

PART I

Ruin and Revolution

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CHAPTER I

Natural History:

Toward a Politics of Crisis

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*Virno*

Beneath our built environment of cultural habits and rules, behind our “organization of work and solid communicative habits,” between the furrows of every form of life, there persists a substratum of human uncertainty and groundlessness that constitutes a natural-historical invariant—or so Paolo Virno would have us believe.<sup>1</sup> As Virno sees it, we humans are disoriented animals, so thoroughly lacking an instinctual blueprint to guide us, even at moments of maximum danger, that we are always generalists, always adaptable, never constrained by a preordained set of rules.<sup>2</sup> Our instability and our language faculty, our anthropogenetic flexibility and mobility, our “dearth of specialized instincts,” our permanent crisis: these qualities mean that we can adapt to any environment.<sup>3</sup> But they also condemn us to a Manichean existence in which, on the one hand, our flexibility and adaptability make us ideally suited to the demands of the contemporary capitalist labor process while, on the other hand, our natural historical invariance—or, to be more precise, our invariant and dangerous groundlessness—constitutes an indestructible opening that makes us capable of insubordination.<sup>4</sup>

Virno is clearly onto something important with his explication of the link between crisis, which he defines as “an emergency situation” wherein “a certain pseudo-environmental setup is subjected to violent transformative traction” and “the potentiality . . . of the human animal takes on the typical visibility of an empirical state of affairs,” and natural history, which he defines as the inventory of “the multiple socio-political” representations (i.e., diagrams) of “the biological invariant that characterizes the existence of the human animal” as a “potential animal” in time.<sup>5</sup> We admit, in fact, that our position varies from his only by a matter of slight degrees. All the same, we

find that his concept of “natural-historical diagrams,” by which he means “the socio-political states of affairs which display, in changing and rival forms, some salient features of anthropogenesis,” remains uncomfortably close to the harsh excesses of “biolinguistic capitalism” precisely because, like Negri and Hardt’s “biopolitical productivity,” it meets capitalism on essentially the same terrain: the same anthropocentric machine that separates political and linguistic human life from nonhuman and dumb apolitical life; the same fascination with original forms of productivity, innovation, and change arising from the dangers of an unruly state of nature; the same concept of an incontestable “metahistory” so basic as to determine the common behavior of humankind.<sup>6</sup> Rather than further historicizing and politicizing natural history, Virno, in a distinctly Heideggerian manner, tends instead to ontologize natural necessities and, in that way, risks repeating the classical gesture of political thought: to separate an objective, indisputable sphere—nature—from the subjective interventions of thought and praxis. That can only mean reducing the critical ferment inherent in natural historical crisis to an organizing principle for future political life, which for Virno means only those “institutions of the multitude” that rely exclusively on the human form.<sup>7</sup>

In Marx and the Frankfurt School, by contrast, natural historical crisis is permanent and pervasive, and it follows a specific dynamic of thought totality and dialectical decline in any given historical situation. Accordingly, it exposes even the assumption of capitalism’s unfathomable complexity, the ungraspable character of its mobility and flux—in short, the ideology of permanent change that is said to be our fate—to the dynamics of transience. (One might even go so far as to say, in fact, that the permanent succession of crises on which capitalist circulation thrives is arrayed against precisely this insight into a more all-enveloping crisis.) For Marx, a real dialectics contains “the recognition of [the] negation” of every state, “its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.”<sup>8</sup> A real dialectics is “critical and revolutionary” (always complementary terms for Marx) because it is not merely a dialectics of concept and logic but a dialectics of natural history that extracts the transient kernel and momentary existence from any “historically developed form.” Not surprisingly, this critical and revolutionary dialectical procedure draws out all the resistances and anxieties of the bourgeois order. In Hegel, nature had merely behaved unreasonably, refusing to play along in the

dialectical playbook except as negation and as an antithesis to be sublated. Natural historical dialectics in Marx expresses real relations determined in particular historical situations wherein the inherent laws of nature operate as fundamental principles in the real.<sup>9</sup> For Marx—and, following him, Adorno and Benjamin—the natural historical stratum identified by Virno is never *sub*, never an “invariant human nature” that suddenly erupts from underneath established cultural encrustations in times of crisis.<sup>10</sup> In Marx’s idea of natural history, what Virno calls “species-specific prerogatives” are themselves profoundly historical and constructable, inseparable from the sphere of world history in which they are enmeshed.<sup>11</sup> Other than invariant, always part of a specific historical constellation with its own mode of expression and laws of transition, natural history persists as an indestructible layer in the midst of any cultural formation—there as infinite perishing and transience—even when that formation is thriving (because natural history elicits an immunitarian response that is coexistent with what is perceived as crisis). The persistent truth content of things, their still-living obstinacy, is not an authentic being; nor is it a constitutively dislocated and unsheltered “Being” in the Heideggerian vein. This is where Virno goes astray: drawing heavily on Heidegger’s terminology, he gives natural history the status of a more authentic and generic layer in human life, an “as such” that, as in Heidegger, tends to become our irrevocable historical destiny. Naturalizing natural history, Virno removes it from analytical scrutiny, from the practice of intervention and presentation, and thereby repeats the concealment of the very natural historical layer that he advocates as the engine of revolutionary politics in times of crisis.<sup>12</sup> The result is that politics then gets cordoned off, as exclusively human history, from nonhuman forms of life, including things and animals, their *techne*, or the life of machines. To draw political philosophy out of its self-satisfied contemplation, political analysis must, as Marx and the Frankfurt School well knew, close off any recourse to metahistorical invariants grounded in the generic nature of man. Politics must instead be cognizant of the fact that truths, far from being permanently available for reflection, are to be seized in concrete, pressing situations and from fleeting, exigent objects—be they inorganic matter, ideas, or living beings—that can get irrevocably lost. Hence a natural history that manifests itself, both in health and in crisis, as an energy of passing away, an indestructible that is not an invariant groundlessness of humans alone but the continuous perishing, the total and infinite passing away, that encompasses concrete political formations, including all nonhuman and thingly life.

Natural history is thus to be understood not only as a perishing that befalls even the nothingness and groundlessness of the human but as a perishing that is itself a new ontology, realized in the task of critical intervention, of ourselves and of the present.<sup>13</sup> What this means, in the first place, is that there can be no stratagem of governance predicated on the separation between a wild thinking underneath and the social calcifications above. Subversion and containment, health and disease: these supposed dichotomies are in fact complicit, with wild, anarchic thinking and the pastoral power of law and order sharing the same topology, one figured in terms of regeneration, of a cyclical understanding of perishing and rejuvenation, like the ups and downs of markets. By contrast, natural history manifests, in specific historical sites, a perishing even of the system of a rhythmic, predictable, regular perishing. To understand natural history is to understand that there persists an incompatible order—transient, unstable, deeply historical, decaying, and therefore dialectical—which folds over and doubles a capitalist order that, like the sovereign, exploits crisis as its engine and foil. It is to understand, moreover, that the vision of the critic must be attuned to the difference between a mythological knowledge that props up the government/sovereign executive order and the scrutinizing, ruinous knowledge that, in its capacity to disarticulate this first order, allows critical knowledge to distinguish between the crises that give rise to police interventions and the crisis that is constitutive of critical ruination. In short, the critic must prompt a self-encounter of critique and crisis with the ambiguous genealogy they share.

### *Foucault/Kant*

Perhaps the prime example of such critical prompting can be found in Foucault's sympathetic engagement with Kant. For Foucault, Kant's critique of reason constitutes an especially bold move because it manages to exceed the bounds of the Enlightenment—manages to become transhistorically imperative, universalizing, even revolutionary—by being a double of itself that, degenerative and self-ruining, dismantles not only the idea of governing crisis but the art of governing as such. When the late-period Foucault returns repeatedly to the question of critique, it is to apply the pivotal concern of the Enlightenment, "the relationships between power, truth and the subject," "to any moment in history" by staging a confrontation between the two arts that, according to Foucault, give rise to modern critique: the art of gov-

erning and the art of being “not quite so governed,” “not *like that*,” “not for that, not by them,” or—Foucault flirts with anarchic defiance—“we do not want to be governed at all.”<sup>14</sup> The art of critique begins with this primary decision, which is a *critical* decision in the original meaning of the term: one that reorients history around a new cause that never fails to be an efficacious power in the real. It expresses an individual and collective will, detectable throughout history, to revolt against government—and against modern governmentality, where the subject is piloted through life with the help of precise medical, legal, and theological techniques of self-governance, in particular. The incandescent traces of this will cut diagonally across history and return to modernity as primal scenes of critical dissent and insubordination. These include, for example, the strategy, common to Saint Paul and Kant, of disobeying the order as though one obeyed it or, as happens with many of Kafka’s protagonists, disobeying it by being excruciatingly obedient. Or they appear in the past scenes of upheaval that Foucault invokes—the trial of Socrates and the revolts of mysticism and reformation against the pastoral powers of the church—scenes whose historical diagrams become legible only belatedly, once we encounter the question of Enlightenment reason.

It is one question in particular, however—Kant’s question, “What is Enlightenment?”—that openly declares a bold, courageous exit from the discursive field, from the trappings of a “self-incurred immaturity” that indolently relies on the guidance of such self-proclaimed guardians as books, doctors, and priests. As an art of subtraction and separation from the discursive scene, Kant’s manifesto for Enlightenment critique marks for Foucault the advent of a completely new self-conscious political attitude toward one’s own contemporary reality. Kant’s critical operation asserts itself as a principled, recalcitrant *gestus*, an act born of a philosophical ethos that both partakes in and parts with the master discourses of his own time—the art of governing and Enlightenment reason—by interrogating and finally reversing the conditions of their acceptance. It does so, moreover, by making critical use of the very faculty of reason, otherwise destined to validate the systems of knowledge (legal, medical, theological) that undergird mechanisms of coercion: deploying reason’s inherent critical powers against its own power effects, endlessly applying its own universalizing truth procedures against it. Kant’s reason critiques, and then critiques reason, in a self-limiting auto-dissolution, curtailing the force of knowledge it generates and, in so doing, delimiting knowledge’s hold upon the subject. The end of critique is to make it impossible for us to accept naturalized forms of knowledge.

