Karatani for Libidinal Economy: Invariance and Praxis

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The Japanese philosopher Kojin Karatani has developed a sophisticated theory of history and praxis, offering a "parallax" reading of Kant and Marx that aligns the Kantian ethical system with an immanent critique of commodity exchange as Marx develops in *Capital*. Kant's ethical reflections are not ahistorical or immaterial, as Marx and many Marxists point out. On the contrary, the universal dimension of Kant's ethics cannot be realised in just any given social arrangement; Karatani argues that for the "Kingdom of Ends" to come about, and Kant insists on a materialist modification of the commodity mode of exchange. Kant thus becomes a necessary interlocutor to Marxian praxis, and Karatani shows that even for Kant himself, the commodity exchange that dominated in Kant's own time – merchant capitalism – had to be transcended as a precondition for any enactment of Kantian ethics. These ethics are thus co-thinkable not only with Marx's critique of commodity fetishism and capitalism, but the Kantian ethical theory informs Marx's praxis, offering a utopian account of world revolution.

There remains a problem in this parallax account of Marx and Kant that neither answer – namely, the problem of human aggression and conflict, including their role in revolutionary sequences. How does human aggression find a proper outlet in a social order? What comes in the wake of a world war or a period of intensified violence? It is Freud and psychoanalysis – that is, the critique of libidinal economy – that treats these problems of human aggression and violence most adequately. Freud offers a historical logic in the dialectic between the death drive and the superego. Karatani's reading of the Freudian theory of the death drive provides a crucial corrective to Marxist praxis – specifically historical materialist praxis, which fails to provide a plausible theory for overcoming the state form without incurring excessive violence. Libidinal economy – the insights of psychoanalysis on the political and psychic economy – can provide insights into these matters, and the Freudian theory of the death drive builds on Kant's more abstract ruminations on "asocial sociability." The death drive – which posits internal aggressivity and is a theory of subjectivity not reliant on consciousness (reason) but grounded in an account of nature – and Kant's theory of man's "asocial sociability" are homologous. The psychoanalytic concept refines Kant's thought to the extent that death drive accounts for the force of freedom in his-

tory. We can only correctly understand this as a dialectic between asocial sociability and reason.

There is what I name an *invariant* principle in Karatani's theory of the Freudian death drive. It emphasises the "non-conscious" element of subjectivity in history, locating this *invariant* force within a dialectic of the Freudian death drive and superego. From this subjective dialectic, Karatani theorises a negative, revolutionising tendency in human history. It is thus fitting that Karatani refers to this impulse in history as "religion" or a force that realises and enacts a materialist "associationist" mode of social exchange relations. From the perspective of libidinal economy, we name this perspective *invariant* as there remains a minimal degree of agitation, an excess that persists despite and beyond revolutionary sequences and changes in social life. The invariant perspective locates a consistency within the social – an *asocial* dimension intrinsic to human subjectivity, per Freud's theory of the death drive.

We will discuss four ways Karatani's theory of the death drive and the dialectic with the superego contributes to the field of libidinal economy. First, Karatani's theory helps us see how a social order develops a mode of exchange wherein internal aggressions are given an outlet primarily in the sphere of the aesthetic and imagination. Although the nation-state governs this under capitalism, we speculate that a revolution of commodity exchange would precisely modify the composition of this aesthetic sphere of exchange, while retaining this sphere to mediate in-built aggressions. This can also be thought of as the mode of culture. As such, we will see how Karatani's theory of libidinal economy differs from Freud's idea that culture as a distinct sphere of social life plays a vital role in mediating aggression. Second, Karatani shows how death drive and superego account for forms of negation and collective agitation (revolution, crisis, war) that modify social affects, sensibility and potentials for mitigating collective aggressions, resentments and negative social affects, specifically within capitalist social life. In other words, the superego and death drive dialectic contains a clear affect theory. Third, by adding a theory of libidinal economy to the wider project of Karatani's transcritique – combining Kantian ethical praxis with the Marxist theory of history – this philosophy lends itself to an entirely new mode of Marxist revolutionary praxis. This critique maintains a distance from the historical and dialectical materialist traditions. Karatani sees these orientations as prone to violence and aggression due to privileging the productive sphere as the site of revolutionary praxis. We will here understand why Karatani's libidinal theory is essential for his theory of revolutionising capitalist commodity exchange. Fourth, we will show that Karatani offers a more positive rejoinder to Freud's pessimistic liberal conclusions regarding capitalism *and* to radical Marxist theories of libidinal economy, such as Jean-François Lyotard, which find no way to transcend the deadlocks of constitutive aggression and asocial affects that capitalism foments. Karatani develops an entirely new mode of exchange premised on the gift and reciprocity ex-

change in the domain of common civic and political life, and his insights are useful for a revolutionary politics of the commune and anticapitalist politics.

In the first part of this chapter, we examine the dialectic of death drive and superego and discuss how this model can be further theorised and applied to historical periods and revolutionary sequences. After developing a historical account of the invariant perspective of death drive and historical change, we examine Karatani's superego theory and discuss the important dialectical account of death drive and superego undergirding the invariant perspective. What of the old order is preserved in the new during a revolutionary sequence, crisis or liberatory movement? How do in-built aggressions find an outlet in each social order? Karatani, like Freud, insists that the national-cultural sphere functions as a site for expressing inner aggressions. We conclude this part by probing whether Karatani indeed has a theory of the political or ideology. We then examine Karatani's theory of libidinal economy and history concerning other Marxist thinkers that use Freudian insights. By reading Karatani with Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, we argue that Karatani's thought overcomes some limitations in Lyotard's theories of exchange; namely, through a positive theory of the superego as a regulator of psychic life, Karatani can isolate the superego not solely as a deterrent to revolutionary possibilities, as Lyotard insists. We then consider Norman O. Brown's theory of history in *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* as it centres a theory of the Freudian death drive as an agency of historical change. However, unlike Karatani's invariant approach, Brown relies on a theory of libidinal economy that is ultimately mystical and thus gets caught up in a non-revolutionary account of historical change. Unlike these approaches to libidinal economy, we argue Ernst Bloch's writings on Freud, specifically his concept of the "not-yet-conscious," is a theory of subjective freedom that complements Karatani's idea of "mode D." We conclude that Bloch is a theorist of libidinal economy very much in line with Karatani's invariant perspective: he envisions a form of revolutionary subjectivity becoming unmoored from negative capture in death drive repetition.

