

Maurizio Lazzarato

SIGNS AND MACHINES

CAPITALISM AND THE PRODUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY



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Maurizio Lazzarato

Translated by Joshua David Jordan

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Mixed Semiotics

A subjective fact is always the product of an assemblage of heterogeneous semiotic levels.

—Félix Guattari, "Agencements. Transistances. Persistances,"
Seminar of December 12, 1981

Although we can distinguish different semiotics for the needs of analysis, modes of expression are always the result of "mixed semiotics" which are at once signifying, symbolic, and asignifying. We will here describe how the stock market functions, how a medium such as the cinema, the infant's "subjectivity," and the organization of service sector labor function as mixed semiotic assemblages. We must underscore that, in each of these cases, linguistic, cognitive, and communicational semiotics do not always play the principal role. Accounting for mixed semiotics will profoundly alter our understanding of enunciation since all these semiotics—and not only language—constitute sources of enunciation and focal points of subjectivation. Analyzing these different cases, we will focus closely on the shift from the individuated subject to subjectivation carried out by capitalist mechanisms as well as Guattarian theory.

1. The Trader's Machinic Subjectivity

A caricatural yet widespread version of the "subject" is *homo economicus*, a subject capable of exercising sovereign rational control over his choices and actions. The financial trader represents its fully realized paradigm, although his subjectivity has nothing sovereign or rational about it.

Finance is the prime example of diagrammatic semiotics in which signs function in place of the "objects" to which they refer. The sign flows circulating from computer to computer in real time constitute a reality that is as objective as material flows; they influence subjectivity and the functional links in the system which set share prices and act directly on the "real" economy.

In the trading room there are only diagrams, only curves traced by a worldwide computer network, which indicate the upward and downward movements of share prices. Several semiotics are already mobilized here: "impotentized signs" limited to representing price history, but also "power signs," "particle-signs," "sign-points," which stimulate, anticipate, make prices happen—in short, these are diagrammatic signs that transform the "real." Unlike the referential function, there is not one reality but a multiplicity of heterogeneous realities: the reality of the "real" economy, the reality of forecasts about the economy, as well as the reality of share prices and the reality of expectations of these prices rising or falling. The "stock market" does not refer to a single reality.

The trader's "human" subjectivity establishes focal points of proto-enunciation both in the (higher and lower) price differentials of assets and in the productivity differentials of the "real" economy forecast by the calculations of machines. These differentials represent nodes of proto-subjectivation in which human subjectivity (or,

rather, components of subjectivity—understanding, memory, attention, perception, etc.) come to fit and combine with machinic proto-subjectivity.

Diagrams, curves, and data "speak," "express" themselves, and "communicate," for, by making visible, comparable, and manipulable the most diverse flows of information (machinic translatability), they forcefully contribute to decision-making and price-setting. Diagrams provide the thresholds of proto-subjectivity from which human subjectivity determines its choices. With each threshold it crosses to make a decision, to express an evaluation, and to indicate a price, subjectivity has no choice but to rely on machines, asignifying writing systems, and information codified and produced by mathematical instruments.

Enunciation would be completely different without these a-semiotic modes of writing and without machines. Given the current conditions of deterritorialization and the phenomenal accumulation of information to process, enunciation would be quite simply impossible. Curves, diagrams, and machines are indispensable components of enunciation, of "non-human" sites of partial subjectivation.

That signs (machines, objects, diagrams, etc.) constitute the focal points of proto-enunciation and proto-subjectivity means that they *suggest, enable, solicit, instigate, encourage, and prevent certain actions, thoughts, affects or promote others*. Machines, objects, and signs do more than influence certain actions, thoughts, or affects; through asignifying semiotics, machines communicate directly with other machines, entailing often unforeseeable and incalculable diagrammatic effects on the real.¹

The freedom, independence, and autonomy of the individual economic subject are undermined by still other forces influencing

him, making him act and decide without necessarily accessing consciousness. What type of subjectivity and what semiotics are mobilized by these sites of proto-subjection determined by diagrams, computers, and so on? Foremost, as with primitive peoples, the insane, and children, the subjectivity is transivist, transindividual, and the semiotics symbolic.

In order to account for the subjective behavior involved in asset pricing, convention theory and cognitive capitalist theory presuppose agents' mimetic behavior. The intersubjectivity, language, and communication of the mimetic relationship are supposed to supplant the methodological individualism of *homo economicus*, founded on rationality and sovereignty. Unfortunately, mimetic behavior is irreducible to linguistic, cognitive, or communicational intersubjectivity.

Without in the least partaking of the philosophical theory that underpins the notion of financial behavior *as* mimetic behavior, we must emphasize that for its creator, René Girard, mimetic emulation is above all the emulation of desire. One does not imitate ways of being, one does not imitate ideas or the "cognitive basis" of the "other"; one imitates desire. If mimesis implies the emulation of desire, its constitution and dissemination/circulation cannot, however, be explained by communication, language, or cognition, because affects undermine precisely the communicational, informational, linguistic, and cognitive models.

"Mimetic rationality" is not linguistic-cognitive—far from it. For affect suspends the speaker/hearer enunciative dichotomy. "Affect sticks to subjectivity," but as much to the enunciator's subjectivity as to that of his addressee. Spinoza, Guattari suggests, perfectly understood this transivist feature of affect: "(from the fact of conceiving a thing like ourselves to be affected with any

emotion, we are ourselves to be affected with a like emotion') [...]. Affect is thus essentially a pre-personal category, installed 'before' the circumscription of identities, and manifested by unlocatable transferences, unlocatable with regard to their origin as well as with regard to their destination."²

Affect remains "vague, atmospheric," Guattari says, in other words, it is not founded on systems of distinct oppositions as in the linguistic, communicational, or cognitive models. It is therefore quite reductive to explain mimetic behavior via linguistic, communicative, or cognitive rationality. Somewhere there are downward trends and there are upward trends in the same way as "mana" circulates in animist societies. Mimetic communication occurs through *contagion* and not through *cognition*.

When it is a matter of choosing, deciding, and exercising "freedom," the trader's human subjectivity, language, signifying semiotics, and cognitive power do not rise above but instead act, are of a piece, with machines, power signs, symbolic semiotics, and affects. Machines and power signs, no less than the individual's "freedom," are constitutive of his decision-making, choices, and *pour-soi*.

The trader's subjectivity is undoubtedly a "machinic subjectivity" whose operations can only be determined by way of the functional whole of humans-machines. Mathematical systems, data banks, interconnected computer networks, telephone networks, and so on, are part of the financier's subjectivity. Through him, groups, lobbies, interested economic and political parties, and schools of thought act and express themselves. His enunciation also depends on mimetic action and, furthermore, on the laws and rules that permit certain operations and not others, or the loosening of both laws and rules as the State has endeavored to do for the last forty years. Instead of

a rational subject who controls information and his choices, *homo economicus* is a mere terminal of asignifying, symbolic, and signifying semiotics and of non-linguistic constituents which for the most part escape his awareness. We are not only well beyond the individualism and rationality of *homo economicus*, we have moved beyond “cognitive capitalism.”

In this context, signifying semiologies, discourses, cognitive activities, fulfill a specific function: controlling the deterritorialization and desubjectivation the diagrammatic semiotics and symbolic semiologies define. The individual subject, his sovereignty and rational behavior, ruined by the real workings of the stock market, must literally be reconstructed, refabricated, by signifying semiologies, communication, and cognition. The discourse of economists, media, experts, and judges³ create the belief that it is indeed the individual subject who acts and who thus must be compensated as a result. Through the semiotics of signification, stories, information, and commentary are produced which construct and legitimate the function and the role of these “individuated subjects” (traders) in public opinion.