But critique as transformative truth procedure does more than just derail natures and legitimacies; it instills crisis in the core of those traditional legal, medical, and political forms of critique that seek to liberate us or merely reform our sociopolitical institutions. Such forms of critique remain, in their goal of liberation and reformation, profoundly wedded to the logic of the sovereign, who welcomes our critical care, impatience, and indignation. The conjoined tasks of liberation and reformation come at the steep price of resuscitating a sovereign just as he is about to expire. Foucault's patient form of critique, by contrast, advocates a critique that confers upon itself an insubordinate, intransigent right beyond juridical rights "to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth."<sup>15</sup> In this respect, critique—critique as an ungovernable right without legal rights—resonates with the twin concepts, Pauline on the one side and Kantian on the other, that neither what is covered by the law nor what is deemed to be outside the law is up to the self-appointed task of critique. Only a critique that folds back on itself, perpetually demarcating the limits of its power, expanding and contracting its reach, accelerating and stopping short, truly understands its revolutionary power as something more than reformatory. It grasps its capacity to coin new terms, terms worthy of the event, and enduringly loosens the hold of the sovereign by tethering him to his crisis.

In this spirit, Foucault proposes to name his own historical-philosophical project of critique a "procedure of eventalization," the key strategy in the art of not being governed. Submitting pyramidal figures and principles of sovereignty (final authority, unitary origin, necessity) to an archaeological and genealogical examination designed to dissolve the links between elements of knowledge and procedures of coercion that induce governable behavior and discourse, the eventalizing operation injects crisis into the natural, necessary appearance of such established links so that their singular elements might be reconfigured for the construction of events.<sup>16</sup> Exposing a scientific or institutional system to its "essential fragility," following its "breaking points" until the full display of its arbitrary nature and violence makes it more and more difficult to accept, eventalization reverses the destination of knowledge and power as a prop for the art of governing by making the effects of power contained within a strategic field available for the presentation and creation of pure singularities and positivities.<sup>17</sup> Thus Foucault's rhetorical question: "How can the indivisibility of knowledge and power . . . induce both singularities, fixed according to their conditions of acceptability, and a field of possibles, of openings, indecisions, reversals, and possible dislo-

cations which make them fragile, temporary, and which turn these effects into events, nothing more, nothing less than events?”<sup>18</sup> Eventalization is the archaeological and genealogical procedure of making crisis return in governmental orders, the aim being to ensure the power of reversibility and therefore of transformability as such. Accordingly, it forgoes historical veracity and necessity for the sake of transmitting expressive truths and singularizing events. Foucault’s passion for the event, beginning “with this decision not to be governed,” entails bringing about nothing, understood as the perishing of those seemingly irreversible powers that derive from masters, deep-rooted foundations, legitimizing laws, and unitary causes. The radical will not to be governed at all finds its counterpart in the will to relegate such sovereign figures to “disappearance” or, barring that, in the capacity at least to identify “by what and from what [such] disappearance is possible.”<sup>19</sup>

This convergence of care of the self, virtue, and critique is the closest Foucault gets to an affirmative biopolitics; for not to be governed this way (or not at all) now concerns, as in the term *self-governance*, equally one’s singular life and one’s investment in a political form of life. To engage in critique means, according to Foucault, “to make available for the work that we can do on ourselves the largest possible share of what is presented to us as inaccessible.”<sup>20</sup> To which we would add: what Foucault claims is “presented to us as inaccessible,” occulted by any given regime of intelligibility, is what is in fact unforgettable, and thus indestructible, in history and our lives today. To recognize as much is to recognize that history is not tied to the boundaries of world history but instead touches, in affect and in thought, upon the critical powers that return to us from disavowed strands in our history and prehistory, or what we are attempting to name with the term *natural history*. “Understood in these terms, criticism (and radical criticism) is utterly indispensable for any transformation,” according to Foucault, since it is now “a matter of making conflict more visible.”<sup>21</sup> To make original modes of civil strife, or what the ancients called *stasis*, appear is to insert, by way of critique, crisis into politics and into the fantasy of the market economy—the realm of *homo oeconomicus*—in its deceptive guise as the new common. Foucault was the first to emphasize that modern governmental technology in general obeys the rationality of the workings of economy, loosely defined as the rule of equivalence and the processes of production and exchange that encompass both the economical and the juridical. Modern civil society is born from “a juridical structure (*economie juridique*) of a governmentality pegged to an economy understood as a process of production and exchange (*economie*

*economique*).<sup>22</sup> In other words, the dichotomy between sovereignty and governmentality is a false one. Agamben is right to extrapolate from Foucault's insight and turn *oikonomia* into an umbrella term, strangely permanent and operative in multiple contexts throughout history: the internal operations of the Trinity, divine providence, law, theological apparatuses, the governance of individuals, the sovereign exception, and so on. This allows Agamben to come to the surprising conclusion, given his previous work, that "the central mystery of politics is not sovereignty but government" or, better, "economy and its government."<sup>23</sup> The two terms are now interchangeable. World history, or the alternative term, universal history—essentially the parade of great men, empires, executive powers, and masters in our tradition—has thus been viewed exclusively as the ongoing refinement of governmental machines formed and supported by different permutations of *oikonomia*, a term that reaches back to the despotic management of a household (*oikos*). Indeed, Agamben has raised the question of whether the sovereign is not merely a fantastic supermanager with the power and legitimacy to suture together two otherwise incommensurable rationalities, the "political-judicial" and the "economic-governmental."<sup>24</sup> To push this further, we would suggest that an unacknowledged *oikonomia* knots together governmentality and sovereignty in a mutually reinforcing circle. In light of this, the twofold task of critique becomes much clearer. It is to disarticulate, by articulating the crisis in each, not only the links between the political-judicial and the economic-governmental rationalities but the permanence of *oikonomia* as such.

Foucault's essays on Kant are where we discover the critical mode by which that disarticulating articulation can be achieved and by which something ungovernable in history and in ourselves can be created aside from the economic paradigm. According to Foucault, Kant accomplishes this disarticulation through two related historical interrogations: "What is *Aufklärung*?" Kant's epochal question from 1784, and his follow-up question from 1798, raised in the wake of the French Revolution, "What to do with the will for revolution?"<sup>25</sup> Crucially, however, Kant does not treat these historical occurrences in historical or historiographical terms. He treats them as unforgettable, indestructible, transformative events that forever define, as affect (courage or enthusiasm) or prophetic sign, how we relate to and act within our present and how we actualize an origin, here and for a future politics. In order for an event to become real and active, in order to dissolve the economic-governmental-sovereign alliance, one must isolate

that event in history and give it the value of an affect and a passionate sign. In this way, Kant ties the task of critique inexorably to the idea of revolution. In “The Contest of Faculties,” for example, the constitutive strife among the theological, medical, and juridical branches of the *universitas* (again: the priest, the doctor, and the lawyer) barely veils its roots in a critique and crisis that culminates in the indestructible will to revolution. And when Kant discusses how history could be a priori, he in fact raises the possibility that crisis, understood as the exposure of apparently consequential events to historical transience, might coexist with an indestructible and unforgettable predisposition in human nature. The revolution thus becomes the transcendental condition for modern politics and for thinking through the fragility of history. Kant himself may speak of the prophet; but in doing so, he can also be heard to evoke the critic as a revolutionary, “the one who occasions and *produces* the events he predicts.”<sup>26</sup> The prophetic critic predicts, by his actions in the present, the events that will take place in the future, since those events will result from his present actions. This confers an order to the crisis he puts in motion. Not only should the critic be aware of the unintended and unwitting ramifications of his declarative and diagnostic intervention, he must be, since what a prophetic critic does is to put a state into crisis by introducing something untenable and unbearable within it. What makes the act revolutionary and at the same time a question of crisis is that it introduces a memory of revolutionary will into whatever attenuated form the revolution might take after the fact, a memory that makes hope possible precisely because it introduces the inevitability of failure into the makeup of any political formation. The unredeemable becomes the precondition of the unforgettable. If the hopes of the actual political revolution of a people remain unfulfilled, they perpetuate themselves all the more powerfully and comprehensively, beyond the specific location and time of a revolution, in the aspiration and nature of universal humankind.

Thus the enduring existence of revolution as what Kant calls a “historical sign” in its rememorative, demonstrative, and prognostic temporal vectors gathers a given polity around a permanent cause of traumatic crisis and disjointedness—a permanent unrest—since all subsequent orders are then grounded in that instance of dissolution. Revolution introduces a politicizing tendency that takes every order out of itself, given that revolution is itself proof that there exists “a *tendency* within the human race as a *whole*.”<sup>27</sup> This tendency introduces into the traditional concept of what Kant calls the natural history of man a moral history that confers upon the natural laws

of the planetary orders a revolutionary truth content for universal human history. In this, Kant effectively reprograms the empirical laws of nature so that, suffused with a moral law of revolution tied to the permanence of crisis in human institutions, those laws attain a heightened political status that licenses us to envision a new mode of thinking about nature and history. Traditionally, politics needed nature to justify historical continuities; in Kant's critique, nature begins to work as the agent of profound historical and political breaks. Kant's critical and at times poetic procedure exhausts the full weight of the overdetermination with which the term *nature* is at once blessed and plagued (laws of nature, natural laws, the nature of man, the nature of the noumenal world, i.e., what Kant calls the "kingdom of nature," the state of nature, natural history, etc.). It is as if Kant's confusing deployment of the term *nature* were meant to name a crisis and revolution in nature itself, and so render all expressions of nature immediately historical and political. More to the point, his deployment of the term wrests control of revolution away from world history and resituates it in natural history. In "The Contest of Faculties," Kant refers (albeit with caution) to Blumenbach's concept of a *Naturrevolution* occurring before the advent of humans on the stage of history, while in "Perpetual Peace" he writes of a "complete revolution . . . brought about by nature alone."<sup>28</sup> Although Kant is always careful to interlace this idea of a revolution of and in nature with human history and the nature of man, with what in human history and human nature "*can never be forgotten*," he nonetheless embraces the idea of natural, objective laws of motion in our unconscious history. Not only, then, does the phenomenon of revolution emerge as an irresistible natural historical event; it can now be understood as at once the irrevocable cause and promise in "the prophetic history of mankind."<sup>29</sup> And precisely because this nature proceeds behind the backs of acting humans, eluding our conscious grasp, the subject is primordially invested in natural historical time and must respond to what is unthinkable in it by subjectifying its revolutionary truth-content.

