**The desire for private appropriation of space is a ‘spatial fix’ for global capitalism. Spatial fixes necessitate the outward expansion of capital into newly appropriated space as a temporary solution to resource scarcity. Exporting capitalism into space is not only unsustainable but naturalizes logics of the colonial frontier.**

**Shamas and Holen’19** |Dr. Victor Shamas, Oslo Metropolitan University, Work Research Institute (AFI), Oslo, Norway. Tomas Holen, Independent scholar, Oslo, Norway. “One giant leap for capitalistkind: private enterprise in outer space” in *palgrave communications* 5, 10 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0218-9|KZaidi

No longer terra nullius, space is now the **new terra firma** of capitalistkind: its naturalized terroir, its next necessary terrain. The logic of capitalism dictates that capital should seek to expand outwards into the vastness of space, a point recognized by a recent ethnography of NewSpace actors (Valentine, 2016, p. 1050). The operations of capitalistkind serve to resolve a **series of (potential) crises of capitalism**, revolving around the **slow, steady decline of spatial fixes** (see e.g., Harvey, 1985, p. 51–66) as they come crashing up against the **quickly vanishing blank spaces** remaining on earthly maps and **declining (terrestrial) opportunities for profitable investment of surplus capital** (Dickens and Ormrod, 2007a, p. 49–78). A ‘spatial fix' involves the geographic modulation of capital accumulation, **consisting in the outward expansion of capital onto new geographic terrains, or into new spaces, with the aim of filling a gap** in the home terrains of capital. Jessop (2006, p. 149) notes that spatial fixes may involve a number of strategies, including the **creation of new markets** within the capitalist world, engaging in trade with non-capitalist economies, and exporting surplus capital to undeveloped or underdeveloped regions. The first two address the problem of insufficient demand and the latter option creates a productive (or valorizing) outlet for excess capital. Capitalism must regularly discover, develop, and **appropriate such new spaces because of its inherent tendency to generate surplus capital**, i.e., capital bereft of profitable purpose. In Harvey’s (2006, p. xviii) terms, **a spatial fix revolves around ‘geographical expansions and restructuring**…as a temporary solution to crises understood…in terms of the overaccumulation of capital'. **It is a temporary solution because these newly appropriated spaces will in turn become exhausted of profitable potential and are likely to produce their own stocks of surplus capital; while ‘capital surpluses that otherwise stood to be devalued, could be absorbed through geographical expansions and spatio-temporal displacements'** (Harvey, 2006, p. xviii), **this outwards drive of capitalism is inherently limitless: there is no end point or final destination for capitalism. Instead, capitalism must continuously propel itself onwards in search of pristine sites of renewed capital accumulation. In this way, Harvey writes, society constantly ‘creates fresh productive powers elsewhere to absorb its overaccumulated capital'** (Harvey, 1981, p. 8).

Historically, spatial fixes have played an important role in conserving the capitalist system. As Jessop (2006, p. 149) points out, ‘The export of surplus money capital, surplus commodities, and/or surplus labour-power outside the space(s) where they originate enabled capital to avoid, at least for a period, the threat of devaluation'. But these new spaces for capital are not necessarily limited to physical terrains, as with colonial expansion in the nineteenth century; as Greene and Joseph (2015) note, various digital spaces, such as the Internet, can also be considered as spatial fixes: the Web absorbs overaccumulated capital, heightens consumption of virtual and physical goods, and makes inexpensive, flexible sources of labor available to employers. Greene and Joseph offer the example of online high-speed frequency trading as a digital spatial fix that furthers the ‘annihilation of space by time' first noted by Marx in his Grundrisse (see Marx, 1973, p. 524). Outer space serves at least two purposes in this regard. In the short-to medium-term, it allows for the export of surplus capital into emerging industries, such as satellite imaging and communication. These are significant sites of capital accumulation: global revenues in the worldwide satellite market in 2016 amounted to $260 billion (SIA, 2017, p. 4). Clearly, much of this activity is taking place ‘on the ground'; it is occurring in the ‘terrestrial economy'. But all that capital would have to find some other meaningful or productive outlet were it not for the expansion of capital into space. Second, outer space serves as an arena of technological innovation, which feeds back into the terrestrial economy, helping to avert crisis by pushing capital out of technological stagnation and innovation shortfalls. In short, outer space serves as a spatial fix. It swallows up surplus capital, promising to deliver valuable resources, technological innovations, and communication services to capitalists back on Earth. This places outer space on the same level as traditional colonization, analyzed in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, which Hegel thought of as a product of the ‘inner dialectic of civil society', which drives the market to ‘push beyond its own limits and seek markets, and so its necessary means of subsistence, in other lands which are either deficient in the goods it has overproduced, or else generally backward in creative industry, etc.' (Hegel, 2008, p. 222). In this regard, SpaceX and related ventures are not so very different from maritime colonialists and the trader-exploiters of the British East India Company. But there is something new at stake. As the Silicon Valley entrepreneur Peter Diamandis has gleefully noted: ‘There are twenty-trillion-dollar checks up there, waiting to be cashed!' (Seaney and Glendenning, 2016). **Capitalistkind consists in the naturalization of capitalist consciousness and practice, the (false) universalization of a particular mode of political economy as inherent to the human condition, followed by the projection of this naturalized universality into space—capitalist humanity as a Fukuyamite ‘end of history', the end-point of (earthly) historical unfolding, but the starting point of humanity’s first serious advances in space.**

What role, then, for the state? The frontiersmen of NewSpace tend to think of themselves as libertarians, pioneers beyond the domain of state bureaucracy (see Nelson and Block, 2018). ‘The government should leave the design work and ownership of the product to the private sector', the author of a 2017 report, Capitalism in Space, advocates. ‘The private companies know best how to build their own products to maximize performance while lowering cost' (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 27). One ethnographer notes that ‘politically, right-libertarianism prevails' amongst NewSpace entrepreneurs (Valentine, 2016, p. 1047–1048). Just as Donald Rumsfeld dismissed the opponents to the Iraq War as ‘Old Europe', so too are state entities’ interests in space exploration shrugged off as symptoms of ‘Old Space'. Elon Musk, we are told in a recent biography, unlike the sluggish Big State actors of yore, ‘would apply some of the start-up techniques he’d learned in Silicon Valley to run SpaceX lean and fast…As a private company, SpaceX would also avoid the waste and cost overruns associated with government contractors' (Vance, 2015, p. 114). This libertarianism-in-space has found a willing chorus of academic supporters. The legal scholar Virgiliu Pop introduces the notion of the frontier paradigm (combining laissez-faire economics, market competition, and an individualist ethic) into the domain of space law, claiming that this paradigm has ‘proven its worth on our planet' and will ‘most likely…do so in the extraterrestrial realms' as well (Pop, 2009, p. vi). This frontier paradigm **is not entirely new: a ‘Columbus mythology', centering on the ‘noble explorer', was continuously evoked in the United States during the Cold War space race** (Dickens and Ormrod, 2016, pp. 79, 162–164).

#### Thus, the plan: private entities should appropriate all of outer space, pave space rocks and put up a parking lot. We use an arm of the university and its operations to force the fiating of the removal of simulacrum through the injection of meaningless signs within the system. The use of an inherently meaningless construct of fiat exposes the operations of the university as we radically say ‘no’ to a simulacrum and prevent its existence through the system’s own construction, proving any answer to the solvency mechanism of the aff is actually proof of our method. Using educational institutions is key to accessing the inside of the system and imploding meaning

**The only option is a radical mimicry of the forms of the system, one that accelerates them to the point of their obvious vacuity. Fatal theory seeks to restore the symbolic space of mystery by operating in the margins, issuing the ironic force of the object in lieu of mastery of it. We must infuse education with symbolic exchange, breaking open the determinism of language and penchant for falsifiability that grounds political violence. Our paradoxical politics dwells in the poetic aporia of hyper-commodification, issuing signs against signs in a bitter but happy duel with reality as such**

**Pawlett 13 - William Pawlett, Senior Lecturer in the School of Law, Social Sciences and Communication at the University of Wolverhampton, in Ashgate Publishing, in 2013** ["Violence society and radical theory: Bataille, Baudrillard and contemporary society", https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288148526\_Violence\_society\_and\_radical\_theory\_Bataille\_Baudrillard\_and\_contemporary\_society, pg. 33-35, 1-5-2019] recut ahs emi

Symbolic Exchange and Death begins with a remarkably strident and politically radical preface: it declares that symbolic exchange is the only effective means of challenging or defying the capitalist system at a fundamental level. The capitalist system, for Baudrillard, is a vast and insidious system of control, adept at neutralising critique and political contestation. Critique may be neutralised by suppression or mis-representation, but increasingly **critique is assimilated as commodity** and as information/data through electronic solicitude. Taking its place within the general information overload, critical thought becomes just another link on the home page of the sort of person who ‘likes’ critical thought, one of your endless options on a Kindle or something you are made to read on an unpopular module during a university degree. That is, critical thought does not succeed in challenging the capitalist system; the cheap and abundant availability of works of critical thought, on Amazon for example, not only provides profits to a tax-dodging mega-corporation, it also demonstrates (or rather, simulates) the openness, tolerance and freedoms of the consumer capitalist system. How does symbolic exchange embody a greater or more successful defiance? Taking up Mauss’s notion of gift exchange as a concept “more radical than Marx’s or Freud’s”, Baudrillard insists that symbolic exchange does not merely describe the traditional practices of certain archaic cultures but is also “taking place here and now” (Baudrillard 1993a: 1). According to Baudrillard, symbolic exchange “haunts” capitalist social relations, it is present in them (in the sign – the medium of exchange) and it “mocks” these structural significations “in the form of their own death”. To understand what Baudrillard might mean by this it is important to stress that symbolic exchange is not a concept to be deployed as critique, symbolic exchange is, in itself, the practice of defiance; it is the living reversal of the system’s order. Symbolic exchanges, in Baudrillard’s sense, are the practice or act of reversal of the system’s priorities and values and so, in this sense, spell death for the system: not ‘real’ but symbolic death and symbolic death is more fundamental and humiliating than ‘real’ death. It is the enormity and reach of the system that makes it so vulnerable, like a much larger opponent being thrown by the momentum of their own weight in martial arts. The system is eminently vulnerable because it is built upon the sense of its own invulnerability, and specifically on its sense of irreversibility: the irreversibility of rationality, of progress, of (Western) dominance, the irreversibility of technological advancement. Given these conditions, according to Baudrillard, even a small or “infinitesimal” injection of reversibility can threaten the entire edifice; the system has no defences against symbolic reversion while it is more than capable of neutralising a frontal attack. Such reversions, the reversion of all the system’s ‘gifts’ include: the reversion of power in the sudden, unanticipated defiant acts of the apparently weak; the reversion of technological supremacy in the breakdown or computer virus; the reversion of rationality in the experience of the irreducible irrationality of rationality; the reversion of official meanings and sense into nonsense and mockery; the reversion of control in catastrophic failures. The effect of symbolic reversibility then consists in sudden, catastrophic reversals suffered by power and by the powerful which reveal, perhaps momentarily, the system’s deep vulnerability. Baudrillard’s position on symbolic exchange is not to be confused with the strategies of the Situationists, though he remained sympathetic towards this movement with which he was involved in the 1960s (Baudrillard 2004a: 15-20). An egg or custard flan thrown in the face of someone powerful and captured by the same media channels which the powerful usually dominate, can be far more effective in countering power than an unwieldy political statement. However, if the Situationists sought meaningful spaces for self-assertion in the gaps, lapses and dead zones of the capitalist system, Baudrillard’s approach is quite distinct. It seeks the setting in motion of a chain reaction or a chain failure through the rippling effects of symbolic humiliation by counter-gift or potlatch. The counter-gift may well be more effective when it is immediate, unplanned, or more specifically when it is not the result of subjective desires and considered beliefs – which can generally be accommodated by the system through simulation. One example might be the sudden, unexpected haranguing of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher by an elderly lady in 1983. Yet, this example does not really capture the sudden escalation that is involved in placing one’s life and death as a stake against the system. The tragic suicide in December 2012 of a nurse, Jacintha Saldanha, who worked at the private hospital in London favoured by the British royal family and was tricked into revealing information about a royal by two ‘journalists’ working for a Australian radio show, captures something of this fatal escalation. She had been humiliated by the journalists, yet her suicide vastly escalated the stakes and re-directed the humiliation back at the journalists, the media and wider society, generating a truly devastating, ‘potlatching’ humiliation of the journalists responsible (who seemed to crumble inwards), it further weakened the reputation of the so-called ‘free’ press and also brought to a close the British royal family’s ‘bounce’ in popularity after the royal wedding, jubilee and the London Olympics. Each of these powerful interests suffered an immediate reversion of their standing, a symbolic death ; and although the British media partially succeeded in limiting these symbolic effects to the designated sacrificial scapegoats consisting of the two journalists, the fundamental nature of the sacrificial or symbolic sphere became, temporarily, brutally obvious. In a sense we could say that the system cannot suffer a ‘real’ death in any case, not only because it is not a discrete, finite organism but because, in Baudrillard’s terminology, it is already dead, it has no genuine life or vitality and is kept alive only by its life support systems of simulation. The vampiric nature of capitalism was, of course, already a prominent feature of the Marxist critique (Marx Capital Vol. 1). For Baudrillard, the capitalist system does not only draw the life-blood of its exploited workers, it condemns its citizen-consumers to a life-less survival, a living-on in a state of humiliation and dependence, a ‘life’ that is shaped by the system, a life that is made to seem a gift of the system. Though suicide is expressly forbidden by both religious and secular law, that is the system exerts ownership over our death as well as our life, the point of biological termination does represent the absolute limit of the system’s control. Given these conditions the only fundamental strategy of defiance, for Baudrillard, is to reverse this humiliation, to refuse the ‘gifts’ and imprecations, to reverse this derisory life through a symbolic death hurled back at the system. This may take the form of the reversal of the poisonous gifts of consumer goods and information through a greater counter-gift of “**hyper-conformity”: the absorbing of** anything and **everything the system gives while refusing the proper use of these ‘gifts’**. One example given by Baudrillard is obesity, the indiscriminate absorption of food to a degree that becomes a social problem; this involves a (literally) internal revolt against the cult of physical fitness and the body beautiful, a rejection of the injunction to compulsory sexuality and sexual enjoyment (Baudrillard 1990b: 27-34). A further example is the reversal and cancellation of the overload of information through its spontaneous “poetic dispersal” into paradox and ever greater uncertainty: only in the correct dosage does information aid understanding, in excess it creates an absolute uncertainty. These forms of internal reversal reveal the ambivalence hidden within the system. It is not ‘real’ (or biological) death, nor ‘real’ violence, which has the power to challenge the system, it is death as symbolic form which is excluded from the system, and it is the symbolic death through the reversion of its systems which may be re-introduced into the system to subversive and fatal effect. According to Baudrillard, symbolic exchange is experienced “as a demand forever blocked by the law of value” and embodies “an intoxicating revolt”. This intoxication is always present so it does suggest a radically different pattern of social relations, which for Baudrillard would be “based on the extermination of values” (Baudrillard 1993a: 1). But could this extermination of all controlling values ever exist beyond clearly circumscribed ritual occasions, such as those described by Mauss (1990)? It seems that for both Bataille and Baudrillard the answer must be negative, there can only ever be a dynamic alternation or a fundamental duality and, Baudrillard suggests, all social formations except Western modernity have implicitly understood this. This issue is re-visited in more detail in Chapter 2. For Baudrillard “the principle of reversibility (the counter-gift) must be imposed against all the economistic, psychologistic and structuralist interpretations” (1993a: 1-2) and he adopts a very Bataillean formulation when he declares that symbolic exchange is “a functional principle sovereignly outside and antagonistic to our economic reality principle” (1993a: 2). Baudrillard comes close to a definition of symbolic exchange with the following:The symbolic is neither a concept, an agency, a category, nor a ‘structure’, but an act of exchange and a social relation which puts an end to the real, which resolves the real, and, at the same, puts an end to the opposition between the real and the imaginary. This initiatory act is the reverse of our reality principle … the symbolic is what puts an end to the disjunctive code and to separated terms … in the symbolic operation the two terms lose their reality (Baudrillard 1993a: 133).