In the second part of this chapter, we show how Karatani's praxis, known as "Associationism," is informed by his theories of libidinal economy. Associationism conceives of revolutionary tactics and strategies that weaken commodity exchange's dominance by emphasising practices such as boycotting, consumer struggles and developing alternative currencies. These tactics do not prioritise interventions in labour (as we find in historical materialist socialist strategies) but rather emphasise the sphere of circulation and exchange for revolutionary action. We show how Karatani's libidinal economic analysis informs associationism's praxis. Karatani is deeply attentive to the role of collective human aggression and aims to overcome the pitfalls of violence that plagued 20th-century socialist revolutions, from Stalinism to Maoism. We also argue that a more expansive form of associationist praxis is possible beyond the specific "New Associationist Movement" that Karatani founded

in Japan. This praxis would benefit from thinking anticapitalist movements, such as the 1990s anti-WTO protests up through more recent uprisings such as Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, as "exchange struggles" and thus in line with Karatani's broader praxis. Circulation and exchange struggles negate the ubiquitous power of commodity exchange. It is through tactics such as stopping circulation, blocking port access for shipping and property damage, and even uprisings such as riots and rebellions that such struggles outside of the immediate sphere of labour are very much thinkable with Karatani's proposals. As a praxis, Karatani's emphasis on non-violence is an admirable feature of the Associationist praxis. However, several problems go unaddressed and overlooked, namely the role of ideology, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and class struggle. These shortcomings are examined and critiqued to conclude.

Part 1: Libidinal dialectic of history: Death drive and superego

Understanding modes of exchange

In *The Structure of World History*, Karatani presents four distinct modes of exchange that have governed societies throughout world history. These modes come to be intermeshed within a given order, and a dominant mode of exchange governs any particular social order. *Mode A* is what he names reciprocal exchange, and it is premised on reciprocity as the basis of social relations; it emerged in primitive tribal societies. This mode is composed of a tribal gift-giving form of exchange. The social system governing this mode tends to be "mini-systems," in which no larger federation or state sovereign governs them, but a series of semi-autonomous mini-systems relate through gift exchange. These mini-systems remain prone to hostility, conflict, and war, but gift exchange is at the heart of governing the mediation of these conflicts. *Mode B* is a form of exchange governed by a sovereign king or ruler, and this mode gives rise to the "world system" consisting of mini-empires such as the period of European feudalism. The sovereign (or king) is the principal overseer of each exchange relation, granting legitimacy to every form of exchange within the society. Mode B is thus the birth of the social contract, and Thomas Hobbes is the exemplary philosophical perspective of mode B. The social arrangement is one where exchange is under the purview of the sovereign ruler that operates on a logic of "distribution and plunder," rather than gift exchange governed by ideals of reciprocity. Where there is a share of resources in societies governed by mode B, this decision is overseen by sovereign diktat, which is again based on distribution and plunder. *Mode C* is commodity exchange, where the sovereign is no longer embodied in the Hobbesian king. Instead, it becomes money itself – namely, the accumulation of money and the exchange system that develops under the money-form. Importantly,

mode C appears in precapitalist social formations when an empire reaches a status of a globalised or regionalised federation and establishes a common currency across different polities.[1] Karatani writes that mode C "acquires an objectivity that transcends human will"[2] at the heart of reification – or the pervasive encroachment of commodity exchange over every domain of social life. In social orders where this domination of mode C is present, people's consent to enter labour contracts freely and sell their labour-power is also present. This paradox of freedom – freedom is reducible to the freedom to sell one's labour-power – makes the very basis of the social contract in capitalist (and precapitalist social orders dominated by mode C) depersonalised and abstract. *Mode D*, the fourth mode, is a regulative mode that seeks a return to reciprocal forms of exchange and thus transcends the other three modes, aiming to return social relations to mode A once again. Each mode has developed distinct spheres from the communal (A), to the state (B), to the market (C), to the fourth mode (D), which functions as a regulative idea and a logic of negativity within social life, manifested in revolutions and other forms of political agitation. While the mode of exchange governed by commodity relations is dominant within capitalist social orders, the state is also present in such orders. It is governed by a different, historically prior mode of exchange based on plunder and redistribution. Despite these overlapping logics of exchange in our contemporary capital-nation-state order, the dominant mode C (commodity exchange) remains hegemonic over the other modes. In this case, the nation and state are subordinated to mode C's domination.

Types of mode exchange	**Mode A:** Community	**Mode B:** State	**Mode C:** Market	**Mode D:** Association
Description	The reciprocity of the gift (or "pooling" through commons)	Ruling and protection (also called "plunder and redistribute")	Commodity exchange (capitalist market)	Transcends other modes, with the return of mode A at a higher level of complexity

Table 1: Karatani's Modes of Exchange

1 Although Greece during the time of Socrates (400 BC) had no capitalist social system, the Greek mini-system had developed a form of exchange that Karatani calls "mode C" – a precapitalist form of commodity exchange in which the mini-system had a common currency.

2 Kojin Karatani, *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*, trans. Michael K. Bourdaghs (Durham: Duke UP, 2014), 89.

Within the nexus of capital-nation-state, mode A governs the national sphere, and Karatani says this is the sphere of imagination. Nationalism emerged under capitalism in the early 1800s in tandem with the labour-power commodity's formation. In the capitalist nation-state, workers must have adequate training, education, and skills, including exposure to relations with others (e.g., a multicultural and cosmopolitan world system), so that they learn to adapt to conditions of labour in which they will work with strangers. The national sphere negates the cosmopolitan basis that capitalism relies on for a harmonious source of labour-power and becomes a site of social life where collective solidarity is organised. The nation

> emerges when, following the overthrow of the absolute sovereign by a bourgeois revolution, each individual acquires freedom and equality. But these alone are not sufficient… a sense of solidarity is also required. In the French Revolution, the slogan was "Liberty, equality, fraternity." Here liberty and equality are concepts deriving from reason, but fraternity belongs to a different order: it signifies a sentiment of solidarity linking together individuals. A nation requires this kind of sentiment. Different from the love that existed within the family or tribal community, *it is a new sentiment of solidarity that arises among people who have broken away from those earlier bonds*.[3]

The nation is the site of social life where the contradictions and limitations of human solidarity produced by capital are worked out via imagination. The national sphere is thus an outlet for the aggressions kicked up by commodifying labour-power that citizen-labourers must undergo in the market. However, if we consider this sphere of social life in a context in which mode C is not dominant – namely, where labour-power is not commodified as it is under capitalism – the national sphere does not have to be structured around national identifications and the irrationalisms, such as patriotism, that often attend to these identifications. In other words, this sphere of social life, also known as "culture," can be thought of as a sphere where human solidarity can be cultivated under the logic of reciprocity.