In this way, Kant invents a new grammar of revolutionary critique—"an aptitude and power" with new causes, signs, and affects guiding humanity throughout history—that introduces (or inserts) a permanent crisis mode into our concept of world history, commonly understood as the "path to progress."<sup>30</sup> This grammar, however, is now deeply historical, in that it moves through an essentially revolutionary form of time and space; and because of that movement it is forever diagrammatic, never resolving into a self-contained form and order. Fortified with this new grammar, the

philosopher-critic now grants himself the right to activate a revolutionary will and proceeds, like an advocate, with proofs and public judgment to constitute a new *nomos* for a people and for nature. Kant's revolutionary is no anarchic firebrand. He is a disciplined organizer for a natural history that is now full of signs and internal laws capable of drawing humans out of their accustomed *oikonomia*. It is not enough for the revolution to have a "permanent virtuality," as Foucault puts it.<sup>31</sup> The revolution must be seen as the fundamental real effective in nature and history: in me, in the polis around me, and in the starry sky above me. After that, judging the true meaning of historical events becomes a matter of assuming the proper standpoint. As Kant insists in "The Contest of Faculties," the Copernican Revolution enables us to view both ourselves and human history from an entirely different perspective, one from which other, more expansive and enduring laws of movement—the *nomoi* of a revolutionary, albeit highly fragile, nature—come to light. Deprived of their central viewpoint, humans now see their objects and themselves as if they were spectators: spectators permanently revolving within a greater spatiotemporal reference system of astronomical forces whose underlying movements, propensities, and laws they must decipher in order to decipher their own. Insight into man's nature comes from the outside of man, from a blind spot that diverts his attention away from the active part he purportedly plays in the grand dramas of history. No longer strutting and fretting, we find ourselves standing on a very different stage, one where historical objects and dramatic scenes are newly constructed around transformative events, where unfamiliar players demand the articulation of a completely new historiography and politics.

By identifying an unforgettable revolutionary "predisposition in human nature," Kant effectively posits a quasi-natural evental force that is stronger, albeit less perceptible, than any earth-shattering accomplishments generated in the course of world history.<sup>32</sup> To find a new certainty in a natural predisposition or sympathy for the revolution must remain strangely paradoxical. Revolution is in some sense impossible and uncertain, filling both its actors and its spectators not only with enthusiasm but also with the distress, anxiety, and disorientation that every fundamental crisis generates. In this case, however, certainty is guaranteed by a prophecy that can be envisioned vividly and yet remains completely untenable to any given order. The unforgettable and indestructible resides precisely in a cause that is continuously dissolving, being itself highly tenuous and forever on the brink of dissolution. In "The Contest of Faculties," Kant carries with this

permanent fragility of the revolution, which, like the moral law that in our daily lives is dismissed, watered down, compromised, evaded, and glossed over, is both indestructible and completely impossible. It can be infinitely destroyed and yet, for precisely that reason, remains indestructible. Like the revolution itself, the frailty of revolution is, by virtue of that very frailty and “in view of the frailty of human nature,” to be taken as a prophetic “sign of history.”<sup>33</sup> Crucially, however, this insight into an essential frailty eludes the monarchs, priests, and doctors who make it their business to heal crisis and promote narratives of improvement (to the point, Kant wryly notes, that a patient could not help but confess how much he is “*dying of sheer recovery!*”).<sup>34</sup> It thus falls to the Kants of this world to warn the masters of crisis that their antidotes, by mistaking critical frailty for a misery that is in need of their care and intervention, are in fact unprincipled and anarchic.

For Foucault, then, Kant’s double critique of reason, always turning back upon itself in a gesture of autodissolution, introduces a model of genuinely revolutionary critical practice. And not only that: Kant’s own isolation of the fragile revolution as a prophetic sign—a singular, affectively charged event—models how the critical modes of passion and prophecy can transform present reality by naming, and thus introducing, the unforgettable and indestructible will to revolution that manifests the moral history at work in man’s natural history. Revolution in this sense makes no reference to transcendence or *telos*. Instead, it is driven by a critique that, itself being intimately tied to crisis, is in turn rooted in an unforgettable—and, in that sense, moral—prehistory. The singularity of an event such as the revolution derives from the fact that each one is a perishing, fragile instance of a prehistoric will. Thus critique, homing in on a symptomatic, critical point, intensified by its incisive, restricted concentration on a singular occurrence, aims to bring about an order of singulars. Heterogeneous, incommensurable to one another, such singularities dwell in an ever-expanding constellation of concrete, historically determined struggles, actualized for the present and made compossible by the critic in a manner akin to Kant’s enthusiastic spectator of the French Revolution, who mobilizes his own situated standpoint from outside participatory action for a prognostic reversal of history.

The Foucault that emerges here is a different Foucault from the well-known prophet of bio-thanatopolitics, the Foucault whose conception of biopolitics has emerged as a new  $S_1/S_2$  in which “life” looms so ominously as to once again elude critique. This is a Foucault who enlists Enlightenment critique in the search for a historical-philosophical analysis reminiscent of the

dialectical truth procedure with which Benjamin and Adorno actualize distant pasts in the present (and vice versa) by constructing disturbing new origins and a priori objects of history. “Actually, in this historical-philosophical practice,” as Foucault himself puts it, “one has to make one’s own history, fabricate history as if through fiction.”<sup>35</sup> Like Deleuze, who proposes giving Bergson’s notion of fabulation a political meaning, and Derrida, who coins the term *affabulation* to define the strategies that render a political logic and knowledge meaningful by putting a fable to work in politics, Foucault sheds light on the commonality between political theory and poetic practice, on the fictions that politics and art share. What Foucault has in mind, however, is the invention of politically efficacious fictions that are in accordance with the art of not being governed. Every relation of forces, every complex network of powers and truths must traverse through a fiction in order to become effective as a historically determined real. Within every fictional artifice resides an unarticulated strength of fiction, just as any given nexus of power-knowledge contains a strength of power and knowledge whose energy can be redeployed for the construction of events. At this instance, the critical procedure of eventalization and the poetic practice of fabricating “history as if through fiction” converge. Both examine and dissolve the intimate and necessary relays between structures of knowledge and the mechanisms of coercion; both dismantle the intimate links joining real historical objects to established representations designed to mask or legitimize the violence of elementary power struggles and to dissipate or neutralize the efficacy of ungovernable singularities. Most important, such fictioning critique creates events; for “one ‘fictions’ history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one ‘fictions’ a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.”<sup>36</sup> Foucault himself fictions the very power of fiction, using the reality effects of fictions to exhibit the complex poetic, scenic, and diagrammatic—and also material, factual, and microphysical—procedures that make historical truths real and acceptable.<sup>37</sup> Foucault’s fictions thus tend to widen the same gap between imaginary semblances and real struggles that dominant discourses attempt to both represent and conceal. In this sense, Foucault’s fictions are counterfictions, diagrams that employ the power of fiction to intrude into fictions of naturalized, legitimized power. They also are counterscenes that rearrange concrete systems of power-knowledge by infusing them with crisis and the *gestus* of critique. A fiction of this sort—the diagram of a power struggle, the scene of a moment of crisis, the particular attitude of critique—intervenes in historical moments at the point of their

greatest symptomatic tension. And in so doing, it confronts a specific political reality with the history of the will, with a real that derives its force from the art of making lives ungovernable. Conjoining historical scenes with the rigor of thought, Foucault's exemplary scenes begin to think, while, conversely, thoughts themselves become scenic or a central part of a scenic arrangement. One must only paraphrase Foucault's paraphrase of Kant to crystallize this critical operation into a single imperative: "One must isolate an event in history that will take on the value of a *scene*."<sup>38</sup>

Foucault himself models just such a scene—models, we should say, the critical practice of fictional actualization, eventalization, and compossibility—in his reading of the fateful collision, circa 1800, between psychiatric power and the sovereign recounted in Pinel's case history of George III's treatment at the hands of a certain Dr. Willis (in essence a reordering of an ordering of events). Foucault characterizes the scene of George III's madness not simply as a deposition but as a "total inversion of sovereignty": not the triumph of psychiatric power over the sovereign but the profanation of both forms of transcendent sovereignty, sovereign power and governmentality.<sup>39</sup> Before turning to the scene itself, Foucault reminds his audience of the classical iconography associated with sovereign power, a tableau organized around oppositions and the asymmetrical submission of subjects beneath the king, who towers over all with his ermine, scepter, and globe. It is exactly those insignia that psychiatric power sets out to rearrange. Confined now to a padded cell, cut off from his relations, the mad king falls upon himself and into the hands of the two brutish, "magnificent," "Herculean" pages who were once members of his household, but who have now assumed the wordless task of subduing him.<sup>40</sup> George III's world has turned to shit, and not just metaphorically. Before he would have ordered the suppression of the filth and excrement thrown at his carriage by the poorest of the poor. Now he is reduced to using his own ordure as a weapon of last resort, daubing it on the old doctor who comes to visit him. At the moment when "the crisis intervenes"—intervenes not only into the midst of sovereign splendor but into the critical act of decision itself, throwing established ways of judging and deciding into crisis—what had been the stratified and oppositional structure of the royal scene gives way to a new scene, one in which a host of miniature tyrants (doctors, helpers, and bureaucrats) enter the stage at the very site of royal decomposition, filling the vacuum left by the demise of the royal function and converting the symbols of royal power into meaningless, dumb matter.<sup>41</sup>

