Truth, Temporality, and Theorizing Resistance

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Workshop 14: Truth, Representation, and Politics (Annabel Herzog and Tuija Parvikko)
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A spectral moment, a moment that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents. [...] Furtive and untimely, the specter does not belong to that time. (Derrida, Specters of Marx, ix).

And you should know that the zapatista dead are very restless and talkative. They still speak, despite being dead, and they’re shouting history. They’re shouting it so that it can’t go to sleep, so that memory won’t die, so that our dead will live, shouting --
(Marcos, Our Word is Our Weapon, 201).

I.

The complicated problem of truth forms a reinvigorated horizon in contemporary radical, critical, and utopian political theory. This horizon is shaped by four aspects: first, the reclaiming and refunctioning of “Truth” as a cognitive form that is at once situated and perspectival, as well as anticipatory, “fictive,” or imaginative; second, the possibility that such truths can be deployed to cultivate “combative lucidity” or transformative knowledges of, and orientations within, the world; third, the ways in which the “affective register” of the subject can enhance ethical energies and political agency; and fourth, the possibilities that inhere in temporality itself. These aspects of the horizon of truth overlap. For theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Antonio Negri, and Alain Badiou, for example, figures of truth are theorized via the disordering effects of spectrality, the radical interruption of the Event, or the imaginative refusal invoked by the experience of Kairos. Such truths are active at once on the temporal and affective register of
subjectivity, as, first, complication or interruption of temporal linearity, the disorderly experience of time’s “untimeliness,” and second, through the as creative and imaginative qualities of the affective-cognitive capacities of the subject.

As well, the contemporary critical attention focussed on the affective register of subjectivity can supplement the mapping of this horizon. Drawing theoretical inspiration from the modern altercanon (Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze), work by theorists such as William Connolly and Jane Bennett explores the affective as it inflects, and is inflected by, the epistemological, in order to cultivate ways of knowing and orienting the subject in the world that are potentially socially transformative. This endeavor draws sustenance from an implicitly utopian ethics grounded in an affirmative attachment to the potential that inheres within the world. The significance of such explorations in theorizing a politics of resistance is marked; for the vital maneuvers of radical, critical, and utopian theory are to figure truth as a dislocation from the dominant knowledges of the times, and to do so in such as way that makes agency possible.

In this paper, I propose that an exploration of the fourth aspect of the problematic of truth, the possibilities that inhere in temporality itself, is crucial. Temporality (the experience of time/untimeliness) can, I suggest, be theorized precisely as an affective-epistemological form, and doing so has implications for the theorization of both agency and truth. Mapping temporality’s affectivity reveals potentially dissident ways of moving from hope to desire, revealing new possibilities for agency, and creating new (post-representational) figures of truth.

The most sustained meditations and explicit reflections upon the questions of time, truth, and resistance emerge from debates within utopian studies. Utopianism, as impulse, process, or problematic is at once a dissident orientation within, and a refractory theoretical perspective upon, the world. Utopianism denotes those cultural practices, theoretical perspectives, and lived political experiences that locate possibilities of
freedom on the horizon of the complex of current regimes or configurations of power(knowledge). While in this way future-oriented, the temporality of the utopian impulse is nevertheless recondite and nonlinear, mapping, instead, time’s layered excess as the overlap of future into both present and past, and of past into present and future. The utopian Not-Yet, the alterity on the horizon that utopian impulses anticipate and give voice to, inflects the lived present; the alterity of the horizon seeks to alter, to exert a transformative force within -- and against -- the hegemonic and instrumental logic of the present. Similarly, the past is not closed, for echoes and resonances remain to be activated in the present and future. Utopianism thus marks both lived and theoretical gestures of refusal that dislocate the dominant logic of the times, and it is this dislocation generates (fragmentary, in potentia) figures of truth and agency. The utopian challenge, then, is to elicit, make palpable, different strata of possibilities within the contested political present; and so to render vivid ways of knowing the world that venture beyond the existent, that are not captured and contained by the exigencies of the present ordering of things.

Consider Ernst Bloch’s evocation of the time of struggle, the time of a self-transforming present, wherein “unbecome future becomes visible in the past, avenged and inherited, mediated and fulfilled past in the future. Past that is grasped in isolation and clung to in this way is a mere commodity category, that is, a reified Factum, without consciousness of its Fieri [to be done] and of its continuing process,” (Principle of Hope, 9). That is to say, the time of the present is composed of multiple temporalities, and so the horizon of possibilities of the present remains always open and contested (to be fought for). A key maneuver of Power is to commodify or otherwise reify that past as complete, so as to consolidate and sustain hegemony in the present, and to mark the future as the nothing other than the reproduction and repetition of that hegemony. On the contrary, for the radical, the past is not closed, over, finished; for echoes remain to disturb the
finality of any victory of the powerful. Walter Benjamin, too, was compellingly alert to the potential that inheres in the untimeliness of the present moment: “the past carries a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one […] Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim,” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 245-6). That other time, the untimely or out-of-time, is the time of potential disruption that inhabits “homogenous, empty time” as the possibility of critical interruption, redirection, resistance. Its untimeliness is a form of (motivating, directing) temporal disjuncture that reveals the possibility of the different and other, as well as rendering alertness to forms of temporal (as well as spatial) solidarity in the processes of struggle.

