation of the general strike into a *metropolitan strike*: instead of withdrawing from their position as workers, in the metropolitan strike people withdraw from their positions as citizens of a particular polity.⁶⁶ They use urban space in ways that are not compatible with their position as citizens of an existing polity. By doing this they create a vacuum that exposes the oppressive structure of political power, which then loses its legitimacy. This exit from the position of the citizen as the fixed subject of rights and responsibilities into a position that forces the reorganization of the political itself⁶⁷ is the main form of the metropolitan strike: Paris in 2005; Oaxaca in 2006; Athens in 2008; Tunisia, Cairo, Spain, and London in 2011; and so forth. What is crucial in the metropolitan strike is that it addresses justice by revealing that justice is primarily about temporality. Given that justice is never here, is something of another world to come, with Benjamin we can see the divine *Gewalt* as the termination of the deferral of justice. Rolland Munro's work provides us with an important insight on the temporality of justice: justice is now, justice is against deferral; the space of deferral is the space of law and of destructive violence.⁶⁸ Benjamin's divine *Gewalt* is that which dismantles the very possibility of law as the deferral of justice. It is the moment when something that is just happens just now. The possibility of a nondeferred justice is materialized through the reappropriation of urban space: metropolitan strikes turn the materiality of metropolitan space into something that can no longer serve the existing function of polity. This is what happened in Genoa, in Paris, in Cairo, in Madrid, in Athens: a new temporality of justice emerged when people started reclaiming and experimenting with the urban space. And paradoxically this is the *end* of any form of violence, social or individual. The more justice is ordinary and concrete, the more *nonviolent* and collective it is. The more justice happens just now, the more "worlded" it is. It breaks with the violence of the eternal cyclical struggle between constituent and constituted power and starts from the very fact that it restores justice for those who suffer injustice just now.⁶⁹ When justice is ordinary and present, it happens without mediators;⁷⁰ it is a justice without intermediaries and without diplomats, referees, experts, translators.⁷¹ Divine *Gewalt* is *im-*

⁶⁵ For an extended discussion of the meaning of the proletarian general strike in Benjamin, see Tomba, "Another Type of Gewalt," 139–44.

⁶⁶ See also Tsomou, Tsianos, and Papadopoulos, "Athen"; Tsianos, Papadopoulos, and Stephenson, "This Is Class War."

⁶⁷ Following Rancière, *Disagreement*.

⁶⁸ Munro, "Just Waiting."

⁶⁹ See Tomba, "Another Type of Gewalt," 140.

⁷⁰ Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 247.

⁷¹ There is a proliferation of these figures of mediation in current theory; for a discussion, see Stengers, "Cosmopolitical Proposal"; Latour, *Politics of Nature*; Collins and Evans, *Rethinking Expertise*.

mediate justice, the moment when mediation and violence stops. “Just-ice takes places in the time of the stop,” as Munro says.⁷²

This form of radical political action is a form of processual and material justice that, rather than being concerned with normative issues and issues of power, is concerned with altering the material conditions of existence starting from positions marked by asymmetry and injustice: thick justice. Let us turn “thick description” upside down: thickness for Geertz is semantic;⁷³ let us look for material thickness instead. Practice for Geertz is text, but what about action as matter?⁷⁴ Thick justice is the beating heart of radical posthumanist Left politics. It is in the core of the embodied politics of new social movements, of the alter-globalization events, and of the metropolitical strikes discussed earlier in this essay. But let us fantasize and think thick justice in relation not only to these events and actions but also to a form of political practice that is about creating—literally—alternative material forms of existence. This could offer a different view on what many contemporary social theorists and social scientists call ontological politics, cosmopolitics, and action in actor networks.⁷⁵ In all these approaches symmetry is required to grasp how the human and the nonhuman constitutions operate together and how they produce new, mixed, hybrid forms of existence and associations with various elements of a network. Instead of clear-cut classifications and orderings of beings, these positions multiply the possibilities of how beings can connect to each other. This is a legitimate perspective that responds either to traditional humanists, who attempt to defend the exceptionality of humans, or to deep ecologists, who put the emphasis on the independence of nature and its primacy of value. So far so good; but this position cannot help much if we accept that these clear-cut distinctions between the cultural and the natural do not exist *anyway*. It is even more limited if you take hybridity, not as something that must be defended or argued for, but as something that is a given, as a starting point for any action. The real question facing posthumanist Left politics is how to move beyond anthropocentrism and humanism by maintaining a commitment to the problem of justice that pervades sociotechnical assemblages. The third dimension of posthumanism I am describing here is postanthropocentric because *we* have never been human indeed; but we have never been human not because we have never been modern but because “we” have never been *we* and “they” (the nonhumans) have never been *they*. The postanthropocentric dimension of posthumanist Left politics is neither about developing an ecological egalitarianism that considers the value of all nonhuman beings as equal⁷⁶ nor about creating the grounds for the articulation of constantly novel connections and concerns between us and them.⁷⁷ Rather, it is about the worlding of justice, that is, making alliances and engaging in practices that restore justice in the im-mediate ecologies that *certain* humans and *certain* nonhumans are inhabiting in deeply asymmetrical ways. These interventions are about building al-

⁷² Munro, “Just Waiting,” 64.

⁷³ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., how this transition takes places in Haraway’s work: from the thick descriptions of representation in *Primate Visions* (esp. chap. 3) to the thick sociomaterial interspecies traffic of matter and meaning in *When Species Meet*.

⁷⁵ Law and Hassard, *Actor Network Theory and After*; Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, vol. 1; Latour, *Science in Action*.

⁷⁶ For an important critique of this type of inclusive egalitarianism, see Rancière, *Disagreement*. See also Stephenson and Papadopoulos, *Analysing Everyday Experience*, chap. 6.

⁷⁷ See Puig de la Bellacasa, “Matters of Care in Technoscience”; Puig de la Bellacasa, “Ethical Doings in Naturecultures.”

ternative forms of life and connecting them together into shared commons of matter. An association of such forms of life into common spaces—alter-ontologies—can ultimately *account for* the multiplicity of hybrid life-forms that contemporary technoscience and global capitalist production unleash. It is about acting within and against these conditions to fulfill the responsibilities that the world market constantly announces but cannot realize. The commoning of material worlds is the worlding of justice. A

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Special thanks go to Hywel Bishop and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa for their critical comments. I would also like to thank Antonis Balasopoulos, Joanna Latimer, Simon Lilley, and Stephen Shukaitis and the members of the Culture, Imagination and Practice Research Group at the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, for their valuable suggestions. Crucial for developing the ideas presented here was the presentation of earlier versions of this essay at the conference “Life, Practice, Multiplicity,” held at the Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University, Berlin; the conference “Intellectuals and the State,” held at the Department of English Studies, University of Cyprus; and the conference “State of Things,” held at the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy, University of Leicester. This essay would not have been possible without the collaboration of Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos and our common work on earlier publications. An earlier version of this essay was published in the journal *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 10, no. 2 (2010): 134–51.