The paradoxical point here is that the nation's organisation already aims to resolve and restore mode A within social life but faces only a partial realisation of the higher objectives of solidarity that mode A demands. This fundamental limitation of human solidarity within capitalism is evidenced in Adam Smith's theory of the importance placed on the affects of "pity" and "compassion" in social life. Karatani argues that these two moral virtues are thought of by Smith in his early, pre-political-economic writings when he was a moral theorist under the influence of the Sentimentalist moral philosopher Francis Hutchenson. When Smith refines his theory of

3 Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 212–213. Emphasis added.

capitalism in *The Wealth of Nations*, he is faced with the contradiction that a countervailing affect to keep solidarity in harmony – namely, sympathy for others – is not realisable in capitalism because of mode C's dominance. Smith argued that constitutive selfishness drives the human labourer. In his theory of the individual, Smith had to account for the centrality of mode C (commodity exchange's dominance). In so doing, the higher virtues of pity and compassion could not be realised through sympathy (as was his attempted solution) but remained unrealised within the limited sphere of the nation/culture. This example shows that the sphere of mode A remains a site where unmet solidarities are negotiated through imagination and aesthetic practices.

Now that we have a grasp on the interrelation of the three primary modes within capitalist social life, we turn to a discussion of mode D, a mode Karatani refers to as a "regulative" mode that comes about to negate the dominant mode and return to mode A but in a higher form. There is thus a form of teleology in Karatani's logic of the modes of exchange in that the logic of mode D realises gift exchange based on the other modes. In various places, Karatani discusses the logic of this movement of mode D as "religion,"[4] by which he means religion in a way like Kant's "religion," realised in a world republic that has abolished state and capital. In other areas, he refers to mode D as provoked by repression and the death drive in the Freudian sense of the concept.[5] Overall, as a political mode of historical change, Karatani theorises communism as "mode D," a repetitive demand to break from mode C commodity exchange and return to reciprocal exchange across each mode of exchange. In this account of history and praxis, we can take the example of the French Revolution and subsequent revolutionary periods as enactments of mode D; the French Revolution was a collective demand for a return to more fundamental arrangements of freedom, equality, and fraternity. These collective demands were also thinkable as a libidinal upsurge. This logic repeats in history as a form of negation that seeks to break apart oppressive modes that dominate social relations.

The most accessible example Karatani provides of this form of reason is his account of Socrates and the form of universal equality or "Isonomia" that he placed at the centre of his teachings. Isonomia is an example of mode D because Socrates' speculative philosophy emerged in a material context of exchange relations governed by a primitive mode C commodity exchange. Socrates lived during a wider unification of various polities in the Greek world, including instituting a com-

4 See Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, ch. 5; Kojin Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*, trans. Joseph A. Murphy (Durham: Duke UP, 2017), Appendix.

5 Karatani's main discussion of psychoanalysis as a key feature of mode D is found in Kojin Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics: On Kant and Freud*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel, Hiroki Yoshikuni, and Darwin H. Tsen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017).

mon currency.[6] In Socrates' time, mode C (commodity exchange) was introduced in proto-form through precapitalist merchant confederations of mini-states. Karatani argues that Socrates' philosophy, in the primary concept of Isonomia, is a demand for a return to mode A in a higher form.

While mode D is a regulative idea of revolution that occurred before the rise of capitalism, Karatani argues that within capitalism, it was Kant who discovered mode D in his ethics, specifically with the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is only truly possible in a society where the form of exchange goes against mode C (commodity exchange). The notion of always treating others *as ends and not as means* is impossible in a social order – for example, capitalism – in which commodity exchange is paramount. Kant's ethics were only possible in social conditions of associationism, which consists, Karatani writes, "of the return of reciprocal exchange in a higher dimension."[7] This interpretation of Kant notably differs from the Rawlsian "distributionist" mode of justice that many liberal commentators of Kant emphasise. In Karatani's reading, Kantian ethics is exchangist and not distributionist. Society must enter associationist arrangements as the primary mode of dispensing justice and establishing the categorical imperative – that is, by treating persons and future persons as ends and not as means. Thus, the categorical imperative is actualised in a mode of exchange that transcends the merchant capitalism of Kant's time and the financial capitalism of our time.

This reading of Kantian ethics enables us to read Marx and Kant in an entirely new light. The early Marx, like Kant, argued that communism would come about as the realisation of free associations, a position that he shared with Kant. More controversially, Karatani argues that the early Marx shared Proudhon's view of the state as a form of associationism, and Proudhon's non-state-centred communism is in line with Kant's cosmopolitanism premised on the state's absence. Karatani argues that after the Paris Commune of 1871, the Proudhonian anarchist anti-statist position became an unthinkable antinomy for Marx and Marx absorbed an anti-statist view into the heart of his theory because of this impasse of the question of how to destroy the state. Overall, this example shows Karatani's method of transcritique of Kant with Marx, as an undecidable theory becomes "bracketed" in Marx's thought – in this case, abolishing the state. There is an immediate benefit in this idea of bracketing an unthinkable point within Marx's thought that invites a certain de-intensification on the priority of sectarian ideological battles that inevitably arise between anarchists and Marxists. Indeed, if Kant's framework of history and ethics is deeply linked to the vision of a future in which nations and states dissolve into a federation of communes no longer reliant on a state, then this is like what Marx (and anarchists) advocate.

6 See Karatani, *Isonomia*, specifically the chapter "Colonization and Isonomia."

7 Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 231.

Not only is Kant linked to the Marxist project of a stateless arrangement of social relations no longer governed by mode C (commodity exchange), Kant's theory of what fundamentally drives historical change lies in an underappreciated passage from his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*. In this short text, which reads like a manifesto, Kant argues that the essence of human nature lies in what he names "unsocial sociability," or the idea that a fundamental antagonism drives communal bonds and ties. Kant writes, "man has an inclination to associate with others, because in society he feels himself to be more than man, i.e., as more than the developed form of his natural capacities."[8] If the logic of what propels human civilisation is unsocial sociability, then it is immediately clear why Freud and psychoanalysis become heirs to Kantian ethics and politics. Although vaguely construed, Kant's notion of antagonism contains a significant homology with the Freudian notion of the death drive as a central concept at the heart of thinking large-scale social arrangements.

In *Transcritique*: *On Kant and Marx* (2003) and *Nation and Aesthetics: On Kant and Freud* (2017), Karatani argues that the libidinal insights of Freud offer a missing analysis of aggressivity and violence. Human aggression, he suggests, manifests in any social order irrespective of its relative status of equality or mode of exchange. This is what Kant means by nature – a form of antagonism which becomes the cause of a law-governed society. To the extent there is a telos of world civilisation for Kant, it is not found in the peaceful coexistence of a reason-bound view of humankind that negotiates a peaceable social order. The emphasis on nature, or what Kant calls the "cunning of nature," in contrast to what Hegel called the "cunning of reason," emphasises nature as subject. Karatani insists that this is not mere rhetoric. Kant's idea of nature is a form of subjectivity both immanent within a social order and a logic of history evidenced in a dialectic of conscious/non-conscious forces. It is impossible to think the source of asocial sociability from a Hobbesian viewpoint based on mutual hostility with only human will and understanding. Instead, according to Kant, only something derived from hostility itself could overcome hostility, and this is what Kant refers to as nature: the dimension of human life where there is no subject of consciousness.