Benjamin and Bloch are exemplary in their depiction of the ways in which temporality as dissident affective form shapes both truth and agency in politically counterhegemonic ways. For the utopian, tracing temporality’s affective force shows possible ways of moving from desire to hope; this utopian project, then, plays a part in the “education of desire,” as Ruth Levitas, drawing on Morris, has argued (Concept of Utopia, 6; see also “Educated Hope”). So, tracing temporality is also a way of mapping the movement of hope within historical processes, of mapping threads that hook up le temps, histoire, and le monde, (and it is just such a movement that Fredric Jameson has argued the Utopian novel achieves (Archaeologies, 7).4

There are political inflections, then, inherent in the ways subjects experience and represent time, and in the multitude of ways in which time is lived. Temporality thus conceived is a potent force, shaping memory as well as desire, in-forming imagination and possibility.5 To be sure, affective subjectivity is always-already shaped, disciplined, invested; that this is so indicates a psychic social economy wherein the constitution of time and the constitution of subjectivity are significantly interlinked. So, it is of further
importance to explore the ways in which the subject is a product of time, or, put otherwise, the ways in which subjectivity itself is ineluctably constituted by temporal dynamics that are also profoundly political. I propose this as a formal claim; that is, while recognizing the multiplicity of cultural-temporal formations, subjectivity is inextricably formally entwined with temporality as such. “My subjectivity,” David Wood provocatively remarks, “comes from a time that is not my own” (12). That there is a non-coincidence of the subject with her times marks spaces of possibility as well as, darkly, possibility’s disappearance. As “the time is out of joint” resonates throughout Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, it marks the disjuncture of time in both these directions: potential disruption, or, bleakly, the impossibility of setting the times straight. Theorizing or figuring temporality in terms of a potentially affective untimeliness, then, reveals “possibilities […] for intervention, for resistance, for creativity, for production, for transformation, for intervention in the world,” as untimely figurations stage a “kind of dramatic opening up of our capacity to think both our relation to that which has framed us, and also our capacity to imagine how we might transform what comes after us…” (Wood, 12). Put otherwise: figuring untimeliness may reveal many utopian “elsewheres” here and now.

II.

I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don’t look back along time, but down through it, like water. […] Nothing goes away. (Atwood, *Cat’s Eyes*, 3).

What, then, *is* time? Or rather, what temporal modalities do “we” (late modern? Western?) subjects encounter? Or, do we “encounter” time, or are we, rather, temporal beings? And what are the affective, epistemological, and ethical implications of the ways
that we figure or represent time? Such questions belie easy responses; for time, too, is something complicated, and the constitutive force of temporality engenders, literally, different worlds, as, in a Deleuzian vein, Claire Colebrook suggestively proposes: “the world is not something in which time takes place; there are flows of time from which worlds are perceived” (41). Radically different flows of time inflect radically different temporal-cultural formations and vice versa. One need only consider the many and varied grammatical tenses to note that the multitude of ways in which time is experienced are culturally specific. It is, nevertheless, possible to very briefly delineate on a formal level some of the ways in which time has been apprehended.

Two key axes can be identified: time as primarily constitutive, or primarily conceptual; and time as primarily chronological, linear, forward-moving, or otherly ontic, layered, folded. While recent theoretical work by Gilles Deleuze and Negri, for example, theorizes time in all its constitutive complexity, for modern philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, time “in-itself” could not be grasped. For Kant, time functioned as a regulative idea, a fiction, a way of apprehending objects in space rather than a property of those objects. (Kant’s maneuver here strikes me as a somewhat disciplinary confinement of the experience of temporality to the conceptual apparatus of the subject.) Exploring the latter axis through the lens of the experiential, the relentless, inexorable forward movement of chronological time -- undeniable, commonsensical -- is again belied by the subject’s equally undeniable experience of time as layered, folding: the experience of déjà vu speaking to such a temporal-experiential folding. Time’s arrow is intangible, ethereal, otherly (time does not yield itself up to the grasp of the subject). That “Time” in itself cannot be approached univocally or directly suggests, as Elizabeth Grosz has argued, that “time is neither fully ‘present,’ a thing in itself, nor a pure abstraction. […] It is a kind of evanescence that appears only at those moments when our expectations are (positively or negatively) surprised” (Grosz, 5). Time, and temporal modalities, register significance on
many and varied levels. However, those registers, Grosz suggests, manifest themselves (if at all) to the subject affectively, through the “surprise” of the temporal. (I do not want to suggest that the concept of time that concerns me as a political theorist is primarily “subjective” or experiential or social, as opposed to natural, or ontological conceptions of time. Instead, I would rather propose that those ontic conceptualizations also have implications within the political imaginary.) For now, I aim to delineate some of the keynotes of the modern experience of time, through a dual exploration of the quotidian and the theoretical.

