TOWARDS A PRODUCTIVE AESTHETICS:
HISTORY AND NOW-TIME IN BLAKE AND BRECHT

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparison of the theory and practice of aesthetic politics in key works of Bertolt Brecht and William Blake. I argue that there are two separate temporal moments that define Brecht's and Blake's political aesthetics. The first moment is defined by a more direct engagement with the "nowness" and relative newness of their capitalist social world. Capitalist social relations bring out in each of the two a more directly engaging oppositional aesthetics. Given capitalism's desire to create a form of experience that not only makes sense for its subjects' own subjugation, while while also attempting to negate any possible alterative to itself, Brecht and Blake develop a political aesthetics that exposes and undercuts these dominant forms of experience. Using Walter Benjamin, I argue that Brecht and Blake posit an "oppositional aesthetics of the now" which takes seriously capitalism's desires and successes in refashioning experience, but provides a means of both understanding this experience while counterposing and making desirable an oppositional form of existence. This political aesthetic response is grounded in contemporary social relations and responds using this as a framework of reference.

The second moment under discussion examines the role of history and historical representation in Brecht and Blake. The central focus is how Brecht and Blake continue the responsive project referenced in the first two chapters by making use of history in aesthetic-political interventions in the present. I argue that they engage historical tropes and use history "against the grain" in the *Jetztzeit* (Now-Time), as Benjamin notes. Both repurpose history as a means to produce historical recoveries, making failures or losses in the past open for radical productive possibilities in the present. In this way forms of inherited experience or preconceived truths are placed in a space of contestation. Historical representation is another opportunity to cleave open an oppositional aesthetics and unsettle that which capitalism wishes to make silent.

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As both Brecht and Blake would agree, the work towards completing a dissertation requires the patience, care and above all support of a large network of people. This project began with a conversation with my supervisor, and thus I would like to give special mention to David McNally, who has worked with me over several drafts and even more years and at all times replied with thoughtful and deeply constructive criticism. Likewise, while they entered this project later on, Susan Ingram and Ian Balfour provided detailed, helpful and encouraging comments and both have provided longer term encouragement which both helped get me to this point, and will take me beyond it as well. I should also note that part of Chapter 2 draws slightly upon my previously published article "The View from Below: Film and Class Representation in Brecht and Loach," published in the journal *Cinema*.

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Alice, who passed before seeing its completion, but who I know would've been pleased and proud by its accomplishment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The origins of this dissertation are located in a desire to understand how materialist (and non-materialist) cultural responses aim to integrate and interrogate the question of the politics of production in oppositional literatures. The absence of a full consideration of the aesthetics of production has resulted in a turning away from the social and economic problems asserting themselves both against and within a tradition of aesthetics that seeks to understand the social landscape which propels it and makes itself possible, and to respond in fully oppositional ways. This has predominantly encouraged a turning away, especially in the age of postmodernity, from oppositional aesthetics.[1] Too often aesthetic interventions into the political imperatives of the day eschew an engagement with the actual political situation and respond with old answers to new questions. This has regularly come in the form of a realist aesthetics that presents the contemporary audience with a conception of veracity and devotion to totality[2] that does more to obscure than illuminate, and even more so negates the role of agency through the assumption of objectivism in making cultural politics. As Fredric Jameson defines it, "traditionally in one form or another the central model of Marxist aesthetics as a narrative discourse...unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive, mapping, or well-nigh 'scientific perspective.'"[3] This form of cultural politics, rather than beginning from an aesthetics from below and of the now – wherein there lies a necessity for those oppressed and exploited to be integrated producers of the

[1] The literature maintaining this critique is extensive, but most important here are Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
[2] The primary exemplar of this tradition is Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel* (London: Penguin, 1962). A less intellectually sophisticated version is found in Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* (New York: International Publishers, 1973).
[3] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 104.

text – reproduces the textual dynamics of the society to which they are hoping to respond in critical ways.[4] In contrast to this tendency, this dissertation argues that the works of Bertolt Brecht and William Blake, two of the most oppositional of oppositional cultural producers, are exemplary figures in articulating an aesthetics wherein the moment of the now, the contemporary moment, is the *sine qua non* of an aesthetics of production.

An aesthetics of production, drawing from Walter Benjamin's "The Author as Producer," encourages a debate around the way in which that work relates to its own society. His text asks not "What is the *attitude* of a work to the relations of production of its time?," but rather "What is its *position* in them?"[5] What Benjamin raises in this analysis is the role of cultural production in the function of literary analysis. Cultural production has a long pedigree, and one of its clearest definitions is put forward by Pierre Bourdieu in his *The Field of Cultural Production*. He writes that:

> The space of literary or artistic position-takings, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field – literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc. – is inseparable from the space of literary or artistic positions defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.[6]

[4] See in particular the discussion of the forms of realism in Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art* (London: Verso, 2010).
[5] Walter Benjamin, *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978): 222.
[6] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 30.

The concept of forces that Bourdieu encourages moves discussion away from mere "influence"[7] to bring in questions of cultural production and the larger forces at play with a given literary text on the one hand, but also a larger field of play that both structures and makes possible the production of literary and cultural documents themselves. In this regard, the "superstructure" is, as Terry Eagleton notes, "a relational term" in that it "designates the way in which certain social institutions act as 'supports' of the dominant social relation."[8] In this way an emphasis on cultural production puts the question of "literary technique"[9] more firmly in relation to its technological and political determinants (what was possible, or deemed possible, at what time in literary history for instance, and also what questions were being pressed out into the open that necessitated an aesthetic response), which begins a form of investigation that puts into sharp contrast the literary text's relation to its own "*Jetztzeit*" or "*time of the now*" and history. This is a most sincere political question[10] and encourages the question as to what form of response a cultural producer is committed.[11] A central point of departure where much of this work has stubbed its toe is on the distinction, already explicitly made use of here, between what the Welsh literary critic Raymond Williams terms oppositional and alternative cultures.

In his "Base and Superstructure in Materialism and Culture," Williams states that the degree of difference between oppositional and alternative cultures is subject to what he terms "constant historical variation." Providing greater clarification into his own historical moment but also expressing a more generalizable perspective, Williams continues:

[7] As expressed in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[8] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991): 83.
[9] Benjamin, *Reflections*, 222.
[10] Benjamin, *Reflections*, 223.
[11] Using Theodor Adorno's formulation, in contrast to "autonomous art." See Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Fredric Jameson (London: Verso, 1998).

> Thus, the effective decision, as to whether a practice is alternative or oppositional, is often now made within a very much narrower scope. There is a simple theoretical distinction between alternative and oppositional, that is to say between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light. This is usually the difference between individual and small-group solutions to social crisis and those solutions which properly belong to political and ultimately revolutionary practice. But it is often a very narrow line, in reality, between alternative and oppositional. A meaning or a practice may be tolerated as a deviation, and yet still be seen only as another particular way to live. But as the necessary area of effective dominance extends, the same meanings and practices can be seen by the dominant culture, not merely as disregarding or despising it, but as challenging it.[12]

Despite the fact that this distinction is nearing its half-century mark, the prescience of this passage for our times should not be underestimated. As it stands now, there is no dearth of alternatives to the standing order of capitalism. Indeed, the so-called linguistic turn in the social sciences has witnessed an extraordinary heap of "deconstructions" of the cultural logics of capitalism which, although they attempt to rid societal formations of systemizing thoughts, have done little to withstand or aid in the struggle against one of the historically deepest entrenchments of capitalist power on an ever increasing and deepening scale. As E. San Juan Jr. notes in regards to contemporary cultural studies, "an emancipatory discipline producing testable knowledge cannot go beyond textualism without rejecting methodological individualism and its framework of idealist metaphysics. Linguistic analysis needs to be supplemented with a critique of ideological structures."[13]

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[12] Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 41-2.
[13] E. San Juan Jr., *Racism and Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 234-5.

David McNally, in his *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor and Liberation*, has spoken to the inability of the contemporary trends in aesthetic theory to deal with societal structures as they are present today. He writes, "For the new idealism, there is no way out of the linguistic forms of thought or the social relations characteristic of Western capitalist society."[14] Thus, the contemporary oppositions to the system specifically, if not always intentionally (or even willingly), rule out the problematics of opposition; all that remains is minor spaces or pockets of activity rather than any conception of a sustained challenge to the system's logics. As such, while one can still name the institutional order as capitalism, an idea that one may imagine a world beyond it is seen as risible. Indeed, we have entered a period of "Capitalist Realism," as Mark Fisher has termed it, wherein a systemic, "aggravated and chronic"[15] logic dismisses any notion of opposition rather than alternative and as such systemic opposition appears as the greatest affront in the academia today.[16] For this reason, Williams' distinction is indispensable for a committed materialist criticism.

In this text I will be arguing that Blake and Brecht represent high points of oppositional cultural production. In terms of their influence throughout the history of oppositional cultural practice, few authors have projected such a great influence in determining the major questions (if not always resulting in the same formation of answers) that subsequent producers have posed and sought to grapple with. They are two of the most significant archetypal producers of oppositional aesthetics in that the aesthetic strategies they employ (for Brecht read distancing effects, gestural

[14] David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor, and Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001): p. 7.
[15] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009): 7.
[16] Recent works in this regard are Teresa L. Ebert and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Class in Culture* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2008), Teresa Ebert, *The Task of Cultural Critique* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2009), Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles* (London: Harlow, 2007): 75 Two historical critical texts in this regard are Richard Wolin, *The Terms of Cultural Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) and Bob Hodge, "Labor Theory Of Language: Postmodernism and a Marxist Science of Language," in *Post-Ality: Marxism and Postmodernism*, ed. Mas'ud Zavarzaadeh et al. (Washington: Maisonneuve Press, 1995).

politics and Epic Theatre and for Blake read an explosive yet complex verse full of inspiration and channeling of messianic energies) have become the models for a variety of expressions of the realities and problems faced by organisations and individuals throughout the history of the left.

In this thesis I hope to provide a comparison of the two authors in order to examine how both sought to expose contemporary modes of oppression and exploitation in direct connection to the moment of the now, coupled with a Janus-like vision towards the past. In this latter moment they discarded the reproduction of an accurate version of historical reality and sought something much closer to Walter Benjamin's famous analysis of an historical materialist approach to history. That is, when we take as read that, as Benjamin notes, "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," the mode in which we look towards and examine the past alters. In this context, a cultural producer is always in a space where the need for response is keen. Yet rather than reproducing historical truisms, or truths that do not sufficiently examine the terrains of history and the contemporary, the oppositional outlook proceeds differently. As Benjamin notes further in "On the Concept of History": "A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from [barbarism] as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain."[17] Benjamin's argument itself is connected to the political landscape of his age, and is responding to a vision of progress that had haunted progressive forces in German Social Democracy, and therefore had deeply affected their ability to challenge seriously the admittedly immense weight and, it should be emphasized, capabilities of capitalist forces to respond to opposition and defeat it head-on or, if necessary, to co-opt them.[18] Nevertheless, the belief that the truth will out and justice will be won had led the working-class

[17] Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968): 256-7.
[18] For a detailed discussion of Benjamin's essay and its fragmentary nature (and how this reflected his political thought) see Andrew Benjamin, *Working with Walter Benjamin: Recovering a Political Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): 162-202.

movement into a position of existential and practical inactivity. In response to this, Benjamin postulated that what was necessary was not a return to those good old, specifically a-historical, arguments of progress and stability but a consideration of the role of experience in articulating a revolutionary politics or a "radical moving-forward."[19] Susan Buck-Morss, commenting on the introduction to Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in her *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, expresses this new form of historical investigation in the following:

> Now in this new methodological introduction Benjamin had stressed precisely the opposite moment, in which truth emerged only by the setting up of a critical distance between the material and the interpreter, and that meant standing at the present edge of history, on the dividing line between "now-time" (Jetztzeit) and the possibility for a radically different future. From this perspective history could not be affirmed or rationalized.[20]

Benjamin suggests and tries to cleave open new pathways of responding to our time, and I wish to examine how Benjamin's insights can be seen as reflected in Brecht and Blake's aesthetic strategies and politics.

There are two forms of temporal engagement that are expressed in Brecht and Blake that I would like to examine. On the one hand we have a specific notion on the moment of the now, one which develops from a deep understanding of the moment to which one relates oneself in the present. This relies on a Janussian moment found between that of the present and a "radically different future," for better or ill. The present's newness, as opposed to capitalism's fake newness (the newness of the commodity, of false-novelty, old wine in new bottles), is an entire mess of

[19] Gerhard Richter, *Inheriting Walter Benjamin* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016): 113.
[20] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977): 169.

congruent and discordant impulses, concerns and motivations. True, these are always informed by history and determined by factors that constrain these impulses, concerns, and motivations in infinite ways. This is, as always, a structured moment, a moment of indeterminacy as well, and one which must, as much as possible, be understood so as to construct a counter-hegemonic force. This is required as capital is constantly remodelling and refashioning how we experience the world in its own image. In response to this conflagration, as committed cultural producers, Blake and Brecht argue for a political engagement with the structures at play in the interstices of indeterminacy. This is the moment of the now dealt with in the first two chapters.

The second engagement occurs in a similar Janussian temporal space, but here between a collision of past and present. This moment, as elucidated by Buck-Morss above, occurs on the cusp of one's historical position and the historical past writ large. Yet this is not a matter of precisely understanding one's history and then drawing the links between the two. This would reproduce the folly that Benjamin seeks to have us steer clear of. Here, history takes on a far more malleable, plastic, form in the hands of the artist and the impulse is to release its potential against the current disasters, as opposed to locking it down and containing it, in essence making it safe. The emphasis is far less on understanding an historical moment, but rather imagining what can be usefully made of the past for the needs of the present. We move from history as "not so much a past reality as an unrealized possibility."[21] In this regard the present is still the focus, but during in their own specific moments characterized by historical loss (the failures of the French Revolution, the inability of the Russian Revolution to live up to its promise, etc.) Brecht and Blake seek to take inspiration from historical periods, singular moments or figures and transport them for their own purposes. The knowledge and use of history provides a refuge in that it offers

[21] Michael G. Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power: Figures of a Time to Come in Benjamin, Derrida, and Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014): 5.

a way of engaging with the contemporary moment by ushering in a re-immersion of agency in the course of contemporary-historical events.[22] Its potential is uncapped and open to exploration and experimentation. What I am trying to locate in Brecht and Blake here is a shift away from a concept of the now and of history that negates this potential and in its place I argue that the basis of each author's work is a highly productive and ultimately responsive theory of aesthetic practice.

My principal aim in the following is to mobilize the works of Brecht and Blake in aid of rethinking the role of the artist in the contemporary moment. As specifically political interventionists who organise their works around the double strategy of the time of the now and use history as a device to reinforce and make clearer the moment of the now, Brecht and Blake offer a form of cultural response which stresses a sophisticated relationship between the audience and the producer.[23] Such a relationship is centred upon the notion that the moment of the now must always be the focal point of the aesthetic, and that the moment of the now is at every moment haunted by history.

Blake and Brecht provide a useful comparison for the analysis of oppositional aesthetics as they have often been seen on opposite ends of the aesthetic spectrum. It is particularly

[22] As regards the relationship between the powerful Messiah and the knowledge that comes of the Messianic impulse, Benjamin Britt notes: "There is agency first of all in critical awareness, which Benjamin cultivated through a variety of philosophical and aesthetic categories, and which he eventually related to a politicized conception of the Messiah. This Messiah is not subject to human control, but awareness of the Messiah is not possible without awareness of tradition, which survives in modern culture." Brian Britt, *Postsecular Benjamin: Agency and Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016): 135. Useful also in this regard in James R. Martel, *Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin and the Eschatology of Sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[23] Although I will discuss this later, two contemporary critics have noted the response that both Brecht and Blake wish to draw. Firstly, Neil Larsen has described the interaction between Audience and Play in Brecht that "bringing into juxtaposition, not disparate images or objects, but rather the disparate attitudes towards *actions* on the part of the dramatic characters themselves, on the one hand, and on the part of the audience, on the other." Neil Larsen, *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative and Nation in the* Americas (London: Verso, 2001): 196. This suggests a conversation and activity that is also argued by John H. Jones in relation to Blake's *Milton* that, "Blake wants his readers to from their own responses to the poem, each of which would recreate the poem anew." John H. Jones, *Blake on Language, Power, and Self-Annihilation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 178.

tempting to literary theorists of all persuasions to erect a binary which places an impassioned, Blake (with his visions of Angels in trees, etc.) in counter position to the cold, emotionless, and almost hyper-rational Brecht. Yet while there may be a kernel of truth in each, it is far from clear where this may take us except into an unproductive dualism. Ironically, rarely have there been two oppositional cultural producers so convinced of the virtues or merits of a belief in production as Brecht and Blake. This productive aesthetics is frequently under question. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière, whose ideas have helped to redefine the political reading of cultural and literary texts,[24] has cast doubt on art's potential to create. He argues in an interview in the influential art magazine *Artforum*:

> In the time of politically engaged art, when critical models were clearly agreed upon, we took art and politics as two well-defined things, each in its own corner. But at the same time, we presupposed a trouble-free passage between an artistic mode of presentation and the determination to act; that is, we believed that the "raised consciousness" engendered by art – the strangeness of an artistic form – would provoke political action. The artist who presented the hidden contradictions of capitalism would mobilize minds and bodies for the struggle. The deduction was unsound, but that didn't matter so long as the explanatory schemata and the actual social movements were strong enough to anticipate its effects. That is no longer the case today.[25]

Rancière's argument implies that oppositional aesthetics, such as those under investigation here, could not have offered a means to significantly alter the world in which they inhabit. While there

[24] See principally *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011); *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010); *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2006).
[25] Jacques Rancière, interviewed by Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, "Art of the Possible," *Artforum*, (March 2007): 258-59.

is an partial yet obvious truth to this, to argue that art alone could not do so is to ignore the unique and complicated relationship between cultural production and social struggle. Just as for E. P. Thompson argues that "class happens,"[26] so to does the making of culture. There is no easy causal relationship between oppositional culture and effect, but to deny one altogether would be to miss the larger point regarding social and cultural interactions and formations.

In what follows, I have three broad, overarching objectives. The first is, through a series of close readings, to suggest how the logic of the texts leads towards a deep penetration of the author's society's contemporary ideologies (particularly in Chapters 2 and 3) and how the mobilization or renewal of lost history is carried out with the intent of highlighting further the contradictions that are increasingly apparent in their contemporary society's ideologies (Chapters 4 and 5). I aim to provide a clear account of the intensity and sophistication that the contemporary impulse plays in both author's texts and to further explain how the focus on a response to the contemporary moment organises and motivates Brecht and Blake.

My second objective will be to highlight the central role of experience and experimentation and reinforce the potential of determining human action in the authors' work as a central structure around which their texts move. What has been lost in the discussions of Brecht and Blake as individual cultural producers (as of yet there is no fuller length academic study of the two that has been published)[27] as they have become to a greater degree institutionalised is that

[26] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1982): 8. Still one of the most useful theoretical texts on the connections between society and cultural forms remains Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981). E. P. Thompson's later edition of his *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin, 1976) is a further attempt in articulating the detailed historical connections between the art and politics.

[27] One recent exception to this is Diane Piccitto's *Blake's Drama: Theatre, Performance and Identity in the Illuminated Books* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). This text offers some connections between Blake and Brecht as regards similarities in promoting active spectatorship, but is not a comparative study. Despite the contention that Blake constructs "a Brechtian alienation that jars us out of our complacency," there is too little substantive engagement with Brecht's theatrical theory (as evidenced in the critically unspecific notion of Brechtian alienation"). See Piccitto, *Blake's Drama*, 54.

both authors placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of reception and the ways in which one might encourage an active reading of their works and an active readership more generally. How to help spawn a way of seeing the world in a different light, so as to recognise and help to flourish an understanding of art that is good in itself but also inculcates productive creative producers of the audience themselves? In this way, I will further argue, experimentation and reserving a space with which one can maintain and produce a critical gaze is not a mere positive trait in the work of each author but rather a necessary condition of the greater logic behind their work. The experimentation of the artist is to mirror the experimentation of the artist's productive readership.

My third objective is to place Brecht and Blake together, two operators working at very different conjuctures, in order to argue for a mode of criticism and practice that seeks to empower useful and productive analysis that is geared towards an oppositional aesthetic that is itself ultimately productive. This will also act as a theory of literary production of each that not only registers and explores the role of aesthetics in creating new forms of experiences (and tapping into and expressing nascent yet existing forms of experience), but is also directly attuned to the key problems of oppositional movements. A central part of this project is to advocate an oppositional aesthetics that offers resistance, and I will attempt to show how in each of the chapters resistance to exploitation and oppressions is a driving force in the two's works. It is important to understand and reflect on the particular characteristics and determinations of one's dominant society,[28] yet failure to explore how one can challenge this (even if it be to encourage the reader of the text to take the contradictions upon themselves) is insufficient for both Brecht and Blake.

[28] See in particular Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976): 11 – 43.

In Chapter 2 the key focus will be on the earlier works on Brecht, at least up until shortly before his exile in 1933. The focus for this section will be to highlight first of all the key motif working within these works: that there is, Brecht would argue, a new in/human way of being formed. Brecht saw himself living at the end of the creation of a decidedly remarkable transition in the history of social contact and behaviour of class forces and he sought to access these new forms of living so as to follow their logic and their ways of being in the world on stage and film. Yet because of the particular logic involved in this creation, particularly as regards the Expressionist focus on the new individual and new individualities that capitalist modernity produces,[29] this necessitated an aesthetic response beyond merely what theatre and the dramatic arts had hitherto articulated. The response from a political aesthetic perspective necessary for this was to stretch out to other newly and often formally unexplored media and incorporate these new technologies into his overall aesthetic strategy.[30] Perhaps most fundamental in this regard is Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*.

In Chapter 2 I will attempt to address the scant attention given to this early work by teasing out the key contradictions of the play so as to locate the tendencies present at a time which were fundamental for the development of his aesthetic. I will argue that in *Mann ist Mann* Brecht is working out the relationship between a temporal-political question, the modern worker and her ability to respond as an individual to capital's remodeling of such people in their own desired image,[31] and the capacity of the theatre to respond to such a question both politically and

[29] For a useful response to this process, and to its gendered content, see Della Pollock, "New Man to New Woman: Women in Brecht and Expressionism," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 4 (1989): 85 – 107. Pollock argues "…no critic has fully recognized the extent to which Brecht develops the emergent but stalemated figure of the "New Woman" in late expressionism." Pollock, "New Man to New Woman,", p. 85.

[30] A helpful text here is Roswitha Mueller's *Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Media* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), in particular 1 – 21.

[31] This has also at times been misrepresented, or at least misunderstood. "Brecht's enthusiasm for the transformative, revolutionary potential of the commodification process in modern society may seem naïve today, considering the

aesthetically. The importance of this process – a process which involved experimentation almost unparalleled in Brecht's career as well as level of revision beyond anything that Brecht will later perform – will be shown to be absolutely indispensable in framing the problematics of change in this formation of the new human and the contradictions of capitalism.[32]

The focus in this chapter will not only be to delve into the contradictions and internal and external workings of this one play. This chapter also aims to present a continuum of practice in Brecht's pre-1933 works, and will thus use the reading of *Mann ist Mann* as an attempt to grasp a better understanding of this new society and the changeable human left without options, and argue that the conclusions that Brecht came to from his work on this play informed his highly productive and much acclaimed work of the period from 1929 – 1933. This work represents a more confident socialist alternative to the concept of changeability and attempts to propose a productive way beyond the twin evils of Capitalism and Fascism. *Kuhle Wampe* and *Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthoefe* are answers to the specific nature and mode of production of meanings and forms of thought that Brecht so brilliantly displays in *Mann ist Mann*.

What shall be made clear throughout this chapter is that Brecht framed his work as a response to the contemporary moment.[33] His attention to experimentation underlies his

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homogenising, totalising effects of global capitalism and the apparent limitations of collective as well as individual resistance and activism. But Brecht's positive evaluation of the capitalist labour process has to be understood within the framework of Marxist thought, which considers the economic system of capitalist society only as a transitory, indeed necessary, stage towards a total functional transformation (*Umfunktionierung*) of life." Karoline Gritzner, *Adorno and Modern Theatre: The Drama of the Damaged Self in Bond, Rudkin, Barker and Kane* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 67. While Brecht was indeed fascinated with the ability of capital to change, this was not due to a resigned acceptance of capitalism's benefits, but an attempt to work through the system as it is, rather than what you'd like it to be. In a similar way, Brecht hastens to Lukacs "Is there no solution then? There is. The new ascendant class shows it. It is not a way back. It is not linked to the good old days but to the bad new ones. It does not involve undoing techniques but by developing them. Man does not become man again by stepping out of the masses but by stepping back into them." This is the response against "capitalism in its fascist phase." Bertolt Brecht, "Against Georg Lukacs," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, Jameson ed., p. 69.

[32] Anthony Squiers and Norman Roessler, "Rethinking Brecht," *Communications from the International Brecht Society* 40 (2011): 119 – 133.

[33] This "*usefulness*", as Jameson notes, "would have delighted" Brecht. Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998): 1.

commitment to an understanding of the *Jetztzeit* – the moment of the now. Whereas several of the key studies of Brecht sought, as Anthony Squiers notes, "to provide formalistic approaches"[34] with an implied extraction of and derision towards the political impulses of his work and frame him as an innovator of the purely aesthetic – i.e. as someone chiefly in conversation with and opposed to the Aristotelean tradition – in this Chapter I will argue that these strategies were part and parcel of a larger political-cultural moment which saw the audience member as a producer of the text themselves and a producer of the means of further cultural and social production. As such, I will argue that Brecht's work before 1933 was moving towards a consistent whole, and that his work is both responsive to his own society's political and economic culture, but also attempted new methods of engaging his audience so as to encourage oppositional forms of thinking in his audience.[35]

In Chapter 3 my attention will turn to William Blake. Given the comparative nature of this project, my aim is to place Brecht and Blake side-by-side in chapters 2 and 3 to highlight the commonalities (and to a lesser extent, the differences) of how each explored the time of the now, albeit at this earlier point in their respective careers without reference to history or overt historical themes. Alongside any discussions of the moment of the contemporary will necessarily be a discussion of the role of experimentation in Blake's works. Experimentation here does not refer to a narrow definition of "trying new things" but to a greater ontological framework that Blake attempts to make known in his work, typified in the opening line of David Erdman's collection,

[34] Anthony Squiers, *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht: Revolution and Aesthetics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014): 14. The studies referred to here include John Willett's *The theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A study from eight aspects* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), Eric Bentley's *Bentley on Brecht* (New York: Applause, 1999) and Martin Esslin's *Bertolt Brecht* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).
[35] In this way Brecht invites us "to act as a political *subject* rather than be exploited as a political *object*." Ellis Shookman, "Barthes's Semiological Myth of Brecht's Epic Theatre," *Monatshefte* 81 (1989): 459. For an examination of Barthes's treatment of Brecht recommended is Jim Carmody, "Reading Scenic Writing: Barthes, Brecht, and Theatre Photography," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 5 (1990): 25 – 38.

that "As the true method of knowledge is experiment, the true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences."[36] My entrance into Blake will be his most common entry point for modern readers, the cycle *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.

Although these sets of poems were written a few years apart, the Chapter will read the two songs cycles in conversation with each other. What the poems offers is a unique dialectical examination of Blake's England. Blake constructs two opposing forms of living in the world, both built around the response to a potential fulfilling and nurturing form of life. In the song cycle Blake constructs a yawning excoriation of the logics of contemporary capitalism, "a world in which the mind and the senses are completely ensnared by fallenness."[37] Unlike Brecht, however, Blake's references involved a specific lived relation to God in the world, a worldview of God that could never truly be disentangled from our lived relations with ourselves and the natural world of which we are part. The problem for Blake, as I will argue, was that the dominant forces of his day were attempting to poison the waters which made life so creative and nourishing. Blake understood the political power of God in the world, especially as the dominant ideologies of his day sought to consolidate their power and make strange the freeing nature of life that could be, and the potentialities that such a life could release and inspire in others. This is then a culmination of Blake's poetics.[38]

Blake sought to argue in the *Songs* that we could make of life a continuous experiment, where the true depths of our engagement would reveal, constantly, new ontological relations between all created and creative beings.[39] This potential was being denied and deformed, and

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[36] David Erdman ed., *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Doubleday, 1988): 1.
[37] Nicholas Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 26.
[38] The chief texts that will be dealt with this here are Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast.*
[39] While Makdisi will deal with this point extensively, John H. Jones articulates this process using Mikhail Bahktin: "Blake's creative process, then, can be seen as based on what Bahktin would later call dialogue. In order for a poet's

thus we see a conversation beginning in *Innocence* and *Experience*, between, as the subtitle reads: "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul."[40] In *Innocence* Blake constructs, or as he might see it, explores and taps into, a mode of relating to the world in its most admirable state. This is not ideal in the sense of never possibly existing, as Blake suggests it is this form of being that is necessary. Yet while *Experience* is the other of *Innocence*, its inverted other, *Innocence* attempts not only to provide a model for a form of life after the dominance of *Experience* has ended, but tries to show that *Innocence* enacted becomes a form of resistance and resisting inspiration.

While Blake and Brecht have different aesthetic strategies, and are defined very much by their relation to the aesthetic traditions they inherited, not to mention the political-economic contexts/moments that determined their texts, there was a combined commitment for both to understand their moments and also respond in oppositional ways that could both engage with their historical moments, and articulate an aesthetics of resistance. In this way they have a unique but overlapping strategy to stand on the edge of their respective historical conjunctures, between understanding and what one makes of this understanding, between engaging with structures of dominance, and locating ways of unlocking them.

Whereas in Chapter 2 the focus is centred on the role of the newness and *Jetztzeit* of Brecht's contemporary society, the works dealt with in Chapter 4 are those which are important for his use of history. Yet this is not, as mentioned, history "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist." Rather, Brecht articulates consistently a redemptive "political hermeneutics"[41] of history that he

discourse to be inclusive, to be more than a single, subjective viewpoint, the poet must restrain his impulse toward Selfhood and engage the world dialogically." John H. Jones, "'Self-Annihilation' and Dialogue in Blake's Creative Process: *Urizen*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*," *Modern Language Studies* 24 (1994): 8-9.

[40] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 7.

[41] Nicolai Krejberg Knudsen, "Redemptive Revolutions: The Political Hermeneutics of Walter Benjamin," *Crisis and Critique* 1 (2014): 167.

formed in his discussions with Benjamin in the late 1930s, capturing that which he finds fruitful and using it to his own ends in order to engage productive material for the struggles of his present.[42] This is not, let us be clear, a use of history in order to rewrite it, or as a means to right historical wrongs. Rather, Brecht's tasks are to make known those voices which have been written out of ruling-class models of historiography[43] and to make what is known (setting aside historical veracity) of history in the public consciousness – what Raymond Williams has termed residual cultures[44] – as a means of conveying an argument about the contemporary world.

Chapter 4 will begin with an examination of Brecht's most famous history play, *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. Despite the mirage of historical accuracy, the firm dates listed throughout the text, the map that was originally used to show Courage's movements across northern Europe, and the backdrop of an historical war, I argue that the play uses these to evoke the image of the peasant as she is generally registered as occupying the most pitied position of all. The peasant is useful for Brecht because she, in popular imagination, clearly signifies and associates with decidedly clear forms of exploitation and oppression while also being the terrified subject of war and famine.[45] Yet, despite the fact that Courage is not herself a peasant – her particular lesson is that of the peasant turned contemporary small businessperson – the play relies heavily on depictions of historical forms of oppression and exploitation to make clear the death drive of the plague of Nazism and to argue that the interchangeability of national and religious identity can be a useful force for opposition to contemporary forms of exploitation and

[42] Although the definitive text on Brecht and Benjamin remains, in my view, Wizisla's, a useful chapter that rethinks on the level of philosophy the relationship of the two is "Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht Discuss Franz Kafka: Exilic Journeys," in Freddie Rokem, *Philosophers and Thespians: Thinking Performances* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).
[43] Robert Vork, "Silencing Violence: Repetition and Revolution in *Mother Courage and Her Children*," *Comparative Drama* 47 (2013).
[44] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[45] Jameson, *Brecht and Method.*

oppression. History is therefore not that which has happened, but continues to happen. Here the play allows for the audience member to be a producer of alternate meanings and history (for the present), a strategy that Brecht further developed in exile.[46]

A similar process is at work in the *Caucasian Chalk Circle* where Brecht uses a traditional biblical moral narrative as a means of engaging in the question of land distribution in post-WWII Eastern Europe. By drawing on the biblical story of Solomon, Brecht attempts to make arguments about the right of production over tradition, interestingly by using traditional tropes as the process for doing so. Brecht uses then what is available to him (in true *bricolage* fashion), yet he uses it as a means of articulating a possible political project. In using the fable form, Brecht reaches back and performs a redemptive hermeneutic of the form and mixes it with the techniques that he had fostered in his earlier work, particularly as regards engaging the audience.[47]

This political intervention also provides the backdrop behind the writing of *Galileo Galilei*. As in *Mann ist Mann*, *Galileo Galilei* was subject to numerous revisions and incarnations. As is seen in other works, Brecht uses an historical figure or setting in order to make an argument about the present. Yet here Brecht uses history as a means to argue against the mistakes or errors that others have committed and to distance the audience from these histories.[48] In all three textual analyses I will show how history is used as a means of both distancing the audience from the actions of their own circumstances while at the same time making the actions

[46] As Raymond Williams notes: "Deprived of such a public, and having tried and largely failed to produce a drama which could confront Fascism directly, Brecht moved, both in technique and in choice of subject, towards new and deliberate forms of distance." Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1996): 90.
[47] Joachim Fiebach, "Brecht: Gestus, Fable, Attitude-cum-Stance," *Modern Drama* 42 (1999): 207 – 213.
[48] As Michael Sprinker notes while quoting Althusser: "The confrontation of two entirely distinct temporalities in Bertolazzi's play 'is in essentials also the structure the of plays such as *mother Courage* and (above all) *Galileo.*'" *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1987): 278.

on stage connected to their own experiences. The role of history is absolutely central to Brecht's developing oppositional aesthetics and serves to entrench further the necessity of accessing the reality and contradictions of the now.

Chapter 5 will speak to the role of history in Blake's work and in this regard it will be in conversation with Chapter 4. Here I will be building on the work of E. P. Thompson's classic text *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*. While this seminal text offers a profoundly incisive way of reading Blake's more directly politically engaging work from the 1790s, Thompson's focus stops there. My work will branch off of Thompson's and connect further with Benjamin. I will examine a larger piece of Blake's, his epic *Milton*, in order to locate how this work of historical re-investigation puts forward a philosophy of connecting the present to the past in order to illuminate what it is that the present lacks (and why the present lacks it) and presenting an oppositional alternative to the dominant ideologies and structures of his society.

For Blake, what is involved in his recovery of history is a proto-Benjaminian attention to the messianic impulse in history, except in this case it is not only the stakes allotted in Blake's work for the "redeeming" vision of Christ. It is not enough that the messianic may enter at any point, but rather the messianic impulse offers a mode of historical re-fashioning for cultural history as well. In other words, for Blake the problem becomes not simply about creating an oppositional ideology of being in the world but one of undoing the historical injustices that have led to the present circumstance, especially those involved in the figure of Milton himself.[49] As

[49] Thomas J. J. Altizier notes succinctly the stakes here for Blake: "Blake's most revolutionary vision revolves around an absolute reversal of Milton's Satan, a reversal in which Satan is envisioned as the absolute Lord and Creator…" "That reversal occurs through an absolute death, but that death in crucifixion is apocalypse itself…" "Yes, Blake is a visionary of eternal death, but an eternal death that is an apocalyptic death, and precisely so as the eternal death of Satan. Only that eternal death realizes an absolute compassion or the compassion of Christ, a compassion truly reversing all Satanic judgment and repression, but a compassion in actual apart from that reversal; hence the absolute necessity of Satan, the absolute necessity of Satan for apocalypse itself, and the primacy of Satan

history is filled with loss, a resurrection of historical failures (Milton's own feature prominently here) is therefore always a fundamental part of Blakean aesthetics. The resurrection is always already fundamentally political and therefore up for grabs by the contending parties of class society. Building on Chapter 3's exegetical reading of the *Songs*, it will be shown how the time of the now is inextricably intertwined with historical reinvestigation and rediscovery.

Such a gesture necessitates a return to history and locates the radical tradition as a real and always openly radical oppositional alternative. History and its recovery are not, however, a returning to a comfortable point in history before the new evils of capitalism and religious orthodoxy. It is not a setting right of things by setting them back, something akin to a nostalgic formulation. Rather, the position that Blake argues for is one where the questions around the organisation of the everyday are merely made visible and possible by the contrasting of history against the contemporary. As Thompson writes, Blake is arguing for "not a place at all, but a way of breaking out from received wisdom and moralism, and entering new possibilities."[50] This need not occur only through an articulation of the moment of the now, even though extra-historical notions of time make the leap into new possibilities out of the past.

Despite the attention to Blake's version of history (a history which is always around us), I will investigate the way in which Blake uses various notions of labour (broadly defined) to articulate a politics that – while acknowledging that we are historical creatures – is always attuned to providing a way out of contemporary oppression. In this regard I will focus on the metaphors of labour and production in the text, arguing that while the historical situation may not

in all apocalyptic vision, and the fuller the apocalyptic vision, the fuller the vision of Satan." Thomas J. J. Altizer, "The Revolutionary Vision of William Blake," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 37 (2009): 37.

[50] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 20.

have allowed it, Blake was fixated on advancing a redemptive politics of history that was placed firmly in the time of the now.

The dissertation closes with an analysis of the comparative strategies of Blake and Brecht. While much of the dissertation has as a central focus the comparison of the two strategies, given that each of Chapters 2 through 5 has a specific focus on either Brecht or Blake, the conclusion will provide a more thoroughgoing comparison particularly on the forms of experience that each puts forward as a means of thinking through, and beyond, contemporary dynamics.

Such an understanding of oppositional aesthetics must stretch back to its principal figures in order to understand its position today. Brought together, Brecht and Blake offer a powerful argument for a contemporary political aesthetics which both seeks to witness and to lay bare the destructive contradictions of capitalism. By laying bare they are not merely skirting around capitalism's contradictions but rather offering a powerful analysis of the system straight through its heart. Thus, it is not merely a rejection of the system, although it is most definitely that as well, but a productive attempt to both understand capital's movements, its abilities consistently to create new meanings and produce new avenues of exploitation and production, in order to make something revolutionary out of it. This criticism is always a nascent criticism which takes seriously the movements in the contemporary to express a living aesthetic.

To be clear, I am not merely reproducing here the problematics of other oppositional criticisms which retreat into those moments when they were in power or in the ascendancy. That is, I am not going back to the "Good old Times," as Benjamin once recorded a comment of Brecht's. Rather, I am arguing that these past works can provide much needed useful direction and succour at a moment when the left needs it most. Following Benjamin, the non-chronological method adopted in the dissertation (starting with Brecht, then moving to Blake, and then again in Chapters 4 and 5) mirrors my argument about history. This procedure is "constellative" in

Benjamin's sense, that is bringing both Brecht and Blake (as well as Benjamin) into a non-linear but rather constellated relationship, in which each is read in the light projected by the other. The connection to what was then, and what was before then, is dialectical in nature and a clear attempt to gather the interpreted images of Blake and Brecht, characterized and defined as they are in relation to differing historical projects (the modernist and romantic) and provide an alternate reading, very much against the grain of literary history.[51]

[51] This focus on a constellative approach is also taken up by Adorno in his "The Actuality of Philosophy," where he refers to the "to the manipulation of conceptual material by philosophy, I speak purposely of grouping and trial arrangement, of constellation and construction." See Theodore Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos* 31 (1977): 131.

Chapter 2: Brecht and the Now

A Brechtian maxim: "Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones."[52]

In this chapter I will be comparing three of Brecht's earlier texts, all three written pre-exile from Nazi Germany. I will be arguing that in *Mann ist Mann, Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthoefe, and Kuhle Wampe*, Brecht was motivated in providing responses to the key, and to varying degrees nascent, political questions/quandaries facing the socialist left of his day. Further, I will argue that rather than advance a propagandistic approach, Brecht sought to navigate these questions with a highly developed (yet itself always developing) formal aesthetic politics. While each of the three texts (two plays and a film) attempts to deal with a specific problem on its own, taken together the three share a unified and complementary response to the larger issues that confronted Brecht as a committed cultural producer. By complementary I mean that each text builds on and follows from each text that precedes it, and provides a fuller analysis of Weimar capitalism than any one single work could achieve. Although I am not arguing that these three texts represent a prescribed path on which Brecht was determinedly moving, that is, that the order of the texts necessarily had to follow the order they did, these three works nevertheless represent a coherent attempt to deal with the myriad political, social and economic problems of his time on a deeper and deeper level, and dealt with these three issues in more integrative ways – coming to terms in more direct and aggressive ways with the core problematics of the time period, as his works progressed. In this way, as I mentioned in the

[52] Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso, 1998): 121.

Introduction, following Benjamin, Brecht sought to engage radically his present to make possible a radically engaged future.

I will investigate the key problematic in each text. For *Mann ist Mann,* I will focus on the formation of what Brecht terms the "bad collective" and its relation to forming (or perhaps de-forming and then re-forming is more accurate) a new individuality and also new class formations in Weimar capitalism. I will then shift gears and focus on *Die Heilige Johanna,* a play which deals with the new class (or the ability of the system, at a time of considerable economic and social crisis, to integrate and control those whom it exploits) and its relation to the disastrous financial system. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of Brecht's first major film (as ever, in collaboration with others) *Kuhle Wampe: Oder wem gehört die Welt?* in order to show how oppositional groups must respond to this financial system which oppresses them and also how, given that this new system is a class system, must respond as a class. Brecht responds, in light of these earlier works, in ways that subvert the system he analyses, while also going through it.

In these texts Brecht addresses dynamics that capitalism itself creates on both an immediate and largely historical scale, its crises and its political responses (most important here are the rise of fascism in terms of the social construction of the modern individual/class and the breakdown/reconfiguration of the capitalist order, and the appropriate political action needed to halt it and construct a viable socialist alternative). While later in the dissertation I will be examining Brecht's use of history, here I will be exploring how Brecht constructs an aesthetic politics of the now. These three texts are deeply complex investigations of the contemporary moment and all three in their own way provide not merely a critique of Brecht's own society but speak to a deep-seeded interest, or, more appropriately, opposition to the current order. For this, it was necessary for Brecht to understand the motives and potentials of what this world could

produce. In *Mann ist Mann,* as I will present shortly, this is the menacing figure of the "bad collective" and the uses and abuses of its continued reproduction.

***Mann ist Mann*: The Right Question and the Precision of Time**

Despite the fact that Benjamin wrote the words that open this chapter as late as 1931, I would like to argue that they apply equally well to Brecht before his oft-cited transformation into a full-fledged Marxist thinker, however overblown this transformation is made out to be.[53] I believe there is a constant in Brecht, at the very least from the point of the first productions of *Mann ist Mann* onwards, to involve himself wholeheartedly in an exhaustive, and at times exhausting, experiment of the present. This experiment begins with an understanding of the contemporary moment, but the notion of experiment involves a far more thoroughgoing appreciation and playing with the often under-appreciated and under-theorized impulses that are necessary in maintenance of the contemporary order. This exercise, this practice, is not one which ends at any one point in Brecht's life's but rather continues until the end of his work.[54]

[53] This is a serious problem in Brecht scholarship. Efforts have been made to locate the specific point in Brecht's political development when his political outlook became Marxist. The fault in this investigation seems to be the placing of a specific point in time that Brecht read Marx's works. Rather, I would like to shift focus from this to a more complex view of this process, a view which sees Marxism not as a formal endpoint that one arrives at, but rather a process which helps to make sense of one's society. Brecht himself seemed to share in this outlook as noted when he states that "When I read Marx I understood more deeply my own work…this man Marx was the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across." Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1978): 24-25. This remark suggests Brecht was at the very least already posing those questions that Marx's work can inspire, but also make sense of. Also, Brecht's comment that he hadn't as of yet found the spectators for his plays is in some way substantiated in that Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*, along with other early, were often dismissed as a "satirical polemic against bourgeois value systems." See Dorothee Ostmeier, "The Rhetorics of Erasure: Cloud and Moon in Brecht's Poetic and Political Texts of the Twenties and Early Thirties," *German Studies Review* 23 (2000): 275.

[54] Fredric Jameson has very usefully referred to a "Brechtian doctrine of activity" which is similar to what I am describing here. It is particularly apt, given its Luxembourgist connotations, something which Brecht would have himself been very sympathetic to. See Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 4.

Evidence of this preoccupation with the contemporary moment is perhaps no more clearly present than in the full title of *Mann ist Mann*. In its entirety it reads *Die Verwandlung des Packers Galy Gay in den Militaerbaracken von Kilkoa im Jahre neunzehnhundertfuenfundzwanzig*.[55] The full script version, including the exact date of 1925, denotes the intentional laying down of a marker of time. This suggests precision in a specific moment in time above all else. The inexact qualifier "Packer" – which shares the exact spelling and inexact meaning of the English equivalent – stands in contrast with such an explicit moment. When given the attention it deserves, the term Packer is translated as "Dockarbeiter" or, in English, "Stevedore" or "Docker." This is an interpretation of exactitude, losing the broad generality which the term Packer entails, and such a translation provides an opportunity for the audience member/reader to get her head around the social codes and locations involved in the popular imagination of such a profession. The sense of specificity in the space and time of continual change – that is, who one is, for whom one is, and where one stands in relation to others – will become the central dialectical relation in Brecht's play. Indeed, there are many instances throughout Brecht's works where the predominance and overt highlighting of the exact intervention, particularly as regards specific dates, is apparent, and I will endeavour to show this in each of the Brecht chapters. *Mann ist Mann*, which Brecht once admitted he had rewritten no

[55] The English translation of the subtitle reads *The transformation of the packer Galy Gay in the military Cantonment of Kilkoa during the year nineteen hundred and twenty five.*

less than ten times,[56] provides a fruitful starting point as the history of this play and its various productions mirrors the history of the development of Brecht's Marxist aesthetic praxis.[57]

Let us then begin with perhaps the most prevalent reading of the play. As has been the case in many other non-materialist interpretations of avowedly materialist texts, critics have (either willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously) attempted to extract the class politics out of Brecht's early work and to reinforce the image of the playwright as being essentially an operator in formal matters. An example of this can be found in the following:

> Since all things in nature change, it may be assumed that man is also changeable and capable of being changed, capable even of changing himself. ...The issue, as Brecht sees it, is much more pragmatic; it is a matter of sizing up situations in terms of flux, of tracing the course of events by which change manifests itself, and then of gauging the possibilities (including those in human nature itself) for alteration. In short, the problem of change, measured by its effects, becomes the problem of method – of selecting the proper means for controlling the direction of change in order to bring about the results one desires.[58]

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[56] "I feel myself I must still, must always, learn. From what I learned from the audience that saw it, I rewrote *Mann ist Mann* ten times, and presented it at different times and in different ways – for example, in Darmstadt in 1926, at the Berlin Volksbuehne in 1927, at the Berlin Federal Theatre in 1929. We worked with different means and in different strata of society. These experiments were theatrical performances meant not so much for the spectator as for those who were engaged in the performance. It was, so to speak, art for the producer, not art for the consumer." Bertolt Brecht, *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993), Band 22.2: 943.

[57] What is perhaps interesting in this regard is that there is that Brecht encouraged others to make concrete interventions with the play as well. As Brecht wrote in 1936 in regards to an interest from London in re-staging the play in Nazi Germany, "Die Parabel *Mann ist Mann* kann ohne grosse Muehe konkretisiert werden. Die Verwandlung des Kleinbuergers Galy gay in eine "menschliche Kampfmaschine" kann statt in Indien in Deutschland spielen. Die Sammlung der Armee zu kilkoa kann in den Parteitag der NSDAP zu Nurnberg verwandelt werden. Die Stelle des Elefanten Billy Humph kann ein gestohlenes, nunmehr der SA gehoerendes Privatauto einnehmen. Der Einbruch kann statt in den Tempel des Herrn Wang in den Laden eines juedischen Troedlers erfolgen. Jip wuerde dann als arischer Geschaeftsteilhaber von dem Kraemer angestellt. Das Verbot sichtbarer Beschaedigungen juedischer Geschaefte waere mit der Anwesenheit englicher Journalisten zu begruenden." Brecht, *Werke*, Band 24: 51.

[58] Leroy Shaw, *The Playwright and Historical Change: Dramatic Strategies in Brecht, Hauptmann, Kaiser and Wedekind* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970): 146-7. This analysis of the play is also (albeit more adroitly and complexly) offered by Jan Knopf in his "Die Austauschbarkeit Individualitaet" section on *Mann ist Mann.* See Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch I: Stuecke*, (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2002): 156. A further criticism of the type of position held by Shaw is advanced by Frederic Jameson when discussing Manipulation theory.

From this passage, seasoned with an oddly Aristotelian flavour given Brecht's pronounced aversion to this in his statements on Epic Theatre, one could be misled into thinking that the lead character of the play, Galy Gay, is the classical "universal" figure, existing at any time and in any place. Change here is a concern not of content, of a specific type of determined historical change, but an abstracted one of methodology. The play though offers several ways in which this abstracted reading is bucked by the motivations and, importantly, pressures of change in the text and its production. Not least significant in this regard is the role of Widow Leocadia Begbick, a key character in the play and the play's only female character. It is interesting to note here that Begbick is the only character in the play who operates under her (or his) own rules and volitions (as much as that is possible given the military settings). Whereas all the male characters in, as a common English translation of the title goes, "A Man's a Man," are representative of the inability to shape their own lives, Begbick, as Margaret Setje-Eilers notes, "remains paradoxically stable in each version." Begbick "resists manipulation and influences others for her purposes."[59] In this way, the form of change or remodeling of humanity that the play offers is specifically gendered.[60] Our notions of agency and mobility are constantly being confronted by changing notions of life in a world dominated by gender norms.