**Thus, Evaluate arguments about the form of debate over content level arguments about the resolution. three warrants:**

**[1] Sequencing DA: Establishing ethical forms of debate is a perquisite to evaluating content. We have to agree upon what truth is before we evaluate the truth value of particular arguments**

**[2] Material Violence DA: Evaluating form gives the judge the ability to preserve debate as a safe space which is key to access and minimizing psychic violence**

**[3] Probability DA: Voting on content will not result in any legislative change in the real world. Your ballot can empirically shape practices in this space.**

**Nixon’s proclamation that “Gold is dead” marked the end of material labor relations. With no anchor to production the financialization of capitalism has made revolution impossible. Only the exacerbation of viral reactions solves through catastrophic collapse.**

**Baldwin 15 - Dr. Jon Baldwin, London Metropolitan University, International Journal of Baudrillard Studies, July 2015** “Baudrillard and Neoliberalism” [https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/baudrillard-and-neoliberalism/] Accessed 10/5/20 SAO

As would be expected of a thinker from the left concerned with issues of political economy, Jean Baudrillard’s work can be used to illuminate the machinations of geopolitical finance and the global economy. The most significant event to recently occur to this economy was the financial crash and crisis of 2007/8. A Baudrillardian reading of these events is the prime focus of the essay. Baudrillard’s work proposes that the origins of the crash can be found in the transformation of capitalism into a new form of hyper-capitalism, namely neoliberalism. As well this is the transformation of the economy into a financial simulacrum, namely a hyper-real economy. This article proposes that the suspension of the gold standard by United States President Richard Nixon in 1971 is the principal act of deregulation of the market. This fundamentally transmuted the nature of the economy. This ‘freeing’ of the market can be understood as a semiotic act, even a creative act, and is compared to radical movements in the arts. It is common to use the phrase gold standard to refer to a model of excellence or a foundation upon which judgement may be based. Postmodernity may be defined as an era that has lost such gold standard foundation. Nixon’s claim that ‘Gold is dead’ echoes Friedrich Nietzsche’s claim that ‘God is dead.’ Nothing is the same after this. There is no longer any possible morality of the market. The flow of capital is freed from any anchor to real wealth. We witness, as Baudrillard had fully anticipated, the virtual international autonomy of financial capital. Monetary debt becomes a mere paper promise and the world becomes more successful at creating claims on wealth than creating wealth itself. This is the play of floating capital. In this financial simulacrum money becomes a sign free of any reference to real wealth or production. When this simulacrum is exacerbated to the point of parody, the bubble bursts and crash ensues. The crash and crisis of neoliberalism can be seen to fully correlate with Baudrillard’s principle of exacerbation. The article begins by outlining the official and unofficial accounts of the crash of 2007/8. It suggests that capital is, to a certain extent, perpetual crisis. The move of the economy into neoliberalism and the discontent this facilities is remarked upon. The deregulation of the gold standard is a key moment in the move to a hyper-real economy. Analogies with post-modern architecture, music, literature, and poetry are made. These analogies are possible because, at heart, they all involve issues with the political economy of the sign. Indeed, in the early 1970’s Baudrillard had identified a certain correlation between Saussure and Marx on the semiotics of value. The deregulation of the gold standard is argued in the article to be central to the genealogy of the hyper-real economy. The implications of this are considered as well as consequences of the move to simulated finance and the virtual market. One outcome is the freeing of the economy and unlimited financial speculation. The trans-economics of speculation is argued to be exacerbated to the point of parody, and hence the bubble bursts. The article concludes with a discussion of the Baudrillardian motif of exacerbation. The world’s leading economies are in crisis and the harsh repercussions of the financial crash of 2008 are still being felt. The global financial meltdown continues and economic inequality has reached extremes not seen for a century. Business and government in their economic activity, commercial or military expansion, corruption, and surveillance are widely distrusted. Many people regret the consumerism and social corrosion of modern life. **However the emancipatory activities of protest, activism, and both the traditional and radical left, appears already exhausted, ineffectual, and have yet to deliver.** Less fortunate people in the west seem entrapped in a form of what Baudrillard would call Stockholm syndrome – expressing empathy for a system that does not have their interests at heart and which conceals gross inequalities of wealth, power, and opportunity. They seem content to accept exploitative and precarious working conditions, and the compensatory pathologies of narcissistic consumption (retail therapy), media spectacle (a thousand channels and nothing on), fantasies of status and advancement (the mythologies of advertising), and celebrity idolatry (the twittered selfie). Meek acceptance or resignation to a banal, materialistic, nihilistic society appears complete for some. Capital and affluent societies have always had waves of boom and bust – stasis and chaos – but what is crucial about the current financial situation is its scale. It is a global crisis and not regional like other previous crashes. It cannot be contained, assistance is not available from some other region, and austerity measures are already being met with civil disobedience. Dependent on one’s perspective, this heralds one of the greatest catastrophes of recent history or one of the most significant opportunities for radical change. Nobel laureate economist, Joseph Stiglitz, has proposed that the crisis – the fall of Wall Street, the revelation of the machinations of the bankers, and market fundamentalism – presents a legitimation crisis to capitalist society akin to the effect of the fall of the Berlin Wall upon communism. What was the catalyst for the crash? After decades of largely steady growth and expansion the global economy began to reveal signs of distress in 2007. On the 9th August BNP Paribas is the first major bank to acknowledge the risk of exposure to the subprime mortgage market and freezes three of their funds. Subprime lending is typically made to those who may have difficulty maintaining the repayment schedule. These high credit risk loans are characterized by higher interest rates making them lucrative to the institutions granting them. The chief executive of another major bank, Northern Rock, will later claim that this was ‘the day the world changed.’ In 2008 it became apparent that financial difficulty had snowballed and that the world was experiencing the onset of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Day by day there was the utter collapse of huge and household name financial institutions, the failure of core businesses, stock and housing market downturn, and decline in consumer wealth and economic activity. Global retirement funds dropped by 20 per cent in a single week. Economies worldwide slowed, credit was tightened, and international trade declined. Banks had to be bailed out by nation states to avert a meltdown on Wall Street. A number of causes and triggers of the crash were proposed with varying weight given by differing authorities. These involved a complex intersection of economic policies and deregulation. They include the encouragement of home ownership, the relatively easy access to loans for subprime borrowing, and subsequent overvaluation of bundled subprime loans, all of which assumed the housing market would continue to grow indefinitely. There were also questionable modes of trading by buyers and sellers, an ambition for short-term instant profit over longer term growth. There was a lack of adequate capital holdings by banks and insurance companies to support the financial commitments they made. An important distinction should be made here between the individual and the economic system itself. Often it is all too easy to scapegoat a few individuals for their failings in the attempt to present the financial system as essentially just and workable. Undoubtedly there were individuals’ idiosyncrasies within the system. There was blatant greed, idiocy, insider dealing, criminal activity, and escalation of little more than Ponzi schemes. There were dealers on cocaine, antidepressants, or anti-anxiety medication, which fuelled exuberance and the taking of risks one would normally avoid. Memorably, Tom Wolfe cites a study that discovered that “traders with unusually high levels of testosterone at the start of the trading day could be counted on to turn a profit by the day’s end.” However, when it came to sex “his demonstration rarely took more than 60 seconds. It went pump pump pump pump pump pump pump pump oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oooouh uh oo agghhh and bingo – roll off, snore like a bear” (Wolfe, 2013: 19). Traders treated their customers with disdain, referring to them as ‘muppets’, ‘guppies’, ‘suckers’, ‘marks’, ‘sheep’, ‘chumps’, ‘lambs’, ‘baby seals’ (Ibid). But these were the only people actually providing ‘liquidity’, that is, ready money. Also worthy of consideration are the hiring policies of financial Human Resources departments with their tried and tested techniques for ensuring they only hire the most aggressive and money-driven of all their candidates, and their ability to weed out anyone with morals, restraint or empathy. Whilst there is an element of ‘human error’ to the crash ultimately focus should be upon the economic system itself, a system that churns out and feeds off such individuals. The U.S. Senate’s report, Wall Street and the Financial Crisis: Anatomy of a Financial Collapse, concluded that the crash was the result of “high risk, complex financial products; undisclosed conflicts of interest; the failure of regulators, the credit rating agencies, and the market itself to rein in the excesses of Wall Street” (U.S. Senate: Levin-Coburn, 2011). Concomitant with this, and to address and attempt to lessen the chance of a recurrence, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act regulatory reforms were adopted. This was an overhaul of the U.S. financial regulatory system on a scale not seen since the restructurings that followed the Great Depression. The act attempts to increase regulation of banking and risk, increase transparency of markets (in particular derivatives), and protect consumer and insurance interests. There are further measures to increase standards and cooperation in accounting procedures and credit rating agencies. The ambition of the legislation is announced as follows: “To promote the financial stability of the United States by improving accountability and transparency in the financial system, to end ‘too big to fail’, to protect the American taxpayer by ending bailouts, to protect consumers from abusive financial services practices, and for other purposes” (Ibid.). Alongside the new regulatory measures there have been two dominant responses to attempt to lessen the impact and aggravation of the crisis. One is unprecedented fiscal stimulus such as institutional bailouts and quantitative easing – the printing of more money – to promote economic activity. Another has been the implantation of austerity measures such as public spending cuts, and certain tax increases. The general mood from western governments and big business has been one initial embarrassment and hand-wringing followed by an air of business as usual: the show must go on. There has been the regulatory patching up, the closing of a few loopholes, the making of some cuts here, and a stimulus of the economy there. The belief is that after several years, maybe even a decade or two, economic growth will return to the previous level and things will be back to normal. The masses must tighten their belts. They must accept the slashing of public spending, the shrinking of social protection, and an impoverished quality of life. They must accept the thwarting and regression of progressive change. They must knuckle down and ride out the storm while seeing advancement opportunities for their children dwindle to levels unknown for more than half a century. That is the mainstream official, Wall Street, version of events. On this account the crash presents no insurmountable obstacle to the ideology of free market capitalism. The crash is seen as just a blip. There is historical amnesia and myopia in this official vision. On the other hand there is a more critical view of the crash. Capitalism, its critics say, has always had waves of boom and bust. A boom fuelled by lending and private debt is always and inevitably followed by bust. Witness the recent bubbles in third world debt (1980s), the Asian meltdown (1990s), dot.com fever (2001), and property and mortgages (2007). On this view capitalism is perpetual crisis. The regular and cyclical nature of boom and bust is apparent in a broad historical overview of US economic activity. There were depressions in the 1830s, 1870s, and 1890s, and a financial panic in 1907: “It is interesting to note that all were immediately preceded by some kind of speculative financial boom that went bust, followed thereafter by the sharp and deep contraction of the real economy in the wake of the speculative bust” (Rasmus, 2010: 11). The crash of 1929 was a massive financial catastrophe chiefly caused by highly leveraged speculative borrowing. Hand-wringing and regulation followed such as the introduction of rules to stop such leveraged speculative trading by banks with customer deposits. Certain stability in the 1950s and 60s followed and there was no major financial catastrophe until the deregulation and removal of the aforementioned rules in the 1970s and 80s. Hence we arrive at another massive financial catastrophe caused in part by highly leveraged speculative borrowing. Again, this is being followed by hand-wringing and regulation. And so it continues like endless sequels to a film that was awful to begin with. As Marx and Engels had anticipated in The Communist Manifesto, “And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises?