

Post-Postmodernism

PERIODIZING THE '80S: THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF ECONOMIC PRIVATIZATION IN THE US

Any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed. —GILLES DELEUZE, *Negotiations*

How Soon Is Now?

After the economic meltdown of fall 2008, it may have seemed for a moment like the era of unbridled faith in free-market or neoliberal capitalism was waning. When the US government orchestrated huge bailouts of the private sector, it might have seemed logical that the slick era of “small government and big business,” born in the Reagan 1980s and intensified through the Clinton '90s, was definitively over and that we were on the verge of a retooled era of mid-twentieth-century Keynesianism. When Paul Krugman can wonder out loud in the *New York Times* magazine, “How Did Economists Get It So Wrong?,” you’d almost have to conclude that, more than a decade into the new millennium, 1980s-style neoliberalism was soon to be a discredited thing of the past.

This of course turned out to be wishful thinking, or at least sadly mistaken—neoliberal capitalism was temporarily discredited, maybe, but is hardly a thing of the past. In the wake of the bailouts, the budget and debt battles in the US were fought and won not by liberal Keynesians offering a government-backed New Deal 2.0, but by free-market conservatives who take their neoliberal mantras directly from the 1980s book of Reagan: “Government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem,” as Reagan infamously put it in his 1981 inauguration speech. Likewise, what we saw in the financial meltdowns and the budget-cutting debates that followed were not really changes of course or swerves away from market dictates at all—quite the contrary. What you see when you see a government bailout of private industries is not so much the beginning of a brave, new socialism, but simply the other shoe dropping: with the privatization of wealth on a massive scale comes the socialization of risk on an almost unthinkable scale, \$1.2 trillion of what amounts to “success insurance” loaned out to private companies in public, taxpayer funds.¹ Ultimately, these bailouts were not the abandonment of free-market ideology, but simply the other face of the privatized, free-market coin we’ve become so familiar with since the 1980s.

Indeed, it feels a lot like the 1980s both economically and culturally these days. Even the fashion and entertainment segments of CNN are '80s saturated: the hottest new radio format is “all '80s,” with several stations having gone from the ratings cellar to number one in about the time it takes to play the extended dance remix of “Tainted Love.” On the fashion front, the runways and malls are filled with '80s-style fashions—I recently saw a designer-ripped T-shirt that said, somewhat confusedly, “Kiss Me, I’m Punk,” and the skinny tie has made its inevitable comeback. All kinds of diverse media (from Iron and Wine’s post-postmodern cover of New Order’s 1984 “Love Vigilantes” to Hollywood fare like *Hot Tub Time Machine* and *Wall Street 2*) stocks our collective iPad with reminders that we both have and haven’t come a long way since the 1980s. But, as always, the real confirmation comes in the TV commercials: Joe Jackson urges us to Taco Bell “One More Time,” while the Clash add rebellious street cred to the Nissan Rogue. I swear not long ago I heard the Smiths, whose myopic '80s anthems to frustration were perhaps second only to American Music Club for their sheer misery quotient, playing over an upbeat commercial for a sport utility vehicle.

While the return of the '80s is hardly surprising—how long could the nostalgia industry keep recycling '70s hip-huggers?—it remains a decade with something of a PR problem. Put most bluntly or economically, the '80s are haunted by the specter of Gordon Gekko’s “Greed is good” speech in the 1987 film *Wall Street*. It’s difficult for the '80s to shake its reputation as the decade in which self-interested capitalism went utterly mad; indeed, it’s hard to imagine the '80s without conjuring up pictures of cocaine-addled yuppie scum with slicked-back hair and suspenders, floating worthless junk bonds to finance leveraged buyouts (LBOs) that callously ravaged what was left of “good jobs” in industrial America. Mary Harron’s 2000 film version of Bret Easton Ellis’s 1991 *American Psycho* cannily tries to replay some of the madness of the 1980s—the kind of madness thoroughly documented in Bryan Burrough and John Helyar’s *Barbarians at the Gate*, on the mother of all LBOs, 1988’s KKR hostile takeover of RJR Nabisco.

The '80s, in short, was the decade when the dictates of the market became a kind of secular monotheism in the US, thereby opening the door to the now-ubiquitous “corporatization” of large sectors of American life: welfare, media, public works, prisons, and education. In fact, such a market dictatorship, honed in the many palace coups that were '80s LBOs, has become the dominant logic not only of the US economy, but of the fast-moving phenomenon known as “globalization.” Downsize, outsource, keep the stock price high—those are the dictates of the new global version of corporate *Survivor*.

Indeed, it seems clear that the American TV hit *Survivor* and its clone shows can be dubbed “reality” television only if we’re willing to admit that reality has become nothing other than a series of outtakes from an endless corporate training exercise—with the dictates of '80s management theory (individualism, excellence, downsizing) having somehow become “the real.” In fact, the exotic, “primitive” physical locations of *Survivor* argue none too subtly for the naturalization and universalization of these corporate strategies. Watching *Survivor*, it seems as if GE’s corporate template for the '80s—“eliminating 104,000 of its 402,000-person workforce (through layoffs or sales of divisions) in the period 1980–90” (Jensen 2000, 38)—had somehow become the way of nature. In the end, *Survivor*’s “tribal council” functions simply as a corporate board, demanding regular trimming of the workforce, until finally the board gets to award a tidy executive bonus of \$1 million—with all decisions along the way having been made according to an economist’s notion of subjectivity, what Michael Jensen has dubbed the “resourceful, evaluative, maximizing models of human behavior” (194).

On further reflection, then, maybe it’s not so much that the '80s are back *culturally*, but that they never went anywhere *economically*: the downsizing and layoff mania of the '80s—designed to drive up stock prices and impose market discipline on corporate managers—has now simply become business and cultural orthodoxy, standard operating procedure. Following *Survivor*’s lead, one might call it “reality,” a rock of the real as tailor-made for the boom cycles as it is explanatory of the bust cycles that inevitably follow them. Less dramatically, one could say that the economic truisms of the '80s remain a kind of sound track for today, the relentless beat playing behind the eye candy of our new corporate world—a world that’s been shocked by recent downturns, but one that has hardly abandoned the monotheistic faith that markets are the baseline of freedom, justice, and all things good in the world, for so-called liberals and conservatives alike. For a concise version of this mantra, one need look no further than Barack Obama’s remarks in the summer of 2008: “I am a pro-growth, free market guy. I love the market. I think it is the best invention

to allocate resources and produce enormous prosperity for America or the world that's ever been designed."

This across-the-board and continuing acceptance of '80s-style market principles is, it seems to me, one of the primary reasons why one might want to "periodize" the '80s, to steal a phrase from Fredric Jameson. Because to periodize the recent past is, of course, simultaneously to periodize the present: to begin figuring out how the cultural, political, and economic axioms of today (mandates only beginning to take shadowy shape) are related to the axioms of yesterday (mandates on which we should presumably have a better theoretical handle).

At this point, the reader might wonder how, why, or even if Jameson's work offers us a privileged path forward, insofar as today's postmodern materialists of the neo-Deleuzian variety tend to think of Jameson as someone dedicated to an old-fashioned—been there, done that—methodology: namely, dialectics. Well, like Foucault's nagging historical questions concerning power and exploitation (as he insists in his "Intellectuals and Power" dialogue with Deleuze, it took the entire nineteenth century for us to get a handle on what exploitation was, and surely it will have taken the twentieth and some chunk of the twenty-first before we have any workable sense of what "power" is), I wonder whether a certain *positive* Jamesonian itinerary surrounding the work of historicization or periodization remains unexplored or underexploited. We all know about dialectical method's attachment to the work of the negative; but surely any such work of negation must, in a dialectical system, be compensated for by an affirmation. What about this less-discussed "affirmative" Jameson? For a sense of that neglected Jameson, we need look no further than another '80s icon, his famous essay "Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984).

Holding at bay for a moment the many constative things we know or think we know about what the essay means or what it wants (a new totalization, a negation of consumer culture, a cognitive map, a return to this or that style of modernist subjectivity), I'd like to suggest that we concentrate instead on the essay's performative aspects—looking quite simply at how the essay does its work. For me, rereading Jameson's "Postmodernism" highlights a contradiction of the sort that we can only assume is intentional—antinomy being precisely the kind of shifting quicksand of an *Abgrund* on which dialectical thinkers influenced by Adorno often build their homes. In short, if Jameson is indeed a thinker of dialectical, progressive totalization (of the kind familiar from an old-fashioned reading of Hegel), then he certainly doesn't practice what he preaches. The style, range, and sheer volume of reference in the essay are anything but restricted or developmental in a recognizable sense—there's certainly no Hegelian movement from sense certainty, to unhappy consciousness, to the heights of knowledge, absolute or otherwise. Instead, from the opening paragraphs and their mishmashing of punk music and the minimalist song stylings of Philip Glass, through discussions of Nam June Paik, Andy Warhol, Heidegger and Derrida, E. L. Doctorow, Bob Perelman, the Bonaventure Hotel, Duane Hanson, Brian De Palma, and so on, we get less an analytical snapshot or critical dissection of postmodernism than a jump-cut-laden video starring it. We are presented, in other words, with many, many modes of postmodern cultural production but hardly any sense of postmodernism's sublated "meaning." And the hasty list of examples just provided doesn't even try to account for the heavy volume of seemingly passing reference so characteristic of Jameson's style on the whole: in the Austinean sense, he "uses" Doctorow or Warhol in "Postmodernism"; but he in addition "mentions" a truly dizzying array of postmodern cultural productions that would seem to have very little or nothing in common: Ishmael Reed, Godard, John Cage, *Reader's Digest*, Foucault, John Ashbery, Stanley Kubrick, Chinatown (both the Polanski movie and the San Francisco neighborhood referenced in Bob Perelman's poem "China"), Robert Wilson, David Bowie, the architecture firm Skid-more, Owings & Merrill, and William Gibson—as well as what must be the only extant reference to B-list movie actor William Hurt within the canon of poststructuralist theory.

On what's become the standard reading of this essay, the wide range of Jamesonian reference does indeed harbor a performative point, but it's largely a negative one: we, as readers, are meant to experience the dizzying array of centerless "intensity" produced by this laundry list of cultural productions; and as we try to deploy our outmoded categories to "read" or make sense of this puzzling, affectless flat surface, we're led inexorably to Jameson's conclusion: we need a new cognitive map. Without it, we're stuck with a meaningless and monotonous march of shiny, contextless consumer images. On this reading, the very intensity of the Jamesonian barrage—so much postmodern cultural production, so many examples—is meant not so much to highlight the positive (if sinister) force of postmodern cultural production, but instead to solicit our (modernist, all-too-modernist) inability to respond.

Fair enough, and—*mea culpa*—I've advanced just such a reading of Jameson elsewhere (1993, 144–52). But here I'd like to highlight the fact that there's another Jameson, one lurking beside (or maybe even in dialectical opposition to) the negative, stony, finger-wagging one we think we know. In classical dialectical fashion, Jameson insists that this negative inability can also provoke "a more positive conception of relationship":

This new mode of relationship through difference may sometimes be an achieved new and original way of thinking and perceiving; more often it takes the form of an impossible imperative to achieve that new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness. I believe that the most striking emblem of this new mode of thinking relationships can be found in the work of Nam June Paik, whose stacked or scattered television screens, positioned at intervals within lush vegetation, or winking down at us from a ceiling of strange new video stars, recapitulate over and over again prearranged sequences or loops of images which return at dyssynchronous moments on the various screens. The older aesthetic is then practiced by the viewers, who, bewildered by this discontinuous variety, decided to concentrate on a single screen, as though the relatively worthless image sequence to be followed there had some organic value in its own right. The postmodernist viewer, however, is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference; such a viewer is asked to follow the evolutionary mutation of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (who watches fifty-seven television screens simultaneously) and to rise somehow to a new level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship. (1991, 31)

There's a lot going on here, in one of Jameson's most overt statements concerning "a more positive conception" of "what used to be called relationship" in and around postmodern cultural production. Most striking in this passage is Jameson's neo-Deleuzian (though he'd undoubtedly prefer the adjective "utopian") call for "a new mutation in what can perhaps no longer be called consciousness." Not a lot of nostalgia or mourning there.

Perhaps less obviously, this paragraph also constitutes the essay's most overt moment of reflexive self-thematization. We readers of Jameson are positioned as the hapless viewers of Paik's rapid-fire video installations: "bewildered by this discontinuous variety" of cultural stuff that Jameson so quickly offers us, we tend "to concentrate on a single screen"—this or that specific example—"as though the relatively worthless image sequence to be followed there had some organic value in its own right." However, this critical failure, far from being the negative and inevitable point of Jameson's essay, is overtly thematized as the trap to be avoided in reading it: "The postmodernist viewer, however, is called upon to do the impossible, namely, to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference; such a viewer [who is also Jameson's reader—*mon semblable, mon frère et soeur*] is asked to follow the evolutionary mutation of David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (who watches fifty-seven television screens simultaneously) and to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship." Rather than primarily constituting a requiem for the non-schizo, somehow-still-centered mediating functions of modernist subjectivity, Jameson's essay is a call for revolution in this thing that can no longer be named by its quaint, old-fashioned handle: consciousness. On a performative reading—which will allow itself to speculate concerning constative effects only by first taking into account performative form—Jameson's work is far more schizo than it is centered, more "postmodern" than it is "modern." And this ambitious formal agenda should hardly surprise us, as Jameson is certainly a thinker who's had more than his share of things to say about the political and theoretical implications of "style."²

So, throughout this project I'll be taking up and intensifying both Jameson's call for a revolution in historical consciousness, and the immanent, experimental, well-nigh mishmashing style in which that call is announced. This book could be called "Jamesonian" not because it attempts to distill a method (dialectical or otherwise) from Jameson's texts and apply it to a horizon of new objects (the sort of thing Jameson himself would never do), but because *Post-Postmodernism* tries to follow along in the path that Jameson has set out for thinking about the present and its relations to the recent past. In short, I take Jameson's method to be immanent to his style of analysis, and it is precisely this style of analysis that I'm trying to inhabit, extend, and pay tribute to throughout *Post-Postmodernism*. As I noted at the outset, the project makes no claims to overcome Jameson's analyses or displace them. Rather, *Post-Postmodernism* follows his analyses precisely through intensifying them, and that movement of intensification and spread is what I try to stress by the infelicitous phrasing of post-postmodern (rather than that obsolescent valence of the dialectic where the "post-" might signal a simple historical overcoming). Postmodernism is not a thing of the past, any more than the 1980s are, precisely because it's hard to understand today as anything other than an intensified version of yesterday. But, of course, intensification is a movement that does alter things over time.