Important to note in the following is the move away from abstraction. Jameson notes that "Manipulation theory implies a psychology, but this is all very well and good: Brecht taught us that under the right circumstances you could remake anybody over into anything you liked (*Mann ist Mann*), only he insisted on the situation and the raw materials fully as much or more than on the techniques." See Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 140-141.

[59] Margaret Setje-Eilers, "A Man's a Man, but What about Woman? Widow Leocadia Begbick in Bertolt Brecht's Play (1926-2006)," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 24 (2008): 97. Indeed, Setje will link the peculiar position of Begbick's power in the film to growing achievements for feminists during the Weimar period as an explanation for Begbick strength in the play.

[60] Adding to this, before Galy Gay leaves, his wife assures him that she will not leave the kitchen so as not to be in danger of coming into contact. Yet as we learn, it is Galy Gay, not his wife, who is in danger. Here the gendered version of the title – it is not Mensch ist Mensch or a Person's a Person – suggests that men are more in danger than women if they are determined to not act upon their interests.

The play is further brought down to earth in that we learn that what sets Galy Gay out on the path to becoming re-functioned is a concrete pursuit of material goods, specifically a fish for the family's dinner. This basic impetus to the action in the play has more or less been lost for critical engagement. The specificity of the position not only of worker but yet again of the task of buying food is central in assessing the role of the lead character. The materiality of the act, and the importance of that materiality in determining or limiting direction in the unravelling of the play, is key. In this regard it is useful to recall one of Brecht's most famous aphorisms, "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann die Morale (First comes eating, then morals)." It is first in the basic act of reproducing himself and surviving that Galy Gay will be subject to his transformation. In this regard, his class position is also vital in analysing his unenviable, but explainable, shift in persona. It is a simple motivation, yet one that determines his action and that of those around him.

While this may resemble a straightforward fulfillment of the oft vulgarized and highly static base/superstructure metaphor – whereby the economy determines all aspects of politics and human emotions – one should be cautious about such an interpretation. I am dealing with something more important in the Brechtian aesthetic than the foregrounding of materiality, although this is fundamental to Brecht's aesthetics. It is the foregrounding of precision (which will propel Brecht to experiment in order to meet this level of exactitude) that is the focus. Precision here is the fullest understanding of a moment in time which necessitates a full-blown process of continual reinvestigation of the bare grounds on which Brecht as a cultural producer stands, but also of the ground upon which we all stand. The process itself, due to its historical specificities, will never allow for a moment of stasis. The aesthetic which Brecht seeks to shape will be necessarily in flux. At a later stage in Brecht's cultural production, when a fuller and deeper understanding of Marxism forces him to rethink his political trajectory (most obvious here

is the rewriting of the play *Die Dreigroschenoper* into novel form), he will revisit his earlier work in order to make the texts more prescient for contemporary interventions. Yet what will stick with Brecht will be this always already moment of precision or accuracy at a temporal and spatial point when, paradoxically, it is at its most elusive, i.e. *in medias res*.

Due to this positioning, the task of the aesthetic producer must therefore be quick, but open to specific political developments and revisions. For this reason, the *Mann ist Mann* document (i.e. the physical text) is that which is perhaps the least relevant for a Brechtian aesthetic. It is this new form of aesthetic response that Walter Benjamin argued was so difficult for professional theatre reviewers to get their collective heads around, a reading which I will address shortly. Thus, the first productions of the play bear the mark of a working-class movement that had been under the threat of imperialism and militarism, and would soon be confronted with their uglier sibling, Nazism. The question for Brecht is how could such a situation arise? What would make the victory of such a "movement" possible and realisable? While it would be dangerous to state that Nazism was a fait accompli as early as 1923 or even 1926, Brecht was clearly grappling with the implications of the potential for such a movement, and these implications were later made the guiding principle of the play. Brecht writes:

> I turned to the comedy *Man Equals Man* with particular apprehension. Here again I had a socially negative hero who was by no means unsympathetically treated. The play's theme is the false, bad collective (the "gang") and its powers of attraction, the same collectivity which Hitler and his backers were even then in the process of recruiting by an exploitation of the petty-bourgeoisie's vague longing for the historically timely, genuinely social collectivity of the workers. Before me were two versions, the one performed at the Berlin Volksbuehne in 1928 and the other at the Berlin Staatstheater in 1931. I decided to restore the earlier version, where Galy Gay captures the mountain fortress of Sir El-Djower. In 1931 I had allowed the play to end with the great dismantling operation, having been

> unable to see any way of giving a negative character to the hero's growth within the collectivity. I decided to leave that growth undescribed.[61]

Brecht began writing the earliest version of the play shortly after the First World War in 1919, and the impulse for writing a play about a passive character who is co-opted and transformed into a "menschliche Kampfsmachine" (human fighting machine)[62] is not difficult, at least in hindsight, to ascertain.[63] Yet the first production of the play comes only in 1926 when a new "dangerous affair" was rearing its head, something which Brecht himself was aware of. Yet what should interest us most in the quote above is the notion of "schlechte Kollektiv," or the bad collective, which has interests that run counter to those of the working class but could also transform these people who, as Galy Gay, "can't say no." In this sense Brecht's play is a valuable heuristic model and parable, a piece that from its very beginning allows itself to act out the spoken and silent moments in which the potentials of the future, but more importantly of the present, are to be made known.[64] It is for this reason – that the present is always with us but never

[61] This translation can be found in Douglas Robinson's *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature: Tolstoy, Shklovsy, Brecht* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 2008): 245. The original German reads as follows: "An die Lektuere des Lustspiels *Mann ist Mann* machte ich mich mit besonderen Befuerchtungen. Auch hier hatte ich wieder einen sozial negativen Helden, der nicht ohne Sympathie behandelt war. Das Problem des Stückes ist das falsche, schlechte Kollektiv (*der Bande*) und seine Verfuehrungskraft, jenes Kollektiv, das in diesen Jahren Hitler und seine Geldgeber rekrutieren, das unbestimmte Verlagen der Kleinbürger nach dem geschichtlich reifen, echten sozialen Kollektiv der Arbeiter ausbeutend. Es lagen zwei Fassungen vor, die in 1928 in der Berliner Volksbühne und die 1931 am Berliner Staatstheater gespielte. Wiederherzustellen, fand ich, war die erste Fassung, in der Galy Gay die Bergfestung Sir el Dchowr erobert. Ich hatte 1931 das Stueck nach dem grossen Montageakt enden lassen, da ich keine Möglichkeit sah, dem Wachsum des helden im Kollektiv einen negativen Charakter zu verleihen. So hatte ich lieber auf die Beschreibung des Wachtums verzichtet." See Brecht, *Werke*, Band. 23: 244-5.

[62] The reference to the "menschliche Kampfmaschine" is the description given to Galy Gay at the end of the play (but before the elephant calf). See Brecht, *Werke*, Band 2: 157.

[63] It is also important to note, as Kate Elswit argues, that the reassembly of the character Galy Gay is similar to the way in which many "disfigured" WWI veterans were rebuilt with prosthetics after the war. See Kate Elswit, *The Some of the Parts: Prosthesis and Function in Bertolt Brecht, Oskar Schlemmer, and Kurt Jooss*, Modern Drama 51 (2008): 389-410.

[64] I am using the notion of the unspoken or silence as that expressed by Pierre Macherey a notion which attempts to get at what a work "refuses to say" or "what a work cannot say." See Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978): 87.

fully understood nor understandable – that Brecht relies on many levels of experimentation and revision. One cannot "know" the ground upon which one stands, and so chances need to be taken.

This was something that Walter Benjamin understood very well. Benjamin was, of course, a very significant analyst of the play in its early 1930's iterations, and was unequivocal in his positive reading of the play. However, what I would like to note specifically about Benjamin's view of these versions of the play is the emphasis on understanding the key contradictions and "newness" of the piece. Benjamin, in his "What is Epic Theatre?" argues for the importance of that understanding and presentation in *Mann ist Mann*. He writes:

> The plays of a Toller or a Lampel do not take this detour [via Epic Theatre]; exactly like the works of German pseudo-classicism, they "award primacy to the idea, and all the time make the spectator desire a specific aim, creating, as it were, an ever-increasing demand for the supply". Such writers attack the conditions in which we live from the outside; Brecht lets the conditions speak for themselves, so that they confront each other dialectically. Their various elements are played off logically against one another. The docker Galy Gay in Brecht's A Man's a Man is like an empty stage on which the contradictions of our society are acted out.[65]

Benjamin's reading of *Mann ist Mann* is written in the context of an analysis of Epic Theatre as a whole, and his reading is inevitable as the central tenets of this aesthetic approach are articulated thoroughly in the play.[66] The key contribution of Brecht is an attempt to do what others do not, that is, attack the conditions in which we live from the inside in order to some degree to be

[65] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 8.
[66] What is interesting to note here is that while professional critics attacked Brecht, they also sought to make it difficult for his supporters to be heard in defending the merits of his play. This included Benjamin himself, whose piece "What is Epic Theatre?" was blocked from being published by, among others, no less a figure than Siegfried Kracauer. See Erdmut Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 114.

useful. This approach to cultural production is one which asks us to think differently our connection to the "real." As Terry Eagleton writes:

> Brecht's practice is not to dispel the miasma of "false consciousness" so that we may "fix" the object as it really is; it is to persuade us into living a new discursive and practical relation to the real. "Rationality" for Brecht is thus indissociable from scepticism, experiment, refusal and subversion.[67]

The idea of not attempting to fix the object, or perhaps for our purposes the object could be read as a moment in time, is vital in understanding how the Brechtian aesthetic seeks not to capture an overall picture, but to understand a dialectical image of capitalism. The refusal to which Eagleton refers represents what is at stake in the play. Galy Gay is introduced to us at the very outset as a man "who can't say no" and for this he must work through the imperatives that capitalism and war place upon him, not by chance or exception but rather by the fullest of determinations, impulses and rules. The inability to say no is what makes the structural contradictions absorb Galy Gay so definitively, rendering him vulnerable to the unique demands and general rules of the dominant societal impulses. Benjamin again: "And so it happens that the wise proletarian Galy Gay, the man who keeps himself to himself, agrees to join the berserk ranks of the British colonial army, thereby consenting to the denial of his own wisdom."[68]

In stressing the class position of the lead character, Benjamin employs and grounds his argument with a distinct notion of contemporality here. The contemporary moment manifests itself (always already) in the relationship between the audience and a politicisation of the cultural producer. This itself is made possible only through a combination of the analysis/interpretation of

[67] Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, Verso, 1994): 85.
[68] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 9.

the contemporary moment and the form of theatre put forward by Brecht.[69] Astrid Oesmann has commented on the centrality of the question of positionality in her 2005 book *Staging History: Brecht's Social Concepts of Ideology*. In it she writes:

> This vision of social existence informs Brecht's changing political vision and becomes a formative element in his teaching plays, in which every question is negotiated in a strictly defined space. This renders political problems as questions of social positioning: "Wo stehst du und wie stehst du zu uns?" (Where do you stand and how do you stand toward us?).[70]

The question of where one stands in relation to the other, both in terms of an individual to a social group, or one social group to another, is fundamental to Brecht's Epic Theatre. The posing of the question of this relationship gets at the heart of Brecht's politics and aesthetics.

Brecht's interest here is to design an ongoing project that will most clearly illuminate the current historical moment in which he operates. This project is larger than any one moment, and becomes a philosophy of agency. As Brecht noted on this play:

> It does not make the hero the victim of an inevitable fate, nor does it wish to make the spectator the victim, so to speak, of a hypnotic experience in the theatre. In fact, it has a purpose of "teaching" of the spectator a certain quite practical attitude; we have to make it

[69] "Brecht's theatre, Benjamin now argued in "What is Epic Theatre? (1)," changed the function of theatre from entertainment to knowledge, whereby the political thesis-play was superseded. This change exploded at a stroke the "functional relationship between stage and public, text and performance, direction and actor." Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 112.

[70] Astrid Oesmann, *Staging History: Brecht's Social Concepts of Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York, 2005): 95. An important note to make here is that there is a growing refusal or partial rejection in recent Brechtian scholarship which argues, as I do here, that rather than provide a periodisation of Brecht – the experimental Brecht, Brecht in exile - or even to try and locate or dissect the precise moment when Brecht has reached Marxism, Brecht's works are full of continuities and are better judged as a unity of central ideas and unfolding practices.

> possible for him to take a critical attitude while he is in the theatre (as opposed to a subjective attitude of becoming completely "entangled" in what is going on).[71]

Behind this is an entire aesthetic philosophy trained towards agency, whereby one attempts to delve as deeply as possible into our social situation and from that position articulate a politics from which we can make visible to a larger audience the current state we find ourselves in. Brecht's cultural project (because it suggests it is larger than a project for theatre) is obliged to create formal techniques designed to show how individuals and collectives are socially/economically structured and that how they can act (or, as is more common in Brecht, fail to act) is not pre-determined, and is decisive for social outcomes.[72] This theatre of the now (or, alternatively, a political aesthetics of the now) must be continually updated (as societies change so must oppositional movements) and be open to experimentation and the intricate materiality of the current historical moment.

Yet the foregrounding of materiality in *Mann ist Mann* and the development of Epic Theatre are deeply intertwined.[73] What one also loses in "an abstracted Brecht" is a fuller understanding of the piece and the greater political impetus of the play. Through the character

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[71] Brecht, *Werke*, Band 22.2: 941.

[72] On the question of Galy Gay's own repeated transformations, Eugene Lunn notes that this is evidence that "it would be anachronistic to see him as alienated from himself in these roles: his "self" is in each of the transformations." The point here is that there is great potential in such a transformation, "total changeability encourages the hope that things can be very different. The issue for Brecht was not any inevitable psychic depersonalization in the modern, collectivist age—a common traditionalist reading of the theory of alienation—but the question of how technology is used and to whose advantage." See Eugene Lunn, "Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács," *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 27.

[73] Brecht would remark that his first full Epic Theatre text is in fact *Mann ist Mann*. "Ja, diese Theorie vom epischen Drama ist allerdings von uns. Wir haben auch versucht, einige epische Dramen herzustellen. Ich habe *Mann ist Mann*, Bronnen hat den *Ostpolzug* und die Fleisser hat ihre Ingolstaedter Dramen in epischer Technik verfasst. Aber die versuche, episches Drama herzustellen, sind schon viel frueher dagewesen. Wann began sie? Sie begannen zu der Zeit, wo der Wissenschaft ihren grossen Start hatte, im vorigen Jahrhundert. Die anfaenge des Naturalismus waren die Anfaenge des Epischen Dramas in Europa." Brecht, *Werke*, Band 21: 273.

Begbick, the play offers the reader a midway summary of what Brecht would like the audience to take from the piece. The last four lines of her "Zwischenspruch" read as follows:

> Herr Bertolt Brecht hopes you'll see the ground on which you stand
> Slither between your toes like shifting sand
> So that the case of Galy Gay the porter makes you aware
> Life on this earth is a hazardous affair.[74]

These four lines offer two different yet possible avenues for reading Brecht's work. The first two lines seem to match very neatly the reading of the play which focuses only on an abstracting changing of humanity. "The ground on which you stand / Slither between your toes like shifting sand,"[75] is akin to the unrelenting change that is so much the part and parcel of human existence. But this reading only fits neatly if we stop there. The last two lines, however, point towards something decidedly less abstract. "So that the case of the porter Galy Gay will make you aware / Life on this earth is a dangerous affair." These last two lines bring us down from the abstract to the specific, which is what I would argue is a necessary turn for Brecht. These last two lines bring us into the realm of history, and of one's precise historical moment and the stakes involved for its main actors. This is the chief point of the bad collective. There is simply no other option but to confront the bad collective for what it is and those who militate against it, and to examine the ways in which this entity seeks to multiply itself, manipulate contemporary experience (and forms of experience), and ward off other alternatives in order to meet its own needs. Not only

[74] Bertolt Brecht, *Man Equals Man and The Elephant Calf* (New York: Arcade, 2000): 38.
[75] This dialectic relationship is reflected in the staging of the actors. As Olga Taxidou notes in her analysis of Mei Lan-fang, a Chinese actor who influenced Brecht at an early stage. She notes: "In the Brechtian world this dialectic is never fully resolved and points towards an endless "changeability" as the actor's body denotes 'this way of changing.'" Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 142.

must the bad collective reproduce itself, it must consume anything that provides for a possibility that another form of being in the world can exist.

If we take Brecht's use of "hazardous" seriously here, the abstracted reading of the play comes off as inadequate. By shifting discussion from merely the malleability of humans to the specific historical conditions of the play's production, we are obliged to take into consideration Brecht's interventionist strategy. In this regard, the vaguely unspecific nature of Galy Gay (he is an empty vessel, besides the markers mentioned earlier) poses a difficult question for Marxist analysis, that is how does capitalism not merely reproduce workers for its own purposes, but then reproduce differently on disparate trajectories? Brecht's play is not an abstract interpretation of the general re-formation of humans but rather of the potential for the capitalist class to make workers into killing machines (this is the bad collective making true on Brecht's promise that life is dangerous).[76] The position of worker, however, needs to be highlighted here. As opposed to earlier forms of relatively fixed identities based on one's work, the modern worker in capital's logic must re-imagine herself and the way in which she "fits" into the market. In this sense Galy Gay's transformation is mirrored by capitalism's drives, crises and needs. This is a structured "reassembling," wherein one aimed to be "the right man in the right place, '*der rechte Mann am rechten Platz*' (Benjamin's own adaptation of a Taylorist catchphrase)." This restructuring bears serious similarities to the problems of "re-functioning" for theatrical and cinematic production, as both Brigid Doherty and Lucia Ruprecht note throughout in their useful essays.[77] I needn't have

[76] Marc Silberman sees this in more purely economic class terms. He writes: "Galy Gay in Man Equals Man is the most extreme example of this class mobility. He has no individual personality but conforms to the changing circumstances around him because he simply cannot say no." Marc Silberman, "Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy," *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 79 (2012): 178.
[77] Brigid Doherty, "Test and Gestus in Brecht and Benjamin," *MLN* 115 (2000): 442-481. Lucia Ruprecht further argues that the use of Gestus in the play is also evident in shaping and being shaped by "the gestural aesthetic of silent film," and Brecht was involved in using video in his many productions of the play. Lucia Ruprecht, "Ambivalent Agency: Gestural Performances of Hands in Weimar Dance and Film," *A Journal of Germanic Studies* 46 (2010): 271.

the same purpose, but if the nature of capital is to refashion completely the specific class structure, the oppositional cultural response must itself respond. In this way, this response is fundamentally linked with Brecht's ability and desire to make an intervention. This is what makes Brecht's theatre so fundamentally political, even in the earlier, "non-Marxist," phase. The reactions against this political rethinking of the theatre were found in Brecht's own time, as seen in the critical reaction to the 1931 production (but not, if we believe Benjamin, the audiences), as the critics were either unable and/or unwilling to locate the real importance of the play, notably as they sought to maintain cultural production's safe distance from the now. Benjamin articulates this in his analysis of *Mann ist Mann*:

> For the difficulties encountered by epic theatre in achieving recognition are, after all, nothing other than an expression of its closeness to real life, while theory languishes in the Babylonian exile of a praxis which has nothing to do with the way we live.[78]

Benjamin's emphasis on the "closeness to real life" embodies more than a politics of intervention, it must be said. Yet without an ultimate location/theatre/stadium wherein the importance of intervention is taken into account, the potential of this closeness will remain unresolved.

The fulfilling of this potential is of course no simple business and something I shall address shortly. Suffice it to say, however, that the intervention, in order for it to be meaningful, requires a deep understanding of the situation one is in. To this end, as times changed, Brecht relied heavily on a sustained interrogation and re-examination of his work. This constant re-examination of one's own work further belies a theory and practice of production that

[78] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 3.

undermines the notion of a work of art being a totality in itself and forms of prescriptive practice. Terry Eagleton very usefully notes that Brecht offers a "suggestive model[] for the notion of the literary text as practice rather than object."[79] The emphasizing of the notion of ongoing process in a creative piece as opposed to a reified, static text may seem, in today's conjuncture at least, a less than dramatic statement. In Brecht's own time the situation could not have been more different, especially so for a cultural producer (and such an influential one) of the left. While visiting Brecht in exile in Denmark, Benjamin notes Brecht's reaction to the growing influence of Stalinist literary policy. Dogmatic socialist realists, Brecht contends,

> …are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what's going to come out. And they themselves don't want to produce. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.[80]

There is a deep connection that exists between Brecht's aesthetic politics of the now and the notion of production that he uses in the above passage. While this notion of production is influenced by his visits to the Soviet Union in the 1930s,[81] I would argue that Brecht was developing this concept earlier, as evidenced by his work with *Mann ist Mann*. Important in this regard is how production is coterminous with a specific cultural labour/work process, which

[79] Terry Eagleton, "Ideology, Fiction, Narrative," *Social Text* 2 (1979): 66.
[80] Brecht in Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* 118.
[81] It is important to note Brecht's politics aesthetics were influenced by Sergei Tretjakov, who as Eugene Lunn notes, also "was developing…an aesthetics of "production" from which Brecht would learn in formulating his own Marxist cultural theories in the 1930s." See Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982): 102. It should be noted that Brecht was mutually admired by Tretjakov, and the two had been planning a production of *Die Heilige Johanna* in the Soviet Union, although that production never was produced. See David Pike, *Lukacs and Brecht* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985): 200.

demands of the producer a continual self-reflexivity.[82] Yet the production was not univocal – that is, it was not one of the producer directed towards the audience. In order for production to be successful it must also make the most of the productive capacities of the audience involved. In this way the audience produces itself and produces part of its own history. This process rejects the naturalistic passive audience – (in the field of language studies this passive process is reminiscent of Valentin Volosinov's notion of *uniaccentuality* – a process which extinguishes the way in which signs are struggled over by all social actors) as opposed to Brecht's theatre, which acknowledges the agency of the audience (this would be similar to Volosinov's corresponding concept of the *multiaccentual* sign – "a sign that maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development"[83]) and is directed towards a multi-vocal response. In this way production for Brecht centres on showing how audiences might actively produce themselves and their history (interestingly, Brecht noted that a particular audience also included the actors involved in this performance). History, while structured, cannot be known in advance, since history itself is always open-ended.

Brecht was clearly not averse to experimentation and continually rethinking his work. In fact, as aforementioned, *Mann ist Mann* went through at least ten rewrites, and continually revised the work in order to be able address the current conjuncture as directly as possible. Suggestively, Brecht also considered renaming the subtitle for the play to match the year it was presented – for example, the transformation of the packer Galy Gay in the military barracks of

[82] As Lunn notes specifically on *Mann ist Mann* "Brecht's theatre became an experimental self-reflexive workshop in which humans and social reality were shown to be constructions capable of being "reassembled" (ummontiert)." Lunn, 103. While I disagree slightly with Lunn's chronology, I am sympathetic to his focus on production. He continues: "Soon after working out the rudiments of a new theatre, Brecht began to develop (after 1928) a conception of "production aesthetics", which he formed with a Marxism filtered through constructivist lenses: e.g., he viewed art as an aspect of material labour; as a construction based on the formal principle of technological modes of production, such as montage; and as an activity which was tied to new mechanical media, such as film and radio." Lunn, 103.
[83] See Valentin Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 23.

Kilkoa in the year 1925 (or 1926 or 1930 depending on the year of the performance). This reworking was not an empty gesture. Besides the continual rewriting, Brecht showed the play to audiences of different social classes in an effort to understand as deeply as possible the structures of contemporary society and the place for his contribution in relation to them, which manifested also in questioning the appropriate form of intervention into the social order. In order to reach a wider audience, Brecht produced a radio version of the play, broadcast in 1927. What's more, on the basis of this work Brecht was moved to change the form of the play from a *lustspiel* or comedy,[84] to what Benjamin refers to as a parable.[85] This is especially interesting as the switch speaks to Brecht's changing response to the rise of fascism, the threat of which was obviously much clearer in 1930. Where the need was more urgent, Brecht opted for the more direct method of a Lehrstuck (or didactic learning piece) in order to structure his intervention.

Despite the many revisions, what Brecht took seriously throughout the whole project was the development of the "new man" (sic). Rather than assuming an audience, a fault he analysed in the modern theatre of the time, Brecht attempted to work through modern society in order to engage with an audience which would question and mobilise around these developments. In awe of the modern sports spectator, Brecht sought to realise a cultural space where the audience's reaction was to question what they were seeing rather than be simple consumers and passive in

[84] Brecht would come back to the comic form in other circumstances, especially in his exile plays. There he began to use comedy as distancing effects, linked with the almost incomprehensible devastation of the post war-era. This is a politicized comedy, as Marc Silberman notes: "Brecht's experiments sought to develop a kind of thinking that can understand the process of historical change and the changeability of human behavior. Naturally, he understood human behavior to be historically contingent, neither universal nor anthropologically based. Because the comic depends on the incongruous, the paradoxical, and the absurd in behavior and situations, it generates that distance so crucial to Brecht's aesthetic strategies: opening up a space for historical cognition while rendering visible the contradictions in society that make the status quo impossible. This is comedy in the service of disillusionment." Marc Silberman, "Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy," 185.
[85] Doherty, "Test and Gestus," 448.

reception. Brecht's cultural politics of production acknowledged the *multiaccentuality* involved in his theatrical practice.

Given this alternate strategy of reading *Mann ist Mann*, it is useful to suggest an answer to the problem of the bad collective. In 1931, at around the same time that Brecht was putting on the production of *Mann ist Mann* that so influenced Benjamin, Brecht was heavily involved in the production of the film *Kuhle Wampe, Wem gehört die Welt?*. In this film we see an alternative to the bad collective as it is depicted in *Mann ist Mann.* This is also an intervention beyond abstraction. *Mann ist Mann* calls for practical consideration based upon the needs and limits of a contemporary moment. Drawn to its conclusion, as Bert Cardullo argues, it necessitates a response to the system. Cardullo notes: "A change for the worse, or no change at all in already bad conditions, as in *Mann ist Mann,* can only lead ultimately to further deterioration in the relations among men. Unless, that is, *a man* takes action."[86]

Because Brecht seeks to hammer the current situation on the head, the response to any historical moment must be an accurate one. There is no way in which looseness can be allowed to slip into the precise task of meeting the historical conjuncture with a political aesthetic. All political debates of progressive change are subject to the determination, or framing, of a political historical moment. Even the supposed logic of the societal structure is to be ruthlessly examined. In this regard we have the problems that I will be dealing with in this chapter – of exactitude and generality, of precision and flexibility, of recourse to specific events and the simultaneous evocation of broad struggle, of a Marxist aesthetic science of sorts, and of making the problems of the individual worker the problem of every worker.

[86] Bert Cardullo, "A World in Transition: A Study of Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*," *The German Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 59 (1984): 263.

All of this makes the notes of Walter Benjamin on *Mann ist Mann* very important, given that he would have seen the production in its various opening stages, as well as in 1931. Benjamin was in this regard perhaps Brecht's greatest reader, and his ability to carefully parse out Brecht's work can only with difficulty be overstated. The work during this period was marked by a crucial experimentation meant to deal concretely with the intense challenges that were presented to the working-class movement of the time, and not to fall into the trap of German Social Democracy. And *Mann ist Mann* is a play that is specifically attuned to begin a project that could understand and respond to these challenges.

The Knowing *Johanna*

Because I praised the useful, which
In my day was considered base
Because I battled against all religions
Because I fought oppression or
For another reason[87]

As with *Mann ist Mann*, there has been an approach to interpreting Brecht's work which attempts to abstract it from the intense materiality in which it is based. By rejecting such an approach, I am not suggesting the impossibility of locating or positing a philosophy of Brecht, nor am I disputing the presence of a Brechtian method, a topic made mostly clearly in Frederic Jameson's excellent offering. Rather, I am arguing that to isolate Brecht from the political nature of his project and to remove the connections to his own time, place, and strategic imperatives (to be useful, for instance) is to obfuscate and misunderstand both the nature and potential of his

[87] Bertolt Brecht, "Why Should My Name Be Mentioned?," in *Collected Poems, Poems 1913 – 1956,* edited by John Willett and Ralph Mannheim (London: Methuen, 1979): 264.

work.[88] While the opposite approach has been largely confined to non-materialist theories and criticisms, another version of this approach has been advanced by professed materialist theorists.

This vein of criticism has sought to view the play (and others at the time) as a distilled explication of the workings of capitalism, and, because the explication was insufficient, Brecht failed (usefully or unusefully) in its chief pursuit. In part, such explanations have been sourced from Brecht's biography. The narrative runs that during the period of 1926-1929 Brecht began to study Marxism with the noted theorist Karl Korsch, author of the renowned, *Marxism and Philosophy*, and that through these studies Brecht became a Marxist.[89] That Korsch had a profound effect on Brecht's formulation and conception of Marxist economics should not be in dispute. The problem, I believe, runs when the suggestion becomes that through his work with Korsch, Brecht on the one hand "found Marxism" and that, as a result, he decided that it was necessary to teach Marxian economics on stage.[90] As Jameson notes, the play "has so often been taken as Brecht's most comprehensive initiation into Marxian analysis."[91] This has also, it has

[88] In opposition to this argument, and while I would take issue with the heavy handed nature of the claim, there is something very important to defend in Patty Lee Parmalee's argument that: "*St. Joan of the Stockyards*, the first major play since *A Man's a Man*, is in every sense the culmination of Brecht's early work." Patty Lee Parmalee, *Brecht's America* (Miami: Ohio State University Press, 1981): 244.

[89] This argument, while well rehearsed, is put forward in various ways. Mark Clark puts it forward here: On the notion that Brecht "found Marxism" "In the early 1930s Brecht not only reinterpreted his earlier plays through a Marxist lens, but also wrote a series of *Lehrstuecke* or didactic plays, which were meant to be models of political commitment for children." Mark W. Clark, *Beyond Catastrophe: German Intellectuals and Cultural Renewal after World War II, 1945 – 1955* (Oxford: Lexington, 2006): 132.

[90] Another vital moment in Brecht's life seems to have been witnessing first hand a worker's demonstration, although there is little attention paid to this. As a group of Communists protested a ban on public meetings, Brecht witnessed the violence meted out by the police response while at the apartment of his friend Fritz Sternberg. Sternberg writes: "As far as we could make out, these people were not armed. The police fired repeatedly. We thought at first that they were firing warning-shots. Then we saw several of the demonstrators falling, and later being carried away on stretchers. At that time, as far as I remember, there were more than twenty dead among the demonstrators in Berlin. When Brecht heard the shots and saw that people were being hit, he went whiter in the face than I had ever seen him before in my life. I believe it was not least this experience which drove him ever more strongly towards the Communists." See Fritz Sternberg quoted in Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht,* 5-6. Also worthy of note is the fact that the police chief at the time, Karl Zoergiebel, was a Social Democrat. This would have given Brecht another reason to shift his support more firmly towards the more clearly oppositional Communists.

[91] Jameson, *Brecht and Method,* 148.

been argued, been the main fault line of the piece. An alternative approach, put forward by Marc Silberman, is that "What appealed to him about Marxism was neither the theory of political economy nor the history of the proletariat but rather its power as a cognitive method that understands social conditions as processes and pursues their contradictions."[92] Astrid Oesmann's otherwise excellent *Staging History* has advanced this line of argument, arguing that when read in such a way the play necessarily loses the specificity that was such a fundamental aspect of *Mann ist Mann*. She writes:

> His plays grow hazy, however, when he seeks to present the workings of capitalism outside of social interaction by stagings the working of capital itself. Brecht's claim that it is incomprehensible how, exactly, processes are not presentable on stage in *Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe (Saint Joan of the Stockyards)*, the trading of money and meat is mentioned, but it never becomes part of the performance.[93]

The odd formulation here states that when we abstract Brecht's work into a space where he merely seeks to represent capitalism (a typically "unuseful" Brechtian project) Brecht then fails to understand class struggle (or "social interaction" as Oesmannn somewhat ambiguously states). Yet Oesmann is not alone here. *Die Heilige Johanna* is also seen thus by Frederic Jameson. He writes:

> But in the great representations of capitalism – particularly in the two fundamental Brechtian works *St Joan* and the *Three-Penny Novel* – these last are reduced to Dickensian misery, lumpen status (Peachum's beggars) or desperate objects of charity. It is as though in Brecht's works that radically different temporality of peasant life had

[92] Marc Silberman, "Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy," 174.
[93] Oesmann, *Staging Brecht*, 108.

> absorbed the actantial position of the "proletariat", the position of the oppressed and exploited in capitalism, of the dominant class. [94]

Here the problem is restated but the belief is the same, and that is that *Die Heilige Johanna* fails in its task to represent capitalism effectively.

I do not wish to suggest that the play is not fundamentally concerned with trying to get to terms with the larger capitalist economic system. On the contrary, essential to the play's structure is Joan's movement throughout different socio-economic settings, from an initial point of naivety as to the intentions of the capitalist class (through the delightfully horrible character of Mauler) to a Marxian understanding of the role of profit in Mauler's life, and how this forms the basis of the misery of the lead characters in the play.[95] As with the progress of Galy Gay before, the point to stress here is the *social* aspect of Joan's journey and then further (in only the latter's case) the lesson it has for her ultimate rejection of the capitalist system.[96] In this way it "is a play about how ideology is used to obscure reality. Simultaneously, its effect on the audience is to teach them how to see through the ideology to the reality…"[97] This may be over-stating the analysis somewhat, but there is a clear attempt to distinguish between capitalism's outer and inner layers

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[94] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 151.

[95] Karl-Heinz Schoeps notes that the issue of Die Heilige Johanna's naiveté is central to not only this text, but also continues in much of Brecht's work. "The fact that Brecht used a Saint Joan figure [a naïve figure – my note] in three of his plays (Saint Joan of the Stockyards, The Visions of Simone Machard, and The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen 1431) highlights the particular importance he attached to this character." While I disagree with Schoeps' negation of Epic Theatre's centrality to Brecht's work, his argument about the centrality of the naïve in Brecht I find useful. See Karl-Heinz Schoeps, "From Distancing Alienation to Intuitive Naiveté: Bertolt Brecht's Establishment of a New Aesthetic Category," *Monatshefte* 81 (1989): 196.

[96] Interesting in this regard is a recent essay on the play by noted Brazilian poet Roberto Schwarz. In the essay Schwarz continues along the same lines of Jameson and Oesmann that the representability of capitalism is the key issue throughout. Schwarz further argues that capitalist system has fundamentally changed in the way it represents itself and thus the play loses an important currency. He writes "Today, the picture has changed. Economic determinism has switched sides and functions as an explicit ideology of the dominant classes, a justification for social inequality." While Schwartz further criticizes the suitability of a "revolutionary exit" as a contemporary option that the play offers – a position I would agree with – his dilution of the play's representation of capitalism is something that I take issue with in this chapter. See Roberto Schwarz, "Brecht's Relevance, Highs and Lows," *New Left Review* 57 (2009): 85 – 104.

[97] Parmalee, *Brecht's America*, 246.

as they are expressed in social understanding. For Joan, nothing could be a more concrete instantiation of capitalism than the bourgeoisie's profiting off of the working poor. And the emphasis on the concreteness of this socio-economic relation is exactly the problem for Brecht; how to construct a theatre that recognizes this relation and responds by promoting the primacy of establishing what he called a "critical attitude."[98]

The development of such a viewpoint begins with the title of the play and its often problematic English translation. The German title is *Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe*.[99] The play has most routinely been translated as *St. Joan of the Stockyards*. A less common translation, although I would like to argue one truer to Brecht's purposes, is *St. Joan of the Slaughterhouses*.[100] A stockyard is literally a storage point, a building or set of buildings normally adjacent to the slaughterhouse. A slaughterhouse requires no mediation. Slaughterhouses are about the deed of killing, of pre-mediated and systematic carnage for the sake of producing food and its sale. The slaughterhouse is the more exact location for Brecht, as it is killing, its product, *and* the reasons for killing which are important and undergird the structure of the play.

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[98] On this point Brecht is quite explicit. He writes, "In fact, it has a purpose the "teaching" of the spectator a certain quite practical attitude; we have to make it possible for him to take a critical attitude while he is in the theatre (as opposed to a subjective attitude of becoming completely "entangled" in what is going on). Some of my plays in this type of dramaturgy are *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, *Mann ist Mann*, and *Round Heads and Pointed Heads*. See Brecht, *Werke*, Band 22.2: 941.

[99] It is perhaps interesting to note that the play that Brecht found so hard to produce over the years has been subject to a renewed interest in Germany at least (other production figures are unavailable), with more productions of the play in the 1990's or 2000's than in all other decades combined. Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch 2*, 286. For information on the problems that Brecht encountered in putting on the play see Gisela Bahr, *Bertolt Brecht: Die Heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, Bühnenfassung, Fragmente, Varianten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1971): 211-231.

[100] Interestingly, as Brecht develops further his aesthetic, there is also a strong shift in the focus of his work to places of production, and the question of how gender is used to represent labour. As Laureen Nussbaum notes, "All through his previous work Brecht had mainly identified bourgeois society with male predominance. Now, working for change, he developed new, self-reliant, and politically conscious roles for proletarian women." *Die Heilige Johanna* and Anni from *Kuhle Wampe* are clear examples of this shift. See "The Evolution of the Feminine Principle in Brecht's Work: Beyond the Feminist Critique," *German Studies Review* 8 (1985): 228.

In this regard, seeing as the play revolves around the slaughterhouses, meat acts as a metaphor which organises the play.[101] On the most basic level flesh is the stuff upon which fortunes sink or soar. The key economic downturn is in part a product of Mauler's (the play's chief capitalist) playing with the stock market, and the way in which he makes the value of meat abstract. This abstractness of meat is, and can be only, partial, however, as Mauler's toying with the price of meat is in fact his toying with human life itself, as evidenced throughout the play.[102]

As a metaphor, meat embodies and personifies the human in the play. This happens in a few ways. Firstly, workers are meat in that they are, like the cattle which they are supposed to kill, the commercial good that is routinely easily bought and sold. They are manipulated so as to disregard or negate solidaristic feeling or independent thought, and promoted to become passive creatures worried only about their next meal. As such they are similar to the beasts they look over and ultimately slaughter. Brecht, when referring to workers eating, uses the German word "fressen" to describe their eating – a word which translates to a specific form of animalistic eating, or devouring. They will eat anything that will satiate their hunger. In one bizarre case (but only bizarre when one doesn't understand the system), a man literally becomes meat.

Luckerniddle, a worker in the slaughterhouse, falls into the "bacon maker" and is processed into canned meat. The brutality of the situation is compounded when his wife comes to

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[101] The depiction of the butcher as *Urkapitalist* was previously shown in Pabst's *Die freudlose Gasse*. The dancer and cabaretist Valeska Gert had worked on the film, and subsequently on Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper*. See Alexandra Kolb's *Performing Femininity: Dance and Literature in German Modernism* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2009) for a discussion on this connection and Gert's influence more generally. The film also puts the lie to the idea of the gullible, helpless "young girls", and features an act of revenge against the callous butcher. For more on the connection between Brecht and the role of sex work and Brecht's filmic work, see Jill Suzanne Smith, "Just how Naughty *was* Berlin? The Geography of Prostitution and Female Sexuality in Curt Moreck's Erotic Travel Guide," in *Spatial Turns: Space, Place and Mobility in German Literary and Visual Culture,* edited by Jaimey Fisher, Barbara Mennel (New York: Rodopi, 2010).

[102] In this case, however, Mauler as capitalist seems to know and understand what the price of meat is. Brecht will also use to great comedic and didactic effect the capitalist who has no idea what his products are. See for instance the "Song of Supply and Demand" in which the character Trader sings "What is a man actually, Do I know what a man is? / God knows what a man is! / I don't know what a man is / I only know his price!" See Bertolt Brecht, *The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1992): 95-96.

enquire about his whereabouts. She is advised to drop any case she may have for the price of twenty lunches. As she has not eaten in two days, she accepts the offer. Yet whereas meat is literally a matter of life and death for workers, actual meat knows only one referent for the capitalist. The lead capitalist, Mauler, when he has a bad spell on the market, consoles himself by having a steak prepared for him. Almost as soon as the meat touches his lips, Mauler is brought back into a good humour. Here meat acts as an elixir for the ruling classes. Its substance and its abstracted value bring only them pleasure and sustain them.

By using meat as this structuring metaphor, Brecht makes clear that what may seem to be abstract to one is also that which is the most concrete for another. While Luckerniddle's widow is made the offer of food for forgetting, Joan watches in the wings. Playing the intermediary "witness" to this, she is able to spot the connections between the abstract workings of the financial system and the bare processes of workers being chewed up, not of their own volition but by compulsion, by and for the system. Darko Suvin expresses this point succinctly in his *To Brecht and Beyond*. He notes:

> …the Marxist political economics undoubtedly present in *Saint Joan* (the labour theory of value, and the crisis theory) happens in the flesh and blood of the workers and packers, Mauler and Joan. Political economics determining the existential destiny of all strata of society represent here a first, basic exchange-system or code.[103]

The rejection of the body, of abstracting the body from its material conditions, will thus be Joan's final position. Joan has understood the fundamental barbarity of the system and its lived class oppression. In her final lines, Joan rails against her former position and beliefs and calls out for

[103] Darko Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond: Soundings in Modern Dramaturgy* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984): 148.

an end, a violent end, to the system of religion (as a former Salvation Army worker she notes its particular importance) and its complicity in reproducing capitalism. She exclaims:

> And those preachers who tell the people they can rise in spirit
> Even if their bodies are stuck in the mud, they too should have their heads
> Bashed against the sidewalk. The truth is that
> Where force rules only force can help and
> In the human world only humans can help.[104]

While there is little doubt that this is the position Brecht would wish his audience to be won over to, he realises that such a simple transference is a) not possible and b) would only provide a partial answer. The point of the audience's discovery is then not what is presented but what is missing. To locate this we must see the reaction of the cast to Joan's radical statement. For the first time in the play the cast sings out in unison, attempting to drown out Joan's final words before she dies. The Cast sings out:

> Shower the rich with Thy treasure! Hosanna!
> And virtue and leisure! Hosanna!
> Pile high the rich man's plate! Hosanna!
> Give him the city and state! Hosanna!
> Give to the winner in full measure![105]

Over these "declamations" are broadcast disastrous headlines from Brecht's time, including: "EIGHT MILLION UNEMPLOYED IN THE USA!" "BRAZIL DUMPS A WHOLE YEAR'S COFFEE CROP INTO THE OCEAN!" "EVERY BANK AND STOCK EXCHANGE IN

[104] Bertolt Brecht, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (Methuen, London, 1991): 108.
[105] Brecht, *Saint Joan*, 108

GERMANY CLOSED BY GOVERNMENT ORDERS" "POLICE BATTLE UNEMPLOYED OUTSIDE HENRY FORD'S DETROIT FACTORY."[106] The point here is to explicitly state that the point of knowing is not enough. While individual knowing is highly recommended (we are clearly better for knowing), there is little doubt that an individual knowing amid chaos is not enough. One must be able to know and then use that knowing to alter the system in which one is living. This is what Brecht himself did with his own studying of Marxist economics. As *Mann ist Mann* was a warning of the bad collective, *Die Heilige Johanna* argues that merely knowing must be met with effective (or useful) practice.

When the disastrous news over the loudspeakers has sunk in, there is an exchange of vituperative exclamations wherein the competing groups gather on stage seeking to place the blame for the crisis on each other. "'The middlemen are to blame for the high price of meat!' 'The grain profiteers are to blame for the high price of livestock!' 'It's all the fault of the railroads with their freight rates!'"[107] The material and pressing nature of the situation will require an extra-individual response, a response that the individual alone cannot advance, no matter how knowledgeable about capitalism she becomes. This response is of an organised knowing. A knowing which seeks to change as Joan notes, in "the human world where only humans can help."[108] This is the response that will be offered in *Kuhle Wampe.*

[106] Brecht, *Saint Joan*, 108-9.
[107] Brecht, *Saint Joan*, 109.
[108] Julie Stone Peters' article is very useful in noting that despite the obvious different political attitudes of George Bernard Shaw (the author of *Saint Joan*, a piece first produced in the early 1920s examining the trial of Joan of Arc) and Brecht, there are similarities between the two uses of the Joan of Arc trope. She notes that "each nonetheless offered a critique of the international sphere order that saw past its subterfuges to the possibilities beyond." Julie Stone Peters, "Joan of Arc Internationale: Shaw, Brecht, and the Law of Nations," *Comparative Drama* 38 (2005): 374. What is more interesting for our purposes, however, is the way in which the article focuses on how the "taken-for-granted" world that Joan initially inhabits is part of "wordless oppression does not equal peace." Peters, "Joan of Arc Internationale: Shaw, Brecht, and the Law of Nations," 367.

While *Mann ist Mann* was an endeavour which set Brecht off on a course towards a fuller Epic Theater, *Die Heilige Johanna* was an expression of his further understanding of his society, but also his place within that society as a politically committed cultural producer. As he himself notes:

> Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. Can we speak of money in the form of iambics? "The Mark, first quoted yesterday at 50 dollars, now beyond 100, soon may rise, etc." – how about? Petroleum resists the five-act form; today's catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but in cyclical crises; the "heroes" change with the different phases, are interchangeable, etc.; the graph of people's actions is complicated by abortive actions; fate is no longer a single coherent power; rather there are fields of force which can be seen radiating in opposite directions; the power groups themselves comprise movements not only against one another but within themselves...[109]

It is interesting to note that the play that Brecht was working on when he wrote the above theoretical piece was *Die Heilige Johanna*, as it suggests further evidence that Epic Theatre was taking a step away from simply modern sociality to a specifically capitalist structured and capitalistically dialectical form. Epic theatre at this stage is falling even further from the sky of the abstract and plummets to earth (on this note the emphasis on religion in the play is especially noteworthy). When it lands (or has it always been there?), it finds a scenario far more akin to Benjamin's analysis of Paul Klee's celebrated *Angelus Novus*.[110] I will explore the meaning of the painting and its importance for Brecht's theatre of history at the end of the next chapter. What

[109] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 30.

[110] Such a connection should not seem a stretch by any means. Brecht and Benjamin were great collaborators, and it is useful to note that Brecht also was helped in the writing of the text of Saint Joan by Benjamin himself. A collaborator of Brecht's, Margarete Steffin, "often brought variants of the text or plot to Benjamin; the experience of working together on the text, as in the case of the *Saint Joan* play, or the crime novel, aroused hope of a useful response." See Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 147.

we should take now, however, is that as with the painting itself, what is emphasized is not the single solitary moment of discovery but the larger repetitive disaster beneath it. In such a setting, we find St. Joan, caught adrift in the winds of catastrophe wherein, by witnessing the horrors beneath, she rejects all that she sees from above. Yet in this way Brecht also eschews a crude didacticism and recognizes that the potential for such events to recur is not small. Yet recognizing that such events can continue, simultaneously allows for us to acknowledge that the moment where we apply the brake on endless disaster is also at hand only if we work *through* the contemporary moment. The moment of historical recognition – this has happened and it could happen to us – allows for a moment of change – only if we grasp the historical structure of our moment. This is particularly characteristic of Brecht's aesthetics of the now.

In his lengthy mapping out of the logics and dynamics of *Die Heilige Johanna*, Darko Suvin is at pains to note the highly stratified positions that exist in the work. These positions stretch from the "New York friends" and Mauler at the "Empyrean" and "Sardonic Heavens" levels respectively, down to "Cold Hell" occupied by the "Strike Leaders, Workers, Ranchers and Cattle." In Suvin's arrangement, Joan is not at the bottom (even though we are clear that Joan does not have much money) but in "Limbo" along with "Newsmen" and the Salvation Army-like Brigade called the "Black Straw Hats."[111] St. Joan in this setting belongs to the intermediary professional class that includes intellectuals and those whose overall social position the intellectual occupies, yet her position is very much up for grabs. She can reside comfortably in the position of what Brecht would later call the "Tuis,"[112] or she could align herself with the

[111] Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond*, 135.
[112] From the German word IntellekTUellen), those who understand the real cause of social problems yet seek to divert attention to other, less directly political factors. Martin Jay in his discussion of the Frankfurt School (otherwise known as the Institute for Social Research): "To Brecht, the Institut consisted of "Tui-intellectuals," who prostituted themselves for American foundation support." Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-50* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 201 – 202.

workers. Her position is in Limbo (Limbo as in both the state between the heavenly state of the Black Straw Hats and the earthly reality of the workers *and* the state of the undecided intellectual). While workers and Mauler are defined and "locked-in" to their social positions, St. Joan is free (or freer) to choose her position. Yet it is this position which will be Joan's downfall as she stands in for a classic "petit-bourgeois intellectual." This person, a person of the "rational" mind who dismisses the complexities of the ideology of the conjuncture, must fail.[113] We learn from her failure. As Suvin notes:

> The only attempts at communication and pressure going from below upward come from Joan and the strike leaders (Communists). The ideological failure of the former and the pragmatic failure of the latter are complementary; the reasons for that complimentarity are not explained in the universe *Saint Joan*, and would have to be inferred from the larger context of Brecht's opus.[114]

While the last point here is somewhat contestable (but may well prove correct), the important aspect to note is the ideological failure. This failure of the intellectual was understood quite deeply by a collaborator of Brecht's.[115] A few years after *Die Heilige Johanna* was written, Walter Benjamin presented his views on the subject in his important foundational text, "The Author as Producer." The last few lines of the text read as follows:

> The mind, the spirit that makes itself heard in the name of fascism must disappear. The mind which only believes in its own magic strength will disappear. For the revolutionary

[113] Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond*, 151.
[114] Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond*, 150.
[115] For a much fuller examination which highlights just how fully Brecht and Benjamin were involved in each other's work, and also displays how each was seen as co-creating the others work, see Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*.