Signifying semiologies cannot be reduced to “ideology.”⁴ Narratives and discourses that speak of *homo economicus*, the freedom of the entrepreneur, the self-regulating power of the markets, and so on, have no superstructural function, since it is sign machines that produce a specific and fundamental commodity: the individuated subject. The “ideological force” of signifying semiologies does not lie in the fact that it prevents us from thinking or in mere manipulation (although it can do both as well), but rather in its ability to effect a mutation in subjectivity. The refrains of neoliberalism (be an asset, be a self-starter, get rich, etc.) are there to ensure this happens. The latter do not hide a reality from us; instead, they endow us with

a relationship to time, space, and others by making us exist somewhere in a world that refers every subjectivity which capitalist deterritorialization produces to the entrepreneur, individual success, competition, social Darwinism, and so on.

2. The Mixed Semiotics of the “Human”

This opposition—on the one side, desire-drive, desire-disorder, desire-death, desire-aggression, and, on the other, interaction [...]—seems to me an utterly reactionary reference.

—Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*

In the last years of his life, Guattari often drew on Daniel Stern’s book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*⁵ in order to map a cartography of the semiotic, affective, and existential components that contribute to the production of subjectivity. In Stern’s work, preverbal subjectivity, expressed through asignifying symbolic semiotics, is described in its problematic relationship to the linguistic “social machine.” According to Guattari, linguistic theory and analytic philosophy systematically ignore or gloss over this pre-individual subjectivity, which is at the root of all modes of subjectivation.

Stern’s book undermines the unity of the subject by enumerating the multiplicity of “selves,” semiotics, relations, and affects, especially preverbal ones, constituting him. The approach proves particularly enlightening when trying to apprehend the existential and self-referential dimension at the heart of Guattari’s theory of subjectivity. Far from passing solely through language, cognition, or communication, the relation to the self presupposes a self-positioning that is existential, pathic, and affective prior to being linguistic or cognitive. Subjective mutation is not primarily discursive, because it

is situated at the focal point of (existential) non-discursivity at the core of subjectivity. It is starting from this existential dimension that there is an emergence, a processuality, a taking on of consistency, of subjectivity. Only from this asignifying, unnamable, and incommunicable core can there be signification, language, and narrative. The point has important political implications since this same pre-individual subjectivity is brought to bear by capitalist machinic enslavements to exploit affects, rhythms, movements, durations, intensities, and asignifying semiotics.

1. The Emergent Self and Asignifying Semiotics

Before acquiring language, infants actively construct forms of perceiving, communicating, and experiencing the self and the world through very rich and differentiated nonverbal semiotization. Stern's work underscores what is from the outset the trans-subjective nature of the earliest experiences of the infant, who is yet unable to distinguish between a sense of self and other.

Stern describes three "senses of self" (the sense of an emergent self, the sense of a core self, and the sense of a subjective self) that precede the "sense of verbal self." "Sense of self" does not mean, in the first three cases, "concept of," "knowledge of" or "awareness of,"⁶ as these experiences do not pass through language, consciousness, or representation.

According to Guattari, the different senses of self preceding the linguistic sense of self are in no way stages in the Freudian sense but "levels of subjectivation," nonverbal focal points and vectors of subjectivation that manifest themselves throughout life in parallel with speech and consciousness. The three first senses of self are expressed through mixed, asignifying and symbolic semiotics.

Between the infant's birth and the first two months of life, he experiences the "genesis" of an "emergent interpersonal link," the genesis of what Stern calls the "sense of emergent self." There are three principal ways in which the infant experiences this: amodal perception, categorical affects, and vitality affects. The infant has a great ability to select from and organize the general and abstract features of what happens to him. Intensities, temporal figures, rhythms, and movements are features common to every sensorial form and the infant can easily identify and, from there, transpose them from one sense to another, from sight to touch, for example, or from touch to hearing.

The abstract and amodal features of what happens are apprehended through two different affective processes: categorical affects, which express anger, surprise, joy, sadness, and so on, and vitality affects, which express changes in mental states and intensity thresholds in his way of feeling. Vitality affects are "captured by dynamic, kinetic terms, such as 'surging,' 'fading away,' 'fleeting,' 'explosive,' 'crescendo,' 'decrescendo,' 'bursting,' 'drawn out,' and so on."⁷ Dance, music, as well as the duration of video-cinematographic images are, according to Stern, realities that best capture these intensities, these "ways of feeling."

This global, subjective world in which there is not yet a division between subject and object, in which the self and others are indistinguishable, in which communication occurs by contagion, "is and remains," according to Stern and Guattari, the "fundamental domain of human subjectivity." It operates outside of consciousness and represents the "matrix" (Stern), the "existential core" (Guattari), of experiences from which "thoughts and perceived forms and identifiable acts and verbalized feelings will later arise. [...] Finally, it is the ultimate reservoir that can be dipped into for all creative

experience.”⁸ All learning and all creative acts depend on this sense of emergent self. “This domain of experience remains active during the formative period of each of the subsequent domains of sense of self” as well as during later learning and creative processes.

We have access to these modes of semiotization in childhood, through psychosis, drug use, and certain altered states of consciousness, but also through artistic creation, falling in love, political passions, existential crises, and, even discursively, through philosophy.⁹

2. *The Sense of a “Core Self,” the Sense of a “Subjective Self,” and Symbolic Semiotics*

The sense of a “core self” (the self as opposed to the other and the self with the other) constitutes the experience of self and other as “entities” with “a physical presence, action, affect, and continuity.” The sense of core self depends on “numerous interpersonal capacities.”¹⁰ This is still not a cognitive construction (for it occurs outside consciousness) but rather an integration of experience and a “memory without words” which provide the bases for all the more complex senses of self.

According to Stern, the period spanning two to six months is perhaps the most exclusively and intensely social period of the infant’s life (the social smile, vocalizations directed at others, the mutual gaze, etc.).¹¹

The sense of a subjective self occurs when the infant discovers that he has a “mind” and that others do too, that experiences, content, affects, and emotions are shareable (or not shareable) and can be communicated without words because language is yet unavailable. Self and other are no longer only core entities with a certain physical presence, action, affect, and continuity; they are entities with “internal and subjective states.”

How does one relate with the subjective experience of others, share their affects, without the use of words? As Guattari and Simondon (or Spinoza) might put it, one does so through “transi-tivist, transindividual” subjectivity.

Between the ages of nine and twelve months, the infant is able to coordinate his “mental states,” such as “joint attention,” “intentions,” and “affective states.” Vitality (dynamic and kinetic) affects and categorical affects (joy, sadness) constitute the material enabling the infant’s “attunement” and sharing, which presuppose the existence of a “shared framework” of signification and the means for “preverbal” communication (gesture, posture, facial expression and vocal expression, etc.).¹² Affects remain the “predominant mode and substance of communications with [the] mother”; other people— affects coupled with gestures, posture, nonverbal action, and vocalizations—are the “most immediate origins” of and the protolinguistic conditions for the emergence and acquisition of language.¹³ As Guattari remarks, “It is at the heart of this proto-social and still preverbal Universe that familial, ethnic, urban, etc. traits are transmitted (let’s call it the Cultural Unconscious).¹⁴

3. *The Sense of a “Verbal Self” and Signifying Semiotics*

The fourth sense of self, the sense of a verbal self, has to do with the *junction* and *disjunction*, the *complementarity* and *gap*, between the verbal and nonverbal parts of subjectivity, between asignifying symbolic semiotics and signifying semiologies. This is because the emergence of language is the source of a cleavage between experience as it is “lived” and as it is “represented.”