Time, Grosz suggests, manifests itself to the subject in an experience of the affective form of surprise. Some keynotes of surprise would certainly have to include Proust, and the recall of the past in the present invoked by the scent and taste of a madeleine cake. Henri Bergson’s figuring of duration that encompasses both the sedimentation of the past within the present and the unpredictability of the inventiveness of the present as it extends into the future sounds another vital temporal rhythm. Further, utopists have sought to unpack the utopian potential that inheres in mixed temporalities; consider Vincent Geoghegan’s work on memory in Bloch, and the import of the distinction between anagnorisis as recognition and anamnesis as recollection (here, productivity, possibility, resides in the work of the former, while the latter evokes repetition). And, as a final cultural keynote, Samuel Beckett’s dramatic staging of the vast expanses of cosmic and existential time evokes, perhaps, the sheer complexity of “homogenous, empty time” itself.

But in terms of quotidian experiences of time, surely the exemplary manifestation of the subject’s experience of, and relation to, time in modernity is the utterly unsurprising presence of the time-piece, the watch, the clock. As Raoul Vanegeim notes, “ours is the time of the watch-maker,” denoting at once ontological, ideological, and experiential formations of the temporal in modernity (226). Vanegeim diagnosed a
modern malaise of “survival sickness” whose most telling and disconsolate symptom is that time is no longer lived; *time itself* is “dead,” or, felt only and wretchedly as “time-that-slips-away”: “people are bewitched into believing that time slips away, and this belief is the basis of time actually slipping away” (151). The modern time of progress and linearity, for Vanegeim and theorists like him, signifies not the disenchantment of the world but rather its *double* enchantment, where the surprise of temporality is perhaps irredeemably lost in a newly mythical temporal formation: the cyclical time of capital’s reproduction. Conceivably, this is the gloomy paradox of the modern experience: as time is inscribed upon our very bodies down to the merest millisecond -- only then, desultory, instrumental, quantifiable time supersedes the time of, and time as, epiphany, Event, *kairos*. To be sure, delineating the contours of the affective dimensions of temporality necessarily must deal with historically specific modes and flows of time within which historically specific subjectivities are produced. I shall return to this point in more detail in the following section, delineating some of the mechanisms whereby such temporal experiences are produced. For now, what is the sickness (what are the affects) that clock-time signifies?

For Vanegeim, it (firstly) destroys the layered qualities of temporal experience; the epiphany of Atwood’s Elaine, as much as for Marcel -- that “nothing goes away” -- is replaced by utter loss: “no matter that lived space is a universe of dreams, desires, and prodigious creative impulses: in terms of duration, it is merely one point following another, and its emergence is governed by one principle only, that of its own annihilation” (226-7). And again: “linear time -- objective time, time-which-slips-away -- invades the space that has fallen to daily life in the shape of negative time, dead time, the expression of the temporality of destruction” (226-7). The affective impact of clocktime is indeed a dangerous sickness, and threatens an annihilation of the quotidian itself. The utterly unsurprising, the watch, thus leaps from the quotidian, to become one of the
more fascinating, perplexing, cosmological riddles of modern philosophy: for what else are Friedrich Nietzsche’s various formulations of eternal recurrence counterpoised to, if not to the forms of revenge that humanity takes against time-that-slips-away? Eternal recurrence confronts “time, and its ‘it was’.” For Nietzsche, the melancholy of “time and its ‘it was’” produces *resentment*, that is, reactive formations of desire, as linear conceptualizations of temporality herald a loss of the past and (perhaps paradoxically) inculcate a sense of the future as mere repetition; and so, change is structurally ruled out. In one formulation from *The Gay Science*, a demon who may be malignant, or may be a great god, asks: “How well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?” (*The Gay Science*, 341). Nietzsche proposes that the processes of thinking this thought of eternal recurrence acts as a kind of “technique of the self” whereby the perceived necessity of linear time (and its mythical repetition -- power as Power) becomes loosened in a psychic unlocking or unfreezing of time’s “flow.”

Part of the significance of Nietzsche’s reflections on untimely temporalities is simply this: in his speculations, he allows ontological or cosmological configurations of time to play and work within social, historical, and experiential formulations; he refuses a forced or false analytical distinction between these temporal levels, revealing instead their interplay. The quotidian, that is, is also part of the cosmological. Second, he marks a critical distinction between modes of time that generate senses of irretrievable loss (and thus reactive modes of subject-formation) and modes of temporal experience that seek to inculcate a sense of agency within temporality. That Nietzsche formulates his “most abyssal thought” at the high point of modernity is not innocent or coincidental; time as an *affective form* is, of course, deeply interwoven with historically specific modes and flows of time within which historically specific subjectivities are constituted. Utopian, radical, and critical theorists (e.g., Benjamin, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Negri,
Badiou) all mark some kind of distinction between empty or dead temporal modes (time as measure, the time of reproduction, repetition) and that other time, the untimely time (radical or revolutionary temporalities: the event, time to come, Messianic time). How are these temporalities produced? And how can empty forms of time be disrupted in politically dissident ways? How can re-figuring the temporal reveal agency, and create truth? If in western modernity the surprise of the temporal is captured by linearity, chronology, and quantification, then attention to critical maneuvers that cut through modernity’s production of dead time might be politically, ethically, and epistemologically important. To that end, in the following sections of this paper I explore some of the mechanisms whereby survival sickness is produced; some critical interruptions that re-figure temporality; and some of the ways in which such interruptions reconceptualize the problematic of truth itself.

III.

*Time is the work of attrition to that adaptation to which people must resign themselves so long as they fail to change the world. Age is a role, an acceleration of “lived” time in the plane of appearances, an attachment to things.* (Vanegim, *Revolution*, 151).