> struggle is not fought between capitalism and mind. It is fought between capitalism and the proletariat.[116]

Benjamin echoes quite neatly the "plumpes Denken" (crude thought) of Brecht. And this, as we learn, is *St. Joan's* central error. This is not a merely subjective error (one of pure agency) but rather a question of her only realising her agency too late and thus no blame is attached to her. Indeed, we may sympathise with her, and most definitely are meant to, but we also must learn that she did not succeed and examine why, in the same way that we are to learn from the transformation of Galy Gay as a portent from the present. We are not to come to this realisation, a stance of knowing, alone. The play rejects the mere presentation of the abstract functioning of capitalism, and thus to "represent capitalism," and rather focuses on capitalism's wreckages and how not to respond to them (St. Joan, for all her labours, dies). The point in this regard is to produce a committed intellectual project which has a class politics as its engine. On this level the rejection of the social position of the "petit-bourgeois intellectual" (and the worldview that is associated with it) and what it is replaced by is the key issue for Brecht. This is the task in *Kuhle Wampe.*

***Kuhle Wampe* and the Good Answer**

It is interesting to note that given Brecht's numerous misgivings with the cinematic production of the *Three Penny Opera*, misgivings which went as far as initiating a lawsuit to stop its airing as well as the writing of a novel to counter both the play and film, it is that work, and not his ideologically and aesthetically coherent and preferred *Kuhle Wampe: Oder wem gehört*

[116] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* 103.

die Welt? (*Kuhle Wampe: Or who owns the World*), that has received the larger amount of scholarly attention and public interest, perhaps ironically despite the film's ideologically achievement in Brechtian practice.[117] Continuing on from my discussion of *Mann ist Mann* and *Die Heilige Johanna*, I would like to argue that while *Kuhle Wampe* carries forward Brecht's move from abstract to the real refunctioning of individuality in capitalist society, and whereas in the previous two texts we learn from the mistakes of those on stage (we will see this also very clearly in the analysis of *Mutter Courage*), here we witness that the collective response, specifically through a recognition of the power of organised oppositional activity, is the logical reaction to capitalism.

If the chief problem in *Mann ist Mann* was dealing with the relation of the bad collective and the individual in capitalist society, and if *Die Helige Johanna* articulates the worker's understanding of the functioning of that society and the way economic functions are made known in the life of the worker, *Kuhle Wampe* provides the organised left's answer. Brecht's left response is not to deal abstractly with the theoretical "worker" but rather to meet the worker where not only "he" is, but, and this is vitally important as regards the gender politics of the film, where "she" is as well. Thus, while I have argued that in *Die Helige Johanna* we witnessed not an attempt at a representation of capitalism, but of the way in which capital feeds off workers, in this same way *Kuhle Wampe* is not about concretising the extraction of surplus value (although this may have merit for a Marxist cultural producer) but rather show how the lived relations of working people are slowly destroyed and systematically ground down. In this regard we have a

[117] For an analysis of the influence of Brecht's problems with the Three-Penny Opera film see Steven Giles' *Bertolt Brecht and Critical Theory: Marxism, Modernity and the Threepenny Lawsuit* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

necessary examination of class, wherein issues of choice, marriage, employment and unemployment all intermingle and intersect with each other.

Individuality here is refracted through the lens of the social, yet the individual must first of all be seen, at least partly.[118] For Brecht, the theory of classes was lacking an understanding of the individual or of the viewpoint of the individual and her relation to the social. As he was to state of "Me-Ti" in his 1930s theoretical text *Book of Changes* (published in English only in 2016 under the title *Me-Ti: Book of Interventions in the Flow of Things*) "Me-ti found few enough indications in the writings of the classics about the behaviour of individuals. Most often they spoke of classes or of other large groups of people."[119] While the latter sections of the film provide an at times stunning depiction of the depths of alternative organisations active in Weimar Berlin, the first of the three acts of the film provides a dynamic exercise in the relation of the individual to the social, and the abstract to the concrete.

In the opening scenes of the film the frantic spinning of wheels dominates the screen. Workers speed on bicycles from factory to factory in the hopes of finding a day's work. At this stage we see only a group of workers, a blur of disappointment and despair as they are told again and again that there is no work available. Here the workers are without names and while the locations may have been known to Berlin audiences, no attention is paid to carve out meaning in the buildings, other than the occupants have no need for workers. Seen from capital's perspective

[118] This is valid at the level of the social world, but also at an aesthetic level. Angelos Koutsourakis argues that in Brecht's filmic strategy, he understood that "cinema challenges the understanding of art as a reflectionist process, and the medium's political efficiency is grounded in its ability to engage with the material reality, so as to point to structures that are not necessarily comprehended even by the filmmaker. The prerequisite for the radical employment of the medium is that the story is an epiphenomenon. What matters most is the ability to use the technological apparatus so as to engage with the social reality and point to social mechanisms beyond the narrative world." Angelos Koutsourakis, "Utilizing the 'Ideological Antiquity': Rethinking Brecht and Film," *Monatshefte* 107 (2015): 252. Koutsourakis is examining the connections between Brecht and Walter Benjamin's famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." For more on the similarities between the two see Marc Silberman, "The Politics of Representation: Brecht and Media," *Theatre Journal* 39 (1987): 448 – 460.
[119] Brecht in Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 36.

they are a mass of unproductive labour, even though they are all literally "on their bikes." Soon we will learn the effects of this abstract unemployment. Particularly through the story of the son of the Boenike family, Franz, we see how unemployment makes itself felt on individual workers, while Brecht also displays how this problem is anything but individualisable. Although the young son's mother and father seem intent on personalising his unemployment, his communist sister defends him against the complex causes that exist outside of the individual's door. Hers is a social perspective, and one representative of a generation of young workers who see no hope that capitalism can rescue itself and provide anything like lasting employment, no matter how economical one is.[120]

In his narrowing in on the Boenike family, however, Brecht is wary of creating a possible predominant emotive response (that is, emotionally identifying with Franz) to this situation. He does not desire for us to have pity for the young character but rather to examine what is going wrong in these scenes and then to approach it on that basis. In order to achieve this, Brecht utilises distancing techniques to break the audience from the habit of emotional identification. One way of accomplishing this, as Bruce Murray notes, was to introduce each act in such a way as to "interrupt the narrative flow and encourage the audience's intellectual engagement. They do so by commenting ironically on the unfolding, by foreshadowing what will transpire and, in every case, by minimizing the potential for building suspense."[121] This negation of suspense building is particularly effective and acts as a barrier to the acceptance of official responses to Franz's death. The police officer's statement of "unknown" as the cause of Franz's suicide marks

[120] This sentiment will be succinctly expressed in Brecht's *Die Mutter* as follows "über das Fleisch das die in der kuche faellt, waer nicht in kueche entschieden." The English translation of the above reads as follows: "The meat not there in your kitchen / won't get there, if you stay in your kitchen!" Bertolt Brecht, *The Mother* (New York: Grove Press, 1965): 39. This translation seems to arrive at only part of the point, however. There is also the suggestion in this sentiment that the reasons for there not being enough food are not because you are not thrifty enough.
[121] Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic*: *From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990): 222.

the judgment complicit in his suicide. Again we are confronted with an interesting connection of individual and the social here, as without recourse to the social we cannot interrupt the real life decisions of the individual.[122]

In both the depiction of anguish in the present world and hope for the new, the individual and individuality are crushed. Indeed, it is this leading marker of bourgeois morality that marks out Brecht's early work that continues in *Kuhle Wampe*. The notion of the lone individual protagonist battling for his family is defeated before we are introduced to young Boehnike. We see only him and others gathering around together waiting in the very early morning, as the mass of unemployed that they are, clamouring for newspaper listings of what work is to be had for that day. The pursuit of those jobs with the "suicidal panic"[123] of the spinning of bicycle wheels will come to fruition with the actual suicide of the young man. The depiction of the suicide, and the reporting officer's response to it, are yet another entrenchment of the failings of the notion of the bourgeois individual in both a formal and then political sense. The integration of the social and the individual here marks a deep connection in the specific moment of the now – we are now in the moment of the crisis of the dissolution of the individual – and this is, as mentioned above, a tactic devised with maintaining this recognition by the viewer in mind.

Before he jumps out of his parent's window, he is careful and considerate in his actions. He slowly considers his actions, and he even takes off his watch so that its value will not be lost to his family. *Pace* the central metaphor of Kassovitz's powerful *La Haine*, wherein a man also jumps off of a tall building, young Boehnike does not delude himself that "so far so good." And

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[122] The suicide itself, coming as it does in the first third of the film, "practically defies all German screen traditions," states Siegfried Kracauer. Despite being asked repeatedly to shift this scene towards the end "so as to re-establish the natural order of things." and disavows psychological retrogression" (that is, making a social act into an individual one). Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966): 246. This shift would have also "prevented spectators from interacting with it as they had grown accustomed to interacting with mainstream films." Murray, *Film and the German Left,* 224.
[123] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 150.

as in the French film, we are witness to both an individual and social moment bound up together. For him, the matter is tragically announced in the spinning away of his time. Before he jumps, however, he pauses to gaze into the camera. As Franz Birgel notes:

> The suicide is presented as purely mechanical rather than an impulsive act, which, as the censor in "Kleiner Beitrag zum Realismus" asserts, the viewer does not even want to prevent in the absence of "artistic, human, warm-hearted representation.[124]

This "purely mechanical" act marks a significant challenge to traditional aesthetics. Theodore Rippey notes that this is the film's

> …first breach of the cinematic fourth wall. The turn is virtually his only action in the entire apartment sequence; his expression conveys his powerlessness and visually poses the question: "What other options do I have?" He now views suicide as the only viable release from oppression. In a bow to the family's economic plight, young Bönike leaves his watch on the windowsill before leaping to his death. Dudov[sic] (the film's director) adds emphasis with an extreme close-up of the watch two shots after the jump.[125]

The depiction of the state of things having been met, the question will eventually become that of the response to such horrific predictability.

Often lost in analysis of the film is probably its most deliberate statement about (or delivering of) politics and aesthetics.[126] It is the play within a play that is meant here, put on by

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[124] Frantz A. Brigel, "Kuhle Wampe, Leftist Cinema, and the Politics of Film Censorship in Weimar Germany," *Historical Reflections* 35 (2009): 51.
[125] Theodore Rippey, "Kuhle Wampe and the Problem of Corporal Culture," *Cinema Journal* 47 (2007): 7.
[126] While they may too easily accept the transition from a "pre-Marxist" to a Marxist Brecht, Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano note how the historical fact of the destruction of perfectly good coffee to raise the price of it, a fact that is mentioned in *Die Heilige Johanna*, "…led Brecht to Marx, and to the dramatization of the link between class position, social knowledge, and aesthetic form evident in the coffee scene from Kuhle Wampe." See Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano, "Filming the Crisis: A Survey," *Film Quarterly* 65 (2011): 48. Also useful in this regard is Nenad Jovanovic's discussion of James Pettifer's "Against the Stream – Kuhle Wampe," *Screen* 15.2 (1977): 49 – 63. This

the *Rote Sprachchor*, and the particular role of art in changing social scenarios. Throughout the film we are witness to tales of homelessness not as an abstract category or ontology but as a process, or social event. A person or group is not simply homeless as a state of being through some fault of their own; rather the process by which this has come about consistently acts as a frame for the film. Its offshoots, such as suicide, expressing the right to choice,[127] not to mention the broader role of sexism in the society, a punishing judicial system, and a raft of destructive emotions are not backdrops but the thing itself. The role of art is necessarily to assess these and then respond. This is the distinctly social nature of Brecht's formal practice.

In this regard, returning to Franz's unstated question as to "what other options do I have" is an important one as it also poses the political aspect of the cultural producer's position through a formal method. On formal invention in the film Katie Trumpener notes that: "Brecht's writings around his 1932 film script for *Kuhle Wampe* suggest how non-traditional and dialectical uses of film syntax (the establishment of a counterpointal relationship between image and music, for instance) can be used to unsettle the spectator and to create a critical space for (political) reflection…"[128] That is, the political aspect is not, and in this moment cannot be, separate from the formal strategy. The moment is one of a social-political aesthetics which seeks to liberate

article occludes the relation of political aesthetics that Brecht et al. advance in the film. See Nenad Jovanovic, *Brechtian Cinemas: Montage and Theatricality in Jean-Marie Straub and Daniéle Huillet, Peter Watkins, and Lars von Trier* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017): 53 – 54.

[127] While often overlooked, female sexuality and a woman's right to choose are important aspects of the film, and, as Kerstin Barndt notes, it is the character Anni's "sexual independence, though, that ultimately determines the heroine's fate and brings the drama of abortion into play". It is Brecht's task in the film to show how Anni's positionality is defined by her social setting. This politics of situatedness is show to be in contrast to the ephemeral notion of young lovers. See Kerstin Barndt, "Aesthetics of Crisis: Motherhood, Abortion, and Melodrama in Irmgard Keun and Friedrich Wolf," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 24 (2008): 82.

[128] The formulation "unsettle the spectator" needs further thought: this quote is useful as it clearly articulates that Brecht began to articulate a formal strategy aligned with his political purpose. This key point often gets lost in discussions of Brecht's political aesthetics. See Katie Trumpener, "Theory, History and German Film," *Monatshefte* 82 (1990): 300.

both in a propagandistic sense – that is to challenge the dominant views – as well as challenging the dominant modes of viewing.

The response to real, concrete concerns as opposed to abstract categories and goals (which is how Brecht's work is sometimes characterised) is the basis of the play within the play. Jameson may be correct in stating that it is in Brecht's oeuvre "not the worker's work that is representable but their poverty,"[129] but this is hardly a shortcoming. The oppression of rent and how to respond to that oppression are equally valid "representables" in understanding the complex of pressures brought to bear on the working class. Therefore, this raw material of lived relations is taken up in the play within the play. The latter section of the play which offers the expression of organised opposition frames the play as the socialist artistic or cultural response to the capitalist crisis. Whereas in *Die Mutter* a worker responds to the owner's demands for firings and reduced wages due to financial crisis as "Capitalism is sick and you're the doctor," there is little effective organised response as *Die Mutter* (as are *Die Heilige Johanna* and arguably *Mann ist Mann*) is a learning play based on defeat.[130] The offering here is much more overtly combative and positive. If we learn through sport to win (especially as the unsuccessful jobseekers bicycle through the city**,** to scrape by is compared to the motorcycle racers driving forward to win, not so much in competition with others but pushing each other on), we also learn through protest aesthetics to aim to win, and respond to the concerns of people immediately. This is not, one should clarify, a template for oppositional aesthetics. Rather, this is how a particular form of aesthetics responds in this situation (particularly one that is protest oriented). What is important and worthy of generalisation is the emphasis on beginning from the concerns of the contemporary

[129] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 150.
[130] *Die Mutter* was also produced prior to *Kuhle Wampe* and was, like *Die Heilige Johanna* before it, perhaps less concerned with producing an directly oppositional project given the further proximity to the strongest showings of the NSDAP electorally, and more generally on the ground as 1933 approached.

problem and then finding ways of addressing this problem through encouraging collective activity. In this instance the film's depiction of the Boenikes' eviction is mirrored in the depiction of the content of the Agit-Prop group. Brecht's aesthetics are responsive. They must be focussed on addressing and shaping actual lived social situations and the importance that Brecht gives to the troupe "Das Rote Sprachrohr" ("The Red Megaphone") in the film suggests a larger proposal for action and strategy. Here is one "critic's" take on the film:

> Yes, you will be astonished that I reproach your depiction for not being sufficiently *human*. You have not depicted a person but, well, let's admit it, a type. Your unemployed worker is not a real individual, not a real flesh-and-blood person, distinct from every other person, with his particular worries, particular joys and finally his particular fate. He is drawn very superficially. As artists you must forgive me for the strong expression that *we learn too little about him*, but the consequences are of a *political* nature and force me to object to the film's release.[131]

The "critic," as one may deduce from this last sentence, was the censor who blocked earlier releases of the film.[132] Yet this is only relevant given that Brecht, upon hearing this appraisal, had the "unpleasant impression of being caught red-handed" and went further to commend the censor by stating that "he had penetrated far deeper into the essence of our artistic intentions than our most supportive critics."[133] What this censor had understood was the attempts at redefinition of the individual in capitalist society, although clearly the censor objects to this for the reasons

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[131] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Film and Radio* (Methuen, London, 2000): 208.

[132] One should note that besides getting the film through the censors, the film was affected by the very depression it sought to examine on film, with Brecht and Dudow having to find another film company to finance the completion of the project, as the Prometheus Company dealt with liquidation proceedings.
Kuhle Wampe was, despite the best efforts of the authorities to keep the film from being seen, relatively successful. After a successful first week, the film was prolonged and opened in 15 separate cinemas. This was followed by showings in London, Amsterdam and Paris. Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch 2*, 443.
See Vance Kepley Jr., "The Workers' International Relief and the Cinema of the Left 1921-1935," *Cinema Journal* 23 (1983): 19.

[133] Brecht, *Brecht on Film and Radio*, 208-9.

stated above. What Brecht constructs is, in a way, a cinematic form of repetition whereby the individual is, as evidenced in *Mann ist Mann*, capable of reconstruction. The reconstruction is the gap filled by the narrative arc created by the suicide at the beginning of the play. Whereas the speeding of the wheels locates workers in a race against each other (and at the expense of each other), the collective marching through the streets on the way to the festivities presents the opportunity to highlight what Eugene Lunn terms the "positive potentials of the depersonalised, urban, machine age."[134] That is**,** by working through the constructs that capitalism provides, one is able to produce something that is able to liberate itself.

In his excellent essay "A Brechtian Aesthetics," Dana Polan argues that the production of an over-formalised Brecht has lost sight, or even obscured the importance of Brecht's political aesthetics. Brecht himself, notes Polan, insisted that all art contained a distancing or alienating feature to it. Yet there is in this nothing "socially distancing" about this.[135] Whereas audiences may have become used to these alienating forms of making strange, many artists themselves have shied away from the conscious distancing towards intuitive abstraction. In order to meet the historical moment, Polan notes, we must replace the process which "keeps literary production in the realm of accident and signals a refusal to situate such production within the actual workings of history." For this we must adopt a "scientific attitude."[136] The emphasis on the "actual workings of history" cannot be underestimated in Brecht as it implies a supple ability to address and act as redress in the *now*. It is important to note however that the "scientific attitude" need not privilege an anti-communal or anti-social experience. In fact, the living out of this attitude is

[134] Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism*, 103. As Katherine Roper notes, Kuhle Wampe was unique (alongside Piel Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*) in that it was the only film to "refer to revolutionary transformation of institutions and the Communist movement that would carry it out." See Katherine Roper, "Looking for the German Revolution in Weimar Films," *Central European History* 31 (1998): 90.
[135] Dana Polan, *The Political Language of Film and the Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985): 92.
[136] Polan, *The Political Language of Film*, 93.

made clear only in the moment where a plurality is involved. Unfortunately, very little has been written on the play within a play chapter of *Kuhle Wampe* as the political aesthetics of the now are perhaps nowhere clearer than in any other part of the film.

Just preceding the play there is a round of socialist games that highlight the ideals of comradeship, learning through sport to win, and the larger metaphor that to "win" socialism is key. It is not enough to respond to injustice, however; one must create an oppositional project aimed at overthrowing the world which makes injustice possible. At this point the purpose of the play seems to operate as a lesson in responding to the social problems repeatedly addressed throughout the film, but only partially. The actors make clear the particularities of their position in the play (for instance, that they are active in the working-class district of Wedding, Berlin) and make clear their role in the daily activities of the lives of those facing eviction. The purpose of their action is to support those being made homeless by late-Weimar capitalism. In this way their practice is necessarily defined by the positions of their allies in the particular historical moment and location. This adeptness requires a collective experience and one which liberates the construct of the singular bourgeois artist from his (sic) individuality to the position of collective cultural producer. As noted by Birgel below, such a political aesthetic project was itself attempted in *Kuhle Wampe*.

> Working with over 4,000 participants, including the members of the leftist Fichte Sports Club, the agit-prop group *Das Rote Sprachrohr* (The Red Megaphone), and several choruses, Brecht wanted the production to be a learning experience for all involved. As in his *Lehrstücke* from this period, the collaborative process was just as important, if not more so, than the final product. In addition, the audience was to be a co-producer of the film. By disrupting the illusion of reality through his well-known alienation technique,

> Brecht wanted the viewers to become active participants who reflect on what was happening on the screen and relate it to their own lives.[137]

The collective nature of the production and its nimble nature, able to respond in a meaningful way to the lives of workers in a moment of great need (eviction), necessitates a move away from a firm formal structure (so often the cause of misunderstandings of Brecht) and the understanding of Brecht's political aesthetics as a process which requires a move towards experimentation that, for instance, one can witness so dramatically in the many productions and re-productions of *Mann ist Mann*.[138] As Dana Polan explains, "Brecht's interest in experimentation, his strictures against any too rigidly constructed theory of political art, are so many attempts to minimize predictability and keep art open to the changing demands of history."[139]

Concluding Brecht to 1933

While I discuss Brecht's conceptions and constructions of history in the next chapters, for Brecht's time and for the works covered in this chapter the outstanding interpreter is Walter Benjamin. In Benjamin**,** Brecht finds not only a collaborator on many texts, including *Die Heilige*

[137] Franz A. Birgel, "Kuhle Wampe, Leftist Cinema, and the Politics of Film Censorship in Weimar Germany," *Historical Reflections* 35 (2009): 49. Brecht's admiration for groups such as *Das Rote Sprachchor* was in part due to their ability to put forward arguments to workers directly. Yet Brecht also was keen to show, as in the tram scene at the end of the film, "the value of proletarian common sense, in which young workers successfully debated older bourgeois passengers about the need to change the world." See Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997): 146.
[138] On the concept of change in Brecht, the important Brechtian scholar Marc Silberman notes that "Brecht's entire oeuvre, his very mode of thought, derives from the conviction that society can and must be changed." This article provides a very useful riposte to "post-modern" appropriations of Brecht while also noting the current power of Brecht's work where this work has not been as of yet been institutionalized. See Marc Silberman, "A Postmodernized Brecht?," *Theatre Journal* 45 (1993): 8.
[139] Polan, *The Political Language of Film*, 95.

Johanna (although of these Brecht had more than most),[140] but rather someone – at least from the period – whose understanding and perceptions of Brecht's work, even if they did not always agree, was unrivalled for his (and maybe any) age. While Brecht notes in 1927 his first spectator was Karl Marx, the argument could be made that in Walter Benjamin he had found his second.[141] In fact, Brecht himself would admit to as much. Wizisla notes:

> Benjamin was Brecht's first systematic critic with a claim to theory, and he was the first to identify Brecht's originality and his role in contemporary writing. According to Hannah Arendt, Brecht knew that in Benjamin he had encountered "the most important critic of the time". This was confirmed by a note by Adorno, certainly in this case an incorruptible source, and certainly free from suspicion of having represented the relationship between Benjamin and Brecht as closer than it was: "Story that BB, when I saw him again for the first time since 1932, in exile in the autumn of 1941, spoke of WB as his best critic."[142]

What concerned both was an attempt to rethink a means and a form of active political aesthetics that was uniquely and deeply attuned to its age, an "expression of its closeness to real life."

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[140] That said, it would be hard to overestimate Benjamin's contribution to Brecht's work during their friendship. One example of this deep connection is the fact that the two had been involved in an open journal project, the purpose of which was to "account for itself in regard to positions and challenges which uniquely – in current circumstances – permit it an active, interventionist role, with tangible consequences, as opposed to its usual ineffectual arbitrariness." Wizisla, *Benjamin and Brecht*, 66. For more on this exciting project, which unfortunately never saw publication, and the way in which this was key in the development of aesthetics and politics of the day, see Wizisla, *Benjamin and Brecht*, 66-97. Of course, this was not a one-way street, and Brecht's influence can be seen clearly in key Benjamin works such as the Arcades Projects, "The Author as Producer," "The Work of Art" and "Theses on History." Brecht's work, as Guenter Hartung has observed, was for Benjamin the unexpected phenomenon of a great modern non-auratic art, and in the German language to boot – to the extent that even the powerful effect on Benjamin of surrealist texts paled by comparison. (Guenter Hartung in Wizisla, *Benjamin and Brecht*, 103).

[141] Fascinatingly, Benjamin had intended to send a copy of the essay to Brecht before he committed suicide, envisaging Brecht as "one of the first readers of the theses" as Wizisla notes. Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 173. In this he was correct. As Brecht wrote in his journal of the essay: "In short, the little treatise is clear and presents complex issues simply (despite its metaphors and its Judaisms), and it is frightening to think how few people there are who are prepared even at least to misunderstand such a piece." Brecht, quoted in Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 173.

[142] Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 151.

What Benjamin recognizes as powerful in Brecht, and what I have attempted to articulate about Brecht in this chapter, is that there is a necessity to work through the logic of the system, that is, to understand and experiment in order to understand it at a moment, let those contradictions lose and play out on stage, and situate the audience so that they will be able to critically engage in the piece with which they are presented. A chief part of this project is not to abstract the key tensions and struggles but rather to embody them as much as possible. Thus the problem is not, as Jameson may argue, that Brecht is unable to represent capitalism in its totality. This, I have tried to argue here, is not Brecht's chief pursuit, although it is one that has been attributed to him. Rather, Brecht is focussed on depicting how capitalism figures in remaking itself and a working class (as in *Mann ist Mann*), on the necessity of learning how the capitalist system manipulates and produces a system of complex ideological obfuscations (on things that need not be obfuscated, as seen as *Die Heilige Johanna*) and ultimately on the way in which art and culture can respond to the perpetual crises and daily horrors that are part and parcel of capitalism (*Kuhle Wampe*). In Chapter 4 I will continue to show this influence at work, yet with a focus on retrieving history as a means to illuminate the importance of making an argument for the present.

Chapter 3: Blake, Opposition, and the Now

In the following two Blake chapters I hope to argue, following the previous example of Brecht in the preceding chapters, that there are two distinct moments in Blake's work. While the circumstances for their interventions are somewhat comparable in that they are marked by major historical defeats (the cause behind the shift for Brecht occurs with the rise of Nazi power which necessitates an exile away from his political and artistic connections, whereas for Blake (et al.) we see the hopes and desires of a generation expressed by the French Revolution destroyed by its failures),[143] there is a similarity in that the earlier periods of each writer are structured by exploring their own moment of capitalism and working through its specific contradictions. This exploration involves examining the way they can be as close to that moment as possible – a process dedicated to understanding that historical moment's impulses most deeply – while producing an oppositional aesthetic that speaks of and to that moment. Yet just as we see the connections in producing this aesthetic, what I have termed, following Benjamin, a political aesthetics of the now, so too do we see, as presented in the last chapter and as I will present in the next, a moment of historical reexamination as a means to think through an otherwise historically relatively inopportune time for progressives more generally and progressive cultural producers as a result.

[143] Erdman notes that Blake's work at the time and in response is "alive with the sense of a new and revolutionary break with the past and a great hopeful movement of the people." Erdman, *Blake, Prophet Against Empire: A Poets Interpretation of the History of His Own Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969): 130 whereas later, once the Revolution had collapsed, the figure of Orc, a harbinger of rebellious spirit, is described by Erdman as "the Napoleonic serpent". Erdman, *Blake, Prophet Against Empire*, 375. See also Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); and for a more nuanced approach, considering Blake's hesitation to violence, see Robert Manquis, "Holy Savagery and Wild Justice: English Romanticism and the Terror," *Studies in Romanticism* 28 (1989): 365 – 95.

Just as *Mann ist Mann's* Galy Gay is a character who begins his quest in response to a need (the purchase of food) so too in the *Introduction to the Songs of Innocence* do we meet the poet responding to a need. A religious vision (a child upon a cloud) entreats Blake to pipe and sing and ultimately to write down his lyrics "that all may read."[144] This poem, like many of the poems in *Innocence*, is a thoughtful moment of introspection, seemingly very personal in nature, so that the desire to spread the word, as it were, is especially notable. The poem bears many of the common marks of a perceived simplicity in Blake. The intended audience for the poetry, which is meant to be written so that "Every child may joy to hear," hints further at the "innocent" purpose of the poem. But the question which should be posed is: what comprises this innocence, and perhaps more relevant, from what and where does it originate? What in the make-up of this cycle defines innocence, and likewise, is there something, *sine qua non*, that comprises this definition by its absence?

What I would like to argue is that the poems offer a conception of innocence that is constituted by an absence from (or retreat from and rejection of) the dominance of exploitation and oppression, very broadly, and that this innocence embodies a conscious rejection of this dominance, and by doing so erects a space of innocence separate from this dominance. Innocence, it cannot be stressed enough, is *not* indicative of, or a signal of, ignorance.[145] Indeed, innocence stands specifically against ignorance and obfuscation, especially in regards to those dominant attempts to make of that which is radical and (radically) pleasurable about life a cover

[144] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 7.
[145] Robert Rix, in contrast to my argument, states that in the poem "Chimney Sweeper" Innocence "becomes ignorance blinding [children] to the way they are socially exploited." I take issue with this argument below using Thompson and Makdisi, although Löwy and Sayre's point also *suggests* concurrence with my position. See Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2007): 111.

for their own misery-making domination. That is, innocence is a block or a refusal against its own possible inversion and perversion.

Innocence is a conscious space of rejection against the dominating oppressive and exploitative world of capitalism. Innocence involves carving out a space where the rules of oppression and exploitation do not, and cannot, apply. In part, innocence in Blake relies on a retrieval of the past, whereas for Brecht the move into history is a form of accessing the disastrousness of the present. The shift away, for Brecht, brings us closer to home. In contrast, the past exists for Blake not merely in the sense of a particular historical conjuncture, but rather, a state of being that is at once seemingly originary and historically determined. The absence (or negation) of an exploitative worldview in *Songs of Innocence* does narrow the options available as to what can comprise innocence. That is, innocence is not simply a universal, always existing category reliant on an essentialist notion of itself.[146] Innocence is both responsive to and determined by its own structures. That is, in Blake's cosmology there is a conceit in which he combines the absolute and the contemporary and presents it merely as the absolute. Yet in Blake's formulation innocence is determined by this other of exploitation and oppression, while maintaining a clear position that determination does not equal being comprised of it as well. Determination here is perhaps, following Raymond Williams' intervention in *Marxism and Literature*, better translated as limitation, a closer translation of Marx's concept of *bestimmen*.[147] In this sense, what is defined as innocence is limited to what can be rejected from the dominant society. Innocence involves a (concealed) knowing rejection of the world of experience.

[146] See Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Important in this regard is also Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988): 3 – 13; Dennis M. Welch, "Essence, Gender, Race: William Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," *Studies in Romanticism* 49 (2010).
[147] Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 84.

Yet innocence is only half of the equation. The other half exists in the realm of experience, and what experience connotes for Blake. I wish to argue that experience is that moment of proof or recognition in Blake that the realm of the actually existing world is one that must be acknowledged and reckoned with. That is, innocence is not possible of creating everything in its image, or even indeed of opting out of the world of experience. The process of innocence is necessary for maintaining an allegiance to something that is good in an abstract but also very much lived, and deeply practical sense. Experience is equally necessary for the development of understanding of the ways in which the type of *innocence* that Blake constructs is turned over and used by the dominant classes and oppressive actors and institutions. The processes of innocence are always in danger of being co-opted and used in ways in which the ruling ideologies benefit as "organized Innocence *springs out* of Experience."[148] Blake is aware of this and seeks to carve out a space of freedom, the freedom(s) that the society attempts to distinguish and constantly reframe for its own purposes. This is the central dilemma of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and shows how deeply Blake's poetry is concerned with understanding and operating in his moment.

This may sound perhaps like an unfaithful reading of Blake. It may appear to be an attempt, as it were, to smuggle Blake's complex world into one that neatly corresponds with that of an almost explicit, dialectical, Marxist one. This suspicion is perhaps understandable, albeit misguided. Nor is this the first time that such a misunderstanding has occurred, as I will show later. I am not stating that all in Blake is "proto-typical" of Marxism (as if such a thing were possible). What I am arguing is that Blake's process is nevertheless something that is ultimately liberatory and specifically driven through its own moment.

[148] Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 118.

Blake and Romanticism

A large part of the central thesis I am proposing here borrows from the work of Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre and their analysis of the central tenets of Romanticism. Löwy formulates his central arguments in two pieces, his 1987 essay "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization" and then later again in his book-length text with Robert Sayre. The key failing in critical writings on the Romantics, argue the two in the latter work, is that most appreciations and examinations have sought to justify a particular theory of Romanticism with only examples from a select group of writers, painters, poets etc. at the expense/omission of other figures who do not fit in a particular schema. As a result such attempts, they argue, "no doubt designate significant features that are present in the work of many Romantic writers, but they fail to deliver the essence of the phenomenon."[149] Löwy argues that it is thus necessary to examine Romanticism as a way of seeing the world that stretched beyond a particular group or subset of cultural producers and encompasses the movement as a whole. While my focus on Blake is informed mainly by the experience of English Romantics, and many of the commentators I use will be likewise focused on this region, it is important to highlight that, as Löwy argues, that the Romantics across Europe were united in their vision against what they term the "Quantification of Life." As Löwy argued in his 1987 essay,

> The central feature of industrial (bourgeois) civilization that Romanticism criticizes is not the exploitation of the workers or social inequality – although these may also be

[149] Michael L. Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 4.

> denounced, particularly by leftist Romantics – it is the quantification of life, i.e. the total domination of (quantitative) exchange-value, of the cold calculation of price and profit, and of the laws of the market, over the whole social fabric.[150]

What Löwy's framework makes clear is that the Romantics were met with a rapidly advancing capitalist system which sought to lay waste to all it encountered, letting nothing slip either out of its sphere of domination or its systemic logic. While it is true that there were a myriad of political and aesthetic responses to the problems that capitalism forced onto them, the Romantics, across the diverse collection that they were, and for a longer period than the 1850s, were fundamentally concerned with the quantification of all aspects of the social, cultural and political economic realities of their age.

Even among more general appreciations of Romanticism, contemporary scholarship has been fully willing to accept that the Romantics were sharply political and often politically active. Aidan Day's *Romanticism* leaves us in no doubt of the connections between politics and literary production of the time, as does Carmen Casaliggi and Porscha Fermanis *Romanticism: A literary and Cultiural History* and the connection to the rise of human rights discourse. Even a mainstream author such as William Vaughan has argued as much in the admittedly clichéd notion that they were "courageously facing the realities of their age."[151] Despite the melodramatic word choice, the basic idea itself is sound. Often described as hopelessly lost in an age that was most

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[150] Michael Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization," *Theory and Society* 16 (1987): 892.

[151] William Vaughan, *Romanticism and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978): p. 9. A less bombastic offering by Raymond Williams achieves the same goal: "Than the poets from Blake and Wordsworth to Shelley and Keats there have been few generations of creative writers more deeply interested and more involved in study and criticism of the society of their day." Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780 – 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 30. The chapter "The Romantic Artist", 30 – 48, remains a useful analysis and has a refreshing boldness of language. See also Aidan Day's *Romanticism* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and Carmen Casaliggi and Porscha Fermanis *Romanticism: A literary and Cultural History* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

definitely no longer theirs (a description with some validity), the Romantics sought to engage with their society by way of a significant rejection of "modernity," yet this opposition was the basis for reenergizing their own times. This rejection of capitalist modernity is highly important for Romanticism in general,[152] but also for Blake in particular.

Part and parcel of the quantification of the world was a disenchantment of ideas that capital deemed antithetical to its own purposes, a point that Marx and Engels also advanced. Löwy and Sayre quote a particularly telling passage from *The Communist Manifesto* in which the two argued that the effect (if not the stated intent) of the rise of capitalist modernity involved the extinguishing of the non-quantifiable energies of previous systems. They note, "Marx observed that 'the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism' of the past had been submerged by the bourgeoisie, 'drowned…in the icy water of egotistical calculation.'"[153] The reaction of the Romantic project, largely defined, was the activation of a resistance meant to reverse this process. As Löwy and Sayre note,

> Romanticism may be viewed as being to a large extent a reaction on the part of "chivalrous enthusiasm" against the "icy water" of rational calculation and against the Entzauberung der Welt – leading to an often desperate attempt to reenchant the world.[154]

[152] A general but worthy study in this regard is Mark Lussier and Bruce Matsunaga eds., *Engaged Romanticism: Romanticism as Praxis* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008).
[153] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*, 29.
[154] Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism*, 30.

The idea that Blake's work represents a reaction to the "icy water of rational calculation" should incite little argument. However, to describe this rejection of the "Entzauberung der Welt" (disenchantment of the world) as a "desperate attempt to reenchant the world" cannot be said as easily of Blake. Blake surely expresses desperation when one considers the fervency with which he rejects his own society. Yet the desperation can often result in a desire merely to reconstruct the past in largely uncritical ways. That is, rather than a thinking through of the issue at hand, one lurches back in search of a form of society which is deeply implicated in the same power relations that one finds so abhorrent in the current society. In such a regression, reconstruction of the almost always idealized older order frequently leads to a glorification of and desire for a re-imposition of facets of feudalism, without critically acknowledging the real oppressive and exploitative nature of that system, merely in an attempt to rid oneself of the present's undesirable circumstances.[155] Blake stands contrary to this desperation in that his rejection of life's quantification is of a more thoroughgoing and comprehensive sort than was the case with most of his fellow Romantics, as he seeks to reenergize his society by working through the logic of capitalist modernity and by arguing for justice for those who are oppressed and expropriated. Thus, while I agree with Löwy's statement that "The essential characteristic of Romantic anti-capitalism is a thorough critique of modern industrial (bourgeois) civilization (including the process of production and work) in the name of certain pre-capitalist social and cultural values,"[156] at the same time I take the position that the political impulses of Blake were to re-energise the present and also to occupy it, thereby saving the present from those who sought to

[155] What is particularly important here is the work of Raymond Williams in his major work *The Country and the City*. In that work Williams investigates the way in which the glory days of so-called "organic" communities are often an attempt to re-impose paternalist forms of oppression onto the present. In this regard, the emphasis of the country manor poems is a background glance at the supposed halcyon days of a peaceable community which was in fact built on the foundations of one of the largest scales examples of expropriation in Europe, the enclosures act. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985).
[156] Löwy, "The Romantic and the Marxist Critique," 891.

monopolise it. This does not involve opting out fully (but definitely partially), but rather working through the system's logics and monopolising discourse. Blake takes the contemporary at its face value and makes known that which it occludes or leaves aside (leaving it on the "ecchoing green"). Blake's particular form of oppositional aesthetics necessarily revolves around a dialectical analysis of his modernity, an analysis which requires an understanding of its key impulses and drives while simultaneously examining how these require the extinguishing of liberatory spirits on the one hand and the disempowering of those liberatory spirits for large sections of society on the other. This is very far from a naïve re-enchanting of the world. Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* represent an attempt to dialectically dissect society from a dissenting position. These poems argue against the nascent and established ideologies and experienced worlds of modernity by working through its contradictions and omissions.

I should note, before I turn to a closer consideration of Blake and anti-capitalism that while, unlike Brecht, he did not have the concept of capitalism available to him, and nor did he have any systematic or likewise formulated critique of the system upon which he could draw, this should not preclude the descriptor being applied to his work. Charges of anachronism miss the point that Blake's work is not closed to the future, as I have tried to argue *passim*. To not have the ability to understand the system in its totality (in as much as we are able to, or as Brecht was able to) should not invalidate his anti-capitalism, especially when one considers the extent to which his work foresaw areas of capitalist domination that would only be the focus of contemporary scholarship almost two centuries after his death (one case of note, as Joel Kovel argues, is surveillance studies).[157]

[157] As Joel Kovel argues in his analysis of Blake's *Milton*, "As Joel Kovel argues, "There is an entire economy of accusation in the regime of Satanic Mills, watching, nagging, hemming in the mass, extracting power for the aggrandizement of the state. War is its matrix. And the system prepares for war in all its Mills, bringing the Satanic

Expect Poison, Demand Movement

Nothing more kills the revolutionary, redemptive, inspiration of God for Blake than the destruction of his (sic) power in the name of those who purport to carry it forward. Conversely, nothing is more prized in Blake than the achievement of that inspiration through the mediation of the mind and enjoyment of the body.[158] In this mediation of the living, working human the revolutionary impact of Blake's work is most pronounced. In this relationship, the stress on movement in partial dialectical opposition to stillness is vital.[159] Being inside the flow of creativity and experiment as the fulfillment of human activity very much defines Blake's approach, and its opposite is the product of Blake's greatest fears. This fundamental duality is expressed in the following passage from the "Excerpt to the Marriage of Heaven and Hell." Blake writes:

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arts of surveillance to bear on the workers in advanced, monopoly capital, where productivity is the mode, and a century-old process of controlling and invading the bodies of workers are the norm: "quality control" is the fine structure of domination, the quiet, everyday humiliation of the worker, the control that does not speak its own name." See Joel Kovel, "Dark Satanic Mills: William Blake and the Critique of War," *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 21 (2010): 14.

[158] One post-modern interpretation of the body in Blake seems to argue that it is impossible for such a connection that I suggested above to exist. Erin M. Gross notes that "The body in Blake's work points to the inability of comprehension to catch up to the lived experience that the body makes possible." I don't see there a necessary disjunction between the thought and action of the body. In fact, in Blake's cosmology, the two can never fully be disassociated from the other. Erin M. Gross, "What is Called Corporeal: William Blake and the Question of the Body," *The Eighteenth Century* 51 (2010): 414. This is not to deny Nicholas Williams' claim that "If Blake is a poet willing to acknowledge the difficulty of being born, then he is also one who seems to acknowledge the difficulty of seeing and knowing oneself in motion." Difficulty is one matter, inability is another. The latter invites a discussion of the problems of materiality and becoming, the former invites none. See Nicholas M. Williams, "Blake Dead or Alive," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63 (2009): 491.

[159] In *Innocence* even Blake's own work is implicated in the aversion to permanence. As Edward Said has noted**,** "…the opening poem of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* represents the poet as using a reed – "a rural pen" – to write his happy songs for the joy of every child. His paper is the water which is stained as he "writes": but one's inclination is to associate innocence in the poem with impossibility of a permanent inscription in the water. The one line of the poem that suggests a troubling of innocence is "And I stain'd the water clear." Nevertheless, the ambiguously placed adjective "clear" offsets the threat in "stain'd", so that one can read the line to mean either "I stained the water until it became clear" or "my pen stained the clear water": in both cases the conclusion is that because he writes on water, which even if momentarily stained would not retain the imprint, the poet composes happy (and clear) songs." See Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 203-4.

> The fox provides for himself, but God provides for the lion.
> Think in the morning. Act in the noon. Eat in the evening. Sleep in the night.
> He who has suffer'd you to impose on him, knows you.
> As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers.
> The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.
> Expect poison from the standing water.
> You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.[160]

There is a deeply connected sentiment expressed in these last two lines and one that offers help in finding an origin to the stream of his thought. While Blake will rely at times on a circular logic, wherein the end goal is merely a beginning again of the same process, he does not see all attempts at making or producing as equal. Indeed, what terrifies Blake, and this is the poisonous source of the standing water, is those attempts to rule out the conditions of productive activity. The poison exists when production cannot. It is better thus to go too far than to not go far enough.[161] That is, there are forces (authoritarian religious, commodifying, sexist) which excel in producing standing waters of thought. Blake is deeply distrustful of these. He is always wary of

[160] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 37. There is a tendency to read the lines above as the culmination of a particular line of abstracting thought. That is, as I showed in the criticism of the early Brecht, to abstract the poetry here as a *mere* philosophy on the role of reading and interpretation, emphasizing the importance of doing rather than thinking. Yet such an approach neglects the important line "As the plow follows words, so God rewards prayers". What Blake seems to be hinting at here is not a choice of words over actions, but rather words that are inspired by actions. This requires a deeper understanding of the moment of action, of labour in its own instance and its movement that will invoke inspiration. This version of Blake requires a more complex analysis than the clichéd version of the poet with his head trained only towards the sky (particularly of a Blake only obsessed with angels and spirits in the trees). Yet works which have attempted to stress the importance of this relation of the material and the philosophical in Brecht have often left out the role of the structured society that Blake was interested in countering.

[161] Blake's notion of radicalism thus finds comfort in excess, which would have distanced him further from other forms of radicalism of his time. As Saree Makdisi notes; "Radicalism in the 1790s, at least in its hegemonic formulation, must be understood as a project to locate and articulate a middle-class sensibility as against the unruly excesses of both higher and lower orders". Saree Makdisi, "Immortal Joy: William Blake and the Cultural Politics of Empire," in *Blake, Nation and Empire*, Steve Clark and David Worrall eds., (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 22.

the colonization of the one extreme (of innocence, of potential, of pleasurable lived experiences) by the other (of those elements in experience, which seek to make of innocence a commodifiable, useable entity to reinforce their own power and necessarily clamp down on innocent desire and need).

The fear of such extreme caution is borne out of an intense trepidation of the destructive powers of the dominant system. The lack of movement is a symbol of organized inertia causing a virtual death as one is not aware of one's life's potential. The constriction of movement both destroys life-making potential while benefitting those who profit from such a constriction. In a metaphor that would be to Blake's liking, paraphrasing Rosa Luxembourg, one cannot notice one's chains if one doesn't move. These energies, while constricted, are never fully distinguished and their potential sets up a moment of tension between the state of things, understood in a broad fashion as the totality of human experience and action and the possibility of what could be different. Saree Makdisi has nicely articulated this point in his *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790's.* He writes,

> The question, in other words, is whether life is to be the instrumental and reified life of the organized organism…or, on the contrary, the joyous life of the "prolific", indefinite open, reaching out toward an infinitely prolific number of re-makings, re-connections, re-imaginations – life as pure potential, life as constituent, rather than constituted power.[162]

[162] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 266.

For Blake this constituted power makes itself known in all aspects of life; in work, in freedom to and from work, in all of life's spoken, and importantly, unspoken activities. In this way, Blake's poetics have also led to attempts to break down the totality of his "'prolific', indefinite open, reaching out" thought into a reified space which imposes "an interpretive frame" which limits the reader's creative appreciation of his work.[163] This process abstracts away, as we saw with Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*, the complexity and openness of Blakean materiality. In Blake's construction, often his concept of the imagination (as mentioned more generally within the Romantic tradition) is offered as one which would lead us away from the material and into the realm of pure ideas. Yet there exists another option that seeks to reject the dualism and put forth another possibility:

> For Blake's concept of the imagination unifies body and mind, thought and action, material and immaterial, not in the sense that it mediates between them, but in the sense that it marks the deployment of pure creative ontological power on both a mental and material plane. It is, in other words, the experience of a materialist ontology.[164]

This experience of a materialist ontology attempts to be all encompassing. Not in the teleological or predictive sense, or even inclusive of all that it produces, but rather in the way in which Innocence implicitly and explicitly celebrates a non-repressive, creative world which is necessarily open ended. In contrast very much to our own times, the notion of imagination is part of our lived reality. Innocence, its production in the everyday, and specifically Blake's

[163] Saree Makdisi, *Reading William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 2.
[164] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 266.

production of it, are at one and the same time unique instances of productive life. Not all lived reality is bent towards productivity, and some forms of lived reality target production itself. Imagination is almost co-terminous with productivity in this regard. As Makdisi notes, "Imagination here is the process by which such images of truth are produced: it is the process by which lived, experienced reality is brought into being. The freedom to imagine is the power to create the world…"[165] Blake's emphasis on productivity, his ability to make of imagination a lived way of being, acts as a reminder also of his connection to God – not as a God of rules and prescriptions – but of good, nurturing life that reproduces itself through the good nature of God in our lives. Here, "power is human rather than divine" in that "such divine power is here recognized as inherently human."[166] And yet, as Axel Staehler notes: "Divine revelation is not a singular occurrence in the past but happens time and again anew, and occurs individually for every human being."[167] This unique process of reproduction of innocent life through the imagination is put forward in the poems "Laughing Song," "A Cradle Song," and "The Divine Image." What we see in these is a progression of nature's connections in (pro-) creation, creation, and maintenance, and a philosophical examination of the natural inclination that is reflected ultimately in God's own vision of the innocent life.

The first six lines of the "Laughing Song", much as the title would have us believe, centre on the how everything in innocent life seems bent on pleasure. They read as follows:

When the green woods laugh, with the voice of joy

[165] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 267.
[166] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 267.
[167] See Axel Staehler, "Writ(h)ing Images. Imagination, the Human Form, and the Divine in William Blake, Salman Rushdie, and Simon Louvish," *English Studies* 89 (2008): 105.

And the dimpling stream runs laughing by,
When the air does laugh with our merry wit,
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it
When the meadows laugh with lively green
And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene[168]

"The green woods," "the dimpling stream," "the air," "the green hill," "the meadows," and "the grasshopper" all laugh, either of their own accord or through interaction with the human "merry wit."[169] Here, nature is, like imagination in the discussion above, brought to life. The natural world in this regard seemingly follows our human lead, reciprocated in the poem as the last six lines are human-centric. Nature is not merely given over to us, but conjoins with our conception of judgment of the pleasure-making of life. This is not to anthropomorphize the woods, stream, air, or hill but to make them a part of the same process. Humanity's life-giving force is mirrored as nature offers up delights, so too are we then delighted by it. The similarities do not stop here. Nature comes alive with its connection to humanity, and reaches a fuller fruition by its extension through the prism of human imagination, often as a metaphor for both human production and reproduction. The poem offers "a profound unity, a sense of commonality and unruptured mutuality linking us all joyously together."[170] In order to extend this unruptured mutuality, Blake employs somewhat subtle sexual imagery to further bind the two.