If linguistic significations make our experiences with others more easily shareable, they can also make certain parts of these same

experiences inaccessible to others as well as to ourselves. The non-verbal and “global” part of experience and that part of experience converted into words can very well coexist, the verbal part harmoniously enriching and expanding lived (affective) experience. But the latter may also be fractured, rendered poorly by language, consequently forcing experience underground (repression). The adult’s words, “Oh, look at the yellow sunlight,” specify, separate, and fracture the amodal experience of the sunray the infant has.

“The paradox that language can evoke experience that transcends words is perhaps the highest tribute to the power of language. But those are words in poetic use. The words in our daily lives more often do the opposite and either fracture amodal global experience or send it underground.”¹⁵ The three preverbal senses of self are not steps in the formation of the verbal self. They remain independent centers of semiotic and subjective “production” and continue to function in parallel with their own “autonomy” and their own semiotics.

According to Guattari, the way in which linguistics and psychoanalysis conceive of the relationship between verbal and nonverbal semiotics raises the same political problem. The theories are informed by a model founded on the opposition between a raw world of desire, drives, instinct, animality, and spontaneity, on the one hand, and, on the other, a universe of social order, the symbolic, law, and prohibition expressed by language and signifying semiotics. The semiotic-linguistic model is in reality a political model. In the same way as a supposedly undifferentiated economy of desire necessitates signifying, symbolic semiotics, the law, and taboos to provide its structure, in the process of political subjectivation we need the political party and its “democratic centralism” in order to structure and discipline the spontaneity of subjectivities.

Butler considers the model of “symbolic castration” and the “law” at once necessary and inevitable in the formation of both speech and society. The idea of a “prediscursive libidinal multiplicity that effectively presupposes a sexuality ‘before the law’”¹⁶ is part of a “romantic vision” of subjectivity even for Foucault, since we can say nothing about and do nothing with a reality prior to language, the law, the symbolic, and the taboo, contrary to what Stern demonstrates. Access to the “real” of the undifferentiated can only be assured through the “mediation” of the symbolic, the law, taboo, and the signifier.

Since desire partakes of dream, fantasy, and representation, there will always be a choice to make between a “pleasure principle” and a “reality principle.” For Bernard Stiegler, the “drive” closest to animality must undergo a symbolic “sublimation” in order to reestablish the necessary functions of the “super ego” and the “law” destroyed by capitalism. Virno, for his part, follows to the letter Wittgenstein’s aphorism according to which “speech” replaces “drive.” Language completely reconfigures the world of drives “by shaping them from top to bottom,” for it teaches us to express, with words and grammar, what is of the order of affect. In Badiou’s party-less Marxist-Leninism, the opposition between the animal and the subject turns on the opposition between “desiring spontaneity” and “organization.” Guattari challenges the model on the grounds that, as we have just seen, the nonverbal semiotics of subjectivity have “absolutely nothing undifferentiated about them”; they on the contrary “involve highly elaborate operations of assemblage, syntax, and modes of semiotization that do not necessarily imply the existence of metalanguage and overcoding in order to interpret, direct, normalize, and order them.”¹⁷ They are neither poorer nor richer in language; they are different.

The point is not to devalue language and signifying semiotics, but rather, as opposed to what linguistics and analytic philosophy do, to place ourselves between the discursive and the non-discursive in order to make enunciation and subjectivation “grow from the middle.”

3. Cinema's Mixed Semiotics

We go to the cinema in order to suspend for a moment our usual modes of communication.

—Félix Guattari, “Le divan du pauvre”

A political battle has unfolded and continues to unfold around cinema for control of the effects of subjectivation and desubjectivation that the “non-human” semiotics of the cinematographic image produce on the individuated subject. The three preverbal senses of self, the sense of a verbal self, and semiotics (at once asignifying, symbolic, and signifying) are mobilized by cinematographic machinism which by deterritorializing the image and perception (the “film-eye”) risks undoing, in its way, the unity of the subject.

With the cinema, we have a textbook case of how the signifying machine comes to neutralize, order, and normalize the action of symbolic and asignifying semiotics which exceed dominant significations. By hierarchizing the latter through signifying semiotics, the film industry functions like group psychoanalysis (Guattari), powerfully aiding in the construction of the roles and functions and, especially, in the fabrication of the individuated subject and his unconscious.

Guattari lists precisely the semiotics at work in the cinema:

- the phonic fabric of expression that refers to spoken language (signifying semiology);
- the sonorous but nonphonic fabric that refers to instrumental music (asignifying semiotics);
- the visual fabric that refers to painting (both symbolic and asignifying semiotics);
- the gestures and movements of the human body, etc. (symbolic semiologies);
- the duration, movements, breaks in space and time, gaps, sequences, etc., that make up asignifying “intensities.”¹⁸

The cinema, whose effects derive above all from its use of asignifying symbolic semiotics (“linkages, internal movements of visual images, colors, sounds, rhythms, gestures, speech, etc.”¹⁹), represented for a brief moment the possibility of moving beyond signifying semiologies, of bypassing personological individuations, and opening up possibilities that were not already inscribed in dominant subjectivations.

Film images cannot be directly encoded, marked out, and framed by the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes that ensure the relative stability and invariance of meanings as in language. With cinema, it becomes possible to rediscover the features of pre-signifying semiotics in a post-signifying world. The cinema does not put two components of expression (signifier/signified) into play, but rather, as in primitive societies, “n”: the images, sounds, and words spoken and written (texts), movements, positions, colors, rhythms, and so on. Depending on the component that prevails, there are different modalities of reading and seeing a film. “It can be seen through its colors or rhythms, through its images, through the chain of affects it creates, and there is absolutely no univocal,

necessary, or unmotivated relationship between a signifying chain and the contents signified."²⁰

As in primitive societies, images (symbolic semiotics) and intensities, movements, intervals, temporalities, and velocities (asignifying semiotics) reintroduce ambiguity, uncertainty, and instability into denotation and signification. Expression once again becomes polyvocal, multidimensional, and multireferential. "The semiotic components of film glide by each other without ever fixing or stabilizing themselves in a deep syntax of latent contents or in transformational systems that would lead, superficially, to manifest contents."²¹

The same impossibility of formalizing filmic language is analyzed by Pasolini. For the Italian poet, the cinema as well as an important part of human reality and of things themselves are expressed through systems of signs, in other words, by nonverbal (images or "im-signs") and non-human "languages." Images from memory and dream all have the features of film sequences, they are "almost prehuman events, or on the border of what is human. In any case, they are pregrammatical and even premorphological (dreams take place on the level of the unconscious, as do mnemonic processes)."²²

The cinema is at once "fundamentally oneiric" and a "hypnotic monstrem." The "irrational" elements of the language of film, "barbarous, irregular, aggressive, visionary," cannot be eliminated; thus the difficulty in establishing an "institutional film language."²³ Indeed, these features, which Pasolini terms "irrational," make up the modalities of expression of affects, intensities, velocities, etc., whose functioning depends on a logic other than that of the individuated subject's rationality.

The cinema is thus capable, if for only an instant, of making us "orphans: single, amnesiac, unconscious, and eternal," and removing

us from the social divisions of labor that assign us a role, a function, and a meaning.²⁴

The intensities, movements, and duration of film images can produce effects of desubjectivation and disindividuation in the same way that childhood, drugs, dreams, passion, creation, or madness can strip the subject of his identity and social functions. Cinema suspends perception and the habitual coordinates of vision, making the sensorimotor system malfunction. Images and movements no longer depend on the movement of the object nor on the brain; instead, they are the automatic products of a machinic apparatus. In turn, montage disrupts the links between ordinary situations, images, and movements by compelling us to enter into different space-time blocs.