These Things Take Time

Jameson's "Periodizing the 60s" (1984) argues that the 1960s—or more precisely, the cultural, economic, and social upheavals that we commonly lump together and refer to as "the '60s"—actually began with the global decolonization movements of the mid-1950s and ended sometime in the early to mid-1970s. In other words, Jameson suggests that "the '60s" is not so much a calendar decade bounded by the years 1960 and 1970 as it is a period of transversally linked revolutionary historical developments that lasted nearly twenty years.

One might flesh out Jameson's claim by venturing that the '60s began politically sometime around the events of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, followed by the Algerian uprising starting on its heels, the Bandung conference in 1955, the strengthening of Indian independence in South Asia, and continuing struggles for decolonization in Africa in the '50s. Economically speaking, the postwar suburbanization of the US and Western Europe led to a sharp intensification of consumption-based capitalism in the "first world." Concomitantly, the "second world" of Soviet influence was solidified in the mid-'50s, with satellite nations becoming important players in the increasingly hot cold war. The rapidly decolonizing, nonaligned "third world" may have freed itself from direct political control by the former imperialist nations, but it quickly became sutured into a severe and controlling debtor relation with international capitalism: economics was already becoming the primary means of recolonizing the nonaligned nations, a movement that only intensified through the '60s and into the massive debt crises of the 1970s (with the increasing activism of the Bretton-Woods institutions, the World Bank, and the IMF). Culturally, the mid-'50s in the West saw a wide range of disparate global responses to the intensifying cold war: from the postcolonial theorizing of Fanon and C. L. R. James, to the increasing exhaustion of international modernism in the face of mutually assured destruction (one thinks of Beckett especially here, or at the other end of the spectrum the films of the French auteurs and the dreams of liberation and mobility connected to everything from abstract expressionist painting to beat literature). In any case, the revolutions we characterize as part and parcel of "the '60s" can be seen to have had their roots in the '50s, or at least it's a provocative and useful intervention to begin with that historicizing, periodizing premise.

On the other side of the '60s, the fall of Saigon in 1974 or the Watergate scandals of the early to mid-'70s are perhaps the most dramatic political markers of the end of the '60s, at least in the US. Economically, the most convenient break on the other side of the '60s is probably the Smithsonian Agreement (1971), which officially took the US dollar off the gold standard, allowing worldwide currency values to "float," their value determined by markets of supply and demand rather than by reference, however tenuous, to the "real" value of gold reserves in Fort Knox. Culturally, the overdose deaths of '60s icons Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and Janis Joplin—all in the early '70s—are often pointed out as definitive breaks with the joyful, experimental ethos of the culturally liberated 1960s.

Of course, what counts as a key cultural, political, and economic reference could be multiplied, refined, and argued exponentially—this is part of the gambit and provocation of Jameson's periodizing hypothesis. But here near the beginning of my analysis, I'd like to mine two relatively uncontroversial premises from Jameson's "Periodizing the 60s": first, calendar markers are not the be-all and end-all of grappling with historical periods; and, second, insofar as Jameson's "Periodizing the 60s" was published in 1984, it suggests that only from after the end of an epoch can one begin to size the era up historically or begin to "periodize" it (following, perhaps, Derrida's famous remarks on deconstruction and its relation to modernist philosophies of the subject: it is precisely from the boundary of a historical period, from inside its continuing end or closure, that one might hold out some retroactive or retrospective hope of naming what happened there).

In following up Jameson's periodizing thesis a few decades later, and focusing it narrowly on the United States, I am tempted to say that whenever "the '60s" finally ended in the US, the period that emerged in its wake was not so much "the '70s" as it was "the '80s": the conservative, "down with big government" period of backlash that fueled the Reagan revolution; and the intensification of that pro-business, market-take-all ethos in the 1990s. One might say that the '80s, that period of market-mad privatization, began in the mid- to late '70s, with the global reorganization of production. Fueled by the evisceration of unions and government regulation, the beginning of the leveraged buyout years in the US, and the unprecedented run-up of the equity markets, the Reagan '80s had quite a run through the Clinton go-go '90s. Indeed, if in the US "the '60s" functions politically as a kind of shorthand for resistance and revolution of all kinds, "the '80s" most immediately signifies the increasing power and ubiquity of markets and privatized corporatization in everyday life. And the '90s were clearly the years of full bloom for the conservative fiscal agenda hatched in the '80s. The market-tested Reagan truisms of the '80s were intensified to fever pitch throughout the 1990s (you remember: the government can't do anything right, we're not in the business of "nation building" abroad, Social Security should be wholly privatized, the wealthy getting wealthier is actually good for the rest of us, the Dow will run at 36,000).

And though it's a little hard to say exactly when the economic, political, and cultural regime we call "the '80s" began in earnest in the US (Reagan's election in 1980? the Iran hostage crisis of 1979? Talking Heads' first album in 1977?), one might say a bit more definitively when the '80s ended: if not with the bursting of the NASDAQ dot.com bubble in fall 2000, then certainly with the wave of corporate scandals (Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen) that followed. And perhaps most definitively, the events of September 11, 2001 ended an era of antigovernment sentiment in the US. In the present social and political climate, where people in airports happily take their shoes off at the behest of government flunkies, it's hard to remember how omnipresent the tirades against big government were in the '80s and '90s. (Think about Waco, Randy Weaver, Tim McVeigh's Oklahoma City bombing. When merely to question United States hegemony is labeled "treason," in right-wing pundit Ann Coulter's catchy phrase, it's difficult to recall the hard-core intensity and ubiquity of antigovernment hatred during the '80s and '90s, especially among conservatives: so far, the Tea Party seems pretty tame by comparison.) In terms of foreign policy, the US government's forays into nation crushing/building in Afghanistan and Iraq seem possible only in a world that's very different from the isolationist corporatism that ruled the '80s and '90s (remember the conservative outrage against "nation building" in Somalia). Of course, there were a few cries of "socialism" during the US bailout discussions of 2008, but adding another several hundred billion dollars of taxpayers' money to the original package somehow silenced the critics of big government. The nation-state, which had looked like it was becoming an anachronism in the world of triumphant global corporatization,

is back—and in a big way, though none of the things that progressives might like about the nation-state, such as widespread entitlement programs, seem to have much chance of returning with it.

On the affective level of everyday life in the US, it's pretty clear that whatever happened culturally and economically in the 1980s and '90s, we're living in a different period. We're still living that legacy, but many of the dominant economic, cultural, and political rules of the game have changed dramatically.

That being the case, I want to engage here in a kind of periodizing thought experiment, one that takes some of its inspiration from Jameson's "Periodizing the 60s." I want to suggest that, like Jameson's more global thesis about the '60s, the '80s in the US were a "period"—an era with a loose cultural, economic, and political affinity—that lasted roughly twenty years: from, say, Reagan's election in 1980 to the summer of 2000 or the fall of 2001. If that period is or feels like it is over today, we may be at a point where we can begin to describe and grapple with what happened there and to speculate concerning what's likely to come about in its wake: what has disappeared since the '80s, what has intensified, and what, if anything, has remained the same? In short, and in anticipation, I'll try to suggest throughout this book that over the past thirty years in the US, the major shift in economic and cultural terrain is within "capitalism" itself—which is no longer exactly the same thing it was in the 1980s. Less dramatically, one could say that the privatizing economic mandates of the '80s remained and intensified throughout the 1990s. And this perhaps is the most obvious way that the economic truisms of the '80s linger on today, even after the bubble burst. As Tom Frank writes, "The free-market faith is still with us. What's gone is the optimism" (2001, 3).

Still III

Jameson's "Periodizing the 60s" was published in 1984, the same year as his epoch-making "Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"; and the two essays have much in common, each illuminating aspects of the other. One can, for example, more clearly understand Jameson's skepticism about the "cultural dominant" of '80s-style postmodernism by recalling one of the central themes of "Periodizing the 60s"—the 1980s is or was a period of cultural containment in the US, a dialectical inversion of the artistic, political, and economic energies unleashed in the '60s: artistically, the experimental avant-gardism of the '60s—pop art, performance art, Black Arts—is met in the '80s by the culture wars and the increasing corporatization of artistic production; politically, antiwar and civil rights movements of the '60s are countered by the "moral majority" Reagan backlash of the '80s—the revenge of white suburbanites; economically, the global decolonizations of the '60s and the US's abandonment of the gold standard in the early '70s are met by the massive global debt crises and inflationary spirals of the 1980s (and the concomitant rise in power of finance institutions like the Federal Reserve, World Bank, and IMF). If, as Jameson writes, "the 60s were . . . an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the universal gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of every more devalued signifiers" (1984, 208), then the bills unfortunately come due in the '80s: "The dreary realities of exploitation, extraction of surplus value, proletarianization and . . . class struggle, all slowly reassert themselves on a new and expanded world scale" (209). Needless to say, this description of the early to mid-'80s also has some considerable resonance with the present situation in the US, where we're reckoning with the staggering debts—human, environmental, and monetary—accrued by a go-it-alone style of global imperialism in Iraq and Afghanistan, America's longest war.

Reading Jameson's '60s essay next to his postmodernism essay also suggests that he harbors very little hope for nostalgia as a mode of critical engagement—that is, Jameson argues that the political and artistic strategies of resistance born in the 1960s aren't likely to be effective in the very different social and political climate of the 1980s. In diagnosing and contesting economic and social realities from the vantage point of 1984, Jameson notes that "the older methods [of the '60s] do not necessarily work" (1984, 208): "nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the '60s," he notes in the essay's opening line, is the first "error" to be avoided in any kind of historicist thinking about the present. Finally, "Periodizing the 60s" shows us that the historical transition from the '60s to the '80s is very poorly understood if we thematize that transition *solely* within the preferred terms of '60s-style narratives—as the unleashing of subversive social energy (the '60s) that's overcome by the repressive backlash of the '80s; '60s authenticity versus '80s co-optation; '60s resistance versus '80s normalization. In other words, the narratives by which we characterize that period called the '60s—narratives of unprecedented rebellion, resistance, and liberation—don't necessarily do much useful work in explaining or intervening within a very different historical situation. Taking a good deal of the wind out of the "wasn't that a time?" ethos, Jameson rather soberly suggests that the *economic* narratives of the '60s—rather than the artistic or political ones—may be most useful in thinking historically about the present. The social revolutions of the '60s, he writes, "may perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systematic stage of capitalism to another" (208). Leave it to Jameson to bring the wet blanket of economics to a '60s beach party.

Throughout this book, I want to follow Jameson insofar as he suggests we need to do a genealogy of the recent economic past, not so that we can nostalgically recall and celebrate the gains and losses, but finally so we don't delude ourselves into thinking that the oppositional strategies of the past can unproblematically and effectively be imported into the present. (I take this to be the force of the Jamesonian slogan "always historicize.") If Jameson's two 1984 essays suggest—however subtly—that many left-leaning academics in the mid-'80s were still stuck in an outmoded mindset of the 1960s, and that an economic analysis was the clearest way to show this, I want to fast-forward that hypothesis into our present. To put my concern baldly, it seems to me that much North American humanities "theory" of the present moment is essentially stuck in and around the "the '80s"; and perhaps the easiest and most effective way of breaking that spell is to try to think economically as well as culturally about the differences between the two periods.

If we consider only the most obvious example of such present-day theoretical anachronism, Jameson's "Postmodernism" essay itself remains the touchstone for cultural studies work on the present—it's a perennial syllabus favorite, and it continues to function as a term-setter for debates about economics and culture today. This, it seems to me, is quite odd (and quite un-Jamesonian). Remember that when Jameson's essay was published in 1984, the Berlin Wall was still firmly in place—the cold war was in fact heating up again, with Reagan's new morning in America still dawning; the Dow Jones was struggling to run at 1,200; Paul Volcker's inflation-worried Fed had US interest rates sky high; Japan, it seemed, was the economic power to be reckoned with and feared in the next century (recall that in the industrial Midwest of the mid-'80s, people would routinely vandalize Japanese cars and motorcycles—or, for that matter, just take a look at 1982's *Blade Runner* and its Japanized dystopian future); in 1984, Americans were just beginning to talk about AIDS; the first MAC computer—with 286 stunning k of RAM—debuted in North America in January 1984, introduced in a splashy, Orwellian Super Bowl commercial; the Internet—at least as we know it—was still the stuff of science fiction, as was the global ubiquity of cell phones and smartphones. Watching Michael Douglas talk on a billionaire's prize—a portable satellite phone the size of a shoebox—in *Wall Street*, who could have imagined that only two decades later, most middle school students would possess communication technology ten times smaller and a hundred times more powerful?

We live, in other words, in a very different world from the early to mid-'80s. Though we still live with the fallout of the '80s, it's clear that the economic component of our "cultural dominant" is no longer that particular brand of "postmodernism, or late capitalism." In fact, the neo-Marxist

hope inscribed in the phrase “late capitalism” seems a kind of cruel joke in the world of globalization (“late for what?”). So among the tasks of periodizing the present, a collective molecular project that we might call *post-postmodernism*, is to construct a vocabulary to talk about the “new economies” (post-Fordism, globalization, the centrality of market economics, the new surveillance techniques of the war on terrorism, etc.) and their complex relations to cultural production in the present moment, where capitalism seems nowhere near the point of its exhaustion. Although the hopes contained in the phrase “the new economy” have all but dried up in recent years, the dreary realities of its market dictates remain very much with us—one hesitates to say permanently, but as far as the eye can see at the present moment. Also, I should note that I take mine to be a diagnostic project: any kind of tentative *prescription* for treating current ills would have to follow from a thick *description* of the symptoms and their genealogical development over time. So it’s to that descriptive or diagnostic project that I now turn.