The "sweet round mouths" of "Mary and Susan and Emily" is a physically pleasurable utterance, as is the fact that they sing "Ha, ha he!" There is at the very least a sense of double entendre here. This reading is given more credibility when we read that "our table with cherries

[168] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 11.
[169] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 11.
[170] Makdisi, *Reading William Blake*, 73.

and nuts is spread." The final entreaty to "Come live, and be merry, and join with me, To sing the sweet chorus of "Ha, ha, he!"[171] is an equation of sexual pleasure and the pleasure of the natural world more generally. They are, if not inseparable, at the very least complementary to each other. The introduction of the pleasure of the natural world, and the joys of the natural world with their connection to humanity and humanity's role in their existence (for instance, "the painted birds laugh in the shade"), lends a certain degree of conjoined frivolity, and sexual frivolity, herewith.

Although it would be wrong to equate the physical enjoyment of sex, and in particular the playfulness of this portrayal of sexuality, with procreation (designed with a purpose wherein pleasure is a mere inducement to the larger act – indeed we are provided little evidence here that Blake is referring to hetero-normative sex, given that the three names mentioned are women's), the poem which follows is about the raising of a young child. Love is in this sense, especially as regards a unity of multiples (albeit with a maintenance of difference), extended towards another who cannot, at least in the moment, appreciate it. This involves loving more purely in the sense of a gift. Whereas the joy of nature and sex in "The Laughing Song" took place during the day, in the evening we find an ode to care and protection of a sleeping child, or perhaps a child struggling to find sleep.[172]

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[171] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 11.

[172] While not the focus of this text, it should be noted that although Blake is seen as almost synonymous with progressive sexual politics, so much so that that Susan Matthews has stated that "Blake has stood for a prophet of sexual freedom in popular culture in the latter part of the twentieth century," his later writings (not including the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*) have been "seen as characterized by ambiguity at best, ambivalence, contradiction and even misogyny at worst." See Susan Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 1. Likewise, as Jon Mee notes, Blake will "return again and again to the theme of sexual freedom" and sexual freedom was "treated as part and parcel of political liberation," there was nevertheless a "tendency among the male prophets of women's liberation to limit that liberation to the sexual sphere." Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasms: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790's* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 144-45. For a considerable grounding of Blake's contradictory feminisms during the 1790s see Helen P. Bruder, *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997): 90-132. As with sexuality more generally, and although Blake was far more open to including in at times very non-regressive was issues of gay and lesbian sexualities, Blake's notion of homosexuality in many ways bore the marks of his time, yet this it is not sufficient to state that he reproduced them. An exhaustive view is provided in

Sleep should offer a moment without hardship, though Blake suggests that all may be not well with the warning that the child should "Sleep, sleep, happy child, / While o'er thee doth mother weep."[173] In the midst of this sadness, the child's peace and the parent's care signify the promise of redemption that we find in the reliance on others, but also in the innocent world's offering of unity in compassion and love. Humanity is not alone in this as, like innocence, it is cast in a cosmological frame. In the mother's weeping, for instance, we find the sympathetic nature of God. "Sweet babe, once like thee / Thy Maker lay, and wept for me:"[174] And nor is the connection between the mother and child, and mother and God, the end of it. There is a third connector. "Infant smiles are his own smiles; Heaven and earth to peace beguiles."[175] The correlation of the infant to the heavenly is a further instantiation of the deeper sense of unity that exists in innocence. At every level of compassion we see how another becomes represented. "Sweet babe, in thy face / Holy image I can trace."[176]

Being free of an oppression that exists everywhere in the tragedy of experience is at once seemingly an impossibility yet paradoxically also the only present antidote for an exploitative world, a world which seeks to colonise all in and out of its path. Yet innocence should not be read merely as an exasperated critique of the current order. Blake was mindful of the ways in which there were only a few moments that opened up a possibility against the tyranny of a totalizing capitalist world. All language and activity (not just biblical) is not merely fused with meaning, but rather is immersed in the *struggle* over meaning. If exploitation acts in such a way as to almost bar opposition to it, then an aspect of resistance to this involves maintaining

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Christopher Z. Hobson, *Blake and Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave, 2000) and also Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly eds., *Queer Blake* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[173] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 12.

[174] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 12.

[175] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 12.

[176] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, p. 12.

something that is universally good, and to a very large extent, "pure." In Blakean terms, this purity is not uniform but rooted in difference and acceptance.

In the poem "The Little Black Boy" there is seemingly a clear demonstration of the pitfalls associated with the notion of purity as referenced above. The poem, *prima facie*, suggests offensive racial over/undertones. The opening lines, in particular, stand out as problematic; "My mother bore me in the southern wild, And I am black, but oh my soul is white!"[177] seems to confirm the racial hierarchies of the time. Whiteness bears the marks of superiority, and likewise there is an equation of whiteness and "civilized" Englishness. Whiteness bears the marks of blessings, while blackness stands as a marker for deprivation and lack, as the last line of the first stanza notes, "But I am black, as if bereaved of light."[178] Read in relation to the rest of the poem, the meanings here shift considerably. At this stage of the poem we are hearing from the black boy himself, but he is in conversation with his mother, a teacher, who challenges this thought. As Elizabeth A. Bohls notes, "The child's African mother teaches him a lesson about God, nature and human bodies, a lesson that questions in significant ways what we come to recognize as the imposed colonial mentality of the first stanza."[179] The lesson involves equating racial attitudes to "a cloud, and like a shady grove" which obscure from the light of God. This importantly involves our collective "learn [ing] to bear the beams of love."[180] The lesson is to jettison the binds of racism and racial authority and, in the second last stanza, the child arrives at a state which contradicts the problematic formulation referenced abouve. As Blake states, "When I from black and he from white cloud free, / And round the tent of God like lambs we joy."[181] Whiteness and

[177] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, p. 9.
[178] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, p. 9.
[179] Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Romantic Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): 63.
[180] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 9.
[181] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 9.

Blackness as racial categories of superiority and inferiority obscure us from understanding our indivisible humanity. Interestingly, and in opposition to standard colonial narratives of the time of the learned white and instructed brown learner, in the final stanza it is the black child that takes on the role of his mother in teaching the young white boy how to bear the light of God's love.[182]

In this poem humanity is reflective of God's most benevolent state. Despite Blake's protestations against the standing water, there exists a form of stasis in God's purity. Stasis, rather than a block on human creativity and the making possible, acts as a form of protection against the world of experience in which racial categories are necessary to maintain the system. Yet this version of stasis involves a state of being that is simultaneously a state of becoming. In order for this benevolence to become a reality, we must arrive at a time "…when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear."[183] That is, in order for God to have purpose, God must be made living in the everyday both in moments of innocence but also by maintaining moments of innocence in trying circumstances.

What is striking in "The Divine Image" is that Blake suggests how God's action in the world manifests itself, but also suggests that the gesture goes one better by portraying humanity as reflective of and constituting of the Divine. There is the clearest evidence presented in maintaining the natural goodness that Blake displays is in fact part of *Innocence*. Note here the duplication in the following,

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[182] It should be noted that in two persuasive readings of the poem, Makdisi's *William Blake* and Bohls' *Romantic Literature* much discussion is given over to the physical representation of the black child in Blake's attendant visual to the poem. While this discussion is vital and lends more ambiguity to the reading of the poem (what are we to make of the fact that in one image the child is brown, while in another he is pink?), my main argument – that the poem offers up the notion that difference and unity are not opposites and need not be reducible in their entirety to racial hierarchies – is still tenable. See Makdisi, *William Blake*, 165 and Bohls, *Romantic Literature*, 64 – 66.
[183] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 9.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is God our father dear:
And Mercy Pity Peace and Love,
Is Man his child and care.[184]

This is a poem not merely of relation but of equivalence. The mirroring of the two lines provides a clear sense of the reproduction of God in humanity. Yet while the first two lines lend themselves to a description of God's nature, the following two are a description of action, especially when one considers the relational nature of humanity and the natural world in "A Laughing Song," "A Cradle Song," and as well "The Little Black Boy." While God is, in the terms referred to earlier, a pure being of goodness in nature,[185] the trinity of man (as humanity), child, and care are the products of nature in action and in this way inseparable. Christopher Z. Hobson argues similarly that: "Exactly the distinction between human and transcendent Jesus….is one that Blake has denied since his early works, such as "The Divine Image.""[186] This connected existence, while connected to the Divine, is interdependent on its own reproduction. This reproduction necessitates the nature of God made alive, and this is "Mercy Pity Peace and Love." The grammar here is particularly telling, as the use of semicolon is literally meant to join the independent clauses.[187] Blake may at times be very creative with grammar, and often eschews its rules, but this particular instance seems, given the content here, to be a symbolic formal

[184] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 12.
[185] David Erdman argues the three poems under examination here do not have the satiric bent as others in *Innocence*. He notes: "Their social purpose is larger – to construct one of the foundation of an imaginatively organized and truly happy prosperity." Erdman, *Blake, Prophet Against Empire*, 126-27.
[186] Christopher Z. Hobson, *The Chained Boy: Orc and Blake's Idea of Revolution* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999): 224.
[187] On Blake's intentional use of syntax and grammar in *Songs of Innocence* see James Chandlers's "Blake and the Syntax of Sentiment," in Clark et al., *Blake, Nation and Empire*, 112-13.

strategy. This formal aspect is further found in the notion of, the poem's title, "The Divine Image." The poem continues,

> For Mercy has a human heart
> Pity, a human face:
> And Love, the human form divine,
> And Peace, the human dress.[188]

Blake carefully devotes a line to each aspect of humanity's reflection of God made real. In the image, in the moment before it can be spoiled, and perhaps even while being spoiled it maintains the belief in cleanliness, is innocence. What we see here is the beginning of the end of a trinity of sorts, a trinity of a composition of life that is founded on an alternative notion of humanity than that offered by the dominant forces and their structures of feeling.

While admitting the advancement of a religious politics of innocence, it would be a mischaracterization of Blake to suggest that he looks merely to negate an oppressive politics by his oppositional way of viewing and being in the world. Blake does not offer a mere rejection of the corollary but offers what E. P. Thompson terms a "contrary state." The distinction is relevant as it illustrates both the necessity of responding to the current moment in Blake, and a refusal to accept the dominant features of that current moment as the only way out. In an earlier model for the poem "Divine Image" we see an example of this mirroring:

> Cruelty has a Human Heart
> And Jealousy a Human Face
> Terror, the Human Form Divine

[188] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 12-13.

And Secrecy, the Human Dress
The Human Dress, is forged Iron
The Human Form, a Fiery Forge.
The Human Face, a Furnace seal'd
The Human Heart, its hungry Gorge.[189]

Terror and Love equally stand on opposite poles of the Human Form in this framing. This is likewise the case with Pity and Jealousy, Cruelty and Mercy, etc. The fact that Blake rejected this mirror opposition is telling. The opposite of Innocence is not Experience. Experience, as I will argue, is a knowing of what is there in the world which attempts to deform and purposefully empty out the content of Blake's living, productive, trinity. What we should draw from this is that the straight negation of The Divine Image is rejected by Blake. The trinity is also a representation of unity, and one which attempts to shield us from the penetration of the world depicted in Experience.

While the more common deployment of God, especially those depictions characterized in *Songs of Experience,* works towards an abstraction of human relations, the use of God here produces the opposite effect. The title, "Divine Image," potentially reflects the source of the human malady, but again one must note that the source of the error is the image of God as a static entity which must be obeyed, and not God a process to be discussed, and struggled over. In Blake's alternative reading, God here produces an ever-greater materiality, that is, becomes a practiced thing, even if the dominant practice's object is to remove the idea that God is an arguable subject matter. This materiality is caught in an interesting circle, as the more it is

[189] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast* (New York: The New Press, 1995): 204.

grounded in the totality of social relations, the more it attempts to make impossible its own undoing, and in that, change.[190] Here we have again the principle which objects to "Standing Water." Nature itself depends on movement, on the overcoming of itself and transference into something else. Thus, an attempt to fix any particular moment of the godly into a series of set rituals, is anathema to Blake.[191] It is for this reason that Innocence has an impulse that is its own, devoid of Experience's determining influence. Yet for this reason, Innocence involves the necessity of continual active creation in life as it is constantly lived, that Innocence must reckon with, and define itself in relation to, *Experience.*

And here again is where the connection with Brecht, in the creation of an aesthetic politics of the now, is so vital. For Brecht, the contemporary moment defines the nature of a necessary aesthetic response. It defines what its categories of reference are, but also involves the duty to explore that moment. The general theory of opposition is a *sine qua non* of oppositional political aesthetics, but it must be continually lived and shaped to its own time. A significant part of Blake's particular constellation is formed with another quite radical tradition.[192] Blake was by no means alone in framing a way of seeing or imagining a world of thought that sought to

[190] Martin Bidney has adeptly described Blake's philosophy in contrast with the German Romantic Goethe metaphorically in the following: "Blake and Goethe share a Heraclitean awareness of the omnipresence of change….Blake presents Becoming as a Heraclitean fire; Goethe as a Heraclitean river." See Martin Bidney, *Blake and Goethe: Psychology, Ontology and Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988): 76.

[191] As Jeremy Tambling suggests in regards to the first half of the poem "The Garden of Love," but which I think can be applied more broadly to those positive evocations of nature in Blake, "The 'garden of love', the activity of playing on the green and the 'sweet flowers' exist in a continuum." While *Experience* will end this continuum, that it exists in Blake's philosophy is vital. See Jeremy Tambling, *Blake's Night Thoughts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 8.

[192] With Brecht, the key frame of reference was a capitalist order which was impacting on the formation of new, easily malleable individuals who would reject their own interests by, among other things, embracing the influence of the "bad collective." There is less of an emphasis in Blake on the creation of an oppositional bloc (although there is ample evidence that he was active in creating oppositional movements of his day, most notably his opposition to slavery as represented by his work with Richard Steadman). There is nevertheless in his work an attempt to put forward an alternate oppositional thought which would reject the dominant structure of life. The question for Blake in this regard is what makes the "standing water stand"? For the *Song of Innocence and Experience* the concentration of power and the forms of abuse that come with that power is perhaps the best place to begin.

discharge itself from dominant ideologies. The tradition that he channels is Antinomianism, and its centrality to Blake's work should not be underestimated.[193] E.P. Thompson defines this tradition as follows: "Antinomianism, indeed, is not a place at all, but a way of breaking out from received wisdom and moralism, and entering upon new possibilities."[194] Blake's own inheritance of the politics of antinomianism, if we follow Thompson,[195] produces a specifically oppositional politics for his own time. While the colour and shape of antinomianism will change according to the mode of the specific historical time in which they are found,[196] for Blake they are linked to issues of poverty and social justice. It is a feature of this tradition of radical religious thought,[197] as I have argued in Blake's conception of innocence above, that God must be made real in lived relations. The greater belief in what God represents and entails is more important than a stricture

[193] In contrast to other commentators, Thompson is at pains to make clear that this tradition does not merely influence Blake's work but rather notes "its structural centrality". Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast,* p. 20. It is useful to point out as Michael Ferber does, that through this tradition Blake shared many of the same beliefs and viewpoints as Gerard Winstanley, the radical Digger of the century preceding Blake's, and Ferber goes so far as to state that Blake is Winstanley's heir. See Michael Ferber, *The Social Vision of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Thompson also briefly notes this influence, particularly when he refers to Winstanley's depiction of "the God of magistrates, property-owners and the Church [as] "the God Devil." See Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast,* 22. While the political impulse of Winstanley's position would find favour in Blake, the focus on love and imagination would've shaped him as well. See Gerrard Winstanley, "A New-Yeers Gift," in *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England*, David Wootton ed., (London: Penguin, 1986): 317 – 332.

[194] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 20.

[195] While Thompson's work on Blake's Antinomianism is largely its first major treatment, there are some texts that take issue with it, specifically on the exact type of Blake's inheritance of antinomianism. See Keri Davies and David Worrall, "Inconvenient Truths: Re-historicizing the Politics of Dissent and Antinomianism," *Re-Envisioning Blake,* edited by Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude and Angus Whitehead (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 30 – 47. While there may be some validity to such a re-appreciation of the specific strains and trajectories in Blake's work, and while there has been some disagreement of the origins of Thompson's configuration of Blake's inheritance of the Antinomian tradition, it should suffice to note, as Jon Mee has done, that; "The point is that antinomianism and millenarianism of varying degrees of extremism remained available in the popular culture of the eighteenth century. If this is accepted Blake seems less the mystic who reproduced beliefs that had generally disappeared than someone whose radicalism was the product of a dialogue with the complex nexus of popular enthusiasm." See Jon Mee, "Is there an Antinomian in the House? William Blake and the After-Life of a Heresy" in *Historicizing Blake*, edited by Steve Clark and David Worrall (London: St. Martin's Press, 1994): 43.

[196] As A. L. Morton has suggestively noted, "Blake was the greatest English Antinomian, but also the last." See A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake* (New York: Haskell House, 1966): 36.

[197] While there is some disagreement on the actual form of antinomianism that Blake allied himself with, Jon Mee writes that: "Practical antinomianism, on the other hand, involved a conviction of a finished state of salvation in the here and now which led to an active rejection of the authority of the law, sometimes to the point of rejoicing in sinfulness as an occasion for the outpouring of God's grace." Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasms: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790's* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992): 58.

of observance. As Thompson notes, "Faith must always take priority to form."[198] God's form is only a form, an image, or a semblance. It offers a hints towards a particular instantiation, but this is as much as the form can offer. As Makdisi notes,

> …the antinomian tradition with which Blake engaged locates in its faith in the eternal and the infinite – that is, in God – a concept of particularity that cannot be reduced to a single, definite, and reified – and hence quantifiable, measurable, and interchangeable – form, even though it is "infinitely various."[199]

The most explicit statement of this form is that innocence is a form of love that should be directed towards another as one would love God. Acceptance of everyone is necessary as God is in everyone. Life is always already a continuous radical gesture of becoming and developing a connection with one's social world. Innocence thus involves an enacted purity of position. Innocence is an irreducible that negates any attempts to ascribe religious affiliation to an other. As final stanza of the "Divine Image" runs:

> And all must love the human form,
> In heathen, turk, or jew.
> Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,
> There God is dwelling too[200]

[198] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 9.
[199] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 323.
[200] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 13.

Innocence here implies an "immanent understanding of God [that] does not impose unity at the expense of difference."[201] This immanence of God, "A God constituted from below rather than existing independently of us from on high,"[202] fills every aspect of life, and only when life is fulfilled in this way can we reach the stage of love.

The form of this godly intervention is only possible through human interaction, yet its pulse can often seem faint. While Blake scholarship has at times supported an unhelpful dichotomy of city as place of dirt and decadence and country as place of refuge and hope, such a binary is consistently bucked by Blake himself. He makes clear that the countryside, or the natural world as such, is no simple refuge. There is hope there but the actual living situation is much different, especially as the dominant systems begin to dominate it. Indeed, as quoted in a famous essay by George Orwell[203], there is posited the notion, a fairly conservative one which occludes the laborious reality of rural production, that seeks to mould the countryside as the other to the city. The offending passage goes as follows:

> Such such were the joys.
> When we all girls & boys,
> In our youth-time were seen
> On the Ecchoing Green.[204]

As in Orwell's essay, this lines are intended as a rebuke to those who would idealize nature. Indeed, one need only keep reading to see that this joyous scene is, crucially, no longer to be

[201] Makdisi, *Reading William Blake*, 69.
[202] Makdisi, *Reading William Blake*, 52.
[203] See George Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in George Orwell, *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell* (Penguin: London, 1994): 147.
[204] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 8.

found:

> Like birds in their nest,
> Are ready for rest,
> And sport no more seen,
> On the darkening Green.[205]

While there is a strong argument to make that Blake is dismissive of an ideal past of pleasure in nature, it is another thing entirely to suggest that Blake is claiming that the joys of the natural world are gone.[206] Blake is not advancing a nostalgic politics here, but rather attempting, as he is doing across the whole of the *Songs of Innocence,* to show how those who are different can still be or act in unison. The speaker of the "Such, such were the joys" is Old John, and through the aid of the children, "Does laugh away care." And the poem suggests that the children are aware of this beneficence. Just as in nature "The birds of the bush, / Sing louder around", so too do the youth offer themselves for a greater pleasure "While our sports shall be seen / On the echoing Green."[207] The notion of the "Ecchoing Green" suggests an action in the past, but given this reading's propensity to productivity, it is more accurate that this marks "the convergence of being and becoming, of production and constitution."[208] In this sense "echoing" is both the noise being made, as well as its reference and typification of this process. The metaphor of an echo is useful,

[205] Blake, *Complete Poetry*, 8.
[206] Orwell is not alone in this position. Steve Clark follows by arguing that the poem ends with the belief that: "An idealized past is evoked from which the present narrator is necessarily exiled: 'Ecchoing' signifies estrangement rather than proximity, the encroachment of mortality onto the 'darkening Green.'" This too literal reading of the text projects a vision of mortality that a larger reading of *Innocence* tends to negate. There is not only no exile here, the notion of echo seems to, if anything, note maintenance and reverberation as opposed to a definitive stoppage. See Steve Clark, "'There is no Competition': Eliot on Blake, Blake in Eliot," in *Blake, Modernity and Popular Culture*, edited by Steve Clark and Jason Whittaker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 93.
[207] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 8.
[208] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 265.

however, in that it locates the mark of potential – it has once existed – and will continue to reverberate in another form. The potential of child's play – its inability to be harnessed by rationalist, utilitarian ends – points towards a life outside of experience.

The "childlike" simplicity of the poem, and the position given to children as both responders to pain and agents of change should not be overlooked. While Nick Rawlinson argues that: "Indeed, it is the inherent vulnerability of child's play that leads to the need for institutionalized religion, thus exposing the child to exploitation,"[209] one might instead posit that in fact while the child's inherent vulnerability makes possible the child's exploitation, it does not produce the need for institutionalized religion. Rather, it is the absence of good care that, in effect, creates a vacuum which exploitation will seek to colonize. In reference to his illuminated works, Blake stated that "his own work has been particularly well elucidated by children, who 'have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I have ever hoped.'"[210] This is an example of how Blake's conception of justice is coloured by his analysis of the potential for inspiration in the contemporary moment, and cannot disconnect from this change the role of human compassion as an engaged, thoughtful position. Blake dismisses the attitude that regards the emotional aspects of humanity body as an unthinking being, and locates in its opposite the power of its own liberation, specifically against those forms which would negate its potential. As Stephen Goldsmith argues:

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[209] See Nick Rawlinson, *William Blake's Comic Vision* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 168. Blake would maintain an interest in childhood vulnerability long throughout. Writing on Blake's *Urizen*, George H. Gilpen makes a link between the contrast between *Innocence* and *Experience* in different stages of the Urizenic world. He notes that in later texts, and as I have tried to argue in the *Songs* and Löwy and Sayre do above, "What Blake does accomplish with fascinating artistry is a clear identification of the errors in the blinkered thinking of unholy priests of Enlightenment science – their stagnant pride, their meaningless abstraction, their spiritual vacuity, and their practical inhumanity." See George H. Gilpen, "William Blake and World's Body of Science," *Studies in Romanticism* 43 (2004): 56.

[210] Makdisi, "The Political Aesthetic of Blake's Images," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, edited by Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 111.

> Blake stands at the early stage of a modern critical legacy that posits the agency of emotion within and against a world that would subordinate the full capabilities of response and action to instrumental reason. Against the old enlightenment charge that enthusiasm overleaps the space of reflection and is therefore incompatible with the intellectual distance required by modern critical judgment, and against the charge that errant enthusiasm relies instead on experiential immediacy as evidence of its authenticity, this legacy integrates the immediacy of enthusiasm into critical practice, placing charged affect at the vanguard of critique, creativity, and change.[211]

And thus *Innocence*, to extend our reading of Löwy and Sayre above, cannot be positioned from neglect, whether of neglect of compassion, human empathy or care, or even of intellect.[212]

The only use of the word "innocent" in the cycle of poems is in "Holy Thursday," a poem which more than most in the cycle makes clear the division of young and old, yet emphasizes the connection between the two. The last six lines of the poem are informative in this regard, as well as particularly instructive in establishing the state of the godly instantiation. They read as follows;

> The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
> Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands
> Now like a mighty wild they raise to heaven the voice of song
> Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
> Beneath them sit the aged man wise guardians of the poor
> Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door[213]

[211] Steven Goldsmith, "William Blake and the Future of Enthusiasm," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 63 (2009): 446.
[212] Thus, the famous line from the Preface of *Milton*, "I will not cease from mental fight," See Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 95.
[213] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 13.

In their infancy, the "multitude of lambs," innocent, make "harmonious thunderings" to the heavens. Here the collective is taken care of and the potential of the many (due to their harmony as the "mighty wild" who "raise to heaven" their song) is clear. These uproarious descriptions do not seem to harness their offerings, yet they point again to the connections between young and old, and the immanence of God is offered in the shepherding of the poor and inclusiveness that is a prerequisite of this immanence. The last lines prefigure the state of hardship that resonates through Blake's society, and clearly we are not in a "pure" setting of the "Ecchoing Green." In that scene there is reason to believe Blake is suggesting something that is not the actual order of things, but the order of things as they could and should be. The use of the term "lest" is a telling harbinger of the many abuses of power to come in the *Songs of Experience*. There is a balance, an edge, on which things stand. If anything, the deployment of the term "wise" – so categorically a term of derision in the Marriage of Heaven and Hell – instructs us to beware the potential of abuse or misdirection. Wisdom here is rhetorical – not a matter for question in that *they are* wise – and taken as given and positive. This deployment of rhetorical questions is employed in the same way as Blake's question in "On Another's Sorrow";

> Can I see another's woe,
> And not be in sorrow too.
> Can I see another's grief,
> And not seek for kind relief?[214]

[214] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 17.

At this stage, in the world of innocence and all that comprises it, the answer is no. Yet Innocence is also lived and is thus a direction, a way of acting, being and becoming in the world, and a response to a need, as we saw at the beginning of the *Songs of Innocence* cycle. As the poem concludes, the last in the cycle, the shift to a world of experience is prefigured;

> O! he gives to us his joy,
> That our grief he may destroy
> Till our grief is fled & gone
> He doth sit by us and moan.[215]

As "He" sits so did the Mother prior in "A Cradle Song," and they both moan in empathy with the sufferer. Comforting someone in grief is an end in itself. Compassion is pure and necessary. It evokes that moment of connection between those in need and those able to help. This simple, loving logic of Innocence, at home in all manner of peoples and protective of differences, is consistently undone and prohibited in the world of Experience.

Innocence's Opposition to Experience

If in the *Songs of Innocence* we saw a vision or a worldview that attempted to offer a totalizing (read all-encompassing – cosmological) picture of Blake's possibility-making, inspiring world, in the *Songs of Experience* we see that world toppled over and replaced by an equally totalizing worldview of modern capitalism and its commodifying, monopolizing,

[215] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 17.

rationality. While Blake is not shy in using repetition of words, images or metaphors throughout his work as a formal strategy (which is sometimes problematic for critics as the same signifier denotes an entirely different meaning depending on a subtle shift of context), few are as pronounced as the repetition of the "every" in one of the most notable offerings, "London," in the *Songs of Experience*. The word is repeated seven times[216] and in each we are left with little ambiguity as to its intent.

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear:
How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls
But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear

[216] While "charter'd" and "every" capture attention given the repetition another word dirt and dirty should also be noted. As Susan Matthews argues, "But the flatly unpoetic "dirty" was there for a reason. Dirt is not only a literal feature of Blake's Lambeth but also an image of the corruption of childhood and marriage…" See Susan Matthews, "Impurity of Diction: The 'Harlots Curse' and Dirty Words," *Blake and Conflict*, edited by Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 65. Note however the depiction of the process of consistent life-giving force in *Innocence*: "Significantly, Blake's Sweep in *Innocence* is envisioned as a weaving Caterpillar, a creature regenerated from death." Paul Milner, "Blake's London: Time and Spaces," *Studies in Romanticism* 41 (2002): 293. Pramod K. Nayar has provided a modern take on the poem, suggesting that one of the forms of authority depicted in the poem is the surveillance state. See Pramod K.Nayar, "William Blake's 'London' as a Surveillance poem," *The Explicator* 72 (2014): 328-332.

And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.[217]

What we have here is the closest vision of a system which leaves nothing outside of the wake of its destructive power. The overwhelming sense of despair in the poem is introduced not merely by the dirt and destruction of London[218] but through its specifically commodified nature, most notably in the repeated use of "charter'd," a reference to commercial organizations that existed in London connecting the political and economic systems that profited from its management.[219] The system turned streets and rivers into profit making entities. Blake's London builds "out of the indirect translation of radical oppositional politics and nonconformist discourse, while attempting to "unbuild" the mainstream manifestations of London's political power."[220] Yet London reveals, in its supposed specificity, more than the city itself. As Raymond Williams notes, the "London" of the poem is more than a signifier for the metropolis:

> A dominant part of the life of the nation was reflected but also created within it [London]. As its population grew it went into deficit, not only in food but in the balance of material production; but this was much more than compensated by the fact of its social production: it was producing and reproducing, to a dominant degree, the social reality of the nation as a whole. It was in this still eighteenth-century sense that Blake, himself a craftsman and a

[217] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 26-7. On the subject of marriage and submission, "What Blake has most in mind is the bringing of a thing into a state of acquiescence or submission to another, the establishment of an unequal relation between two things, indeed a kind of "marriage" in which one partner is, perhaps forcibly, reconciled to the domination of the other." See Russell Prather, "William Blake and the Problem of Progression," *Studies in Romanticism* 46 (2007): 509.
[218] It is interesting to note that the original poem had the word Chartered replaced by "dirty." See Williams, *Country and the City*, 148.
[219] On this point we can further see the totalizing essence of capitalism is reflected in capital's attempts to disrupt the connection between humans and the natural world. This runs counter to a Blakean stance which argues that in nature and ecology one finds that "all things are complexly interrelated." Thus, to argue against this inter-relatedness is to be "anti-ecologic," and there is little that is more anti-Blakean than being anti-ecological. See Kevin Hutchings, *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002): 13. This argument is contended *passim*.
[220] Julian Wolfreys, *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998): 37.

Londoner, saw the capital city.[221]

The key problem for Blake is that his capitalist society, by then the dominant form of social relation, was doing all it could to make alternative ontologies risible and impossible. Indeed, this totalizing system produces itself a form of "educated" readers, trained carefully in rebutting criticisms of their own oppression, which hinders the possibilities for thinking outside of it. For this reason, Saree Makdisi questions how we begin to approach Blake in the first place, given that we have come through this process ourselves. "It may be, in other words, that the very way we have learned to read is precisely what prevents us from reading Blake properly."[222] This is not to suggest that no efforts have been put forward to unravel these strategies and dominant discourses. Yet these strategies are principally marginal. The problem for Blake's society was its profound totalizing quantification. The "Charter'd streets" and "charter'd Thames,"[223] the urban and natural in London's duality, were imposing other forms of living and surviving, and Blake is at

[221] Williams, *Country and the City*, 147-48. Jennifer Davis Michael argues that in regards to the poem "London" that "The potential danger of pastoral, illustrated in the deadly gardens above [The Garden of Love], is that while it enables us to envision an ideal world, it also enables us to ignore the elements in the world around us that fall short of the ideal." I believe this argues misses the point of Blake's criticism of the pastoral, as Blake's philosophy seems to buck the ideal/real formulation, as in Blake everything is in a sense real, even, as Makdisi will argue, the imagination. Michael's slight on materialist criticism, referring to "London" as "the poem most favored by Marxist interpreters of Blake, is hardly a realistic description," perhaps is informative as to the inattention to materialism in that regard. Raymond Williams also dismisses the notion that Blake maintains a notion of the pastoral (especially as opposed to the city). See Jennifer Michael Davis, *Blake and the City* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006): 67 & 26. In a similar vein, Christopher Tomlins writes: "The London of Blake's poem was Patrick Colquhoun's London—the London, that is, of the *Police of the Metropolis* (1796), the world's greatest commercial city, the riverine heart of an imperial political economy, inhabited by a laboring population disciplined by the sciences of magistracy." See Christopher Tomlins, "Revolutionary Justice in Brecht, Conrad and Blake," *Law and Literature* 21 (2009): 196.

[222] Saree Makdisi, "The Political Aesthetic of Blake's Images," 111.

[223] David Erdman usefully notes that in "London" Blake borrows Thomas Paine's notion "that all charters are purely negative in effect and that city charters, by annulling the rights of the majority, cheat the inhabitants and destroy the town's prosperity…" Erdman, *Blake*, 277. This further speaks to the universality that Blake aims to represent, a point that Raymond Williams also makes here: "It is worth stressing this in Blake, since although he inherits many eighteenth-century pastoral images, in his whole work he transforms them to elements of a general condition. The simplifying contrast between country and city is then decisively transcended." Raymond Williams, *Country and the City*, 149.

odds with this process. The construction of Blake's aesthetic politics of this time is grounded in this relation to (and ultimate rejection of) his society. What I argued in the earlier section of the *Songs of Innocence*, particularly around the question of care and its fundamental nature in Blake's system of thought, is relevant in this regard.

As argued earlier, the temporal and spatial co-ordinates of Innocence do not exclude moments of difficulty, moments of sadness, or even physical or emotional pain. That is, Innocence is not a pure space where certain realities of human hardship are magically whisked away. The relevance of Innocence is not the absence of human suffering, or depression, but the way in which that suffering is responded to, and how the others in the same space are implicated and responsible for the misery. In "A Cradle Song," the moment of anguish ("While o'er thee doth mother weep") is deemed part of life's cycle on the one hand (parents worrying over their children), or a consequence of capitalism on the other (the poverty that one presumes exists so widely in Experience also exists in the realm of Innocence). The difference is that in the realm of Innocence there is an offer of assistance, or of guidance, and ultimately of sharing in that pain. In the realm of Experience, there is no aid to pain, but rather that pain is portrayed not as an unfortunate by-product of the system, an aberration, but an aspect of the system's very core functioning. Thus in "Holy Thursday" Blake notes this bare contradiction in another rhetorical question:

> Is this a holy thing to see,
> In a rich and fruitful land,
> Babes reducd to misery,

Fed with cold and usurous hand?[224]

The comment that these babes are "fed with cold and usurious hand" should prick our ears. There is a deep connection here between the depiction of money and its force in the world. It seems that they are two mains criticisms that Blake is laying out for us. There is corrupting power that money has in that it makes humanity move away from the notions of pity and mercy that were so prevalent in Innocence. Yet it goes one step further insofar as there is a long-term plan in place for these children as they spend their entire lives in the service of this misery. The usury to which they are subjected will dominate them, and make them beholden against their will to the propertied, or at least, moneyed classes.

There exists another form of criticism here, and it is specifically the notion of being chartered and its role in the production of "England." The practice of being chartered – literally undergoing a formal training in (the most relevant application here) accountancy – is a formal written arrangement with the state. And here is the most delicate yet venomous entangling for Blake, as power is no longer merely moneyed and coercive, but outright controlling. The moment of freedom cannot exist in this realm (in both meanings of that term) but only in its abolition. Blake may dissect the current system's urges, and how those urges distort humanity's need for care, but the need for its abolition must be total.

In the absence of the "wise guardians of the poor," who were to nourish the poor?[225] It is those whose specific responsibility is to guard against that mistreatment, or at the very least

[224] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 19.
[225] Interestingly, David Fairer has argued that the presence of poor children, and specifically the visual act of giving charity to a handful of poor children**,** was in fact a more commonplace act, perpetrated by those who wished to

provide aid through that period. Yet from the top down, the means by which capitalism reproduces itself, capitalism's innermost ideology, wishes to make care for another who is at risk seem an impossibility, despite the concessions it might find necessary to make at times when pushed to do so.[226] Indeed, not only is care not offered, but the must vulnerable are asked to take part in their own subjugation. The last four lines of the "Chimney Sweeper" are particularly damning.

> And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
> They think they have done me no injury:
> And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
> Who make up a heaven of our misery.[227]

instrumentalise the poverty of children. Often the children's presence was designed to stage a moment of "national unity". This was a longer tradition present even before Blake's time. Fairer writes that: "The awkward subsuming of the political into the national had characterized a comparable occasion earlier in the century, the day of Thanksgiving for the Peace of Utrecht on 7 July 1713, another gesture of Tory triumph marked by the presence of the massed London charity children. Fig. 4 shows the scene along the Strand when the procession made its way to the service in St Paul's. 3,925 children, newly clothed for the occasion, were arranged in a specially erected stand 620 feet long, consisting of eight rows of seats, and they sang together two hymns, one for the Queen as she passed along to the church, and a second three hours later as she returned. At least that was the plan, but Anne herself was too ill to be present. Nevertheless, between a repeated chorus of nine Allelujahs, the first hymn greeted her as the nursing mother of the kingdom ("Long, long may she remain"), while the second jubilantly celebrated the Tory Peace ("Peace his best gift to Earth's returnd, Long may it here remain; As we too long its Absence mourn'd, Nor sigh'd to Heaven in vain")." See David Fairer, "Experience Reading Innocence: Contextualizing Blake's 'Holy Thursday,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2002): 541. In this regard it is best to apply David Erdman's reading that the Chimney Sweep "is saying to the London citizen: you salve your conscience by handing out a few farthings on May Day, but if you really listened to this bitter cry among the snow you and your icy church would be appalled." Erdman, *Blake*, p. 275.

[226] Indeed, even charity – the supposed bridge to care offered by the powerful – is deeply implicated in the current consensus. As Sarah Haggarty notes, "Charity, even the direct, voluntary charity so lauded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was in many respects designed to reconcile the "poor" to the inequality of their status – a reconciliation of especial importance during periods of special crisis. Charity might even create that inequality…". Sarah Haggarty, "From Donation to Demand? Almsgiving and the Annotations to Thornton," in *Blake and Conflict*, Haggarty and Mee eds., 108.

[227] Erdman, *Complete Poetry* p. 23.

Similar to Brecht's own position, a rejection of the current society requires an understanding of its most intimate impulses. Without this acknowledgement of the way this dominant system perverts the possibility of ultimate redemption, reproduction of its abuses would proceed unhindered. The logic of capital necessitates the maintenance of an ideological worldview that takes in its very own worst excesses and results and sells them back at the price of honourable, quiet suffering. This does not mean, however, that the logic behind this twisted logic, nor the effects they produce themselves, are accepted by those who are harmed by capitalism. Quite the opposite, as Shirley Dent and Jason Whitaker note:

> …the total omission of quotation marks makes the closure of 'The Chimney Sweeper's' narration highly ambiguous and highly charged…. This is not simply the subjective voice of the naïve sweep, who has internalized religious ideology and dutifully murmurs the dogmas of deferred reward. It is a direct plea from the poet for the audience to do their social duty so that they, the sweeps, need not fear their present life.[228]

In this there is a toying "with the ideal of a childish Utopia, putting the onus on the reader to actively engage in an imaginative act of emancipation, of seeing grim social reality in order to change it, to envision an emancipated world."[229] It is no coincidence that Joan is asked to view the degradation of working by Mauler as not merely an unfortunate bi-product of the system, but as necessary to its proper functioning. And as we have seen, *Die Heilige Johanna* ends with a call to action.

[228] See Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 102.
[229] Dent and Whittaker, *Radical Blake*, 102.

Blake presents us here with a compelling analysis of oppression, and how it works and is reproduced. Far from dismissing those who are young and have potential, the "They" see the evidence of hope and potential and bury it with the weight of misery. Whether they even note their part in this process is an open question. The world of Experience provides the appearance of openness and care; it ventures on producing and reproducing misery, while using the gestures of caring as a means to disguise its actual misdeeds.

Education and the rearing of children are important instruments for Blake in depicting the manner of inversion of life's pleasurable pursuits. This inversion required a move against humanity's nature. This nature, in the Blakean sense, as is so frequently displayed throughout Innocence, does not merely secure a bridge between humanity and nature, as much as moulds them into the same entity. All aspects of humanity's lived relations are a discovery (of life and its endless possibilities), and in every discovery we see a partial return of connected action of nature and humanity, so much so that their existence as experiencing beings becomes interchangeable. Their unity becomes a form of resisting the world of Experience in practice. Note for instance the problem that is experienced in "The Schoolboy":

> But to go to school in a summer morn,
> O! it drives all joy away;
> Under a cruel eye outworn,
> The little ones spend the day,
> In sighing and dismay.[230]

[230] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 31.

The depiction here is of making education a source of misery rather than exploration, and the "cruel eye" denotes a lack of humanity. It is a partial entity in a world that, were it to focus on possibility making, needs to be made whole as in the description of the little ones. The question of how one subverts the process of manipulation and destruction of natural innocence by education is through Innocence's own logic. To undercut Experience's use – which has been "outworn" – human and nature, or human/nature, responds by reframing the issue. The child questions:

> How can the bird that is born for joy,
> Sit in a cage and sing.
> How can a child when fears annoy,
> But droop his tender wing,
> And forget his youthful spring.[231]

The merging of entities, the boy and the bird in the description of the boy's "tender wing", returns us to our connection both to ourselves and to our nature and natural world. This simple discovery of the schoolboy, a discovery not because of his education but rather in response to it, will lead to greater realizations of the logic of both Innocence and Experience. If we have not cared for and gathered the "summer fruits" because the "buds are nip'd," how "shall we gather what griefs destroy / Or bless the mellowing year, / When the blasts of winter appear."[232] If we do not have reserves of pleasure, if we have not taught ourselves how to experience life's pleasures, how can we respond when in times of anguish. The logic here is that there is no other way if, shorn of life's endless horizons, "the tender plants are stripped." This is the monopolizing

[231] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 31.
[232] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 31.

nature of capitalism. It creates despair, while also doing away with the means by which one might counter despair's consequences. In contrast, Innocence offers a way of acting and living in the world. It is a means by which life-making thought, that specific brand of philosophy which is so integral to Blake, is the response to those efforts to make life impossible. The enacting of Innocence is the acknowledgement of Experience, and offers the hope for its potential undoing.

If Innocence is the kernel of the greatest potential that we could possibility have, Experience as its most deceitful uses the shell of Innocence, which promises everything that Innocence hopes to deliver, and ultimately destroys that potential. This is the central tension between the two. There is an alternate version of agency here, an agency which feeds off of rather than feeds.[233] The infrastructure of Experience, the "God and his priest and king" are the key drivers of this exploitative system. While for Blake everything in the constellation of Experience is challengeable (and he explicitly sees his project as that which "rouzes the faculties to act"[234]) Innocence reads Experience's intent and function. In the opening stanza of "The Human Abstract" we see this dynamic at work, both elucidating the problem and suggesting a way out of it. It reads:

> Pity would be no more
> If we did not make somebody Poor:
> And Mercy no more could be,

[233] On the loving connection between God and active love more generally in Blake, Matthew Green notes: "This accords well with the experience of the believer who discovers the love of Christ, who is let into or out of the secret that he or she has been loved since before time and is therefore enabled to experience love as an active participant, to have her or his love kindled, even if it must always fall short of the mark." See Matthew Green, *Visionary Materialism in the Early Works of William Blake: The Intersection of Enthusiasm and Empiricism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005): 103-4.
[234] William Blake as quoted in Makdisi, "Political Aesthetic," 111.

If all were happy as we;[235]

The central contradiction of this society requires an intervention, and one that acknowledges that there a counter-balance to the attempted universalizing logic governing "Ev'ry chartered street." The world of Experience, so attuned to paternalistic manipulation, was not only distrustful of a poetics of production as found in Blake, but sought to make us answerable to a capitalist logic. Esther Leslie provides a useful contrast of Blake and his age in this regard. She writes:

> Blake was born into the "Age of Johnson." This was his misfortune. This was an age dominated by blank English instrumentalist empiricism, such as that promoted by the Royal Society which demanded clear language, mathematical plainness. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was a lexicographer. He was a waiter serving up words, fixing meanings rather than creating them. In addition, Johnson saw it as his lexicographer's duty to provide moral instruction for the semi-educated. So Johnson's business was weighty, but dull. It was a chore all round, and who would do it but for financial recompense?[236]

Leslie's presentation of Blake as misfortunate is useful in that it helps focus attention away from his supposed views on rationality and places him in relation to his age more broadly. In this reading of Blake, Leslie brushes the cold, moneyed calculation then dominanting the age, against a Romantic for whom the rescue of words and images for the imagination was paramount. As Löwy and Sayre would argue, while the leveling of the critique of "irrationality" is a serious charge, it is also seriously misleading. Such a characterization of one of Romanticism's key

[235] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, p. 27.
[236] Esther Leslie, "Blake's Lines: Seven Digressions Through Time and Space." *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 3.2 (2007). Dept of English, University of Florida. 22 Apr 2013. <http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v3_2/leslie/>.

problematics lends only further obfuscation to what is central to Blake (and other Romantics besides). The criticisms of "rationality" that are present in Blake's texts, and most other Romantic's, are mobilized against a particular form of rationalism, notably a mechanical rationalism and rationalist abstraction, very much akin to the Johnsonian paradigm described above. Mechanical rationalism was associated with those institutions and forms of life which sought to make all life calculable and subject to mathematical or quantifiable logic.[237]

The necessary effect of this logic was that anything that was not deemed economic– for instance compassion and empathy – was discarded and dismissed from the liberatory potential that Blake locates in God. As a contrast, note the pains of the struggling mother to find a way for her child to sleep from "A Cradle Song" ("Sleep, sleep, happy sleep, / While o'er thee doth my mother weep") to those spoken by the child from "Infant Sorrow":

> My mother groand! my father wept.
> Into the dangerous world I leapt:
> Helpless, naked, piping loud;
> Like a fiend hid in a cloud.
>
> Struggling in my father's hands:

[237] Many of the same criticisms are leveled against rational abstraction. Here, there are two key points of discussion. Not simply are Löwy and Sayre referring to abstract rationalist philosophy, but rather to a totalizing system of thought and life which seeks to reproduce itself on every available level. Following three philosophers, Löwy and Sayre argue that this system works on the level of "abstract categories: abstract work, abstract exchange value, money" (Marx) the level on which "modern bourgeois civilization…organizes all economic, social and political life according to the requirements of rationality-with-respect-to-goals (Weber), and finally the level on which rationalization, disenchantment and quantification' are embedded in a psychic attitude and form of experience with regard to things and the world which may itself be described as 'abstract'" (Mannheim) Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism,* 39 – 40. The effect of this rationalization led to two important consequences both evident in Blake simultaneously, a turn towards forms of "concrete thinking" on the one hand a "rehabilitation of nonrational and/or nonrationalizable behaviours" such as "love as a pure emotion, a spontaneous attraction that cannot be reduced to any calculation and that is in contradiction with all rationalist strategies of marriage, - marriage for money, marriage 'for good reasons.'" Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism,* 41.

Striving against my swadling bands:
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mother's breast.[238]

As Ian Balfour has noted in his analysis of the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, in Blake's works writing is an instrument of dissemination and democratization, producing books "that all may read."[239] Yet the object of this democratic dissemination[240] is Divine and Human, and the ultimate gesture is to join oneself with this coupling, as the Divine and the Human joined together are the "closest to the moment of birth" in Blake, as Tristanne J. Connolly notes.[241] This literally new moment must involve itself with Experience's anguish and anxiety-making while also holding out the moment of Experience's potential undoing. The entreaty to "Sleep, sleep, happy sleep" is at once a good on its own. The act of nourishment in seeking to turn towards its "mother's breast" is a concluding act in and of itself as it is representative of a joining with others to deal with one's predicament. This poem is not a representation of gladness and hope against the odds, or of quiet suffering. Rather, through such acts we "thought best" acts as a means that mirrors the method that "Our grief he may destroy" as Blake's cites in "On Another's Sorrow." Faith here does not stand still, but is the immediate engine for rejecting the systematically imposed grief and "binding with briars my joys and desires" of Blake's age. What Blake is demonstrating in this fissure between the worlds of

[238] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 28.
[239] Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (Stanford University Press: Stanford California, 2002): 144.
[240] Writing on the poem *America*, Peter Otto speaks to the emergence and resonance of the new world in Blake. Note here the emphasis on democracy. "I am of course not suggesting that this emergent world is incommensurate with the revolutionary rhetoric of modernity. One could argue that Blake here merely reworks the movement from the old to the new, troping it as the passage from a static world, anchored in a transcendental principle, to a democratic world where form is forged by interaction between its parts." Peter Otto, "Politics, aesthetics, and Blake's 'boundling line,'" *Word & Image* 26 (2010): 179.
[241] Tristanne J. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 125.

Innocence and Experience is the necessity of a messianic power articulable in the moment of the now. As Benjamin would famously note, "Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power,"[242] and Blake's society was no different. Blake's addendum to Benjamin might well be that not only does the past have a claim to this, but so too does the present. And yet Innocence represents more largely the moment of a godly intervention, a moment of action forever in the now, which the world of Experience attempts to forestall. Yet as Benjamin notes, "The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of making in an enormous abridgement, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe."[243] Experience attempts to starve the present of this conception of time, of intervention, and ultimately claim ownership to notions of compassion and empathy. Its role is to clamp down on the potential of the present, and make of the past a stick with which to beat the living out of the living.

Conclusion: The Future in the Present

On the 6th of June 1929, in a letter to Gershom Scholem, Benjamin writes that he has struck up a "close acquaintance with Brecht." Erdmut Wizisla notes that "This was the first hint of a friendship which, in the years that followed, many of Benjamin's friends and associates were to find disturbing."[244] It is surprising, given the extensive and profound intellectual friendship that the two would forge, how often this connection continues to get lost in a critical appraisal of their work. Indeed, as Wizisla's research has demonstrated, even their more famous

[242] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.
[243] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 263.
[244] Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 1.

disagreements on Benjamin's "Some Reflections on Kafka" and "The Author as Producer," were less about the central arguments themselves and more about the specific application of them.[245] In the same way here, I hope to show that while Brecht and Blake experience their worlds in different ways and express this difference asymmetrically, thee works covered in this and the preceding chapter advance a common oppositional political aesthetic that gestures towards responding to the time of their now.