But it is not until Willis, the doctor who has appointed himself both

director and protagonist of this new scene, enters into the midst of the ceremonial of sovereign power—not until the microphysics of psychiatric power have overwhelmed the political field with their elemental mode of operation—that we begin to detect the microphysical underside that was always at work within the premodern sovereign diagram. For embedded within this primal scene of a total inversion of sovereignty and of the advent of psychiatric microphysical power is the truth content of another scene, one that erases any distinction between a microphysics of dejected, excremental things of crisis and humans as they are rearranged by variable power relations. It is true, of course, that George III would recover from his madness enough to reassume the throne. But from the moment he enters his cell, he is irrevocably the subject of microphysical power—one actant in a wider microphysical diagram of power, no better or worse than his brutish pages or the poorest of the poor, who once threw filth at his carriage. This does not mean, however, that Willis is suddenly in charge. One gets the sense at first that Foucault, in staging the scene as he does, has set up the doctor as the modern crisis manager par excellence and psychiatric power as the emblem for the managerial, policing approach to crisis per se. The doctor, in seizing hold of the course of crisis, and thus making abnormal life a new political object, believes that he has the power to foster life where the sovereign used to take it. But the richer, more active manifestations of microphysical life that his analysis and crisis management have brought to light, a life embodied in the imposing pages and the other tenacious, masterless things that crowd the royal cell, exceed the control of the doctor as silent crisis manager to an even greater degree than they did the asymmetrical form inscribed in the ostentatious insignia of sovereign power. Crisis, in fact, more than exceeds the doctor's control, for the crisis that he has induced, manipulated, and healed returns to him as the inverted truth of his own discourse. Forced to confront the melancholic, the paranoiac, or the psychotic on their own turf, the doctor has little choice but to devise a fiction of cure that is “exactly patterned on the delirium itself, homogeneous with the erroneous idea” produced by the patients he treats. Yet that can only mean that the stratagems of his truth are from the outset entangled in the same delirious forces, in the same real and fictional causes of madness, that he at once authenticates and works to suppress.<sup>42</sup> Like all crisis managers, doctors of psychiatry are mimetic geniuses who closely model the verifying strategies and truth procedures of their *dispositif* on the capillary diagram of forces at play in the crisis of a disease. But precisely in that way, they unwittingly incorporate

the incomplete, delirious logic of those forces, the uncontrollable rhythms of their return. After all, to eagerly bring about an event within a delirium only in order to then forcefully discipline individuals on the grounds of this fictional event is also a way of taking something on, of contracting the powers of deviant life the doctor meant to regulate. Foucault is too subtle a thinker to settle for a simple dichotomy between transgression and containment or undifferentiated abyss and rigid systematicity. On the contrary, his masterless, tenacious things, like his isolated scenes, would murmur the two correlating psychiatric declarations drummed into every mad patient—“You are not king” and “Your body is not made of glass”—to both sovereign powers, king and doctor. For the very fact that no one is ever a king, not even the king himself, is exactly what releases indestructible tenacious powers, powers that can be stifled neither by the power of kings nor, conversely, by the sense of one’s own powerlessness.

So much for the doctor. What of his counterpart in crisis, the critic? The doctor’s form of treating crisis must, in more ways than one, elicit the scrutiny of the critic, whose task it is to return crisis to its critical core by once again fictionalizing the “labyrinth of fictional verification” fabricated by the doctor in his pursuit of the cure.<sup>43</sup> Following the lead of Foucault, then, the critic is to act as a counterdoctor, reverting psychiatric domination (in all its forms) back to microphysical powers and forces. Pinel’s small tyrants—the pages who apply brute psychiatric force to quell the obstinacy of unacceptable crisis things and crisis bodies, the doctors who submit the sovereign’s fragile, transient body to a regimented framework of psychiatric discipline meant to tie sovereignty to the economy of a proper, reasonable government—have one chief objective: to knot together the two different rationalities of sovereignty and government, politics and economy, power and knowledge, the juridical and the disciplinary as though they were indivisible, mutually legitimizing, reasonable only in their union. The archaeological-microphysical critic, by contrast, recounts and then reverses this institutionalized fusion, embodied in sovereign government or governmental executive power, back to its heterogeneous, microphysical scene of ruination.

But the other, divisive scene that Foucault stages within the psychiatric scene does something else as well: it disarticulates, critically, the fiction that there exists an inevitable, epochal struggle among sovereignty, disciplinary power, and governmentality. Intimately bonded, this triumvirate in fact shares a common will—to perfect the art of governing—and the same root: a common *oikonomia* of mastering a crisis as a despot manages his house-

hold. Against the anomic principle that dwells in the midst of the triangular disciplinary-governmental-sovereign oikonomia (the despotic administration of a household not being bound by a system of rules), the critic thinks an “ungovernable,” as Agamben writes, “something that could never assume the form of an oikonomia.”<sup>44</sup> Thus the task of the critic: to create ungovernabilities that remain heteronomous to the disciplinary, governmental, and sovereign permutations of oikonomia even as they insist upon their own inherent nomical organization.

Yet one might push this further still and say that Foucault’s “critical ontology of ourselves,” the historical-philosophical form-of-life that critique at once denotes and embodies, itself constitutes just such an ungovernable life, a life that articulates a self-legislating nomos incommensurable with oikonomia.<sup>45</sup> What would this life of critique consist of? How would it do justice not only to the “ourselves” of a new critical ontology but to the nomos of things? From the time that Pindar’s sovereign law (*nomos basileus*), conjured to justify violence “with the strongest hand,” joined forces with the Sophists’ fantasy of a “right of the strongest,” political philosophy has stumbled over the egregious conflation of might with right, of violence (*bia*) with justice (*dike*), that constitutes the inner workings of both sovereignty and government.<sup>46</sup> One way that politics has tried to counteract that conflation of might with right is by drawing sovereignty itself within the ambit of the law. But while the generality of the law purports to have forever constrained the whimsical nature of sovereign rule, effectively ending the crisis behind that rule, critique reminds us that the authorized recourse to legal force might be a continuation of Pindar’s *nomos basileus* by other means. Political philosophy, meanwhile, has itself long been suspected of aspiring to the role of master or of creating a system of knowledge that is in service to the master. But at the same time—and here we see its intimate connection to critique—political philosophy has never ceased to dream about a noncoercive nomos and an immemorial *physis* able to elude the grasp of sovereignty and government while being highly active in them. Consider the idea of *chora* (space) in the *Timaeus*, Plato’s dramatized theorizing of cosmogony and natural history. Plato’s reflections, “as in a dream,” on the unsettled and yet indestructible *chora* seem to be driven by a single-minded pursuit of a third, bastard nature capable of breaking open the dichotomy between a changeless sphere of commanding, lawful being (a “source” and a “father,” *50d*) and an anomic nature of becoming and semblance apprehended by changeable opinion (*doxa*).<sup>47</sup> Here and elsewhere in his political

philosophy Plato, very much like Kant, tends to multiply the terms nature (physis) and law (nomos) in order to avoid the false alternative between a sovereign nomos that becomes one with nature, as in Pindar's poem, and the Sophistic notion of an anomic, brute nature anterior to nomos. For this notion of a lawless nature only serves to justify the violence of the strongest and, in Hobbes, the intervention of the sovereign into the state of nature. Meanwhile, Plato's chora, this nearly incomprehensible space, formless and yet capable of receiving and giving form, compels us to think a nomic kind of nature suspended between the hypernomic order of unchanging forms and the anomic sphere of visible nature. A "choratic" *physionomos* would make appear a singular life—its specific materiality, its metabolic processes, the rhythms of its appearance, its peculiar ways of being and perishing—that is inseparable from its form. It is as the Athenian remarks in Plato's *Laws*: such *physionomos* would replace and displace Pindar's "decree of nature . . . that the stronger should rule and the weaker should obey" (690c). The Platonic pursuit of *physionomos* effectively derails the operative fantasy of the Sophists that a physis can be severed from its nomos—that underneath law and logos roam the unfettered forces of a wild state of nature in need of despotic rule.

It is this tradition, in which thought devises a cohesive *physionomos* able to retain a disposition toward justice and the event for each singular being, that informs both Kant's critique and Foucault's microphysical diagram of ungovernable forces. Foucault's procedure of eventalization is not only an integral part of the art of not being governed; it is also, as in Plato and Kant, a novel form of self-governance (or of not governing oneself at all) among masterless, transient things and common powers unwilling to play their part in the economy of sovereignty and government. The task of the critic is then to shed light on the uneconomical fold in the living—to tease out a different economy of powers, an economy at once heteronomous to the governmental economy but dwelling as a disintegrating kernel in its midst. It is our recourse to the power of crisis and critique that opens the horizon for a different politics. Sovereignty and government may both be preoccupied with apprehending things and lives, yet they are apprehended in turn by what they cannot avow in themselves: the growing power of their perishing, which is at once a downfall and an elevation. What sutures the juridical rationality to the governmental economic rationality and the theological-political paradigm to the economic-providential paradigm is not, as Agamben holds, the

fiction of sovereignty. It is the ordering and disposing of lives and things, either as fostering life or as making die, within a circumscribed territory meant to hem in the relatively autonomous physionomos of things and lives.

### *Marx*

In the figure of the psychiatrist, Foucault was able to identify a particular type of conjurer, a sorcerer of providential economic governance. But it was Marx who gave that figure his proper name: the capitalist. And it was Marx who put his finger on an effective critical practice in response. Marx's materialist critic intervenes at the precise juncture where the capitalist conjoins mystery to economy in the form of nature and in the processes of naturalization. Where Foucault's critic unleashes microphysical powers in the midst of microphysical institutions, the Marxist materialist critic intensifies a double already at work within the "naturalized" capitalist economy. This Marxian counterpart to Foucault's diagrammatic microphysical force goes by the name of natural history. Natural history is the critical fold of a physiocratic economic nature.