Hand in Glove

How does or did this thing called economic “privatization” work? What exactly is the relationship of the ’80s leveraged buyout craze, for example, and today’s more seemingly sedate corporate orthodoxy? Not surprisingly, most economists—right and left—point to a fairly straight line of economic development from the ’80s to today, from the death of the “old” economy to the triumph of the “new.” As Michael Jensen, Harvard economist and leading theorist of the new market-take-all economy, writes in his 2000 *Theory of the Firm*, “LBO associations and venture capital funds provide a blueprint for managers and boards who wish to revamp their top-level control systems to make them more efficient” (56). Rather than an apology for the excesses of the ’80s, Jensen’s work constitutes a cheerleading tribute to “LBOs and their role in the restoration of competitiveness in the American corporation” (64). Indeed, if you want to ask why the Dow Jones Industrial Average shot up more than 12,000 points between 1985 and 2007, when it had managed only about 1,000 points of total growth in the half century between the 1929 crash and 1980, one need look no further than Jensen and his vision of “unlocking shareholder value.”

Among all the other things that sprang onto the economic scene in the ’80s, the most central throughout the 1990s was this Jensenite notion of shareholder value, which translated into an almost total corporate emphasis on maintaining a high stock price. For the better part of the twentieth century, American businesses didn’t worry too much about their stock price, and the financial sector of the economy was certainly nowhere near the center. Production was king, with an economic and corporate structure dedicated to the Fordist courses of expansion, production, and liberal spending originally mapped by J. M. Keynes and tailored for the postwar mega-corporation by J. K. Galbraith. And Jensen is very much aware of the historical reasons for the triumph of production-based economics; the finance-based model lost considerable luster in the 1929 US stock market crash and subsequent worldwide Depression. Through the Depression and war years to the baby boom generation, the crash of 1929 resonated louder than bombs within the collective memory of American business. As a result, the financial sector of a midcentury corporation was hardly in any position to call the corporate shots.

Under a Keynesian or Galbraithian theory of the firm, shareholders and others in the “private” finance sector are a low priority—not exactly an afterthought, but certainly not the enterprise’s primary reason for being. “Slow and steady growth” was the mantra of American business from the ’50s through the ’70s, and disgorging large amounts of “public” corporate cash to “private” stockholders is not a good way to manage such growth. Servicing the stockholder is, in fact, destabilizing for those who actually work at the firm—so-called stakeholders. Keeping the stock price and dividends high commits everyone at the firm to an uncertain, quarter-by-quarter, what-have-you-done-for-me-lately mind-set rather than a long-term pattern of steady growth.

Doug Henwood usefully sums up the orthodoxy of midcentury corporate America in *Wall Street*: “Galbraith dismissed profit maximization as the goal of a giant firm in favor of the growth in sales and prestige. To thrive, it needed not maximum profits, but ‘a secure minimum of earnings’ that would keep it from having to tap troublesome capital markets or cope with demanding outside stockholders. . . . The technostucture had little to gain from high profits, which would only be passed along to shareholders, and might even entail higher risk” (1998, 259). In such a Galbraithian scenario, it’s more or less admitted that shareholder profits could always be greater; but the corporate management and workforce have little incentive to take the risks necessary to squeeze out every last little bit of profit—especially since such profit would, in the end, not help anyone *in* the corporation. Rather, such profits would be paid *out* to private individuals who don’t work at the company but hold its stock. So goes the wisdom of corporate technocracy, the thinking attributed to “the man in the gray flannel suit”: Why risk your job, your public reputation, and the jobs of your colleagues to secure higher profit for private shareholders, who have no stake in the everyday running of the corporation, no knowledge about the intricacies of the product line, no expertise in the industry? This corporate orthodoxy helps explain why, for example, the Dow Jones Industrial Average didn’t break the 1,000 mark until 1972; and even then it didn’t top 1,100 until more than a decade later, in 1983. During the period from 1990 to 2000, by contrast, rarely did three months go by without a hundred-point gain in the Dow. From 1995 to 1999, thousand-point yearly gains were the norm.

Indeed, the LBO era of the 1980s constituted nothing less than an assault on the Galbraithian corporation, the giant company and its truism that steady and predictable growth is good for all. For Jensen, this seemingly rosy picture of slow growth brings with it a horrible cost: inefficiency. Who’s running these corporations, Jensen asks? The answer, in Jensen’s view, is middle managers—glorified production supervisors and halfwit business administration majors in cheap suits. And to whom are they loyal? The people who work for them and their immediate bosses; the private shareholder is nowhere to be seen in the equation. Jensen was outraged that businesses were not being run according to the interests of their ostensible owners, the shareholders. Jensen sums up the woeful rise of managerialism this way: “As financial institution monitors left the scene in the post-1940 period, managers commonly came to believe companies belonged to them and that stockholders were merely one of the many stakeholders the firm had to serve” (2000, 65–66).

The leveraged buyout movement of the ’80s, fueled as it was by the mantra of “unlocking shareholder value,” was nothing less than a civil war within American business, with shareholders (buoyed by the rise of the large institutional investor, the almighty mutual fund) demanding their piece of the corporate pie. And Jensen makes crystal clear the stakes of this internecine war: “The mergers, acquisitions, leveraged buyouts (LBOs), and other leveraged restructurings of the 1980s constituted an assault on entrenched authority that was long overdue” (9). True to his market orthodoxy, Jensen prefers to talk about the ’80s LBO craze as a market itself, the “corporate control market” (3). And Jensen very much articulates the orthodox line in contemporary business—the history written by the winners—which understands the ’80s as a kind of massive market correction: individual stockholders stepped in to discipline the lazy and unproductive practices of the old-line corporation. As Jensen smugly sums up, the ’80s meant curtains for “those we used to call ‘entrenched’ management” (4). We all know the story, because we are still there: tens of thousands “lose their jobs as the inefficient and bloated corporate staffs are replaced by LBO partnership headquarters units” (78). Ahh, efficiency.

What was enshrined through the notion of “unlocking shareholder value” is a new-fashioned kind of class warfare, the revolt of the rich. Simply put, Jensen asserts that the people who put up the money should get the profits: “For control to rest in any other group would be equivalent to allowing the group to play poker with someone else’s money and would create inefficiencies that lead to the possibility of failure” (2). Because rich people are so obviously and voraciously greedy, Jensen implies, they can be counted on to do anything necessary to maximize profits, which are

hiding here behind the code word “efficiency.” As Jensen baldly states, “In the private corporation, stockholders and bondholders, who bear the wealth effects of changes in firm value, have incentives to monitor managers to prevent them from making transfers of corporate assets to workers or permit workers from making such transfers” (194). This, the upward distribution of wealth to CEOs and shareholders while management and workers are ground under finance’s heel, is the real agenda and effect of ’80s-style corporate privatization.

With the high-profile crackdowns on corporate malfeasance in the US before and after the bubble burst, we might be tempted to say that the new barbarians finally got theirs. Note, however, that precious few Harvard MBAs or Wharton grads took the perp walk for the cameras in the first decade of the 2000s: the two CEOs actually led off in high-profile chains were Tyco’s Dennis Kozlowski, an alum of Seton Hall, and the hapless John Rigas of Adelphia, a Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute graduate. Of the other infamous convicted CEOs and investment ne’er-do-wells, note that WorldCom’s Bernie Ebbers was a working-class kid from Alberta, Canada, and unlikely alum of Mississippi Baptist College—which he attended on a basketball scholarship. Enron’s Ken Lay was a graduate of the University of Missouri, and Bernie Madoff graduated from Hofstra College. The folks who took the heat were, in other words, aggressively *not* old-money Ivy Leaguers, and it’s no coincidence that these upstarts are served up as scapegoats, while all the others repeat the line they learned from the Princeton frat-house scandals of their college days: it’s just a few bad apples, not a systematic problem. Indeed, it’s an instructive class lesson to recall that no one high up in the financial firms Lehman Brothers or Bear Stearns, lead perpetrators of Bursting Bubble 2.0 in 2008, has come anywhere near a federal courtroom.

Note also that the investigations that produced the corporate crackdowns of the early 2000s were instigated and fueled not by the outrage of unions, employees, the SEC, the Justice Department, or the general public, but by the shareholders of these corporations. While there’s a nice populist feel to watching CEOs and CFOs being humiliated, their falls from grace owe virtually nothing to old-fashioned public outrage at the excesses of big business. They were taken down by the power and influence of Enron, Qwest, Adelphia, and WorldCom *stockholders*, which is to say that corporate scandals don’t necessarily contradict the privatizing, shareholder-take-all logic of the ’80s; they in fact confirm and intensify this logic. Since the ’80s, CEOs have been paid lavish salaries to do what the shareholders hired them to do—drive the stock price sky high, by any means necessary. But when the proverbial shit hit the fan, the shareholders turned on their flunkies in a New York minute. So what you’re seeing when you see a CEO in handcuffs is largely the continuation of an internecine war among the super-rich, and a concomitant extension and consolidation of the shareholders’ power in corporate America. It most assuredly is *not* the result of a populist revolt against the fat cats.

What Difference Does It Make?

At some level, this is a familiar story: In the move from Fordism to post-Fordism and beyond, capital has become increasingly deterritorialized, floating flexibly free from production processes, and coming to rest more centrally in the orbit of symbolic exchange and information technologies. In addition, private notions of unleashed finance assert themselves over more public modalities of planned growth, in the corporation and in the public sphere at large. Lean and mean financial “efficiency” becomes the mantra; and in a nutshell, efficiency means privatization. That having been said, however, perhaps we need to follow those ’80s masters of masochism, the Smiths, and ask, “What difference does it make?” Why rehearse this story, which tends only to make people on the left feel hopeless and resentful? Aside from bemoaning the state of advanced finance capital, what can we *do* with this genealogy of the recent past?

Regarding the present state of theory in the humanities and the possibilities for mobilizing response to the logic of privatization, this genealogy suggests it’s no longer very productive to think in the terms of theoretical drama familiar from the 1980s—as Jameson notes, those terms themselves are already a hangover from the ’60s. That is, it’s becoming increasingly unhelpful to replay the drama that posits a repressive, normative “stasis or essentialism” that can be outflanked only by some form of more or less liberating, socially constructed “fluid openness.” At this point, we’d have to admit that privatized finance capital has all but obliterated the usefulness of this distinction: to insist on the hybridity and fluidness of X or Y is the mantra of transnational capital—whose normative state is the constant reconstitution of “value”—so it can hardly function unproblematically as a bulwark against that logic. Think of the war on terrorism, for example. In order to be patriotic in this war, we in the US have not at all been asked to repress or downsize our desires: no collective, public efforts like wholesale rationing or conserving to enhance the war effort. Rather, in a 180-degree turnabout from the usual austere rhetoric of wartime, Uncle Sam now wants us to liberate our individual desires in the face of the axis of evil (defined primarily as anti-desire, anti-individual, fundamentalist repression): so we’re asked to consume, travel, refinance our mortgage at lower rates, buy durable household goods. Follow our personal desires; that’ll stick it to al-Qaeda.

Indeed, when Led Zeppelin plays over Cadillac commercials and a Rolling Stones tour can be brought to you quite literally by the housing bubble (the Stones’ 2005 official tour sponsor was now-defunct Ameri-Quest Mortgage), you have to assume that the cultural rebellion narratives of the ’60s, which often revolved around the liberation of an individual’s or group’s desire in the face of various social repressions, can now officially be pronounced dead. Under an economic logic that is in fact dedicated to the unleashing of multifarious individual desires and floating values (broadly speaking, a corporate-nation-state model), rather than desire’s dampening or repressive territorialization on a gold standard of univocal value (broadly speaking, the traditional nation-state model), the role of social “normalization” (previously the purview of the state’s Ideological Apparatuses) needs to be rethought from the ground up. Put simply, a repressive notion of “normalization” is not the primary danger lurking within contemporary capitalism. Though, of course, rigid normalization is still alive and well elsewhere in the political *socius*, as the xenophobic Arizona immigration laws of 2010 amply remind us; but we should also be reminded that *businesses* in Arizona and elsewhere are none too happy with these draconian laws. There are myriad social and political dangers latent in the neoliberal truisms of finance capital, but the rigid normalization of cultural options isn’t paramount among them. (In only the most obvious example, it’s not corporate capitalism that’s at the forefront of discrimination against gays, lesbians, or immigrants—Disney offers same-sex partner benefits and produces large numbers of kids’ TV shows in Spanish; my blue-state university only recently started offering partner benefits, over the continuing objections of the state legislature; and don’t hold your breath for lawmaker sessions conducted or broadcast in Spanish.)

So let me return to the methodological reconsideration of Jameson that I began earlier in this chapter and that I will likewise develop and perform throughout this book. On this kind of reading, what Jameson performs in the ’60s essay and the “Postmodernism” essay—and, I’d argue, largely throughout his mature work—is nothing less than a rethinking of dialectical method, recasting it largely as an operation of what I would call “overcoding.” What is overcoding? Recall that for Jameson the late capitalist social realm is inexorably “totalized” (Jameson’s more provocative, Sartrean word for the mundane postmodern sense that there is no “outside”: nature is gone forever, he writes, so culture is all there is). So, overcoding (or, to use Jameson’s preferred word, “transcoding”) is just one “dialectical” way of following out the logic, methodologically speaking:³ if everything in our world exists on the same flat plane, then things that don’t at first seem to have much in common quite literally have to be related in some way(s)—the cultural realm and the economic realm, avant-garde poetry and downtown skyscrapers, for example. Or, to put it somewhat more precisely, one should be able to take the claims and effects that surround the logic of X or Y cultural phenomenon (say, that contemporary literature is open ended, process oriented, not dedicated to the limitations of univocal meaning) and dialectically overcode or transcode these cultural effects in terms of economic ones (that, say, global capitalism is open ended, process oriented, not dedicated to the limitations of univocal

meaning).