In part what ties Brecht and Blake together is not the specific form of opposition espoused, but rather the philosophical implications that their opposition, taken together, speaks to. For the two, the object was not merely to be opposed to a system or logic or ideology. What was fundamentally necessary was that each articulated a response to the specific predicaments of their society, predicated on a unique yet comprehensive understanding of this society and then offering, ultimately, a form of aesthetic articulation that responded to that society and offered ways by which one could undo its logic. But again, the form that this takes in the two differs in considerable and contradictory ways.

Brecht seeks to work through its logic far more than Blake does. I would disagree that this is attributable to the "nascent" status that thinkers such as Makdisi suggest was characteristic of Blake's capitalism during his time (the central forms of capitalist relations had long been dominant, a fact that Blake himself suggests in his use of "every" and "chartr'd" above) but rather Blake had not seen the coalescing of the response of class forces that Brecht had recognized and made himself an active part of. This is not to suggest that Blake can be slotted into the position of Marxist *avant la lettre*, as such a framework would do more to confuse our

[245] See Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht*, 144-187.

sense of Blake's position than edify us as to its coordinates, not least given the Marxist tradition aversion towards religion.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* engages the present – knowingly – by rejecting it. Whereas Brecht's engagement was to submerge himself as deeply as he could, Blake's response is to acknowledge and refute. This means recognizing the moment of capital's barbarity, while maintaining the need for a space outside of its dominance. In this way, the moment of Innocence is a celebration of the Brechtian possibilities of experimentation, wherein a space for productiveness and work outside capitalism is present. Yet this does not mean a withdrawal, but rather a complex coming together. Take, for instance, Brecht's notes on the sporting public, and in particular the bold nature of his claims.

> Make no bones about it, we have our eye on those huge stadiums, filled with 15,000 men and women of every variety of class and physiognomy, the fairest and shrewdest audience in the world. There you will find 15,000 persons paying high prices, and working things out on the basis of a sensible weighing of supply and demand. You cannot expect to get fair conduct on a sinking ship. The demoralization of our theatre audiences springs from the fact that neither theatre nor audience has any idea what is supposed to go on there.[246]

Yet the response that Brecht will offer is not a submission to the crowd, but an engagement with it.

> …no doubt an artist will fall far short of achieving his maximum effectiveness today if he sails with today's wind. It would be quite wrong to judge a play's relevance or lack of relevance by its current effectiveness. Theatres don't work that way. *A theatre which makes no contact with the public is a nonsense.* Our theatre is accordingly a nonsense.[247]

[246] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 6.
[247] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 7.

Brecht's damning emphasis, his not mine, reiterates the need for connection to the lived experience of the audience, but that this did not mean succumbing to the ephemeral moods of an audience (an audience whose expectations were shaped by capitalist social relations). Likewise, Brecht's rejection of the "enemies of production" is about maintaining the ability of the cultural producer to operate in a radically engaged way. Here, the individual artist's relation to their society, while preserved, must not also reproduce the dominant forms of life which one is seeking to undercut.

The *Songs of Innocence* are constructed in such a circular way to block out the work of totalizing capitalist existence. Innocence acts as a bulwark against the threat of this world. It is a preserve against the danger of the outside. Innocence is a refuge, but a knowing refuge. On the other hand, Experience is the warning of this world. Experience is not a harbinger of things to come – but an identity of a spirit of a real existing world that is sold off and purchased piece by piece. Experience seeks to locate any activity, way of seeing the world or "spirit" – such as the one that resonates in Innocence – and either block it entirely or usher it out of any sphere of influence. But it is so knowing in that it sees the threat – and attempts to delegitimize and make impossible the threat. This dichotomy is the one in which Blake operates, and he does so consciously. His dilemma is then how to maintain the individual's position while at the same time maintaining a connection to one's audience? Saree Makdisi and Jon Mee note how central this question was to Blake's overall aesthetic strategies:

> …Blake refused to endorse wholesale the Orientalist discourse distinguishing between a virtuous, disciplined, productive, sober, rational Western Self, and a delinquent, undisciplined, unproductive, unregulated, and irrational Eastern Other. Moreover, he refused to distinguish between Self and Other in the first place. Not only is such a rigid

> contrast not something that we can find anywhere in Blake's work, early or late: it is the very antithesis of all his work, the concept that he most fundamentally struggled to resist and subvert.….*This* is why Blake refuses Orientalism: because he utterly refuses the logic of individualism predicated on an opposition to otherness – the logic that Orientalism fundamentally requires as its motives force.[248]

Blake's refusal is a step further away than Brecht's strategies allow, and marks out a disjuncture between the two. In order to divine more closely those, we must first think in terms of what possibilities have been made open by the understanding of the contemporary moment, and what options there are in an alternative future. Nevertheless, it is for this reason that Brecht relies on a far more clearly co-ordinated response than Blake's. For Blake, as E. P. Thompson points out, there is something far deeper required. He notes: "There must be some utopian leap, some human rebirth, from Mystery to renewed imaginative life. "London" must still be made anew as the New Jerusalem."[249] This leap though does not move us away from connection with the world, or put us in a holding pattern while the Utopian leap approaches. To the contrary, "Blake's innocence is more than cultivated state of inner warmth, however, for the cultivation of innocence is itself a form of social criticism."[250] Critique exists so that we may make future possibilities possible.

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[248] Saree Makdisi and John Mee, "'Mutual interchange': Life, Liberty and Community," in *Re-Envisioning Blake*, edited by Crosby, Patenaude and Whitehead, 16. Yet we should be clear that the rejection of the present did not result in a retreat into the past. Martin Bidney also uses Benjamin's "Theses" in his essay on Blake, but contrary to the position I have sought to put forward, Bidney argues that to "counteract the seeming threat of a relentless speeding up of modern industrial time by nostalgically envisioning a dream-like slow-motion medieval world where time is comfortingly relaxed, or even brought to a halt. Both the historical, socioeconomic problem and its attempted poetic solution can be expressed in terms of ontological psychology as involving each poet's attempt to protect himself against the overwhelming pressures of chaotic Becoming by imagining a more blissful alternative condition of purer, simpler Being. The paradoxical trap is that such an imagined freezing of life and action in static Being makes palpable the even graver menace of a deadening Nothingness." While the notion of counteracting the time of capitalism is part of Blake's oppositional aesthetics, to suggest that his poetics leads him to a position of stasis seems to be a rejection of the thesis of potentiality put forward by Makdisi, and against the spirit of referenced authors such as Erdman, Thompson, Mee, et al. See Martin Bidney, "Slowed-Down Time and the Fear of History: The Medievalist Visions of William Blake and William Morris," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 2 (2002): 102.

[249] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 193.

[250] Erdman, *Blake*, 117. Likewise, as Frye noted of the *Songs of Experience*: "Contempt and horror have never spoken more clearly in English poetry." Yet despite this, "The reason will not take us far. Only vision helps us here,

Critique exists so that good spaces can remain and be potentially harnessed for a redemption of the present for future purposes. Whereas Brecht seems to take in all he can in order to engage more fully within the frameworks available to him, Blake understands what is dominating his society in order to remove himself and his work, to maintain what is fundamentally good from the clutches of the totalizing system. In this sense, individuality (as understood in relation to Makdisi and Staehler above) and a rejection of alienation are fundamental. A central focus for Brecht, from *Mann ist Mann* forward, is to map out the seeming impossibility of individuality. This could, in part, be a difference of historical moment, but it also underlies the notion of reproducibility. For Blake, the artwork bore the necessity of individual input, whereas Brecht's work – fully immersed in the moment of no return of technical reproducibility – locates the death of the individual and the need to embrace this and respond in collective fashion.

Despite the ways in which they present their cases, both Blake and Brecht present us with a world that is always changing. In Blake we see more clearly how the fires of change are sought to be extinguished by those in power, and likewise in Brecht we see the ways in which change has been used by those in power for their own purposes. This posits a conception of change that is reliant on a notion of "messianic time" where other worlds are possible. As Peter Fenves argues:

> …messianic time is not another time; it is just time – time and nothing else but "plastic time". The paradisal character of space, toward which the painterly plane tends, accords

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and vision helps us here, and vision shows us the tree of mystery and morality growing inside the human skull; it shows us the prophet calling to the earth to herself and earth answering with a groan to be delivered; it shows us our accusing enemy who frightens us out of Paradise behind the menacing blaze of a tiger's eyes." "This is the only world the child can grow into, and yet the child must grow. The *Songs of Experience* are satires, but one of the things they satirize is the state of innocence. They show us the butcher's knife which is waiting for the unconscious lamb. Consequently, the *Songs of Innocence* satirize the state of experience, as the contrast which they present to it makes its hypocrises more obviously shameful. Hence the two sets of lyrics show two *contrary* states of the soul, and in their opposition there is a double edged irony, cutting into both the tragedy and the reality of fallen existence." Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969): 236-7.

> with the messianic character of time, which is thus charged with tension and can be called "full" because every stretch of time contains all of time. In "World and Time" Benjamin says of first category" "there is nothing continuous"; the opposite condition characterizes the other concept under consideration, namely time, which, as Benjamin briefly suggests, should actually be called "the coming world." By virtue of its nondirectional continuity, time – "turned" by "now" – is the "coming world."[251]

This coming world requires for Blake and Brecht opposition and experiment in the present for its eventual manifestation to be even remotely considerable, were a "Utopian leap" possible.[252] If this is not deemed possible in the present, if the time of the now provides insufficient nourishment required for the rich veins of experiment, then the move towards the past and historical redemption, the focus of the next two chapters, becomes the hope for the future.

[251] Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011): 244.

[252] Benjamin himself expressed this relationship to the present himself. Michael Jennings states: "Life as an experiment: Benjamin's restless travelling, his problematic friendships and alliances – all can be seen under the category of experiment. "When it comes to the most important things," he wrote to Scholem in 1926, "I always proceed radically, never consistently; this would also be my attitude, were I one day to join the Communist Party….The possibility of my remaining in the party will have to be determined experimentally." Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987): 8.

Chapter 4: Brecht, History and the Productive Past

A Brechtian maxim: "*Don't start from the good old things but the bad new ones.*"[253]

Much has been made of the period of Brecht's exile and the ways in which this move abroad, or more accurately *moves* (given the many countries he sought refuge in before arriving in the United States), shaped his politics and the nature of the work he produced.[254] In what follows I hope to link this period of exile with the nascent relevance of history in his work. I am not, however, arguing, that the move towards history was in any way new for Brecht. His work in Weimar Berlin was marked by an interest in historical themes. For example, there was *The Life of Edward II of England*, and the celebrated reworking of Gay's *The Threepenny Opera* (perhaps Brecht's most well known work). There, historically reimagined works were the exception and not the rule for this time period. For if Brecht's connections with the working-class movement in Germany did a great deal in shaping his response to the particular social and political situation in Germany (and to some extent abroad), as I have attempted to show in Chapter 2, and the imposition of successive exiles ("changing countries more often than shoes,"[255] was his deft description) saw Brecht resort to using history and historical themes as a means of returning to the present conjuncture.[256] This is not to suggest that Brecht eschewed political intervention. On

[253] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*: 121.
[254] An important work on the successful work of Brecht's present while in exile is examined comprehensively in John J. White and Ann White, *Bertolt Brecht's Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches: A German Exile Drama in the Struggle against Fascism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2010).
[255] Bertolt Brecht, **"**To Those Born After Us" in *Collected Poems*, edited by Willett and Mannheim, XX. Galvano Della Volpe refers to this poem as "Marxist" as the "moral and ideological climate which constitutes the poetic "tone" is, unlike Rimbaud's *Ouvriers*, revolutionary." Galvano Della Volpe, *Critique of Taste* (London: Verso, 1978): 147.
[256] Just as Brecht offered little fidelity to other texts, so too did he view history. As William Burling notes: "Brecht routinely thought of all history and all earlier cultural production as grist for his mill." William J. Burling, "Brecht's

the contrary, it is the purpose of this chapter to argue that the more considered and fully-formed turn towards history and historical themes was specifically an attempt to make a political impact in a different manner than was previously imaginable given that connections to developed social-political movements were now thin on the ground, and the receptions of Brecht in the United States were mixed at best.[257] Although more could be added to the list, John J. White notes that:

> Two factors weighed heavily with Brecht in the mid-1930s. The first was knowing that ideologically progressive theater-groups could also fail to grasp Epic Theater's innovative approach, and the second, an awareness that the American stage was becoming dominated by Stanislavskians to a far greater extent than he could have suspected from his European vantage point.[258]

Given this context it is telling that during his period of exile, a period which stretched from 1933 – 1949, his most direct form of political writing, with few exceptions (direct meaning here simply not mediating his political interventions through history and historical themes), is located in his poetry.[259] Yet his poetry notwithstanding, what I would like to argue in this chapter is that the historical focus in Brecht's plays (which included other post-1939 texts and re-workings such as *The Trial of Lucullus, The Judith of Shimoda, The Duchess of Malfi, Antigone, and Coriolanus,* among other texts besides the three examined herein), both as a device and as a strategy, offered him a means to continue his political aesthetics productively in order to intervene in the

"U-effect": Theorizing the Horizons of Revolutionary Theatre," in *Brecht, Broadway and United States Theatre*, edited by J. Chris Westgate (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007): 173.

[257] On Brecht's exile and his search for a new project, Theodore Rippey writes: "From this we conclude that art, while not necessarily subject to social context in its self- forming, is nonetheless dependent on (thus bound to) that context because art is incapable of *sustaining* itself. Art divorced from social reality will deplete itself; poetry is a social practice, even if not a politically catalytic one. This, not the fantasy of social intervention, is the *Gegenwartsbindung* that becomes clear in exile." Theodore Rippey, "Brecht and Exile: Poetry after Weimar, Poetics during Blitzkrieg," *Monatshefte* 101 (2009): 53.

[258] John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004): 84.

[259] A collection of essays that speaks directly to the political nature of his poetical work during the period of exile is Ronald Spiers ed., *Brecht's Poetry of Political Exile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

contemporary moment. In this sense, the "time of the now" is still operating as a guiding principle for Brecht, but with historical settings and motifs being used as a vehicle to shed light on the present. This historical turn, although a continuation of the political trajectory of his earlier work,[260] a process that Brecht himself termed *Historisierung*, marks Brecht's "final – and most political – major new term in Brecht's conceptual arsenal of the late 1930's."[261]

In this regard I will argue that the plays *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis,* and *Leben des Galilei* are constructed in such a way so as to continue the political uses of estrangement effects, but using the historical past as a means to stretch the political understandings of the audience. Yet history is not meant to act as a mirror of the present, but to skew it slightly, to give it distance or "perspective," as a means of establishing a productive memory that continues to make itself useful in the present rather than repress the oppositional energies that could be unleashed by going against the grain, in the sense of Benjamin's Brechtian maxim. Indeed, the new maxim, after Benjamin, is more akin to "start from the bad old times *for* the bad new times." In order to show this the present chapter will focus on the aforementioned three post-1933 plays. First, I will show how the historical backdrop

[260] There is a stream in Brechtian scholarship that has sought to divide Brecht into a younger and older version, with each temporal position defined by decidedly contradictory political positions. As Betty Nance Weber has argued, what has occurred is a viewing of the "young" and "old" Brecht as two separate fields of cultural practice, "as a backsliding on Brecht's part from the exciting experimental theatre of the 1920s to uninteresting, traditional, even simplistic plays for old-fashioned stages." Much in line with my thinking throughout, she argues that these positions have "hindered an appreciation for the strong continuity in Brecht's work, in form and substance." See Betty Nance Weber, "*The Life of Galileo* and the Theory of Revolution in Performance," in *Bertolt Brecht: Political Theory and Literary Practice*, edited by Betty Nance Weber and Hubert Heinen (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1980): 61.

[261] White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory,* 126. While White's highlighting of history is useful, his portrayal cleaves an unnecessary split between Brecht and Benjamin's notion of progress. "Moreover, his various explanations of "Historisierung" leave one in no doubt about their predicated on a dialectical materialist conception of history and not on some simple appropriation of Walter Benjamin's more mystical concept of "Jetztzeit."" White argues that "The "Jetztzeit" concept plays a central role in Benjamin's attempted dismantling of historical progress. The pessimism that informs Benjamin's focus on the "Jetztzeit" is the diametrical opposite of the premises of Brecht's conception of "Historisierung."" Such a view I think unfairly assigns Benjamin to a resigning position, and not one that in fact calls into question the liberatory potential of historical understanding, even if that historical understanding leads to disheartening truths. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory*, 128.

found in *Mutter Courage* and the lead character's inability to see the system which feeds on the destruction of her family propels the audience to learn from that bad history. I will illustrate how the "Little Monk" character in *Leben des Galilei* is emblematic of the importance of the larger struggle for justice of those who are deemed to have little power. In this regard, although key historical targets for Brecht's play were both Stalinism and Capitalist war, the backdrop of Renaissance Italy provides the opportunity to explore the possibility of how we can learn from history. In the third section, the usefulness of historical learning for the present, especially as regards the ingenious strategies of productivity and historical planning, will be shown in the *Die Kaukasische Kreidekreis*. Perhaps fittingly, I will eschew chronological order and begin with the role of memory and forceful forgetting in Brecht's *Mutter Courage*.

And the Cart Rolls On…*Mutter Courage* and Learning from Those Who Don't

> *WHAT IS A PERFORMANCE OF MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN PRIMARILY MEANT TO SHOW? That in wartime big business is not conducted by small people. That war is a continuation of business by other means, making the human virtues fatal even to those who exercise them. That no sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war.*[262]

Although others had long before discussed the long centuries of the wreckage of history before he arrived on the scene (not least Marx himself, whose famous encapsulation that "history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle"[263] involves an acknowledged reality of the grand scope of human oppression), few have exposed the liberating potentialities of the past as sharply as Benjamin. Rather than explore this potential for the contemporary

[262] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 220.
[263] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 1985): 79.

conjuncture, however, Benjamin's position is to no longer take the past for granted, and that the sufferings of the past will not, without a radical resurrection of them, positively condition a future left. This was significantly the case with the largest German left movement of Benjamin's lifetime. As he writes in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Social Democracy in Germany "made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren."[264] By forgetting its hatred the working class has become unmoored from the struggles of its past. This has been key to the suppression of hatred of war, most notably in the infamous vote in August 1914 by deputies of the German Social Democratic Party in support of "War Credits" for the First World War. The fight against war for Brecht, as the above quote from his notes on the play makes clear, involves a sacrifice (of one's own life, or of restricting one's choices) in the present against war. The historical background offered in *Mutter Courage* enables a way of learning from previous failures of others who have not acted against a similar threat.

That much has been written on Brecht's *Mutter Courage* is an understatement. For an author whose works have been subject to an industry of investigation, few works have been so delicately (and at times indelicately) chewed over as this piece. Yet despite the proliferation of scholarly work on and translations of the play,[265] few have sought to seriously examine the role of loss in the work, and how that key theme of loss (and here one means more than the sum of the parts found throughout, such as family members, capital, self-respect, etc.) structures the work entirely.[266]

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[264] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 253.
[265] See, for instance, Tony Kushner and Tom Kuhn's recent bilingual edition of 2012, *Mother Courage and Her Children / Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2012), and David Hare's translation *Mother Courage and Her Children* (London: Methuen, 2010).
[266] It is important to note that the character of Mother Courage finds her roots not in Brecht, but rather in the work of the seventeenth-century German novelist Grimmelshausen in his *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus (*translated as *The Adventurous Simplicissimus).* Grimmelshausen knew a lot about loss, being himself stolen away from his family

In Brecht's careful production of the play, special attention was given to make clear to the audience the "bare facts" of the background of the work. For instance, maps of Europe detailing the progress and regress of various army movements were shown, placards stating the year were used between scenes to give a sense of temporal fixation, and other visual markings were deployed. Such efforts may seem especially counter-intuitive for a playwright who is known, perhaps more than any other, for his work on distancing techniques, the *raison d'être* of which is the meticulous alienation of the trappings of realism and facticity present in what he saw as Aristotelian theatre. Yet the techniques Brecht used in *Mutter Courage* are not an eschewal of his formal practice, but rather an attempt to make clearer the step backward in time for the purposes of historical reinvestigation in the present moment.

Through the use of these techniques Brecht sought to set in place a situation where audience members would leave, in part, their assumptions of the current period and move to a time which is not explicitly capitalist but is assuredly pre-modern. That we will learn that Mother Courage herself is engaged in the buying and selling of commodities, and is a referent for the capitalist-parasitical position of living off of war, is in no doubt. Indeed, so blatantly obvious are the historical markers provided that they are merely enough to establish that we are not in the present epoch, despite the obvious correlations for the audience of the original productions. Openly we are invited to leave, at least partially, the moment of class conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie and turn to that other struggle which, at least in terms of historical time, dwarfs the relative newness of the two chief struggling classes under capitalism. This is the time of feudalism in German-speaking lands (and elsewhere) and the *almost* incomparable exploitation of the peasantry. It is a moment in time that Brecht wishes to mobilise. Fredric Jameson, in his 1998

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and rural life at the age of ten by the then Hessian army. A comparison highlighting religion as a survival strategy in each is provided in Cara M. Horwish, *Survival in Simplicissimus and Mutter Courage* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997).

work *Brecht and Method,* has written of this process of drawing back into historical time (more than history as such) in Brecht's work. He writes:

> This is the moment of freedom, the redemptive moment, in one of Brecht's temporalities: the moment of provisional change, the moment which Advak [the corrupt judge in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*] can appear, no matter how briefly, before vanishing again into the mists of time and the immemoriality of peasant labour and oppression. It is the Xairos of Brecht's peasant history, and a temporality of pre-capitalism that is most often associated with the "populist" features in Brecht, and determines the chronologies of the great plays: the Thirty Years War in *Mother Courage*; a peasant Middle Ages shaking off its timeless lethargy in *Galileo*...[267]

That Mother Courage herself is not a peasant is not, strictly speaking, the point. It is rather the image and aura of the peasant, the larger "structure of feeling," to abuse further an already abused term of Raymond Williams, that is meant here.[268] Brecht reaches back into history and brings

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[267] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 139. While I am sympathetic to Douglas Kellner's attempt to situate rather than abstract (a very Brechtian impulse) I think Jameson's point here is at odds with Kellner's when the latter points out that: "In his epic theatre built on the principles of historical specification and critique, Brecht sought to illuminate the historically specific features of an environment in order to show how that environment influenced, shaped, and often battered and destroyed the characters. Unlike dramatists who focused on the universal elements of the human situation and fate, Brecht was interested in the attitudes and behaviour people adopted toward each other in specific historical situations." Douglas Kellner, "Brecht's Marxist Aesthetic: The Korsch Connection," in *Bertolt Brecht: Political Theory and Literary Practice*, edited by Weber and Heinen, p. 31. Oddly enough, the notion of specific conditions is far too limited in a discussion of Brecht. For Brecht, the specific condition is the now, and the historical condition is that which is far more malleable in Brecht. This leads us to the point of change and performance in Brechtian theatrical practice. As Marc Zimmerman had pointed out, "A Brechtian Theatre which represents a changing world implies that the theatre itself must change. A Brechtian production today which copies Brecht, or which adheres to his production models, is not Brechtian." Marc Zimmerman, "Brecht and the Dynamics of Production," *Praxis* 3 (1977): 125. In this regard the purpose is not to show historical truth or historical specificity for itself. Theatre does not seek to "evoke feelings of compassion an pity in the audience, as in Aristotelian theatre, nor do they leave the audience purged; [the] aim is to teach the audience so that each member leaves the theatre a changed person." See Yasco Horsman, *Theaters of Justice: Judging, Staging and Working Through in Arendt, Brecht and Delbo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011): 92.

[268] See particularly Chapter 9 of Williams, *Marxism and Literature*. On the connections between this long standing feeling, and historical knowing, Douglas Robinson writes: "What for Brecht may in fact be *allgemein menschlich* is this hunger for progress, this instinct for the transitional moments in the dialectic, this shared kinaesthetic memory of our collective steps forward – this tendency, if I may generalize, to store in our collective regulatory knowing and deciding (our ideosomatics) the most important events in the long history of our learning." Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature*, 227-28. This is a very fruitful thought, and one that connects our notions of learning and historical progress, and crashes them to the ground of historical tragedy. For Brecht, accessing these moments of

with him, as Jameson writes, the "immemorality of peasant labour and oppression" as a means of emphasising the dire situation of again, almost incomparable expropriation and exploitation. Yet this critique does have limitations. Whereas a defining feature of peasant labour is its specific involuntary nature – the peasant is forcefully tied to the land – Mother Courage's "enslavement" is neither enforced by, nor the fault of, others, at least not directly. Her relationship to her own exploitation is very much of her own making. While one should be cautious in terming her struggle over her own "freedom" – she is compelled to reproduce herself and her family under threat of starvation – she is given the possibility of not relying on war profiteering to do so. Ultimately, she embodies most importantly the contradictions of her own exploitation. The exploitation in her case is for the most part of her own devising, albeit in some sense unintentionally so, as it is not her surplus value (or all of her produced value) that is stolen from her. What Mother Courage is robbed of is her children (and thus her store of labour power), stolen away by the war upon which her material existence is based. Brecht here is mobilizing the World Wars, and the destruction that they brought upon Germany (and Europe) and the mindset of those who neither cannot face the truth about what they are involved in, nor about the conditions which make the horror (capitalist crises among them) possible. Further, this exposes the contradiction that Brecht presents between the Feudal relations of production (in various states of decline) that existed in Germany and Europe during the first half of the 17th century and the capitalism of his day. Germany at the time (or if we take the borders not of Germany and read

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the grand sweeps of history was a playing ground of immense possibilities. And of course, the point was not merely to understand history, but rather to change it. As Robinson continues, "The desire to alter the world is specifically a dialectical desire (a) to recognize (through identificatory empathy) one's membership and unconscious emotional and intellectual investment in that world, one's circulatory ideosomatic regulation by and of that world, and (b) to feel (through estranging empathy) the discomfort of alienation from that world, the strangeness of alienness of that world from one's own best interests, and yet at the same time the caused by any thought of separating once from it, precipitating (c) the discovery of another (Marxist) channel of ideosomatic regulation, which offers models for the *Umfunktionierung* of the world from a (de)alienated standpoint, a standpoint incorporating both the belonging of (a) and the alienation of (b)." Robinson, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature*, 228-29.

them to the 17th century) was not a capitalist society, and would not fully establish the capitalist market as such for some time.[269]

Here I should pause for a moment and think back to the lines of Benjamin's essay to capture the political reasoning of Brecht's historical positioning of the play. Brecht's gesture matches Benjamin's urging to remember the hatred of exploitation that can be drawn from the image of the "enslaved ancestor." In Benjamin's Thesis XI he writes that "Nothing has corrupted the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving, with the current."[270] The idea then of a rupture in the notion of progress, a rupture which transforms the idea of a steady climb of prosperity to something akin to the *longue durée* that is represented by peasant suffering but is visible in this specific form of exploitative, commodified relationships raises the question of movement away from this "progression." The *gestus* (and perhaps as well the *habitus*) of the peasant, coupled with the immense chronicle of loss that defines *Mutter Courage's* personal narrative, sets clearly in motion a past wherein the oppressed protagonists have been unable to shake themselves out of their dire situations. Benjamin's "Angel of History," looking back on the destruction behind it, is mirrored in the moment of recognition of the part that Courage plays in the death of her son, Swiss Cheese, particularly as made famous by Brecht's lead actress and long-term collaborator and partner, Helene Weigel, in her performance of Mother Courage. Weigel used a newspaper photo of an Asian mother "screaming over her son's dead body"[271] in

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[269] On this point I would follow the historiography of David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley in their classic text: *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). While the authors famously reject the "Sonderweg" Thesis (wherein Germany's capitalist ascent occurred only in the late 19th century due to a political push from the State), even they do not acknowledge a capitalist hegemony during the Thirty Years' War. David Blackbourn will also argue that far from a direct transition from feudalism to capitalism, the transition was uneven, and there are several examples that during this time there was an expansion of nobles' direction of the economy. See David Blackbourn, *Fontana History of Germany 1780 – 1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Fontana, 1997): 19.

[270] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

[271] Gitta Honegger, "Gossip, Ghosts, and Memory Mother Courage and the Forging of the Berliner Ensemble," *The Drama Review* 52 (2008): 100.

her own performance. This usage reminds us to hold in contrast historical portrayal as a distancing device and the brutal reality of the continuing relations of war production and profiteering. When Courage is forced to deny knowing the identity of her dead son, a son who is dead because she haggled too long over his ransom, she lets out an inaudible scream. The scream punctures the air through silence. Even in the moment of tragedy her voice is not heard, just as the peasant and peasant history is largely unheard in the annals of official history, despite its ubiquitous historical presence throughout the centuries of feudalism. For Brecht, the silent scream of the past, that history of pent-up anger, must be made audible.

The question, though, is why Mother Courage seems unable to recognize the rather simple logic that her parasitic existence on the war is slowly but surely killing off her children. If one is to resurrect the past, what is the value in her inability to change her circumstance? It is this problem that Brecht seeks to realize not in the play itself, but in the play's reception. Dealing with this dynamic in correspondences with the playwright Friedrich Wolf, who asks if *Mutter Courage* would not have been more successful if there was some sense that *Courage* had learned from her behaviour, Brecht responds with the following:

> As you quite rightly say, the play in question shows that Courage has learnt nothing from the disasters that befall her. ...But even if Courage learns nothing else at least the audience can, in my view, learn something by observing her. I quite agree with you that the question of choice of artistic means can only be that of how we playwrights give a social stimulus to our audience (get them moving). To this end we should try out every conceivable artistic method which assists that end, whether it is old and new.[272]

[272] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 229. In part this was a difficulty for Brecht as the actresses were successful in the Aristotelian tradition and audiences became too connected with them. This raises other issues of the type of theatre that Brecht put forward in an institutionalized GDR theatre, although as David Barnett notes, a technique used in another production with Therese Giehse as Mother Courage, produced the effect that despite her hope, "the audience knows it is mistaken." See David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015): 177.

The link between historical time and the trajectory of her downfall, the loss of all but her own life and her wagon, are presented not just in the content but also in the formal strategies that Brecht employs. They shape the way in which the audience learns, in the particularly Brechtian constellation of didacticism,[273] i.e. through learning from others' mistakes. The key idea of learning, and its absence, is crucial here. In this regard Jameson writes,

> But in Brecht what is fatal is always the failure to learn: as witness the alleged tragedy of *Mother Courage*, for Brecht a fundamental illustration of the deadliness of the idea you can't give up (the little nest-egg, the capital of the wagon that cannot be lost, hanging on to your investment no matter what happens).[274]

Despite the feeling of historical accuracy – the firm dates listed throughout the text, the map that was originally used to show Courage's movements across northern Europe, the backdrop of an historical war, etc., the play uses these to register the uses of the most pitied of all – the person who cannot learn from their own exploitation despite massive personal loss. This trope is useful for Brecht because this figure in the popular imagination (especially as an historical figure in the guise of the peasant) is signified with decidedly clear forms of exploitation and oppression, the object of historical suffering, while also being the terrified subject of war and famine. Despite the

[273] While Brecht's didacticism clearly does not sit entirely well with Raymond Williams, as has been noted often, Williams felt most drawn towards how Brecht constructed a way of so-called "complex seeing." This form of seeing develops the mediation of the complex actions that are present on stage. As Alan O'Connor writes, "This separation between action and consciousness is the actual history that Brecht's plays live out." See O'Connor, *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989): 89.

[274] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 91. Mother Courage's problem is that she tries to sneak through the gaps, to be that lucky one who escapes war's total destruction while profiting from it. In contrast to this, "Brecht contends that survival tactics, if practiced collectively, can undermine oppressive strategies. The *details* of material, tactical existence have revolutionary potential, which is why epic theatre tries to single them out". While I am sympathetic to aspects of this work, especially as it locates how very often female characters in Brecht are depicted as marginalized and left to manage the "tactical" issues of everyday (eternal) survival, one should not confuse all "strategies" as oppressive ones. See Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theatre: The Brechtian Legacy* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000): 70.

fact that Courage is not herself a peasant – her particular lesson is that of the historically represented peasant turned small businessperson – the play relies heavily on the forms (or depictions of historical forms) of this oppression and exploitation. Brecht's historical work then demands what Sarah Bryant Bertail has discussed as the dialogical model wherein a particular theatrical piece is "multitemporal and multispatial in itself, able to stand independently" from its direct content while also making productive use of a recognized history.[275]

In Brecht's moment (the first version of the play was written in 1939, at the dawn of the World War II) the allegory[276] of historical loss would have been all the more prescient as the plague of Nazism was to wreak its havoc outward after years of doing so within its own national borders, even though the most famous productions of the play, save a 1941 Zurich version, came after the war. Most notable here was the international production in Paris in 1954. This production was witnessed by, among others, the French theorist Roland Barthes.[277] What influenced Barthes so immensely was the practice of *gestus*, fundamental in Brechtian theatre. While gestus is notoriously hard to define, Bryant-Bertail has usefully contributed to the discussion by noting that "Gestus may also be a nexus where contradictory spatio-temporal dimensions and their ideological valuations cross paths at one material object."[278] One example of these "contradictory spatio-temporal" moments which impressed Barthes was the moment in *Mutter Courage* where Courage bites down on a coin to test its authenticity. The dual moment of

[275] Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theatre*, 22.
[276] Examining the formal role of allegory, Alan Ackerman notes that: "Allegories collapse aspects of the present and the past, as Miller did in The Crucible or Brecht did in *Leben des Galilei*, redeeming the past for the purposes of the present." While Ackerman doesn't delve further in this in regards to *Leben des Galilei*, his comment is useful in diagnosing the purpose of the Allegory for Brecht's play. This basic point is often lost of critics of the play. See Alan L. Ackerman, "The Prompter's Box: Modern Drama's Allegories of Allegory," *Modern Drama* 49 (2006): 151. This could be equally applied to the other texts dealt with in this chapter.
[277] A useful analysis of the history of the play and its popular productions is found in Peter Thompson, *Brecht: Mother Courage and her Children* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[278] Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theatre*, 22.

the hardness or materiality of money, in contrast to its abstract quality in capitalism, is a useful and informative contradiction. There is a dual moment involved here which involves a recasting of the moment of historical reality in Brecht. On this formation in the gestus, as regards the particular and the general, Jameson notes:

> What has not yet been added is that *gestus* clearly involves a whole process, in which a specific act – indeed, a particular event, situated in time and space, and affiliated with specific concrete individuals – is then somehow identified and renamed, associated with a larger and more abstract *type* of action in general, and transformed into something *exemplary* (even if archetypal is no longer the word we want to use about it). The theoretical viewpoint required by *gestus* is therefore one in which several "levels" are distinguished and then reassociated with each other…[279]

What is refreshing here is Jameson's emphasis on specific concrete individuals and instances, as this is something which he is at times not as willing to address, in part as his immensely valuable text does not take seriously Brecht's engagement with Benjamin.[280] Yet what is interesting is that both Jameson and Bryant-Bertail used similar words – "concrete" and "material" respectively – in relation to *Gestus*. What should be taken from this is that those who attempt to place Brecht as a formal practitioner above all else miss the point. Brecht's formal practice is realized only with reference to concrete and/or material practice and situations.

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[279] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 103

[280] Indeed, the sparse references to Benjamin contained in Jameson's text speak solely to Brecht's work before the historical works under investigation in this chapter were written. In part, this seems to reproduce the notion that is much harder to hold after Wizisla's text that any influence between the two was unidirectional (from Brecht to Benjamin). This may in part be in relation to Jameson's presentation of Benjamin's aesthetics as too influenced by "mysticism" unlike Brecht's supposed hard-nosed, almost vulgar, materialism. Jameson would not be alone in this reading (with which it should be noted I disagree). For instance, Stanley Mitchell in his introduction to *Understanding Brecht* notes: "In one respect, by eliding the politicization of art with the use of artistic "means of production" or apparatus, Benjamin and Brecht at times constricted the relationship between politics and art. Brecht, in his later theory and practice, was able to clarify this confusion. Benjamin died before he could completely think through a new materialist aesthetics." Mitchell in *Understanding Brecht,* xv.

It is for this reason that gesture/g in Brechtian theatrical practice is such a vital entity. Gestus is so fundamental in his work as it is, in effect, a means of locating in the body a specific point which is the irreducible locus of human life. Despite capital's wish/tendency to attempt to abstract away from the body, gestus brings the materiality of the body back into play. As McNally argues, "The drama of gesture is an historical one – an index of what has been lost with the decorporealization of language and culture."[281] What capital attempts to be rid of – the body as a site where its effects cannot be gotten rid of – is the place where Brecht attempts to dwell. As much as capital seeks to exist in a world divorced from material labour and in a "monetary universe that knows no social fixities or stable identities"[282] it cannot occupy that space without exploiting human, corporeal labour. Brecht realizes that this tendency is unsustainable (one can only attempt to abstract away from the body) and brings us back to the ground zero of the body found in each moment of time, making them dialectical. McNally explains:

> Such gestures are dialectical because, by disrupting the flow of scenes and actions which recreate the time of everyday history, they cast light on the space of the body and its desires. In so doing, they give rise "to the dialectical at a standstill," the dramatic entry of that which has been repressed – body, Eros, *mimesis* – onto the stage. Gesture is the language of the body and things.[283]

Gestus is an oppositional practice. And what one learns from this material practice is the importance of giving up on things which bring nothing with them but misery. This is specifically a rejection of the notion of progress that Benjamin finds so central to German social democracy and detrimental to working-class activity. He writes: "Progress, for Brecht, has a negative

[281] McNally, *Bodies of Meaning*, 190.
[282] Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998): 85.
[283] McNally, *Bodies of Meaning*, 190.

connotation as the *fortschreiten* (to strive forward; to advance; to progress; to pass; to proceed) from others; it implies moving ahead and thus destroying unity even when it is well intentioned."[284] The lesson from this is clear. "Theatre, then, can provide a site for tracing ideas back to their progenitors and to those affected by them. Tracing ideas back and forth forms the basic structure of Brecht's theatre…"[285]

The depiction of historical loss can be a useful force for opposition to contemporary forms of exploitation, oppression and war. In Brecht's *Mutter Courage,* tragic history is (and was) therefore not that which has happened but that which will continue to happen unless something breaks its rhythm. In part the tragic form lends itself to a form of teleology of the pre-ordained, of a kind of fate and fateful outcomes. For this reason Brecht was suspicious about the formal nature of tragedy. As Terry Eagleton notes, "Tragedy is about inevitability, and thus a politically noxious form."[286] Brecht addresses these traits by making it possible for the audience member to be a producer of alternate meanings and history (for the present). In this sense Brecht's play is "anti-tragic" as it argues that "tragedy can be avoided."[287] Yet for this to be avoided someone must act, and be heard.[288] In this regard the moment of Courage's pain over the death of her son is obviously insufficient, but this insufficiency is a design of Brecht's and is enacted as a means to encourage agency in the audience. As Elinor Fuchs notes:

[284] Oesmann, *Staging History*, 201.
[285] Oesmann, *Staging History*, 201.
[286] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003): 127.
[287] Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, 127.
[288] This also involves a realization of one's position in a politics of learning, and acting on that learning. On this question Julian H. Wulbern notes that there is a similarity in *Mutter Courage* and *Leben des Galelei* when each turns from the truth and reason: "… there has been a dialectical transformation quite akin to that which occurs in *Mother Courage*, when Courage curses the army for having killed her child at the end of Scene Six, only to proclaim in her next words at the start of Scene Seven that she won't have her war spoiled for her. Here Galileo has acceded to the demands of the Inquisition that he abjure his astronomical and has turned to a considerably safer field of investigation, the study of floating bodies." Julian H. Wulbern, *Brecht and Ionesco: Commitment in Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971): 163.

> If Mother Courage achieves the political aim of Brecht's Epic Theatre, it is because the reverses of Courage's children's deaths do not function as reversals in the plot. The recognition scene that should classically follow on these losses is glaringly absent. In effect, that scene is transferred from the protagonist to the audience. If, as Brecht hopes, the spectator leaves the audience motivated to change the world, it is because Courage cannot see what needs to change.[289]

Courage, famous for her ability to talk around and fool others with linguistic trickery, is notably (and perhaps necessarily) silent in her scream. Yet silence, while the dominant response to a recognition of the barbarity of war, is not the only response the play offers.

By the end of the play Courage is alone, having witnessed the death of all her children. Yet only one of her children, her daughter who was deemed not to have been militarily useful due to her gender, has died in anything resembling noble circumstances. Courage's daughter Kattrin sounds an alarm in the early hours of the morning and wakes a town that will otherwise be sacked. She nevertheless does so in the full knowledge that she will be killed for her actions. In this way, "Kattrin's death alone is also portrayed as an act of vital revolutionary resistance, and in this form it is positioned in the penultimate scene of the play as its climactic, defining event."[290]

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[289] Elinor Fuchs, "Waiting for Recognition: An Aristotle for "Non-Aristotelean" Drama," *Modern Drama* 50 (2007): 540. A similar point is offered by Susan Cannon Harris. She writes: "Courage knows, as the audience knows, that if she betrays her relationship to him by expressing emotion, she will be killed. Brecht would also seem to have known, by now, that forcing Courage not to express grief was the surest way of inducing spectators to feel it. Brecht enforces another such divergence by informing the audience of Eilif's death while Courage is offstage. Since Courage never learns of Eilif's death, she cannot grieve for him; the spectators have to do it for her. Courage hooks spectators as hard as any melodramatic mother ever did; but she is structurally prevented from making them her mirror." Susan Cannon Harris, "Mobilizing Maurya: J. M. Synge, Bertolt Brecht, and the Revolutionary Mother," *Modern Drama* 56 (2013): 54.

[290] Vork, "Silencing Violence," 33. While Vork's above point is valid, his work does betray a reductive notion that Marxism's radical notion can only lie within a narrow definition of class struggle, and this often leaves the complex relation to historical transposition buried under the presuppositions of what a Marxist playwright should be concerned with. "At the same time I will argue that this revolutionary power does not stem from the inherent inequity of class struggle." Robert Vork, "Silencing Violence," 35. Yet Vork is not alone here as the most prominent postmodern appreciation of Brecht, provided by Elizabeth Wright, suggests that Brecht's plays "cannot be reduced to any particular ideology, including those of Marxism or existentialism, because this would amount to an attempt to join up a deliberatively decentred view of reality." Instead, Wright argues instead that: "Their Politico-aesthetic function resides rather in the way Brecht manages to make the spasmodic, discontinuous perceptions of a reality-in-

Here, for once in the play, is an example of someone who does not try to feed on the pain and misery of war. In her death there is the ultimate irony that the one person who was deemed to be without voice (Kattrin is speech impaired), makes herself heard. The metaphor of those who are not heard and yet have agency has obvious parallels with the function of the audience, but also with Brecht's faith in the working class's ability to change the historical tides. It is they who have been hidden from and unheard throughout history and occluded in historiography. As the narrator asks in Brecht's poem "Questions from a Worker who Reads," "Great Rome/ Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom/ Did the Caesars triumph?"[291]

This reconsideration of those occluded or suppressed (or both) questions plays an important part not only in Brecht's concept of the gestus but elsewhere as well. While most of the earliest receptions of Brecht in English made much of his "Alienation Effect," for some time Brechtian scholarship has opted for a more accurate translation of the *Verfremdungseffekt,* which is actually much closer to "Distancing Effect." Alienation should not be completely dismissed, however, as there is some sense that Brecht wishes his audience to take on a new role inside the theatre, alien in relation to their traditional role as passive consumer. This marks a new positionality for the Brechtian spectator. Often Brecht has been depicted as encouraging an anti-emotional attitude in his work, in part due to this misleading translation. Brecht sought the opposite, as Anthony Squiers notes in the following:

process into a theatrical object, thus challenging our automatic interpretations of the concrete and our assumptions that words are able to match that which we sensually perceive. Most of all, the plays are an attack on our assumptions of stable identity, our own and that of others, for in these plays no one has a fixed identity, least of all the "hero," who tries to wrest it from others in a ceaseless round of aggressiveness and exploitation." Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 1989): 98-9. This position is counter-balanced by Dougal McNeill who states that "We need to accept that Marxism, unlike measles or malaria, is not something one can isolate and cure a playwright from suffering under. There is no easy dissection possible to offer up Brecht the man and Brecht the Marxist militant." See Dougal McNeill, *The Many Lives of Galileo: Brecht, Theatre and Translation's Political Unconscious* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005): 37. Another piece which dissects Wright's position is found in the aforementioned Marc Silberman, "A Postmodernized Brecht?".

[291] Willett and Mannheim eds., *Bertolt Brecht: Poems*, 252.

> In fact, Brecht wanted the audience to be engaged with the performance. He required attentiveness and personal, intellectual commitment to it. The estrangement Brecht desired was an internal estrangement from one's current *Weltanschauung* or worldview.[292]

The shift in emphasis is vital here as we move away from the caricatures of Brechtian theatre as austere and anti-emotive to a space wherein complexity of positionality and emotion are central to any production of his work. As Angela Curran notes in her useful "Brecht's Criticisms of Aristotle's Aesthetics of Tragedy,"

> The play does represent the individual suffering and loss Mother Courage experiences from the death of her children in the war. But this loss is presented so that the relationship between Mother Courage's individual loss and her occupation as a businesswoman whose livelihood depends on the war is made clear.[293]

This loss conflicts though with Kattrin's outburst. The loss is accepted and predictable. In order to fully understand it we must have a critical attitude to this historical loss. Brecht had three strategies of distancing which he lists clearly in his instructions to the play. They read as follows:

> Three aids which may help estrange the actions and remarks of the characters being portrayed:
> 1. Transposition into the third person.
> 2. Transposition into the past.
> 3. Speaking the stage directions out loud.[294]

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[292] Anthony Squiers, "A Critical Response to Heidi M. Silcox's 'What's Wrong with Alienation,'" *Philosophy and Literature* 39 (2015): 244.
[293] Angela Curran, "Brecht's Criticisms of Aristotle's Aesthetics of Tragedy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2001): 172.
[294] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 138.

While the first and third aids give the impression of specific tactical use, the second aid bursts beyond the realm of a single production. Together they go a long way in determining the content of the play itself. Indeed, while aspects of the production were changed given the location of production (important here are the productions in Berlin, Munich, Paris, and London), the field of historical transposition marks the *sine qua non* of the work. The shifting to another historical time allows for the further distanciation of action and thought in the play.[295] As noted previously in Fredric Jameson's comment that the learning from errors is vital, the inability of Courage to learn from her actions is a further sign that such benefitting from war is a dish served only to those who can afford it. As with the case of Mauler in *Die Heilige Johanna*, it is clear that through crisis there are those that win and there are those who will (continue to) lose. The point of Courage's lesson is that it should have been learned as a specifically historical lesson. This is not an abstracted lesson, an *Aesop's Fable* of instruction, but a lesson which involves an emotional *and* critical tie to historical learning and transformation. By seeing what has failed before, and by understanding the reasons for this, we also understand what was, is and forever will be a *dead* end. The resonance for a German audience of the time, their memories fresh with the barbarity of

[295] Part of the role of distanciation and history must be understood in relation to the intellectual environment within which Brecht was working, or at least that to which he needed to respond. It is safe to say that although after the fact Brecht's works and aesthetics came to be seen evermore both in the North and than later in the Global South as *the* committed response to the arts, this is not to suggest that such a state of affairs was present at both the time of Mother Courage's writing nor at the first production. What's more, the opposite was in fact the case. By far the dominant literary position of the left at the time had been expressed via Zhdanov and Lukacs which stated that art must eschew "subjectivist tendencies" and aim to present a clear wholeness of the contemporary situation. Writing on the Lukacsian phenomena that "It just is the case that art which gives us the "real" is superior art", Eagleton shows how the emphasis on displaying history as real is problematic for Brecht. He writes: "Now there is a sense in which Brecht would agree; but his sense of "rationality" surely differs in important respects from Lukacs's. For Brecht, it is not quite that art can "give us the real" only by a ceaseless activity of dislocating and demystifying; it is rather that this *is*, precisely, its yielding of the real, not a mere prelude to the dramatic moment when the transcendental signified will emerge in all its glory." See, Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin*, 85. This should not lead into the position that Brecht saw no hope in Lukacs. Rather than a rejection they are more properly seen as an encouragement, even if one with "misplaced" hope they "could be corrected." See Cliff Slaughter, *Marxism, Ideology and Literature* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980): 129.

Prussian militarism, the for it's time incomparable carnage of the First World War, and Nazi rule (and perhaps their role in it), would have been stark.[296]

What is interesting in this regard is that Brecht's understanding is that Courage's downfall is not due to the individual choices only of her's alone. Courage follows the logic of capitalism (transposed onto a peasant past) and thus what is often framed as an "opportunity" to make money in capitalism is understood here rather as an imperative. This imperative involves no longer a choice (does one choose to win?) and thus defines who one can be or become. Darko Suvin articulates this dyanic in the following;

> *Mother Courage* is a union of opposites; even her nickname (or man-made name) testifies to it. It was earned when she saved her little wagon business by running a corridor of gunfire. Ironically, the "courage" came from her being more afraid to lose her profits than to face the shells. (It is, of course, a "courage" which will lead both her financially virtuous and her ruthlessly warlike sons to face the firing squads.)[297]

The imperatives (as opposed to opportunities) imposed upon Courage's family necessitate the risk taking that will eventually lead to her inevitable downfall.

This is a thoroughgoing radical critique of the present.[298] The excursion into history which marks Brecht's period of exile is specifically about a fundamental understanding of the present condition**,** one that knows that a simple reproduction of the past (were that even possible)

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[296] As Michael Richardson notes, "Brecht's ending, however, derives its potential prophylactic power from a different sort of identification with Courage, one in which the audience is forced to come to terms with its own possible guilt with respect to its actions (or inactions) during the war years. In implicating the audience in this way, Brecht is able to activate the audience to ground their conclusions about the future in a specific moment in the past." Michael D. Richardson, *Revolutionary Theatre and the Classical Heritage: Inheritance and Appropriation from Weimar to the GDR* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007):168.