In bringing psychoanalysis into the transcritique of Kant and Marx, Karatani is also importantly offering a critique of representational politics. So while mode D is thought along the lines of the Kantian regulative idea – an idea that cannot be represented – the link to libidinal economy comes about in negation and revolution, which aims at a social order governed by a utopian mode of exchange. This mode is what Karatani names reciprocal gift exchange or associationism. While a primary

8 See Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, in *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck (1784; reis., London: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963). In the fourth thesis, the concept of "asocial sociability" is elaborated at some length.

force of mode D is non-representational, it continuously modifies existent mode A relations within the social order; mode D is thus a principle of freedom enacted in struggles. Revolution and negations of the social order do not end "unsocial sociability." Instead, the subject of nature Kant develops, and the notion of "world peace" that Kant writes about in his later work is in line with communism as a world republic no longer hampered by the state and the market as organised around commodity exchange. Further, the very movement of this change within human communities is made possible not by human reason or the moral will but by "unsocial sociability," or the "antagonism" innate in human beings.

Karatani draws our attention to the fact that, upon describing the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud confronted the historicity of World War I in the war neurotics he was treating. Through this discovery, we locate the core of Karatani's invariant perspective. We should not think of death drive as a standalone antagonism that libidinally or biologically propels collective action and revolution in history. Instead, it is a force in dialectical tension with the superego. To understand this vital relation, we must revisit the historical context in which Freud discovered the death drive. The principle of the repetition compulsion found empirical proof in the nightmares of the veterans of World War I and how their dreams unlocked a particular sadistic drive. Although Freud sought to apply the logic of the repetition of the death drive to his grandson's play with toys – the fort-da game – and traumatic neuroses more generally, it was the war neuroses as manifest in dreaming that served as the most persuasive argument for the concept. We must, Karatani exclaims, "read the death drive as an historical concept."[9]

Reading the death drive as a historical concept means that we remain attentive to the broader social context in which Freud was operating; 1920 saw the chaotic aftermath of the collapse of the German Empire, one of the last strongholds of the aristocratic order in Europe, after World War I. This period also witnessed the rise of the Bolshevik socialist revolution in Russia, adding a spirit of egalitarianism to the broader European political climate. In Berlin and the other cities across central Europe where Freud sought to grow psychoanalysis, this progressive social context led him to experiment with a more egalitarian form of the psychoanalytic clinic. This period is documented by Elizabeth Danto in her study *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice 1918–1938*. Danto shows how Freud sought to expand psychoanalysis in line with the era's social-democratic and socialist-inspired values. Freud advocated lessening regulations on analyst training and lifting payment requirements for working-class analysands to receive analysis, and virtually every one of Freud's most prolific initial psychoanalyst disciples, including Wilhelm Reich, re-

9 Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics*, 47.

ceived their training analysis for free.[10] However, despite this egalitarian political climate, Karatani describes the situation in the following way:

> Freud, after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, albeit uncomfortably, attempted to reinforce culture, or the superego. It is not external control, but the aggressive drive itself that can inhibit the aggressive drive. By this thinking, he insisted on the necessity of maintaining the Weimar regime. It should be noted, however, that it was not the war itself but the patients who repeated the war every night that compelled Freud to take a drastic turn that changed the meaning of the superego and culture. Freud speculated that individuals should be cured of neurosis, but that states did not have to be cured of neurosis, namely culture.[11]

The Weimar regime is the superego of this specific historical moment. Recognising that there remains aggression independent from the political situation – a residue of the old order in the new order – meant that the sphere of culture and nation became a significant area for releasing and managing repression, a zone governed by the superego. This insight reflects Freud's political liberalism. Freud avoids the question of a revolution in the regime of capitalist private property, fearing that such a revolution would lose grasp on managing surplus repression. Herbert Marcuse argues similarly that the cultural sphere is granted the task of making surplus repression conscious, thus enabling it to be mourned.[12]

Nevertheless, Freud's view, his *liberalism*, must be understood in relation to the theoretical dimension of the discovery of the death drive, which modified how the superego functions. After the invention of the "death drive" concept, the superego is no longer an external censor of repression from institutions and the social world. Instead, the aggressive drive inhibits from within and thus differently corresponds to the superego. Therefore, Freud argued that conscience is formed not by the severe and superior (i.e., external) other but by a renunciation of one's aggressivity – psychic energy passed into the superego and wielded on the ego. Simultaneously, he insisted that this view was compatible with his former view of the superego as a censor.[13] Both logics of the superego are at play: external censorship and inner-directed logic tied to the death drive. However, after he discovers the death drive's centrality, the primary logic of the superego is mediated by the inner-directed death drive.

However, the fact that Freud's great discovery of the death drive coincided with the collapse of the European aristocracy presents a crucial truth of this discovery: a

10 Elizabeth Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis and Social Justice 1918–1938* (NY: Columbia UP, 2005), 123–127.

11 Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics*, 48.

12 For a more elaborated example of this argument, see Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (NY: The Beacon Press, 1955).

13 Karatani, *Nation and Aesthetics*, 50.

social order undergoing a liberationist upsurge will still be confronted with superegoic mechanisms. Paradoxically, collapsing ego ideals and unstable censor mechanisms do not portend a collapse of the superego. On the contrary, the egalitarian social order can indeed bring about a crisis of the superego. Freud sought to develop the death drive theory to locate a specific outlet for this aggressive drive that remains lingering after the horrors of the war and the advent of a more progressive social order. Suppose the Freudian discovery of the death drive accounts for a logic by which a certain mediation of history, namely, the cunning of nature, comes about. What is the function of the superego in such a context? Is it also to be read in line with the Kantian moral law? Freud introduces the superego with an explicit "super" moral state: "from the point of view of instinctual control, of morality, it may be said of the id that it is totally non-moral, of the ego that it strives to be moral, and of the superego that it can be super moral and then become as cruel as only the Id can be."[14] Karatani embraces these two logics of the superego in a way similar to Adorno, for whom morals derive from the "objectivity of society," the external censor of existing morals and values as well as from "the repressive form of conscience to develop the form of solidarity in which the repressive one will be voided."[15]

Ètienne Balibar reveals the heart of this antinomy of the superego when he describes the superego as a mode of authority that can be made emancipatory or furthered in each social order, but which also situates the subject in a "psychic tribunal." The superego concept emerges from two terms: "over" (*Über*) and "compulsion" (*Zwang*), the latter being inseparable from the law and especially the right to punish. The superego is not equivalent to the Kantian concept of the "categorical imperative" as a structure of the unconscious; this would re-establish, in another modality, the subordination of law to morality. The superego is instead a form of simultaneous *obedience* to, and *transgression* of, the law. Balibar writes:

> No social norm would be effective, nor would the respect for norms produce the "excessive" guilt (*Schuldgefühl*) and the "need for punishment" (*Strafbedürfnis*) which Freud describes as characteristic of the "severity" or "cruelty" of the Superego, which derive from its "instinctual" nature or from the retroactive effect of the "id" at the heart of the "ego" that it represents, and that ends up instituting the absurd equivalence between obedience to the law and the transgression of the law.[16]

14 Sigmund Freud, *The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 11* (London: Harmondsworth Publishing, 1984), 395.