…by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises” (Marx, 2002: 184). What is crucial, however, about the contemporary financial situation is its scale. In the late 1990s Baudrillard had proposed that “what has triumphed isn’t capitalism but the global” (Baudrillard, 1998: 10). It may now already be a cliché and a form of wishful-thinking for some, but Christian Marazzi suggests that this is “one of the greatest crises of history” (Marazzi, 2011; 9). joseph Stiglitz has proposed that the crash presents a legitimation crisis for capital and should all but silence the most vociferous supporters of neoliberalism (the neoconservative supported vision of ‘capitalism on steroids’). This may well be overly optimistic but what remains significant is the fact that ‘capitalism’ or ‘neoliberalism’ is now emerging as the name of the problem rather than as something that seems obvious, the best, natural, or even inevitable. The term neoliberalism was originally coined in Europe in the late 1930s to suggest a new form of liberalism following the decline of interest in classical liberalism. It fell out of favour until recently whereby the meaning has shifted somewhat to embrace a host of related ideologies, mode of governance, and policy packages that are all favourable to a hyper-capitalism. There is a clear relationship with globalisation and imperialism. There are nuances but typically the political philosophy of neoliberalism supports total economic liberalisation, ultra-free trade, open markets with no geographic restriction, complete deregulation, and on-going privatisation. It would weaken and decrease the public sector in favour of the private sector. For its critic’s neoliberalism is a form of fundamentalism as crude and dangerous as any other fundamentalism. This market fundamentalism seeks market solutions and suggests competition as the answer to any problem**. The competition**, however, is not on a level playing field: **it is won by those with** connections and concentration of **capital, founded on imperialism, slavery, theft, and lineage**. The players take illegal short cuts, creatively cut corners, exploit others, and avoid tax payments. As with any competition it ensures that there are some winners but a majority of losers. This is at odds with the neoliberal claim that competition ensures the best outcome for all involved. A political economy has been established which ultimately only benefits a wealthy elite. Neoliberalism advocates the unfettered use of free market techniques and principles outside the spheres of commerce and business in the creation of new markets and interventions in non-economic areas and social space such as health, care, education, culture, energy, and so on. The basic premise is that everything will run better if run as a business. The neoliberal answers to the canonical questions of philosophy, such as ‘Why are we here?’ and ‘What should I do?’ are answered thus: We are here for the market, and you should compete. Neoliberals tend to believe that “humans exist for the market, and not the other way around” (Treanor, 2005). The human is defined as merely a potential entrepreneur, the middle-manager of their own life, which is seen as their own initial capital and enterprise. Neoliberalism perhaps makes sense only to those already holding the bargaining chips of economic power, or the poor souls who have internalised this ideology and definition of their finite time on earth in purely economic terms. Since the 1970s neoliberalism as a practical system of government has been implemented in various forms around the world often under the guise of liberal-democracy but in reality as variants of crony capitalism (a sprinkling of liberal legitimacy to dictatorships), corporatocracies (the corporate takeover of nation states), and unfettered and unrequested globalisation. The governments of Ronald Regan and Margret Thatcher, with big business whispering and tonging in their ears, are said to have done much to facilitate and disseminate such neoliberal ideology. A key resource for their ideas is Friedrich Hayek’s paranoid and unwarrantedly influential book The Road to Serfdom. Hayek argued that the trend, as he saw it, towards socialism and collectivisation occurring throughout the west in the 1940s was incompatible with freedom and democracy. The fear is of the growth of the state and variants of socialism. His ideology is perhaps best summarised by Ronald Reagan’s famous quip: “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help.’” Given the recent bank bailouts this rings rather hollow today. Thatcherism is largely synonymous with neoliberalism. The tributes that followed the recent death of Thatcher revealed how much of neoliberalism is now taken for granted even of the left of the political spectrum. One delightful piece of dissention was offered by Labour M.P. Glenda Jackson in a House of Commons speech which went against the mainstream of historical amnesia. She spelled out the disapproval of such neoliberalism for the general population of the UK. Thatcherism wrought “the most heinous social, economic and spiritual damage upon this country… We were told that everything I had been taught to regard as a vice – and I still regard them as vices – was, in fact, under Thatcherism, a virtue: greed, selfishness, no care for the weak, sharp elbows, sharp knees, all these were the way forward…[people know] the price of everything and the value of nothing” (U.K. Parliament, CM201213). Also typical in enumerating the social problems, growing populist reaction, and discontent of neoliberalism are the heartfelt words of a UK school teacher: “We train children to be successful, ruthless, greedy and selfish; our virtues are money, fame and looks. We do not reward kindness, do not value loyalty, we do not care about courage” (Griffiths, 2013: 11). The World Health Organisation has predicted that depression is on track to become the second most widespread disease, after heart disease, in the developed world by 2020. Oliver James (2008) posits a strong correlation between rising rates of mental distress and nations most advanced in neoliberalism. Our hugely increased wealth over the past half century has done nothing to increase our happiness. In fact not only does market capitalism have little impact on improving levels of happiness but it actually exacerbates certain types of mental illness. Rates of distress among women in the UK almost doubled between 1982 and 2000. This is also true of the US and in striking contrast with more egalitarian and collectivist countries. Capitalism itself, with countless boom and bust cycles, is fundamentally bi-polar, swinging from the hyped-up mania and exuberance of a boom to the depression and come down of a bust. The advocacy of cognitive behaviour therapy, James suggests, must be refuted as merely a sticking plaster for a sick society which encourages individuals to try to think positively rather than challenge the status quo. James describes the human being under neoliberalism as a passive, empty, anxious, isolated person for whom life has no meaning except work and who compensates for this through compulsive consumption. Our emotional malaise is a direct result of increased competitiveness, individualism, materialism, and the way that these exploit our insecurities. **Selfish capitalism generates insecurity and inflates comparisons**. A winner-takes-all competitiveness merely creates losers and a pandemic of low self-esteem. It offers only compensatory pathologies around consumption, celebrity, and status. The acceleration of neoliberalism is clearly a crisis in itself, and a back-drop to the actual crash. There will be numerous ways of telling the story of the crash and the ‘biggest bubble in history’ but at some stage all plot lines will converge to one place and one time: Camp David, Maryland, on the afternoon of Friday 13th August 1971. Here, in secret, Richard Nixon met Federal Reserve chairman Arthur Burns and other advisers. The backdrop was high inflation, and high unemployment. These were implications of the fact that since the mid 1960’s the US had begun to borrow enormous sums to fund Lyndon B. Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ and the Vietnam War. In essence “the US began to live – and kill – considerably beyond its means” (Kunkel, 2012:23). To avert a run on America reserves Nixon announced the advice he was going to follow on television on Sunday 15th August, before the markets opened: “I have directed Secretary Connally to suspend temporarily the convertibility of the dollar into gold … Now, what is this action – which is very technical – what does it mean for you?” (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?%20pid=3115%20#axzz%201UZnES7PMon). Indeed, what does it mean and what are the implications today? Previously the Bretton Woods system of international financial exchange had fixed exchange rates based on the US dollar, which was redeemable for gold by the US government at the price of $35 per ounce. This anchor meant that the U.S. was committed to backing every dollar overseas with gold. The dollar was anchored to gold and other currencies were anchored to the dollar. Paper banknotes in circulation carried the guarantee that they could be exchanged for a certain amount of gold. As gold is scarce, this put strict limits on the amount of money that governments could print. The suspension of the direct convertibility of the U.S. dollar into gold ushered in the era of **freely floating currencies**. This is a move away from the strict post-Depression regulation of U.S. finance. The current world monetary system assigns no special role to gold; indeed, the Federal Reserve is not obliged to tie the dollar to anything. It can print as much or as little money as it deems appropriate. Nixon’s neat opportunism “changed the rules of world trade” (Auters, 2010: 35). and Slavoj Žižek confirms that the decision to abandon the gold standard for the US dollar “was the sign of a much more radical shift in the basic functioning of the capitalist system” (Zizek, 2012: 17). In semiotic terms Nixon suspended the relationship between a sign and its referent – in this instance money and gold. This disconnected the circuit between paper and bullion, and hence representation and the real. The implications following this type of divorce of sign systems from their referent (even if the relationship was always only ever idealist or utopian) underpin much of Baudrillard’s work. The implications of the loss of a core referent, or loss of a sign systems connection to a reality, are often discussed under the rubric of postmodernism. The much debated term was first used around the 1870s but gained wider currency in the 1970s. Following Nixon there is no transcendental law of capital and in many ways anything goes. There is incredulity to grand narrative of the modern, planned, regulated market. One can make an analogy with developments in the arts. Around the date of the ‘Nixon Shock’, July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm to be exact, Pruitt–Igoe, a large urban housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, was given the final coup de grâce by dynamite and the first stage of demolition was complete. For architectural theorist and provocateur, Charles Jenks, this was the day modern architecture died and a new paradigm emerged: postmodern architecture. The destruction of the complex, typified by poverty, crime, and segregation, signalled the failure of public policy planning and is seen as a direct indictment of the ideals of modernism and of the society-changing aspirations of the International School. Modernist architectural form, planning, and space were meant to regulate good conduct and healthy behaviour. Postmodern architecture, for better or worse, is incredulous to such ambitions and has loss the gold standard and regulation of modernist planning. In music one might point to composer Arnold Schoenberg’s ambition of the emancipation of the dissonance. Music loses the standard of tonality and arguably sounds like the dissonance of emancipation. Literature loses the regulated contract between author, text, and reader with fragmentation, paradox, parody and questionable narrators. The work of art loses the divine and cult value. It is no longer the representation of a referent just as money is no longer a representation of gold or wealth. Religious and mythological themes, the portrait of the patron, the landscape, and the slice of modern life all dissipate. Art becomes a self-referential sign system playing with its own possibilities. Its referent becomes other art movements and as such becomes simulation. New Age spirituality is a quasi-sentiment of the ineffable freed from the dogma and rituals of the standard of institutionalised religion. In Baudrillard’s signature theory, reality itself becomes a self-referential system disconnected from the gold standard of the Real. Let us take a moment to stretch a tentative analogy with what happened in poetry and the deregulation of verse. The Oxford Companion to English Literature announces that “Verse in the twentieth century has largely escaped the straitjacket of traditional metrics.” Likewise we can say that ‘Economics in the twenty first century has largely escaped the straitjacket of the traditional regulated market.’ In England ‘free verse’ was initially a term of derogation before it became a battle cry, and today is more or less a neutral descriptor. Emerging at the advent of European modernism, the French term vers libre, first used by Gustave Kahn in the late 1880s, signified poetry free from the closed forms such as the sonnet, villanelle, or sestina, making very little or no use of traditional rhyme or meter. Kahn refused all legitimacy to traditional meter, seeing in it only a constraint, “an essentially political one – the inherited legacy of royal centralism and absolutism, put to work in servile manner” (Meillassoux, 2012: 22). Charles Baudelaire, with his focus on modern life in the city, also signals the freeing of poetry from strictly religious, mythological, or natural referents. There is no standard in terms of form or content that poets are bound or restricted by. For pedagogical convenience we can cite the myth of Arthur Rimbaud as pioneering these developments. The poet is raised to ‘seer’ with ‘verbal hallucinations’ and ‘verbal alchemy’ under the aegis of the theory that ‘inventing the unknown calls for new forms’. This is Rimbaud, in his own words, “exempt from all morality” (Robb, 2001: 194). Une Saison en Enfer was one of the first modern works of literature to show “that experiments with language are also investigations into the self.” Fifteen years before the vers libre made its official appearance in French literature, the idea that poems could be written without rhyme or metre “sounded like artistic vandalism” Ibid.). For Stéphane Mallarmé, Rimbaud was the sort of ‘attractive hooligan’ who could, and did, do “serious damage to French literature” (Ibid.). In ‘Crisis of Verse,’ Mallarmé will speak of the “exquisite and fundamental crisis” (Meillassoux, 2012: 21). occasioned by the emergence of free verse. The qualified acceptance of free verse is enabled insofar as “God had ceased, for the young Mallarmé, to guarantee the status of literary symbols” (Ibid.: 28). For verse, as the poet believes, there are to be no political or centralist constraints, no referents or standards, no morality, and ‘God has ceased.’ For the economy, as Nixon states, there are to be no political or centralist constraints, no referents or standards, no morality and ‘Gold is dead.’ For organised religion and philosophy, as Nietzsche states, there are to be no political or centralist constraints, no referents or standards, no morality, and ‘God is dead.’ If we have broken with these standards and referents of poetry, religion, and philosophy then it is because we have killed their guarantor and transcendental signified – God. If we have broken with these standards and referents of the economy then it is because we have killed their guarantor and transcendental signified – Gold. The ending of the gold standard may not be the single cause of the current crisis but it is certainly an enabling factor. In 1973 dollar-gold convertibility was abandoned once and for all. Enter now the play of borrowing and lending: all monetary debt since has been “mere paper promises” (Kunkel, 2012: 23). Overall indebtedness has grown faster than most national economies: “In the last forty years, the world has been more successful at creating claims on wealth than it has at creating wealth itself” (Ibid.). Marx’s circuit M – C – Mˈ (Money – Commodity – Money) becomes, as he anticipated, M – Mˈ (Money – Money). In likewise, fashion pioneer of semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure’s formula S – R (signifier and signified comprise the (S) sign which refers to (R) a referent) become S – S (Sign – Sign). That is, it becomes what Baudrillard will term a simulation, a self-contained self-referential sign system. In the financial economy money – a ‘paper promise’, a ‘claim on wealth’ – becomes a sign free of any reference to real wealth or production: a financial simulacrum. Economic referents enter into a play of self-generated signs abstracted from real value. In The Mirror of Production, Baudrillard summarises: “The sign no longer designates anything at all. It approaches its true structural limit which is to refer back only to other signs. All reality then becomes the place of a semiurgical manipulation, of a structural simulation” (Baudrillard, 1975: 128). A financial bubble, viewed through a Baudrillardian lens, can be conceived as one such simulation. It is becoming routine in discussions of Baudrillard to note the uncanny nature of how his thought anticipates and seems to predict future developments: “the prefigurative qualities of Baudrillard’s writing are, now, self-evident” (Noys, 2012). Problems with the symbolism of the disentangling of the gold-standard are emblematic and the seeds of the current crash are planted in the early 1970s. Baudrillard notes, in 1973, that this process culminates in the ‘virtual international autonomy of finance capital’, in the uncontrollable ‘play of floating capital’. When financial capital is extracted from ‘all productive cautions’, and even from ‘all reference to the gold standard’, then ‘general equivalence’ becomes the strategic place of the manipulation: “Real production is everywhere subordinated to it. This apogee of the system corresponds to the triumph of the code” (Baudrillard, 1975: 129). Here, in a characteristic motif, the economic real (of production for instance) is subordinated to economic simulation: simulation becomes more real than the real (hyper-real). The code now becomes the greater political problem than alienation, exploitation, inequality, and so on. **The financial simulacrum should not be taken as having no effect on everyday economic life:** the code, the model, precedes the real. The economy is hence forth considered hyper-real. Elton McGoun uses Baudrillard’s notion of hyper-reality in his study of intrinsic value. The simulation-model and virtual market comes to determine the real economy itself: “decisions affecting production and employment are made on the basis of stock prices, and not on the basis of production and employment” (Elton, 1997: 113) The following conclusion is reached: it is not the ‘real economy’ that shapes reality but activity in the financial economy. “The financial economy is thereby more real than the real economy itself; it is a hyper-real economy” (Ibid.). This results in a financial simulation which consists of an exchange sphere without any reference to economic reality. It is an internal (virtual) exchange with no referent. The sophistication of the financial simulacrum tends to reduce the degree of materiality of the financial reality. Schinckus explains the evolution from commercial fairs to financial markets, whereby “the goods were not exposed anymore and the transactions (on paper) became symbols” Schinckus, 2008: 1086. Finance has largely abandoned its role of raising capital or supporting entrepreneurial activity (with subsequent variants of exploitation) and is now almost totally dedicated to speculation. Orléan evokes the ‘virtual character’ of finance to describe this disconnection with the sphere of production (Orléan, 1999). Schinckus uses Baudrillard to tease out some of the consequences of the move to e-finance and the technological virtualization of the financial market. The emergence of automatic trading and the creation of electronic financial products have profoundly modified the organisation of the markets and financial exchanges themselves. The ‘Iowa Electronic Market’, created in 1988, was the first virtual market where all interactions took place online. Oral negotiation has been superseded by an abstract sociability whereby traders only interact via computer screens. Wolfe describes traders “trying to monitor six screens at once, six screens that fan out three over three, obscuring any connection we have to the real world” (Wolfe, 2013: 27). This leads to a ‘screen sociability’ which sees traders “personify their screen by giving them a hypothetical personality” (Schinckus, 2008: 1081). Often stock market transactions (or rather risks) concern minute quantities, which may be just fractions of a per cent. But when these are amplified into quantities of hundreds of millions of dollars of shares these fractions soon add up. One might buy a stock (any stock, it is immaterial – and herein lies one of the very problems) to hope to inflate the general share price and then sell immediately and attempt to make an instant profit. Or vice versa, sell then buy. Wolfe cites an early example from the pioneer Edward Thorp: “He bets $332.5m – virtually one third of a billion – on selling a stock short – and bets another third of a billion buying the same stock to make a profit of one one-hundredth of 1%. Think of risking a total of close to two thirds of a billion dollars to make $2.5m! Sheer madness” (Wolfe, 2013: 21). One effect of the emergence of quantitative trading is that “It had nothing to do with any stock’s or bond’s value. It was a purely mathematical way to game the markets” Ibid.). One issue with this creation of a virtual market is the ambition to reach the idea of the ‘perfect market’ model seen only in economic theory textbooks. In this case, “the finance reality has become a “hyper-reality” i.e. the image of the theoretical reality that we have in mind” (Schinckus, 2008: 1082). One trend of this desire to develop ‘hard models’ in finance has been the rise of econophysics, whereby economists, physicists, statisticians and computer specialists endeavour to apply models seen and developed in physics to the market. In these instance financial quotations are studied as if they behaved, for example, like gas molecules. These models then actually shape the market by being transformed into computational algorithms to price or hedge financial securities with the belief that returns will behave like physical entities. One prominent simulation model, certainly influential in derivatives, has been the Black-Scholes formula published in 1973. This was meant to cut risk and scientifically legitimate the activities of options markets around the world. However, over-reliance upon the model, and its incorrect axioms (e.g. the presupposition of negligible probability of extreme price change) was said, by the likes of NassimTaleb and Jean-Philippe Bouchaud, to spiral into the worldwide October 1987 crash. Capital freed from regulation has no obstacle to circulation and value radiates “endlessly in every direction” (Baudrillard, 1987: 25). Recently, **trade in derivatives worldwide was one quadrillion US dollars, which is ten times the total production of goods on the planet over its entire history**. This is one sense of what Baudrillard means by ‘floating capital’. There is no anchor in real production or wealth. Žižek has recently suggested that the stages in the predominant mode of money seem to obey the Lacanian triad of psychoanalytic concepts of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary. Gold functions as the Real of money (what it is ‘really worth’); with paper money we enter the Symbolic register (paper is the symbol of its worth, worthless in itself); and, finally, the emerging mode is a purely ‘Imaginary’ one – money will increasingly exist as a purely virtual point of reference, of accounting, without any actual form, real or symbolic (the ‘cashless society’) (Zizek, 2012: 101). Financial speculation is “without reference to production or its real conditions…it plays now on its own orbital circulation and revolution alone” (Baudrillard, 1998:1). One result of this is the ‘fictitious’ nature of wealth, as Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy suggest in The Crisis of Neoliberalism. For instance, income is withdrawn against asset bubbles, and there are claims made on future wealth that neither can, nor will, be produced. The signs engendered by the financial simulation cannot fully be converted into real wealth, as the market is currently experiencing. Duménil and Lévy make the case that neoliberalism has less been an ideological programme on behalf of free markets than a quest for more high income on the part of the upper classes. This goes against the traditional legitimisation of neoliberalism by positing old fashion greed against liberty and free-flowing markets. In true ‘trickle-down’ fashion, however, this quest for wealth and property also appeals to the middle-class and the poor. Subprime lending was the attempt to extend to ordinary consumers “through rising home prices [consumer debt, student loans, credit, etc.], a fictitious income long enjoyed by the financial classes. The scheme could hardly last” (Kunkel, 2012: 28). This is congruent with the claim by Angela Mitropolous and Melinda Cooper that the crisis was generated by “usury from below that extended beyond the limits which were tolerable to capital” (Noys, 2010: 46). This is to say that the growth of the bubble accelerated and inflated into what The Economist has called “the biggest bubble in history.” For Baudrillard, the crisis was an always already coming implosion impacted upon by the hyper-real economy and trans-economics of speculation. This is a flouting of the ‘law’ of value, of the market, production, surplus-value, and the’ very logic of capital’. The trans-economic develops into “a game with floating, arbitrary rules, a jeu de catastrophe” (Baudrillard, 2001: 1). Interestingly here, the crisis has come and traditional political economy has come to an end, “but not at all as we expected it to – it will have ended by becoming exacerbated to the point of parody” (Ibid.). **The financial crisis has emerged,** the bubble has burst**, and we witness one of the biggest threats to capitalism** and neoliberalism **thus far, through the exacerbation of simulation.** This has not come about through radical politics and not – as much as it would have been desirable to be agents of change – through critique, or dialectics, or rational discussion, or insurrection, or event, or act, or the deconstruction of political concepts, or long-term revolution, or instant revolt, and so on. Baudrillard’s argument is that we need to follow this process and exacerbate further the contradictions of the hyper-real economy to ensure its demise. **If capital is now floating capital, then let us let it float away.** This is the parodic, ironic, and ecstatic play of the processes often analysed under the rubric of postmodern. Regarding the crisis there is no transcendent critique at play but immanent implosion. This resonates with the theoretical manoeuvre that Benjamin Noys (2012) has identified as ‘accelerationism.’ Noys notes that there are those who argue for the need to ‘radicalise and deepen the tendencies’ that led to the current crisis: “The tendency now becomes the immanent radicalisation of capital’s own dynamic of deterritorialisation” (Noys, 2010: 51). For Baudrillard, this immanent implosion and exacerbation is “a way of putting an end to the economy that is the most singular in style, ultimately more original than our political utopias” (Baudrillard, 1998: 2). Ecstasy is the process in play rather than dialectics. The only revolution in things today is no longer in their dialectical transcendence (Aufhebung), but in “their potentialization, in their elevation to the second power, in their elevation to the Nth power, whether that of terrorism, irony, or simulation” (Baudrillard, 1990: 63). Baudrillard proposes that it is from the inside, by overreaching themselves, “that systems make bonfires of their own postulates, and fall into ruins” (Baudrillard, 2001: 6). This is the fate that arguably awaits the exacerbation of neoliberal capital. Rather than confront power, **one must use power against itself**. As Baudrillard cites as a preface in Forget Foucault, “As in judo, the best answer to an adversary manoeuvre is not to retreat, but to go along with it, turning it to one’s own advantage” (Baudrillard, 1987). In a methodological consideration Baudrillard writes that **the only justification for thinking and writing is that it accelerates these terminal processes. “Here, beyond the discourse of truth, resides the poetic and enigmatic value of thinking**” (Baudrillard, 2000: 83). Exacerbation is a radical form of Daoism, a going with the flow, not offering resistance but letting the power of the system destroy itself. This is certainly counter intuitive and a novel proposition but is perhaps better placed than the attempt to confront a vastly more powerful opponent head-on, or to attempt make an absurd system moral or regulated. Neoliberalism and its “democratic dictatorship is shaping up nicely,” Baudrillard claims(Baudrillard, 1997: 149). If this is the case then ultimately, for Baudrillard, we are to challenge this from the realm of the symbolic. The economic and semiotic system suppresses and is built upon the denial of the symbolic: one must “therefore displace everything into the sphere of the symbolic, where challenge, reversal and overbidding are the law “(Baudrillard, 1993: 136). Is this principle of exacerbation, which is witnessed in the escalation and overbidding of (‘primitive’) potlatch competition that Baudrillard frequently return to, going to be effective in the ruination of neoliberalism? It is at moments like the socio-economic present that we are most likely to find out.