But instead of eluding dominant subjectivations, film images can, conversely, chain us to them. They are only focal points of subjectivation. As vectors of subjectivation, they can only trigger initiate, or open processes of heterogenesis (both the production of heterogeneity and processual genesis). The consistency of subjective heterogeneity depends on the interplay of a multiplicity of forces, apparatuses, and techniques. It depends, in the final analysis, on a politics and an aesthetics. The ethico-political battle, which the American cultural industry has resoundingly won, has been fought over this focal point of heterogeneity. The industry has worked to neutralize and stifle heterogeneity by exploiting, like psychoanalysis, personological and familialist signifiers.

The shift of cinema's multireferential and polysemic semiotics toward dominant values and the domestication of the "oneiric monster" and its "irrational elements" have occurred through the reduction of symbolic semiologies and asignifying semiotics to the models of capitalist subjectivity.

The commercial cinema is undeniably familialist, Oedipian, and reactionary. [...] Its 'mission' is to adapt people to the models required by mass consumption."²⁵ If it is incapable of establishing as invariable and stable significations as language, it can still produce models of subjectivity that have the force of examples, the obviousness of physical presence. Cinema acts on the depths of subjectivity because it provides subjectivity with identities and models of behavior by exploiting asignifying and symbolic semiotics. In this way, it functions like "group psychoanalysis," normalizing intensities, hierarchizing semiotics, and confining them within the individuated subject.

Commercial cinema's effect on the unconscious is even more powerful than that of psychoanalysis, since its unconscious, "populated by cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers" (in other words, a non-Oedipal consciousness, an unconscious equal to the world around us), and the range of semiotic mechanisms it mobilizes "directly connect with the spectator's processes of semiotization."²⁶

The effect produced by commercial cinema and in turn by television has nothing to do with ideology, for it does not involve reflexive consciousness and representation.

"All its irrational, elementary, oneiric, and barbaric elements were forced below the level of consciousness; that is, they were exploited as subconscious instruments of shock and persuasion"²⁷ by the cultural industry and industry in general.

Consciousness-raising is not a sufficient response because images affect us and organize themselves in direct relation with the three "selves" preceding the linguistic self. Asignifying, symbolic semiotics do not act on consciousness but rather directly on "the continuous variation and force of existing and potential action."

Here, subjectivity has nothing to do with Althusser's ideological apparatuses, because it, and especially its components, are produced as a whole, bringing to bear what I call asignifying elements, which provide the basis for relations to time, rhythms, space, the body, colors, and sexuality.²⁸

4. Signifying and Asignifying Semiotics in the Division of Labor

As a matter of fact, two axioms seem to have guided the advance of Western civilization from the outset: the first maintains that true societies unfold in the protective shadow of the State; the second states a categorical imperative: man must work.

—Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*

All the semiotics and modalities of subjective implication we have described come to bear in every division of labor. But whereas signifying semiotics and social subjection are recognized and analyzed as such, the processes of asignifying symbolic semiotics and those of machinic enslavement are ignored in the sociology of work (and "industrial psychology"). This is all the more surprising given that they are what constitute the specificity of the capitalist division of labor.

The same "logocentric" limit detracts from Marie-Anne Dujarier's otherwise remarkable analysis of the organization of production in "mass services" (a geriatrics clinic and a restaurant chain), wherein language is understood as a component of the division of labor and a "productive force."²⁹

"Because service work is relational," the author argues, "it mobilizes *language*, to such an extent that one could even say that most often working means speaking."³⁰ At the same time, she

enumerates a great variety and intensive use of asignifying semiotics irreducible to speech. Up and down the hierarchy, asignifying symbolic semiotics operate with signifying semiotics, but the relative weight of one with respect to the other changes according to the hierarchical level in which they function.

The board of directors does “political work when it sets the organization’s goals and strategies by providing the necessary resources” (“capital, operating budget, and their allocation”).³¹ The board’s “orders” are transmitted along the hierarchy, mobilizing the most varied asignifying transactions. Speech would be insufficient to organize the production “process” and powerless to command and activate subjectivities.

“CEOs” give preliminary form to the generic objectives handed down from the board of directors “in the form of ‘development plans,’ ‘ethical commitments,’ ‘quality policies,’ ‘cost-saving measures,’ ‘authorization,’ ‘management control,’ ‘digitalization,’ ‘marketing strategies,’ ‘IT systems,’ ‘advertising campaigns.’”³² “Budget constraints” are also transformed into asignifying organizational elements: “budgets,” “HR policies,” “investment plans.”

Under the CEOs, the work of “manager experts,” to whom upper management has entrusted the work of turning out instructions and ensuring they are followed, “consists primarily in transforming the abstract demands for ‘total quality,’ ‘comfort,’ ‘attractiveness,’ ‘versatility,’ or ‘ethics’ into ‘specific organizational requirements.’” The translation of CEOs’ choices is non-discursive. Employees are not summoned the way Menenius Agrippa did the plebeians in an attempt to convince them with his rhetorical arsenal to put an end to their insubordination (Rancière treats the episode as a model of the egalitarian function special to language). In the capitalist organization of work this is not how orders are transmitted.

They do not function solely (and we could say principally) “inter-subjectively.” Orders are not first issued through discourse but through apparatuses using asignifying semiotics. If we hold to the description given by the author herself, signifying semiotics are limited to accompanying discourse or to being completely absent from it: “Orders take the form of the organizational chart, plan, project, manual, protocol, charter, indicators, procedures, processes, and production and management software.”³³

The organization of work is first of all a question of diagrammatic pragmatics. Linguistic imperatives³⁴ (“you must”) or exhortations (“you should”), meetings, “ideological” speeches, and so on, would have little hold on subjectivity were they not supported by asignifying semiotics (diagrams, programs, budgets, management indicators, accounting figures, etc.) which do not speak but function. They do not first address the “I” of the “salaried” individual. They set off operations while bypassing consciousness and representation. Asignifying semiotics work like a “material” cog in humans-machines, humans-organizations, humans-processes systems. They establish a reader, an interpreter, a facilitator; and yet this reader, who may very well be a human being as a machine, software, procedure, etc., is without representations.

The corporation, in certain cases (call centers), diagrammatically exploits even language, by reducing signifying semiotics to a means of signaling that simply triggers prefabricated address and response procedures. There is nothing of the dialogical event in the verbal exchange between employee and consumer. Words and propositions are the “input” and “output” of the machinic enslavement specific to service relations. Only idiots like Alain Finkielkraut still think that responsibility for the “degradation” of language lies with poor schoolchildren, immigrants’ sons, the youth, etc., whereas, as Pasolini

already had it in the 1960s, private enterprise and marketing are the ones responsible.

The conversation with a consumer must be quickly referred back to a 'script' which the operator will then read word for word. He can be penalized if he "goes off" script, even for offering an intelligent or empathetic response to the customer. Thus the "prompts," replies to questions, and other forms of civility are planned out prior to the conversation. Dialogue is "triggered" according to the customer's attitude and questions. Finally, the scripts are a way of "taylorizing" conversation; the latter is split into basic units and each task performed. Conversational scripts are made up of pre-fabricated phrases thought up by those who do not speak them and spoken by those whose self-interest is not to think.³⁵

The affects, intensities, and "emotions" that animate every verbal exchange are submitted to the same semiotic training, whose aim is to program and control behavior. "Emotion itself is conceived to be a task and is planned for prior to its occurrence. It can be prescribed to the employee or to the consumer independently of what they feel. Labor management institutes plans such that the employee, whether a ticket-taker, youth leader, cashier, flight attendant, hair-dresser, bus driver, or museum guide, is compelled to adopt cheerful, assuring, calm, happy, or funny behavior."³⁶

Analyzing the use of semiotics in the customer service relationship—from below rather than from the board of directors' perspective—Dujarier notes that "language is growing increasingly abstract." When a service is carried out, whether at the elderly person's bedside or the customer's table, "language" is "that which is

constructed according to each speaker's linguistic references in the interaction between employee and consumer."³⁷ This "language of professionals" marks out a community of peers (employees) and allows us "to speak and, therefore, to examine what real work is."