15 Ètienne Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology* (NY: Fordham UP, 2017), 241.

16 Balibar, 243.

The superego operates on a double bind of adherence and transgression to the law simultaneously, and the effect of this double bind is that the subject undergoes guilt. "How could the subject (the unconscious ego) not feel guilty of failing to reconcile what is both enjoined and prohibited?"[17] The superego establishes a "tribunal" that reveals itself to be constituted at the same time by a personal instance inscribed within a genealogical succession and an impersonal instance formed by a network of institutions or apparatuses of domination and of coercion that includes the "family," which constitutes, *par excellence*, their intersection. These two modes of injunction switch places and injunctions: "The superego, it is the family!" – "The family, it is the superego!"[18]

It is crucial to notice how the superego is inscribed in a "network of institutions and apparatuses of domination and of coercion"[19] and that, even though the superego is a psychic tribunal, this is not to be understood as producing conditions of voluntary servitude for the subject. On the contrary, the superego connects the subject to the collective. However, just as the superego's psychic tribunal situates the subject in a concrete communal instantiation between the network of domination and coercion and the impersonal genealogical status, Karatani will emphasise the impersonal dimension in a significant way.

In a reading of Freud's 1928 essay on humour, Karatani argues that the superego is not to be understood solely as the agency of repression and censorship but as that which, "in humor, speaks such kindly words of comfort to the intimidated ego." We find this unique impersonal dimension of the superego in humour in contrast to jokes. Where humour functions with spontaneity and activeness (i.e., not consciously), jokes function consciously. We are presented again with the invariant dimension of the death drive appearing in the superego through humour. By stressing how autonomy derives not from outside (i.e., the father or social norms) but inside, the invariant perspective also intimates periods of collective life in which the superego is absent.

Since the superego is the harbinger of the affect of guilt when it instantiates itself on a given social order, as we developed above, Karatani draws our attention to the fact that there are prolonged periods in post-war capitalist life in the Western countries that effectively witnessed an absence of superego. Superego formations emerge at moments provoked by crisis, revolt or war; that is, a repressive communal project ushers them into existence. This means a reign of a social order without superego is governed primarily, although not exclusively, by the affect of shame. As previously mentioned, at the affective level, the instantiation of superego typically follows a period of social unrest – war, crisis, revolution – and in such moments,

17 Balibar, 243.

18 Balibar, 249.

19 Balibar, 249.

social orders can expect conditions of guilt to predominate. As Balibar indicates, it is necessary that the radical "feeling of guilt" engendered by absolute coercion be "repressed and perpetuated, and along with it, the paradoxical equivalence of intentions and acts, behaviours of obedience and movements of transgression."[20] What this points to is the function of guilt in the binding of superego formations over subjective life. As such, Karatani argues that the negative social affects this brings mean something significant for civic and social life. Namely, the social order must contain an *other scene* by which these negative and antisocial affects of guilt can be granted a proper outlet.

What precisely is this other scene? For Karatani, the existence of the superego requires the sphere of culture or what Enlightenment thinkers theorised as the national sphere: an imaginary sphere of social life where the sentimentality of aesthetic expressions of the citizenry is given a zone of free expression. Mode A (primitive gift exchange) governs the national sphere. In a certain sense, this means it is the most distant from the dominating mode C, which governs social relations in contemporary capitalism. Nevertheless, what Karatani draws our attention to in the very idea of the nation is that product of the contradictions and antagonisms kicked up by the modes of state and capital (B and C) and that, by extension, it is not a transcendentally necessary zone of social life. We do not know the precise composition of the nation following a revolutionary sequence that would usurp the predominance of commodity exchange. However, we can wager the need for an outlet zone to exist for in-built aggressions and repressions within any given social order. How must this other scene of culture or nation (mode A) be constructed in such a way that it serves as the other scene, and what is it other to? As we will examine later, even if a social order is governed by mode A (gift exchange) as the dominant mode of social life, there remain forms of social and political conflicts generated based on gift economies. There are distinct means of utilising gifts as the means for reparation of conflicts. We cannot say that the sphere of culture and the nation would completely wither in Karatani's theory of revolution. Karatani does not posit a distinct zone of "political" social existence; instead, in emphasising social relations in modes of exchange, these spheres of collective life govern in overlapping ways, and the notion of an ontologically separate zoning of social life is not in line with this theory.

Freud offers a liberal answer to the bigger question of how civilisation manages collective in-built aggressions and general resentments. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*' conclusion, he argues that the reign of private property itself is the best means to inhibit the aggressive drive.[21] For Freud, it appears that the very persistence of mode C and the reign of private property provides an outlet, along with culture,

20 Balibar, 241–254.

21 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Stratchey (1930; reis., NY: Norton, 2010), 148–149.

for aggression. Thus, there is a degree of resentment that a society based on private property perpetuates, which Freud seems to cast as necessary for maintaining a degree of repression. We are again reminded of Freud's ambiguous embrace of the progressive era of post-war Europe and simultaneous insistence that something of the symptom of the older order remain within the new. This position puts Freud at loggerheads with Karatani's insistence that a social order governed by commodity exchange limits freedom. At this point of contrast, the invariant principle of nature located within the core of subjectivity – what we elaborated above as mode D – or an internalising of the aggressive drive not determined by consciousness comes into focus. Karatani is utilising the Freudian apparatus differently than Freud himself did and with different political objectives. For Karatani, Freud's novel discovery is the invariant dimension that enhances the zone of freedom for human beings in ways that link that freedom as a collective, subjective form of freedom beyond repression but attuned to the persistence of aggression. In other words, for Karatani, capitalism fails to manage the constitutive problem of subjective aggression because the very resolution of the problem is only exacerbated, not granted the space for a mode of exchange wherein constitutive antagonisms can be more thoroughly worked through.