As Jameson puts it in *Valences of the Dialectic*, specifically in the context of trying to rethink base and superstructure as transcoding rather than subtending discourses: “The structure of production can, in other words, be translated or transcoded into the language of class struggle, and vice versa. To this proposition we can now add the imperative that the two codes must criticize each other, must systematically be translated back and forth into one another in a ceaseless alternation, which foregrounds what each code cannot say fully as much as what it can” (2009, 46–47). In other words, when one then dialectically “returns” from an economic coding of X postmodern phenomenon back to the cultural coding, one can no longer treat the cultural claims made for the thing in quite the same unproblematically liberating way. This is at least partially to say that, following out Jameson’s overcoding logic, one can’t make the kind of move that you still see rife within political theory: the ethos of liberation that surrounds cultural postmodernism (the transgressions of hybridity, the individual ethics of self-fashioning, Dionysiac celebrations of multiplicity, endlessly making it new) can’t simply be walled off from the substantially more sinister work that these very same notions index within the economic realm—they’re the watchwords of neoliberal capitalism as well. So when one dialectically overcodes the liberated cultural effects of postmodernism with the substantially more dire economic realities that rely on the same concepts, one can no longer assess the cultural effects in quite the same way. And vice versa—the inherently sinister claims of economic theory are cut down to size a bit when they’re overcoded by less obviously grandiose or influential discourses like poststructuralist poetics.

Early on, in *Marxism and Form*, Jameson (1971) helpfully elaborates on the ways in which the “mishmashing” style of his work (taking on seemingly very disparate topics within the purview of a single analysis or essay) is intimately connected to these methodological aims. The style of his work, Jameson insists, is a direct overcoding of dominant political discourse: “The method of such thinking, in its various forms and guises, consists in separating reality into airtight compartments, carefully distinguishing the political from the economic, the legal from the political, the sociological from the historical, so that the full implications of any given problem can never come into view” (368). In short, Jameson’s work, both the content and, just as important, the form, is targeted decisively against the theoretical and political imperatives of logical positivist empiricism—against separating out realms of social life into more easily policeable and controllable chunks, never confronting one social code with the values, language, and force of another.

In any case, I take the Jamesonian methodological starting point to be this: it’s one logic, smeared across a bunch of discourses, and after the transcoding dialectical demonstration, you can’t quite so easily or naively cherry-pick and affirm the stuff you like (say, the Yale School of literary criticism), while you simply denounce the stuff you don’t like (say, the Chicago School of economics). Or, to put it more precisely, you can’t unproblematically say that the logic of one of those things (American deconstruction, in this example) somehow inherently subverts or resists the logic of the other (neoliberal capitalism). I’d hasten to add that it’s similarly unhelpful to assert, simply based on resemblance, that deconstruction causes global poverty: it’s simply mendacious to suggest that Paul de Man is as responsible as Milton Friedman for the financial debacles of South America in the ’70s and ’80s. Indeed, as Jameson asserts in the context of a discussion of Marx’s *Capital*, “The first casualty of this dialectic is of course any moralizing or ethical approach to the matter” (2009, 63). Rather than chum toward an inevitable moral conclusion (an outmoded understanding of dialectic), the transcoding or overcoding job becomes working out the connections, the sites of homology and difference, and the difference they make. If, as everyone seemingly agrees, there is no “outside”—if, as Jameson writes, “we are no longer in the position of evaluating whether a given thought system or aesthetic form is progressive or reactionary” (358)—then the question necessarily becomes, how are these various modes of production related; how do they configure a kind of odd, multiple totality? And what nodes of resistance and/or critique are locatable within such an altered diagnosis of the field itself?⁴

The real question this leaves us with is the question of today. Given the intensifications of privatized capitalism since the postmodern 1980s, what cultural, political, and economic routes of reconfiguration are opened up for us today? And what ones are gone forever? Will the financial crashes characteristic of the century’s first decade really change the playing field of multinational capitalism, or will they simply rearrange the dominant players? Of course, it’s a little too early to tell what will happen with the multiple cultural legacies of a shift in economic production, because such response is ongoing, multifarious, and largely experimental. That is, the work of critique, as Jameson reminds us, moves and gains foothold through an immanent and positive engagement with a present that is not a hole or a trap but is “rather to be imagined in terms of an explosion: a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to have become ‘cultural’ in some original and yet untheorized sense” (1991, 48). It is toward theorizing that “untheorized sense” of today as a kind of intense “cultural explosion” that the present book is dedicated.

Intensity

EMPIRE OF THE INTENSITIES: A RANDOM WALK DOWN LAS VEGAS BOULEVARD

Capitalism no longer looks outside but rather inside its domain, and its expansion is thus intensive rather than extensive.

—MICHAEL HARDT AND ANTONIO NEGRI, *Empire*

Walking down the Las Vegas Strip at night, you can't help feeling that you're at the center of a brave new world of commerce. The Strip seems a perfect example of both the *product* and the *engine* of the American economy. Vegas, in other words, represents a kind of ground zero of the postindustrial American economy, with its just-in-time (which is to say, all-the-time) delivery of extremely high-concept sensory overload, staffed by wave after wave of service labor. As Marc Cooper writes, "if Lenin once summed up Communism as 'Soviet power plus electrification,' the highest formulation of the New American Economy might just be 'casinos plus part-time jobs'" (1997, 30). And every twenty-minute change of dealers and croupiers displays the flexible specialization integral to this post-Fordist economy.

However, one could argue that today's Las Vegas is an exemplary economic site in more ways than one: it obviously works according to the logic of the service economy, but it also figures the shift from such a post-Fordist world to the emergent and troubled new economy that one reads about every day in the *Wall Street Journal*. Those trying to name and diagnose this new economy often file it under the old rubric of neoliberal "finance capital," that regime in which speculative capital is wagered on a future of supposed or projected worth rather than invested in the production and mass marketing of new commodities or services. In other words, the future of capital seems to rest not so much on the innovation of products or manufacturing processes (a Fordist model) or in the colonization of new services or clients (the post-Fordist model), but in a futures market on capital itself, in a kind of gambling on the future worth of stocks and other speculation devices. As Fredric Jameson argues in "Culture and Finance Capital," the future of capitalism "resides no longer in the factories and the spaces of extraction and production but on the floor of the stock market, jostling for more intense profitability. But it won't be one industry competing with another branch, or even one *productive* technology against another more advanced one in the same line of manufacturing, but rather in the form of speculation itself" (1997a, 251.) The future of capitalism, in other words, rests not on the extraction of profit from commodities or services but on the production of money directly from money—making profit by wagering on an anticipated future outcome. And the future, it seems, is now.

This, I take it, is what Hardt and Negri point toward in the epigraph to this chapter: capitalism is no longer primarily "extensive" (seeking new markets, new raw materials, untapped resources), but rather has become "intensive." Capitalism today seeks primarily to saturate and deepen—intensify—its hold over existing markets, insofar as global capitalism of the twenty-first century has run out of new territories to conquer. And the intensities of finance (how do you squeeze more profits out of the stuff you already have?) become the linchpin practices of this risky new economy. Because it's a sector of the economy where capital is staked "intensively" (directly in order to generate more capital) rather than "extensively" (creating new tangible goods or services, which are then bought or sold to produce capital), the regime of finance capital has often been nicknamed "casino capitalism" (see Strange 1997). As Marx himself wrote, stock markets and futures markets work according to the logic of gambling—where no commodity is directly produced or consumed. According to Marx, it is precisely this gambling logic that gives bankers and other speculators "their nicely mixed character of swindler and prophet" (1997, 572–73).

In *Capital*, M-C-M' names the dialectical formula whereby accumulated wealth (M) is invested in the production of commodities, thereby becoming capital (C); the commodities produced by that investment capital are then sold to produce profit (M'). Thus begun, the dialectical adventure of money continues—with ever-more accumulation, evermore investment in the production of commodities, and ever-more profits reaped by the capitalist: M-C-M'. Recalling this economic vocabulary of classical Marxism, one might say that finance capital skips a step, and its formula might be written as Marx writes the formula for all money lending and finance, M-M': "money creating more money," as Marx succinctly puts it in *Capital: Volume 3* (1894, pt. 5, sec. 24.2). In other words, an increase in finance capital requires no direct or overt mediation by a commodity or service: no commodity (C) mediates between investment (M) and profit (M'); no actual goods or services are required to represent or serve as a placeholder for the abstract value of invested money; and no labor power is required to account for the transformation or generation of surplus value as profit. One might say in a kind of shorthand that M-M' comprises the formula for all forms of gambling, where money is directly *intensified*—made greater or smaller—rather than transformed into a different state through the mediating work of investment, labor, commodity production, or exchange.¹

Following this logic to its limits on the streets and gaming tables of Las Vegas, one might argue that contemporary Vegas doesn't primarily produce either goods or services; rather, it produces what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call actual and virtual "intensities"—the thrills of winning, the aches of losing, the awe of the spectacle, weddings and divorces.² Like the booming speculation markets in stocks, futures, and options that fueled its reinvention, Vegas's primary products are two: winners and losers. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, capital of all kinds—phantasmatic, symbolic, monetary—is staked in the hope of producing *more*.

Insofar as Las Vegas specializes in the production of such intensities—direct, hypnotic states of excess, loss, and expenditure—it deserves some renewed attention as a privileged site in the emergence of the newest American economy. If we spent the 1970s and '80s "learning from Las Vegas" the *cultural* lessons of a triumphant kitschy postmodernism (see Venturi 1977), I want to suggest that there are a number of emergent *economic* truths that we can learn from Las Vegas several decades later.

The most insistent thing we've already learned from Las Vegas is that so-called economic truths are inseparable from cultural or aesthetic ones. You don't have to spend much time in Vegas to witness the utter collapse of the base/superstructure model and obliteration of the classical Marxian idea that capital speculation is wholly parasitic and cultural, producing nothing of consequence for the real economic base.³ From Bugsy Siegel's original gamble in the desert, through the Rat Pack years of livin' large, right up to the new Theme Park Las Vegas (rebuilt on junk bonds and culture industry profits), all of Las Vegas's economic power is built on a series of cultural speculations; and even today its economic power and well-being are based largely on its cultural identity as the home of excess: What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. Vegas has plenty to teach us about the economic base of today, but we learn first and foremost from Las Vegas that this economic base is always already shot through with superstructural, cultural capital.⁴

Capital that's merely parasitic, that adds or produces nothing "real," can't build this kind of massive empire in the middle of the desert. Las

Vegas is a kind of testimonial to contemporary modes of power and functions oddly like the symbols of bygone imperial dominance that Vegas so gleefully appropriates: the Egyptian Pyramids and the Sphinx (Luxor), the glory and decadence of Rome (Caesar's Palace), the Italian Renaissance (Venetian and Bellagio), the power of the Sultans (Aladdin), and even the utopian modernism of the City Center complex.

Ancient capitals of empire functioned as centers of both cultural and economic power, with the sheer spectacle of their symbolic excesses working to cement a pedagogical relation between the imperial force of empire and the symbolic spectacle of aesthetic expenditure. On a pilgrimage to ancient Rome from the provinces, one would be led to recognize very quickly (if somewhat unconsciously) that the awe-inspiring architectural spectacles of Rome were made possible by the very same forces of imperialism that rule your home village—just as the vacationing Iowa Knights of Columbus group learns, at some level, the truths of the new economy through Las Vegas's logics of intensity and speculation.

And there is still much learning going on in Las Vegas every day; it's a place of hard economic lessons, indexed by an old joke: "Vegas: I arrived in a \$50,000 Mercedes; I left in a \$500,000 bus." However, I want to shift ground somewhat and suggest that we don't so much learn from the spectacle of intensities that is Las Vegas ("learning" implies critical distance and rational judgment; it implies that we can decide to accept or reject the lessons played out there). Maybe these days we don't *learn from* Las Vegas as much as we are forced to *respond* to the emergent mode of power—the new global casino capitalism—that is Las Vegas. Or maybe, like an ancient Roman subject from the hinterlands, we are even compelled to *obey* Las Vegas.⁵

Hail Caesar!

Perhaps the best site to begin surveying this burgeoning empire of commerce and culture is Caesar's Palace Casino and Hotel, located at the center of the Las Vegas Strip, an appropriately labyrinthine imperial site. If Jameson had a hard time making his way around the Bonaventure Hotel in LA, one shudders to think of the disorientation he'd experience in the "Forum Shops at Caesar's": an unapologetic overlap of hotel, casino, restaurant, theme park, and shopping mall—all done up in some hyper-postmodern version of the ancient past. Around Caesar's shops are scattered mythological Greek figures like Poseidon, Homer, and the Trojan Horse—all emblems that, we may recall, were already ancient by the time of Plato, some four hundred years before the reign of Augustus Caesar. The statuary rubs elbows with a roaming live Cleopatra and her buff Roman Centurions, all of whom will gladly pose for pictures with Caesar's honored guests.

The Forum Shops are a hybrid of the contemporary suburban mall and the nineteenth-century flaneur's arcade (curiously decked out with ubiquitous Roman aqueducts—flows, everywhere flows). You're ferried into the Forum from the sweltering Strip along a series of covered moving sidewalks—a welcome fit for an emperor. When you want to leave, however, you have to trudge the five hundred yards back to Las Vegas Boulevard like a plebeian—through the Caesar's casino (if you can find the poorly marked exit) and out over the unforgivingly hot acres of blacktop set aside for horseless carriages. While you're there, the "experience" of the Forum Shops is rounded out by the usual American mall stores (Gap, Victoria's Secret, Abercrombie & Fitch) as well as unusual ones (Burberry, Versace, Cavalli); restaurants launched by ubiquitous uber-chefs Wolfgang Puck and Bobby Flay; and a huge aquarium, which both complements the statuary in "Poseidon's Fountain" (right next to the Cheesecake Factory in the Roman Great Hall) and serves as a backdrop for one of the rare free shows in Vegas, the "Fall of Atlantis."⁶

In Caesar's new empire, the myths of the absolute past and the promises of the deferred future are mishmashed together for easy, intensive, one-stop "experience" shopping. The heroes of Atlantis, Troy, Greece, and Rome did not die in vain; they perished to help create this new empire of "freedom"—which, as we all know, means subjective empowerment as consumer choice, the only water fit to satisfy our thirsts. But, one might ask the FAO Schwartz Trojan Horse (which curiously talks, making it an appropriately anachronistic mix of Mr. Ed and the Oracle of Delphi), What do you get for a crowd that has already experienced everything? The answer: more of the same.