[297] Suvin, *Brecht and Beyond*, 65.

[298] As David McNally has noted, *contra* Adorno "…Benjamin's dialectics at a standstill, like Brecht's epic theatre, was not about an adequate depiction of an historical totality, but about puncturing the flow of everyday experience." See McNally, *Bodies of Meaning*, 219.

is not what is required or desired.[299] Brecht's formal strategies discussed herein are not peripheral to his political strategies, but rather are part and parcel of the same process. They are devised in tandem and work to make the links between forms of oppression and exploitation and material and/or concrete consequences as clear as possible. The "spirit of sacrifice" of Kattrin's actions ultimately upsets the prevailing historical narrative, and is a key feature in rejecting this seemingly continual process of the business of war, of which there are few winners but many losers. The question of the losers in history, and the extent to which they have been let down in moments of (perpetual) crisis will continue to be the focus in the following section when I examine the problem of faith and its rupture in Brecht's *Leben des Galilei.*

The Religion of the Now: *Galileo* and the Knowing Science

It may well be heretical to speak of the religiosity of Brecht's commitment to the now, especially as regards a play which provides such a resounding critique of the Catholic Church. What exactly the "now" here is depends on the different versions of the play that one refers to, but that is, as I have tried to argue, as essential a Brechtian problematic as it gets.[300] As in *Mutter Courage*, Brecht uses an historical backdrop, in this case a retelling of Galileo Galilei's well

[299] *Pace* the above footnote, a similar point was expressed by Theodore Adorno as well. Writing on *Mutter Courage* Adorno states: "Because the society of the Thirty Years War was not the functional capitalist society of modern times, we cannot even poetically stipulate a closed functional system in which the lives and deaths of private individuals directly reveal economic laws. But Brecht needed the old lawless days as an image of his own, precisely because he saw his own could no longer be directly comprehended in terms of people and things." See Adorno, "Commitment," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Jameson, 186-87.

[300] The play has been recognized for its radical nature, and Benjamin Bennett goes as far as to state that it: "is as close to a demonstrable instance of revolutionary theatre as we are likely to find." Benjamin Bennett, *All Theatre is Revolutionary Theatre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005): 73.

documented battle with the Catholic Church, as a means to arrive at the centre of political questions of his time.[301]

I wish to focus not only on Galileo's relation with the Church and the importance that struggle had for his society, but also with the consequences of the hopes and disillusionments that Galileo's work and renunciation force onto the stage and into Brecht's time.[302] To this end I will not investigate the importance of Brecht's work for his time as manifested in the play, but rather examine what Galileo's crucial failure, his backing-down in the face of pressure from above, means in relation to the peasant "Little Monk," a character who well understands the politics of history and the politics of the now, (perhaps given his class position) more innately than any in

[301] It is interesting to note that in a somewhat recent production of the play in Toronto, the director of the production finds it necessary to claim that "As a piece of history, it's [*Galileo*] horribly inaccurate." This is stated even though the one-off production was itself utilizing Brecht's work to make a comment about the present, in this case the infiltration and commercialisation of private-sector led University-based scientific research. See Jacob Zimmer quoted in Jon Kaplan, "Preview: The Life of Galileo," *NOW Magazine*, (May 27-June 3, 2010): 39. Much more productively, Betty Nance Weber argues that "Brecht's strategy of composition in the play is to interlace moments of authentic seventeenth-century history with anachronisms and invented history to create a consistent set of parallel between two epochs." Nance Weber, "*The Life of Galileo* and the Theory of Revolution in Performance," 62. In Weber's essays she analyses the parallels with Galileo and Trotskyists in the Soviet Union. While I would disagree with this formulation it is interesting further to consider that Weber sees a connection between many of Brecht's history plays and the "need to counter the falsification of history," particularly as there was a progressively greater "distortion in official Soviet record." Nance Weber, "*The Life of Galileo* and the Theory of Revolution in Performance," 62.

[302] For a more general philosophical examination of the reasons as to why it is important to underline the specific historical contradictions that Brecht sought to highlight, see Gene Ray, "Dialectical Realism and Radical Commitments: Brecht and Adorno on Representing Capitalism," *Historical Materialism*18 (2010): 3–24. It is important in this process not to fall into the "argument" that Brecht saw the chance in using history as an attempt to sway his dim-witted audience, a position advanced here: "The problem is, of course, as Brecht's own Marxist analysis shows very clearly, that appetite for illusion and fetish flourish under the conditions of capitalism, creating a gullible mindset that makes room for the uncritical acceptance of representation. The capitalist spectator-consumer is not simply stupid, but in need of magic and illusion." Phoebe von Held, *Alienation and Theatricality: Diderot after Brecht* (Oxford: Legenda, 2011): 59. In fact, as Laura Bradley notes, Brecht's project moved in the opposite direction. Writing on the context of Brecht's Die Mutter, Laura Bradley writes: "Brecht's emphasis on the historical context of the stage action must not be confused with his own use of theater, *Historisierung* (Historicization). In a postscript to the *Messingkauf* Brecht explained that *Historisierung* destroys the illusion that familiar phenomena are eternal: 'was ist, war nicht immer und wird nicht immer sein.' [What is, was not always so, and will not remain so forever]." Laura Bradley, *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006): 71. This point has been misunderstood, I think by Keith A. Dickson, who mistakes the clash of two historical moments as one being held up over another. He writes that "The present is weighed and found wanting by a pointed comparison with the past…". Rather, it is *not only* that the present has been found wanting, it is that both the past and the present have been found wanting. Historical transposition brings this contradiction out. Keith A. Dickson, *Towards Utopia: A Study of Brecht* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978): 61.

the play. Indeed, the Little Monk represents the vital intelligence and, perhaps problematically, the repeated Brechtian trope of the simplicity of working-class intellectuals, that are key in radically altering and fulfilling a project that shuns the pacific notions of official historiography and works for a politics of the now which sets to make of history something burning in the present. The term working-class intellectuals should be read in connection with the theorist Antonio Gramsci's description of "organic intellectuals," a group that, unlike traditional intellectuals who can be won over to a cause, arise from within and are, as it were, born with a movement.[303]

However, I must add that my concern here is not to rehash the surplus of academic work which makes the connections with the actual historical reference points with which the play is, loosely put, "in conversation." Rather, my focus is to broaden the discussion so as to take into consideration the larger implications of these reference points for an often-overlooked character in the play. In this sense, I wish to argue that by using the Little Monk as an example of that comprehension of history (he, of course, is not named, but is defined by his social category), in contrast to the definitive dates that are offered throughout the play chronologising Galileo's life, Brecht simultaneously counteracts the many necessary omissions that comprise the "great man" theory of history, while also bringing in the important question of social transformation and class.[304]

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[303] Gramsci notes that "One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer "ideologically" the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation is made quicker and made more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals." Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1999): 10. The organic intellectual reflects in part the newness of the class formations from which they originate. As Peter Thomas notes, "It is for this reason that the specificity of the organic intellectual is integrally linked to the specificity of the class project from which they emerge." Peter Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010): 416.

[304] On the importance of the Little Monk, Terry Holmes argues that "In his argument with the little monk he even asserts that the problem of social justice is the real point at issue behind the cosmological disputes…Galileo's retraction of this insight, a retraction in effect of his own commitment to the cause of humanity, is a much more serious and fundamental betrayal than his later repudiation of the scientific facts." See Terry Holmes, "The

There are two historical events which are normally brought up when one thinks of the contemporary inspirations for the writing two of the several versions of the play. The more popular interpretation sees in the play a condemnation of Oppenheimer and the Manhattan project, which involved the discovery of the technology behind the atom bombs that were horrifically put into practice on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The lesser-known interpretive example and also "the least mentioned" argues Jameson, "no doubt for all kinds of reasons, although Brecht himself mentions it, is the submission of Bukharin in Stalin's show trials."[305] It stands as a testament to the strength of the play that its function could be switched from a critique of the nuclear politics of the post-war era and, a few years earlier, to the punishing of oppositional theories and practices in the Soviet Union.[306] There is something which binds the two, and it is this common thread which seems to be of importance here. At the centre of both is the shirking of the responsibility of naming the truth that has proven, of science, in Galileo's case astronomy and in Bukharin's case the "science" of Marxism. Here, following Jameson,

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Suppressed Science of Society in *Leben des Galilei*," in *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays*, edited by Steve Giles and Rodney Livingstone (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1998): 154. This is a useful analysis and similar to my position, but is unfortunately not taken up further by Holmes. Rather, Holmes relies too often on preserving a sense of "orthodox Marxism" in Brecht's work, even when that may not be the purpose in Brecht's text. Note for instance Holmes argument that Brecht had wished to have Galileo ally himself with the bourgeoisie, thus hastening the bourgeois revolution, thus hastening communism. This stagist approach often found in Marxism has been powerfully criticized throughout the work of Ellen Meiksins Wood. See for instance her *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *The Origins of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002).

[305] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 123.

[306] While I would not take the position that Bukharin represented a fundamental change of direction for the Soviet Union, it is enough for our present purposes that Brecht himself thought so. On Brecht's attitude to the Soviet Union, Peter Brooker accurately refers to Brecht's anti-Stalinism as "indirect, cautious and delayed." Brooker also refers to the Soviet Union a "type of socialist society," a point with which I would also take issue, arguing instead that that society was a State Capitalist society. Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry, Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988): 6. Brooker's texts is also very useful in pointing out how critics have often sought to divide Brecht between a young period (sometimes "anarchistic," less rational more overtly political Brecht) to an older (often rational, "humanist") version. These latter interpretations often picture Brecht as being at odds with his own work, bursting through the confinements of his "unsustainable Marxist" politics. See Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht*, 182-185. A remarkable study that depicts that the downfall of the hopes and utopic inspiration of the Russian Revolution is Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

> …the notion of Marxism as a science, and, indeed, as the well-known "science of society" is a secondary signifying move which also corrects and limits itself: it says, yes, Marxism really is a science in that sense, but *only* in that figurative sense of what accompanies and theorizes the New.[307]

I have already argued that for Brecht a "transposition into the past"[308] was a key strategy in establishing a critical distance in his history plays. In a similar way religion stands in for other, established forms of dominance, and is, simultaneously, a prism through which to understand the new. Yet despite his significantly over-stated "hyper-rationalist" politics, the question of religion is not dismissed as false consciousness or as a way to cast a shadow over the people's logic. Rather, understanding that the new is driven with contradictions, Brecht is clear that even within the church there are instances of struggle (for good and ill), not least represented during the time of Galileo's birth in the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 (Augsburg is also Brecht's birthplace and this history would have been known). The Little Monk is the prime example of this as he, coming from the peasantry, believes in the power of the Church to relieve suffering. In this instance the winning-over of a position of science must deal with the consequences of its success, and ultimately the circumstances upon which the success is founded.[309]

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[307] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 126. Brecht's theoretical work is often underestimated. Wolfgang Haug argues that: "behind Brecht's world fame as a playwright and poet it is still a widely kept secret that he was one of the most outstanding Marxist philosophers." Wolfgang Fritz Haug, "Rethinking Gramsci's Philosophy of Praxis from One Century to the Next," *boundary 2* 26 (1999): 113. Anthony Squiers partially addresses this considerable gap in his *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht*.

[308] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 138.

[309] As Peter Smith notes, "*Leben des Galilei* suggests that scientists should not view themselves as operating within a metadiscourse isolated from external influences." This is no doubt a complex problem, and a general one in the play. Smith interest is in the history of science, and continues "Galilei warns that a pure science risks becoming an exploited science, as happened in Germany under the National Socialists." See Peter D. Smith, "German Literature and the Scientific World-View in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *The Journal of European Studies* 27 (1997): 406.

The Church of the Little Monk is not the Vatican and its institutional force, but rather a "little church and Bible texts" of Sunday's devotion.[310] In the Monk's presentation, the Church's standing is that of ordering life, in making sense of the poverty and degradation that are part and parcel of peasant labour. In this sense religion's usefulness is to rationalize forms of life. Thus, the Church here represents a very real, material operation in the lives of peasants while also providing a way of viewing the world historically. A mere dismissal, at least in Brecht's portrayal of the Little Monk, is for this reason not possible. As Wolfgang Sohlich notes in his analysis of the play, "Faith, at least, gives meaning to suffering and redeems death."[311] Galileo himself has a coterie of true "believers," but these are educated men[312] whose links to the poor are non-existent. This separation is notable, and Brecht is clear as to what transpires on the ground - the torture of the people by the Church and the ways in which the Church is an expression of dominance - but is also aware that a simple dismissal of God is dangerous for a counter-hegemonic politics. It will, for instance, not win over those who, like the Little Monk and his kind, are necessary if Galileo's larger struggle against the Church is to be won.

The Little Monk position sits on a knife's edge, balanced between the reproduction of the "orderly" society and the potential of the peasants who, for the moment, believe in the rightness of the established church. God has potential as a means for structuring the lives of peasants, and this cannot be forgotten. Yet this must be balanced by the Little Monk's response to Galileo's assistant Federzoni's cry that the established families "who ordered the earth stand still because their castles might be shaken loose if it resolves…" by finishing with "…and who only kiss the

[310] Bertolt Brecht, *Galileo* (New York: Grove Press, 1966): 83.
[311] Wolfgang Sohlich, "The Dialectic of Mimesis and Representation in Brecht's "Life of Galileo," *Theatre Journal* 45 (1993): 57.
[312] There is a serious gender problem herein as the few women portrayed in the play lack the ability to think outside of their perceived lowly positions and gendered stereotypes.

Pope's feet as long as he uses them to trample on the people. God made the physical world, God made the human brain. God will allow physics."[313] God may be something different from the Church, yet God's institutional presence is felt in ways that must be taken into account. Indeed, the philosophy of meeting people where there are in the moment, and acknowledging these contradictions, seems to be the point that we (and Galileo) are to take from this interaction.

As so often in Brecht's work, and as shown in the above section on *Mutter Courage*, we learn from those who do not. Galileo is a complex figure in this regard as he is one of the most knowing characters in Brecht's oeuvre. Yet he's equally as vulnerable as others in not learning, noteworthy given his high standing. At the beginning of Scene Seven of the play, when his findings have been ratified by the Papal Observatory and things seem to be turning in Galileo's favour, he engages in a conversation with the Little Monk. The Little Monk, troubled by Galileo's material facts which conflict with his theological texts, resolves to resign from his pursuit of astronomical truth. Galileo's response, perhaps emboldened by this official validation, is arrogant towards the Little Monk, suggesting that Galileo can only see the Little Monk as an officer of the Church being loyal to its hierarchy. Galileo states "Your motives are familiar to me."[314] The Little Monk engages in a full-blown response, which links Galileo's facts with the world with which he is most familiar: peasant life in the Campagna. Galileo, after having listened to the complexity of the Little Monk's honest statement, and the genuine experience from which the Little Monk is being framed, realizes he has overreached in his assault against the Little Monk, the effect of which is to leave Galileo embarrassed.

Viewed without the Little Monk's intervention, *Leben des Galileo* can very easily be read as a struggle of one man's ideals against the powers that be. With the Little Monk's intervention

[313] Brecht, *Galileo*, 96.
[314] Brecht, *Galileo*, 82.

this reading is severely challenged, and the central problem becomes the scientist's (broadly defined) arguments against the powers that be, balanced against the concrete situation of working people. Witness for instance the Monk's statement that "Too often these days when I am trying to concentrate on tracking down the moons of Jupiter, I see my parents. I see them sitting by the fire with my sister, eating their curded cheese."[315] The distinction here between heaven and earth, between abstract struggle and the lived lives of peasants in the Campagna is not nearly as severe as has been presented thus far. Indeed, they are here presented as if an understanding of one is necessary to understanding the other. The "curded cheese" also stands in contrast to the wonderful meals and wine to which Galileo is accustomed, a pleasure he rates as highly as his research.

In the discourse between Galileo and the peasant, the former is delivered another lesson by the latter. After Galileo has heard of the penury of the Little Monk's devout parents, Galileo asks "where is their divine fury?"[316] The Little Monk's response that "They are old" leaves Galileo "beaten", and unable to "meet the Little Monk's eyes."[317] While the multiple forms of abuse that Galileo will take from those in positions of power has been the focus of almost all of the criticism of the play, the intellectual defeat and shame that Galileo experiences from below with this statement has been pointedly absent in English.[318]

The embarrassment that Galileo feels points to a key problem in Brecht, namely self-criticism on the level of the individual, but also how intellectuals operate within Stalinist societies (a key problem for Azdak in particular), given the increased level of responsibility they

[315] Brecht, *Galileo*, 83.
[316] Brecht, *Galileo*, 85.
[317] Brecht, *Galileo*, 85.
[318] Thus, the problem is not one simply to be placed on his shoulders. Brecht does not wish to isolate the problem but rather, as Darko Suvin explains, "Brecht's *Life of Galileo* melds in the protagonist both individualist and societal failure." See Darko Suvin, "Revelation vs. Conflict: A Lesson from Nô Plays for a Comparative Dramaturgy," *Theatre Journal* 46 (1994): 530-531.

carry. There is ample evidence that Galileo prides himself most on his own materiality (the emphasis placed on the heightened pleasure of eating chief among them). Yet wherever materiality runs its course it is joined by history. Two points in particular stand out here. The Little Monk notes on the one hand that this materiality is expressed in specifically historical terms. The depiction of the ceiling beams "which the smoke of centuries has blackened," evokes Jameson's clever depiction of the "Xairos of Brecht's peasant history."[319] Also, the Little Monk's father who "did not get his poor bent back all at once, but little by little, year by year, with unfailing regularity…" illustrates again the *longue durée* of the peasant. Yet the example of the peasant is also more largely an opportunity for learning. This is expressed especially in the case of Galileo's own learning but also in terms of his teaching.

Despite being twice humbled by the Little Monk, Galileo ridicules him again for taking an interest in his new manuscript, despite the Monk's misgivings about Galileo's relation to the Church. The Little Monk pays no attention to Galileo, but coming across a difficult passage, states: "I don't understand this sentence." Galileo's response is a practical one. "I'll explain it to you, I'll explain it to you," he responds as they are both sitting on the floor. The symbolism of the basic question, the simple repeated answer and the fact that they are working together on the floor is telling. The problematic idea of high-mindedness that is present before, of a battle between the noble, great, individual and the political machine, is deconstructed and ridiculed here.[320] In this scene the Little Monk has established the inefficacy, or even the uselessness, of knowledge that is

[319] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 139.

[320] An attempt to examine this relation between individual and the social has been presented in Jacqueline Merriam-Paskow's "Brecht's *Leben des Galilei*: The Modern Scientist as Voyeur," *Modern Language Studies* 22 (1992): 42 – 56. Merriam-Paskow's contention is that rather than the historical figure of Galileo being a divided subject, straddling the lines between the truthfulness of his political position and the social implications of that position, the play is in fact a deconstruction of the idea of the rational scientist in the Western tradition. My use of the term deconstructed is much different than the meaning provided by Merriam-Paskow and the postmodern trajectory to which it is arguably indebted.

out of reach to those who most need it. Again, he brings Galileo back to earth. It is highly significant that Galileo's single moment of non-coerced submission, that is submission free of physical or economic compunction, comes in the moment where is he forced to acknowledge the larger social importance of his actions. Sat on the floor, closest to the base elements with which Galileo's study has been able to come to terms only in abstract theory, we see an inventive contrast between idealism and materialism. In Jameson's discussion of *Galileo* he examines the complex materialist/idealist contradictions in the play using Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic. He writes:

> The Master is willing to sacrifice his life for Honour (for a Recognition that will later include power and material privilege as a bonus and a supplement). It is this willingness to sacrifice his own life and living body that distinguishes him from the Slave, who is supremely unwilling to lose the one good he already has. The Slave is the materialist; the Master the idealist: materialism, then, is the ultimate unwillingness to let go of the body as such, no matter what the promises of reward (and those are, in any case, generally paid out in idealistic rhetoric and in a hollow language of honour a good deal less "materialist" in the long run than the Master's feudal privileges).[321]

This only partly fits (at least for my purposes), as it is clear from the play that the mark of Galileo's famous submission is in fact that he wishes not to give up his life for his cause. Yet the conversation with the Monk nevertheless illustrates the central omission of the play thus far in that the waging of Galileo's war is not at all sympathetic to the actual real concerns of the peasant class; his war is merely abstract, utopian in the sense of "no place" (note again the embarrassment and submission of Galileo when the Little Monk raises basic question of material circumstances). In this respect, the "good that the Little Monk already has" may not in fact be all that productive

[321] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 124.

(the Little Monk is himself deeply conflicted, and despite his concerns about the repercussions of Galileo's new book, he nevertheless "wolfs down" the text)[322] but it does have an understandable purpose. How one learns, and how one is taught to learn will shift just as the terrain on which one stands moves. In this regard, as Freddie Rokem notes:

> Learning and pedagogy are for Brecht also a form of interaction with the world that is *revolutionary*, both in the sense of contemplating a particular phenomenon from constantly changing perspectives moving "around" it, but also by changing the world itself through revolutionary social change, which as Brecht's Galileo also argues, is based on the new forms of knowledge he propagates for.[323]

Learning must respond to the world it finds itself in. Learning conditions new thought, but it is limited in that it is itself shaped and determined. As Galileo notes in his *mea culpa* to his lifelong assistant Andrea in the penultimate scene, "Even a man who sells wool, however good he is at buying wool cheap and selling it dear, must be concerned with the standing of the wool trade."[324] To bring a world asunder one must understand and have connections to the lived realities of the material world.

After Galileo's recantation his many followers flee from him.[325] Of the Little Monk, Andrea notes: "Fulganzio, our Little Monk, has abandoned research for the peace of the

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[322] Brecht, *Galileo,* 85.

[323] Rokem continues: In order to achieve this dual goal, not only the world as we know it, but also the activity of learning itself—in this case, from and through the theatre, as well as the pedagogies of studying theatre—must also be constantly investigated and radically critiqued and restructured." Freddie Rokem, "The Aesthetics of Learning: Bertolt Brecht's Die Ausnamhe und die Regel (The Exception and the Rule)," *Theatre Topics* 25 (2015): 57. This text also is useful in articulating novel ways in which the Brecht and Benjamin collective path began before the two began their friendship.

[324] Brecht, *Galileo,* 123.

[325] While her article is useful in examining the interrelation between ideology and scientific reason in Brecht's play, Anne Moss' analysis seems to overstate the reliance on the reasoning in Brecht, stemming from what she sees as Brecht's "predilection for a utopian vision of *reason* as man's unique capacity for practical intelligence, cognitive acuity and ideological thinking – none of which may necessarily be informed by sound judgment." Anne Moss, "Limits of reason: An Exploration of Brecht's Concept of *Vernunft* and the Discourse of Science in *Leben des*

Church."[326] In this sense the centrality of the Little Monk for the majority of the play, and the centrality of his sudden and distinct withdrawal from political life, recalls the idea of something missing, "etwas faellt" of Brecht's earlier piece *Der Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahogonny*. The meaning of this loss, and the potential that it could have unlocked, is made clearer in the final scenes of the play. Galileo is visited by Andrea who is on his way to Holland to spread the word of Galileo's works. Galileo, attempting to reflect on his part in the larger attack on science, states:

> As a scientist I had an almost unique opportunity. In my day astronomy emerged into the market place. At that particular time, had one man put up a fight, it could have had wide repercussions. I have come to believe that I was never in real danger; for some years I was as strong as the authorities, and I surrendered my knowledge to the powers that be, to use it, no, not *use* it, *abuse* it, as it suits their ends. I have betrayed my profession. Any man who does what I have done must not be tolerated in the ranks of science.[327]

This may sound like an extreme burden to be placed on one's shoulders, yet such a concern is not a new one for Brecht. And Brecht is clear on the subject. For Brecht, as I have already established, the idea of suffering – especially for the cause – is omnipresent. This is not always unproblematically formulated, for instance as in his infamous *Die Massnahme*. Nevertheless, what's "missing" in this regard is not merely the Little Monk but the unrest which is belied by his return to the Church and its "peace." Here we have a rejection of peace as an abstract category. A peace in the material sense does much to produce and reproduce the material destruction of the

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Galilei" in *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays*, Giles and Livingstone eds., 141. Such a viewpoint seems to abstract away from the principle of applied reason in Brecht's work, and the usefulness Brecht locates in, as with *Mutter Courage*, learning from those who don't learn. This also draws the line around the meanings of truth is differing social settings. "Truth must never be regarded as an absolute content of writing but must always be treated as a function of the responsible social action of individuals here and now." Bennett, *All Theatre is Revolutionary Theatre*, 62.

[326] Brecht, *Galileo*, 120.

[327] Brecht, *Galileo*, 124.

timeless peasant, a peasant who with Galileo has the possibility of being blown out of History's continuum. The coupling of the fact that Galileo's work "could have had wide repercussions" and the fact that the renunciation of politics of the Little Monk, the figure for whom these repercussions would be most keenly felt, are clear for Brecht.

Yet history here is also the potential liberation of that weight of history in the sense that perhaps only Benjamin has been close enough to touch, a history which is truly dangerous. And the Little Monk is clear on this when he asks the question,

> How could they take it, were I to tell them that they are on a lump of stone ceaselessly spinning in empty space, circling around a second-rate star? What, then, would be the use of their patience, their acceptance of misery? What comfort, then, the Holy Scriptures, which have mercifully explained their crucifixion?[328]

Something must stand in for this "missing" piece, something that will offer a way out of the "happy peace" of the Church's chronology. As stated earlier, the Little Monk sits on a knife's edge. The religion of "our Little Monk," a name intended to be worthy of great compassion rather than condescension, is one of feeling towards working people. Working people are knowing subjects who are experts in their own struggle, even if they don't always arrive at the right answer, just as Galileo may be the knowing subject who has the right answer, but is not an expert in the struggle which surrounds and consumes him. And thus falls the great man theory of history, and a renewed interplay of agency and structure. The emphasis on agency and division is central to the play, as Michael Bennett notes:

[328] Brecht, *Galileo*, 83-4.

> Thus, *Galileo* examines the point in human history where narrative and the idea of motion intersect: forcing the audience to be aware of conflicting narratives; forcing the audience to realize that their own narratives about the world are just socially and culturally constructed (i.e., artificial, in the broad sense, and human-made, in the more general sense); and forcing the audience to accept that both narratives and society is not a given and is not unchangeable.[329]

For *Galileo*, the knowledge of science is knowledge, yes, but only of a kind. Crucially it is not the only form of knowledge that counts; there is also a knowledge joined to practice. Practice, its implications, and what confines it, will be the focus of the next section on *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*.

The Chalk Lines of History: *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, Productivity and the Past

I move now from the historical investigation of *Galileo* to *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* where the transposition into the past has a more open, directly strategic, use. In some ways the movement here is very similar to that which came in the previous chapter on Brecht. As in *Kuhle Wampe* and *Mann ist Mann*, Brecht uses the trope of a play within a play. Here though there are two uses of this device, firstly with the story of the rescue of the child, and also in the story of the Judge, Azdak.[330] Indeed, the principle of moving and shifting terrain structures the play, not only

[329] Michael Y. Bennett, *Narrating the Past through Theatre: Four Crucial Texts* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 61. Also useful in this regard is Bennett's argument regarding the link between the moment of the now and historical consciousness. He notes: "Confronting these memories not only takes us "back" into our individual and collective consciousness but also, importantly, simultaneously makes it "anew," so as to alienate (to use Brecht's idea that will be articulated near the end of "modern drama") the familiar, making the "past and the strange" come into contact with the "near and the present": making us encounter and question our deep-seeded individual and collective assumptions and memories." Bennett, *Narrating the Past through Theatre*, 15.

[330] The origin of Azdak, argue Neil Brough and R. J. Kavanagh, is possibly found in a Persian religious figure called "Madzak". See Neil Brough and R. J. Kavanagh, "But Who is Azdak? The Main Source of Brecht's *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis*," *Neophilologus* 75 (1991): 573-580. This adds to the complex make-up of the play's origins, and points towards Brecht's use of various historical trajectories in the play.

formally (in the use of a play within a play, among others) but also with regard to content. Important in this sense is the connection between Grusha's development from obliging servant to self-conscious actor,[331] a dynamic which mirrors that of Joan in *Die Heilige Johanna*. Continuing in this vein we have similar trajectories in both *Mann ist Mann* and *Die Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, wherein the lead characters set out on a journey not of their choosing, forced to carry a burden (another identity and social role for both Galy Gay and Grusha, with the latter taking on the responsibility of a child to boot) before ultimately accepting and making that burden their own. The point here is that there are major structural links to be made between the works written before Brecht flees Germany and those which are written while in exile. The major distinction here is the specific use of history as it occurs in the later work (as opposed to the scant use of history in his Weimar days, as mentioned before) through which Brecht articulates his politics of productivity in the now. History here, both in the sense of the repressed peasant expressed above as well as a false/failed utopian past, is productively employed. As a correlative, in *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis,* the possibility of building socialism is seen simultaneously as

[331] Given the potential misunderstanding that are possible in Grusha taking the child, Brecht sought to formally divide the moment (and any flippant connection) involving "innate" behaviour. In this regard, a deep problem for Brecht was to prefigure Grusha as a product of a class divided society with its own inherent determinants. As Meg Mumford notes: "Not only did Brecht present Grusha's behaviour as socially derived, but he repeatedly sought to avoid the presentation of her character as a fixed entity. For example, by foregrounding Grusha's long hesitation before taking the abandoned child he interrupted the idea that her decision was a spontaneous impulse born of an eternally honourable character." Meg Mumford, *Bertolt Brecht* (London: Routledge, 2009): 119. With this stated, however, in an important essay Iris Smith pays attention to the role of women's sexuality in Brecht's later works. She writes: "The crux of the problem is the representation of the mother's desire. In *Mother Courage* (1939), *Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944-45), *Good Person of Szechwan* (1939-41) and *The Mother* (1930-31), the female subject is identified as an asexual mother, or as a sexual being that willingly abandons her sexuality and self-definition for the sake of children. These characters' social and economic positions are determined through their roles as mothers, and their sexual identities are correspondingly stunted. None of this can be explained by the flattening of dramatic character normally seen in Brecht's epic theatre, for the sexual identities of male characters are not similarly foreshortened." Iris Smith, "Brecht and the Mothers of Epic Theater," *Theatre Journal* 43 (1991): 496. There is no doubt validity to this point, and it perhaps for this reason (and the stereotype of the "sexless" mother) that audiences identified so strongly with the principal characters (to Brecht's bemusement). This said, it does need pointing out that Brecht's focuses more on the social effects and problems that women (as mothers particularly) have to deal with as primary caregivers and providers for children and the elderly, and that their involvement in this "day-to-day" struggle often means putting off meeting their own needs.

productive and utopian. Brecht's use of peasant history makes this odd linking possible.[332] The specific question of historical positionality in *Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis* is key to understanding the play's political and aesthetic relevance.

Brecht wrote the play when he felt himself very much politically irrelevant. His work in the United States with college and labour organizations' productions was fraught with problems and often quickly abandoned, and his one other significant work during his time there – the film *Hangmen Also Die* – was both a limited and limiting production given the restrictions of working within the Hollywood system, even though the film itself bears many marks that make it stand out as something distinguishably Brechtian.[333] Nevertheless, devoid of a political-aesthetic organization with which to work, not to mention a large group of committed cultural producers like himself (Eisler and Weigel being the major exceptions here), Brecht turns to the parable as a means of providing a productive distance to his work.[334] As with his other historical works, this

[332] While the pretext of the play is the decision making process of collectivization in the Soviet Union, there is a real question as to whether Brecht felt such freedom in deciding one's future was in fact possible in Stalinist Georgia. While Brecht may have held a sincere hope that the economic successes of socialism would destroy the necessity or possibility for Stalinist type rule, he himself expressed sincere misgivings about the rule of Stalin (he referred to him as the "great murderer of the people" and expressed as early as 1936 the point that Leon Trotsky's devastating criticisms of the Soviet Union may very well be valid**)**. Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that the expert in the Prologue – the Delegate – is from Tiflis and his role is that of a Bureaucrat. Stalin was himself from Tiflis and in the Prologue there is a sly criticism given towards the Delegate. When, for instance, he asks for the play to be shortened to fit his schedule the Singer responds bluntly with "No". For more on the critique of Stalin see T. M. Holmes, "Descrying the Dialectic: A Heterodox Line on the Prologue to Brecht's Der Kaukasische Kreidekreis," *Journal of European Studies* 7 (1977): 95-106.

[333] Among other examples, the character Professor Stephen Novotny states the Brechtian formulation "Don't start from the good old times, but from the bad new ones." *Hangmen Also Die*, Dir. Fritz Lang, Arnold Pressburger Films, 1943. On the subject of the United States, J. Chris Westgate humorously notes: "If Brecht had lived long to consider the history of his plays on Broadway, he would have known that he made the right decision in settling in the GDR." J. Chris Westgate, "Brecht on Broadway: A Dialectical History," in *Brecht, Broadway and United States Theatre*, Westgate ed., xii.

[334] Long-time Berliner Ensemble member, Manfred Wekwerth, constructively delineates the parable as form and ideological content. He writes: "If the history play contributes to the construction of ideologies by encouraging activity on the part of the spectator, the parable makes ideology itself into its subject. It critiques ideology. It is not primarily concerned with discovering people or processes, but rather discovering discovery itself." Manfred Wekwerth, *Daring to Play: A Brecht Companion* (London: Routledge, 2011): 157. Wekwerth qualifies his notion of Brecht's work thus: This does not refer to the history play as a literary type, but to a mediating form in theatre." p. 156. "The history play is a suitable way of confronting the individual in the audience with the individual on stage. Its technique resides in highlighting the individual." Wekwerth, *Daring to Play*, 157. And here: "Likewise, if you want

parable relies, however, on a distinctly different use of time than the frantic, ear-to-the-ground movement, of his earlier works.

The play begins with a discussion of the future of a Georgian field that was – before the Nazis had taken over and subsequently expelled the local inhabitants – operated by the "Galinsk goat-farming commune." The question presented to the nascent "Rosa Luxemburg fruit-growing commune" is how to convince those who wish to return to the pre-Nazi goat farming days that the land should be collectivized. The strategy that the commune devises is to invite a group of actors to produce a play which will make clear the notion of productive "ownership," in the sense of showing how those who work together *productively in common* deserve their rightful ends. Clearly, the specific deployment of art here as a mechanism of actively engaging with material questions (something which was seen most directly before in *Kuhle Wampe*) should be highlighted. Yet, lacking a situation that made an organization devoted to such a politics a possibility (an organization like the *Red Megaphone*, for instance), Brecht uses history as a means to make an argument for the present. In order to provide an answer to the problem, historical representation, both via "transposition into the past" and by resurrecting the content of a biblical parable (although the reference given in the Prologue is that the legend "comes from the Chinese"[335]), is used to illuminate the present circumstance. As argued before, this history is specifically a peasant history in the general sense, a history not merely focused on exploitation of the land as such but of the entirety of social oppression of that time. Jameson has argued on this point that this vision of the peasantry represents almost an heuristic vision of historical

to question the present – with old or new plays – and "mercilessly" criticize it, dehistoricization in the end leads to the opposite – to adaptation. Because it deactivates the spectator." Wekwerth, *Daring to Play*, 37-8.

[335] For an overview of the history of the Chinese versions of the *Chalk Circle* play see Weinwei Du's "The Chalk Circle Comes Full Circle: From Yuan Drama Through the Western Stage to Peking," *Asian Theatre Journal* 12 (1995): 307-325.

exploitation before capitalism (and socialism). The peasantry epitomize exploitation taken to its most exaggerated state, without even the weak freedom of workers under capitalism. Likewise, the capitalist class (as opposed to the Feudal ruling elites, etc.) represent the clearest example of parasitic life. As Marx describes them in Volume 1 of *Capital*, "Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."[336] This is the choice that Jameson sees Brecht making. How to represent the systems of exploitation most clearly involves a blending of historical periods and their particular forms of surplus extraction. He writes:

> For in the peasant works – and above all in the *Chalk Circle*… – peasant time is *par excellence* the time of oppression: in the great class struggle of human history as a whole, now defined not by the specific modes of production as such but, rather, as the immemorial relationship between exploiters and exploited – yet not a relationship of sheer power and domination only, as in the anarchist tradition, but as a very general economic relationship between those who produce and those who enjoy the products of that production – in this vision of human history, as Brecht sees it and is able to represent it, or perhaps as he sees himself able to represent it, peasant life is the great vehicle through which one is able to represent the experience of the exploited and the oppressed; while the life of the capitalists is the form through which one can best represent the exploiters…[337]

What we have here is a compression of history into a compact form. By compression I mean a cursory summary of human history reduced to its basic (exploitative) impulses that is, once compressed, more easily explored (for its being therefore generalisable). And while Jameson may object to the Benjaminian possibilities that such a compression leaves open, there is nevertheless in this an historical politics which allows for a highly redemptive hermeneutic. This is not merely

[336] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (London: Penguin, 1990): 342.
[337] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 138.

one of subject matter but also especially one of linguistic form and content. Indeed, Brecht's language choice in the text matches this turn towards a long view of history and the reduction of dialogue and emotion. Of special importance here is the reliance on the axiom in *Die Kaukasische Kreidekreis*.

There are numerous examples of the use of axioms throughout the text, but there is a particularly enlightening episode found in Scene 6 in the play, wherein the Judge Azdak and the Ironshirt Simon debate the fate of Grusha. In this debate (or perhaps "challenges" may be the more accurate term) the two exchange the following salvos:

> Simon *loudly*: "When the horse was shod, the horsefly stretched out its leg", as the saying is.
> Azdak *eagerly accepting the challenge*: "Better a treasure in the sewer than a stone in the mountain stream."
> Simon: "A fine day. Let's go fishing," said the angler to the worm.
> Azdak: "I'm my own master," said the servant, and cut off his foot.
> Simon: "I love you like a father," said the Czar to the peasant, and had the Czarevitch's head chopped off.[338]

The purpose of this exchange is to reproduce the play's key notion of suffering – of having injustice from above meted out to those below, as well as emphasizing the parasitical nature of those who live off of those who labor – to the level of aesthetic representation.[339] These

[338] Bertolt Brecht, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (London: Methuen, 1988), 91.
[339] Yet this basic anti-oppression politics is at times lost on some important readers, including Jean Genet. A particularly shocking "understanding" of Brecht's play is delivered in Carl Lavery's essay on Jean Genet and commitment. In this piece, Lavery shows how Genet took Brecht's argument about productivity (the land "belongs to those who are good for it") and twisted it to produce its opposite intent and theory, while then suggesting that this is Brecht's position. Lavery notes that Genet "…uses Brecht's commitment to Marxist ideals of progress to justify colonial violence. This is an apt demonstration of Genet's point about ideology, for it shows that Marxist ideology does not interrupt bourgeois oppression; rather, it repackages that suffering under a different name." See Carl Lavery, "Between Negativity and Resistance: Jean Genet and Committed Theatre," *Contemporary Theatre Review*

exchanges excel in their purpose of historical reduction, yet they are by no means the only such devices found in the play. Another missive in this vein is found in the following insertion from the "Singer":

> When the houses of the great collapse
> Many little people are slain
> Those who had no share in the fortunes of the mighty
> Often have a share in their misfortunes. The plunging wain
> Drags the sweating beasts with it into the abyss.[340]

These axioms, while not only summing up the key problems of the play, direct it irrevocably. The axiom as strategy in the play is symptomatic of a type of gestus which seeks to link historical forms of oppression and an impulse of reconstruction of the recognition of this former "attitude" for the present. Sean Carney has expanded on this double movement in the following passage from his *Brecht and Critical Theory*. He writes:

> The most important thing to draw from Brecht's play, then, is the attitude that it displays, which Brecht also calls a kind of wisdom that is performed or staged for us. It seems important here to distinguish between the form of wisdom, and the content of wisdom. Brecht, for his part, is concerned only with the former, the posture of wisdom, wisdom as an action. The form of this wisdom is dialectical and historical. As the storyteller himself says, "It may be mistaken to mix different wines, but old and new wisdom mix very well" (148). The message of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is found in the "mixing" of old and new wisdom, and what matters is not the moral of Grusha's tale, but that we perceive the

16 (2006): 226. To reiterate, Brechtian reception is at times subject to seemingly willful misrepresentation, and one must be clear in these examples of the limitations of it as such.

[340] Brecht, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, 13.

> dialectical relationship between past wisdom – the traditional Chinese tale and its biblical counterpart – and present wisdom, namely Marxist reconstruction and innovation.[341]

Carney's contribution here is valuable, not least for the emphasis on historical understanding and its implication in contemporary situations. What I find less convincing in Carney's argument is the latter half of the formulation – "present wisdom" and "Marxist reconstruction and innovation." I argue that history and its relations to the present cannot be read merely via a simple philosophical procedure, staging an ancient legend as a means to smuggle in Marx. In fact, this relation structures the text in a far more dramatic and *immediate* way than Carney allows. The fact that the most vicious group of the play – the "Panzerreiter" in Brecht's original but often suggestively translated as the the "Ironshirts" (an obvious reference to the Brownshirts of Hitler's Germany) are modelled on the Gestapo, thus making the link with historical forms of oppressive governments and those that were for Europe at the time a pressing concern – is one of many examples of the "directness" that is key to Brecht's works. Yet perhaps the most important point here is that the introduction of the "mixing of old and new wisdom" is worth little if it is not ultimately joined with an attitude of action in the present, essentially a principle of judgment.

Grusha's tale is, mirroring the reduced history of exploitation of which she is part, a harsh one. She is bullied and cajoled at almost every point in the play, the reason being that in a way like Galy Gay before her, she is a far too willing and perhaps naïve soul who often takes those she comes across as equally well-meaning, hard-working and altruistic, and thus is seemingly

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[341] Carney continues; "As a dialectical, eminently Benjaminian storyteller, the singer is the emblem of the play itself, for he produces something new through his transmission of the old. Past wisdom, decayed and historicized, is produced in the present in the form of a new historical attitude." See Sean Carney, *Brecht and Critical Theory: Dialectics and Contemporary Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2005): 56. Yet this learning always takes place in a social setting. As Markus Wessendorf writes: ""Brecht the dramatist prefers to put his characters into social situations in which they are compelled to produce attitudes and gestures that reveal who they are as social beings, for example when standing trial, conducting a business transaction, reporting a traffic accident, going on strike, or teaching a lesson." Markus Wessendorf, "Brecht's Materialist Ethics Between Confucianism and Mohism," *Philosophy East and West* 66 (2016): 123.

unable to say no. While on her travels smuggling the child across borders, her situation is constantly compromised and she often is subjected to various forms of indignity. Despite all the personal sacrifices she has made, when Grusha is called to bring her rescued child forth to its biological mother, she bucks this demand, and with it her own history (and the compressed history of exploitation), and declares the child rightfully hers. At this impasse Brecht resolves this situation by opting for a trial to be led by the woefully corrupt and imperfect Azdak.[342]

The move towards a moment of judgment is vital in this historical recovery if it is to be meaningful at all. Yet the material conditions of this judgment are highly questionable, as Grusha would normally simply be dismissed or killed for her "impudence." What makes this moment of judgment possible is the fact that Advak believes *History* has been arrested, and that the peasants have taken over and restoratative judgment can be highly productive. We must remind ourselves that this is a parable, and we are liberated from sticking to the official line. For this brief utopian moment, a space has been carved out on stage (albeit in chalk, impermanent), and we are able to discern that by learning to judge historically, we can effectively judge in the now, albeit with different weapons. Good judgment relies on having good justices in positions of authority, aiding those who contribute.[343] As Darko Suvin notes:

> In fact, this is an aesthetic correlative to a salvational perspective in which history has no end, so that the kolkhoz story is simply a *presently possible* society in which Azdak's

[342] Marc Silberman has noted of Azdak that he is: "the judge despite himself who knows how to exploit the disorder of a revolution when it is opportune but never takes a risk otherwise. Such figures do not represent class positions but rather move between them, and hence they are able to undermine both class solidarity and social hierarchies." Silberman, "Bertolt Brecht, Politics, and Comedy," 178.

[343] This is also notable in "The Democratic Judge," a poem that Brecht composes around the same time as *The Chalk Circle*. Brecht's judge rewards the sincerity and hard work of an Italian innkeeper by manipulating immigration law in his favour. See Willett and Mannheim, *Collected Poems*, 385.

> exceptional drawing of a chalk circle has become the normative or dominant use of pencils instead of pistols.[344]

Yet in order for this to happen we must first have the example *par excellence* of Grusha and of the historical figuration of the time of the peasantry which she embodies as the framework or backdrop of historical, class, memory. This moment of "making succinct" that which seems endless is an attempt towards a productive use of history. As Brecht notes, "…the kolkhoz story assigns a historical localization."[345] This localization is that which Grusha and Azdak offer but should not be confused with the form of localization that takes place in a specific moment in the play, where a concrete historical situation is analysed. Because the play is in itself a mode for learning (it supposedly has a specific motive – to convince the peasants to collective the farm), the play necessitates a singular focal point in history (which is also able to articulate a moment outside of itself) and requires that history itself offer up an "exemplary 'case' calling for judgment."[346] This notion of judgment of the exemplary case (which Jameson notes follows from Andre Jolles's notion of *casus*[347]) allows Brecht to make history more malleable and generalizable, a double yet linked procedure in which the past is made plastic and therefore accessible, so that which needs to be made strange – the present forms of exploitation and oppression – can be made that much more visible.

Yet we must warn ourselves not to reduce the problematics laid out above to merely a formulaic games playing wherein the mystery to Brecht's genius is, at once, revealed and easily duplicated or, on the flip side, tossed away as mechanistic (the latter of the two is much more common). Instead, the chief conjunctural tensions of the day need to be connected more fruitfully

[344] Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond*, 179
[345] Bertolt Brecht in Suvin, *To Brecht and Beyond*, 179.
[346] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 28.
[347] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 28.

with those which have historically determined the individual moment. This is a philosophical question for Brecht, which reasserts the principle of usefulness in the present moment. Jameson writes:

> Brechtian storytelling, looked at in this way, is indeed informed by something like a "method", but one which is rigorously non-formulistic, and thereby evades the philosophical objection to sheer method as such which have been outlined above. Casus, in other words, must be shown to be a form with genuine content, not merely an abstract frame into which narrative content of all kinds can be neatly arranged and subsumed.[348]

If we follow Jameson, this moment of judgment suggests a philosophical trajectory of judgment in Brecht, but the judgment tends towards never being fixed. This draws out the metaphor of the chalk circle as an heuristic tool that makes judgment possible. A chalk circle is easily rubbed away. It is not meant to be a permanent fixture but rather a sketch which will require rewriting as in a liberated classroom where teachers and students work together to produce knowledge for themselves, or as in the case of Brecht's work, where the ensemble creates meaning firstly for itself, and then more broadly. The result is an internal education that is as important as that made for others. The chalk circle is that possibility, an outlining of something that may be theoretically possible, (theoretically possible and demonstrable in the confines of a play) but is as yet unattainable on the level of the social. In this sense Brecht leaves his most furtive and speculative moments for the future.[349] The moment of judgment can, at least for now, be merely a suggestion

[348] Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 28.

[349] Further to this point, where we are left at the end of the play is not resolved, given the play within a play movements that come at the beginning. As Caroline Rupprecht points out, "…since the play does not return to the action of the prologue but rather ends with the play-within-the-play, we do not see their reaction. What we are left with is a happy ending, and at the same time, an open ending, since Brecht never closes the "frame" established in the prologue." What this means is that "Brecht works with two competing versions of reality to show the discrepancy between what is and what might be." See Caroline Rupprecht, "Post-war Iconographies: Wandering Women in Brecht, Duras, Kluge," *South Central Review* 23 (2006): 39.

based on a type of guidance as laid out by Mayakovski: "The home of the soviet people shall also be the home of Reason."[350]

As decision making of the sort in the Prologue of the play did not take place in the Soviet Union,[351] one may read this as an implicit critique of that Stalinist system, at least as referenced above. Nevertheless, what is clear is that Azdak's final judgment of use over ownership is a utopian one, but one solely assigned not to this world but to the next, and hopefully to the next generation, as the child hints towards a future world and its potential for an alternate material/social existence. His request that the estates of the rich shall be made into a playground

[350] Brecht, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, 6. It may have hoped to be the home of reason, but also, in Brecht's text, there's an attempt to rescue this project. As R. Darren Gobert notes, "The framed story of the chalk circle test, [Brecht] claims, demonstrates for the kolkhozes not a just verdict but "a certain kind of wisdom" – "an attitude" that might help produce a verdict in the still-undecided argument over the valley's ownership." R. Darren Gobert, "Cognitive Catharsis in The Caucasian Chalk Circle," *Modern Drama* 49 (2006): 21. This emphasis on a critical attitude, something that is just as fundamental to Brecht's theatre as his later theatre, is fulfilled by an estrangement into (and by) history for Brecht. Yet while this "attitude" relies heavily on a reasoning subject (and not a "consuming object" of culture) this need not eschew the use of emotion.