**Productivism has hidden colonialist imperatives reversibility undermines oppression**

**Holliday-Karre 15 - Dr. Erin Amann Holliday-Karre, Assistant Professor of Literature at Qatar University, in the Journal Feminist Theory, March 24th, 2015** “The seduction of feminist Theory” [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1464700114562530] Accessed 1/29/20 SAO

Jean Baudrillard has long been dismissed by feminists, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, not only as anti-feminist but also, by implication as sexist, racist, and misogynist. Many feminists accuse Baudrillard of denying women access to the masculine realm of production by arguing that the feminine power of seduction can trump masculine ideology. Rebecca Schneider, for example argues that the timing of Baudrillard’s theory of seduction is significant because it occurred just as women and people of colour were beginning to gain access to the spheres of production: ‘Baudrillard might be read as representative of an anxiety born of women’s entry into the realms of production’ (1997: 191). This suspicion might be turned around to ask why feminists reject new theories that challenge them to rethink assumptions about ‘the realms of production’. The production model as the sole means of empowerment is at the heart of Baudrillard’s critique, not women per se.1 And while the twenty-first century ushered in a feminist revaluation of Baudrillard’s work, many still argue that the work of feminism and Baudrillard’s theory of seduction are incompatible. The claim of incongruity between feminist theory and a theory of seduction stems from a belief that feminists must rely on productive strategies, using terms such as equality and difference, to empower women. To conceptualise all feminist theory in this way misses the fact that many canonical feminist texts challenge the use of productive terminologies in discussions of their work. In her analysis of contemporary feminist theory and Baudrillard, Baudrillard’s Challenge: A Feminist Reading (2000), Victoria Grace challenges the feminist use of terms such as desire, power, identity, equality, and difference arguing that these terms perpetuate structures used to oppress and exclude women. For Grace, as for Baudrillard, **feminists should not jockey for inclusion in an inherently unjust system**, but rather challenge and work to subvert its foundations. Both Grace and Baudrillard maintain that arguing for a feminine difference, as Luce Irigaray does, perpetuates a notion calculated to keep women in a subservient position. Grace claims that: These concerns and foci of analysis and deconstruction are undeniably driven by an assumption of the inevitability of the economic (needs, production, value), the inevitability of the law (the bar that structures identity/difference, subject/object), even taking into account the attempts at deconstruction and re-writing from a position of a different ‘difference,’ and of the inevitability of power. There is no seduction here. (2000: 188) According to Grace, many feminists, including Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Judith Butler, do not theorise the political foundations for productive ideologies thereby perpetuating their inherent binaries. For Grace, Baudrillard becomes critical for feminism to the extent that his theory of seduction provides tools to challenge and overturn the logic and supremacy of productive ideology. While **feminists** see a positive focus for their work in the logic of the **production model,** in Baudrillard’s estimation all ideology **is Eurocentric and** thus **contains hidden colonialist imperatives**.2 Grace agrees with Baudrillard that unless feminists challenge productive ideology, we risk preserving its hierarchical foundations. While Grace presents an important and timely analysis of Baudrillard and contemporary feminism, I challenge her claim that ‘there is no seduction here’. I agree that Baudrillard’s theory of seduction is crucial for feminism in that it presents a challenge to the value-laden productivist discourse that Grace finds perpetuated in contemporary feminist theory. However, I argue that the next step in assessing the possibilities of Baudrillard’s work for feminist theory is to recognise those feminists who do employ a strategy of seduction in Baudrillard’s sense of the term. Where Grace (2000: 5) finds no feminist whose standpoint comes close to that of Baudrillard, I highlight several feminists who can be read as taking precisely the position called for by both Grace and Baudrillard. By limiting her analysis to contemporary feminists, Grace obscures Baudrillard’s mention of British feminist Joan Rivie`re’s essay, ‘Womanliness as Masquerade’ (1929). Taking Baudrillard’s reference to Rivie`re into account allows for the elucidation of an historical strain of seduction in feminism that I argue can be traced from early feminists, such as Virginia Woolf, to more contemporary feminists, such as He´le`ne Cixous. Explicit references to Baudrillard’s theory are unnecessary to the recognition of seduction in feminist writing – what is required is a close attention to language. Naming Baudrillard’s theory of seduction as a new concept for feminism allows us to see its contours in feminist writing, and to reveal it as a strategy used to overturn the logic of production. Grace suggests that most feminists reject Baudrillard’s theory on the basis of the traditional definition of seduction: ‘The word ‘‘seduction’’ in the Anglo-American context, is resolutely associated with a kind of predatory male behavior bent on conquest [...] or alternatively a female sexual behavior designed to turn the male on his path toward evil and his downfall’ (2000: 140).3 However, it seems precipitous to assume with Grace that Baudrillard’s use of the term is ‘precisely in opposition to, and a process of critique of, these accepted readings’ (2000: 142). Although I agree that Baudrillard critiques its traditional literary definition, the fact that he chooses to use the term seduction situates him in the context of both literary and psychoanalytic discourses on ‘seduction’. Placing Baudrillard in conversation with Shoshana Felman can show that contemporary feminist readings of, for example, Don Juan are not so different from Baudrillard’s theory. Felman divorces seduction from terms like ‘sexual manipulation’ and ‘predatory male behavior’, situating it within a performative theory of language. For Felman, ‘Don Juan is a myth of scandal precisely to the extent that it is the myth of violation; the violation not of women but of promises to them’ (1983: 11). Locating Don Juan’s transgression not in his behaviour but in the structure of language, Felman argues that the words ‘I promise’ serve to violate the meaning attached to language. Baudrillard and Felman both argue that a cognitive (Baudrillard uses ‘productive’) view defines language as ‘an instrument of knowledge, a means of knowing reality’ (Felman, 1983: 27). But Don Juan’s seduction, says Felman, depends on the point that ‘saying for him, is in no case tantamount to knowing, but rather doing’ (1983: 27). That is, the words ‘I promise’ constitute a certain truth for the person who hears them, and also function as a performative act. When women seduced by Don Juan attribute meaning to his performative act, they err. By dismissing Baudrillard as merely critical of literary notions of seduction, Grace misses the opportunity to read Baudrillard’s definition of seduction in relation to contemporaneous feminists like Felman. Baudrillard writes, ‘To be seduced is to be turned from one’s truth. To seduce is to lead the other from his/her truth’ (1990: 81), precisely what Don Juan does. Significantly for my argument, Grace concedes that literary engagement is in some ways necessary for understanding seduction, but acknowledges that, as a sociologist, she is limited in that regard. In her notes from the chapter subheading ‘The Enjoyment of Poetics’, she writes, ‘I do not claim expertise in analyzing poetry [...] My intention is to present Baudrillard’s reflections [...] to show how language might be traversed by seduction, by the symbolic’ (2000: 200). This is a significant concession given that seduction travels over and through language. She can, however, easily identify a productive reading: A psychoanalytic ‘reading’ will lend itself [ ... ] to the articulation or manifestation of the hidden meaning, silenced through each utterance. The assertion of meaning also has the function of silencing, within this framework, of repressing the unsaid, establishing a disjuncture through what is said and what is meant. (Grace, 2000: 179) Grace’s assertion that ‘there is no seduction here’ is, I argue, the result of a productive, analytic, and interpretive reading for meaning that functions (unintentionally) to repress feminism’s seductive potential. Thus both Grace and Baudrillard employ the same practice of productive reading, with regard to feminist writing, that they accuse feminism of perpetuating. Reading feminist writing as literary writing, and thereby paying close attention to language, enables us to better understand the seductive potential of feminism. In order to recognise feminist writing as seductive, we must emphasise where and when seduction occurs in feminist discourse. I do not aspire to set up a hierarchy in which seductive discourse is good and productive discourse bad; rather, I want to show the ways in which seduction appears in and through productive discourse so that feminists can understand seduction as a tool used to challenge the truth claims of productive discourse. While we cannot codify seduction as a practice – to do so would be to relegate it to the productive realm – we can expose the ways in which systems of production contain their own foil in and through seduction. Awareness of how productive ideologies structure social systems and recycle oppressive value systems can decrease blind advocacy of productive language. Although Baudrillard does not describe what a seductive reading practice would look like, in his analysis language is seductive (and revolutionary) to the extent that it employs ‘reversible speech’ (speech without the proclamation of truth), is not annexed by linguistic structures (language distributed as value through meaning and signification), and cannot be reduced to a unified argument. Seductive discourse is aware of the ideological laws regarding the signification of language, how words come to have meaning, and works to expose the artifice behind such signification, by using non-sense signifiers – words, images, and concepts emptied of significance and value. When describing the ways in which seduction functions in culture, Baudrillard turns to literary texts: in one example, he provides a reading of a fairy tale in which a boy finds a fairy and asks her to grant him wishes. The fairy agrees on the condition that the boy ‘must never think of the color red in the fox’s tail’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 74). The boy replies, ‘is that all?’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 74). What happens next is what is, perhaps, most expected. The boy begins to see the colour red in the fox’s tail everywhere he goes. Baudrillard writes that ‘[h]e becomes obsessed with this absurd, insignificant, but tenacious image, augmented by the spite that comes from not being able to rid himself of it. Not only do the fairy’s promises not come true, but he loses his taste for life’ (1990: 74). For Baudrillard, this story demonstrates the power of any signifier that is insignificant. The fairy is aware of the fact that the boy’s mind will be attracted to a place devoid of significant meaning. But, being unaware of the insignificance of the colour red in the fox’s tail, the child is not on his guard. Had the fairy asked the boy not to engage in something serious or of significance, the boy would be more likely to succeed. According to the theory of seduction, it is meaningless signs that consume us much like the door marked ‘this door leads to nowhere’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 74). You feel compelled to open it just to see. What is crucial here is Baudrillard’s analysis. For one could argue that the colour red in the fox’s tail does have meaning in that the colour red contains both a signifier, red, and a signified, the colour that comes to mind. The colour red becomes emptied of meaning only in relation to the way Baudrillard reads the story. He urges the reader to recognise that absurd and artificial signs rule the world to a greater degree than logical ones because of social and political imperatives to create significant meaning. To understand feminist writing as seductive would involve a reading strategy in which feminist theory is recognised as breaking down the coded system of production through the dissemination of meaning and value. A seductive reading practice highlights the presence of signs without referents, eclipsed signs, absurd and nonsensical signs in feminist writing, not to provide meaning for these signs but to explore the ways in which empty signs function in the text to reverse ‘irreversible’, or fixed, ideologies. I argue that where feminism empties words and gestures of meaning, as I show Woolf does with the mulberry tree in Three Guineas (1938), the reader is seduced. I further argue that when feminism employs neither productive value nor opposition to that value, as Rivie`re does with the masquerade, seduction comes into play. Seduction is not an either/or proposition but spaces in-between. For Baudrillard, seduction ‘takes from discourse its sense and turns it from its truth’ (1990: 55). I would argue that much **feminist thought is dedicated to this very task** and here I expose the textual politics whereby feminism works as seduction, what Grace defines as ‘that movement that removes from the realm of the visible, that vaporizes identity, and is marked by ambivalence’ (2000: 141). I believe that feminists have posed a radical challenge to productive ideology. Baudrillard provides a discourse that helps recognise seduction in feminist writing. I argue that, in order to discover similarities between Baudrillard’s theory of seduction and the work of feminism, productive reading practices must be abandoned.

**The role of the ballot is to vote for the debater with the best strategy to rupture the property simulation in outer space**

**Prefer**

**[1] Revolutionary Skills: The debate should be evaluated through the flow but every argument must stop bolstering the reserve labor force of corporate society**

**Hoofd 07 - Ingrid M. Hoofd, National University of Singapore, December 2007** “The Neoliberal Consolidation of Play and Speed: Ethical Issues in Serious Gaming” in “CRITICAL LITERACY: Theories and Practices Volume 1: 2” p. 6-14, 2007 [http://www.criticalliteracyjournal.org/cljournalissue2volume1.pdf] KZaidi Recut 9/27/21 SAO