"Higher up, in the idiom of orders and control, 'managerial' language is employed." In "the procedures, plans, and management or economic indicators used by hierarchical superiors, the semantic references are essentially taken from the language of action ('do this') and measurement ('in order to obtain a result')."³⁸

"Above managerial language we find the language that addresses methods and processes," the language of "experts," which produces "*discourse about discourse*" because its object is managerial discourse itself. At a still higher level, "political discourse" concerns the evaluation of results and methods and represents what the author calls "*a discourse about discourse about discourse*," that is, a discourse about experts.

The move to ever-greater abstraction in capitalist command is always interpreted in terms of language (a "discourse about discourse" and a "discourse about discourse about discourse"), whereas, as one moves up the hierarchy, rather than speak of abstraction, we would do better to analyze the way in which asignifying semiotics are increasingly used. The hold superior hierarchical levels have over inferior ones does not occur because of the use of metalanguage but through the exploitation of asignifying semiotics.

In monitoring, the second function devolving on those higher up the ladder, the same mechanisms and semiotics are at work as in order-giving. Monitoring consists in the activation "of major indicators, of overall rankings"; it "is exercised through tracking mechanisms" and prioritizes the automatic mechanisms and "impersonality" of asignifying ratings. Functional control wins out

over disciplinary and discursive control even as it employs them both.³⁹

Even “self-control,” which measures the “subjective” investment of the employee’s “I”—one form of social subjection—is “maintained by managerial tools (rankings, performance summaries, etc.)” Within the service industry a large part of the employee’s work consists in rating, ranking, classifying (“We have to follow procedures, jot down, draw up the indicators, validate, track [...]. Personnel rate everything and rate themselves on everything”).⁴⁰ Ratings make tracking possible, which machines in turn process via asignifying semiotics. The management tools mobilized through “self-control” are still machinic apparatuses, a kind of hypomnemata of labor structure.⁴¹ The “I” of social subjection can only be separated from technical machines, from organizational machines, from processes, through abstraction.

Symbolic semiotics play an overwhelming role in the service relationship by arranging the essential aspects of business communication with customers. Through advertising, symbolic semiotics are fully part of the management techniques of labor organization. The (dreadful) business and marketing culture which they instill while molding public/customer subjectivity also directly acts on the subjectivity of employees, for whom “advertising communication is ‘really’ what must be produced [...]. [Employees] behave at work as if they believed, on the one hand, that the people they serve believe the promises made to them, and, on the other hand, that it is essential to fulfill them. In this interplay, the ideal promised to the consumer becomes the norm of what must be produced.”⁴²

Dujarier differentiates in her work among semiotics, cleverly called “mille feuilles semantics”: “body language” (symbolic semiotics), “technical language” (asignifying semiotics), and “social languages”

(signifying semiotics) all converge in the service relationship.⁴³ What is lacking in this is an appreciation of machinic enslavement. It is not an empirical but a conceptual shortcoming, since machinic enslavement is very much present in the text and clearly mentioned by those interviewed who exercise command functions in the company under the term “process.”

At higher levels, the “language of experts, theoretical language, often colored with Anglicisms [...], no longer deals with work” but with “process.” “Managers” are not interested in whether one belongs to a particular trade or in its legitimacy; the focus is the organization and control of “processes” essentially consisting of the application of methods, monitoring of indicators, verification of the uniformity of procedures, and the organization of meetings.

CEOs and experts “represent themselves and are considered as specialists, not in ‘labor,’ but in ‘processes,’ ‘techniques,’ and ‘tools.’ The central role played by process also emerges in monitoring procedures.”⁴⁴ What first of all must be monitored and evaluated are the humans-machines systems, the mixed semiotics (signifying, asignifying, symbolic) which together make up “processes.”

Sociology and industrial psychology seem to be incapable of grasping conceptually the qualitative leap that has occurred in the move from “work” to “process,” from subjection to enslavement. Those high on the hierarchy no longer deal with work but with “process” which integrates labor as “one” of its parts. They organize machinic enslavement (process), in which work appears no different from machines, semiotics, procedures, advertising, and communications. Within these person-based services, whose machines do not bear down with the same crushing weight as in other industrial sectors, diagrams, schemas, indicators, budget entries, etc., take machines’ place in the organization of the process.

The sociology (and the psychology) of work is imprisoned, along with the rest of sociology, in anthropomorphic thought whose “actors” are the “I” of the employee and the intersubjectivity of the “collective” of workers. Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-sociology frees us from the political limits imposed by the reduction of labor organization to the personology of social subjection.

Although the Marxist and Marxian theory of value has directly or indirectly inspired the “progressive” part of sociology and industrial psychology, it in no way helps to escape this anthropomorphic paradigm, for by distinguishing “living labor” from “dead labor,” it assigns all creativity and productivity to the former and relegates to the latter a mere reproductive function. The distinction between living labor and dead labor is appropriate only from the point of view of social subjection. From the point of view of machinic enslavement the sites of productivity, the vectors of enunciation, the “for itself” [*pour soi*] and “for the other” [*pour l’autre*], are not exclusively human. Machines, objects, procedures, diagrams, maps, and so on, are not waiting for the “biblical” spirit of living labor to restore life, mobility, and creativity to them. From the point of view of machinic enslavement, asignifying semiotics, objects, diagrams, programs, and so on, contribute to production, creativity, innovation, in the same way as “people” do. Like machines, humans are hybrids of “dead” and “living labor.”

Machinic enslavement (or processes) precedes the subject and the object and surpasses the personological distinctions of social subjection. The latter, between living and dead, subject and object, are the result of the reterritorialization process centered on “man” and “labor.” Sociology and industrial psychology operate a humanist reterritorialization, a “humanization” of work, which has nothing progressive about it; indeed, it is identical to the social

subjection it legitimates. Instead of being considered an operation of power, capitalism’s distribution of places, roles, functions, and jobs is identified with man’s very emancipation. By attributing “status and social place [...] [work] contributes decisively to the construction of identity... it allows one to act on the world, on other people and oneself.”⁴⁵

Sociology and industrial psychology only recognize “work” (“work assigned,” “work accomplished,” “work experience,” etc.) and completely neglect the fact that “work” is always “capitalist labor,” that the concept itself exists nowhere else but in capitalist society. They project the category “labor” onto the past and the future by making it a “universal” spanning all of history.

The political dimension of the distribution of “labor”⁴⁶ is forgotten in favor of an analysis of self-realization. “Work is a bodily and existential experience that man makes of the limits and uncertainty of his actions [...]. The work we do (or are deprived of) plays a decisive role in each person’s psychic and somatic thought.”⁴⁷

Sociology and industrial psychology confuse “work” with the “political program” the workers’ movement created in response to “wage slavery.” It was not labor as such that guaranteed emancipation. Self-realization, identity formation, and social recognition through work have always been at the heart of the capitalist—and socialist—project itself. The reverence for and celebration of work expressed by France’s last president⁴⁸ are more than the products of ideology and opportunism. We must look to something other than “real full employment,” genuine “work-value.” For the social-democratic functions with which work has been invested—income guarantees, social recognition and mobility, the meaning and confidence in the future—are no longer borne out by work or employment. Starting with machinic enslavement, we must

conceive a reterritorialization that leads to something other than “work=value.” We must seize the opportunity of desubjectivation opened by machinic enslavement so as not to fall back on the mythical-conceptual narratives of producers, workers, and employees. This is one of our most urgent tasks if we are to invent new political subjectivations.