Hegel, to give the man his due, had at least found it tragic that history necessitated the subjugation of first nature in our constitution of second nature. He could recognize how ironic it was: the fact that we had no choice but to overcome the very nature whose laws we nonetheless assimilated in our development of the ethical/historical world. Yet beyond that he had dismissed nature and natural history as nothing more than an unreasonable antithesis, a roadblock of thought. Nature had therefore remained for him the disavowed outside of history. Marx, for the first time, thinks nature as the outside inside man: his history, his inorganic body, his techne, his machines, his unconscious life activity. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, this concept of nature remains largely anthropocentric and even anthropomorphic: that which drives the life activity of human beings. It is not until *Capital* that natural history becomes even more externalized and outside, even more alien and nonhuman, than it had been for Hegel. But now, in a crucial overturning of Hegel, this radical nonhuman outside at work in natural history is understood to constitute the truth content of world history, determining the unconscious evolution of history and "of the economic formation of society, [which] is viewed as a process of natural history."<sup>48</sup> Human actors are not individuals, but "personifications

of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests,” and an individual can therefore not be made “responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking” (92). Contrary to the naive anthropology behind traditional world history, Marx presents things, realities, materials, animals, machines, and men within relations of production, within differential structures that define and distribute places and functions. At every turn, Marx inscribes things, human actors, raw materials, objects, and instruments of production into relations and structures of a natural historical diagram.

In *Capital*'s brief chapter on the production of absolute surplus, for example, Marx exemplifies his dialectics of nature and the metabolism carried out by humans as itself a natural power. His point is not so much that the givenness of earth history—of nature independent of human beings—has become indistinguishable from our transformation of nature and, through that process, of our own nature. His point is that nothing exists apart from the continuous transformation and perishing at work in the dialectic of natural history. In Hegel's master-slave dialectic, the liberation or self-consciousness of the slave stems from his transformation of the world of things. All the same, the master and the slave remain lead actors in an exclusively human drama where the overthrow of the existing order assumes an almost heroic cast. In Marx's natural-historical dialectics, that same master and slave are reduced to props on a side stage: given over to a natural-historical return, a natural-historical rotation or revolution, in which nature furnishes the materials through which ideas, and governing ideas in particular, are built up. It is like Marx's image of the architect who, in a supposed departure from the bee, “builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax” (284). That image may seem like an affirmation of humankind's radical difference from nature—of the putative gulf between the “worst architect” and the “best of bees”—but it remains embedded in a larger drama of man's loss of mastery (284). Here man does more, but also less, than transform nature; he also realizes himself in nature, traverses nature, to such an extent that he subordinates his will, however indirectly, to that which he has transformed. The more the laborer becomes impersonal, the more he gives himself over to the traversal of natural history and its laws, the more capable he becomes of realizing life as metabolized with and through a nature that has also produced his own actions and organs. Marx may want to insist that “an immense interval of time separates the state of things in a which a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity from the situation when

human labour had not yet cast off its first instinctive form.” “We are not dealing here,” he writes, “with those first instinctive forms of labour which remain on the animal level” (283). But by extending his critical, political history into time immemorial, collapsing epochs until prehistorical states are found to be still pulsating in our organs and modes of production, Marx himself draws even modern labor processes into another history altogether, one in which humankind’s metabolism with the earth continues to guarantee our capacity for genuine, revolutionary transformation.

For what truly interests Marx is not the historical development of labor as such. What interests him is the idea of a symptom-like return detectable in the moment that man becomes an object in the same process by which he subjectivizes nature and by which nature itself becomes a subject. But if natural history operates through a dialectics of return, what is it that returns? Marx is unequivocal: what returns is a “complex of things,” things characterized by their transformative agency, their transience, and their torment, which continues to pulsate in the processes of production (285–86). What returns, to put the matter another way, are the relics of past means of labor in which we can discern the outlines of lost forms of social organization. One only has to shift perspective from the product of labor to the process extinguished in it and that “form of unrest” reveals the traces of torment left behind by past lives and labor (287). In a crowded universe of things, perished forms of life reappear. Past labor is only ever evident or objectified in decaying things. Like symptoms, which only manifest themselves at the point where psychical operations fail, this “form of unrest” becomes our matter of concern when it manifests itself in products falling into disrepair. We only ever become aware of the past labor objectified in a commodity—that is, we only ever become aware of the form of unrest extinguished in a product—when that commodity breaks down and reveals its inherent dysfunctionality and inoperativity. “Past labor,” as Marx calls it, having once produced these now idle objects, returns to conjure the revitalizing sparks inherent in living labor. Living labor may thus be understood as seizing the dead corpus that makes up the humus of accumulated dead labor and decaying things. And by the same token, the process of decay—a process that encompasses things, machines, forms of life—insofar as it is a metabolic process full of its own force, calls living labor to it and, in so doing, calls living labor to itself. Such decaying and passing things “are therefore not only results of labour, but also its essential conditions” (287). Generated by the labor process, entered into it, they also cause that process to realize

its revitalizing force and to carry out its redemptive work. The destructive power of natural processes—a power to which machines fall prey, that rots wood and rusts iron, that turns unwoven yarn into cotton wasted—is itself the engine for living labor. It is decay that confers life on living labor (289). The contact point between living labor and such things, at the deepest root of their uneconomical deadness, makes it possible that things might not only become real use-values but also effective ones. The dialectics are thus, that while dead objects give rise to living labor, seizing it and reanimating it, living labor in turn must revitalize dead objects by consuming them further. In that sense, living labor furthers and instills the force of transience already at work in perishing things and idle machines.

In this respect, Marx is a critical thinker who takes literally the labor of the term *Stoffwechsel*, metabolism. This term translates as “change of stuff” or “change of materials”; and it is to such continuous change that the active theoretical practice of the materialist dialectic is attuned. Such an active theoretical practice says not only that every production of theory is also a practice, defying the opposition between pure theory and applied practice; it says that every production of theory is also an injection, into political economy, of differentials such as metabolism. This goes beyond the mere historicization of political economy. The critical historian of metabolism ties ends to new beginnings and, in the process, becomes a montage artist who amalgamates different states, temporalities, and collectives. But Marx does not stop there. He reinserts those conjoined states, recomposed things, and collectives into the very digestive apparatus of consumption that once dissolved their original, innate ties, his aim being to produce a different type of consummation: a consuming that, in the form of a devouring (*verzehren*) of the “living means” (*Lebensmittel*) in the process of (critical) labor, creates a novel product “distinct from the consumer” (290). Marx metabolizes those objects to such a degree that he composes a new body, prosthetic and monstrous, made up of relics, including economies that have fallen out of history and dropped from view: a prehistory that disappears even from the natural sciences. “Nature becomes one of the organs of [man’s] activity,” writes Marx, “which he annexes to his own bodily organs, adding stature to himself in spite of the Bible.” He then continues:

As soon as the labour process has undergone the slightest development, it requires specially prepared instruments. Thus we find stone implements and weapons in the oldest caves. In the earliest period of human history,

domesticated animals, i.e. animals that have undergone modification by means of labour, that have been bred specially, play the chief part as instruments of labour along with stones, wood, bones and shells, which have also had work done to them. . . . Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic formations of society as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals. It is not what is made but how, and by what instruments of labour, that distinguishes different economic epochs. . . . Among the instruments of labour, those of a mechanical kind, which, taken as a whole, we may call the bones and muscles of production, offer much more decisive evidence of the character of a given social epoch of production than those which, like pipes, tubs, baskets, jars etc., serve only to hold the materials for labor, and may be given the general denotation of the vascular system of production. (285–86)

Marx, we see, quite dramatically reuses objects whose lack becomes obstinate, including machines that drop out of circulation and lose their use-value, in order to display how thoroughly objects must traverse a process of near complete extinction and consumption before their true power, the power to call living labor into action, can be unleashed. Once past labor loses its sense, its mediating purpose, along with the objects and forms of life activity that sustained it, only then can it return to us; only then can the objects of labor encounter themselves apart from the drudgery of a specific usefulness or the life context that once animated them.

And more: it is only through the power of decay that the critical historian can fully assume the mandate of reanimating things that were once extinguished. The power of such passing awakens the critical activity of the historian who, in the midst of persistent crisis, distills and hastens the downfall of objects and forms of life so that they can then be reabsorbed and recycled for a process of revolutionary germination. Labor rests on the unrest of objects that are released from the productivity of past labor. Mindful of his own critical activity, an activity that is, after all, part of the natural historical dialectics, Marx's natural historian incessantly returns to objects that return, no matter how deadened they are, in order to consume them and mediate them further in the process of living labor activity. As the laborer and the materialist allegorician continue to wear away, to mortify, the material elements of objects and products of past labor, they in fact realize the truth content of those things: the efficacy of their downfall and return,

“the destructive power of natural processes” (289). Living labor is a mighty power because it is a deadening process. In its midst dwell forms of unrest: the ruins of past labor and once useful things. Together, idle objects and the “trace[s] of past labor” manifest the power of a most efficacious destruction and return, particularly and paradoxically when they are consumed or when they fail, decay, and become the dead matter for a different, common use. Perceiving as much, Marx emphatically conjoins the redemptive core of living labor with what he posits as a commonality beyond all traditional forms and manifestations of the common: “the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature” (290).

It is thus a peculiar natural-historical dialectic that drives the passage from an economy of domination ruled over alternatively by the slave driver, the anxious capitalist, the stone-wielding savage, and the managerial Cincinnati—ultimately a world-historical economy—to Marx’s metabolic *nomos*.<sup>49</sup> We don’t use *nomos* lightly here. “True history,” the history of living labor, is by no means anarchistic or undifferentiated simply because it cannot be said to abide by the natural law of the physiocrats: the natural law that predetermines the economy of nature (*oeconomia natura*) and so sustains the political economy characterized by the ordered rise and fall of managers and masters. Marx, at the height of his critical fervor, no longer describes the *nomos basileus* of physical laws that support the political world. Rather, he encircles the *physis* of a *nomos* radically different from a political economy that is simply a social rationalization of the providential *oeconomia* at the root of modern liberalism and government.