Serious games are a fascinating next stage in the continuous exploitation of digital media technologies over the last decades for training, learning, and education. As formal education and training always involves the transmission and repetition of certain culturally and socially specific sets of skills and moral values, it would be of paramount importance to ensure that developments within the serious gaming industry are in step with the effects of the good intentions of nurturing people within a social framework that emphasises a fair, culturally diverse, and blooming society. In this light, it is interesting that from the very advent of the information society, digital technologies have been depicted as central to the development of a more just and equal society by harbouring the promise of bridging gaps between classes, races, and genders locally as well as globally. Driven by the vision of this utopian potential of new technologies, the education industry and larger policy organisations have been exploring the pedagogical possibilities of these technologies both in- and outside the traditional classroom for the last twenty-five years. Indeed, the implementation of increasingly more sophisticated and technologically mediated methods and tools for learning and education, takes as its starting point the techno-utopian assumption that (new) interactive technologies themselves are the primary harbingers of a fair and blooming society through facilitating (student) empowerment. This paper takes issue with this widespread techno-utopian perspective by seeking to shed light on the larger ethical implications of serious gaming. It will do so through foregrounding the relationship between global injustices, and the aesthetic properties and discourses of serious gaming. So while reframing serious games themselves in a new ethical perspective constitutes the main objective of this paper, it is equally important to situate serious games within a larger political discourse on the teaching of new skills. Firstly then, policy papers and academic studies on serious games all display an assumption of the inherent neutrality of gaming technologies, as if these technologies were mere tools equally suitable for all. What also becomes apparent in the language used in these studies and proposals, is how this instrumentalist vision of gaming technologies for learning goes hand in hand with a particular neo-liberal assumption of what constitutes a fit individual, and by extension of what the hallmarks of a ‘healthy’ society may be. For instance, in the European Union study “Serious Gaming – a fundamental building block to drive the knowledge work society” by Manuel Oliveira on the merits of serious games for education, justification runs along the lines of gaming ‘encouraging risk-taking and a winning attitude’ and creating a ‘performance-oriented individual.’ Similarly, Michael Guerena from the US Orange County Department of Education proposes in one of the Department’s web-casts that serious games instil “twenty-first century skills” like risk-taking, adaptability, self-direction, interactive communication, and ‘planning and managing for results’ in the students through the “channelling of fun.” Likewise, the UK-based Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association last year published their white paper Unlimited learning - Computer and video games in the learning landscape, in which they argue that serious games will “create an engaged, knowledgeable, critical and enthusiastic citizenry” whose “work practices will be geared towards networked communication and distributed collaboration” (49). Concerns around the ethical implications of serious games regarding their entanglements with larger social (gendered, classed, and raced) inequalities have until now largely been coined in terms of game content or representation. In a recent case in Singapore, the government’s proposition of using the RPG Granado Espada in secondary school history classes was followed by an outcry from various local academics condemning the stereotypical characters and simplistic representation of medieval Europe in the game. Likewise, various authors have critiqued current serious games not only because of simplistic representation of characters and surroundings, but especially because simulations generally tend to oversimplify complex social problems and situations. Gibson, Aldrich, and Prensky’s Games and Simulations in Online Learning (vi - xiv) for instance discuss these demerits of serious games. While such a critical analysis of how game content contributes to the reproduction of dominant discourses is definitely helpful, I would argue that the aesthetics of serious games involve much more than mere content. Instead, this paper will argue that the formal quest for instantaneity that research around digital media has displayed through the development of interactive technologies for education is already itself by no means a neutral affair. This is because the discourses that inform this quest and that accompany this search for instantaneity arguably enforce the hegemony of a militaristic, masculinist, humanist, and of what I will call a ‘speed-elitist’ individual. Moreover, I suggest that the propensity of current games to have sexist or racist content, is merely symptomatic of gaming technology’s larger problematic in terms of the aesthetic of instantaneity. In short, (serious) computer games have become archives of the discursive and actual violence carried out in the name of the utopia of technological progress and instantaneity under neo-liberal globalisation. This archival function is possible exactly because cybernetic technologies promise the containment and control of such supposedly accidental violence, while in fact exacerbating these forms of violence. This leads me to conclude that such violence is in fact structural to new serious gaming technologies, rather than accidental. I will elaborate this hypothesis by looking at various theorists who seek to understand this structural imperative of new technologies, and their relationship to the neo-liberalisation of learning and education. In turn, I will look at how this problematic structural logic informs the two popular serious games Real Lives and Global Warming Interactive. Secondly, the advent of serious gaming interestingly runs parallel with the contemporary dissemination and virtualisation of traditional learning institutions into cyberspace. While the existence of learning tools in other areas of society besides actual learning institutions has been a fact since the advent of schools, the shift of methods of learning into online and digital tools is symptomatic of the decentralisation of power from ‘old’ educational institutions and its usurpation into instantaneous neo-liberal modes of production. I am summarising the work of Bill Readings on the university here, because it sheds light on the shift in education tout court towards virtualisation, and its relationship to the ‘new hegemony of instantaneity.’ In The University in Ruins, Readings argues that the shift from the state-run university of reason and culture to the present-day global knowledge enterprise must mean that the centre of power in effect has shifted elsewhere. More important, says Readings, is that the function of the new ‘university of excellence,’ one that successfully transforms it into yet another trans-national corporation, relies on the fantasy that the university is still that transcendental university of culture in service of the state and its citizens. So the invocation of the fantasy of an ‘originary’ university of reason and progress, that produces unbiased knowledge for the good of all, facilitates the doubling of the production of information into other spaces outside the university walls proper. While Readings surely discusses only higher education institutions in The University in Ruins, I would argue that the logic of a shifting centre of power from the state into the technocratic networks and nodes of speed operates quite similarly in the case of primary, secondary, and other types of formal education. Indeed, the current virtualisation of learning and the emphasis on lifelong learning marks a dispersal of traditional learning institutions into online spaces. This dispersal works increasingly in service of the ‘speed-elite’ rather than simply in service of the nation-state. The heralding of serious games for education can therefore be read as a symptom of the intensified reach of the imperatives of neo-liberal globalisation, in which consumption enters the lives of locally bound as well as more mobile cosmopolitan citizens of all ages through harping on the technological possibility of the confusion of production and play. Through the imperative of play then, production increasingly and diffusely colonises all niche times and -spaces of neo-liberal society. In other words, (the emphasis on) play allows not only a potential increase in production and consumption through the citizen-consumer after her or his formal education of ‘skills’, but starkly intensifies flows of production and consumption already at the very moment of learning. While such an integration of play and production is generally understood within the framework of the neo-liberal demand for the circulation of pleasure, it is useful here to widen the scope from understanding the learner as a mere consumer of pleasure into the larger set of problematic interpellations that marks subjugation in contemporary society. Intriguingly, a host of research has emerged over the past years pointing towards the intricate relationship between subjugation, military research objectives, and videogame development. Such research suggests an intimate connection between the C3I logic and humanist militaristic utopias of transcendence, which incriminates interactive technologies as inherently favouring culturally particular notions of personhood. In the case of computer- and video-games for entertainment, researchers have argued that the aesthetic properties of gaming technologies give rise to so-called ‘militarised masculinity.’ In “Designing Militarized Masculinity,” Stephen Kline, Nick DyerWitheford, and Greig de Peuter argue for instance that interactive games open up very specific subject positions that “mobilize fantasies of instrumental domination” (255). This specific mobilisation that video-games invoke, is not only due to the remediation of violent television- and film- content, but also due to the intimate connection between gaming- and military industries which grant these technologies their particular cybernetic aesthetic properties (see also Herz 1997). This element of militarisation partly informs my concept of ‘speed-elitism.’ I extrapolate the idea of ‘speed-elitism’ largely from the works of John Armitage on the discursive and technocratic machinery underlying current neo-liberal capitalism. In “Dromoeconomics: Towards a Political Economy of Speed,” Armitage and Phil Graham suggest that due to the capitalist need for the production of excess, there is a strong relationship between the forces of exchange and production, and the logic of speed. In line with Virilio’s argument in Speed and Politics, they argue that various formerly the less connected social areas of war, communication, entertainment, and trade, are now intimately though obliquely connected. This is because all these forces mutually enforce one another through the technological usurpation and control of space (and territory), and through the compression and regulation of time. Eventually, Armitage and Graham suggest that “circulation has become an essential process of capitalism, an end in itself” (118) and therefore any form of cultural production increasingly finds itself tied-up in this logic. So neo-liberal capitalism is a system within which the most intimate and fundamental aspects of human social life – in particular, forms of communication and play – get to be formally subsumed under capital. In “Resisting the Neoliberal Discourse of Technology,” Armitage elaborates on this theme of circulation by pointing out that the current mode of late-capitalism relies on the continuous extension and validation of the infrastructure and the neutral or optimistic discourses of the new information technologies. Discourses that typically get repeated – like in the policy papers – in favour of the emerging speed-elite are those of connection, empowerment and progress, which often go hand in hand with the celebration of highly mediated spaces for action and communication. Such discourses however suppress the violent colonial and patriarchal history of those technological spaces and the subsequent unevenness brought about by and occurring within these spaces. I would claim that Armitage’s assessment of accelerated circulation, and the way new technologies make play complicit in the techno-utopian endeavour of speed, is crucial for understanding the larger ethical issues surrounding serious games. It is helpful at this point to look at Paul Virilio’s and Jacques Derrida’s work because this helps us understand the complicity of the aesthetics of interactive and visually oriented gaming technologies in speed-elitism. In “Cyberwar, God, and Television,” Paul Virilio talks about the simulation industry’s function of “exposing [one] to the accident in order not to be exposed to it” (322). What is according to him ‘accidented’ through the virtualisation of accidents and violence, for instance in video-games, is reality itself. This ‘accident of reality’ that virtuality brings about, argues Virilio, is due to the fact that simulation technologies fragment space through their property of instantaneous connection with previously far-away places. The hallmark of this fragmentation is therefore that it brings about an intensification of forms of in- and exclusion through actual disconnection. Eventually, there will be “two realities: the actual and the virtual” (323), and I would claim that consequently the privileged speed-elite will be able to live in the illusion of engaging with social reality that the virtual grants, at the cost of the (s)lower classes who will suffer the social and ecological effects of the accidents of virtualisation. The illusion of mastery for Virilio consists in the sense of the “incorporation of the world within oneself” that “real time technologies permit” (328) due to their militaristic compulsion that seeks to “reduce the world to the point where one could possess it” (329). I maintain that these statements spell out exactly the function and logic of serious gaming.

**[2] Bindingness – Every subject exists within the code – any action a subject takes is infected by its operations which means an understanding of it is a priori question to any action.**

**[3] Motivation – All thought and action including the flow has been influenced by the semiotic attachments enforced by the hyperreal which means any genuine motivation stemming from an agent must come from a rupture, since capitalism has otherwise influenced all our desires so the aff is a side constraint. Means the aff is a side constraint on the flow.**

**[4] Sociological Subjectivity – hijacks their fwk- if a subject is socially excluded, only rectifying the mechanisms of the code which produced those conditions allows for any solvency.**

**[5] Policymaking Skills: Policy making knowledge doesn’t change policy**

**Gilens and Page 14 - Martin Gilens, Professor of Politics at Princeton University, and Benjamin Page, Gordon S. Fulcher Professor of Decision Making at Northwestern University, Perspectives on Politics, Volume 12, Issue 3 , pp. 564 – 581, September 2014** “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens” [https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/testing-theories-of-american-politics-elites-interest-groups-and-average-citizens/62327F513959D0A304D4893B382B992B] Accessed 9/30/21 SAO

Each of our four theoretical traditions (Majoritarian Electoral Democracy, Economic-Elite Domination, Majoritarian Interest-Group Pluralism, and Biased Pluralism) emphasizes different sets of actors as critical in determining U.S. policy outcomes, and each tradition has engendered a large empirical literature that seems to show a particular set of actors to be highly influential. Yet nearly all the empirical evidence has been essentially bivariate. Until very recently it has not been possible to test these theories against each other in a systematic, quantitative fashion. By directly pitting the predictions of ideal-type theories against each other within a single statistical model (using a unique data set that includes imperfect but useful measures of the key independent variables for nearly two thousand policy issues), we have been able to produce some striking findings. One is the nearly total failure of “median voter” and other Majoritarian Electoral Democracy theories. When the preferences of economic elites and the stands of organized interest groups are controlled for, **the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy.** The failure of theories of Majoritarian Electoral Democracy is all the more striking because it goes against the likely effects of the limitations of our data. The preferences of ordinary citizens were measured more directly than our other independent variables, yet they are estimated to have the least effect. Nor do organized interest groups substitute for direct citizen influence, by embodying citizens’ will and ensuring that their wishes prevail in the fashion postulated by theories of Majoritarian Pluralism. Interest groups do have substantial independent impacts on policy, and a few groups (particularly labor unions) represent average citizens’ views reasonably well. But the interest-group system as a whole does not. Overall, net interest-group alignments are not significantly related to the preferences of average citizens. The net alignments of the most influential, business-oriented groups are negatively related to the average citizen’s wishes. So existing interest groups do not serve effectively as transmission belts for the wishes of the populace as a whole. “Potential groups” do not take up the slack, either, since average citizens’ preferences have little or no independent impact on policy after existing groups’ stands are controlled for. Furthermore, the preferences of economic elites (as measured by our proxy, the preferences of “affluent” citizens) have far more independent impact upon policy change than the preferences of average citizens do. To be sure, this does not mean that ordinary citizens always lose out; they fairly often get the policies they favor, but only because those policies happen also to be preferred by the economically-elite citizens who wield the actual influence. Of course our findings speak most directly to the “first face” of power: the ability of actors to shape policy outcomes on contested issues. But they also reflect—to some degree, at least—the “second face” of power: the ability to shape the agenda of issues that policy makers consider. The set of policy alternatives that we analyze is considerably broader than the set discussed seriously by policy makers or brought to a vote in Congress, and our alternatives are (on average) more popular among the general public than among interest groups. Thus the fate of these policies can reflect policy makers’ refusing to consider them rather than considering but rejecting them. (From our data we cannot distinguish between the two.) Our results speak less clearly to the “third face” of power: the ability of elites to shape the public’s preferences. 49 We know that interest groups and policy makers themselves often devote considerable effort to shaping opinion. If they are successful, this might help explain the high correlation we find between elite and mass preferences. But it cannot have greatly inflated our estimate of average citizens’ influence on policy making, which is near zero. What do our findings say about democracy in America? They certainly constitute troubling news for advocates of “populistic” democracy, who want governments to respond primarily or exclusively to the policy preferences of their citizens. In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, **because of the strong status quo bias built into the U.S. political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it**. A possible objection to populistic democracy is that average citizens are inattentive to politics and ignorant about public policy; why should we worry if their poorly-informed preferences do not influence policy making? Perhaps economic elites and interest-group leaders enjoy greater policy expertise than the average citizen does. Perhaps they know better which policies will benefit everyone, and perhaps they seek the common good, rather than selfish ends, when deciding which policies to support. But we tend to doubt it. We believe instead that—collectively—ordinary citizens generally know their own values and interests pretty well, and that their expressed policy preferences are worthy of respect. 50 Moreover, we are not so sure about the informational advantages of elites. Yes, detailed policy knowledge tends to rise with income and status. Surely wealthy Americans and corporate executives tend to know a lot about tax and regulatory policies that directly affect them. But how much do they know about the human impact of Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, or unemployment insurance, none of which is likely to be crucial to their own well-being? Most important, **we see no reason to think that informational expertise is always accompanied by an inclination to transcend one's own interests** or a determination to work for the common good. All in all, we believe that the public is likely to be a more certain guardian of its own interests than any feasible alternative. Leaving aside the difficult issue of divergent interests and motives, we would urge that the superior wisdom of economic elites or organized interest groups should not simply be assumed. It should be put to empirical test. New empirical research will be needed to pin down precisely who knows how much, and what, about which public policies. Our findings also point toward the need to learn more about exactly which economic elites (the “merely affluent”? the top 1 percent? the top one-tenth of 1 percent?) have how much impact upon public policy, and to what ends they wield their influence. Similar questions arise about the precise extent of influence of particular sets of organized interest groups. And we need to know more about the policy preferences and the political influence of various actors not considered here, including political party activists, government officials, and other non-economic elites. We hope that our work will encourage further exploration of these issues. Despite the seemingly strong empirical support in previous studies for theories of majoritarian democracy, our analyses suggest that majorities of the American public actually have little influence over the policies our government adopts. Americans do enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association, and a widespread (if still contested) franchise. But we believe that if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organizations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America’s claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened.