5. The Dual Function and Processing of Subjectivity

Power uses signifying semiotics, but never loses itself completely in them, and it would be a mistake to imagine that it could fall victim to its own signifying methods or ideologies.

—Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*

What is the relationship between asignifying semiotics and semiologies of signification in the exercise of capitalist power? Their actions coalesce and complement one other. Economic and political power is inconceivable without the production of subjections and significations that determine for each person the position one is to occupy (you are a man, you are a woman, you are a worker, you are a boss, etc.), the way to behave, the function to fill (you have to produce for yourself, for your family, for the State, etc.), the way to think, and to express oneself. If you do not think and if you do not act the way the State wants and as the market demands, your thoughts and behavior will have to adapt, they will have to be made compatible with these significations.

There is no moment when we are not encircled by power formations. In our societies people must not gesticulate overmuch, we must each stay in our proper place, sign on the dotted line,

recognize the signals we are given—and any failure may land us in prison or the hospital.⁴⁹

As Foucault reminds us, power—which is simply an action upon an action—determines possibilities, probabilities, potentialities, and virtualities, which must continually be territorialized and integrated into the molar dimension of institutions and significations, to become embodied in the roles and behaviors of individuated subjects.

Money, for example, creates deterritorializing effects insufficient in themselves. The economic imperatives that result from them (for example, reducing the debt, cleaning up government accounts, imposing “sacrifices” on the dominated, etc.) must be interpreted and translated into discourse, thought, and action by the media, political parties, unions, experts, and State administrators and addressed to public opinion, to each social group and every individual. The State, the media, and the experts ceaselessly produce narratives, stories, and statements that continually reinfuse with meaning the asignifying operations of credit money, which, in its specific function (diagrammatic, asignifying), has no use for subjects or objects, persons or things. Money and profit recognize only an abstract and deterritorialized subjectivity and an equally abstract and deterritorialized object (Marx): any subjectivity whatsoever and any kind of object whatsoever without territory, existence, or subjectivity. Subjections attach this deterritorialized subjectivity to roles and functions in which individuals in turn become alienated.

Conversely, if we remain at the level of social subjection and signification, power is reduced to an icon, an image, a representation for contemplation (about which, in reality, we are rarely fooled).

Discourses, narratives, and significations capture subjectivity only at the level of representation, consciousness, images, and

significations. To take hold, to act on subjectivity, to determine where and when to act, another type of process is needed, a molecular process of subjectivity carried out through machinic enslavements that circumvent representation, consciousness and signification. Enslavement mobilizes both more and less than the person and the individuated subject insofar as it intervenes at infra-personal and supra-personal levels.

The two modes combine and complement one another: signifying semiotics effectuate a molar processing of subjectivity that targets, solicits, and interpellates consciousness, representation, and the individuated subject, whereas asignifying semiotics effectuate a *molecular* processing of the same subjectivity, mobilizing partial subjectivities, states of non-reflexive consciousness, perceptual systems, and so on. We should again emphasize that the destitution of the subject and his semiologies through capitalist deterritorialization “still does not invalidate human semiotics.” The recourse to “human” semiotics has a well-defined goal: to control and modulate the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization realized and assured by the asignifying semiotics of technico-scientific systems, economics, and the collective resources of the State, destroying previous existential territories, their values, and their way of life.

An example of the non-reactionary use of signifying semiotics is that of the workers’ movement. In the nineteenth century, the latter was able to invent a revolutionary reterritorialization that, rather than simply defending those whom capital was destroying, went beyond capitalist deterritorialization: proletarian internationalism, mutualization, and transnational class solidarity went beyond man in the singular.

The ambiguities, uncertainties, and upheavals which periods of great change, like ours, have experienced can be in part explained by

this twofold movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In the Marxist language Guattari employs, the “worker” is deterritorialized in “production” by asignifying semiotics and can thus also be the agent of revolutionary rupture as well as of reactionary reterritorialization.

Capitalism produces crises, indiscriminate and concomitant advances toward a post-human world as well as spectacular retreats toward man. It moves to a world “beyond the human,” and it must reterritorialize itself according to that which is most petty, most vulgar, and most cowardly in “man” (racism, chauvinism, exploitation, war). And this incessantly renewed return to “man” (with no possibility of humanism) is justified by the obsessive fear that through deterritorialization and asignifying semiotics, by taking advantage of them as well as acting against them, one might construct a politics beyond the human, in other words, beyond exploitation, racism, war, and colonization, beyond man’s power over women and over all other existents (living and non-living).

6. Pasolini and Neo-Capitalism’s Semiotics of Immanence

On the one hand, we have an infantilization of the products of subjectivity with a standardization and homogenization of modes of expression and relations with the world, on the other hand, an exponential expansion of non-denotative functions of language.

Children and adolescents do not understand their development, at least for the most part, by way of signifying discourse. They resort to what I call forms of asignifying discursivity: music, clothing, the body, behavior that signals recognition—as well as to all kinds of machinic systems.

—Félix Guattari, *Révolutions Moléculaires*

This language of production and consumption—and not the language of man—appears as implacably deterministic. It only wants to communicate functionally; it doesn't want to perorate or exalt or convince—advertising slogans see to all that.

—Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*

Pasolini is surely one of the first authors to have grasped the nature and functioning of the sign systems of “neo-capitalism.” The way in which he frees himself from the limits of linguistics and semiotics as those fields developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries intersects, at many points, with the work of Guattari.

The “general semiology” he looks to elaborate recognizes the continuity between nature and culture modernity had broken by concentrating all subjectivity on the subject and by depriving the object of all capacity for expression. Drawing on his experience in film, he created, following Peirce's example, a new semiology starting from the question of the image. By refusing to view the latter as a production of the brain or the result of our system of perception, he is able to overcome the dualisms of the image and things, of consciousness and the object. The shot of Jerry Malaga's hair and Umberto Eco's “real” eyes are part of the same continuum of images that constitute a world that is, consequently, a cinema in itself, a cinema in nature, a metacinema. As in the first chapter of Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, the eye is in things themselves; things are luminous by themselves with no consciousness illuminating them.

By situating the eye in things, cinema undermines the anthropomorphic conception of expression and action. Things express themselves by themselves, constitute focal points of subjectivation; they have a power of expression, a “luminosity,” a capacity for

proto-enunciation and action specific to them and that in no way depends on man.

1. *The Languages of Consumption-Production*

What interests us in Pasolini's “general semiotics” is how the language of things functions as a “nonverbal discourse,” as a power for the proto-enunciation of reality itself and, therefore, as a site of subjectivation. As with Guattari, expression is not reserved only to linguistic signs. On the contrary, in capitalism, expression and enunciation belong first of all to signifying and symbolic semiotics.

For Pasolini language is “one of the many possible systems of signs” and not “a privileged system unto itself.”⁵⁰ Action, behavior, and physical presence are semantic fields, sites of non-linguistic communication. The physical presence of Rome's or Bologna's rundown suburbs and their architecture “speak,” just as in Guattari; they function as vectors of subjectivation. Things are sources of discursivity, “dumb, material, objective, inert, merely present,” which act as vectors of enunciation.⁵¹

Things are “iconic signs,” images, which communicate or express something. This sensitivity to the language of things themselves comes from Pasolini's work as a filmmaker rather than from his work as a writer. The gaze, aided by the camera, forces him to become conscious of and to catalogue all the things that a film shot contains. The writer transforms things into words, that is, into symbols, into the signs of a verbal system which are “symbolic and conventional while the ‘signs’ of the cinematographic system are nothing more or less than the things themselves in their materiality and reality.”⁵² It is as a film director that he was confronted with the immediacy of the “expressive presence” of things.