In this section, I explore an important way in which the “surprise” of the temporal has been deadened in western modernity, and I consider the ethical-epistemological implications of this move. For “time-that-slips-away,” empty or dead time, is a naturalized rather than natural (or indeed, ontological) temporal mode. Both Guy Debord and Raoul Vanegim focus on the historically specific *mechanisms* whereby dead time is *produced*. I have chosen to focus my current discussion on the deadening of time in late-modernity on these thinkers partially because both are relatively neglected in political
theory; but, more importantly, because both (as situationists) mark the entwinement of theory and practice. Both imaginatively inhabit the “homogenous, empty time” that is the object of their critique; and so, both stage a confrontation resistance to capital and capital’s recuperative dynamic. Their analyses thus help shape a necessary theorization of time, truth, and resistance, as their confrontation traces the form of modern experience of our shared, complicated, layered present moment. Both also draw theoretical sustenance from an altercanon that certainly includes renegades such as Benedict Spinoza, Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as some of Karl Marx’s modes; and this work is important in informing a transformative subjectivity sans ressentiment.

The temporality of modernity works, both Debord and Vanegeim argue in a Marxist vein, through the specific flows of capital. Time, quite literally, became money, deployed to measure wage-labour. A common temporal unit came to measure labour-power (the worker’s capacity for labour) and also became a means of reducing various concrete forms of labour to a simple unit of abstract labour. Capital is, in a very specific sense, living labour that has been reified, become congealed in its object, and thus that which can be exchanged; hence, surplus value can be extracted from living labour. Temporal processes of human productivity consequently became frozen into things that could be exchanged (and exploitation is thus significantly temporal). The temporality of capital, then, is bound up with a time that has become known only through measure and commodity. This has implications that resonate through ontological conceptualizations of time, to how the world can be known, and to the subject’s experience of that world.

Citing the Marx of The Poverty of Philosophy, Debord argues that in time-as-measure, time itself become thing-like, quantifiable, and thus exchangeable, to the detriment of living time: “It is under the rule of time-as-commodity that ‘time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most time’s carcass’” (Spectacle, 147; emphasis mine). The loss of time heralds a death, as human subjects become literally emptied out.
Vanegeim concurs, arguing that these mechanisms are precisely the means by which “dead time” (and so “survival sickness”) are produced, as “the bourgeois order […] increases the dead time in daily life (imposing the need to produce, consume, calculate)” (159).

I have already gestured, via Nietzsche’s critical interruption, toward the paradox whereby the time of measure (quantitative, linear) generates its other: Debord calls this “pseudo-cyclical time”, but he proposes that “pseudo-cyclical time is in fact merely the consumable disguise of time-as-commodity of the production system, and it exhibits the essential traits of that time: homogenous and exchangeable units, and the suppression of any qualitative dimension” (Spectacle, 149). Debord thus augments Nietzsche’s existential analysis with an analysis of the moves made by capital to produce such a malaise and temporal confusion. Linear time becomes the time of repetition and also the time of pseudo-novelty, as the commodity form produces ever new manifestations: “The ruling class, made up of specialists in the ownership of things who for that very reason are themselves owned by things, is obliged to tie its fate to the maintenance of a reified history and to the preservation of a new historical mobility…” (143). As at once cyclical and linear, exchangeable and marked by increasing novelty, the time of capital is indeed the time of a peculiar metaphysics.

With such a peculiarity marked by the chronological, the linear, the instrumental, and the quantitative, Vanegeim discerns in capitalism’s peculiar metaphysics the “confused geometry of Power”: “The quantitative and the linear are indissociable. A linear, measured time and a linear, measured life are the co-ordinates of survival: a succession of interchangeable instants” (88). As the time of capital encompasses space, other times (precisely as differing quotidian’s and differing cosmologies) come to signify, in our times, the very possibility that “other temporalities, other forms of worldling, coexist and are possible” (Chakrabarty, 57). That is to say, there are multiple dynamics
at work here: if we accept Debord’s analysis, then “the development of capitalism meant
the unification of irreversible time on a world scale. […] What appears the world over as
the same day is merely the time of economic production—time cut up into equal abstract
fragments. Unified universal time still belongs to the world market—and, by extension, to
the world spectacle” (145). While the utopian horizon can no longer be theorized as the
“outside” of capital’s colonization of time/the times, critical interruptions remain “that
straddle […] a border zone of temporality, something that conforms to the temporal
code within which ‘capital’ comes into being while violating that code at the same time,
something we are able to see only because we can think/theorize capital, but something
that also reminds us that other temporalities, other forms of worlding, coexist and are
possible” (Chakrabarty, 57).

Thus, other temporalities that shape other worlds that interrupt the dominant
temporalization and modes of world-creation are possible; the political task is to evoke
those times. In his analysis of Benjamin’s theorization of time, Giorgio Agamben points
out that

messianic time is not chronologically distinct from historical time […] another
world and another time must make themselves present in this world and time.
This means that historical time cannot simply be cancelled and that messianic
time, moreover, cannot be perfectly homogenous with history; these two times
must instead accompany one another according to modalities that cannot be
reduced to a dual logic (this world / other world), (Potentialities, 168).
That time is not reducible to its historical production, and that time is even non-
synchronous with itself, speaks to possibility. From Benjamin, to the Black time of
Malcolm X, to “women’s time” of the radical feminist movement, to the zapatistas, who
evoke “Another calendar: that of resistance,” the demand to live time as a “time that is
filled with the presence of the Now” (Benjamin, *Theses*) in all its complexity and reconditeness. This move is core to any politics of resistance.