Karatani's invariant theory of libidinal economy comes into greater focus for the field of libidinal economy when we compare it not only with Freud's liberal account but also with the heterodox Marxist work by Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (1974). Both Lyotard and Karatani, at first blush, have much in common: both have sought to rework Kantian philosophies of representation and critique, and both philosophers argue for rethinking collective liberation by way of the death drive. However, we immediately sense the significant difference between their ways of conceiving death drive when we look at Lyotard's work:

> We must grasp the fact that the system of capital is not the site of the occultation of an alleged use-value which would be anterior to it – this is the romanticism of alienation, Christianity – but primarily that it is in a sense more than capital, more ancient, more extended; and then that these so-called abstract signs, susceptible to provisional measurement and calculation, are in themselves libidinal.[22]

The "abstract signs" that Lyotard references in this passage are Klossowskian phantasms, or ultimately unexchangeable remainders of *jouissance*. In Pierre Klossowski's idea of the phantasm, although Plato's Republic no longer exists, there are no longer cities or government – it is only in the field of economics that the conspiracy of the

22 Jean Francois Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (1974; reis., Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 81–82.

pulsional social body exists.[23] Like Klossowski, Lyotard thinks exchange as a form of libidinally-charged matter, a "living currency." This radicalisation of the Freudian theory of libido makes commodity exchange a scene where what is at stake is the exchange of enjoyment itself, which calls for an entirely new form of critique. The Marxist distinction between use value and exchange value is no longer useful in this critique. Instead, the phantasms never cancel debts; that is, life and enjoyment are exchanged in commodity exchange. As such, exchange does not reference another order or a signified. Lyotard's notion of exchange is non-dualist, without reference to an outside order founded on alienation. Therefore, in his view, the demand of the masses is not on the side of any invariant principle. Instead, the closest collective demand of the masses is "long live the libidinal!" not "long live the social!"[24] Lyotard's anti-social theory posits that the objects to be traded (for *jouissance*) are incommensurable and incalculable, so any notion of gift is relegated to a Pascalian wager because the gift is beyond reason, unexchangeable. In other words, there is no alterity of *jouissance* because the sensible sign of exchange value dissimulates what Lyotard names the tensor sign, which would then have to be confused with use-value. Lyotard warns:

> He who gives without return must pay. The time of *jouissance* is bought. The time of his ravaged, jubilant, sacred body is converted into cash (and it is expensive). The payment returns him into the cycle, into death. His death is instantiated on the cosmic body.[25]

Responding to Deleuze and Guattari's variety of immanent critique, Lyotard puts forward a mode of critique left to the enemy: "be inside and forget it, that's the position of death drive." Lyotard thus offers a pessimistic and postcritical analysis of libidinal economy. For Lyotard, the superego does not need resurrection or mutation – as articulated above – because, like critique, it only deploys militarist ethics. The superego has an ethics only meant to fend off insurrection against the id. Thus, the projects of critique and psychoanalysis hollow out an interior in which they seek to re-draw the boundaries of energetics. Lyotard probes this interior space in his theories of the "libidinal band," which refers to an assemblage capable of freeing intensities from the repressive strictures of commodity exchange. But this agency does not constitute a well-developed theory of praxis. Lyotard even abandons the entire project of Marxist critique in an infamous distinction between what he shrewdly names "Young Girl Marx" and "Old Man Marx." Little Girl Marx, or the early Marx

23 Pierre Klossowski, *Living Currency*, trans. Vernon Cisney, Nicolae Morar, and Daniel W. Smith (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 91.

24 Klossowski, 66.

25 Klossowski, 184.

interested in the theory of revolution as a utopian achievement of nonalienation, represents only a phantasy of a non-alienated region, a form of praxis that only starts the project of religion all over again.[26] Old Man Marx represents a more rational model of praxis that never reaches the totality, remaining forever removed from real action, always waiting for a perfect critique to align with a revolutionary moment that inevitably misses.

Karatani's thinking of the dialectical relation between superego and death drive is a more positive rejoinder to Lyotard's pessimistic idea that capital captures every libidinal force, that every intense sign appears as a coded sign. Karatani is undoubtedly in line with a reading of Marx that does not shy away from religion. Indeed, associationism establishes a form of religion in modernity, although this is an incomplete project. Karatani thinks of a coming world republic on a socialist basis, which has removed commodity exchange as the primary mode of organisation. However, this associationism is not a search for identity, or the localisation of desire, masculinisation, becoming conscious, power, or knowledge as Lyotard would have it; it is based on an invariant impulse of freedom from the hold of commodity exchange on social life. For Lyotard, (and even for Freud, too) there is no way out of mode C. In contrast, for Karatani, there is a dialectical logic to revolutionary upsurges that point our attention and analysis towards the unsocial sociability that can be processed in common civic and political life. In Part 2 of this chapter, we turn to where we locate this domain of social life, or what we have called the other scene. From this insight, we will then apply further thinking to what it implies for political organisation and ways to overcome the dominance of mode C. And as we have developed thus far, revolutionary subjectivity will contain a remainder of unsocial sociability and superegoic forces will form around these remainders in concrete materialist ways. This is an insight for libidinal economy; subjectivity struggles to overcome social relations dominated by mode C, and this struggle points to a regulative idea, to something which cannot be achieved through reason alone, to something which Enlightenment and education cannot overcome.

Why is it helpful to think of this dialectic as aiming towards enacting reciprocal forms of social exchange and abolishing commodity exchange? The theory of the gift is at the very heart of this question, and there is sizeable anthropological literature that has accounted for the psychological dimension of primitive gift economies. In his *The Structure of World History*, Karatani is attentive to these lineages of research and knowledge. The fact that tribal and prefeudal societies had extensive and complex gift economies shows something about how gift economies contain the potential for a society not based on egoism. In his famous work *The Gift* (1925), the anthropologist Marcel Mauss assumes that gift exchange primarily involves social solidarity. In other words, we must learn something about the potential for solidarity in

26 Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 107.

the modern world from gift economies. However, as an aside, it is important to note that Mauss was not a communist and was a state bureaucrat deeply suspicious of the Bolshevik refusal to pay the debts of the czar after they seized power. Mauss wanted to maintain a capitalist mode of exchange and perhaps implement the wisdom of gift economies onto that edifice. This is not the case with the communist thinker Karatani, who sees a non-representable upsurge and movement of communism in gift exchange. Marx described communism as the movement aimed towards abolishing all things.