Marx’s own, implicit metaphor for this natural-historical *physionomos* is that of the laws of fermentation by which the capitalist and all his products unwittingly abide (292). Fermentation, apart from becoming the matter for any specific user, let alone master, is a process of controlled rot or natural-historical decay that is at once a form of petrified unrest and a politicized apprehension of metabolic germination: that which is apparently most dead, utterly extinguished, most actively works through the living. “By the purchase of labor-power, the capitalist incorporates labor, as a living agent of fermentation, into the lifeless constituents of the product, which also belong to him. . . . The labor process is a process between things the capitalist has purchased, things which belong to him. Thus the product of this process belongs to him just as much as the wine which is the product of the process of fermentation going on in his cellar” (292). What Marx grasps here is that, on the molecular level, seemingly nonliving agents such as yeast and bacte-

ria produce convivial luxuries through the energy generated by the process of dissolution that happens when things, nature, and human labor come into contact. Marx thus concludes the section on the natural history of the labor process with a thought image about a form of life and a life activity that is firmly in touch with the advances in microbiology and fermentation technology of the 1850s. The discovery of the power of bacteria and microorganic life in the work of Pasteur, Swann, and others—life activity below the threshold of recognized agents, or what Pasteur calls “life without air”—germinates, like the concentrated medium of high-yielding, fast-growing microorganisms itself, in Marx’s critical analysis. Indeed, such microorganisms act as the unrecognized engine of Marx’s materialist dialectics, wherein something idle and inoperative turns out to be the most fecund, where what had been dismissed as “unorganized ferments” according to the physiocratic diagram reveals itself, through a slight rearrangement of those diagrammatic coordinates, to be highly organized, even politically potent. Suddenly the inorganic, or that which was thought to be dead, manifests itself as filled with dialectical unrest: a possible model for communal living and the actual overthrow of the physiocratic economy at the heart of the capitalist economy. The distributed networks of, and the quorum sensing among, microbiological forms of life not only cannot be owned or possessed (however much they might be subjected to the seal of copyright and patent law); their silently persistent physionomos is incessantly bubbling up within the products and commodities that the capitalist claims as his own. And indeed they are his own, but not just in the way that he believes or that Marx implies. They belong to him in a way that he cannot own up to, for he cannot get rid of all that life, or even recoil from it, simply by transmuting its excessive activity into surplus value, for he has literally incorporated its surplus life. Standing at the present end of a long history, the capitalist, the only human figure that Marx allows into the concluding paragraphs of this section, is the heir and proprietor of a vast cellar filled not only with the elements, both living and dead, of production but with the relics of past labor activity, superseded economic formations, and the accumulated unrest of things. In the deepest chambers of those cellars (which are themselves natural-historical, built in the caves of prehistoric peoples), there is a life that persists without air. And that life continues to boil in barrels filled not with wine alone but with the accumulated unrest of its making and consumption: a common good of conviviality, luxurious excess, and sociability. This stuff that, according to Marx’s contemporary Nietzsche, flows through Dionysian

tragedy and through the sacraments of Christian communion, has now been privatized and turned into profit. Out of the cellars of the capitalist flows a stream of commodities meant not to intoxicate us but to narcotize us, capture us in the stupefying aura of world-historical gravity and progress. But fermentation continues. It is the task of the materialist historian to venture into the darkest recesses of those cellars and put her hand to the labor that is already under way there, that is always under way there—that is under way in the countless barrels belonging to the capitalist—in the process of fermentation.

Marx thus describes the capitalist as a latecomer who, having traversed through a thingly technical history, is subjected to a metabolism of which he is an integral part and by which he will finally be consumed. This is how Marx understands crisis: not as a detrimental process demanding management and resolution but as in itself redemptive. It is as though Marx works through and then beyond that which, etymologically, crisis concerns: the symptomatic analysis and resuscitation of a diseased body or—why not?—body politic. Marx's critic is not concerned with bodies. Contrary to the capitalist, whose sole care is for the effective administration and distribution of bodies—bodies to consume and to be consumed in the process of labor, bodies to be used up or cast aside, inexhaustible bodies, elite bodies to be disciplined and perfected—the critic is obsessed with the incorporation of alien elements and histories as they gut corporations, turning the organs of their operation inside out. What preoccupies him are the technical prostheses that expand the habituated corporeal confines, the power of exfoliating cadavers, the energy of decaying things and forms of life: all the things that a privileging of the body encourages us to dismiss as pathogenic or parasitical. In short, Marx's critic turns traditional political-economical criticism inside out because he eviscerates the thinking that takes place in and through bodies. The Marxian critic is a nonimmunological thinker. Like the capitalist, that quintessential figure of the undead—adding nothing to the metabolic interaction between labor and nature but instead vampirically sucking out the life activity of labor—the materialist critic manipulates and measures organic undead matter, including the capitalist himself, but with this crucial difference: unlike that of the capitalist, the critic's symptomatic reading functions not by seizing upon the recombinatory potential of undead materials but by dissolving even the treasure of the symptom that can be turned into a surplus. In a nutshell, he makes that which belongs to the capitalist befall the capitalist, and to such

a commonizing extent that the capitalist becomes yet another agent—yet another critical agent—of *physionomos*.

Let us finally understand what Marx is up to here. Marx describes, and in so doing effects, the infinite expansion of the objects of labor and the means and materials of production until “the distinction between principle subject and accessory vanishes,” alongside the “original composition” of all substances and products (288). That means that Marx systematically dehierarchizes the metaphysical taxonomies of substance and accidents that continue to reverberate in the capitalist distinction between the finished product, which interests the capitalist only insofar as it is a commodity, and the raw materials, means of production, and labor processes that went into it. Whereas the capitalist turns all means, things, and processes into substances, the critic liquefies those substances, transforming them into accidentals by reentering them into natural-historical circulation. Being a materialist natural historian means transferring the transient and transformative force of things, regardless of the position, be it raw materials, products, or means of labor, that they happen to take in a given labor constellation, to the world of political economy. In this way, the classical natural order of the physiocrats, with its hierarchies and distributions, its overall properness, is dissolved and rendered uneconomical. So profoundly natural historical is Marx’s structuralist and functionalist thought that this uneconomy can be best described as a *physionomos* in which semimanufactured things—cotton, thread, and yarn—are “submitted to whole series of different processes, changing their shape, their specific function by the position [they] occup[y], as [their] position changes” in a given moment, losing and attaining characteristics, becoming imperfect, failing, dying, until they achieve their complete extinction, at which point they release their destructive powers and also call out living labor (289). Marx thus invents a completely new, ever-expanding universe of infinite means and things: a *physionomical* logic in which everything is unsettled by the unrest extinguished in it. In the process, he reveals himself to be not only a profoundly structuralist thinker, a thinker for whom structures and constellations, and not subjects and people, determine the political arena. He reveals himself to be a universalizing revolutionary thinker of minute things—bacteria, stones, dye, rust—as they come into contact with the grandest accomplishments of mankind—canals and so on—both past and present.

## *Kafka*

Far from being extinguished, Marx's idea of natural history would continue to return—and, in returning, call living labor to itself—long after Marx himself was dead and buried. Arguably the most fruitful of those returns can be found in the correspondence between Benjamin and Adorno, whose exchange on the commodity draws attention to the enigmatic comings and goings of one particular denizen of the natural historical realm, Kafka's creature Odradek. For both Benjamin and Adorno, Odradek lends a face to the natural historical dimension of the commodity. But for Adorno especially, Odradek embodies nothing less than the promise for a future politics, a politics defined by the end of the oikos and the advent of postcommodified life. Does Odradek “not anticipate precisely the overcoming of the creaturely state of guilt,” asks Adorno,

and is not this concern—truly a case of Heidegger put right side up—the secret key, indeed the most indubitable promise of *hope*, precisely through the overcoming of the house itself? Certainly, as the other face of the world of things, Odradek is a sign of distortion—but precisely as such he is also a motif of transcendence, namely of the ultimate limit and of the reconciliation of the organic and the inorganic, or of the overcoming of death: Odradek “lives on.” Expressed in another way, it is only to a life that is perverted in thingly form that an escape from the overall context of nature is promised. . . . No, Odradek is indeed so dialectical that it can also properly be said of him that “almost nothing has made everything well again.”<sup>50</sup>

How is it that Adorno can arrive, from out of distortion, the dregs of the commodity, and the crisis of the patriarchal form of life, at the “promise of *hope*”? What Adorno perceives here is that crisis, first and foremost, exposes the precariousness of the world of things and their names. When a social form of life that had contained the thingly world through an order of naming founders: that is when we apprehend the thingly world in all its obstinacy. At such moments, the critic must recognize himself, in Benjamin's formulation, as a physiognomist of the world of things and their names in crisis: as the one who knows how to read crisis into the constellation of things. At such moments, it is the task of the critic to act as an agent of natural history, seizing upon crisis lest crisis be seized upon as the pretext for its resolution.

The beginning of Kafka's text epitomizes this operation of critique.<sup>51</sup>

What starts off as an etymological critique of Odradek the name soon becomes an ontological critique of Odradek the being, until finally critique expands to become a generalized crisis of knowledge and language: the fruitless investigation of a creature without discernible origin that no existing language can claim as its own. Not only then is Odradek a name for crisis; it speaks the very crisis of naming and being. The etymological critique introduced by the mere existence of Odradek intensifies the crisis of an existing form of life, a crisis that only becomes palpable through a program of interminable study and irresolvable concern. The neologism Odradek intimates the formation of a logic yet to come and a critique that pledges fidelity to that logic. This critique yet to come drains *krisis* from crisis by divesting a modern understanding of crisis of its etymology. For once we divest crisis of its etymological roots—once we drain *krisis* from crisis—we simultaneously deprive ourselves of the resolution and overcoming associated with crisis. What remains is then a form of critique that, like Odradek's name and existence, will live on beyond the house, inflicting crisis upon the *nomos* of the *oikos* in perpetuity. This is not to imply that either the house or its father will themselves exist in perpetuity or that the aim of critique is to bring down the house. Odradek cannot be given a political purpose or get enlisted in a political project that would provide him with a permanent abode. That would be to misunderstand the ongoing, still unfolding, not altogether dreadful delight at work in the Odradekian form of crisis.