In this section I have suggested that the temporality of modernity is produced largely through the mechanisms of capital. These mechanisms affect the ontological imaginary as much as the political, epistemological and affective registers. The forms of agency and ways of knowing that dominate this temporal moment thus seek to flatten time’s complexity and layered qualities. The subject is produced as calculable, quantifiable, ordered; knowledge is cumulative, commodified, again quantifiable. As modern capital increasingly colonizes on a global scale, the dead time of western modernity becomes (productively) infested with other temporal modalities that interrupt its rhythms from within. Thus, attention to other temporal rhythms is a critical practice in interrupting the naturalization of capital’s temporality. Also vital is the interpretative work of paying attention to the possibilities to which the disjuncture or critical tension between hegemonic time and other forms of temporality give rise. In the next section, I turn my attention to the ways in which such a critical disjunction can be *cultivated*.

IV.

What do I want? Not a succession of moments, but one huge instant. A totality that is lived, and without the experience of “time passing.” The feeling of “time passing” is simply the feeling of growing old. And yet, since one must survive in order to live, virtual moments, virtual possibilities, are necessarily rooted in that time. When we try to federate moments, to bring out the pleasure in them, to release their promise of life, we are already learning how to construct “situations.” (Vanegeim, *Revolution*, 93).
In this section, I focus critical attention on maneuvers that cut through modernity’s production of dead time in potentially dissident ways. Through what maneuvers can a revolutionary temporality be grasped? Can temporality, figured in untimely ways, link desire to hope, to history? Some possibilities lie in the constellations, ghosts, specters, produced as critical ruptures within modernity, ruptures that can be deployed to figure new ways of critically re-orienting subjects in their worlds. Receptivity to the voices of specters and ghosts as cyphers of possibility might just inculcate an agency that is receptive to a transformative inflection of the Not-Yet.

For both Vanegeim and Benjamin, such a receptivity can be generated through historiographical critique that aligns itself with cultures of resistance, and thus with voices that have been subjugated, neglected, forgotten in accordance with contemporary truths or priorities informed by dominant ways of producing knowledge. Methodologically as well as politically, Vanegeim sounds a warning against a future that is nothing other than “historians repeating themselves” (232). As he and Bloch both know, the future that is mere reproduction or repetition of the prevailing order is the unreal future, and so Vanegeim begins to point to the ways in which political subjects can unwork the seemingly ontological, natural, and insurmountable barriers between those who have struggled in earlier times and their own times: “past revolts take on a new dimension in my present, the dimension of an immanent reality crying out to be brought into being,” (233). He addresses those who would practice resistance as well as, methodologically, those who would study resistance in shaping a sensibility that is attuned to the absent presence of the past as it “ris[es] from the dead and run[s] through the streets of our daily lives,” (231). And so, as, for example, the zapatistas (or, indeed, Evo Morales) hear the motivating absent-presence of five hundred years of struggle (not defeat), they gesture toward a utopian invocation of the new wherein immanent possibility, memory, and the Not-Yet future generate agency and counterhegemonic
truth in the present moment of struggle. As such, their political practices can be read via an unruly, nonlinear temporality that generates “another form of worlding” (Chakrabarty, 57).

Grosz puts it thus: “The task is to make elements of this past live again, to be re-energized through their untimely or anachronistic recall in the present. The past is what gives us that difference, that tension with the present which can move us to a future in which the present can no longer recognize itself” (Grosz, 117). The vital moment in disrupting linearity has its counter-analogy in precisely the commodity form and the energy, the life, congealed therein: that is, how can the thingification of time and energy be made to speak? What would it say here-and-now? And so the critical interest is not in the past as it reflects, prefigures, and naturalizes the hegemonic order of the present (or as it shows its “Scotland Yard Badge”, as Bloch seriously jokes to Benjamin), but, as Grosz suggests, it lies “in that which in the past still retains its dynamic potential” (Grosz, 114); for “the meaning of such moments lies not in their inaugural force within a preordained narrative, but in the possibilities opened by their recovery” (Lowe and Lloyd, 5). In the remainder of this section, I explore the post-representational configurations of knowledge/agency in Benjamin and Derrida, as Benjamin’s “messianic temporality” and Derrida’s “spectrality” help to delineate the “fictive” forms of agency and truth that are vital to a transformative politics.

Benjamin cultivates a form of critical receptivity to the Not-Yet by means of a historiographical critique that undercuts the conventional historian’s claims to coherence and undermines progressivist interpretations of history. Benjamin’s theoretical intervention is at once epistemologically and politically radical: his theoretical practices are concerned to re-value temporal experience in a way that demands action and that elicits agency. This is a necessarily layered endeavor. Attentive to the silencing of suffering in those modes of historical analysis that reiterate the story of the victors,
Benjamin, first, elicits the silenced, the unvoiced, those who have laboured to produce histories that denied them. This is an ethical project, for sure. In accord with Theodor Adorno, for example, Benjamin’s theoretical praxis is attuned to the ways in which the production of history and historical knowledge can become complicit with suffering, either in its refusal to recognize or give voice, or in attempting to justify its necessity. However, this is not simply an ethical endeavor, but an epistemological one -- and also a significantly temporal operation.