Contemporary Las Vegas is not so much a figure for imperialist expansion or assimilation—the old-time "Fuck you, we're movin' in" Vegas of the Mob and the Teamsters—as it is an ongoing, live experiment conducted to see what happens when a certain imperial project has completed itself, when there are no more lands for Caesar to conquer: "the place where the wave finally broke and rolled back," as Hunter Thompson (1998, 68) put it. In other words, Las Vegas's current modes of power are no longer primarily deployed in the service of legitimating the enterprise or overcoming an enemy (the government, the middle-American prude, the other casinos); those battles have already been decided. Rather, emergent modes of both corporate and subjective power in Las Vegas are aimed at intensifying what you've already got: expanding market share and deepening the demographic base by deploying new forms of value-added entertainment "experiences."

In short, the economic force that's deployed in Las Vegas functions *not* by conquering or assimilating new territory but rather by intensifying new versions of familiar things: for example, Paris (with its own Eiffel Tower), the Venetian (with its replica frescoed ceilings and gondolas in the annexed shopping mall), and New York, New York (the building itself constructed as a faux version of Manhattan, complete with a Statue of Liberty). The wholly rebuilt Aladdin, a posh theme-park version of the eponymous Mob casino, was opened at the dawn of the new century—overtly completing the feedback loop of anachronism by taking the past of Las Vegas itself as the original historical script to be remixed and remastered. (That proved not "intense" enough a concept, so the Aladdin became the Planet Hollywood Hotel and Casino, with its Hollywood-film theme, including movie memorabilia in every guest room—the stars' throwaways serving as the altar relics of privatized capitalism.)

In such settings, you don't so much *consume goods* as you *have experiences* where your subjectivity can be intensified, bent, and retooled. In contemporary Las Vegas, you are offered opportunities for doing work on yourself (experiencing, seeing, feeling) rather than opportunities for confronting, overcoming, purchasing, or otherwise consuming some "other." As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write, "In the postmodernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward . . . biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another" (2000, xiii). The force of the new globalized economic empire—the empire one spies from Caesar's Palace—doesn't primarily turn outward in an expansive, colonialist, or consumerist assimilation. Now it turns inward toward intensification of existing biopolitical resources. The final product, in the end, is you and me.

And gambling is the logical cornerstone of such an empire, insofar as *risk* is the perfect figure and vehicle for this new economy of intensities. In any endeavor, but especially economic ones, risk of various kinds is irreducible. You can't simply accept or deny risk wholesale; no actor has that kind of control over contingency. Any actor or collective can only *modulate* risk—speed it up or slow it down. Certainly, risk can be canalized—some outcomes made more likely, and some less likely; but risk per se cannot be subsumed or assimilated. Risk constitutes a flow that can't be overcome but one that can be affected only by being intensified—being made greater or smaller, faster or slower. This intensification, to take only the most obvious example, is what's on display when gamblers "chase" losses: increasing their bets, and their risk, in the hope of getting even.⁷

Such is the logic of intensity, then, on both the global and the subjective levels: in a world that contains no virgin territory—no new experiences, no new markets—any system that seeks to expand must by definition *intensify* its existing resources, modulate them in some way(s). This, in a nutshell, is the homology between the cultural logic of globalization and the economic logic of finance capital, neither of which is dedicated to discovering wholly new sources of human or economic capital: neither is set on cold war goals like seeking out raw materials or new territory to bring into the empire. Rather, the challenge for the globalized logic of finance capital is to find new mechanisms to work on money itself—new

modes of risk intensification like derivatives, swaps, futures, currency trading, arbitrage.

On a subjective level of intensities, then, the paradigmatic Vegas casino experience is no longer modeled on the existentialism of Dostoyevsky's *Gambler*: a masculinized, heroic confrontation with a mysterious "other" (God, fate, chance, destiny, sex, money).⁸ Here in Vegas, authenticity is no longer won extensively by challenging such an other but by a more direct, intensive retooling of the self. Even the strictly speaking corporate force in town is not aimed essentially at overcoming the competition. In contemporary biz-speak, the hostile corporate takeover or leveraged buyout (staple of the junk-bond era that provided the money to build the theme-park Vegas) is a distant memory—soooo '80s. "Mergers" and "synergy" are the new watchwords of empire.

Caesar, in other words, is not at war with the Flamingo or the Bellagio; they are all merely coexisting provinces within the same essentially peaceable kingdom. As a mundane example of this synergy, note that casino chips in Las Vegas are—unlike competing national currencies—essentially interchangeable: the other big casinos will treat Caesar's chips as the coin of their realm as well, which only makes sense, because you can't spend capital if you don't liquidate it—if you can't morph it into a form where it can immediately flow. Monetary chauvinism—like so many practices of the cold war nation-state—is just plain inefficient. At least since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the millennial "defeat" of Soviet power worldwide, it seems that there is no "out there" for casino capitalism to vanquish, no dialectical other against which to define or test itself.⁹ Such an empire can expand only by intensifying its victory, since there are no new lands to conquer.

Empire of the Intensities

Not coincidentally, such a very literal sense of empire's completion pervades another high-profile exercise in Romanesque anachronism at the dawn of the new millennium, Ridley Scott's Academy Award-winning film *Gladiator* (2000). In the opening scene, we're introduced to our protagonist, General Maximus (Russell Crowe, not channeling Charles Olson), who's about to lead his men into the final battle of the Roman Empire's last great campaign, circa AD 180. Maximus is the favorite general of the reigning emperor Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris), the last Caesar of Rome's Golden Age. Victory against the "Germanians," we are told by the opening credits and by Caesar himself, will suture and complete the empire's imperialist expansion. After this battle, which the Romans are sure to win, the peaceable kingdom of Rome's Golden Age will have been wholly forged: there will be no more wars left to fight, no territory left to assimilate.

And seemingly no more movie, no more story to tell. Once this opening battle is over and the empire is secured, what's left to narrate? Audiences seem unlikely to respond favorably to a three-hour chronicle of an aged Caesar and his favorite general playing checkers and reminiscing over libations at the Old Soldiers' Club in Rome. As far as a promising Hollywood plot goes, the bureaucratic management of more-or-less peaceable kingdoms (whether Marcus's management of civil empire or Maximus's desired return to the domestic sphere of the family) hardly seems the stuff of spectacle-laden, epic cinema in the tradition of *Ben-Hur* or *Spartacus*. After seeing Maximus lead his men into the last battle for empire—a sweeping, gory, jump-cut-laden slaughter of the Germanians—do we then look forward to one hundred minutes of Maximus mowing the lawn and ordering the kids to clean up their rooms?

Luckily, Caesar's venal son Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix) steps in to save the plot. Seeing that Caesar distrusts him and favors Maximus—or, worse, that Caesar intends to turn power over to the Senate—Commodus murders his father and ascends immediately to the role of emperor. Aside from the simple motivating force of Commodus's lust for power, the audience can't help noting that Commodus also grasps a complex historical truth: after the defeat of the Germanians, the old emperor has outlived his usefulness. The skills of the father—assimilating and annexing land through warfare—are not the skills required for managing a vast transnational and multicultural empire. As Hardt and Negri write of a parallel in our globalized world, post-cold war politics becomes a matter of regulating "hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command" (2000, xii–xiii).

Paradoxically, *Gladiator's* conquering Caesar has no place in the multicultural, global empire that he's brought about—where a kinder, gentler form of coercion, bloodshed, and violence will have to be invented and practiced.¹⁰ Needless to say, neither does Maximus—commander of the tightly ordered and homogeneous world of the Roman legions—have any clue concerning the administration of such an unwieldy and complex new world order. But Commodus has some ideas. In fact, he's hip to the productive qualities of biopower and the coercions of the culture industry: keep the masses fat and happy by giving them entertainment, he surmises. Bring back the gladiators!

If we enter the world of *Gladiator* at the end of Roman imperialism proper—where the project for the foreseeable future becomes managing diversity rather than assimilating territory—what better tactic than bringing back the crowd-pleasing, heroically nostalgic intensities of gladiator battles? Scott's film—somewhat disingenuously, given its participation in this empire of nostalgia and representation—shows us that like our own colonial cold war, Roman imperialism was indeed brutal; but the film retroactively portrays those days of disciplinary imperialism as honorable, satisfying, and "real" in some way. We see this trace of authenticity repeated in Maximus's signature trope, deployed throughout the film: he picks up a handful of local soil before entering any battle, thereby cementing his existential bond with the earth and the land—with the forces of nature and the stability of the real.

Certainly *Gladiator* suggests that the imperialist world of the film's opening was a dangerous place—paradoxical, fraught with contradiction. Men had to act and fight for a nationalist abstraction, "Rome," without really understanding why. But the faux, staged gladiator fights of the post-imperialist empire (those that dominate the rest of the film) will never offer anything close to this kind of authentic subjective heroism. In the end, *Gladiator* shows us a world where the hard-fought battles of imperialism bring about the ancient analog to the slap-fights that festoon twenty-first-century reality TV programs. The eclipsing of Roman colonial expansion leads to an even more sinister kind of image-based totalitarianism: a spectacle economy staged for the amusement and, finally, *control* of the Roman masses—represented as decadent, fickle, Colosseum-bound couch potatoes. If Augustus ruled them with discipline, fear, and grudging respect, Commodus—a sort of Baudrillard in a toga—will amuse them to death.

I take this detour through *Gladiator* for a reason. First, the film quite overtly wants to function as a *Spartacus* (1960) for the new millennium; and like Stanley Kubrick's film, Scott's *Gladiator* offers—among other things—a historical allegory by which we might come to understand, and maybe even resist, the sinister powers of our own day. The most obvious target of Kubrick's film—and the blacklisted Dalton Trumbo's script—was the anticommunist hysteria of 1950s America. The (in)famous scene where dozens, then hundreds, of slaves stand up and pronounce "I am Spartacus!" functions as a kind of critical inversion and refusal of the US House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee's practice throughout the 1950s—and, more broadly, the scene functions as a reaction to McCarthyist racial, ethnic, and political intolerance and hysteria in the US. Rather than offer up the names of others—"name names"—to absolve yourself of guilt, *Spartacus* models a mode of resistance to political blackmail: "I am Spartacus" could be roughly translated as, "If freedom of thought and action is the charge, then yes, we are all 'guilty,' and proud of it. We are all Spartacus—we are all communists, Jews, African Americans, poor people, homosexuals." In *Spartacus*, we see the slaves standing up to power through solidarity, and in the process the film provides a democratic model of collective action—a united subaltern strategy that promises to confront totalitarian threats of any stripe.¹¹

Scott's *Gladiator* likewise uses the model of the ancient Roman Empire to comment on recent events. But, half a century later, Scott's presentation of global capitalism is inexorably different from Kubrick's cold war moment. Rome, for example, is depicted in *Gladiator* as a crowded, multicultural, and transnational city, much like contemporary global metropolises New York, Shanghai, or London. The gladiators, slaves with whom Maximus falls in after his family is slaughtered on the orders of Commodus, uniformly hail from the distant, annexed Roman colonies: the Middle East, Africa, Spain, Germania. And among Scott's contemporary targets seems to be the exposure of a kind of postmodern plantation system, with all the shit jobs of our empire still performed by those from the so-called third world. More directly, however, *Gladiator* attempts to name and critique the globalized urban mass's obsession with media spectacle—the subtle voyeuristic coercions of “extreme” sports, political spin doctoring, trash talk shows, reality TV, celebrity gossip, millionaire quiz shows, and so on. Like the decadent Romans portrayed in the film, we post-postmodern capitalists are trained by our media masters to watch rather than act, consume rather than do.

Presumably, following the lead of *Spartacus*, *Gladiator* should try to produce a strategy for us, a model for resisting the commodified spectacle that the film so effectively demonstrates. There should be another way mapped—a response that might act as a vehicle for collective resistance, a road to some better place. But, alas, recall that the film is framed by the completion of empire, the literal absence of any such outside. In our world, as in the world of *Gladiator*, there's literally no place else to go: the dominant mode of power has succeeded in covering the known earth. And in the end, *Gladiator* responds to this situation fairly predictably—offering nothing but nostalgia for an older form of domination, longing for the good old days of discipline. Throughout, but especially in the end, the film rather shamelessly lauds the imperialist, masculine labor power of Maximus and Augustus (“good”!) and excoriates the feminized and incestuous practices of the image-monger Commodus (need I say, “bad”—even his name suggests heading for the toilet). Indeed, they don't get much more reprehensible than Commodus: incest and the hint of child molesting are bad enough, but this guy's even shown to be a *bad sport*, having fatally wounded a bound and helpless Maximus moments before their final battle in the Colosseum. So Maximus is forced to stumble through—and of course win—the battle while dying from this wound.

After the mutual death of Maximus and Commodus in the Colosseum, the Senate is poised to take power at the conclusion of the film, with Senator Gracchus (Derek Jacobi) as their leader. But this ending gesture toward “democracy” can't leave savvy, image-saturated movie audiences entirely happy. Senator Gracchus portrays himself as the ancient counterpart of a Kennedy liberal (“Not a man of the people,” he reminds us, “but a man for the people”). However, Camelot hasn't fared so well in revisionary American history: Jack Kennedy was elected president largely because of his slick media savvy (or the 1960 Nixon's lack thereof), and he's remembered these days less for any populist credentials than for having brought about the Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam, and a level of White House philandering that would have made Bill Clinton blush. Besides, if audiences recall their high school textbook history, they know what's on the menu for Rome after the Golden Age of Marcus Aurelius: decline and fall. In the end, *Gladiator* suggests that only the reluctant but heroic leadership of someone like General Maximus—an Eisenhower for the ancient world—could have saved the empire: if we liked Ike, we'd have loved Max. But saddled as we are with our own venal, image-obsessed political and corporate emperors, we global capitalists in the United States should expect the same immanent moral and political decline as the Romans.