Nonverbal discourse is “endowed with a persuasive power which nothing verbal possesses.”⁵³ We can forget what we have been taught through words but we can never forget what we have learned through things.

The first image from Pasolini’s life is a white curtain, and this image spoke to him “objectively” and communicated the world of his bourgeois childhood to him, the universe in which he was living. We also find a curtain, although “red,” in Guattari, which also speaks, communicates, and expresses something.

The somber red color of my curtain enters into an existential constellation with nightfall, with twilight, in order to engender an uncanny effect that devalues the self-evidences and urgencies which were impressing themselves on me only a few moments ago by letting the world sink into an apparently irremediable void.⁵⁴

Guattari specifies the color’s modes of expression, in other words, the way in which a thing can function as a focal point or vector of subjectivation. Even if we cannot say that the color red “speaks,” it nonetheless constitutes, by arranging human elements (perception, memory) and non-human elements (the curtain, dusk), the existential foundation of all expression and all speech: “What is in the curtain, what is in the twilight, what is in my memory, *is given as an enunciative nucleus*. Yet it couldn’t be said that representation is involved. The latter is present solely as part of an existential function. [...] This existential function is organized in a way totally different from that of denotation and signification.”⁵⁵

The particular assemblage (color, curtain, evening, memory, perception, etc.) effects an aggregation, a condensation, of existential elements which, although non-discursive, are at the basis of enunciation.

As with Guattari, although the language of things is unable to establish invariable and stable significations, it can produce models of behavior which possess the force of example and the self-evidence of physical presence. Nonverbal semiotics, asignifying semiotics (the operative technico-scientific languages of industry) and symbolic semiologies profoundly transformed Italian subjectivity during the 1960s and 1970s. Neo-capitalism is the “second and final bourgeois revolution” whose “culture produces codes that engender behavior.”⁵⁶ Codes do not first act through verbal language and its functions of representation, denotation, and signification. Neo-capitalist culture puts models of desire into circulation and imposes models of subjection (models of childhood, the father, the mother, etc.). “It launches (subjective) models the way the automobile industry launches a new line of cars.”⁵⁷ Capitalism manufactures the individual, molding his body and his psyche, equipping him with modes of perception, semiotization, and an unconscious, endeavoring to introduce a “bourgeois property-owner in every worker.”

Since the 1960s, capitalism has required from the “deterritorialized worker, someone who goes beyond his professional expertise, who follows technological innovations or even develops a certain creativity, a certain interest. Furthermore, a consumer is needed who can adapt to market developments.”⁵⁸ Pasolini offers the existential version of the new type of worker laid out by Guattari. “Power needs a different type of subject” endowed with what Pasolini calls “existential flexibility”—the counterpart to the economic flexibility of the labor market—an “absolutely formal elasticity in ‘existences’ so that everyone becomes a good consumer.”⁵⁹

The cultural model offered to the Italians (and to the rest of the world), a model to which they must conform (in the way they dress, the shoes they wear, their hairstyles, their actions and gestures),

bypasses representation and the cognitive dimensions of subjectivity to affect existence itself.

"It is above all in lived experience, in the existential, that we find conformity to the model, and thus in the body and behavior as well."⁶⁰ The semiotic efficiency of nonverbal discourse is formidable because it affects existential functions (Guattari) through domesticating effects: "What has to be educated, shaped, is the flesh itself, the flesh as mold of the spirit."

These models of conduct and subjectivation are imposed through a "physical language," a "language of behavior," which, because nonverbal, "is no longer rhetorical in the humanist sense, but pragmatic in the American sense."⁶¹

Neo-capitalism asserts the primacy of languages of clarity, precision, functionality, and instrumental and pragmatic efficiency by vacating them of the expressive dimension of humanist languages. During a historical period in which verbal language has become completely conventional and empty, subjected to the translatability, the centralization, and the imposed equivalency of languages of infrastructure, "this physical and gestural language is of decisive importance."⁶²

Neo-capitalism always acts and expresses itself through "mixed semiotics," albeit by reversing the semiotic hierarchies in which languages of superstructure (school, law, university, etc.) were once dominant.

The culture of a nation like Italy is expressed above all through the language of behaviors or physical language, plus a certain quantity—completely conventional and extremely vacuous—of verbal language.

Together with the spread of non-denotative language acting through mimetic contagion, through affect, arises the molding of language through "technique." "The technological phenomenon, like a new spirituality, permeates language from the roots to all its extremities, all its phases, and all its particularities."⁶³

At the same time as a national language, a sole and unique signifying substance is imposed, in particular through the educational system and television; the collective structures of the State and mass communications carry out a centralization of symbolic semiotics through a new culture of the image, producing a new, paradoxical, hideous "expressivity." The hold on subjectivity is therefore less due to speech, language, representation, ideology, or consciousness than to the languages of production and consumption (to the asignifying semiotics of economics and the symbolic semiotics of consumption).

2. *Intolerance and the Italian "Cultural Genocide"*

Without a collective assemblage of "revolutionary" enunciation deployed at the level of neo-capitalist development, the effects of the languages of infrastructure (industrial, media, bureaucratic, etc.) are catastrophic since Italians become the victims of the consequent anthropological mutation. Following the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*, Pasolini speaks even of "cultural genocide."

Deprived of their popular culture, the "new poor" live the disparity between the new neo-capitalist culture of mass consumption and their own economic conditions. It is impossible for them to acquire what mass consumption dangles before them "because of the poverty that persists, disguised by illusory improvements in the standard of living." The disappearance of the old popular cultural

models and the socioeconomic disparity produce the frustration, violence, guilt, and aggressiveness that Pasolini identifies above all in the behavior and presence of young people's bodies.

Before neo-capitalism incorporated and subordinated society in its totality, the poor experienced a "segregation and marginality" that allowed them to conserve, reproduce, and reinvent their culture and forms of expression. The lumpenproletariat of the 1950s were "blacks" in all but name, over whom the bourgeoisie limited its control to police repression without bothering to "evangelize" them, in other words, without bothering to impose cultural models or models of subjectivation. From this point of view, fascism was still a part of the world of the first capitalism, or more specifically, it stood at the intersection, at the threshold, of the old and the new capitalism. The languages of production and consumption represent a more considerable internal revolution of fascist dictatorship.

Fascism offered a monumental, reactionary model, although it went unheeded. The various distinctive cultures (of the peasants, the lumpenproletariat, the workers) continued undisturbed to identify with their own models, for repression was limited to getting them to acquiesce in word alone.⁶⁴

With its "languages of infrastructure," neo-capitalism strikes at the roots of existence. It does more than demand submission or obedience, it molds and modulates individuals' subjectivity and lives. Government is a government of "souls," as Foucault later writes.

Various forms of fascism had transformed them into puppets, servants, and perhaps in part into true believers, but it didn't really reach the depths of their souls, their way of being. Consumption

touched their innermost selves, it gave them other feelings, other ways of thinking, living, other cultural models. Unlike under Mussolini, there was no superficial, scenographic regimentation, but rather a real regimentation that altered and robbed them of their souls.⁶⁵

Historically, fascism had exploited rhetorical values like heroism, patriotism, and family, whereas the "new fascism is [...] a pragmatism that acts as a cancer on all of society—the national tumor of the majority."⁶⁶

By imposing familialist forms of life and sexuality, the new fascism of culture, public relations, and mass consumption is "almost racist," producing a "false tolerance." The "new tolerance" of consumption, public relations, and mass culture threatens to turn into a new and more disturbing "intolerance."