**And: Theory is violent and should be rejected.**

**[1] Notions of fairness in agonistic games are hopelessly vague and ideologically reinforce conquest**

**Lee 17 - Jonathan Rey Lee, Analog Game Studies, March 20th, 2017** “CAPITALISM AND UNFAIRNESS IN CATAN: OIL SPRINGS” [http://analoggamestudies.org/2017/03/capitalism-and-unfairness-in-catan-oil-springs/] Accessed 9/14/20 SAO

Before the first turn was over, I knew I had won—a circumstance typically only achievable through overwhelming skill, prognostication, or cheating. In this case, however, the game itself gave me an insurmountable advantage via my starting position. It’s tempting to label this as poor game design1 since it certainly violates the principle of fairness almost universally assumed in competitive gaming. Yet in a world where the myth of a ‘level playing field’ obscures and authorizes ongoing social inequalities, problematizing the notion of ‘fairness’ in gameplay may provide unique insight into the ‘fairness’ of capitalist culture. This insight is possible because contemporary games are cultural phenomena that have also become media phenomena. Games, that is, need not merely reflect culture, but have critical potential for reflecting on culture. The following reflections work toward developing such a critical paradigm by showing how the Oil Springs scenario for The Settlers of Catan plays out ethical dilemmas raised by the emergent and systemic inequalities generated by capitalist systems. In order to analyze these inequalities, this paper first explores game balance as the interplay between emergent inequality (how games determine winners and losers through the inputs of skill and chance) and systemic inequality (how an asymmetrical game state may privilege certain players).2 This paper then analyzes how the Oil Springs scenario for Catan links resource generation to land ownership, the runaway leader problem to the tendency of capital to accrue capital, and industrialization to market destabilization and ecological catastrophe. Finally, I reflect on the experience of enacting inequality within an unbalanced game system. Throughout, I suggest that while competitive games are typically designed to produce emergent inequality from within a level playing field (systemic equality), the rules that govern such emergent inequality are systemic in ways that allow for critically engaging systemic inequality. Fair and Balanced While not all games are competitive,3 the history of games is thoroughly intertwined with agon (or ‘**contestation’) as an organizing principle of Western culture**. According to French sociologist Roger Caillois, agonistic games play out agonistic culture “like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner’s triumph.”4 With mathematical precision, agonistic games create balanced contests that reflect the ideal of agonistic culture: a perfectly level playing field that produces a genuine meritocracy. Yet, even while reflecting this agonistic ideal, the complicated balancing act performed by actual games demonstrates the limits of this ideal. Recognizing that fairness is problematic even within the carefully-controlled medium of games should also call into question the very possibility of a level playing field in arenas as complex as global capitalism. Fairness, like beauty, is left to the eye of the beholder. What standards determine which is most fair: that everyone gets the same amount of pie (equality), that everyone gets pie according to their need for pie (equity),5 or that everyone gets pie in proportion to how much money or labor they invested in the pie (meritocracy)? There are similarly divergent ways of considering fairness in games. Caillois is adamant about the fundamentality of fairness, arguing that games of both skill and chance (agon and alea) “require absolute equity, an equality of mathematical chances of most absolute precision. Admirably precise rules, meticulous measures, and scientific calculations are evident.”6 Taken together, however, skill and chance presuppose contradictory paradigms of equality, making it difficult to determine what counts as fair for games that incorporate both (as most contemporary tabletop games do). Similarly, although Caillois argues that “The search for equality is so obviously essential to the rivalry that it is re-established by a handicap for players of different classes,”7 notion of fairness behind the handicap does not reinforce but rather undermines the agonistic ideal. Such contradictory messages suggest that fairness is a highly subjective notion. That is: standards of fairness vary not only according to individual preferences, but also by context (casual gaming vs. tournaments), game genre (wargames vs. party games), and even circumstance (games are generally only ‘unfair’ when one is losing). Unsurprisingly, this variability amongst subjective standards yields a spectrum of paradigms for promoting balance, a somewhat vague negative term that presents fairness as ‘not unbalanced.’ Most commonly, games that tend towards symmetry tolerate emergent inequality but very little systemic inequality: symmetrical games allow skill and chance to separate players as the game progresses, but provide roughly parallel pathways to victory. In such games, the inevitable asymmetries are typically either minimized (playing first often confers an advantage, but usually a minimal one) or counterbalanced by other asymmetries of relatively equal value (the komi in Go compensates black’s advantage in going first with a point bonus given to the white player). Asymmetrical games extend this latter technique by counterbalancing different ways of playing (via differing pieces, abilities, rules, goals, etc.) to create a more or less equal game balance. Thus, asymmetrical game design provides two possibilities for exploring systemic inequalities. Balanced asymmetrical games can explore themes of inequity while maintaining an environment of fair play that adopts a perspective of critical distance—the player observes the interplay of differences that contribute to inequity without being immersed in the experience of inequity itself. By contrast, deliberately unbalanced asymmetrical games can explore inequity both thematically and procedurally, immersing players in a fundamentally inequitable world. To advocate critical play with and against capitalist systems, there are good reasons to challenge any standard of competitive balance that supports the myth of capitalism as a level playing field. **Insisting on perfectly balanced games is not just an impossible ideal; it** is a problematic one. Balanced games imagine idealized worlds that **may reinforce the deep cultural assumption that contestation is a** practical and **ethical way of organizing society**. Yet, there is a substantial disconnect between the fair and balanced worlds of gameplay and the many systemic inequalities that emerge in everyday societies. In practice, major genres of competitive game design—such as wargames, race games, betting games, and economic strategy games—often uncritically invoke and thereby reinforce broader forms of cultural contestation. Strategic wargames, for example, may intellectualize war tactics while glossing over the cost of violence. Similarly, economic strategy games may glamorize profiteering while failing to represent exploitation. For instance, Monopoly depicts rents as an arena for capitalist competition but ignores the consequences for tenants, worker placement games often reinforce the dehumanizing representation of laborers as human resources,8 and Catan fails to represent the violence of settler colonialism.9 And even as these games ignore disenfranchised populations, they ask players to become complicit in the systems that produce such disenfranchisement: the participatory medium of games often entangles player agency with the logic of capitalism by promoting a particularly capitalist model of agency—a self-interested agonistic impulse that plays out within a quantifiable, rule-governed system of exchange. Monopoly board There is perhaps no clearer example of the intersection of games and capitalism than Monopoly, of which Caillois writes, “The game of Monopoly does not follow but rather reproduces the function of Capitalism.”[ref]Caillois, p. 61.[/ref] Ironically, the game industry appropriated Monopoly from a game explicitly designed to demonstrate social inequality—The Landlord’s Game (patented 1904; this image from 1906) by Elizabeth Magie. Originally designed to demonstrate Henry George’s notion that the infrastructure of renting properties consolidated wealth in the hands of landowners at the expense of their tenants, The Landlord’s Game has resonances with the issue of land ownership discussed in the next section. (CC Wikimedia Commons) Although the way that games are more generally implicated in capitalism10 (and vice versa)11 deserves more critique, this parallelism may also provide games like Catan with a special critical potential to expose systemic inequality. For instance, in The First Nations of Catan, game designer and scholar Greg Loring-Albright describes how he developed “a balanced, asymmetrical strategy game” that “creates a narrative for Catan wherein indigenous peoples exist, interact with settlers, and have a fair chance of surviving the encounter by winning the game.”12 As discussed above, this type of game represents a critical intervention into historical inequalities while minimizing systemic gameplay inequalities, such as ones that might give the indigenous peoples a less than “fair chance.” By contrast, Catan and its Oil Springs scenario are mostly symmetrical and, if not actually unbalanced, certainly balanced unstably. With respect to Catan, Oil Springs makes more explicit the thematic connection to capitalism and, in a related move, makes the game balance even less stable “to draw attention to important challenges humanity faces, in relation to the resources that modern society depends on.”13 It accomplishes this by adding to the five original pastoral resources in Catan the modern resource of Oil, which is simultaneously more powerful (it counts as two standard resources), more flexible (it can be used as two of any resource), and more dangerous (its use triggers ecological catastrophes). By raising the stakes in these ways, Oil Springs further unbalances Catan to make a point about emergent social inequality tied to the unequal distribution of resources. Playing Capitalism Capitalism is far too multifaceted for any game—even one with as many variants and expansions as Catan—to model fully. Yet, games can indeed critically play with capitalism by condensing capitalist principles into their game systems through the systemic constraints and affordances that structure game interactions. Rather than describing capitalism, many agonistic games are themselves simple capitalist systems in which self-interested players engage in more or less free market competition with each other. Certain game designs, therefore, are not only tied to the agonistic logic behind capitalism, but are unique microcosmic economies that can represent specific facets of capitalism. The abstraction of Catan, for instance, obscures the history of settler colonialism and the exploitation of labor to focus instead on portraying land ownership as a lynchpin of modern capitalism, both in relation to resource generation and the tendency of capital to accrue capital. Similarly, the mechanics in Oil Springs focus on the role of the natural resource of oil as fuel for industrial capitalism by showing how industrialization accelerates resource production and exploits the environment. For Karl Marx, ownership of private property14 precludes fair compensation of workers by granting the capitalist (the holder of capital[refMarx defines capital thusly: “Capital consists of raw materials, instruments of labor and means of subsistence of all kinds, which are utilized in order to produce new raw materials, new instruments of labor and new means of subsistence. All these component parts of capital are creation of labor, products of labor, accumulated labor. Accumulated labor which serves as a means of new production is capital.” See Robert C. Tucker, ed. The Marx-Engels Reader. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, p. 207.[/ref]]) legal ‘rights’ the value generated by production without requiring that they contribute any labor towards generating that value. Land in Catan reflects this model by automatically generating resources which are given directly to the player/landowner, completely bypassing the question of labor. Instead, the emergent inequality is between rival capitalists played by the game participants. Although class differences are not represented, these emergent inequalities are structurally linked with class differentiation. Indeed, private property is problematic for Marx primarily because it forms the conditions for emergent inequalities to become systemic inequalities through wealth consolidation. Thus, private property parallels an emergent asymmetry known in game design as the runaway leader problem, in which it becomes increasingly difficult to catch the lead player as the game progresses. This occurs in any game design—such as Catan—that links point accumulation and resource generation, creating a feedback loop such that the further one is towards achieving victory the more resources one gains to reinvest in that progress. In contrast to a game like Dominion, in which accumulating victory points can actually reduce the effectiveness of one’s resource-generating engine, in Catan the closer one is to victory the faster one should move toward victory.15 The idiom it takes money to make money captures this fact about capitalism, which Marx describes as “the necessary result of competition” being “the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form” (70). In fact, emergent and systemic inequalities often do synergize in this way as the material consequences of emergent inequalities become concretized as systemic as they are passed down from generation to generation, maintaining fairly resilient wealth disparities between different social and ethnic groups. Catan For Marx, these problems with land ownership are only intensified in industrial capitalism, in which ownership over the machinery of production further disenfranchises the industrial worker. This is precisely the shift in emphasis behind Oil Springs, which introduces Oil not just as one more roughly equivalent commodity, but one which radically unbalances Catan’s market economy. Representing the increasing pace of production from pre-industrial to industrial societies, one unit of Oil is worth two resources. In fact, it is worth two of any resource, which means that the strategic value of a single Oil resource ranges from two to eight resources (since it can take up to 4 resources to trade for a resource of one’s choice), making Oil so much more valuable than other resources that it seriously unbalances the game. In addition, Oil is required for building a Metropolis, the most powerful building in the game. Depicting how new industrial processes destabilize existing economic relationships, Oil Springs shows how the problems of capitalist land ownership are compounded when such land contains scarce resource reserves that are essential to industry. Such resources encourage relationships of dependence not only over renters and laborers (who are nowhere represented in Catan), but also over other industrialists who require these resources. Thus, the game makes the inequality between different starting positions more dramatic to depict a shift in modern geopolitics away from territory being valued primarily for it land, population, and location to being valued primarily for its strategic resources. While Oil Springs does have mechanisms that restore some balance, such as keeping Oil off the highest-probability