If the new, all-consuming object of epistemological and political critique goes by the name of Odradek, its new, deranged temporality first announces itself with *sometimes*, as in “sometimes he is not to be seen for months . . . but then he invariably comes back to our house again. Sometimes when one comes out of one's room” (176). The intervals between Odradek's returns are as unpredictable as where he will appear—the attic, the staircase, the corridor, the hallway—for Odradek is “exceptionally mobile and refuses to be caught” (176). What happens to a subject—the father of the family, in this case—when his affective attachment (in the mood of worry) to the outside world, the world of objects, comes via an elusive, mobile object whose location and time remain uncertain? At the very least, it means that what Heidegger calls the “Age of the World Picture,” wherein a subject makes the representation of an object dependent on how he places himself firmly in the scene—that is, the way humans position themselves “to beings as the objective”—has come to an end.<sup>52</sup> With the arrival of furtive and nomadic objects like Odradek, we are no longer at home in the age of the world pic-

ture, where a stable subject-object opposition licenses man to subjectivize himself through the world of objects, while objects themselves are subjected to the fixed positioning and measurements of man. Now dwelling in a world populated by whimsical, ill-disciplined, and vaguely impish Odradeks, the father and his world picture are unsettled by the obstinacy of things that withdraw from us, only to return on their own time and in their own manner. The moment when Odradek derails the *oikos* is the moment when the ennobling care (*Sorge*) that had defined *oikonomia*, the care for things and bodies, turns into an all-consuming concern and worry (*Sorge*).

If the appearance of Odradek should worry anyone, then, it is the father of the family; but even he, as Judith Butler observes, finds it “almost painful” that Odradek will outlive him.<sup>53</sup> How are we to read that *almost*? The father of the family, as Marx, Freud, Lacan, and Foucault (for starters) well knew, stands at the gateway to modern economic and political thought. The Roman *paterfamilias*, with his right over the life and death of his children and his right to enjoy the usufruct of the products of their labor, is the archetype for the modern sovereign, capitalist, manager, and master. As Foucault notes, the family, although sovereign in origin and grounded in the *patria potestas* of Roman law, constitutes the cell of the disciplinary archipelago.<sup>54</sup> “In Rome,” writes Foucault, quoting Montesquieu, “after fathers were no longer permitted to put their children to death, the magistrates inflicted the punishment that the father would have prescribed.”<sup>55</sup> Juridical and disciplinary power radiates outward from the family bond to the government and the state. It is not only that the Roman magistrates are the first figures to occupy the threshold between sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical regimes; it is that the doctrine of the *parens patriae* establishes, once and for all, the obligation of the state to care for the legally incompetent and the infirm—a doctrine built on the paternal and familial model. But if the father acts as the fulcrum for three diagrams of governmental power—the juridical, the disciplinarian, and the biopolitical—it is because he embodies the origin of our primordial investment in the social and political spheres. The *paterfamilias* of Rome amasses legal and moral obligations, establishes a regime of permanent relations and loyalty, and consolidates, among his sons and heirs, a regime of contractual and personal indebtedness to him, in the process creating a guilt history tied to the past and to a future genealogy. In the family structure, as Foucault reads it, the flat, isotopic politics of contiguity associated with discipline joins the hierarchical, asymmetrical politics of verticality associated with the sovereign. The care and welfare of

the *parens patriae* characteristic of modern societies simply adds the biopolitical dimension to the “double role,” at once sovereign and disciplinary, already performed by the family man.<sup>56</sup> But if the care and welfare of the father of the family primarily concerns the production of docile and efficient offspring, he also, in the end, becomes responsible for those who fall outside of the home: “the uneducable, undisciplinable, unusable and unwanted human waste” produced by and yet anathema to biopolitics.<sup>57</sup> The father, in other words, becomes the caretaker of Odradek, while his home becomes the repository in which the *homo economicus* meets the *creatura physionomicus*.

And so the father of the family finds it “almost painful” that Odradek will outlive him. Because if, on the one hand, the father harbors the secret worry that his reign will replicate itself without him, on the other hand he betrays the not-so-secret hope that nothing of his reign will be reproduced at all—that a completely new progeny will emerge, one with no connection to his genealogy. Just as the superego ambivalently wishes that the child would accede to its demands while forever failing to become like it, so the father of the family invites his children to eventually supersede his rule and become Odradek’s playmates. The mercilessly perpetual feast days that celebrate the cult of capitalism—a cult grounded, as Marx well knew, in the paternal oikos and the *homo economicus* in general—are transformed into playdates with Odradek.<sup>58</sup> Once the state of the father (the literal sense of *patrimonium*) is dissolved, not only will his children be freed from a regime of worry and care, but the father too will be unburdened of the immunity that he is expected not only to dispense but to protect. For we flatter ourselves if we assume that the problem the father faces is that of protecting us; the problem he faces is that of protecting the immunitarian paradigm of protection. And it is a problem of which he would just as soon be relieved. So it is that while the father initially worries about protecting the rule of the paternal home, he ends up worrying that Odradek, in outliving him, will fail in his appointed task and not unmake the patrimony whose dissolution will absolve the father of his worry. If the father’s new concern is also the source of his hope, his new worry is that he will lose that hope.

The father has no choice, then, but to learn to live in the midst of the worst, encapsulated in Kafka’s text by the *einstmals* (once, erstwhile, one day) of Odradek’s perpetual reappearance. “Can it be,” the father asks himself, “that he [Odradek] might one day [einstmals] still be rolling down the stairs, with ends of thread trailing after him, before the feet of [our] children and children’s children?” (177). *Einstmals* denotes an event in the past that,

in Kafka's peculiar handling of the term, stretches into the most distant future, thereby challenging the frame of origin and last judgment that delimits the perimeters of our patrilineal mode of history. With the arrival of Odradek, we find ourselves in the realm of the almost: a middle where all acts, either the ones that run precipitously forward to the *telos* of history or those that run nostalgically back to a pure origin, are spliced. But even in this acting and being in the middle, which is the act our time demands, the father of the family does not give up on a remnant of last judgment. For every present spent with Odradek or wondering about his absence is an opportunity for more than the mutually beneficial exchange that the father seems to have in mind when he first meets the living spool. Every such present holds out the potential for a true last judgment of the present, one that paradoxically declares fidelity to the ruination of the father's oikos and to the end of all paternal judgment. Odradek's existence in the *einstmals*, indexed by the impossibility of determining the precise date of his appearance, detemporalizes chronometric time so utterly that it derails an epoch and a logic of decisionism.

Read from the perspective of the capitalist cult, in fact, Odradek's crooked calendar traverses generations and confuses cause and effect, before and after, in a manner akin to the metalectic temporal reversal of the Trinitarian father-son incest that Marx detected in the capitalist production of surplus (256). Only in the debris of capitalist production, at once its cause and effect, will we encounter a new type of infinity, one that departs from the immortal regime of fathers and sons rolling out quietly and solemnly before us. In a kind of infinite finitude—old, torn, knotted, and discontinuous—or infinite decompletion of the surplus value produced and enjoyed by the father, we find the prospect of a newly anxious type of care. The very idea of Odradek being ground down by purpose so worries the father that his anxiety becomes a care; and that new care relocates him and his household to a dominion where the only master is the laughter, “like the rustling of fallen leaves,” at our creaturely stupefaction (177). Simply by relating to Odradek, the father of the family and his children so thoroughly contract the creature's discontinuous temporal and indefinite ontological status that they can no longer establish the distinct moments, delimited by a determinate before and after, when the trauma of concern began and might end. Odradek's *einstmals*, about which “it is not possible to state anything more definite . . . since Odradek is exceptionally mobile and refuses to be caught,” renders impossible the retroactive constitution, in a second encounter, of the first time he

vexed, concerned, and traumatized the father. Not even the psychoanalytic narrative of subjectivity, in which we relate to the impudent impossibility of our existence by returning to the past trauma through which we become subjects, is available to the father; for his nightmare has yet to arrive and never will have arrived since it has not even begun and therefore cannot end. Odradek, who moves into and, by moving into, voids the very position of the master, turns the father into a creature-object unable to subjectivize himself and thus to become a Being. Yet in that conundrum, the father discerns the outlines of an immanent transcendence, reachable only by traversing the figure of Odradek and the natural-historical rhythm of his reappearance.

The father of the family is not alone in catching a glimpse of that traversal, however. He has an important counterpart in another of Kafka's sovereign-cum-managerial figures: Poseidon, from the parable of the same name.<sup>59</sup> Poseidon, one might say, is a more developed, because more paralyzed, version of the father of the family. Poseidon has a crisis of naming of his own. Everyone seems to think that he is a god. Worse, everyone seems to think that he is a Homeric god. This is almost more than Poseidon can bear. Not only is he not an idle, indolent god out cruising the waves, as everyone seems to believe. On the contrary, "the administration of all the waters gave him endless work" (85). Cruising around the waves, trident in hand. As if he had time for such nonsense! The only opportunity he ever gets to act like the Homeric god people wrongly conceive him as being is when he goes up "now and then" to meet with Jupiter. (And when had his own brother, Zeus, become Jupiter, figure of the imperium? Had he been so immersed in the management of the seas that he had missed the passing of the old order? Was he the last holdout of a form of life that had already faded away? If so, why had no one informed him?) At such times, he gets to pass fleetingly through his realm, but the meetings with Jupiter are invariably petty and humiliating, and he ends up returning to his office in a rage. Hardly the all-powerful god of the oceans he is made out to be.

Instead, Poseidon dwells where the father of the family dwells: in the midst of the worst, the realm of the perpetual almost. As he himself well understands, Poseidon is neither a god nor a bureaucrat. Rather, he inserts the bureaucrat into the god and, in so doing, occupies an origin different—neither coming to be nor passing away, neither divine nor profane—from the one imposed upon him by Homeric myth. In that sense, Kafka's parable can be understood as a restaging and, in turn, an exit from the anarchy at the heart of Olympian management. His trident now propped up in a corner of

his office, Poseidon's image (as a god) and his nature (as a bureaucrat) cancel one another out, leaving him nowhere other than in a natural-historical middle. To judge by his complaints, one would think that Poseidon finds this situation intolerable. "In fact, he had already filed many petitions for—as he put it—more cheerful work" (85). But the few times he is given an opportunity to be something other than he is—appointed to a new post, given new responsibilities—Poseidon panics, his divine breathing becoming troubled and his bronze chest beginning to tremble (85). The office of ocean management could not function without him. That, at least, is what he tells himself. But underneath his conflicted emotions, underneath the complaints and frustrations, Poseidon understands that there is no other, or no better, place for him than in the mutually canceling middle. He panics because, were he to leave his present position, he would cease to be the natural-historical figure he is; and it is only insofar as he retains his natural-historical position, only insofar as he continues to occupy his origin, that he has any hope or chance at happiness.