Benjamin deploys these unvoiced voices in order to critically interrupt the smooth surfaces of the hegemony of the present order. His critical historical praxis endeavors to “grasp […] the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one” (Theses, xviii). Establishing a critical interruption, “he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance to fight for an oppressed past” (xvii). Benjamin fashions a counter-hegemonic sensibility in his encounters with what is past. More so, he figures the past precisely as active within the present configuration; constellations become “readable” in “moments of danger”; that is to say, the presence of the past does not always have the same force (ghosts only speak in times of crisis). Benjamin’s figuring of the past within the present, then, is “post-representational” when it speaks to the possibility of fashioning a future that breaks with the hegemonic tendencies of the present.

Benjamin’s re-visioning of the chronological in favour of “cairological” or “qualitative” time “suggests multiple and singular temporalities that discursively unite past and present moments” with epistemological and political implications (Curthoys). Transformative political agency is always “untimely”: breaking with the time of measure, the time of commodities, Benjamin evokes a “tiger’s leap” over “empty” world historical time in favour of evoking the transformative force of those other times that refuse to be consigned to the dustbin of history. Thus severed from the linear order of
succession, and marking the non-synchronicity of the present with itself, those other
temporalities enable a critical engagement with the problem of agency and truth.

In Derrida, I find a no less radical form of praxis. Derrida engages Marx by
means of an exploration of the ways in which the simple invocation of Marx’s name
unsettles the contemporary moment. (Specters was written in the context of a triumphant
neo-liberal hegemony given its most succinct articulation in Fukuyama’s ill-advised
claims of the “end of history.”) The specter, Derrida argues, marks the presence of the
unresolved and active past within the forcefield of possibilities in the present. The
specter is out of time (out of its temporal chronology): “A spectral moment, a moment
that no longer belongs to time, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized
presents. […] Furtive and untimely, the specter does not belong to that time” (Specters of
Marx, ix). As such, the specter speaks a different kind of truth to the dominant
knowledges of the present.

As Wendy Brown has argued, these post-representational constellations of past,
present, and future moments of struggle act as critical interruptions, as a “political and
intellectual gesture of disinterring repressed emancipatory hopes and experiences” (157).
“Seizing hold of a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger,” or engaging the still
unsettling presence of the past in order to affect and redirect the flow of the present,
makes possible the recovery and invention of possibilities that otherwise become
precluded. It is in this context that Brown reads Derrida’s engagement with Marx (or
Marx’s specters) as finally an engagement with the work of a transformative agency:
“learning to live with haunts or specters--with things that shape the present, rendering it
as always permeated by an elsewhere but in a fashion that is inconstant, ephemeral, and
hence not fully mappable” (145). She provocatively suggests that agency can be rewritten
as a form of conjuration: “what lives on […] what is conjured […] how past generations
and events occupy the force-field of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt,
plague, and inspirit our imaginations and visions for the future” (150). The specter, then, is perhaps one of the most crucial “crags and jags” that render the world malleable to intervention, and agency is circumscribed and enabled because of its force.

The affective-ethical-epistemological work of utopian impulses speaks to an active rendering of the world and to the weaving of past into future by political subjects. Attention to temporal dynamics is vital to utopian figurations as they seek to delineate the complexity of relations that compose the present moment, and yet they also seek to make that totality glimmer with potentiality. “History” does indeed “already think […] the thinking subject and is inscribed in the forms through which it must think” (Jameson, Late Marxism 24); but within that history, and the futures it contains, there reside fissures and glimpses of potentiality to be elicited and activated. In terms of agency, then, part of what emerges in the utopian subject, when desire turns into hope as a “directing act of a cognitive kind” (Bloch, Principle of Hope, 12) is the return of a past that has been silenced or repressed. This return thus creates a new space wherein one can “choose” to be constituted by a different past: she recognizes herself as a constituted, for sure, but also a constituent part of a world and a history that remains in process. A vital dynamic of Messianic time and spectrality/hauntology, then, is a dramatic and felt switch from a serial constitution in “homogenous empty time” to a homologous constitution across moments that are disconnected in the linear-temporal movement. The maneuvers that Vanegeim, Benjamin, and Derrida theorize here make such a switch palpable and possible at the affective-cognitive (and historical) level.

V.

Philosophy is an experience of thinking about the breach in time… (Badiou, Manifesto for Philosophy, 38).
It is in this context that I aim to analyze recent theoretical work wherein figures of truth are mapped precisely in terms of a disruptive untimeliness. As agency can be given an energizing direction from the potential of the past and the future as they inhere in the present, the time of truth in contemporary theory is similarly untimely. Critical, radical, and utopian modes of political theory have sidestepped or undercut the epistemological or metaphysical privilege claimed by “Truth” (in any a-temporal formulation) as a ruse of power. Critical modes of theory, then, seek instead to confront, and so to counter, power (and power/knowledge regimes) in their entwined and overlapping material and discursive forms. Such a confrontation with the powerful lies of the present is undertaken, not in the name of truth, but in the name of possibility. Like utopianism’s double gesture, these critical maneuvers are characterized by a double move of (genealogical) critique -- directed within and against the hegemonic and hegemonizing forces in the complex of tendencies that compose the present -- and (utopian) anticipation -- wherein newly fashioned, but immanently grounded, figurations seek to make that totality glimmer with potentiality. This dual move undercuts the cohesion and closure of the present as always-already a powerful form of falsity and imaginatively fabricates new possibilities.