In *Gladiator*'s vision of the Roman epic film, a strategic mode of resistance to the violent othering of cold war imperialism (“I am Spartacus!”) is replaced by a nostalgic mourning *for that very world of imperialism*: “I wish I could be like the conquering Maximus! But they don't make 'em like that anymore.” *Spartacus*'s collective response is replaced by *Gladiator*'s atomized yearning for individual authenticity. And, needless to say, such a Golden Age of subjective authenticity is always already a thing of the past, an object of commodified nostalgia in late Augustan Rome as well as in contemporary Disneyfied Hollywood.

Taken as a contemporary political and historical allegory of cold war imperialism giving way to an even-more-dangerous, media-saturated globalized capitalism, *Gladiator* leaves us with very little strategic room to move, other than pining for the good old days of imperialism—when you knew who the good guys were, when you could be heroic and authentic, when the blood was real. Resistance to the global flow of fleeting images, the film suggests, can be found only in the intensive authenticity of your own private experience, turned up to Maximus: a quirky individuality that's available—maybe even on sale—at sublime locations like the Forum Shops at Caesar's, as well as mundane sites like your Netflix queue. And seemingly everywhere in between.

In any case, rest assured that it's coming soon—in fact, over and over again—to a theater near you, as virtually all Hollywood films contain a version of this message: resist the system by courting intense experiences, always modulating your own authentic, flexibly specialized subjectivity.

Post-Postmodern Empire

Of course, this new empire of postimperialist biopolitical production travels under a more recognizable pseudonym, one we read in the paper every day: globalization. In their mammoth book *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out that “Empire is materializing before our very eyes. Over the past several decades, as colonial regimes were overthrown and then precipitously after the Soviet barriers to the capitalist world market finally collapsed, we have witnessed an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges” (2000, xi). It's all one world now, we're told over and over again, by people on the right and the left.

But how exactly is this new world of globalized, triumphant capital different from the old colonial hostilities of the cold war? Is this really a peaceable, postimperialist kingdom? The answer seems to be, yes and no. The new mode of empire's power—as *Gladiator* shows us—is different, but it's no less forceful. Hardt and Negri write, “Although the practice of Empire is continually bathed in blood, the concept of Empire is always dedicated to peace—a perpetual and universal peace outside of history” (xv).

As Foucault puts forth in his work on disciplinary regimes, iron-fisted mechanisms of regulation are both expensive and inefficient—a lesson that international business learned long before the cold war nation-state did. Foucault argues that the disciplinary apparatus was born gradually alongside imperialist expansion in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, and reached its height in the twentieth. As Hardt and Negri explain, “In a disciplinary society, the entire society, with all its productive and reproductive articulations, is subsumed under the command of capital and the state, and that the society tends . . . to be ruled by criteria of capitalist production. *A disciplinary society is thus a factory society*” (243). For Hardt and Negri, the American New Deal represents the apex of this disciplinary vision of society as a vast but centrally controlled and regulated factory.

By all accounts, however, this kind of Fordist New Deal welfare state has been systematically dismantled by worldwide conservative political hegemony and the rise of the new economy. In a world of cyber-work, e-commerce, wireless communication, distance education, virtual markets, home health care, and the perpetual retraining of flexibly specialized labor, the disciplinary world of partitioning and surveillance (the office, the school, the bank, the trading floor, the mall, the hospital, the factory) seems like it's undergone a wholesale transformation. As Deleuze argues, “We're definitely moving toward ‘control’ societies that are no longer exactly disciplinary. . . . We're moving toward control societies that no longer operate [primarily] by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication. . . . In a control-based system, nothing's left alone for long” (1995, 174–75). Deleuze further elaborates on the distinction between discipline and control: “In disciplinary societies, you were always starting all over again (as you went from school to barracks, from barracks to factory), while in control societies you never finish anything—business,

training, and military service being coexisting metastable states of a single modulation, a sort of universal transmutation” of power (179). So, while societies of control certainly extend and intensify the tactics of discipline (by linking training and surveillance to ever more minute realms of everyday life), they also give birth to an entirely new form of power.

Discipline itself constitutes a form of power different from its predecessors—the sovereign power of the spectacle, the banishment of the leper, or the confinement of the plague victim (see Foucault 1979, 195–200). The panoptic power characteristic of modern discipline acts not directly on bodies but on the body’s potential for actions: as Deleuze explains in *Foucault*, “Force is exercised on other forces” (1983, 35). In short, the Foucauldian power of surveillance doesn’t directly mark bodies, as the sovereign power of the scaffold does; it is a (much more efficient and economical) regulatory mechanism—you don’t know exactly when you’re being watched, so you adapt your behavior at all times to the power of being seen. Such a form of power acts on your actions; its primary target is your “virtual” possibilities, which in turn more economically regulate your actions.

Surely, surveillance in the globalized world of control has been taken to a new, even more disembodied and therefore efficient state; your Web browser, your DNA, your credit or debit cards, your subway pass, cellphone usage, or credit report all suggest that you are tracked in ways that make the warehousing of bodily traces (like photographs, surveillance tapes, fingerprints, or blood types) seem positively quaint by comparison. If you can’t even escape your undergraduate alumni magazine, how can you hope to evade the grip of transnational corporations?

Discipline has been taken to the limit of what it can do; and in this intensive movement, discipline’s limit has become a threshold, inexorably transforming this form of power into a different mode, a “lighter” and even more effective style of surveillance that can only accelerate the already lightning-fast spread of that monstrous form of power/knowledge known as globalization. And Hardt and Negri build their concept of post-postmodern empire precisely on this notion of the waning of disciplinary power and the waxing of the society of control: “The society of control might thus be characterized by an intensification and generalization of the normalizing apparatuses of disciplinarity that internally animate our common and daily practices, but in contrast to discipline, this control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks” (2000, 23).

Hardt and Negri suggest that we are witnessing not so much the end of imperialist or disciplinary power, but its intensification and transmutation into another kind of power. At its completion, one might say that the disciplinary power of imperialism doesn’t merely halt, but it’s forced to work differently, to develop another *modus operandi*. As Hardt and Negri argue, the present-day empire of transnational capital comprises “something altogether different from ‘imperialism.’ ” They explain:

Imperialism was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries. Eventually, nearly all the world’s territories would be parceled out and the entire world map could be coded in European colors: red for British territory, blue for French, green for Portuguese, and so forth. Wherever modern sovereignty took root, it constructed a Leviathan that overarched its social domain and imposed hierarchical territorial boundaries, both to police the purity of its own identity and to exclude all that was other. (xii)

As *Gladiator*’s Romans no longer fight the Germanians and Caesar’s Palace is no longer out to slay the Venetian, so the logic of post-postmodern capitalism no longer works primarily according to the rigid disciplinary logics of exclusion, othering, and noncontamination. As GATT, NAFTA, the euro, and the WTO attest, the nation-state no longer functions primarily as a machine “to police the purity of its own identity and to exclude all that was other”; rather, the nation-state now seeks primarily to hold the door for transnational capital—though, of course, this task regularly requires crackdowns of a terrifyingly “old-fashioned” disciplinary nature.

Such brutal tactics are still in fact prominently on display wherever global elites—the leaders of the World Bank, IMF, WTO, G-20, major political conventions—meet, and where dozens of “potential” protestors and protest leaders are summarily arrested or banished to far-flung “free speech zones.” And of course, the War on Terror has brought such first-world barbarity front and center—with “enhanced interrogation,” arrest without warrant, and illegal rendition remaining approved US government tactics long after the George Bush administration has faded into unpleasant memory. And in times of economic downturn, you can still count on xenophobic political scapegoating of immigrants, or so we’ve seen globally in recent years: Turks in Germany, Muslims in Scandinavia, Mexicans in the American Southwest. In short, simply because the nation-state’s primary reason for being has changed, we shouldn’t therefore assume that it’s been evacuated of its disciplinary power or its investments in confinement. This is especially obvious in the context of the US not only in terms of terrorism, but with its burgeoning prison-industrial complex: throughout the 1990s, the American prison industry boasted growth rates second to only one economic sector—that’s right, gambling.¹²

So the emergent economy of globalized control doesn’t simply supersede or wholly displace the society of the nation-state’s discipline. However, in the world of post-postmodern capital, nationalism’s political boosters dream not of purity or overcoming a threatening other but rather of the endless, smooth flow of capital and goods (though not so much people) across boundaries of all kinds. These days, everyone from politicians to CEOs to the Arby’s fast-food chain joins in the global refrain “different is good”: and, needless to say, one can’t imagine any cold war leader worth his SALT talks saying such a thing. The world of imperialism is, by definition, a world where “different is bad”—otherness is an obstacle, there only to be excluded, demonized, or assimilated. But difference in the postmodern world isn’t there to be overcome; it’s there to be intensified.

The logic of *intensification* is the (non)site where the logic of the individual subject overlaps with the logic of globalization. As the subjective pole of existentialism—with its thematics of alienation, mutually assured destruction, binarized subject/object splits, its heroic confrontations with the other and with death—is inexorably tied to the era of extensive imperialism, so the subjective pole of contemporary experience *intensification* is equally tied to the economic and political logic of globalization. The “flexible and fluctuating networks” of postmodern globalization function according to an intensification of Foucault’s notion of productive power, which teaches us that power doesn’t hold good unless the subject can take some pleasure or knowledge from its bargain with a dominant mode of power. There has to be something “in” it for the subject. This is the breakthrough *modus operandi* of empire, its direct linkage to subjective intensities, the complete “culturization” of political and economic life. As Hardt and Negri argue, “The society of control is able to adopt the biopolitical context as its *exclusive* terrain of reference” (2000, 24).

Unlike the discontinuous, desiring subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis (and the nation-state to which that subject was bound), the new globalized subject of empire requires no rigid boundaries to transgress, no central or Oedipal laws by which to orient itself. As Hardt and Negri continue, “In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detrterritorialized* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding borders” (xii–xiii). It is precisely its detrterritorialized status—the biopolitical network of intensities—that inexorably links the individual subject to the logics of globalization and capital.

In the end, we may have to admit that *Gladiator*, at some level, has it right: the image-based intensities of the new culture industry *are* the ironic fruits of the West’s economic “victory” in the cold war, the form of power that flourishes in our era of globalized finance capital. Rather than lament the victories of these intensive economies, we had best do some hard thinking about how these economies work, what they can and can’t do, and how they might produce results otherwise. Because whether we like it or not, today it seems that Wall Street and Main Street are connected by the intensities we see played out along Las Vegas Boulevard.

Commodity

THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME: ON THE POST-POSTMODERN ECONOMICS OF CLASSIC ROCK

*The Rolling Stones lasting twenty, thirty years—what a stupid idea that would be.
Nobody lasts that long.* —LESTER BANGS, 1973

The Song Remains the Same

A decade into the new millennium, my American college-town life remains positively saturated with 1960s and '70s “classic rock.” On the way to the gym the other day, I couldn't find anything but classic rock on the radio. Even our student radio station programs mostly classic rock throughout the day because, so they say, it's what people want to hear. So I got to listen to a nineteen-year-old kid intro Jimi Hendrix's “Purple Haze” as if it had never been played on the radio before. I arrive at the gym only to recall that even here classic rock plays all day, every day. Am I the only one who thinks that drug music is a little strange as a sound track for working out? (I heard the stoner anthem “White Rabbit” before I got my iPod up and running, a few seconds of “Comfortably Numb” on the way out the door.) This is all made even odder by the fact that the gym is owned and run by fundamentalist Christians. I get the impression that Jerry Falwell didn't work out much, but if he did, I'm reasonably sure it wasn't to the dulcimer tones of the Grateful Dead's “Truckin'.” When I was a kid, serious Christians railed against the excess of rock music. No more, I guess. What a long, strange trip it's been.

Back in the car, inspired by the Dead, I decide to stop at the state-run liquor store. No respite there, though, as the state store also plays classic rock. As I search for bargains, I'm treated to a Doors two-fer: “Peace Frog” (you remember, “blood in the streets / It's up to my ankles”) and “Five to One” (“trade in your hours / for a handful of dimes”). I wonder, should a state-run facility be playing music that, on the face of it at least, constitutes a sledgehammer critique of both the state and capitalism? But no one bats an eye. I'm back in the car just in time to hear Black Sabbath's “Sweet Leaf” playing under an ad for the local attorney who sponsors the classic rock show on the college radio station (“When that night of partying turns into a world of trouble, call us”). When I stop to fill up the gas tank, Kansas's “Dust in the Wind” pours out of the speakers at the self-service pump.

Watching a little TV after dinner bookends my day of classic rock. Surfing through the news stations, I find that nearly all US political candidates shake hands with supporters over the beats of classic rock, consistently dredging up the unpleasant reminder that Fleetwood Mac was the (white) house band of the Bill Clinton era. Meanwhile, Led Zeppelin, Blue Oyster Cult, and Aerosmith play over commercials for cars, while the Kinks, the Rolling Stones, and Bachman Turner Overdrive help to hawk office products, and Beatles songs play behind Blackberry and Target ads (“You say good buy / I say hello”). Oddly, though, it's not just the commercials that are saturated with classic rock. The Who has become the official theme-song provider for CBS's *CSI* franchise—“Who Are You?” functions as theme song for the original *CSI*; “Won't Get Fooled Again” introduces *CSI: Miami*, its first spin-off (clearly something's going on there, as the spin-off is a genre dedicated, one would think, to fooling you again). Finally, there's “Baba O'Reilly” for *CSI: NY*—“teenage wasteland” for the electronic wasteland? Turning to my Netflix queue for relief, I recently watched the futuristic drama *Children of Men*; but even circa 2027, the film suggests, we'll still be tapping a toe to Deep Purple, King Crimson, and the Stones.

Indeed, if you listen closely, as I have for the past few months, it seems that classic rock is everywhere—Santana in the doctor's office waiting room, Jimi Joplin at the hamburger joint, the Eagles in the grocery store, Crosby, Stills and Nash in the dentist's chair (as if a root canal weren't painful enough).