hexes and capping the amount of Oil a player may hold at one time,16 its primary mechanisms for balancing Oil ironically further unbalance the game. By making Oil use precipitate ecological disasters, Oil Springs highlights the costs of industrial capitalism and makes an implicit ecocritical statement about how environmental consequences affect us all. They affect us, that is, randomly but not equally. Demonstrating that even negative consequences can be exploited by the industrial capitalist, the game’s two forms of environmental disaster turned out to be less damaging to me than to other players. The first environmental disaster, in which rising water levels destroy coastal settlements, played in my favor because I planned to exploit Oil and therefore avoided building coastal settlements.17 The second disaster, representing ‘industrial pollution,’ randomly strikes individual hexes, causing them to permanently cease to produce resources. More precisely, it does this to the ‘natural’ resources—affecting all hexes except for Oil Springs, which continue to produce after a reduction in the shared Oil reserves. Thus, because I was disproportionally less accountable for the consequences of my actions, I was able to safely initiate risky behavior that the risk-averse players suffered from. As risk and accountability can become unhinged in a free-market society that pushes for deregulation, Oil Springs speaks to the fact that those most responsible for climate change—be they individuals, corporations, or nations—do not generally bear the brunt of the consequences.18 Oil Springs The Disaster Track from the Oil Springs Scenario. Every time an Oil resources is used, it moves a marker along this track, triggering an ecological disaster if it reaches the final space (this takes 5 Oil in the 3-4 player game and 8 Oil in the 5-6 player game). If this occurs 5 times in total, the game immediately ends and no one wins. Image used for purposes of critique. In all the aforementioned ways, the game systems of Catan and Oil Springs use emergent inequalities to reflect on various systemic inequalities. This conflation, however, raises another question of fairness, namely how systemic inequalities emerge. In the case of Catan, this question becomes how to distribute land that has such intrinsically unequal value that it is sometimes possible to accurately predict the winner based on the starting positions (as in my case). The game attempts to solve this by using a snake draft to organize how players select their starting positions. Fairness is achieved not by creating equal spaces, but by assigning fundamentally unequal spaces using the mechanisms of emergent inequality: skill and chance (agon and alea). There is a fundamental difference, however, in the role these two forms of emergent inequality play in the deep interpenetration of games and culture. For Caillois, whereas agonistic games reflect the meritocratic ideal of cultural contestation, aleatory games play with the fundamental uncertainty of life—they are ludic, even carnivalesque experiments in fatalism. Unlike the triumphalism of agon, therefore, the aleatory elements of games explore consequentiality beyond the limits of human agency. This explains, for Caillois, how aleatory social institutions such as gambling and lotteries counterbalance the fundamentally agonistic structure of society by providing a faint hope that any individual may leap out of a condition of systemic inequality through an emergent (but rare) inequality. This demonstrates how capitalism balances itself by using the possibility of upward mobility to obscure its systemic conditions for economic immobility. This also reveals a way in which game design struggles to represent systemic social inequality: games often achieve balance by using aleatory elements to subsume systemic inequality within emergent inequality, sacrificing the critical experience of systemic inequality in order to maintain the ideal of balance. Thus, the emergent inequalities in Catan fail to represent how historical inequalities are invariably systemic as race, gender, class, and nationality play prominent roles—how in America, for example, the original occupants were dispossessed by force of arms and land was redistributed according to explicitly discriminatory laws.19 It also fails to represent how even after more recent legislation has eroded many of these practices, their legacy20 necessarily lingers within a capitalist system where ownership is passed down from generation to generation. There are limitations, therefore, to representing social inequality exclusively through emergent mechanisms—when games create a genuinely level playing field, they become incompatible with capitalism, which perpetuates the myth of a level playing field while in fact perpetuating systemic inequalities. Playing with Privilege It was only upon further reflection that I began to tie my play experiences to the preceding forms of social inequality. In the moment, however, my focus was more narrowly focused on executing my strategy—or, to put it bluntly, on winning. At the same time, this was tinged with a growing sense of discomfort that can only be described by an even more uncomfortable word: privilege. Certainly, my ability to win the way I did was due to a privileged starting position, which tilted the balance of power in my favor. Yet, privilege is an attitude as well as a condition: **being able to focus exclusively on strategy and winning is itself** a form of **privilege**. Games (even so-called serious games) are not theories of social inequality—as embodied, performative spaces, games express a procedural rhetoric21 in which players develop perspectives by exploring the consequences of their decisions and actions as they play out within the game system. To play certain games in certain ways, therefore, is to play as capitalists and play out capitalism. Games like Acquire encourage us to play as capitalists. As mentioned above, the procedural rhetoric of Oil Springs is paradoxically predicated on privileging the very strategies of industrial capitalism that this ecocritical game otherwise censures. This presents players with a dilemma, in which **playing to win may require performing actions that are** thematically represented as **ethically problematic**. Thus, the primary reason I received such advantageous placement in my case study is that I ruthlessly pursued Oil from the start, whereas several of my opponents hesitated to do so (possibly due to their ecological consciousness). Sometimes gamers attempt to justify a win-at-all-costs mentality by claiming they are merely following the dictates of the game (indirectly valorizing the cultural ideology of agon), or that they are merely solving an abstract puzzle without regard to thematic considerations. While these are valid ways to play a game, **they** nonetheless **represent an active choice** on the part of the player **rather than some** ‘objective’ or **‘default’ position.** Indeed, the phrase “win at all costs” itself admits that such play necessitates a cost. While I can understand why some players would choose to play in this way, **this position is not viable for game scholarship**. To properly study a game, one must account for the interplay of its many facets. Theme, which can evoke representational content and complex psychological and affective22 responses, is an essential facet of a game as text. When players respond to a game’s theme, they are performing a genuine textual engagement worthy of analysis. Thus, this section draws on my own play experience to reflect on possible consequences of systemically privileging certain positions. If I had to sum up my experience, I would say that playing and subsequently winning this particular game was no fun at all. And, although I cannot speak for the other players, I imagine it was not much fun them either. Working from an advantaged position altered the game experience in ways that counteracted much of the enjoyment I typically derive from gameplay. I say ‘working from’ rather than ‘playing from’ because rather than playfully exploring new strategies, I found myself merely implementing the most obviously advantageous strategy. My narrow focus on winning imposed an inappropriately results-driven framework on play, something I typically value more for the experience than the results. This focus was driven, moreover, less by the rewards of victory than by the fear of failure23—even while my privileged position robbed winning of much of its merit, losing would have been still worse. Although the game was unbalanced in my favor, an increased probability of winning did not, in my case, lead to an enriched game experience. This is because **the value of a game experience cannot be reduced to winning,** which is why games—even agonistic ones—are distinct from non-playful tests or contests. This is surprisingly analogous to Marx’s argument that capitalism not only inequitably distributes resources, but also reduces human experience to something instrumental and transactional. Indeed, Marx suggests that even while the capitalist is materially advantaged over the laborer, both are equally alienated by being reduced to their respective roles within the capitalist system. Systemic inequality, that is, is dehumanizing for all its participants—whether privileged or marginalized. Systemic inequality in games is, of course, less consequential and more voluntary than social inequalities,24 but it can alienate players in similar ways. In fact, most games eschew systemic inequality because it tends to be unpleasant for everyone involved. Players in privileged positions may find their roles overdetermined by the game structure, resulting in a narrowing of strategic, exploratory, or playful possibilities (for example, I had no reason to trade with other players when I could acquire all the resources I needed on my own). Similarly, players in less privileged positions may find their choices narrowed by their limited resources as the runaway leader problem renders their choices increasingly inconsequential. Systemically unequal game design, that is, looks like a lose-lose situation. Yet, it is not that inequality deprives play of choice, but rather that it overdetermines the consequences or relative viability of various choices. In the right conditions, therefore, such unbalanced play may add a unique dimension to the play experience. Rather than playing as an industrial capitalist, for instance, I could have chosen to play as an environmentalist. Instead of using Oil, I could have chosen to ‘Sequester’ Oil by permanently removing one of my Oil resources from the game each turn, gaining 1 Victory Point (VP) for every three Sequestered Oil, and an additional VP for sequestering the most Oil. Simple mathematics suggests that this is a terrible strategy: 1 VP is a paltry reward for the relative value of three Oil.25 This discrepancy underlies a model in which industrial capitalism is systematically more viable than environmentalism. Yet, what counts ‘viable’ can be called into question. Precisely because sequestering is ‘bad’ strategy, it offers an interesting thematic possibility: role-playing as an environmentalist knowing that one is not likely to win. From a thematic perspective, this strategy could be quite rewarding. Whereas my privileged play would lead either to failure or a victory deprived of merit, pursuing sequestering could offer either an impressive victory or a loss offset by the satisfaction of maintaining a moral position. These benefits, however, are psychological rather than ethical. While environmentalism is certainly much needed, playing environmentalism in a game is no more intrinsically beneficial than playing industrial capitalism. Critical gameplay requires more than importing real-world values into games; it requires interrogating the assumptions players bring to the game and the positions they adopt within the game. To sequester Oil solely for the sake of feeling morally superior is not a critical position (although it could certainly be an attractive one). Precisely because environmentalism matters, it deserves critical attention and critical gameplay. After all, activism can be problematic in, for example, replicating colonial attitudes towards the developing world or performing a kind of ‘conscience laundering.’26 Critical play,27 that is, is not an outcome but a method. Or, as Marx puts it, “I am therefore not in favor of setting up any dogmatic flag. On the contrary, we must try to help the dogmatics to clarify themselves the meaning of their own positions” (13). The potential consequences of such reflection are not just two, but many. Beyond simply stating that one way of playing (environmentalism) is superior to another (industrial capitalism), critical play provides an opportunity for players to self-reflectively engage the decisions and feelings of occupying different subject positions within inequitable systems. Critical play encourages reflection. Coda Games have not historically been on the forefront of discussions on social inequality.28 This is partially because the fundamentality of agon in games reinforces certain cultural logics, partially because the carnivalesque nature of play tends not to revolutionize prevailing systems,29 and partially because social inequality presents a special challenge for game design. To reverse this trend will require a critical perspective that pushes the limits of the game medium, such as the imperative toward balance at the heart of competitive game design—especially in a world where ‘fairness’ alternatively means ‘light-skinned,’ and the myth of a level playing field is used to justify a clearly uneven one. As Oil Springs demonstrates, experimenting with the interplay between emergent and systemic inequality is one way games can explore capitalism as similarly rule-governed, self-interested systems. In deconstructing the myth of the level playing field, it becomes clear that emergent inequalities in capitalism are develop systemic qualities. As a rule-governed agonistic system, capitalism legally positions the capitalist to leverage the rights of ownership to exploit the worker’s labor. Similarly, capitalism promotes the runaway leader problem by passing down capital via inheritance rather than need or merit. Furthermore, despite all claims to neutrality, economic hierarchies in capitalism are historically intertwined with other social hierarchies, such as race and gender. The problems of social inequality, therefore, are necessarily multiple and intersectional. Games have historically also lacked nuance with respect to intersectional analysis.30 If they represent categories like race and gender at all, most games do so either via problematic stereotypes or via visual and narrative means that bypass the procedural rhetoric that makes games so distinctive. I suspect that most game design avoids systemic unfairness at the level of identity politics to avoid alienating players who identify in diverse ways. At least on the surface, class—an extrinsic marker of social identity—seems easier to dissociate from sensitive identity politics and, thereby, more implementable in games like Catan.31 However, critical play must resist the ways that games by their nature simplify and abstract what they represent. Instead, critical play draws upon but moves beyond such simplification and abstraction to respond to complex social realities. And the reality of capitalism, as discussed above, is that class is intertwined with race and gender. Indeed, an intersectional perspective on critical play may provide a way of exploring the paradoxical unity and disunity of player and role that complicates the gameplay experience. After all, despite the common association between criticism and distance, critical play is still an experience—an embodied calling into question of certain social systems. –