[351] Part of the problem in this line of work is that Brecht, particularly Brecht after he departs the United States after 1947, is caught very much caught between the two dominant spheres of his age. Despite this positioning remains the fundamental productive nature of Brecht's works *specifically* as it relates to the activation of the audience in making sense and fulfilling his own Brechtian project. Often Brecht's note that he simply "made suggestions" gets overlooked, or perhaps it is not given the importance that it requires. For Brecht, according to the logic of his own project, could only but make suggestions. Ultimately, that was the self-set limit of the project. Brecht's project is one that must always be fulfilled in practice, and practice has no template. For this reason, both political and aesthetic, Brecht was wary of Stalinist orthodoxy (and not only how it applied itself to the arts) and fought to encourage openness and debate (also, the choice to name the Rosa Luxemburg fruit-growing commune as such seems to be suggesting that Brecht was siding with that particular revolutionary instead of many other Soviet rulers after whom the commune could be named). It is for this reason why Brecht added the vital introduction to the *Kaukasische Kreidekreis*, in order to make clear the open, productive politics that the play ultimately suggests. Loren Kruger recognizes this deep connection between politics and aesthetics in the following passage: "It is this particular experience of defending pluralist socialism against a monolithic socialist party at the historical moment of post-imperialism, rather than a generalized Marxist attitude, that enabled Brecht to refine the theoretical as well as the political point of his key terms, estrangement and realism, and their critical relation, and to argue convincingly that estrangement was under the circumstances the most realistic method." Loren Kruger, *Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 16. Yet this open political aesthetics is often lost on contemporary readers. Some strangely have read Brecht as a pure propagandist for a Stalinist politics. The revolutions of 1989 have therefore made these later works that I've dealt with in this Chapter "in the canons of modern dramatic literature a conspicuous anachronism." See Tony Calabro, *Bertolt Brecht's Art of Dissemblance* (Wakefield, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1990): xiii. Calabro's text is motivated by a reaction against the political trajectory of Brecht (as much of Brecht is equivalent to Stalinism, the failure of Stalinism means the necessary failure of Brecht). For a good (and often seething – perhaps necessarily so) analysis of the (mis)interpretations of Brecht's works by American critics see Westgate ed., *Brecht, Broadway and United States Theatre*.

for the children of tomorrow – to be named "The Garden of Azdak" – is humourous yet draws us furthertowards the reality that this parable needs finishing by those in the position of actually making history in the now. The principle of usefulness is still to be resolved. The time of the now is still the question, yet at this point the question is addressed through the prism of historical chalk lines.

Concluding the Historical Brecht

What I have attempted to argue in Chapters 2 and 4 is that there is a dominant motif running through Brecht's work, beginning from earlier pieces such as *Mann ist Mann* and continuing into plays such as *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*.[352] This motif, that the oppositional text must be as attuned as possible to the demands of the present, and that this requires both a commitment to experimentation and revision, is focused on making the audience as active a critic of Brecht's arguments as possible. Far from diverting from this path, Brecht's move into historical settings and formal strategies is a continuation of his earlier work, and marks a continuation of a fundamentally productive aesthetic. A key aspect in this chapter has been to show how the suffering of the peasant (and especially the time of peasant suffering) was utilized by Brecht as a means to make a political aesthetic argument for the present, chiefly here about the importance of learning from those that do not. In this regard, much of this chapter has focused on the way in which this suffering has come about and played out in the lives of the chief characters discussed herein. We have the Little Monk (and his absent family) and the disillusionment that

[352] My argument stands in contrast to that of James Lyon who argues that there were "almost as many Brechts as there were people who knew him." James Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1980): 205. This is a problem in Brecht scholarship that attempts to resurrect aspects of Brecht "for today," but to varying degrees offer little in an overall understanding of Brecht.

comes from Galileo's retreat, Grusha's self-sacrifice in keeping the small child alive, and Mother Courage's lifelong struggle to maintain her family, and more importantly, her business. Yet through this depiction of struggle we are invited not to be a mere recipient of their stories. Rather, the question of political decision, a question that we will see again in Blake's texts, is a constant in Brecht's understanding of his position as a cultural producer in the now and this was carried forward from before his exile. Benjamin explores the question of political decision, and its importance in Brechtian oppositional culture, by critiquing dominant literary trends found in Brecht's contemporaries:

> I have spoken of the way in which certain modish photographers proceed in order to make human misery an object of consumption. Turning to the New Objectivity as a literary movement, I must go a step further and say that it has turned *the struggle against misery* into an object of consumption. In many cases, indeed, its political significance has been limited to converting revolutionary reflexes in so far as these occurred within the bourgeoisie, into themes of entertainment and amusement which can be fitted without much difficulty into the cabaret life of a large city. The characteristic feature of this literature is the way it transforms political struggle so that it ceases to be a compelling motive for decision and becomes an object of comfortable contemplation; it ceases to be a means of production and becomes an article of consumption.[353]

There is a connection which Benjamin makes here between the political significance of a work of art and the way in which that work is received. This link was understood by Brecht, and Brecht's historical turn aided this purpose**.**

An integral aspect of this turn rejects fundamentally a fidelity to history, that is, an adherence to the process of analyzing a moment of history, as Benjamin notes, "how it really

[353] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 96-97.

was." Instead, Brecht follows Benjamin. Benjamin notes in his *On the Concept of History* that "To articulate the past….means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger. For historical materialism it is a question of holding fast a picture of the past, just as if it had unexpectedly thrust itself, in a moment of danger, on the historical subject."[354]

It is notable that in each of the plays dealt with, a dominant theme of danger occupies them all. Mother Courage is constantly in fear of her life, her family and her capital. Grusha rescues the child as the castle she works in is being sacked, and afterwards she continues to move with the child, even though death seems always around the corner. And finally Galileo, despite his status, has his life threatened by the brutality of the Inquisition, to whose power he ultimately bends. In this way Brecht's history plays, stitched together, bear a striking resemblance to Benjamin's reception of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus.*[355]

In the central metaphor that Benjamin takes from Klee's painting, we see a reduction of history as well. The Angel of History, while gazing towards the past, is propelled forward by the storms from Paradise and in so doing witnesses that "the pile of debris grows skyward."[356] To acknowledge this process sets the historical materialist apart from the rest, states Benjamin. To not do so, to not set one apart from the story of history "as it really was," leads to empathy for the historical victor. This has repercussions for the contemporary moment. As Benjamin notes, "…if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize the answer is inevitable:

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[354] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 255.

[355] Brecht himself suggested that *Theses on the Philosophy of History* had been written after Benjamin read a fragment of his "Caeser" project. Although Wizisla suggests that this was unlikely as Benjamin had been thinking about the same issues for "some twenty years", he further suggests that Brecht has most likely thinking about the proximity of the ideas to each other and "probably did not mean his statement quite so literally." That being said there are striking resemblances between the texts. Wizisla notes that "…the correspondence in intention and concept between *Die Geschaeften des Herrn Julius Caesar* ("The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius Caesar") and the theses….is by no means accidental. Brecht's sentence, 'The triumph of the commanders were triumphs over the people', is reminiscent of the 'triumphal procession' of the rulers." Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht,* 176-7. Paul Haake has also covered these matters here: For connections between Benjamin and Brecht on the philosophy of history read: Paul Haacke, "The Brechtian Exception: From Weimar to the Cold War," *diacritics* 40 (2012): 65-6.

[356] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 258.

with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers."[357] Thus, the historical materialist must acknowledge of history and making use of it in the moment of the now, "The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic if the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action."[358] Yet just as history in Brecht necessitates a contraction, a process of making more finite the seemingly infinite history of catastrophe, so the moment of the now contains an exaggeration, an exploration of the present that demands experimentation. In this regard the compression of history is not a failure of Brecht's (the inability to fully understand accurate historical terms with a specific period) but rather the strength of an aesthetic project that works to aim for precision in the moment of the now. History offers for Brecht a means to depict the present conjuncture more clearly, and thus to reach back into the past to salvage something for the time of the now. As McNally notes, "Rather than something laid down once and for all, the past is a site of struggle *in the present*."[359] By seemingly moving away from his own time, Brecht is actually, as I've tried to argue throughout this chapter, making himself productive in the present.

[357] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 256.
[358] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 261.
[359] McNally, *Bodies of Meaning*, 191.

Chapter 5: Blake, *Milton*, and Historical Redemption

In this, the final chapter, I will be drawing on many of the central ideas and authors of the previous ones, particularly Walter Benjamin, Michael Löwy and E.P. Thompson. I will be arguing that the alternative understanding and usages of history as seen in Brecht (in Chapter 4) and Benjamin are also to be found in Blake's epic poem *Milton*.[360] I will argue that Blake's return to history is geared towards offering something in the present. The present more broadly, but definitely Blake's present specifically, is engulfed by a failure, a failure which keeps being repeated. This failure is in constant danger of repeating itself anew (and is doing so) in every step of repeating the past's failures. In this sense, history is viewed as something not only that we can learn from, but also in some form as a means of access for creating a redemptive hermeneutic moment in the present.

Unlike in Brecht, where the historical setting of his plays acts as a backdrop to illuminate the present, for Blake, history and/or the backward reference and inspiration, is mobilized to access something that the present is unable to access as the organizational patterns of society (capital, exploitation, a life [understood as the realm of possibility] destroying and quantifying rationalism, manacles on the mind, the tradition of Newton) section off humanity from its potential. In this sense, whereas for Brecht history was mobilized to more deeply access the present, Blake looked to history to fill in for that which was absent in his own world. Despite this different stress in each of their uses of history, a key aspect in common for Brecht and Blake is the way we are not dealing with "history as it really was" and the way that both saw in their

[360] Few historical writers stand as high for Blake, as Jackie DiSalvo notes: "Blake's poetry is scarcely comprehensible outside its Miltonic context." Jackie DiSalvo, *War of the Titans: Blake's Critique of Milton and the Politics of Religion* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983): 5.

presents the lack of sufficient energies to enrich and produce a comprehensive oppositional aesthetics. In the move towards history, both Blake and Brecht disregard a realist, naturalistic fidelity to the past.

While in this chapter I will also be investigating the way in which Blake uses and develops a conception of history in *Milton*, I will also be drawing on E. P. Thompson's work on the historical legacy in which Blake's work is framed. It should be noted that Thompson wrote relatively little on *Milton* in his text on Blake, and for that reason I will be attempting to apply his important insights to Blake's later work. My purpose in this is not to be overly exegetical in trying to parse out how all characters relate to his earlier works, a field that is very well tilled, but rather to explore how *Milton* is structured as a text of redemption. This redemption does not seek to make peace with historical events, but rather to negotiate with these specifically unresolved tensions for contemporary purposes.[361] In what follows I will not be restating the complex mythology of Blake's poem as multitudes of Blake scholars have already sketched this out (sometimes producing internecine fallout); I will be focusing rather on the importance of previous historical moments and artists for Blake's conception of history. Important here will be dealing with the question of labour in Blake's text, particularly the notion of a redemptive vision of labour – a labour that redeems the past and makes possible a future beyond its own conceptions of labour itself – which has often been lost from academic view (essentially a self-annihilating

[361] Saree Makdisi has argued in a different context on Blake's strategy of drawing on historical traditions for his own ends. Makdisi's thesis articulates the same thrust as is being attempted here. He writes: "What I want to propose is that through this investigation of Blake's anti-imperialism we will discover how he found a way to draw on and reformulate certain premodern traditions in order to produce a critique for his own time – rather than as a quasi-reactionary attempt to return to some lost original fullness – both of the *ancien regime* and of the bourgeois radicalism which attacked it; a way to refuse the logic of the State and of the discourse of sovereign power itself in the name of what he would call "Immortal Joy."" See Saree Makdisi, "Immortal Joy", 20-21.

project, given how vital the importance of his own material labour [conceived as such] was to his way of analyzing and producing his reality).

Blake Contra Newton

To begin the discussion of Blake's use of history, historical figures and the Bible I should at first respond to and disabuse a reader from the notion that Blake is a solitary figure, operating outside of his social or political spheres, a hermit-like figure creating mystical interpretations of scripture.[362] Although this has not been argued as such, Blake's usage of the Bible cannot be read merely as metaphorical. Rather, it seems appropriate to describe Blake's reading and faith in the Bible as itself a radical one, a reading whose logical conclusions extend beyond the mere text itself. The text, whether historical or contemporary, is very much a living one for Blake. For this reason I think we should take seriously Blake's criticisms of Newton who, beside Milton, is the historical figure with whom Blake concerns himself most. Donald Ault, in his analysis of Blake's dialogue with Newton, notes that despite his death in 1727, "Newton's centuries of triumph were the eighteenth and (in a fuzzier way) the nineteenth."[363] The figure of Newton as he appears in these "centuries of triumph" may in fact be quite dissimilar from his biographical record, but it is the figure of Newton and all that figure stands for that looms large for Blake. It is this triumphalist figure (and defining what exactly he is a figure of triumph of) whom Blake engages.

[362] While Ian Balfour in his own text on "Milton" notes that there is a long tradition behind this notion, he argues that later generations find it easier to understand Blake due to "the greater availability and circulation of his texts, and the critical and scholarly efforts of a large community of readers who have elucidated literary and historical contexts framing Blake's works." See Ian Balfour, *Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 128.
[363] Donald Ault, *Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975): XII.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in Löwy and Sayre's analysis the criticism of the Enlightenment is not principally about rationalism in and of itself, but about a particular type of mechanical rationalism, on the one hand, and a rationalist abstraction, on the other. Attempts to cast Blake as anti-rationalist are thus wide of the mark. His seemingly exhaustive critique of rationality is a qualified one. In Blake's constellation, the figure of the rational intellect, Urizen, is criticized not *tout court*, but only because he is out of balance with the other Zoas.[364] The problem of Newtonian-infused Urizen is that he becomes over-extended and, therefore, out of proportion with his world.[365] Without being checked**,** rationalism in Blake's cosmology produces a self-generating process of accumulation of other ideas, so much so that it begins to impose its worldview onto all it surveys. And this brings us much closer as to what Newton represents for Blake. Nicholas Williams notes that: "Newton provides for Blake an oppressive model of self-motion, or rather an evacuation of self-motion in favour of an anatomizating view of the body as a collection of mechanically interactive parts."[366] When Newton, coursing through the Urizenic world, operates out of proportion, or when Urizen becomes too powerful in itself, the effect is the creation of "Newtonian Voids between the Substances of Creation."[367] These voids are effectively moments which block the ability of the artist to create as they attempt to initiate a worldview which would depict the creative process as irrelevant. Blake's worry, echoed in Ault's

[364] Noting the effect of Urizen being so out of balance, Peter Otto explains that "…the end result of Urizen's activity, is to create a world of self-enclosed globes that outlaw all difference." Peter Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence: Love, Jealousy and the Sublime in "The Four Zoas"* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000): 267. While this text is heavily reliant on Derridian deconstruction, and thus difference signifies more to Otto than it would to Thompson or Erdman, in its usage above, depicting Urizenic methodology as blocking off other possibilities, there would most likely be little disagreement.

[365] Urizen's consuming ways even goes so far as colonizing religion. "Blake's argument to the Established Church asserts that rationalistic moralism that governs atonement as they conceive it is the very thing that cannot possibly achieve it. If this is so even according to its own rules how much more does it fall short of accomplishing the kind of atonement that Blake envisions. A salvation obtained through mercy and forgiveness is wholly beyond the recognition of the satanic Urizen governing the Church." Jennifer G. Jesse, *William Blake's Religious Vision: There's a Methodism in His Madness* (New York: Lexington, 2013): 122.

[366] See Nicholas Williams, "Blake Dead or Alive," 492.

[367] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 138.

statement above, is that Newton *as spirit* becomes more than itself, it becomes *Newtonian*, and thus a movement springs up which aspires to something greater than it can contain in itself, and greater than even Blake himself can contain in his own poetry. The danger consists less in Newton as historical figure and more in Newton as "world-spirit," an abstracting force whose distorted products become "irrational" in that they are "invisible to the Vegetable Man."[368] Newton is opposed to that which is living, and his creations more generally disguise from humanity its creative potentialities rather than open up possibilities for creation, and for Blake specifically artistic creation which is inspired by the force of God's power. Indeed, Newton takes the potential of God's power and inverts it. In this sense the problem is that, as Balfour notes, "Newton is systematically reviled in Blake's work as a proponent of mathematical reason, one who views God as the overseer of a machinelike universe devoid of living form."[369] The absence of living form should ring alarm bells, for as I argued in Chapter 2, the eschewing of human "living form" denotes for Blake a fundamental rejection of the divine image in which it exists. As the Newtonian worldview begins to colonize to an ever greater extent, Newtonian motion will become its opposite, seeing itself to its own rational and fully definable end.[370] In Blake's mythology, the figure of Newton is not only in and of itself devoid of living form, it must also become (through its own logic) an instantiation of the "absurd." The absurd not in the sense of unusual but rather abhorrent in its destructiveness. In Plate 40 of *Milton* Blake pronounces:

[368] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 138.
[369] Balfour, *Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 142.
[370] As in Blake's "Holy Thursday," there is an open question as to whether the establishment that Blake's skewers saw themselves in the evil with which they, perhaps unbeknownst, preached. As Florence Sandler usefully notes, these rulers "…were likely to wear the mask of bland civility and present their ideology as benevolence. They might even believe themselves to be benevolent and their Age of Opacity to be Enlightenment, like Satan in the Bard's Tale in *Milton,* whose demonic nature is not perspicuous even to himself." See Florence Sandler, "'Defending the Bible': Blake, Paine, and the Bishop," in *Blake and His Bibles*, edited by David V. Erdman (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1990): 44.

> In Self annihilation giving thy life to thy enemies
> Are those who contemn Religion & seek to annihilate it
> Become in their Femin[in]e portions the causes & promoters
> Of these Religions, how is this thing? this Newtonian Phantasm
> This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon & Bolingbroke
> This Natural Religion! this impossible absurdity
> Is Ololon the cause of this? O where shall I hide my face
> These tears fall for the little-ones: the Children of Jerusalem
> Lest they be annihilated in thy annihilation.[371]

There is a suggsestion in the above that for Blake Newton's "Phantasm" is an "annihilating" one which seeks to take over fully and extinguish the power of a strong messianic spirit. Annihilation is not solely a negative qualifier for Blake, and it is in part a necessary force that one must accept. That is, as any being will be in and of itself fallible, one must be open to self-criticism which will require one's Self-annihilation. And this is in part why Blake has summoned Milton in the first place. Leonard W. Deen sketches this out nicely:

> In *The Four Zoas*, the true poet ceases to belong to the Devil's party. In *Milton*, he comes into full understanding. Milton becomes a true poet because he sees his error, which is his own distortions of vision and their effect on the religion that prevails in England. Inspired by a Bard's Song in which Los is divided in a family quarrel that issues in the warring nations of the fallen world, Milton descends from heaven to earth, annihilates his Selfhood by overcoming Urizen-Satan, and redeems his Emanation, Ololon. …In *Milton*, then, a figure of identity is divided and falls as Los. As Milton, he is integrated with Blake, wrestles with his Spectre-Selfhood, and is reunited with his Emanation. Each of these events creates its appropriate human-centred world, fallen or redeemed.[372]

[371] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 142.
[372] Leonard W. Deen, *Conversing in Paradise: Poetic Genius and Identity-as-Community in Blake's Los* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983): 166-7. This humanizing of the world also extends itself to engulfing "natural processes" as well. "In *Milton*, Blake substitutes an organic model of the city for the model constructed through labor

And this is precisely the problem for Milton. If Milton's errors and their effects carry on, not merely in his purgatory, mulling over his mistakes, but in part because of the specific residual effects that his errors produce in those who follow in his tradition, he must be absolved for those in the present. Errors compound themselves, and the dangers they breed are omni-present.[373] These dangers never end, and self-criticism, even of those so important to Blake as Milton must come under sustained focus. And this unlocks a democratic model of criticism, for if such a monumental figure as Milton inspires and requires a fundamental critical reading, so to must readers of *Milton* draw critical attention to Blake.[374] Yet Blake's criticism of Milton is different in tenor to that of Newton. Milton is among the cherished, and as Christopher Warley explains: "Milton is a champion of the anonymous, but he never forgets that champions are always those with a name."[375] While there are disagreements as to what exactly Blake wishes to redeem in Milton,[376] it should be clear that Newton and Urizenic inspired forces are another entity altogether and redemption for them is debatable.

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in *The Four Zoas*. Conversely, however, *Milton* describes organic creations as works of art, thus further undermining the dichotomy between "nature" and "art" or "civilization." …"The result is to humanize both nature and the city, so that the entire visible world becomes a product of human art, and the city becomes the body in which that art develops." Michael, *Blake and the City*, 116.

[373] As John H. Jones intelligently explains in his text, "Yet, self-annihilation in *Milton* is not without risk and comes only after great difficulty. As Milton enters self-annihilation, he and the other Sons of Albion view his change as going to "Eternal Death." Since self-annihilation involves such a radical interchange between addresser and addressee to allow for the transcendence of the finite boundaries of Selfhood through dialogue, it implies a dissolution of identity that those in Selfhood see as death or worse." Jones, *Blake on Language, Power, and Self-Annihilation*, 137.

[374] William Richey argues that Blake himself was implicated in his criticisms. "For Blake, the Son's concession [in Paradise Regained] became symptomatic of the classic moralism that "curbd" Milton and thus prevented him from achieving his imaginative potential. But, as we have seen, Blake had come to realize that this failure was also his own. He, too, had failed to purge his pre-1804 compositions of their moral self-righteousness; he – no less than Homer or Milton – had celebrated the heroic individual's ability to assert his superiority over his rivals." William Richey, *Blake's Altering Aesthetic* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996): 114.

[375] Christopher Warley, *Reading Class through Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 122.

[376] While this is a deep debate, this contrast falls into aesthetic ideology here: "At some level Blake indeed saw *Paradise Regained* as more complete than *Paradise Lost*. However, rather than a perfect unity of iconoclasm and aesthetics in the later work, it is the perceived *lack* of unity between ideology and aesthetics that compels Blake's attempt to redeem the poet in *Milton*." Cato Marks, "Writings of the Left Hand: William Blake Forges a New

Coupled with Newton, standing as he does as the key English Enlightenment figure, is a conflation with the presence of the "Natural Religion." The critique of Natural Religion is profound for Blake, as it further removes from humanity any connection to the Divine and thus denies also the part that the corporeal was to have in maintaining this connection by establishing an "increasingly remote and impersonal image of God."[377] This phantasm seeks to deny in God a possibility of accessing its presence. What is left then is a God at a (safe) distance, and this is exactly the problem for Blake and why one must have the introduction of the connection between the material world and something which has the potential to transcend the world as we see it at any particular moment (the factuality of the world, as it were). Safety as referenced above does not seek to respond to Benjamin's notion of danger, that moment when memory explodes involuntarily onto the scene, exposing the fault-lines of repression. Safety is an attempt to further repress those fault-lines by removing the avenues through which the danger can be fully exposed. Donald Ault argues this point, making the connection between these "safe" drives and the subduing of the potential for their unraveling (the Imagination):

> Blake never rejects his most basic conception that the crisis of process is rooted in the Satanic power to abstract static and dynamic elements from the interlocked structure of Eternity in order to construct a counter-system to Eternity to lure the Imagination from its true drives.[378]

Political Aesthetic," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74 (2011): 44. and radical theology here: "Notwithstanding his admiration, Blake felt Milton's radicalism to be compromised. His relationship to the poet was therefore one of creative antagonism. Blake sought to address this by re-writing and re-interpreting his predecessor. *Milton*, chiefly written between 1803 and 1808 (with a possible addition after 1815), is Blake's attempt to rectify Milton's theological errors by the substitution of a creed of self-sacrifice and forgiveness for one of punitive judgment." Michael Farrell, *Blake and the Methodists* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 136-7.

[377] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 111.

[378] Ault, *Visionary Physics*, 165.

The shift towards abstraction and the move away from "the interlocked structure of Eternity" is a way in which we can foreground a specific form of Blakean materialism, which is expressly pronounced throughout the text, not least in the often repeated "vegetation" (of which more later), with its attendant notions of being at once "of the ground" (static)[379] as well as simultaneously growing and creating (dynamic). Given the prominence of this other form of living, which ridicules the Blakean Imagination[380] through the dominant ideology of "Newtonian Phantasms," the question which Blake seeks to address is how can we respond in ways that our capabilities and own rational usefulness could be harnessed to halt this annihilation? The response in *Milton* will be driven by that which the current capitalist-rationalist consensus cannot of its own exclusionary nature fulfill.

The Importance of What is Missing

If we accept the assumption that Blake's reach back to history in *Milton* is intricately tied up with the history of religious prophecy and action since the English Civil War, a position which is argued more generally by Thompson throughout his text, I believe one must also accept that

[379] On the interplay between the connection between the forms of stasis and dynamic change in Blake, John Hutton notes that: "Instead of reconciliation as stasis, as the end to change, Blake presents a constant negation of the negation, as a means to strip away barriers, to free all the *possibilities* for change." As I shall later argue, Blake does not simply construct the final conflict in *Milton* as an end in itself, but rather that the second coming opens up the space for productive change. In this regard, the wish to abolish poverty seems to me a precondition in Blake for (this time with my emphasis) the *possibility* to and for change. As Hutton argues, "Blake's is a notion of change and existence which presents history as an open-ended spiral, a continuous and growing revelation which bridges a gap between metaphorical truth and that of lived reality." See John Hutton "'Lovers of Wild Rebellion': The Image of Satan in British Art of the Revolutionary Era," in *Blake, Politics, and History*, edited by Jackie DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson (London: Routledge, 1998): 161.

[380] This is representative and provides an explanation of the *almost* dichotomous relation of the purely biological brain as opposed to the creative faculties. As Sarah Haggarty explains: "Certainly, while Blake writes positively of the mind and the imagination, he represents the brain more ambiguously. Later in *Milton*, it will be the suspect Urizen who "stoop'd down/ And took up water from the river Jordan: pouring on / To Milton's brain the icy fluid from his broad cold palm." Sarah Haggarty, *Blake's Gifts: Poetry and the Politics of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 149.

that history, defined by heightened class consciousness and a thoroughgoing struggle against the established powers, was no longer present in Blake's England.[381] This, however, is not to dismiss this inheritance. As Aijaz Ahmad argues: "The origins of English Romanticism are inseparable from the anti-capitalist passions of Blake, and it had the Cromwellian radicalism of Milton in its past…"[382] Yet this was the past, and Blake's society was in a much different position, especially after the failures of the French Revolution. In part this is reflected in Los' speech in Plate 25, where the call to "preach righteousness & punish the sinner with death"[383] is refused by Los, a figure so often connected with fire and judgment, who "now moves history."[384] Instead of opting for wrath, the watchword here is mercy. This world is full of division, and purity is in short supply. "As it concerns Milton, the implication of the Bard's Song is that in *Paradise Lost* the source and father figure is Milton, and that Milton, like Los, is divided."[385] Given the poem's structure, that a difference in chronological time needs to exist between Blake and Milton, the world that Blake inherits cannot be Milton's own, and thus one's level of historical consciousness during Blake's era was limited (distance equals limitation). To judge those who merely went along with the current order, or even those who sought to continue the losses imposed on

[381] For the definitive longer text on this see Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977). Hill also argues that Blake is the inheritor of the "dionysian freedom favoured by the Ranters" (the Ranters being an important part of the dissenting social forces of the time. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1991): 356.
[382] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1994): 50.
[383] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 121.
[384] The figure of Los is central not only as regards labour but as regards agency and the role of human potential in reorganizing the social world. "In *Milton*, which prefaces *Jerusalem*, Blake puts off apocalypse in order to prepare more carefully for the decisive role of the poet-prophet in its coming. *Milton* continues the account in *The Four Zoas* of the fall into the claim to be God and the rise into and recovery of the human. But the triumph of the human is greater and clearer now because *Milton* begins with a Los who retains the mature but beleaguered humanity he learned in *The Four Zoas*. Los now moves history by identifying himself with particular poets, with English prophets. The figure of the bard singing of a human Los leads to the figure of Milton and then to Blake, and finally to the forming of one man from the Bard, Los, Milton, and Blake. The result is a human poet-prophet, the Awakener, who unites myth and history and who prepares for apocalypse in a much more deliberate and internal and psychologically subtle way than Blake had ever done." Deen, *Conversing in Paradise*, 164.
[385] Deen, *Conversing in Paradise*, 167.

Milton's age, would be a penalty for outweighing the proportion of just judgment.[386] One must know one's crime to be guilty of it. Blake response is fitting with the larger framework not to condemn, judging in alignment with the divine position in the *Songs of Innocence*. It is for this reason that the group most anathematic to Blake's worldview, "the Elect," must be ultimately saved.

> The Reprobate who never cease to Believe, and the Redeemd,
> Who live in doubts & fears perpetually tormented by the Elect
> These you shall bind in a twin-bundle for the Consummation –
> But the Elect must be saved [from] fires of Eternal Death[387]

The fires of "Eternal Death," life as we know it, are not denied them even though they may, in Blake's worldview, reject that which will ultimately save them from damnation. This in part explains Blake's motive for moving back into/towards history. As Erdman neatly explains, "The trouble is, however, that Blake is not content to formulate a message for the times..."[388] Unhappy with the current consensus, Blake seeks to channel a different historical setting to get himself out of the limited possibilities of his own age.

There is something out of sync in Blake's mythology that cannot gradually proceed from the current moment. The annihilating force of the quantifying logic of capital seeks to make impossible the liberating potential that a return makes possible. Those that seek to a "make a Heaven out of our misery" need not only occupy the present, but to eliminate the idea of the messianic impulse, especially as emanating from the "danger" that is the unoccupied past, as the

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[386] Although the world he inherits is not similar, the desire to recreate and re-imagine is deep in the text. For an exhaustive examination of how deep this desire went – so deep that Blake is argued to be attempting "to *outdo* Milton" – see Paul Miner, "Blake: Milton Inside 'Milton,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 51 (2012): 233 – 276.
[387] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 122.
[388] Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 396.

idea of a moment of uncontrolled judgment terrifies them. In this regard, Los' reaction to (what he mistakenly takes as) the permanent absence of Rintrah, a symbol of revolutionary wrath, is instructive, as it seems to mirror Blake's own historically limited situation (minus the error in mistaking the temporary for permanence). Los sits down "on his anvil-stock; and leand upon the trough. Looking into the black water, mingling it with tears."[389] That which is missing is, however, not irretrievable. This would be an historical slippage as great as if Milton had never existed in the first place. But Milton's existence, connected with Rintrah's, results in Inspiration being found in Prophecy. In a moment of desperation this prophecy hastens "That Milton of the Land of Albion should up ascend…and set free / Orc from his Chain of Jealousy."[390] In the moment of absence, Blake reaches back into history in order to recall what is missing in the present, having found that it is in fact something that can be made possible, despite the fears that such gestural igniters had been extinguished.[391]

The prevailing forces of Blake's social order define what is missing in the present. It is in this sense that Blake's particular use of prophecy is always looking backwards. As Balfour notes, "…if prophecy is always oriented toward a future – even when it does not take the form of prediction – it is also profoundly a thing of the past, an echo, a citation."[392] This motion towards the merging of prophecy and history should not be confused with nostalgia, a critique often leveled against the Romantics in general.[393] Rather, the attempt here is to make the link to a

[389] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 115.
[390] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 115.
[391] Orc is an important figure in this regard as his enslavement points to, in part, the reason why Blake has summoned Milton, as Christopher Z. Hobson argues. "…in keeping with *Milton's* overall concerns, the hope is that Orc's imprisoned social and sexual energy will be freed by Milton in a larger liberation of human potentiality. Despite this shift, Orc's most prominent meaning in this poem is as imprisoned energy and elemental rebellion…" Christopher Z. Hobson, "The Myth of Blake's 'Orc Cycle,'" in *Blake, Politics, and History*, edited by DiSalvo, Rosso and Hobson, 22.
[392] Balfour, *Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 129.
[393] While the critique is nevertheless sometimes valid, it should not be used overused and generalized. For instance, Löwy and Sayre argue that "In the constellation of Romanticisms, "restitutionism" occupies a privileged place… In addition, it is obvious that the restitutionist perspective is in a way the closest to the essence of the overall

notion of history that is fundamentally productive. In this regard, Makdisi's borrowing Cesare Casarino's work in describing Blake's aesthetic practice as a "philopoesis," that is a description of how life is a process or making and remaking (as well as being a process of consistently being under threat), is persuasive.[394] Makdisi emphasizes the "political and ontological" qualities of Blake's work, and the undergirding of how we exist and the quality of that existence. He writes that:

> For the question that Blake pushes us to ask is not whether life is made, but how, and under what circumstances; whether that making, and life itself, are to be sorrowful – a matter of lamenting, shrieking, howling, gnashing – or rather a matter of joy, celebration, piping and singing; whether life is to be dominated by "happy chear" which we "weep with joy to hear," as in the introduction of *Songs of Innocence*, by the "bells cheerful sound of *The Ecchoing Green*, by the "tender voice" of the lamb, by *The Laughing Song's* "sweet chorus of Ha, Ha, He" or instead by the howling and shrieking of life perverted, abstracted, and stolen: the harlot's curse, the soldier's sigh, the chimney sweeper's "weep, weep, in note of woe!"[395]

If we follow Makdisi, we can see the figure of Los as mourning and at his wits end, as it were, is telling in that it describes a process more clearly related to Blake's own worldview. Los, we should remind ourselves, is at his anvil and stops working when he fears the worst. The connection here with labour, specifically labour as a creative and itself a redeeming act (as opposed to labour as a stealing, oppressive entity from which we are or will be estranged), in this

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phenomenon, given that nostalgia for a pre-capitalist state lies at the heart of this worldview. Now this restitutionist type is defined precisely as aspiring to the restitution – that is, the restoration or the re-creation – of this pre-capitalist past." See Löwy and Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide*, 59. I think that in Blake's case it is better to focus on the way in which he looks to learn from history, particularly as he looks to learn from historical failure. Blake does not wish to merely recreate, but rather **to** take inspiration from the past in order to ultimately set it right. In so doing Blake looks to "correct" the past while channeling it, a process which is far more akin to Benjamin's notion of history in the final thesis on history than a process of mourning for mourning's sake.

[394] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 265.

[395] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 265.

sense cannot be underestimated. As I shall discuss in more detail shortly, the primacy of labour, of creation, is a structuring principle in Blake's thought. And it is for this reason as well that Blake should not be read as a forerunner of post-modernism, a *bricoleur avant la lettre*, taking a thing frozen in time for his own purposes.[396] In other words, Blake is not merely sampling, but taking from the historical past another conception of history itself, not one in which that which is threatening is denied**,** but rather a conception of "unfinished business" that art can channel and make real in the contemporary. This requires, as Erdman notes in the following passage, a different conception of historical time, but also an account as to why this different conception is necessary:

> … as William Blake reaches identity with Los, his function as the God of Time is emphasized. God's wheel of fate has Seven Eyes; each of the first six fails to serve as an eye for Albion, but the seventh, Jesus, comes at the right moment and thus marks or produces the complete revolution which makes any further rotation of human misery unnecessary.[397]

What makes this leap possible is an alternate conception of time (and historical time especially) that the established church and other authorities cannot accommodate. Blake's conception of time is highly influenced by his affinities with antinomianism, which, as Thompson notes, takes on an oppositional tone for Blake in that it represents a position or a strategy that dismisses the world that the present (in Newtonian form) dictates. Antinomianism "is not a place at all, but a way of

[396] There is a belief in a sub-current of recent scholarship that Blake is a forerunner of postmodernism. It should suffice to say that while his intervention into the political moments of his day did not rely on a sampling of different trends that he chose to tap into, but rather a targeted response to the deep structures of his society which were quashing, both literally and figuratively, the political and physical progressive spirits of his day. Jon Mee deals with this in the first section of his *Dangerous Enthusiasms*.
[397] Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 399.

breaking out from received wisdom and moralism, and entering new possibilities."[398] If we understand Blake as operating within this tradition, despite the caveats that were raised in Chapter 2, we see his approach to the historical world as deviating from those, especially those more dominant positions, that seek to make of it something safe, something at the very best that we can mourn over. This contested terrain is an example of what Raymond Williams termed "residual culture." On this historical form Terry Eagleton argues that "A good deal of culture as identity or solidarity is in this sense residual – enclaves of traditionalist resistance within the present which draw their strength from 'some previous social and cultural institution or formation.'"[399] In Blake's contesting of this "settled" version of events, his radical poetics require, therefore, the "rewriting of history."[400]

Filling in That Which Is Missing

While Blake's Satan in *Milton* represents the established Church and the quantifying logic of capital, it is important to note what Satan is not able to be a part of. This allows us to see how his conception of life is different from Blake's worldview and also what Milton offers that works against the aforementioned evils. The space in which the conception of oppositional time (in contrast to the dominant form) is most directly stated is Plate 29. Blake lays out his conception of time as follows:

> For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
> Events of Time start forth & are concievd in such a Period

[398] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 20.
[399] Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 123.
[400] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 20.

> Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.[401]

Blake's framework for revolutionary time is captured in the metaphor of the heartbeat, a pulse which operates in contrast to "clock time" which "is a mental nightmare like all other abstract ideas."[402] Blake recovers human time of the body from the quantifiable impulses of the capitalist age. In his commentary to Blake's *Milton*, Harold Bloom describes this passage and the one above as "a saving vision of time."[403] He continues: "The poet's work conquers the Eternity that teases us out of thought, for imaginative time triumphs over clock time by denying its categories."[404] Los, through his labour, creates a conception of time and space that bucks any attempt to quantify it. Los is also the creator of all that is truly visionary.

> For every Space larger than a red Globule of Mans blood.
> Is visionary: and is created by the Hammer of Los
> And every Space smaller than a Globule of mans blood. Opens
> Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow[405]

Space is, like Time in the previous plate, unable to be quantified. As Blake notes in a fairly deliberate jab at the "Newtonian Phantasms": "The Microscope knows not of this nor the telescope."[406] As with Brecht, facticity is a betrayal of the possibilities for a time outside of the immediately presentable, even though as we see in the Galileo example, the telescope portends a

[401] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 127. Mark Bracher argues a similar point in his analysis of historical time and its reception in the poem. He writes, "Everything remains because ontologically everything is interwoven with everything else from the beginning of time." Mark Bracher, *Being Form'd: Thinking Through Blake's Milton* (New York: Station Hill Press, 1985) 128.
[402] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 46.
[403] Harold Bloom in Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 922.
[404] Bloom in Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 922.
[405] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 127.
[406] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 127.

world outside of the taken for granted and commidified world. Beyond the vision of what exists before us and is quantifiable exists another world of inarticulable power.

We should be clear to note that Blake is not arguing that a fundamental shift in human relations can happen at any moment of historical time. As Erdman's point above regarding the particular war-dominated situation shows, Blake knew that his England was not ripe for such a transition.[407] Rather, what we are witnessing here is an argument against quantifying time which rejects a notion of history for a conception of historical recovery akin to Benjamin's rejection of "history as it really was." The opening of Benjamin's 2nd thesis reads as follows: "Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that."[408] Benjamin's construction of the past as having a claim on the present is powerful, and is useful in directing us towards locating in the past that to which the present cannot fully respond. As Balfour notes:

> The paradoxical task of politics, then, as of history generally, is to prophesy the present. And to make matters more complex, one achieves this visionary perspective on the present by turning one's back from one's own time to the past, not unlike the stance of Klee's *Angelus Novus*, whose back is to the future.[409]

[407] On the question of a revolution in Blake's time, John Beer notes interestingly that in many of his texts dealing more directly with the French Revolution Blake "would not concern himself with chronological or geographical accuracy if change or invention provided a vivid means of suggesting a significance." See John Beer, "Blake's Changing View of History: The Impact of the Book of Enoch," in *Historicizing Blake*, edited by Clark and Worrall, 159.

[408] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254. It would be a misreading of Benjamin to argue that any moment could be open to revolution, although nor would it be too far to state that, given the volatility of his own time, that the possibility of a revolution in his own time was something to be dismissed. Nevertheless, his point rather is that it is necessary to recognize and to be open to this possibility.

[409] Balfour, *Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 16.

In part what Benjamin is responding to here is his fear of "political progressivism,"[410] a diluting the revolutionary potential of the workers' struggle. Yet the connection between the backward reference and the present as a necessary one is clear. While I agree with Balfour in noting the complexity in this task, one must acknowledge in Blake it is only the refiguring of time that makes possible history's reception in the present. What is interesting is that, given these complexities, and Blake's acknowledgment of the inauspicious nature of his time, it was Blake's goal to counter this trend and the overwhelming tide that was clearly moving against him, not least since the demise of the early promise of, among other events, the French Revolution. There is an argument to make that an achievable goal is to keep a heart of resistance beating. The weak Messianic power that Blake himself saw in his own time needed to find a long-term strategy. The move towards history and its opening up is both a theoretical strategy for his own time, but also for those who come after. The former aspect is perhaps clearer in that Blake, furious at the weak opposition to the clear injustices he witnessed, wanted a way of addressing his own time. Yet the latter is also interesting in that Blake, by bringing in another notion of historical time and redemption, makes it possible for future generations in similar positions to explode the past in aid of the present. Precedence, as in the case of John Milton, is vital.

Milton's Entrance

Milton's appearance in the text comes in two forms. While on the one hand he enters Blake's left foot in a moment of inspiration (again suggesting the importance of being grounded, yet also reminiscent of vegetative growth, as well as a reference to the conversion of Paul of

[410] McNally, *Bodies of Meaning*, 217.

Tarsus[411]), it is through Albion's heart that Milton first has to transcend Eternity in order to operate in the present world. Blake's movement into history is not history as it is generally known – in that it is not a fixed item, a series of knowable and indisputable facts. It is, as with Brecht, made plastic and available as a resource to those who aim is to liberate both those oppressed groups of the past, but also as material to liberate and awaken the present. In Blake, this resuscitated history is akin to inspiration, and thus often it is depicted as divine. And as God is omnipresent, history acts and attains meaning in the present. One must be careful here not to imagine that this shift to history is merely one reference (or citation) amongst others. As Ian Balfour has written**,** "the text [is] open for interpretation, open to an uncertain future."[412] This open future would be possible only if that which were being denied in the present[413] could be fulfilled (or enlightened) by previous struggles. In this regard the connection between the historical past and the moment of the now – in all its variant uncertainties – is one that Blake's poetics retains.

Yet while we can make presumptions as to the political-aesthetic task at hand which makes the summoning of Milton possible and desirable, the question needs to be posed as to who in fact does the summoning and to what end. While basic questions, they are nevertheless ones which centre on a specific historical trajectory which is key in understanding the particular uses of Milton as a spirit made real, but also the importance of Milton as a spirit itself. Milton's

[411] This notes a reference to conversion for Paul/Saul and Milton. "As Erdman and other commentators have noted, the word *tarsus* punningly connects this episode to Saul of Tarsus's conversion into St. Paul. Much in the way that Saul suddenly renounces his self-righteous persecution of the early Christians to become an apostle of Christ, both Blake and Milton in the course of this poem cast off their judgmental neoclassicism to adopt a more genuinely Christian vision." Richey, *Blake's Altering Aesthetic*, 122.
[412] Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 172.
[413] Makdisi usefully describes the tension between Blake and his own time and the desire to move outside of such a limiting historical period as follows: "Blake's language of power was obsolete by the 1790's…only in the sense that it was allowed no room in the historicist discourse of modernity, and in the culture of modernization, which had to purge itself of such enthusiastic tendencies." Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History*, 3.

presence in Blake's world comes at a moment of terror, reminiscent of Benjamin's notion of the past being taken hold of in a moment of danger (of which more shortly), where the possibilities of Blake's contemporary world seem exhausted.

> The Sin was begun in Eternity, and will not rest in Eternity
> Till two Eternitys meet together.
> Ah! Lost! Lost! Lost! For ever!
> So Leutha spoke.[414]

What is interesting here, besides the provocative notion of two Eternitys meeting and that which is dominant being crushed, is that the denial of their meeting is put forward by Leutha, a character who in this plate is noted as repentant but was once in the service of Satan. Her despair is expressed at a moment of shock at what she has done, and the feeling of hopelessness given her admission of guilt. Plate 13 continues:

> But when she saw that Enitharmon had
> Created a New Space to protect Satan from punishment;
> She fled to Enitharmons Tent & hid herself.[415]

So there is protection for those causing damage. This protection for some only further intensifies the havoc wreaked on others. In Plate 12, Blake moves through Harrow, London, which is reacting to pre-repentant Leutha's destructive movements. The situation here is unambiguously noted as "A Hell of our making."[416] Because of the problems of Theodicy (the explanation of evil

[414] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 107.
[415] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 107.
[416] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 106.

in God's loving world), Albion is in a moment of crux, of dialectical anxiety. Blake expresses this contradiction as follows:

> To do unkind things in kindness! With power armd, to say
> The most irritating things in the midst of tears and love.[417]

There is neither love nor care here, and the extinguishing of the radical power of God for those in need, and the establishment of every manner of support for those in power makes the contrast all the more galling. The twisting here of power in the name of the "Moral Law" is profound.[418] But where to find succour in these moments? Blake is clear that it is certainly not in institutional learning.

> …in Cambridge and in Oxford, places of Thought
> Intricate labyrinths of Times and Spaces unknown
> that Leutha lived
> In Palamabrons Tent, and Oothoon was her charming guard.[419]

In these passages we cannot be freed from the original failings of the historical fall, and we are left with the introduction of Oothoon, a figure of free love and of openness and compassion, as the only buttress against an almighty power. This is clearly not enough, and if we continue on this path history as it has unfolded this will continue to maintain its course. If we are damned

[417] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 106.
[418] Jennifer G. Jesse notes clearly the distinction between what those in need *need*, and what they receive by the Established Church. "By the time Blake produced *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, the primary activity he associates with Jesus is the forgiveness of sins and, more often than not, this is described in contrast to the Anglican interpretation of Jesus as a representative of the moral law." Jennifer G. Jesse, *William Blake's Religious Vision: There's a Methodism in His Madness* (New York: Lexington, 2013): 121.
[419] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 107.

with this history, how do we make a break? It is in this context that Milton arrives. In Plate 14 Blake writes:

> Shaking the roots & fast foundations of the Earth in doubtfulness
> The loud voic'd Bard terrify'd took refuge in Miltons bosom
> Then Milton rose up from the heavens of Albion ardorous![420]

While the explicit identification of the Bard is at times unclear (he is seemingly a compilation of various figures in Blake's mythology, including Blake himself), it is instructive that at a moment of deep doubt, feeling an inability to properly function, Blake summons Milton. Milton arrives as a source of power, and he is among the greats to whom one may go back to for inspiration. Blake at his most in need looks backward to Milton (and perhaps we can also note the connection between the move outwards for help when one is in need, as well as the stress on care, in *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*). And despite the complicated nature of "The Bard," John Sutherland notes that in this position, "the Bard himself seems to represent Blake at his most inspired."[421] His summoning of Milton is significant for two reasons. First, Blake "took refuge" at a moment when his conception of life was being threatened deeply by capitalism's quantifying logic and the "Moral Law." It was an impossible situation which required, in the notion of recorded time as put forward by the authorities of his day, an impossible solution. Second, this introduction occurred during a moment of utter despair, with the almost complete abolition of hope prompting the need to take refuge. This is recorded as a flash, which will radically alter our dangerous present from its unsettled history. Benjamin writes:

[420] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 108.
[421] John H. Sutherland, "Blake's Milton: The Bard's Song," *Colby Quarterly* 13 (1977): 145.

> The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.[422]

If we follow Benjamin in highlighting the importance of tradition on tradition's receivers, given that the focus here is on Milton, the question becomes, how does Milton figure in Blake's philosophy of intervention? Milton is of course a ready response against the conformism of the ruling class attempt to, again, "make a Heaven out of our misery." Yet the use here also is heavily indebted to the question of what Milton offers in relation to the reception of religion in Blake's time. On the question of this tradition and Blake, E. P. Thompson is categorical. He writes, "The strongest influence upon Blake comes from one major source – the Bible – but the Bible read in a particular way, influenced by Milton and radical Dissent…"[423] Such is the impact of Milton that in Blake's framework Milton's presence becomes the fulfillment of prophecy. Blake, by creating the idea that Milton has been present from time immemorial, makes his summoning of Milton the potential for new forms of love. In order to make clear what Milton's purpose on earth is, Los states:

> o Sons we live not by wrath. By mercy alone we live!
> I recollect an old Prophecy in Eden recorded in gold; and oft
> Sung to the harp: That Milton of the land of Albion.
> Should up ascend forward from Felphams Vale & break the Chain
> Of Jealousy from all its roots;[424]

[422] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.
[423] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 33.
[424] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 119. One way in which we can read that Blake wished for the work to move beyond the text is found in the fact that as John B. Pierce perceptively notes, "…the moment of action for the character of Milton in the poem springs from a specifically oral event – a Bard's song." See John B. Pierce, "Rewriting Milton: Orality and Writing in Blake's 'Milton,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 39 (2000): 449. And as Pierce argues, it is this

Thus Blake conjures Milton, but only in so much as Milton was always already waiting to be conjured. His presence resembles in this regard Jesus himself, as both were intended to live, die and then return. The connection here between the three is no passing idea. As Makdisi notes, "For on [Blake's] own account, his work is little more than dictation inspired by Jesus Christ, or John Milton, or the "eternals"…"[425] What prophesying the past makes possible is that the true path of history may be understood, and thus the task before Blake is to be able to prepare oneself to be inspired by it. Only then can one be among those to receive history. As Blake notes in the Bard's Song:

> The Bard replied. I am inspired! I know it is Truth! For I sing
> According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
> Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
> To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen.[426]

Here we begin to see the fundamental importance for Blake of "Poetic Genius". Milton has been waiting for this time of inspiration, he who "walkd about in Eternity / One hundred years…Unhappy tho in heav'n."[427] Blake pictures Milton as unhappy because, as Erdman notes, "history has not gone according to his vision of it."[428] Milton's return makes possible for Blake the illuminating process of fulfilling this lost history, or, alternatively, of addressing this long history of loss.

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making real (my phrasing), which translates into "The union of thought and expression, inspiration and execution in turn prevents the work of abstraction." Pierce, "Rewriting Milton," 458.

[425] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 242.

[426] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 107-8.

[427] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 96.

[428] Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire*, 397.