As an everyday occurrence more than forty years after classic rock's summer-of-love heyday, all of this is quite puzzling. In a series of culture markets dedicated slavishly to “the latest thing” (industries like advertising, music, and television), how can such decades-old popular songs remain this ubiquitous? Much of my puzzlement around this question is undoubtedly personal—I'd thought the reign of classic rock was over by the time I graduated from high school more than thirty years ago. My sophomore year of high school, 1979, seemed like the end of the line: it saw the release of Aerosmith's pathetic *Night in the Ruts* (Right in the Nuts, get it?) and Led Zeppelin's tepid last gasp *In through the Out Door*. Pink Floyd's *The Wall* was also released that year, and while it was a gallant attempt to restage the consumer-friendly alienation of 1973's *Dark Side of the Moon* (fourteen-plus years on the Billboard album charts—talk about legs!), it did seem pretty repetitive and formulaic, even to high school ears. Bad Company's unintentionally hilarious 1979 single “Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy” (“Here come the jesters / One, two, three”) seemed pretty much to nail the coffin shut. It must have seemed to anyone who was listening that the Clash's *London Calling* (also released in 1979) was right: “phony Beatlemania” had indeed “bitten the dust.”

In fact, the category “classic rock” was invented by US radio stations in the fateful year 1979, precisely as a bulwark to protect this sagging, increasingly anachronistic musical entity against the dominance of disco, on the one hand, and against an emergent punk music, on the other. At the dawn of the 1980s, it seemed that so-called classic rock was a bloated, irrelevant self-parody. In fact, the very invention of a name and retro radio format for it would seem enough to signal its loss of cultural currency—“classic rock” being a thinly veiled updating of the familiar “oldies” format, in somewhat punchier language (any variant of the word “old” being poison throughout the contemporary culture industry). Just as the popular music of the 1950s had faded into the background by the late 1960s, the classic rock of the '60s and early '70s was, it seemed, largely a cultural throwback by the dawn of the 1980s. Classic rock seemed headed the inevitable way of the Vegas Elvis, destined to be forgotten by all but the most loyal fans by 1985—just as the music of Bill Haley or Chuck Berry had rendered the crooners of the 1940s anachronistic in their day. For better or worse, that's the inevitable consumer dialectic of popular music—almost by definition, nothing can last for long in the viciously trend-driven business of popular culture. Already by 1975, for example, underground rock critic par excellence Lester Bangs wrote of the superstars of the late '60s: “They're washed up, moribund, self-pitying, self-parodying has-beens” (2002, 39). Indeed, as early as the summer of 1973, when Mick Jagger had just celebrated his thirtieth birthday, Bangs suggested that the Rolling Stones were already finished. He called *Goat's Head Soup* “the epitaph of old men. . . . In other words, why don't you guys go fertilize a forest?” (143, 151).

However, classic rock did not go gentle into that good night of cultural oblivion. Quite the opposite. In fact, classic rock to this day remains a stubborn, really quite singular exception to this otherwise iron rule of culture-industry anachronism, the rule of the “new.” Hence for me the impetus for this chapter—trying to understand the unprecedented success and longevity of this cultural product called classic rock. Besides asking

questions concerning whether or not the staples of classic rock are any *good* or not on aesthetic terms, we're left to deal first and foremost with the raw cultural fact of their absolutely unprecedented longevity—the spectacular long-term success of “Ramblin’ Man” or “Black Magic Woman” within a viciously short-term market for cultural commodities. What exactly do I mean by that unprecedented quality? Think about it this way: if you turned on the TV in 1965, you most certainly wouldn't see ads with songs from the '20s playing under them. College students in the 1970s didn't routinely listen to music from the '30s or '40s, and the TV shows of the '60s wouldn't think of using Rudi Vallee or Al Jolson tunes as theme songs. Will anyone in the near future be listening to '80s-era Mission of Burma on “all-punk radio”? One doubts it.

Or, as a more concrete example, think about this conundrum: the Rolling Stones' “Satisfaction,” universally acclaimed as one of the finest works of classic rock, was released in 1965 and quickly climbed the pop charts in the US and Britain. It was a number-one hit in the US for four weeks in the summer of 1965, until it was knocked out of the box by “I'm Henry the VIII, I Am” by Herman's Hermits. In England, the single likewise went to number one, displacing Sonny and Cher, until it was in turn displaced by a Burt Bacharach song recorded by the now-forgotten Walker Brothers. The point, you ask? Well, how is it that, several decades hence, the pop sensibilities of Herman's Hermits or Sonny and Cher have gone the inevitable way of musical obscurity—becoming degraded and even laughable markers of cultural old-fashionedness—while tunes like “Satisfaction” continue not only to sell themselves (“Satisfaction,” a song ostensibly about the alienation caused by rampant consumerism, is happily being consumed somewhere on classic rock radio right now), but to brand everything from beer to cars to TV shows? How can or does classic rock survive the seemingly iron laws to which other popular cultural phenomena are subject? I'd venture to say that few college students today think of Herman's Hermits as “cool” or would be willing to pay to download any of their songs. Not so the Rolling Stones. Leaving aside for the moment the puzzling question of why today's teenagers happily consume a “youth culture” that was originally produced over four decades ago, somehow or another the music of classic rock continues to thrive. It's speculating about the status of that “somehow or another” that will interest me here.

The Beat Goes On

In broad outline, the musical youth culture story of the past half century in America seems pretty clearly a story of innovation and obsolescence. The birth of mass-appeal popular music in the Al Jolson–Rudy Vallee era gave way to the swing of the late '30s and the crooners of the '40s, who in turn faded into the background in the rockin' '50s, paving the way for the folk and soul of the early '60s, which waned during the waxing of the second wave of rock in the late '60s and '70s. In its turn, that so-called classic rock seemingly should have made way for the disco of the late '70s, the punk of the '80s, the grunge and rap of the early '90s, the hip-hop and emo of the late '90s, and so on.¹ So my initial question here is simply this: Why has everything else on this list been subject to the popular dialectic of innovation and obsolescence, while classic rock has somehow remained not only immune to anachronism but actually continued to thrive far beyond its initial successes, with several new generations of mass consumers? Kate Smith, the Slits, Sam Cooke, the Weavers, MC Hammer, Frankie Valli, Fats Domino, Michael Jackson, the Partridge Family, Minnie Riperton, Jerry Vale, Conway Twitty, and the Gun Club: all of these artists, and hundreds more like them from widely varying traditions and decades of the twentieth century, enjoyed some measure of popularity in their day, followed by a slow slide into cultural obscurity. Not so classic rock: Aerosmith is more popular and culturally ubiquitous today than it was in the late 1970s; one certainly can't say the same for the disco and punk music of that same era.

In beginning to answer the question of classic rock's longevity, it's always tempting to fall back again on its internal aesthetics—maybe classic rock has lasted so long because the songs are in fact what the gray-haired, pony-tailed DJs on the radio say they are: just plain great, timeless classics. Classic rock songs survive for the same reason other cultural classics have survived—they stood the test of time. And “You Really Got Me” does have a great hook. But surely one would also have to agree that Chuck Berry's “No Particular Place to Go” or “Maybellene” are likewise great songs with memorable rhythms, but I haven't heard either of them on commercial radio lately, much less playing under TV ads for cars or makeup (for which they would seem particularly ripe pickings). However great the cornerstones of classic rock are, one would have to admit that intrinsically or aesthetically (as songs qua songs), they are at the end of the day no “better” than the best of Nat King Cole (listen again to “Straighten Up and Fly Right”), Buddy Holly, the Ramones, Grandmaster Flash, or Benny Goodman for that matter. But the great songs of the '40s, '50s, early '60s, and even the '80s and '90s, have gone the inevitable way of cultural anachronism, while the classic rock of the late '60s and early '70s has positively flourished. This cultural fact would seem to call for explanations that are not simply internal or aesthetic ones—explanations that attempt to grapple with the cultural uses and functions of classic rock rather than (or at least in addition to) its internal aesthetic makeup. That is, I'm interested here in thinking primarily about classic rock's unique long-lived status as a cultural commodity.

I should also make it clear that in treating classic rock as a commodity, I don't harbor any interest in denunciations concerning classic rock's having “sold out”—an odd claim on the face of it in our era of totalized commodification. Rock music may be all kinds of things in addition to being a commodity—it may be a way of life for people, a personal investment, a sound track for driving or partying, a nostalgia trip, or a new discovery. But in any case, such popular music most assuredly is a commodity. Indeed, what you might call the “way cool / sold out” dialectic of authenticity is, in my view, the least helpful—and, unfortunately, also the most ubiquitous—way to begin (and end) a discussion about popular music. “They were cool when I liked them back in the day; then they became popular and sold out.” Of course, anyone who's ever been in a band, or thought seriously about cultural production of any kind, can see the dead-end quality of this thinking—where authenticity can only be purchased (and make no mistake, authenticity too is a commodity) at the price of utter obscurity.² It would seem odd indeed to make a record, produce a sculpture, or write a play hoping in your heart of hearts that no one will ever support it materially, so that you can save your prized authenticity. Ironically enough, it's precisely classic rock's stubborn attachment to a discourse of subjective authenticity—“I'm Not like Everybody Else,” as the 1966 Kinks song insists—that helps it to survive and thrive in culture markets several decades removed from its native historical moment.

Of course, when one insists on treating classic rock first and foremost as a commodity, one has to be ready for an onslaught of objections. Initially those disagreements come from people who stubbornly refuse to think of rock music as a commodity at all (fans of varying intensities), but resistance to commodity-talk comes even more often from academic critics of rock music, who tend to object to that vocabulary as being tainted from before the fact by the specter of Adorno and Horkheimer's “culture industry” thesis. To treat rock as a commodity seems for many critics to have already (dis)missed much of what interests people about popular music—how various fans use and respond to the music. As Larry Grossberg sums it up, academic rock criticism has been premised on the “belief that music had the potential to serve as an organizing site if not force of resistance and alternative possibilities” (2002, 30). To talk about cultural products primarily as commodities inevitably conjures the specter of “vulgar Marxism,” which treats the music as simply one product among others (Skittles, tires, classic rock) and thereby inevitably casts the rock consumer as a passive dupe of marketers and sinister business executives.

I think we've learned from a few decades of very good academic rock criticism—the work of Simon Frith, Grossberg, and Greil Marcus, among many others³—that consumers of cultural products like rock fans are anything but dupes for the Man, and there's very little understanding to be gained by treating them as such. This strikes me as absolutely true, and the starting point for any analysis of rock music's place in the present.

Following along from those insights, however, I think a somewhat less-commented-upon parallel lesson should have been gleaned from this work: namely, that consumers of tires or Skittles are likewise not simply dupes, passive robots manipulated by Machiavellian businessmen at M&M Mars or Michelin. In short, I think we've learned from several decades of crucial work in cultural studies that the word "commodity" is no longer simply a fighting word, one that signals a top-down model of cultural force-feeding. Methodologically, thinking about contemporary culture is not confined to rooting out the inauthentic commodities (e.g., Boy Bands) and pitting them against the authentic flowerings of spontaneous creativity (e.g., DIY Punk). Certainly, the lightning-fast turnaround time between an innovative cultural phenomenon and its mass-market repackaging ("turning rebellion into money," as the Clash song puts it) is an interesting phenomenon to study. But the terrain of cultural studies, for rock music as much as for Skittles, is no longer well described by the old-fashioned lingo of inauthentic commodities versus authentic cultural expressions of uncommodified desire.

Classic rock is—like it or not—a commodity, and in that sense it is just like candy, tires, academic essays, and virtually everything else in our market-take-all world. If anyone still wants to fight this battle, I'd point out that in July 2008, *Condé Nast* estimated that the ultimate classic rock standard, "Stairway to Heaven," has by itself generated more than \$562 million for Led Zeppelin (see Datskovsky 2008). Here it's probably worth noting that like the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction," probably its only serious contender for most revered tune in the history of classic rock, the lyrics of "Stairway" quite overtly function as a critique of such rampant commodification: the song opens with "a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold"—she is so commodity obsessed that she envisions even the afterlife as a shopping mall. "Stairway" rejects this opening image of a life (and death) territorialized on "buying" in favor of the fuzzy, aneconomic affects of subjective authenticity, that "feeling you get when you look to the west." Luckily, "there's still time to change the road you're on," and the sonic progression of the song itself functions as a kind of allegory: from the grammar of the commodified pop tune (the opening section, recognizable and radio-friendly enough) to the unfettered jam-anthem that takes up roughly the second half of the song. In the end, the thing that "Stairway" wants to avoid at all costs is stagnation or commodification, "to be a rock and not to roll." As with its older sibling "Satisfaction," it's the song's commitment to personal authenticity as bulwark against stifling consumerism that, without the least hint of irony, helps make it one of rock's most enduring consumer products. To paraphrase Marx, if classic rock commodities could speak, they'd say "commodities suck"—which is partially what makes them such enduringly salable products.⁴

That classic rock is big business, however, doesn't mean that classic rock is inherently uninteresting, sold out, crappy, or anything else in particular—just to say that it swims in the same sea that most everything else does these days. The remarkable thing about classic rock, from this point of view, has been its ability to swim so far, wide, and long from its original historical moment—not only to buck the seemingly inexorable trends of cultural obsolescence, but to foil them outright. Indeed, one of the biggest differences between tires, candy, and popular music—considered strictly as commodities—is that successful brands of tires and candy can expect a certain market longevity, while successful rock bands almost by definition cannot. Lemonheads, the Ferrara Pan candy invented in 1962, still sells briskly today; while Lemonheads, the "alternative" rock band du jour of 1992, has not been so lucky.

I'm trying here neither to celebrate nor to denounce classic rock, but to try to understand classic rock's continuing and singular place in American cultural life—and to think about whether its unprecedented continuing popularity suggests any changes in what cultural studies theorists have to say about the fraught relations among American cultural production and economic production. To anticipate my conclusion in this chapter, I'll argue that classic rock's longevity can be read as a symptom of Fredric Jameson's famous understanding of postmodernism (in shorthand, the complete collapse of cultural production into the logic of economic production, and vice versa); but in addition, the continuing reign of classic rock as a cultural commodity shows us the emergent logic of something else: not necessarily something "new," but a different, more intense mode of production/consumption that I've been calling throughout, for lack of another word, post-postmodernism.