The "new tolerance," today's "political correctness," produces paradoxical effects, since, although within neo-capitalism "the elites are much more tolerant toward sexual minorities than in other periods, by way of compensation the vast majority has become more blatantly intolerant, more violent and revolting than ever before in Italian history."⁶⁷

This intolerance, which spread like a micro-fascist cancer only a short time after Pasolini's death, has found its macro-political expression in the Northern League, the party of every intolerance and every reactionary reterritorialization.

Pasolini was undoubtedly the first to grasp the power of languages of production and consumption and especially those expressed through television (which he in fact demanded be temporarily shut down). Power destroyed the old freedoms, those of "the poor," workers, and the proletariat, and created others by appropriating

“the demands—let us say the liberal and progressive demands—of liberty and, by making them its own, changed their nature and made them worthless.”⁶⁸

The normalization, standardization, the leveling of ways of life and behavior are no longer exclusively the result of discipline and confinement (of which the Roman “*borgate*” were a paradoxical example), but rather the work of the “most subtle, cunning, and complex” technologies of power to which semiotics surely belong. The latter express and institute consumer society’s “mass hedonism,” an apparently more tolerant and liberal power that is in reality, according to Pasolini, more intolerant and more destructive than fascism.

3. *The Death of the Sacred and Machinic Animism*

Pasolini is very much aware of the paradoxical situation capitalism creates. On the one hand, it destroys popular cultures and their sacred “animist” vision of nature, things, and the cosmos. On the other hand, through machinic assemblages, it creates the conditions for delineating new continuities between subject and object, between nature and culture. Like Guattari, Pasolini registers these contradictory tendencies: first, the objectivation and complete rationalization of nature and the cosmos that makes them exploitable; second, the possibility of a machinic animism that might make them sacred again (Pasolini) or “re-enchant” them (Guattari).

Pasolini has brilliant theoretical intuitions he gained as a filmmaker. Destined to disappear under the capitalist contagion, “popular” culture paradoxically possesses an understanding commensurate with capitalist machinism and, especially, filmic machinism. Before the “language of reality” became “natural,”

before it was overtaken by filmic apparatuses, it was beyond the reach of our consciousness. Now, as in animist traditions, cinema operates an acculturation, an animation,⁶⁹ and a “subjectivation” of nature such that it is impossible to distinguish it from culture.

Capitalism profoundly transforms subjectivity by destroying the “oral” culture of dominated classes. The symbolic semiotics which were once used in primitive societies (of which a large part had been reproduced in the peasant and lumpenproletariat communities of modern Italy) and which, at the time of the first industrial revolution, manifested worlds, values, ways of life heterogeneous to capitalism, are fated to disappear.⁷⁰ The culture and language of infrastructures (the language of “production-consumption”), superimposed on other cultural and linguistic strata, transform them until they are eliminated. “Subaltern class culture [almost] no longer exists: only the economics of subaltern classes exists.”⁷¹ The culture that was dying under Pasolini’s eyes was peasant (and “lumpenproletariat”) culture, transnational and trans-epochal culture, which came from the depths of history (or better, from the absence of history). To have an idea of what capitalist deterritorialization has meant, one need only be familiar with the abrupt drop in the West’s rural population,⁷² an exodus which has quickly spread to other parts of the world, marking the end of a phase begun in the Neolithic period.

The peasantry’s disappearance has brought with it the disappearance of processes of subjectivation and animist and polytheistic beliefs that survived despite the capitalization and expropriation carried out by the Church. But what touches Pasolini the poet most is the effacement of the “sacred” and the loss of the attitude toward the world and toward others which the animist conception of the world holds.

The “characteristic feature of peasant civilizations is not their finding nature ‘natural,’”⁷³ but rather “animated,” subjectivated, sacred. Where capitalism seeks to desacralize things and people, to make them objects in order to measure, exchange, and capitalize them, Pasolini looks instead to “resacralize them as much as possible.” Against the capitalist process that requires us to perceive only the “inanimate, mechanical” appearance of things, against the “objective and scientific” conception of reality, Pasolini opposes the “subjective” consistency of the same reality.⁷⁴

Some of this “religion” ended up in his “semiotics,” for, as with Guattari, there is no break, fissure, or abyss between sign and reality, between content and expression, culture and nature. Pasolini’s animism is a kind of expressionism since the sign is immanent to the real. In his polemic with Umberto Eco, Pasolini asserted that his semiotics does not naturalize cultural codes but “transforms nature into cultural phenomena: it transforms all life into speech.”⁷⁵

Nature as culture is expressive nature; it speaks to itself because there is a “continuum without any solution of continuity” between a person who says “oak tree” and the oak tree itself. The latter is not the referent of the sign “oak tree,” but a sign itself, an iconic sign, just as the living person is not the referent of the sign “person,” but a “living-iconic” sign itself. A person and an oak tree are the “im-signs” of reality which cinema merely reproduces.

Subjectivated nature, animated culture, is a “Vedic-Spinozan” God, says Pasolini, which speaks with itself. Everything that exists, whether plant or rock, expresses, sings, the glory of this immanent “God.”⁷⁶

Even if man were to lose his “imperialist” claim to be endowed with what all other existents lack—the power of enunciation and expression—“the nonverbal is nothing other than another ver- bality” such that the signs of verbal languages do no more than

translate the signs of nonverbal languages and in particular lan- guages of action.

What we have lost with the disappearance of these non-anthro- pomorphic cultures and religions we can reinvent with the equally non-anthropomorphic machinisms of capitalism.

The cinema reveals that reality is not a collection of “*res*” but of “actions.” Action (as much Lenin’s as that of an obscure Fiat employee, Pasolini would say), the first and primary language of people and things, is the source of all other forms of expression. The image does not only represent, it acts pragmatically on the real and on subjectivity; for it makes us see, intervenes, acts on what “man” and “human” subjectivity cannot see and do.

Science, industry, and art have used the image “diagrammati- cally” for a long time. Computer-assisted imagery, for example, captures, as in a dynamic diagram, the functional articulations of a situation or system which it allows one to anticipate, forecast, and intervene. It participates directly in the production of its “object.” This function of the image, an iconic mapping that both registers and creates possibilities, is also identified by directors like Godard, who denounces the way in which the film industry cancels it out. Society maintains the possibility of using the cinema and its images as science uses diagrams and microscopes to “see” the infinitely small or the telescope to “see” the infinitely large that escapes man and his language in order to construct “iconic cartographies” that multiply possibilities for action. Like a diagram in movement, the cinema: in order to see, decide, choose, and act.

Confronted with and attracted by filmic machinism and its “animism,” Pasolini offers us a political reading of “diagrammatic” action and its possibilities. The action of the image is indubitably “machinic” (or diagrammatic), in the process of “moving away from

classical humanist ideals” and of being lost in what Pasolini calls the “pragma” of languages of infrastructure. Along with other audiovisual techniques, cinema seems to be the language of this pragma; it seems to function in complete harmony with capitalist deterritorialization. But cinema can also represent a chance for salvation, a possibility for a change of course, precisely because it expresses this pragma—“and it expresses it from the inside; by producing itself, by taking it as its starting point, by reproducing it.”⁷⁷ The cinema machine is completely inside the real. But what makes it an apparatus for subjection and enslavement can also be turned into new processes for subjectivation provided that one recognize the nature of machinic assemblages, that one abandon the anthropological and humanist perspective that imbues so much of critical thought.

The immanent power of im-signs prefigures the formidable political power of audiovisual machines like television. Signs do not exist in the world of superstructures but make up operative semiotics, power signs, which act on both the real and on subjectivity.

Action-images can also sing the glory of the “Lord,” like the little birds in *The Hawks and the Sparrows*, in other words, they can sing the emergence of a new political subjectivity or sing the glory of capital, that is, vulgarity, arrogance, and the impotentized power of the machinic image like Berlusconi’s, whose rise Pasolini had anticipated with surprising lucidity.