In this respect Milton occasions a point of departure from the quantified temporality (clearly associated with Satan and his twisted invocation of God) as well as a passive, unresponsive reception of life. This contrasts with his conception of the poet's (Blake and Milton's) reception of historical time, which while not always accessible, nevertheless stretches beyond any quantifiable moment and is ever-present, if one is open to its reception. It is not the raw material of history of which we are to make sense; rather this conception of historical time is the key principle in understanding where we are at any given moment in time. Despite our predicament, it is always there. Blake notes:

> I in Six Thousand Years walk up and down: for not one Moment
> Of Time is lost, nor one Event of Space unpermanent
> But all remain: every fabric of Six Thousand Years
> Remains permanent:[429]

The reference to six thousand years, the time of existence according to scripture, provides an oppositional form of thinking and being in the world. It is a conception of time that rejects the facticity and capitalist temporality of Blake's present. As Frye notes, "History as linear time is the great apocrypha or mystery which has to be rejected."[430] Yet what is at stake here is not merely the redeeming of another view of time for its own sake, although this is indisputably part of Blake's framework. It is not merely another version of time that Blake is looking to construct. Rather, the task is in creating an oppositional form of life which offers a way out of the present distorting consensus. For this reason the emphasis on creativity, and specifically labour as a

[429] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 117. While I disagree with S. H. Clark's argument that in stating that in this passage "History becomes sealed and finite", his qualified notion that "Time is the element in which constructive intervention becomes possible and so provides a merciful release from "eternal torment," is nevertheless an useful description of the role of Los (historical time) in Blake's text." See S. H. Clark's "Blake's 'Milton' as Empiricist Epic – 'Weaving the Woof of Locke,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 36 (1997): 476.
[430] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 340.

broadly creative act, is a way of articulating a liberating politics for both Blake as an artist and for the world as a whole.

Blake *Labouring* in History

As is the case with analyses of Benjamin which attempt to de-contextualize the explicit politics of his work (in particular his rejection of social democracy in the *Theses*),[431] so with Blake it is important not to disregard the importance of labour and its representation in his text. Labour in *Milton* is chiefly articulated in two ways. Firstly, labour is equated with work as it is now commonly understood, and particularly with agricultural work. Secondly, labour is defined in relation to cultural production. In this second sense labour is principally associated with Blake's own creative work. While I wouldn't want to suggest that labour in the second manifestation is not in effect "real" or equally valid as the first, labour often stands as a metaphor for a "mental fight" which is a necessary requirement for the battle against Satan and for the inspiration to channel Milton in re-entering the world, and in this to correct his own errors and to aid the contemporary conjuncture. The conduit through which Milton rushes is made up of several constituent labouring parts, but fundamentally defines labour as a thinking, working, spirit.

> Properly understood, then, labor is not opposed to inspiration. …Invention, the labor of the mind, is coterminous with execution, the exercise of the hands. Copying is not a time-bound mediation (even though it benefits from practice), but an unmediated access, instantaneously, to a tradition of inspired originality. The spiritualization of labor, and as

[431] Although commenting on Blake, Julia Wright's following remark could equally be applied to Benjamin. She writes "Social and political change do not arise from historical evolution, the slow steady march toward civilization, but from beyond such chronological constructions…" See Julia M. Wright, *Blake, Nationalism and the Politics of Alienation* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004): 54.

> it were the bringing down to earth of inspiration, bring a capable, persevering humanity into contest with a captivating divinity.[432]

I should keep within my frame of reference a distinction which Blake makes explicitly clear early in the text, that between the contrasting notions of "proportion." Blake writes, "When Satan fainted beneath the arrows of Elynittria / And Mathematical Proportion was subdued by Living Proportion."[433] That Satan is identified with Mathematical Proportion should make clear that this is a negative reference, and that Living Proportion is positive. The concept of Living is interesting as it has more than an undertone of being productive, as opposed to being overly abstract and thus non-reproductive and non-responsive to the current situation, and also to historical reception. The centrality of living structures the representation of work in Blake.

In Plate 8 Blake draws a line between two places of labour. On the first we are presented with "Satan returning to his Mills" where he does not see that he has "opress'd nor injur'd the refractory servants."[434] Satan possessing his mills and servants makes clear that slavery still exists in capitalism, and with whom it is identified. Yet Blake is quick to counter these "Satanic Mills" with an opposition movement which was always there ("remained permanent"). Los, often depicted as a harvester throughout Blake's work (admittedly among other descriptions), responds to the Satanic Mills as follows:

> Ye Genii of the Mill! The Sun is on high
> Your labours call you! Palamabron is also in sad dilemma;
> His horses are mad! His Harrow confounded! His companions enrag'd.
> Mine is the fault! I should have remember'd that pity divides the soul
> And man unmans: follow with me my Plow. This mournful day

[432] Haggarty, *Blake's Gifts*, 150-51.
[433] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 99.
[434] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 101.

> Must be a blank in Nature: follow with me, and tomorrow again
> Resume your labours, & this day shall be a mournful day[435]

I am not arguing, it should be made clear, that mills, plows, and labour as metaphors are not also deeply imbedded in Blake's references to redemptive religion. My point here is that the predominance of these metaphors is just as meaningful as is their place in religion more broadly in articulating Blake's worldview. The fact that Satan returns to "his Mills" locates a sense of ownership and materiality (of property and labour time), while at the same time the reference to those that work at the Mill connotes a magical note which squarely identifies the workers as the creators of all wealth. As Makdisi notes, "Who works, how he or she works, and the conditions under which she works are all inextricable questions for Blake."[436] As Los calls on the labourers to leave the Mills, this raises the question as to the nature of their Labour under Los, and to how it prefigures the industrial nature of production that Blake is critiquing.

Los himself suggests how he is identified within this unique labour process. In Plate 25, as previously, he cautions against vengeance "till all the Vintage of Earth was gatherd in."[437] Yet while Los calls to wait for vengeance (for reasons again suggested by Erdman above), how he frames his call is instructive.

> And Los stood & cried to the Labourers of the Vintage is now upon Earth
> Fellow Labourers! The Great Vintage & Harvest is now upon Earth[438]

Los is the leader of the harvest, but allies himself clearly with the "labourers" in his great caution. Los stands here as a sort of vanguard, but a vanguard that is not divorced from the workers but

[435] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 101-2.
[436] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 113.
[437] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 121.
[438] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 121.

rather one of them. Further, his caution recognizes the potential of the former slaves to *not* heed his call. They have the agency to seek vengeance, and it is necessary to caution against it. Agency places everything in play. As Sarah Haggarty notes, this means dictates from above will not wash. "The struggle dramatized by *Milton*, then, is not quite between God and man, dictator and secretary, but between the capacity of a man to act divinely and his corporeal aspect. And it is precisely a struggle."[439] These labourers have the possibility of making history, and are in this regard at one with Los in this creation. It is at the moment that "fellow labourers" are summoned to take part in making history (as opposed to being passive pawns in the history of their own lives) that we should reflect that this process has, of course, occurred before.

On the link between labour and past history in Blake, Thompson's work is most convincing, as what he sets out to do is to place Blake's "very unusual and probably unique, position" in an "obscure antinomian tradition."[440] While Thompson focuses on a crucial developmental period in Blake's work between 1788 and 1794, his argument concerns the structuring of Blake's key ideas, which carry forward particularly from this period. While the antinomian tradition had "become obscure by the 1790s,"[441] by "1810 Blake's views had become so strange that Henry Crabb Robinson could comment that 'his religious convictions had brought on him the credit of being an absolute lunatic.'"[442] The disjunction between this tradition and its potential reception is interesting in keeping in our frame how unfashionable Blake's holding on to this tradition had become, but it is interesting nonetheless that there is something that is consistent in Blake's work.[443] Thompson definitively provides this consistency in the last two

[439] Haggarty, *Blake's Gifts*, 150.
[440] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, xix.
[441] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 62.
[442] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 63
[443] This thesis is in direct contradiction to Nicholas Williams' work, who attempts to construct, not unlike Althusser's reception of Marx, with which he is sympathetic, an earlier and mature Blake. See Williams, *Ideology and Utopia.*

lines of his text. He writes, "But there is never the least sign of submission to "Satan's Kingdom." Never, on any page of Blake, is there the least complicity with the kingdom of the Beast."[444] In part, this helps illuminate the above quoted passage wherein Los, entering Blake in a moment of inspiration, declares that all time "remains permanent." Nothing can slip outside such a framework, even though it is, again, seemingly not always accessible.

This compressed history, that is history which in some discernible way works in a continuum, operates on the level of continuity but also has particularities to it as well. For this reason Milton is positioned as a Reprobate while Cromwell, given that he did not fulfill his role, is only ready for redemption (that is, a member of the "redeemed" class), and further that Kings Charles and James, are positioned as members of the "Elect." As the "working" class (not exactly the working class as it will later be defined in the Marxist tradition) produces in the continuum and in the instance, so too does the Elect "class." While in *Milton* the Elect are somewhat repentant for their actions, specifically what they are repentant for is instructive. Blake writes:

> Charles calls on Milton for Atonement. Cromwell is ready
> James calls for fires in Golgonooza. For heaps of smoking ruins
> In the night of prosperity and wantonness which he himself Created[445]

The "fires of Golgonooza" are meant to burn up and cleanse the errors of the past, yet the notion of prosperity as a negative qualifier allies Blake clearly with an oppositional understanding of history as well as the present. This further raises the question of who benefits from the creation of

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[444] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 229. Following E.P. Thompsons's point that Blake never wavered, Jon Mee writes that far from there being a "break" between the "radical Blake" of the 1790's and of that in the time of writing *Milton*, "Although after 1795 Blake published nothing of his own work till *Milton* in 1804, there is little evidence in either his annotations or notebook that he renounced his political perspective on state religion." See Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasms*, 213 This text also provides a useful analysis of Blake's work during that decade, while highlighting the formal developments of Blake's work, not merely their historical significance.
[445] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 99.

wealth. In this sense there is a good deal of wish fulfillment here, as Kings James and Charles are both confronted with the wreckage of their disastrous histories (although their descendants are sure to have profited from the original theft) and held to account.

While Blake wouldn't have been alone in presenting this disastrous history and its contemporary manifestations in his time, the form in which he does it – the Daughters of Albion "sing Creating the Three Classes among Druid Rocks"[446] – marks Blake as unique in his age. As Makdisi notes, there is a

> …distance between Blake and the hegemonic tendency in 1790s radicalism. For the latter, as indeed for the conservatives themselves, "labourer" and "employer" are categories to be taken for granted; whereas for Blake, they are socio-bio-psychological organisms, the products of a particular social organization.[447]

If they are both products of a particular social organization and socio-bio-psychological organisms, then this offers up the very interesting question about what specifically this era (the era of Milton, of the English Civil-War, the advent of capitalism) means for Blake**.** This seems to suggest that Milton is something larger than a mere reader of the Bible, and his particular return (and the fact that Blake looks for redemption and inspiration in Milton) offers up concretely a way of getting at the heart of the predicament in Blake's age.[448]

The way in which Milton makes himself known in Blake's world is instructive in framing that world. Blake sets up a contrast in the way that Milton enters from a position of height in

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[446] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 99.
[447] Makdisi, *William Blake*, 113.
[448] Describing the way in which Blake contrasts the mythology of the essay in comparison to the second coming of the end (of which more later), Andrew M. Cooper argues that "*Milton* strives toward an unqualified affirmation of concrete human life." While this essay is heavily indebted to a Freudian structuralism (note the title), the article, as evidenced in the above, is unwavering in its emphasis on human agency as vital for Blake in the poem. See Andrew M. Cooper, "Blake's Escape from Mythology: Self-Mastery in 'Milton,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 20 (1981): 88.

relation to the heavenly "in the Zenith as a falling star,"[449] yet as previously mentioned he enters Blake through his foot – where he stands – "And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, entered there." Together, the connection between the two symbolizes the process of something organic, both in a similar sense to Makdisi's "socio-bio- psychological organisms," but also as further articulating a moment of specificity. In other words, the two worlds of God and the physical universe are important for highlighting the moment of the now in the process of (always already) historical reception. This moment of historical redemption comes not as something alien to it, but rather as an entity that is part and parcel of the earth's own essential character. This essential character is essentialist itself. While Blake is far and away ahead of his times on representation of women, the mixture and manipulation of genders and gender norms is a core ingredient of the advancement of a broader commonality of humanity, one side is still more equal than the other as David Shakespeare notes:

> In *Milton*, a mix of vision and concealment, and an accompanying mix of genders, are what lead to redemption. This gender mixing is less "sexual" than it might be both in the modern sense of sexual acts and in the sense contemporary to Blake that Susan Matthews delineates – heterosexual gender roles. It is not copulation, nor even a joining of properly male and female figures, but an ideal of androgyny where the feminine remains subordinate, but makes a tangible contribution.[450]

Yet this essential character that brings together Blake and Milton is itself coloured by a specific return to a definitive place. While Milton returns to "eternal death" (our lived reality), he enters

[449] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 110.
[450] David Shakespeare, "'The Sight of All These Thing': Sexual Vision and Obscurity in Blake's *Milton*," in *Sexy Blake*, edited by Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 113. There is also a clear discrepancy as regards which gender and possession of knowledge and inspiration. "…throughout the poem the masculine figures not only have the privilege of access to visions divine and immanent, but they are often consolidating their privilege by doing the hiding." Shakespeare, "'The Sight of All These Thing,'" 114.

"Albions land/ Which is the earth of vegetation on which I now write."[451] The literalness of this passage ("on which I now write") sits out of place with much of the poem. Shortly thereafter, when describing Milton's entrance into Blake's world, he describes the connecting point as both of and outside the moment they live in. He notes:

> But Milton's Human Shadow continu'd journeying above
> The rocky masses of The Mundane Shell…
> The Mundane Shell, is a vast Concave Earth: and immense
> Hardend shadow of all things upon our Vegetated Earth
> Enlarg'd into dimension & deform'd into indefinite space,"[452]

The fact that space is "deform'd" when it is made indefinite provides a clue as to the sense of urgency in location, and as well the importance in moving from abstraction ("mathematical proportion") to a vegetating or growing space ("living proportion").[453] There is a belief or doctrine of "growing" in Blake, and this belief resists any attempt to provide a final destination point wherein life will be ultimately fulfilled.[454] In this regard it would be remiss not to note that

[451] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 109.
[452] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 110.
[453] The emphasis here on growing connects to Blake's critique of Urizenic over-rationalism and over-abstraction. As Mark Lussier notes, "The emergence of consciousness into materiality is always an emergence into the field of the real as a specific perpetual location in spacetime, with only those willing to undertake what Blake later terms "self-annihilation" capable of perceiving the splendors of a complementary, undifferentiated experience." Mark Lussier, "Blake's Deep Ecology," *Studies in Romanticism* 35 (1996): 401. By reducing the self to something larger (the way in which Blake will distinguish himself from Satan), one opens up into a world of deep connection within itself and with other worlds. This connection is deeply held in regards to nature. This adds to the anti-Newtonian aspects of the poem as Lussier further notes. "Blake's signifying nature can be immediately distinguished from then current notions of the cosmos marked by the ascendency of a mechanistic worldview associated with Isaac Newton." Ibid, p. 405 Further**,** he notes that "Only through acknowledging the interpenetration of one another with and all with the world can the imagination truly shape a viable cosmological frame. The cosmos, for Blake, assumes an elasticity shaped by individual perception, fed by the imagination, and experienced beyond our own seemingly limited location in discrete spacetime." Lussier, "Blake's Deep Ecology," 406-7.
[454] This rupturing will tend towards removing oppression, not merely locating a space beyond – momentarily – the reach of Satan's destructive power. One such example of this necessity lies in sexuality. A Christopher Z. Hobson notes: "Rather, as in *Milton*, Blake shows the disruption of same-sex subjectivity by outside enforcement and internal self-affirmation of social gender norms, leading to a different sex-subjectivity in which the repression of same-sex potential poisons personal life and helps form a world of gender and social oppression." Christopher Z. Hobson, "Blake and the Evolution of Same-Sex Subjectivity," in *Queer Blake*, edited by Bruder and Connolly, 32.

the larger metaphors of nature which abound in the text are deeply related to the possibilities of framing historical reception. The notion of the end point of the harvest cannot simply be viewed as a totality in and of itself. As Balfour has argued, "The vintage and harvest are plausible as figures for the end because they mark the end of a given cycle of nature – and yet it is precisely the cyclical character of the seasons that prevents any harvest or vintage from being the last."[455]

While Balfour is absolutely correct in pointing out that the "Last Harvest" is not at all "the last"[456] (and in this regard it deserves noting that there are two "Last Harvests" in the poem), this should not preclude us from examining the importance of what the last does ultimately represent in Blake as it relates to "vegetating" and "growing," which I am here using interchangeably. There seems to be a correlation of the two which echoes Marx's famous statement that after a period of revolution we will then only have put behind us pre-history, and thus our attempts to revolutionize – the summoning of Milton is for this purpose – our existence is about reaching our "nature." That is a moment where our growing is no longer manacled (that most hated of concepts which Blake frequently references) to Satanic Mills or Jealousy. That said, I am not arguing that it is within human nature to reach this point, as this would be to read into Marx and Blake a teleological form which exists in neither. Suffice to say that there is, I would argue, enough to maintain that in Blake's philosophy it is possible to argue for the termination of something odious to human existence. That is, to echo Makdisi, we are able to see

[455] Balfour, *Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 167.
[456] Steve Vine's description of the moment of the transcendent sublime in Blake not as a flight from the material world, so much as finding fulfillment in it, is useful in providing a link between where one is and the direction where one will go. As he writes, "The infinite is always in the process of (its) revelation, for Blake's corrosive designate a process rather than a product, a "displaying" rather than a display. The infinite resides in the corrosion and "melting away" of the material, but this process is internal to the material itself. The material is not so much sublimated as the sublime is installed in the material." See Steve Vine, "Blake's Material Sublime," *Studies in Romanticism* 41 (2002): 242.

in Blake a desire for the true potentiality to occur, and to hope and work towards a moment where those fires which attempt to extinguish such potential are themselves snuffed out.

For this reason we should note that until the "last harvest" is behind us, Blake describes humanity on earth as living in "sorrowful Vegetations."[457] Without the second coming we are in a position of being literally grounded in historical structures of exploitation and oppression. And while Balfour has noted the comparative significance of the introduction of Milton through the "feet" and poetic structure (the foot as the form of metre in poetry), I should also point out that the resurrection will come, as I have shown, not as something *merely* magical (falling from the sky) but rather through our fulfilling the somewhat base materiality coursing through us, arising from where we stand. Only once that has been done will we be able to fulfill the following lament:

> O when shall we tread our Wine-presses in heaven; and Reap
> Our wheat with shoutings of joy, and leave the Earth in peace.[458]

Until that moment in time when the lament is fulfilled, Los stands as the "Watchman of Eternity"[459] and takes up this position so as to warn us of the danger repeating history's failing, principally from recreating a fall. Los warns us against this danger, describing it in the following:

> Arise O Sons give all your strength against Eternal Death
> Lest we are vegetated, for Cathedrons Looms weave only Death
> A Web of Death: & were it not for Bowlahoola & Allamanda
> No Human Form but only a Fibrous Vegetation

[457] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 119.
[458] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 119.
[459] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 119.

A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision.[460]

Here there is a danger of making impossible imagination which will fulfill our humanity and make us the materiality of our salvation. Ultimately though, Milton is the spirit of the Apocalypse, and his coming heralds the possibility of ultimate regeneration, not merely shielding oneself and the broader community from the horrors that one knows. This regeneration prefaces the creative impulse in Blake and its importance in both making something grow, while at the same time highlighting the necessity of channeling history in poetry.

The notion of the Harvest, one of the dominant metaphors throughout the poem, is deeply implicated in the way in which labour appears in the text. I have already discussed the importance of Los' proclamation to "Fellow Labourers" in the text, but the connection exists further between labour and a larger politics of creativity in the redemptive historical channeling which Blake desires. Instructive in this regard is the final clash in the text between Milton and Satan. In this battle, and in the ultimate redemption of Milton, we see the primacy of a life of making, *philopoesis*, and how it is necessary through labour to make this leap into the moment of time beyond (perhaps an always penultimate) the Last Harvest.

In Plate 38 we witness the battle between Milton and Satan. The description of Satan is telling in that Blake offers a clear binary of labour's competing states of being. The depiction of Satan's properties (that is, both his ownership and stewardship of things and what makes him what he is) stand against the notion of labour as a fulfilling practice. Blake writes:

I also stood in Satans bosom & beheld its desolations!
A ruind Man: a ruind building of God not made with hands;
…

[460] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 120.

…its ruind palaces & cities & mighty works;
Its furnaces of affliction in which his Angels & Emanations
Labour with blackend visages among it stupendous ruins[461]

The "blackend visages" is a reference to industrial labour as performed in the "Satanic Mills," but the fact that Satan's building is not made from human "hands" should be read as arguing that it is divorced from the level of human creative (and also labouring) activity. Labour here is inclusive of mental labour, and especially cultural labour (with Blake's own plates and poetry the obvious case in point).

In his entreaty in Plate 39 to "Awake Albion awake," Milton uses the common motif in inspirational thought to awake the recipient from sleep, yet the entreaty is not finished. The way in which awakening comes about is dependent on the role of labour. The repetition of the word "labour" and its variant forms in the following is striking. Blake writes:

Urizen faints in terror striving among the Brooks of Arnon
With Miltons Spirit: as the Plowman or Artificer or Shepard
While in the labours of his Calling sends his Thought abroad
To labour in the ocean or in the starry heaven. So Milton
Labourd in Chasms of the Mundane Shell, the here before
My cottage midst the Starry Seven, where the Virgin Ololon
Stood trembling in the Porch: loud Satan thunderd on the Stormy Sea
Circling Albions Cliffs in which the Four-fold World resides
Tho seen in fallacy outside: a fallacy of Satans Churches[462]

[461] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 139.
[462] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 141.

The repeated reference to Labour overcoming Satan in completing this redemption is significant. The reference to the Arnon is also fruitful, as Bloom notes in an early reference from Plate 19: "The Arnon is a river of error, and like the Red Sea, its crossing symbolizes a movement towards life, from Moab to Canaan, from Urizen to a redeemed Luvah who is Christ."[463] To cross this river, or to go through it, implies a judgment, a point of definitive departure.

While a key feature of Blake's work is a compulsive dedication to democracy more generally and debate in particular, when the final moment approaches, Milton, denouncing Voltaire and others, cries out "Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man."[464] Going further, he declares that "the Reasoning Power in Man / This is a false Body."[465] In a further attack, seemingly directed towards those who divorce theory from any form of beneficial practice, Blake brusquely attacks those whose "Science is Despair"[466] by ridiculing the "idiot Questioner who is always questioning, / But never capable of answering."[467] Here the question of not being able to provide answers should direct us against the notion that a moment of fulfillment is against Blake's "nature." Indeed, as we see in his final Plate, Blake suggests that labour is not only central to humanity and central to its liberation, but also urges that its true fulfillment must be achieved rather than continually postponed.[468] In the penultimate verse, whilst travelling across the city, "Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man: his Cloud / Over London in volume terrific, low

[463] Bloom in Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 916.
[464] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 142.
[465] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 142.
[466] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 142.
[467] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 142.
[468] What I am arguing here is that there is something so rotten in the state of things that we require a new way of living that will aid us in removing us from our present misery. Yet as "humankind can't live context-less" Thompson, 221. we must then resurrect other forms of knowing and living that pre-date our current, self-interested, context. This will require "some utopian leap' … 'from Mystery to renewed imaginative life.'" Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 193.

bended in anger."[469] The anger of the London[470] labouring "Poor man" is justified in Blake. It is they who create, and it is historically their labour which is in need of redemption.[471] Hearing this cry, Blake ends with the beginning of their redemption:

> All Animals upon the Earth, are prepared in all their strength
> To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations[472]

The question of going forth, of completion of the act at hand necessitates that history be redeemed. To quote Benjamin on Messianism again,

> …our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.[473]

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[469] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 144.

[470] It is important to restate that London is not merely a setting defined by Blake's presence, but as Saree Makdisi points out, "In Blake's geography, then, London is the spatial representation of the experience of the Universal Empire of modernizing capitalism; a process that was, in Blake's vision, gradually reterritorializing and transforming the globe." Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, 157.

[471] It is instructive of a real gap in Blake studies that in a work entitled "William Blake and the Body" there is scant discussion reserved in this text of the role of the labouring body. See Tristanne J. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body*.

[472] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 144. Such statements may read as decidedly patriotic, or buttressing nationalist, chauvinist, politics. While Blake himself does not advance such a politics, for a contemporary examination of the uses of Blake's *Milton* and other texts in modern national myth-making that do, see Shirley Dent "Thou readst white where I readst black: William Blake, the Hymn 'Jerusalem', and the Far Right," in *Re-Envisioning Blake,* edited by Crosby, Patenaude and Whitehead, 48-62. One need caution, however, that despite such readings, colouring Blake as a patriot in this conventional sense is wide of the mark. "Blake seems to have been one of a number of republican writers who were seeking other ways in which civic virtue could be conceived and exercised." David Fallon, "'She Cuts his Heart Out at his Side': Blake, Christianity and Political Virtue," in *Blake and Conflict*, edited by Haggarty and Mee, 92.

[473] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254. Werner Hamacher also usefully notes how Benjamin opens up a new conceptions of time that is always struggled over: "If the time-form of historical happening is the present – namely the past contracted to and fulfilled in the present – then the present is never a transition in a series of other presents and yet other ones, but always a singular moment in which the possibilities and demands of the past are contracted and fixed:

While I cannot argue that Blake was an historical materialist, I can safely argue that his aim was to resurrect the weak Messianic power (which at his time was being destroyed) in order to redeem those that have come before, and Blake and his own time as well. *Milton* is intended to show how this is possible.

Brecht, Blake and the Uses of History

As I have shown in this and the previous chapter, a focus on history can be an active way of moving beyond the "merely historical" and position a realignment so that history can be brought into a productive conversation in the present. Yet this is, to reiterate, history not as it is commonly known and translated in a language that is unfamiliar to traditional historiography, and which at any and all times presents the catalogue of human relations as never pre-determined, and always, although structured and limited, open. Yet, even this is a pale incompletion of how both Brecht and Blake think of the past and its accessibility. History, as the present, is never the past, never safe and never secure. In the times of capitalism and previous forms of oppressive social relations, the possibilities of alterity abound. And in this sense, while historical time moves in way that show it will always be contested, it is always already, to borrow a phrase, a moment frozen in time. As Werner Hamacher explains: "When history occurs, it is only in its fixation to a moment and furthermore to an image. Whatever occurs, stands still. History does not have a

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the present is not the time-form of waiting for a better or simply different future, not the state of waiting that preceded the state of redemption, but the standstill where one no longer waits, a standstill into which even waiting itself is drawn and in which the demand associated with the waiting has fallen silent." Werner Hamacher, "'Now': Walter Benjamin on Historical Time," in *Walter Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2005): 53.

course, it pauses."[474] Brecht's and Blake's aesthetics are riven through with precisely this version of history.

The moment of historical time in Brecht's later work exists always where appearance (in dates, in costume, etc.) is made to be in fidelity with factual events. Yet we are consistently invited by Brecht to renege on that allegiance to appearance, and operate on a level of historical understanding that demands a connection to the past so that historical wrongs are just as much part of the present as they were the first time they occured. History is a continuum of articulations made at moments of danger, and often in the face of danger the response is rarely to confront it. So often, except for instances of bizarre, tragi-comic figure of justice in the case of Azdak, those in moments of trauma recoil in the face of the truth that stares back at them.

Likewise, Blake will drive through the past, and move from a standstill – Milton waiting, unable to wake himself from the failures of his life (patriarchal, ideological, theological and aesthetic) – and shift in a radical heartbeat that tears us into the moment of the now. The hand brake of history is pulled so that another history can be made right, and made right by those that have been wronged and have wronged others. "I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One! / He is my Spectre!"[475] exclaims Milton. This arresting of history provides a means to redeem it as well, as following the normal course of events will not provide any reasonable recourse to justice. As Michael Löwy argues in his reception of Benjamin:

> ...redemption/revolution will not occur in the mere natural course of things, by dint of the "meaning of history" or inevitable progress. One has to struggle against the tide. Left to

[474] Werner Hamacher, "'Now': Walter Benjamin on Historical Time," 53.
[475] Erdman, *Complete Poetry*, 108. "In his epiphany, Milton sees that he yielded to pride, vanity, and power hunger, and consequently he emulated tyranny when he promulgated his unsavory portrait of God and, in patriarchal fashion, abused his wives and daughters. He became a despot in his home, a little Urizen." Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 128.

> itself, or brushed *with* the grain, so to speak, history will produce only new wars, fresh catastrophes, novel forms of barbarism and oppression.[476]

When one doesn't "struggle against the tide," the result of the inaction is clear in the texts examined in the previous two chapters. The "Little Monk" withdraws, leaving the possibilities for those who could have been encouraged by a revolt against the church cast aside. Mother Courage consistently meets horror after horror, despite her silent scream, along the same path, convinced that this time events will turn in her favour. Grusha finds herself a bargaining chip in her own life, consistently the subject of other's direction. Milton is left to wallow in purgatory and encourage those forces who seek, with an Urizenic impulse without control or proportion, to threaten the existence of a potential focused nature communing life, which "Blake's visionary poetry admonishes us to realize is not really about technology; what ultimately matters in building our own *ecotopia* is the quality of human vision and the extent of our shared commitment to realizing human potential through creative endeavour."[477] Yet the object lesson here never teaches that history must be avoided, nor worked around as if it is something that can ever be past or de-materialized. Instead, rather than avoid history's un-fulfillments and the way that dominant historiography cuts out the oppressed, both writers engage with humanity's creative faculties to produce new meanings from old truths. In this regard Benjamin is so vital, in that he "retains a materialistic understanding of aesthetics by maintaining their connection to sensual perception, while also displaying the interactive relation between art and everyday

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[476] Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm. Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History"* (London: Verso, 2005): 49.
[477] James C. McKusick, "Afterword: The Future of Ecocriticism," in Lisa Ottum and Seth T. Reno eds., *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2016): p. 239. McKusick further describes this ecotopia by noting that "…William Blake held the strongest commitment to such an idealized urban existence. In place of London's enormous factories and powerful steam engines, Blake envisioned the imaginary city of Golgonooza, powered by small, hand-operated machines, including a loom where women weave "clothing with joy & delight" and a wine-press where the sons and daughters of Luvah "tread the grapes / Laughing & shouting." McKusick, "Afterword: The Future of Ecocriticism," 238.

life."[478] This means attending to creative meaning but also to challenging and countering meaning "from above," thus providing an oppositional hegemonic analysis of history, and of how history gets disordered following the needs of dominant ideologies. Benjamin's work on history helps us think through this process.

> Benjamin cuts up preexistent creations that were believed to have been whole, reshuffles the pieces, and pastes them together in a new way. As a dialectical thinker, he sees aesthetic creation as a two-part process, being as interested in how meanings get created as in how meanings are destroyed…[479]

For both Brecht and Blake, the recreation of meanings, often but not exclusively as dead ones resuscitated, provides opportunities for making political aesthetics in the now. Yet the manner of their resuscitation is not in sync, especially as regards the place of labour.

Labour holds a special place in the course of liberation in Blake. Not labour as an occupation or a means to earn money to provide financial sustenance, but labour as an ultimate expression of the power of humanity to create and make new things possible. Labour is co-terminous with ownership, not ownership of another's labour, but rather the overcoming of alienation (here understood in the Marxist sense of the theft of surplus value), and rejection of the idea that a project of one's individual creation should be the project of another's enrichment, on the one hand, and more broadly that a person would be alien to that which they produce, that their creative connections would be severed to their creations. As S. Brent Plate makes us aware above, this is not – even in the resurrection of historical figures – a negation of the modern world, not the technical means by which the world reproduces itself. Labour can be a means to create a

[478] S. Brent Plate, *Walter Benjamin, Religion, and Aesthetics: Rethinking Religion Through the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 22.
[479] Plate, *Walter Benjamin*, 29.

connection with the past but also the present, and aids in imagining worlds that had not yet existed. As Jason Whitaker notes:

> At roughly the same time as he was composing *Milton*, Blake seems to have been attempting to work out a theory of artistic production which would resolve the dilemma of memory and inspiration. ….This meant that history was not the empirical collection of facts, but the prefiguring of contemporary and future states, a typology of the existent world.[480]

Brecht's focus is superficially dissimilar in that his use of labour is merely as a negative descriptor, in that labour is most clearly in, for instance, *Mutter Courage* that which will keep you wedded to a system of oppression and loss. The use of peasant time clearly highlights, and is meant to highlight, exploitation. Yet there is another sense in which labour is freeing, and that exists with Grusha's example. In her case, productive labour should never be sectioned off from that which it produces, and what is produced in that regard is the young, and the promise of a new life. The experience of creation is tied inexplicably to liberation, the liberation of the self as a creative participant in the world, but of the community of creators/producers more broadly. And this necessitates a realignment in the relation of the world to our creative fields, and also to ourselves. Epic theatre itself can never be, in this regard, a closed field. By its nature, it requires not merely the activity of the players, of the potentially emancipatory labour of the audience's contribution to cultural production. The situatedness of the work requires that, as Sarah Bryant-Bertail argues, "Epic texts and performances are ultimately concerned with *critiquing their specific historical situation*. They are anything but "timeless," and herein is their strength."[481]

[480] Jason Whitaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1999): 104-5.
[481] Bryant-Bertail, *Space and Time in Epic Theater*, 6.

This strength draws both from the work itself and its individual productions, through the connections it makes with its audience.

Built into the process of engagement and liberatory practices in theatre, Susan Buck-Morss notes how Benjamin sets out to: "undo the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, to restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity's self- preservation, and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by passing through them."[482] In both instances the use of history to rescue something from the past for the present, and as a means of locating source material for those in the present to learn from it, is used to open the possibility of self-preservation, and to suggest ways of liberating ourselves from the current drag on humanity's various potentialities.

[482] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (1992): 5.

Conclusion

Over the course of this dissertation I have sought to bring Blake and Brecht together to show how each worked through two separate but related moments in their own works, and how the work of Benjamin is useful in helping to draw out the processes at work in the two. The first moment is their contemporary period, defined largely by a world of commodified social relations in which a fully formed (although still ever-forming) capitalism shows its motivations to exhaustively make and remake its subjects in its own image are dissected, and the ways in which one can work around, against and through that system are engaged. Both Blake's and Brecht's complimentary strategy has been to construct their own rejections of capitalism by attempts to understand its logics and manifestations, as to not do as such would produce an ineffective opposition to the system as a system. Although the two engage capitalism from different starting points and through different mediating social and political axes, both demonstrate a comprehension of the system's processes and seek, *from that point*, to articulate their oppositional aesthetic politics. In this way Brecht and Blake begin to develop a politics of experience through the connection to their particular oppressive societies. Capitalism rules in making impossible a life that is redeemable, fulfilling and compassionate. Yet in its stead, masking itself in all those institutions and forms of life that could be potentially life-affirming, it provides existential danger and continual exploitation as both rewards and punishments for maintenance of its own workings. This process is something that Benjamin understood and grappled with as Michael Jennings insightfully notes in the following: "The essay [The Work of Art] proceeds from the conviction – best articulated in "Experience and Poverty" – that one of capitalist modernity's principle effects is the destruction of the conditions for an adequate human

experience."[483] Once this destructive drive is acknowledged and called out (named) for what it is, one cannot expect to cast aside all that capital (through labour power) produces without foraging through and using what one can to undermine capital's power. This dynamic of standing opposed to a system while acknowledging that one can also use its logic and processes in opposition to it, was a motivator for Benjamin in his examination of the function of the technological manifestation of new experience in capitalism. As Jennings continues, "...for Benjamin, technology is at once a main cause of this destruction of experience and its potential solution."[484]

Experimentation in the "now," the moment of the possible, is a means by which one may articulate a new that is both creative and also offers an acknowledgement that there is no other space possible than the one that determines contemporary human experience. Capitalism's various determinations may leave one with little space to operate, but therein is the dilemma of modern oppositional cultural production. And at no point is there or can there be an escape from capitalist forces' desire to take that which has been made oppositional (or has an oppositional spirit, *in potentia*), and to reproduce it in its own image. In some cases, as for instance in the potential in Messianism for Blake and Benjamin, capitalism's nullifying forces are radically not subtle.

The coercion of oppositional impulses in part revolves around the way in which authorities take what is promising in life – what is life giving and making – and turn it into its opposite. This is a clear form of appropriation, and was supported in Blake's historical period down the barrel of a gun, at times literally, as David Worrall historical study illustrates in the following:

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[483] Michael W. Jennings, "The Will to Apokatastasis: Media, Experience, and Eschatology in Walter Benjamin's Late Theological Politics," in *Walter Benjamin and Theology*, edited by Colby Dickinson and Stéphane Symons (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016): 96.
[484] Jennings, "The Will to Apokatastasis," 96.

> In Edmonton, Middlesex, a loyalist procession dragooned the church band to accompany a "triumphal Arch" supported by five men on which a dove held the motto "No Revolution", while "the rear was brought up by Women and Children; before night they were *half Seas over* and sang God save the King &c." Children, songs and socializing were all enlisted in scenes of social conviviality glimpsed at in the text and design of "Laughing Song" and "The Little Vagabond" whose "Ale-house" is not only "'healthy & pleasant & warm" but likely to be a place where political meetings were held.[485]

In this regard the daily, grinding problem of Capitalism is unavoidable, and one has no option but to go through the system and make of one's humanity the best possible outcome, albeit starting from this degraded status. There is no way around this prison-house of experience without at once destroying and working from the rubble of existence and experience that one is caught within.[486] It is this dilemma that Benjamin will refer to as the "poverty of experience" in his essay of the same name. He writes:

> This should not be understood to mean that people are yearning for new experience. No, they long to free themselves from experience; they long for a new world in which they can make such pure and decided use of their poverty – their utter poverty, and ultimately also their inner poverty – that it will lead to something respectable.[487]

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[485] David Worrall, "Blake and 1790s Plebian Radical Culture," in *Blake in the Nineties*, Clark and Worrall eds., (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999): 204 – 205.

[486] To my argument that the *Songs* are structured so as to speak two separate (yet in no way wholly but rather dialectically contradictory) forms of life and experience, the postmodern retort to my argument is expressed by Edward Larissy. Larissy argues that; "Thus, one may concede that there is undoubtedly a strategy in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* which leads us towards mutual ironizing as constitutive of the relationship between the two 'contrary states'…" Edward Larrissy, "Blake and Postmodernism," in *William Blake Studies*, edited by Nicholas M. Williams (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 255. While I have tried to argue *contra* this position *passim*, it is useful to restate that this position, not merely as expressed by Larissy but also his, leads us away from any conception of opposition, or oppositional forms of life, and in the offers no way out of the abyss of petrified experience that capitalism offers.

[487] Walter Benjamin, "Poverty of Experience," in *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 1 1927 – 1934*, Marcus Bullock, and Michael W. Jennings, eds. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996): 734.

For Blake and Benjamin, it is first important to know one's condition, and the conditions of one's oppression and exploitation, in order to lead out from that experience into new possibilities.

As regards Brecht and Benjamin, one should be careful of making the claim that the connection to the contemporary moment is always similar, even though the two clearly learned from each other throughout their collaborations. For instance, on Benjamin's Kafka essay, Brecht objects that Benjamin's lauding of "depth" in Kafka (depth meaning the level of Kafka's inquiry into his own historical moment) is insufficient. Rather, there must be an outcome or direction that comes out of the delving into. Brecht's objection is not in the direction of the examinations themselves, but "their insufficient *extension*, that they don't emerge on the other side" and thus becomes narcissistic or "diary-like."[488] For this reason Brecht begins, particularly in his teaching plays, by taking "nothing that is based on experience for granted – neither Marxism nor humanity."[489] Change exists in that space of contradiction between one's ability to change oneself in relation to one's world, and that society's social processes which must be combatted in order for new experience (not the "poverty" of post World War One economic, social, and political destruction that defined western Europe), in which revolutionary change can begin, to be conceived of and created.

When the momentum behind pushing this new experience cannot be found in the contemporary, Brecht and Blake's resources fuel them to move into history, while holding in their opposition a realist conception of history that masks or confuses liberatory potential with a "progressiveness," then on the rise in Western social democracy and in the Stalinist distortions of the Soviet Union, that waters down a politics of action and which ultimately represents the

[488] James McFarland, *Constellation: Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin in the Now-Time of History* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013): 225.
[489] Oessmann, *Staging History*, 133

"enemies of production." As the engagement with the contemporary moment requires an extra step, history becomes a refuge in the sense that it provides a moment in which a world of lessening possibilities can be pried open to reveal a moment outside of itself that it can reflect on, and prompt change. The retreat to history cleaves open historical time that capital and its enforcers wish to have remain closed.

While I would tweak the following in order to highlight the coercion involved in the surrender of history, nevertheless Benjamin usefully provides an articulation that history provides something that the present cannot provide. And nor should it be able to. He writes: "We have become impoverished. We have given up one portion of the human heritage after another, and have often left it at the pawnbroker's for a hundredth of its true vale, in exchange for the small change of "the contemporary.""[490] In this regard, the dissertation's second movement, examining history and historical allegory in Blake and Brecht, has shown a contested and fraught affair. The moments at which history is being accessed, and the type of history that is being engaged, are particular painful moments, coloured by loss, failure and suffering. In this regard, as Fredric Jameson notes in *The Political Unconscious*, "History is what hurts."[491] The historical periods that Brecht and Blake make use of in the works under discussion here are ones marked by the dominance of a "peasant structure of feeling" more generally (even if in the case of Brecht the structure of feeling is determined by capitalist relations of production and represents the drives and imperative of this system), but are more properly situated at the moment of capitalism's more clearly formed introduction, and in *Milton, Mother Courage and Galileo*, at a more precise beginning point of its hegemonic dominance. Navigating the interstices between feudalism and capitalism involves a rejection of capitalism's enclosing of historical imagination and an

[490] Walter Benjamin, "Poverty of Experience," 735.
[491] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 102.

imperative (turning capitalism's imperatives on its head) to read history against the grain, while recognizing the danger involved given one's unequal footing in relation to capitalist power. This reading and accessing of history for a specific cultural-political purpose is not a straightforward procedure given that it need be mobilised through oppositionally constructed worldviews. The work in accessing the contemporary needs to be performed, as with accessing history and the contemporary together, through one's own mediation to them. In this regard, as Robert S. Lehmann notes, history "reached only through a certain labour."[492]

The retrieval of history can neither be an end in and of itself, even inside the artwork. In this way, the possibility of a better future, or indeed of utopian futures (a requirement that mirrors that breaks open the history of the present), is achievable through "just" judgments (a decision that implies a changing of one's theoretical position), performed herein by Adzak and Blake himself in *Milton*, that reach beyond the individual and thus necessarily involves community justice. While acknowledging this communal element has not been an issue in Brecht studies, for Blake studies the same cannot be said. It is ironic that given the revolutionary judgment involved in the retrieval of Milton, Blake has been at times "configured as a soft liberal who was buoyed by the false hopes of a foreign revolution only to soften into respectable quietism in later years when that revolution supposedly revealed its true nature."[493] Yet Blake was well beyond the "soft liberals" of his day. As Makdisi notes, "For most of the radicals of the 1790s – with the notable exception of Blake – individual self-control was the key to Liberty." The notion of freedom here is one of individual liberty, de-coupled from care of community as a responsibility.[494]

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[492] Robert S. Lehman, *Impossible Modernism: T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the Critique of Historical Reason* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016), 192.
[493] Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, 19.
[494] Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race and Imperial Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014): 14.

It is partly in the gaps that Blake leaves behind a heightened individualism and therefore understands his role in connection with other traditions that put community struggle ahead of individual liberties. In making the links between Blake and Marx (et al.), Makdisi argues they were indebted to older communist traditions that were:

> …principally concerned with questions of being and ontology, and in seeking to ground not just religion but politics (as well as economics and indeed aesthetics) in ontology it differed markedly from a parallel and to a certain extent competitive movement in political thought – democratic liberalism…[495]

The connection between ontology and being grounded in religion, politics and history operates as an opening to utopian futures, though for Blake his specific form of utopian thought carries community along with it.[496] David Fallon argues this point using Bloch's distinction between abstract and concrete utopia. He writes:

> Bloch's model of utopia in *The Principle of Hope* is illuminating in relation to tensions in Blake's poems. Bloch distinguishes between 'abstract utopia,' largely individualistic daydreams which provide refuge from a reality corrupted by ideology, and 'concrete utopia,' the dimension of present reality which anticipates and reaches towards real future possibilities just beyond the horizon of the present.[497]

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[495] Saree Makdisi, "Blake and the Communist Tradition," in *William Blake Studies*, edited by Nicholas M. Williams (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 237.

[496] In his investigation of Blake's *America*, Makdisi highlights the oppositional nature of the longer term project that Blake is engaged in in the prophetic brake on history. He writes; "if this disruption is produced by the prophecy's attempt to blast a hole in what the radicals (and generations of scholars since them) understood to be a continuous and progressive history, it also has the effect of bringing that narrative, and whatever might be understood as the continuum of history, to a sudden and grinding halt." Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, p. 156. Makdisi notes that he is "deeply indebted here to Walter Benjamin's discussion of historical time in "Theses on the Philosophy of History,"" although his use of Benjamin is not spelled out in citation form. Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s,* 349.

[497] David Fallon, *Blake, Myth, and Enlightenment: The Politics of Apotheosis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 18.

Rejecting a liberal individualism that could not imagine a way out of its own dilemma, history, and in particular the history of struggles against destruction of social change by social actors, initiated a consideration of the stakes at play in history. "Blake, too, was working at a moment when it seemed essential to preserve a sense of the connection between history and ontology, and to maintain a way of thinking of history itself *as* ontological struggle."[498] Viewing history as an ontological struggle hints at the level of danger involved if it is merely left for liberal individualism, or worse.

Similarly for Brecht history is engaged as an ontological struggle, yet there is a more pressing note of danger that inhabits his text. In part this relates to the notion of "experience" examined shortly ago, and its formation in response to the devastation of World War One, and the impending and ultimately fully realized horror of fascism. Given these atrocities, it may seem incongruous to discuss history and utopia in Brecht. Yet while history is destruction, it is specifically it's allegorical use in Brecht and Benjamin that offers a way out of capitalism's crises and wars. "For Benjamin, the exemplary rhetorical figure for the representation of history is allegory,"[499][500] and I would argue that likewise allegory is similarly prized by Brecht. For the two, desiring the righting of the world, of making the right choice between socialism and barbarism, requires in the presentation of history an act outside of the presentation of it, wherein experience can be a worthy ontological topic again.[501] In this sense, "...Benjamin establishes a

[498] Saree Makdisi, "Blake and the Communist Tradition," 238.
[499] Carney, *Brecht and Critical Theory,* 69.
[500] In this regard it is interesting to take into consideration Michael Löwy's contention that Benjamin's depiction of Klee's *Angelus* Novus "in reality, what it describes bears very little relation to the painting." Löwy, *Fire Alarm,* 62. While this may be true, the painting itself is an allegory that Benjamin requires in order to make his connection to history, and thus to sever our experience to and of the linear-historical. The allegorical necessity makes possible Benjamin's reading of history.
[501] On the notion of severing history from its presentation, Lehmann writes: "When the allegorical intention is fixed upon epic history – as it is in Baudelaire's lyric poetry as well as in Benjamin's own historical materialism – what is shattered is the temporal continuity of moments. The moments themselves are preserved, them but not as moments, that is to say, not as successive instants in a unidirectional casual chain. What Benjamin calls "allegorical

relation between the messianic hope of seeing the "disfigured" world put back in order and the materialist hope for revolution, which was proper to Brecht."[502]

Putting this "disfigured" world back in order required a realignment of historical worldviews. To make history open (and even possible) became a precondition of making the contemporary a place for contestation. When Brecht (and definitely Blake) make history unsafe for capitalism, they make it and the contemporary that much safer in the present. Yet for Brecht, the role of the utopian possibility, the sounding out of a possible future, must always be balanced by these two states of history and the present. As Gerhard Fischer notes:

> Brecht's utopian image is thus not based on a supposedly scientific conclusion, a final stage of history as a classless society, but rather emphasizes the contradictory dialectic of past and present as well as the tentative, hesitant, anticipatory and preliminary nature of the political and socio- cultural openness provided by the historical situation.[503]

This tentative approach, involving a sceptical attitude that utopia can even be spoken (similar to what for Benjamin would be his "antifetishism"[504]) is dependent on a critical engagement with

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dismemberment" reveals itself in the nineteenth century by cutting (epic) history's temporal joints." Lehmann, *Impossible Modernisms*, 180.

[502] Rainer Rochlitz, *The Disenchantment of Art: The Philosophy of Walter Benjamin* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996): 147.

[503] Gerhard Fischer, ""good building": Bertolt Brecht's Utopian Historical Optimism at the End of World War II," *Cultural Studies Review* 14 (2008): 143.

[504] As James R. Martel notes: "In my own terms, what separates Benjamin from such utopianism is his antifetishism, his suspicion even of the idea of the utopia itself. Without a focus on antifetishism, we get no true antidote, we just get more of the same. Our "dreams" for redemption remain just that." James R. Martel, *Textual Conspiracies: Walter Benjamin, Idolatry, & Political Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013): 57. To be clear, however, this does not preclude the hopes and aspirations of an utopian moment. Rather, as Harry D. Harootunian notes, "Beneath the rubble of reified imagery marking daily life, the world of the early-nineteenth-century Parisian arcades, announcing their seductive lure of consumption and pleasure, was, he believed, a more humane and utopian conception of community, one that the historical materialist was pledged to retrieve…" Harry D. Harootunian, "The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries," in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, edited by Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996): 69.

what Benjamin describes as the "consciousness of historical man, whose deepest emotion is an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at times to recognize that everything can go wrong."[505] This dual perspective of history and the now heavily defines Brecht and Blake's oppositional aesthetics.

[505] Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character," in *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 1 1927 – 1934*, 542.

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