Other psychoanalytic thinkers have turned to gift exchange in their historical analysis. Norman O. Brown discusses societies of gift exchange as if they are beyond repression. In *Life Against Death* (1959), he situates the death drive as the logic of historical time: "only repressed life is in time," and "repression and the repetition compulsion generate historical time."[27] Brown is a mystical Freudian who believed that psychoanalysis provided the necessary intellectual equipment for ushering humanity towards a mystical break from the bondage of the death drive. For Brown, breaks from the death drive usher the subject, almost messianically, into eternity, or the mode of unrepressed bodies. *Life Against Death* is a psychoanalytic theory of history searching for sensual release from repressive social conditions. Brown follows Freud's statement in *The Economic Problem in Masochism* that, "the cultural task – the life task? – of the libido, namely, is to make the destructive instinct harmless.[28] As modern civilisation is instrumentally structured in regimentation and repressive order, it cannot free *eros* or the life drive. Thus, a complete break from the constrictors of repressive society requires deploying the pleasure principle as a form of negativity. Thus, unlike the invariant perspective, Brown, like Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*, argues that the pleasure principle precedes its domination by the reality principle, and that there is a missing pleasure principle to restore. This view informs a praxis which suggests that revolutionary struggle ought to restore a lost libidinal paradise.[29] It is important to note that there are theoretical and political differences between Marcuse and Brown, particularly about questions of liberation and death drive. In his critical review of Brown's *Life Against Death*, Marcuse rails against the mystical conception of the death drive and Brown's exaggerated stance on liberation, arguing that Brown effectively reduces the question of liberation to "transubstantiation." As Marcuse writes, "Brown's 'way out' leaves the Establishment behind – that

27 Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, 2nd ed. (1959; reis., Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1985), 93.

28 Sigmund Freud, *The Economic Problem in Masochism*, trans. James Stratchey (1924; reis., London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 260.

29 See Bernard Stiegler's excellent discussion of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* in *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 44–45.

is, the way out is indeed mystical, mystification" and notes that his theory "mystifies the possibilities of liberation."[30]

Against the overly sensualist and biologically derived account of libido and pleasure principle as we find in Brown, and to an extent also in Marcuse, or the more pessimist Augustinian theory of libido we find in Klossowski and Lyotard, Karatani's invariant perspective does not situate the problem of liberation as a pure overcoming or as an impossibly rare event. Karatani's account is far more dialectical; as discussed, this is a praxis that must be centred on altering mode C commodity exchange to enact the libidinal and affective shifts we have elaborated thus far.

Karatani is not alone in the libidinal economy field, and other thinkers have developed similar proposals that combine insights of a Freudian libidinal economy with Marxist praxis. The German utopian Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch is one such thinker to present a libidinal theory of revolution. It is very much in line with the invariant perspective. In a brief passage in *The Structure of World History*, Karatani cites a concept developed by Bloch, the "Not-Yet-Conscious," and suggests that this idea gets close to what he means by mode D, but Karatani does not further specify. In Bloch's *Principle of Hope* (1954), the Not-Yet-Conscious is raised as a specific rebuttal to the bourgeois element within psychoanalytic thought that bases the proposal of the unconscious on the "totally regressive proposition" that "the repressed is for us the model of the unconscious."[31] For Bloch, the bourgeois class basis of psychoanalysts perverted the development of its theory:

> More than ever the bourgeoisie lacks the material incentive to separate the Not-Yet-Conscious from the No-Longer-Conscious. All psychoanalysis, with repression as its central notion, sublimation as a mere subsidiary notion (for substitution, for hopeful illusions), is therefore necessarily retrospective. Admittedly, it developed in an earlier age than the present one, around the turn of the century it took part in a so-called struggle against the conventional lies of a civilized mankind. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis developed in a class which was superannuated even then, in a society without future. So Freud exaggerated the dimensions of the libido of these parasites and recognized no other onward, let alone upward drive.[32]

The Not-yet-Conscious does not emerge within a ruling class. It appears in liberatory moments and uprisings within a proletariat or "rising class." Bloch cites examples of the French Revolution, peasant rebellions during the Middle Ages, and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. These uprisings all shared a common relation to the

30 Herbert Marcuse, "Love Mystified: A Critique of Norman O. Brown," *Commentary Magazine*, February 1967.

31 Ernst Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (1954; reis., Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 137.

32 Bloch, 137.

Not-Yet-Conscious that manifested itself in the slogans and images of revolution that pointed towards nothing short of "the realm of freedom." Revolutionary movements, rising classes, and the proletariat in certain situations of the class struggle in history possess a preconscious of what is to come, thus locating "the psychological birthplace of the New."[33] Although Bloch's conception of the class dimension of the Not-Yet-Conscious romanticises the proletariat – "rarely," Bloch writes, "does this class display neurotic features"[34] – this theory ties in directly to his more expansive theory of utopia. The Not-Yet-Conscious breaks bourgeois "contemplation," or the idea that bourgeois consciousness can only truly think "What Has Become." The Not-Yet-Conscious point is reached where "hope itself, this authentic expectant emotion in the forward dream, no longer just appears as a merely self-based mental feeling, but in a conscious-known way as utopian function."[35]

What Bloch's Not-Yet-Conscious opens for the broader invariant perspective is a way of thinking about the break in consciousness that a revolutionary action brings about. The Not-Yet-Conscious identifies an element of a fundamental newness in the break, uprising or revolution; this contrasts with the Freudian model of the infamous "return of the repressed," in which something repressed determines what is to come. For Bloch, there remains an invariant element that is not destined to a bad infinity or an utterly inescapable death-driven repetition of the old in the birth of the new.

Part 2: Karatani's praxis: Associationism

To fully grasp how Karatani theorises a break from commodity exchange, we now discuss Karatani's praxis of associationism, a series of tactics and political organising strategies aimed at dissolving state and capital (mode B and mode C). Karatani critiques historical materialism and Marxist-Leninist theories of praxis by arguing that a major flaw in this wider field of theory – broadly known as historical materialism – is that its praxis led to conceptions of the state and the nation as intrinsic parts of the superstructure of society, on par with art or philosophy. These revolutionary socialist movements, including Marxist-Leninism, notionally sought a form of socialism beyond the nation-state form. However, they could not dissolve the nation or state as distinct categories of social life because both are inextricably bound up in modes of exchange. In Marxist theory, particularly historical materialism, people tend to privilege a revolutionary praxis focused on seizing the means of production of capitalist society, or what Marx called the "base" structures of capitalist so-

33 Bloch, 113.

34 Bloch, 128.

35 Bloch, 144.

ciety (i.e., industry, labour, and other centres of production). Karatani argues, on the contrary, that the failures of 20th-century Marxism, specifically the communist revolutions in Russia, China, and elsewhere, were due to general neglect of thinking revolution at the level of the modes of exchange. Once these 20th-century movements seized the means of production, transforming the superstructure – the wider spheres of culture and education – was the primary task. The nation and the state were predicted to wither through enlightening the people. However, as we know, these movements never adequately transformed the nation or the state – and it was in these domains that the most profound violence and upheaval occurred.

In the post-Bolshevik revolution period (1917–1940s), as in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the task of the ongoing revolution or the "permanent revolution" was set on overcoming the imaginary structures of nation and state to drive towards a communist arrangement of society. This task called for enlightenment, that is, the proper education of the masses (Maoism), the cultivation of a trained vanguard (Leninism), and so on. However, this task left untouched, or did not privilege, revolutionising the modes of exchange. So the modes of exchange largely remained tethered to forms of commodity exchange and were held within the purview of capitalist modes of exchange, albeit with a planned and centralised/nationalised economy. In other words, the praxis Karatani prioritises revolutionising modes of commodity exchange to forms of reciprocal gift exchange.