One of the most significant dynamics of contemporary theory is, however, the project of reclaiming and refunctioning discourses of truth. I have suggested that this project has two moves: the refunctioning of “Truth” as a cognitive form that is at once situated and perspectival, on the one hand; and as anticipatory, “fictive,” or imaginative, on the other. Mapping this configuration in the context of the ethical, political, affective, and epistemological implications of the theorization of untimely temporalities might help to explain why Alain Badiou, even as he is a vital theorist of truth, can pose the problem thus: “the vital political question of our times is not truth, but fiction.” Contemporary radical theory evokes dissident fictions as disruptive, untimely, transformative truths.
Badiou’s articulation of the structure of a truth is exemplary. He proposes: “as long as nothing happens, aside from that which conforms to the rules of a state of things, there can admittedly be cognition, correct statements, accumulated knowledge; there cannot be truth” (Manifesto, 36). On the contrary, truth is characterized as “first of all something new” (“Truth Process”). Badiou thus distinguishes between knowledge as the order of cognition and truth. The former is characterized by science, “techne,” and is “always a continuation, an application, a repetition” that is “only concerned with what already is” (“Truth Process”). The latter is an interruption to the order of cognition itself: “A truth appears in its newness because an eventful supplement interrupts repetition” (“Truth Process”). Crucially, truth takes the form of the Event itself: that which occurs in time, but after which one is literally looking at a new world. For Badiou, Events can occur in four realms: of politics (e.g., French Revolution), science (e.g., Galileo and physics), art, and love. Events are thus truthful openings that create radically other possible ways of living, being, and acting, and radically challenge or reject the conceptual discipline of the order from which they erupt. As James Ingram puts it, truth for Badiou is “something between a principle and an epiphany, as when we speak of the truth of an artwork or a love. Truths are both world-disclosing and practical: they cast the world in a new light and demand that we do something” (“Can Universalism Still Be Radical?” 565-566). Consequently, the distinction between knowledge as cognition, and truth as Event, is made on the basis of the different temporal orders to which each belongs: this maps to the temporal framework with which I have been concerned, wherein knowledge can be theorized as belonging to the time of measure, chronology, and quantification, while truth belongs to “eventual time” itself.

The most important political question of our times might, then, not be truths but fictions, because, in their formal structure of a critical rejection of that which merely is, fictions contain the possibility of the Event -- the possibility of a radical and
thoroughgoing challenge to the present hegemonic order in the name of a counter-hegemonic challenge that could generate new truths as not only new orientations within the world, but, quite literally, new worlds themselves. Truth, then, belongs to the order of the messianic and those other structures that question and anticipate the other, different, and better lives that might be possible. So too, Negri explicitly draws together the critical connections between temporal modes, imaginative and critical truths, and counter-hegemonic forms of political agency. For the moment, then, I give him the closing words:

Time is the concrete reality of my life in so far as it is the substance of my collective, productive and constitutive-of-the-new being. Outside of a materialist, dynamic and collective conception of time it is impossible to think the revolution. Time is not only a horizon, however, it is also a measure. It has been conceived as the qualitative measure of exploitation; now it can be thought of as the qualitative measure of the alternative and of change. [...] Revolution is born from the pathways of a constitutive phenomenology of temporality [...] [Thus, I] repurpose the project of the imagination to Power, or better, against Power. As the classics teach us, the imagination is the most concrete of temporal powers

*(Time for Revolution, 21).*
Notes.

1 On the problematic of truth and fictions on broadly post-structuralist theory, see, for example, Donna Haraway’s exploration of the cyborg imaginary as a world-changing fiction operative within social reality (“Cyborg Manifesto”); Rosi Braidotti, (“Political fictions may be more effective, here and now, than theoretical systems” *Metamorphoses*, 7); Michel Foucault, (“I have never written anything but fictions” *Power/Knowledge* 193) and Alain Badiou (discussed below). For feminist reinterpretations of myths as dissident fictions, see Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous (“The Laugh of the Medusa” in particular). On the “affective register,” see William Connolly and Jane Bennett.

2 The rejection of the blueprint paradigm now firmly established in utopian studies. See, for example, Fredric Jameson’s exclusion of liberal political theory from the category of the Utopian, as its attempts to establish “positive criteria of the good society,” from John Locke to John Rawls, are merely the “composition of blueprints for bourgeois comfort” (12). Utopia, thus characterized, is resolutely critical in a formal, not substantive sense (even as its formal maneuvers work through content). Louis Marin’s “neutralization” is thus an exemplary utopian gesture. It is the formal quality of utopia to be resolutely oppositional.

3 Radical theory draws a distinction between *potestas* (already constituted power) and *potentia* (constituent power), privileging the disruptive creativity of the latter. This distinction between modes of power is not available in the English language.