Poseidon, then, could be said to occupy—occupy voluntarily-unconsciously, as it were—the place that the father of the family comes to occupy only when forced to do so by the arrival of Odradek. Odradek draws the father into a different calendar and a different constellation. But from time immemorial, Poseidon has been immersed in that same calendar, that same constellation, by virtue of his bureaucratic task administering the creaturely life found in the depths of the sea. Poseidon is not simply an accountant. He is stuck in a state of perpetual accounting, of forever taking inventory. Is that not the ideal position for the figure, now understood to be one and the same, of the sovereign-cum-governmental manager? As an activity, accounting negates both poles of the spectrum that runs (in place) from sovereignty to biopolitics. The sovereign, to use Foucault's elegant formulation, lets live and makes die, while biopolitics fosters life and lets die. But accounting, thorough accounting, accounting performed to its fanatical extreme, follows neither of those patterns. It lets nothing die; and yet it makes nothing live. Accounting, moreover, cannot be said either to enliven or to deaden its practitioners. It simply repeats without end. It therefore removes the accountant from the realm of care (which still promises a kind of grandeur) and relocates him, along with the father of the family, to the realm of concern: a realm where he is utterly absorbed, rendered harmless and distracted, no longer interested in aspirational or managerial redemption—a realm where he sits "in the depths of the world-ocean, doing figures uninterruptedly" (87).

As we have known since Derrida's *Archive Fever*, however, there is at the same time no historical or critical world apart from the archive. Were the accounts and inventories of the archive to disappear, so too would the historical and critical worlds. And given the precariousness of every archive, this means that the historical world is forever on the verge of apocalypse. Already, then, Poseidon looks ahead, in his very occupation, to the end of world history. In fact, "he was in the habit of saying that what he was waiting for was the fall of the world" (87). But insofar as he takes perpetual inventory, insofar as he is caught in the endless repetitive task that has been his "from the beginning" (85), the end of the world is held in abeyance even as it continues to unfold. The archive continues, albeit without resolution (there being no resolution to the taking of inventory). In that way, Poseidon can look ahead to an end that is always on the verge of arriving, or that arrives perpetually in its imagined anticipation. On that last day, Poseidon will finally be able to "to make a quick little tour" around the oceans that he administers but has never properly seen (87). But before doing so, he will look through (*Durchsicht*) his accounts one last time. Then, in a moment of transparency (*Durchblick*), he will realize that, all along, his rows were empty but for the figures, the "destructive characters" as Benjamin might call them, that it had been his job to enter there. In that moment of looking through, he will grasp that, behind the clamor of the historical world, there was a nullification even of the nothingness that stirs the drama of the world-historical stage: that the historical world was filled, not with itself, but with the figures of natural history that he had spent his time "doing uninterruptedly." Then he will be released from the burden of guilt that sustains all managerial care. His hope in the worst will have been confirmed.

### Notes

- 1 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 138.
- 2 Virno, *Multitude*, 41.
- 3 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 142.
- 4 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 146.
- 5 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 138, 139, 135.
- 6 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 133–34, 135–44.
- 7 Virno, *Multitude*, 42.
- 8 Marx, "Postface to the Second Edition," in *Capital*, vol. 1, 103. Subsequent references to this edition appear in the text.
- 9 It was Bataille who pointed out the extent to which nature in Marx and Engels

- is antithetically developing not as a movement in thought and spirit but in the real, in politics and the class struggle themselves. See Bataille, "The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic," 106–9.
- 10 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 138.
- 11 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 132.
- 12 Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams," 141–44.
- 13 Foucault summarizes this link between the transient existence of human order and what he calls the labor of "constant criticism" thus: "Thought does exist, both beyond and before systems and edifices of discourse. . . . There is always a little thought occurring even in the most stupid institutions . . . even in silent habits. Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it. . . . So many things can be changed, being as fragile as they are, tied more to contingencies than to necessities . . . , more to complex transitory historical contingencies than to inevitable anthropological constants." Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?," 456–58.
- 14 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 44, 57.
- 15 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 57.
- 16 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 63.
- 17 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 65, 62.
- 18 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 66.
- 19 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 65.
- 20 Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?," 458.
- 21 Foucault, "So Is It Important to Think?," 457.
- 22 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 296.
- 23 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 276.
- 24 Agamben, *Democracy in What State?*, 4.
- 25 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 94.
- 26 Kant, "The Contest of Faculties," in *Political Writings*, 177.
- 27 Kant, "The Contest of Faculties," 181.
- 28 Kant, "Perpetual Peace," in *Political Writings*, 119.
- 29 Kant, "The Contest of Faculties," 184.
- 30 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 88.
- 31 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 93.
- 32 Foucault never quite brings himself to say that Kant makes our and human-kind's history natural or that he turns human history into something natural. It is nonetheless clear that what Foucault calls the transformative ontology of us and our present, Kant calls nature.
- 33 Kant, "The Contest of Faculties," 189.
- 34 Kant, "The Contest of Faculties."
- 35 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 56.
- 36 Foucault states in an interview, "I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth. One

'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth." Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 193.

37 While most political theorists seem to be interested in the question "What is a dispositif?," the pivotal question might be "What is a diagram?" It is clear that the use of the term *diagram* in Foucault, Deleuze, or Virno goes beyond describing a mere visualization technique or graphic tool for illustrating relations of power and networks of forces in a new cartography (in maps, graphs, lines, arrows, visual links, etc.). The construction of a diagram gauges the mode of its presence in its effects. The effects generated by the way a diagram orders its specific phenomena or combines its elements demonstrate that diagrams do not intervene into a real from the outside, as if it were a preexisting object. Rather, a diagram is immanent to the phenomena in its effects like a grammar is to the norms and thoughts it expresses. A diagram is a condensed graph or map that, like a monad or a microcosm, sketches and measures in miniature—often coarsely and abstractly—the coordinates and internal proportions of a discursive field. Diagrams are always on the verge of becoming one with the networks and relations that they actualize. In fact, diagrams produce those things by touching their nerve center and designating their symptomatic charge. A diagram places and displaces the phenomena and forces in which functions; it is at once outside and inside the field it affects. Diagrams in this sense distill the transcendental structure for the demarcations of a specific region, ensuring that it appears in a specific way and that it appears as such. In this way, diagrams enable modes of experience; they demonstrate that it is not enough to explain a constellation, but that the diagrammatic act of enunciation is an integral part of its emergence and structuration. "Diagrammitization" is then a deforming truth procedure that restores phenomena to their true disfigured state and excavates the inherent crisis and instability of a system. This procedure is a praxis, for it makes the experience of an effective political constellation possible, thereby realizing historical objects that either did not exist or that lie dormant in a dross of impassive *Geschichten* (stories/histories). *Mise-en-scène* is one form of diagrammitization.

38 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 88.

39 Foucault speaks of the "inversion," as opposed to the overcoming or abolition, of  $S_1$ , and with good reason. In doing so, he confronts us with the trembling contours of a literally inverted  $S_1$ , one whose body surface, whose whole spirit and body politic, is turned inside out: that becomes flesh, exposing its decomposing organs and intestines. From then onward, once we track the afterlife of subsequent manifestations of  $S_1$  (the small despots and tyrants, the governmental and administrative graph, or contemporary biocapitalism), our politics can never forget this horrifying vision of a divided and decomposing sovereign. Even when Foucault calls "civil society," including our high-flying ideas of democracy and popular sovereignty, our new master signifier, the triangulation sovereignty-discipline-biopolitical governmentality remains fundamentally

fragile, saddled with contradictory rationalities and permeated with a host of countervailing microphysical forces and diagrams (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 295). In this sense Jacques-Alain Miller is right to call our very idea of democracy “the master-signifier which says that there is no master-signifier” (Miller, *Le Neveu de Lacan*, 270). That the three rationalities sovereignty-discipline-biopolitical governmentality often appear nefariously conjoined in our democracies means that the very gaps and inconsistencies between them provide the points of entry for devising a novel, albeit still tremulous, political microphysics grounded in positive rights (without juridical rights) for ungovernable subjects and people.

40 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 20.

41 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 32.

42 Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 34.

43 Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*.

44 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 65.

45 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 115.

46 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 31–32. Agamben would go so far as to claim, in fact, that “the hidden paradigm guiding every successive definition of sovereignty” is precisely Pindar’s sovereign *nomos*, which works by melding the principle of superior force with a force of law said to have originated from a natural source.

47 We have used the edition found in Plato, *Complete Works*.

48 Marx, “Preface to the First Edition,” in *Capital*, vol. 1, 92. Subsequent references to this edition appear in the text.

49 Marx provides an intriguing footnote to this event that suggests how much he wished to emphasize the prehistorical origin of capitalism: the primal fall or, better, primal cast of capitalism. Marx cites Colonel Torrens: “In the first stone which the savage flings at the wild animal he pursues, in the first stick that he seizes to strike down the fruit which hangs above his reach, we see the appropriation of one article for the purpose of aiding in the acquisition of another, and thus discover the origin of capital.” Marx then proceeds to speculate whether this “*Stock*” (stick) is not the reason why in English *stock* is synonymous with capital (291).

50 Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 69.

51 Kafka, “A Problem for the Father of the Family,” 176–77. Subsequent references to this edition appear in the text.

52 Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 69.

53 Butler, “Who Owns Kafka?”

54 Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 82.

55 Foucault, *La volonté de savoir. Histoire de la sexualité 1*, 177, cited by Minkinen, “Michel Foucault on Sovereignty and Law,” 9n21.

56 Foucault views the family as essentially a linchpin of disciplinary apparatuses. As he says in *Psychiatric Power*: “The family, then, has this double role: the pinning down of individuals on disciplinary systems, and the joining and circula-

tion of individuals from one disciplinary system to another” (83). We are reintroducing the father as a player in that double role and, in so doing, distilling the biopolitical content of the family insofar as it represents an intersection between the sovereign and discipline.

57 Minkkinen, “Michel Foucault on Sovereignty and Law,” 10.

58 See Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” 288–91.

59 Kafka, “Poseidon,” 85–87. Subsequent references to this edition appear in the text.