In Karatani's Borromean logic, then, 20th-century revolutionary communist movements seized the state, nation, and economy, thus controlling the three spheres of revolutionary demands coming out of the French Revolution: liberty (market), fraternity (nation), and egalitarianism (state). Freedom represents the primary mode of exchange; fraternity represents the people's national unity; egalitarianism represents the state-form. However, in Karatani's critique, 20th-century Marxism falsely saw the state (egalitarianism) and national (fraternity) spheres as superstructural extensions of society and thus saw these spheres as fundamentally rooted in the base mode of production. As such, they were theorised to wither through programs of education. But thinking these categories as superstructural effects failed to adequately link the project of superstructure struggles, what we might call *representational* struggles – such as education of the masses, the promotion of revolutionary art and culture – to base struggles (or struggles of production and labour). As Karatani has argued, this occurred because they neglected the modes of exchange inherent in the state form – and exchange being the core component of the base.[36] Thus, what occurred in 20th-century socialist movements of state communism, as we know full well, was that capital ended up holding hegemony over social relations within the nation and the state – that is, commodity exchange eventually overwhelmed all three spheres. Perhaps there is no better evidence of

36 Karatani, *The Structure of World History*, 2.

this than contemporary Chinese communism, which has fully adapted to capitalist modes of exchange, and the degree to which the national sphere remains tied to a communist zeitgeist is mostly in mythical and cultural forms.

Karatani's critique points to the broader premise of historical materialism – that the modes of production are the primary site of revolutionary struggle – not being a thesis that bears the weight of recent history. Against this conception, Karatani argues that the state and nation should be understood as extensions of the base – namely, as extensions of dominant modes of exchange. What might a praxis that emphasises the modes of exchange over that of production look like? In answering this question, it is first important to ask whether there is effective resistance to capital at the level of the mode of production because if you take the governing hegemony of mode C seriously, you will understand that its proliferation extends to all areas of social reproductive life as well as the industrial labour process. Therefore, resistance within the circulation sphere is a preferred site to wage struggle because the subject resisting in this ubiquitous sphere holds a higher potential to resist as a free subject. They may be less encumbered, for example, by superegoic constructions that might plague a worker in a corporation or factory who must deal with bosses. Resistance to mode C at the productive level still maintains the edifice of capital valuation, and no resistance is possible if we limit ourselves to thinking resistance to mode C along the production process alone; as Marxists, it is necessary to grasp capital as a totality. Karatani observes, "if workers decide to resist capital, they should do so not from the site where this is difficult but rather from the site where they enjoy a dominant position vis à vis capital."[37] Resistance at the exchange site is the optimal form of resistance to mode C for proletarians to create a universal subject attentive to the dynamics of the superego and death drive we discussed above. Suppose Freud's fundamental insight apropos the "psychic tribunal" of the superego is indeed correct. In that case, resistance at the site of labour, where the subject is the least free, involves entanglement with the double bind of the law within the repressive sphere of labour. There is thus a reason informed by the insights of libidinal economy to focus praxis against capitalism within the sphere of circulation and consumption. In theory, resistance will involve collective action less prone to resentments, repressions, and violence. Since capital forces us to work but not buy, a consumer struggle retains a degree of autonomous freedom of the individual. It thus enables resistance to capitalism to not arbitrarily separate other struggles from working-class struggles.

Struggles against mode C taking the form of circulation struggles also offer an opportunity to create new currencies and credit systems. The primary tactic in these struggles is the boycott which has a specific advantage – it is legal. Boycotts typically take two forms: refusal to buy and sell, and for the method of the boycott to

37 Karatani, 290.

work, an alternative economy must exist. Tactically, this includes the boycott within consumer capitalism, but the boycott Karatani envisions takes the role of refusing to sell and to buy. To compel people in this direction, noncapitalist alternative consumer economies must be created. In a more refined level of organisation, in which forms of state power might open for proletarian takeover, there is also a central international dimension to associationist praxis. This dimension drives towards a new world system of states centred around reciprocal gift exchange, using tactics such as voluntary disarmament of weapons, free exchange of production technology, and abolishing intellectual property restrictions. What would an international alliance formed around the gift look like across nation-states? Perhaps things such as mutual disarmament plans and sharing technology across nations would function as gifts that might eventually challenge the hegemony of the real bases of capital and nation.

There are immediate challenges that the associationist praxis opens: questions of scalability – how can methods of boycott compel large swaths of the population to take on anticapitalist agitation, especially when the predominance of liberal modes of political critique leaves the deleterious effects of commodity exchange unexamined? Does there not need to be a prior consciousness-raising movement against capital at the site where people are least free, precisely in the sphere of labour? Further, perhaps most surprising in the associationist theory of praxis is how it foregoes the period in a revolutionary sequence, identified by Marx as the "dictatorship of the proletariat," or the stage in which the proletariat seizes state power directly. Perhaps the question of power seizing, and the inevitable violence that comes with it, is not theorised as a necessary sequence of revolutionary struggle due to Karatani's emphasis on modes of exchange over that of the political as a distinct or separate sphere of social life.

At the same time as these critiques of associationism are real and compelling, there are other benefits to the associationist praxis for Marxist struggles today. For example, associationism can be thought to align with existing theories of communisation and insurrectionary struggles. The movements that opened with the anti-WTO protests in the early 1990s in Seattle, known broadly as the "anti-globalisation" struggles, up to the Occupy movement and Black Lives Matter – all deploy the tactics of what Joshua Clover refers to as "circulation struggles."[38] These insurrections seek property destruction and stoppages to circulating goods and commodities and are thus aiming to halt the ease of circulation globally. While these circulation struggle tactics of revolt align with a shared goal of disrupting the dominance of mode C, it is not clear that these tactics are proactive in forging an alternative mode of exchange through communal alternatives to currency exchange, the introduction of gift economies based on reciprocity, etc.

38 Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings* (NY: Verso Books, 2016).

In conclusion, we find Karatani's thinking of the dialectical relation between superego and death drive offers a more positive rejoinder to liberal and even to some radical Marxist theories of libidinal economy, such as Lyotard. They find no way to transcend the deadlocks of constitutive aggression and asocial affects that capitalism foments. It is not merely the exchange of commodities in the market sphere that can overcome "unsocial sociability," an entirely new mode of exchange premised on the gift and reciprocity must be introduced in the domain of common civic and political life. These are insights for a radical politics of the commune and anticapitalist politics as much as they are insights for a more comprehensive and revolutionary theory of libidinal economy.

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