4 Ruth Levitas argued in *The Concept of Utopia*, drawing on Morris, that utopian “desire” needs to be educated in order to translate into a politically active hope. I agree; and to that end I propose, in the larger project of which this is a part, a series of utopian techniques of the self, drawn from a cartography of affective forms, as a way of shaping the affective energies that can sustain such a Utopian politics. Fredric Jameson has recently proposed that in the Utopian novel existential time (memory, individual time) and historical time (as *histoire*, the time of agency and collective action) are “seamlessly reunited” (7). This is important because any emancipatory politics must engage with the alienation from both time and history.

5 Rosi Braidotti is certainly right when she argues that politics is “as much to do with the constitution and organization of affectivity, memory and desire as it has with consciousness and resistance” (*Metamorphoses* 20). But the time of resistance itself is intrinsically connected with affectivity, memory, and desire: the world out there (ontology) is not detached from the ways we know and experience it (epistemology and affect). Bloch was particularly aware of the “temporal emotions” of which hope was the most vital as only hope could attain the status of a “directing act of a cognitive kind,” (*Principle of Hope*, 12). But even for the great empiricist Thomas Hobbes we get a sense of the import of temporal and cognitive operations at work in the affective register; for Hobbes, nevertheless, such work must be rendered mere repetition, as “Imagination and Memory are but one thing,” (*Leviathan*, 89). For the radical or utopian, then, then time is not linear, composed of moments that succeed one another; time is layered, composed of multiple possibilities. Second: figuring (as writing, or feeling, or voicing) the untimeliness of time reveals possibilities for agency even as we accept that we subjects are ineluctably and thoroughly constituted. Third: untimeliness reveals many utopian “elsewhere’s” here and now.

6 Time could also usefully be approached through music (the metronome, keeping time); or through various configurations of secular time vis-à-vis sacred time (as marked by e.g., monastic orders). Interesting
to note is the possibility of theorizing temporality via its disciplinary or other formations; such projects nevertheless are beyond the boundaries of this essay. Thanks to the participants in the Ralahine Workshops, Friday March 3rd 2006, University of Limerick, for their suggestions.

7 The skeptical Bloch, however, comments of Bergson that “there is absolutely no genuine Novum in Bergson; he has only in fact developed his concept from sheer excess into capitalistic fashion-novelty and thus stabilized it […] The social reason for Bergson’s pseudo-Novum lies in the late bourgeoisie, which has within it nothing new in terms of content. […] The mighty realm of possibility thus becomes for him an illusion of -- retrospection” (Principle of Hope, 202).

8 “The power of the past resides in its complicated relationship of similarity/dissimilarity to the present” (“Remembering the Future”, 22)).

9 Expressions of eternal recurrence include: “The Greatest Stress” in The Gay Science, and throughout Thus Spake Zarathustra (“The vision and the riddle,” and “The convalescent”). Nietzsche counterposes the despair, resentment, revenge against life that characterize “time and its ‘it was’” with eternal recurrence as a way or sublating resentment.

10 I argue this in my Fictive Theories, chapter 4, and conclusion.

11 See work in the Italian/autonomista tradition for similar analyses, Antonio Negri in particular.

12 See also Paul Smith’s discussion of Johannes Fabian [Time and the Other] exploration of “the intellectual formations of the European Enlightenment whereby the world comes to be viewed according to the disposition of time, starting from a vantage point of a centralized and imperialist ‘here and now’ such that ‘given societies at all times and places may be plotted in terms of relative distance from the present’. For Fabian, such ‘plotting’ operates through a theoretical separation and distancing of the ‘other’, operations which are fundamental to the colonialist and imperialist experience and which produce what he calls ‘the denial of coevalness, or allochronism’ to the ‘other’. Thus, separated and disintanced in time as well as in space, ‘the other’ is construed in terms such as ‘primitive’, ‘relatively civilized’, ‘underdeveloped’…” (12).

13 Ruth Levitas made these maneuvers palpable in her excellent presentation …

14 More recently, in an implicitly utopian mode, Elizabeth Grosz has argued that “political and cultural struggles are all, in some sense, directed to bringing into existence futures that dislocate themselves from the dominant tendencies and forces of the present. […] They are about inducing the untimely” (Nick of Time 14).

15 In Millennial Dreams, Paul Smith argued that “capitalism now claims dominion over even the most metaphysical components of the natural world – time and space,” and thus critical theory’s most important task is to made the commodity speak.

16 See also Chambers, 27.

17 As Fredric Jameson comments on Adorno, the “effects” of the “damaged life” “cannot simply be thought away by the thinking of a better thought, by new forms of philosophizing, and more adequate (or even more Utopian) concepts” (Late Marxism, 24). I concur; but nevertheless, even for Adorno, there are glimpses and fissures, possibility, potentiality could be elicited from the damaged life: “Since thought only derives its idea of a better life from ‘the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape’, such estrangement is ‘also the utterly impossible thing because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair’s breadth, from the scope of existence.’ Thus, critical theorists strive to think what is
virtually impossible to think: the possible, because only possibility affords a critical, utopian perspective on damaged life” (Cook, 2005, 31, citing Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*).

Works cited.


http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v003/3.2r_curthoys.html.