Iron Man: A Case Study; or, Now He Has His Revenge

Black Sabbath's "Iron Man" (from 1970's *Paranoid*) has always been a bit of a puzzler within the classic rock canon. In my day, nothing could get a group of stoner teenagers more worked up than a post-bong-hits discussion of the song: He's an *iron* man, but we learn that he was turned to *steel* in the great magnetic field (when he traveled time for the future of mankind). Just to add to the problem, he has boots of lead. Surely, Ozzy knows that iron, lead, and steel are not the same thing—what's he trying to tell us? And why has the iron-steel man decided, upon return from his time travels, to turn on "the people he once saved"? Because "nobody wants him"? Do men of iron really care that much if they're not loved by an adoring public? How do magnetic forces turn iron to steel, anyway? And steel is of course stronger than iron—it's iron with most of its impurities removed. Is it the impurities that made us love Iron Man, and now that he's Mr. Perfect Steel Man, people don't like him anymore? Was he somehow disabled by becoming stronger? Bogus, man.

Hermeneutic complexities notwithstanding, "Iron Man" has had quite a ride. Its guitar riff is one of the most recognizable in the classic rock canon, and the song is now a standard pop cultural reference, showing up everywhere from commercials for Nissan to Christmas song parodies ("I am Santa Claus")—and it's become a staple on band playlists at high school football games and served as a theme song for the Hollywood blockbusters of the same name. "Iron Man" is, then, an excellent case study in trying to come to grips with the life and afterlife of classic rock—primarily because, if you had told me thirty-five years ago that any song from Black Sabbath's drug-addled *Paranoid* album could be used to sell cars, or would soon become a favorite of high school administrators everywhere, I would have said you were high (and, it being the '70s, you very well might have been). In the American business world of the 1970s, it would simply have been *unthinkable* that the music of loud, heavy-metal druggies from England could help you move Japanese pickup trucks. And anyone who was in an American high school at any point in the '70s can, I think, attest to the fact that suggesting Black Sabbath songs be added to the school-band playlist would bring on a locker search rather than a nod of approval. So how does "Iron Man" go from being a confused underground stoner anthem about a mixed-media B-list superhero who goes on a killing rampage, to being a nifty way to sell products and/or boost school spirit?

Again, one could always attribute this (literally) commercial success to some version of "selling out"—Ozzy's quest for fame in the wake of his reality-TV stardom. As I have intimated earlier, however, in our thoroughly commodified world this kind of accusation doesn't make much sense: popular music is a commodity, so accusing it of being more or less of a commodity seems somewhat of an argumentative nonstarter. To vernacularize for a moment, one can certainly argue that X or Y song sucks, but it can't suck simply *because* it's a successful commodity—insofar as all recorded music is a commodity. Also, even if it's true that Sabbath (or any other classic rock band) desperately *desires* to be featured in endless commercials for all kinds of products, that could never explain why classic rock is *in fact* featured in endless commercials for all kinds of products. Regardless of whether or not you're willing to *sell* out, someone first has to offer to *buy* you out—ad agencies, TV producers, the folks who put together sheet music for high school bands.

To suggest that Black Sabbath has sold out because they allowed "Iron Man" to be featured in a 2006 Nissan commercial doesn't explain how or why anyone would connect a 1970 Black Sabbath song with selling pickup trucks in the first place. Indeed, authenticity-talk aside for the moment,

the real oddity here is not that rockers approaching retirement age will accept big dollars for the thirty-second use of a song they recorded decades ago; the truly puzzling thing is that ad agencies are willing to pay huge coin for the thirty-second rental of a forty-year-old product. (I'm sure that Fats Domino, his life left in ruins by Hurricane Katrina, would happily have "sold out" his songbook to advertisers; problem is, no one was that interested in buying—while the remaining members of the Doors routinely continue to turn down million-dollar offers to use snippets of "Light My Fire" or "Break on Through" in advertising campaigns.)⁵

In short, it would seem that what's changed in the last several decades is neither the imperatives of dominant discourses like advertising (sell stuff!), nor high school administration (keep order!), nor even really the imperatives of classic rock (which still promises to "come into your town, and help you party down!"), but the relation among these imperatives: what's different, it seems, is the larger cultural and economic sea in which these discourses, once so very divergent or even antithetical, now somehow swim synchronously.

The Sun Is the Same, in a Relative Way, but You're Older

The easy answer to this conundrum can be summed up in two words: "baby boomers." The prime demographic target for crime dramas, classic rock radio, or luxury car commercials (forty- to sixty-year-olds with disposable income) has become one with the demographic of people running the advertising agencies, and they're both sets of folks who grew up with "classic rock"; so an advertiser can easily and economically index all that "youth" supposedly stands for with one easy riff or song lyric: lust for life, just push play, start me up, been a long time since I rock 'n' rolled. On the easy explanation, in other words, classic rock is all over the place because baby boomers are all over the place, on both the production and consumption side of much of our dominant culture. Sure, my crew-cut-wearing high school principal wouldn't go for Black Sabbath, but he was born in the 1920s and came of age during World War II, well before the first wave of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s. "Cool" was not his métier. However, today's suburban high school principals, who one presumes follow CEOs and politicians in asking students to call them by their first names, would have grown up on rock 'n' roll, and many of them were in fact weaned on the classic rock of the 1970s.

So, if you want to know why Cadillac plays classic rock under its ads, just think about Cadillac's target market and who's producing the ads: aging white baby boomers trying to recapture some of their rockin' youth. Cadillac needs to rebrand itself, from your Uncle Bernie's car to yours. What better way to rebrand a stodgy car line for baby boomers than to play Aerosmith or Led Zeppelin under your ads? In short, one answer to the question "how does 'Iron Man' end up as a truck commercial?" is quite easy: the riff from the song recalls for middle-aged, white, exurban consumers some sense of carefree nostalgia, being yourself, taking risks, having fun, rockin' out. You're cool, a little bit subversive, and so is the car, so throw away your inhibitions, like you would back in the day, and spend some dough! Classic rock, then, has migrated from its roots as site-specific music of the '60s and '70s and been reinvented as a kind of contentless cultural style: the mandarin commitment to an always "rebellious" subjectivity, identifiable by platitudes that are at this point as easily applicable to right-wing blather of Rush Limbaugh as they are to the music of Canadian power trio Rush. "Do your own thing" has become the Hegelian law of the whole.

This "authenticity nostalgia" explanation also holds for the unusual popularity of classic rock radio (oldies for people who hope they die before they get old) and helps explain why I had to suffer through the entirety of "Rikki Don't Lose That Number" while looking for some hardware at Lowe's the other day. Classic rock's ubiquity is a sign of white suburban baby boomers stubbornly hanging on to the authenticity of their youth, in a series of spaces—the home-repair store, the orthodontist's office, Cleveland's classic rock station—that could hardly get any less authentic.

On this line of reasoning, the prescription for classic rock's cultural longevity is then relatively easy to reconstruct: drain the leftist political stances and the druggy danger out of rock music, and conveniently forget or downplay rock's roots in African American culture, and there you have it—not exactly the "durable Republican majority" that Karl Rove had openly dreamed about, but something parallel. Let's call it a durable cultural style of subjective empowerment, perhaps—one that Robert Christgau (1991) lays out (with maximum prolixity) in his discussion of "how politically retrograde the classic-rock mindset is": "Not for nothing did classic rock crown the Doors' mystagogic middlebrow escapism and Led Zep's chest-thumping megalomaniac grandeur. Rhetorical self-aggrandizement that made no demands on everyday life was exactly what the times called for." In other words, classic rock at this juncture functions in popular culture as little more than an endless incitement to become who you want to be, being your own person, not following everyone else, and all the other stuff that cultural subversives like Miss America contestants and former sports stars talk about in their Sunday prayer breakfast speeches.

What's changed most radically in culture at large is the very status of authenticity itself—or, more precisely, the relation between consumption and authenticity. In the not-so-recent past (even in the classic rock past, if songs like "Satisfaction" and "Stairway to Heaven" are to be believed), there was an outright antagonistic relation between commodity consumption and personal authenticity: the more you consume, the more you're like everyone else, the less authentic you are, mostly because you're simultaneously buying stifling social norms when you buy products (as "Satisfaction" ironically puts it, "he can't be a man because he doesn't smoke / the same cigarettes as me"). In the past twenty or thirty years, however, the work of commodity consumption has been rebranded as part and parcel of the work of individuation and subversion, and thereby a certain style of consumption has become a royal road to authenticity (rather than an assured off-ramp).

In the process, the concept of authenticity in and around rock music has become completely portable and completely personal—it's not so much located anymore in the music or even the ostensible "scene" surrounding the music; nor is authenticity to be found in keeping up with the Joneses, or in the collective consciousness of the age, but in *you*, whoever you may be. The commodities you collect around you are authentic signs of the real you, not evidence—as the Buzzcocks would have it—that you're "hollow inside." Classic rock has become, for better or worse, the sound track of choice for becoming who you already are, and as such it mirrors and extends the baby boomers' slide from the "We" generation of the '60s to the "Me" generation of the '70s, a generational ethos proving to have legs far beyond the usual ten years allotted. And wild, wild horses couldn't drag your authenticity—or your classic rock—away.

Following along after Jameson's mammoth analyses of postmodernism as a phase where the innovation-driven logic of cultural production ("make it new!") becomes central to the logic of economic production as well (consumer capitalism that has consistently to churn out new objects for consumption), one might venture something like the following thesis about the longevity of classic rock as a cultural commodity: *It's the workings of capitalism itself that have changed most radically over the past forty years.* The rock 'n' roll style of rebellious, existential individuality, largely unassimilable under the mass-production dictates of midcentury Fordism, has become the engine of post-Fordist, niche-market consumption capitalism. Authenticity is these days wholly territorialized on choice, rebellion, being yourself, freedom, fun; and these, what one might call the "values" of classic rock, today hold for your choices in music as for your choices in cars (Saab: Choose your own road), computers (Microsoft: Where would you like to go today?), and virtually every other commodity you can think of. Even hyperconservative, fundamentalist Christian political candidates these days run as "mavericks."

In short, capitalism today promises the same subjective authenticity as the once-outlaw commodity called classic rock. So it's not at all that classic rock has "sold out" to capitalism, but that capitalism has morphed into the kind of thing that, at its center rather than at its margins, now has a use for classic rock. Fly high, free bird.

Young Americans

This explanation makes some sense of classic rock's long-lasting run in what seems to be a short-term market for cultural commodities, but it does leave at least one bustle in the hedgerow completely unexplained. I certainly see why people like me (b. 1963) might remain invested in classic rock—nostalgia for authenticity, the days of carefree teenage discovery, sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll, and so on. The more puzzling question is why anyone born in the meantime would culture that was originally produced by people who are now old enough to be their grandparents? (Alas, both Mick Jagger and Keith Richards became eligible for full Social Security benefits when they turned sixty-six back in 2009.)

In other words, this analysis helps explain why someone like me might listen to classic rock radio or be interested in buying a truck because Sabbath plays under its commercials, but it doesn't necessarily shed any light on the enthusiasm that younger folks feel for classic rock. If indeed the classic rock canon was pretty much set when the moniker was invented in 1979 (with many of its cornerstones more than a decade old even at that point), it's hard to imagine how today's freshman class of college students would have much investment in this music. How can today's teenagers and young adults receive another generation's music as relevant any more than the crooning of Perry Como struck young people as timely in the late '60s?

Surely, the pull of a nostalgia-based "authenticity" has something to it for younger folks as well, but for people who are today in middle age, that "authenticity" at least has a tenuous referent, even if it's only the vague memory of bell bottoms, bongos, or disco demolition night at the local ballpark. In other words, if you're over forty-five, you may have a classic rock past to romanticize—not so much if you're presently in high school. So, about the only thing that's left for young folks, on this "classic rock's longevity = baby boomer nostalgia" reading, is that they function as the Adorno and Horkheimer-style cultural dupes who have been patiently waiting in the wings of this story.

While I suppose that this a tempting conclusion (people who grew up during the last decade or two in the US have no "authentic" or common cultural identity to speak of, other than as a consumer), at another level, this also strikes me as ridiculous, yet another manifestation of baby boomer exceptionalism. Commercial radio or arena rock reunions are probably not the right place to go looking for "what's happening" in popular music today. Surely, young people listen to classic rock. But that's not all they listen to, by a long shot.

Ironically, it's precisely this new eclecticism of musical tastes that presents a problem to the founding assumptions of rock criticism, which holds as an article of faith that subjects' investments in the music are supposed to be deeply felt and strongly held markers of cultural identity: you can't wear your "Disco Sucks" T-shirt on Thursday and head for a disco on Friday. But it's just such an "anything goes" aesthetic that seems on the ascendancy today—download them all, and let the iPod shuffle sort them out. According to Larry Grossberg's "Reflections of a Disappointed Popular Music Scholar," this emergent youthful eclecticism of musical taste (what he sees as the new "dominant apparatus" for consuming music) is less a progressive evolution of musical listening habits than it is a retrograde reversion to a '50s-style "Top-40" model of corporate force-feeding:

The apparatus that is becoming dominant is a new mainstream that actually looks a lot like and is committed to much of the logic of the Top 40. . . . Top 40 has always been hybrid, bringing together in a statistical sample the disparate tastes of various taste cultures. The result is a collection of music the totality of which no one actually liked, but that, given the alternatives, many people listened to. Yet I believe today the dominant apparatus embraces a similar kind of eclecticism. Rather than claiming some sort of rock purism, it celebrates rock hybridity at its most extreme and celebrates as well its own eclecticism. . . . In fact, this apparatus—and the individuals within it—embrace an extraordinarily wide and (at least to my musical sensibilities) jarring range of music. The fans within this formation may like some classic rock, some country, some punk, some disco, some rap, and so on. And because these fans happily switch among these genres from song to song, spending an evening with them can be a strange experience for someone who still lives within the becoming-residual formation. (2002, 47)

For Grossberg, what's primarily lost in the withering of the "residual" formation of rock culture is a hard mediating logic of subjective authenticity. In the dominant "rock" cultural formation of an earlier era, investments in the music were inseparable from investments in identity: anyone who insulted your music's authenticity also implicitly questioned your personal authenticity. However, for Grossberg, this is increasingly not the case. Within the new cultural dominant, he argues that younger music fans'

tastes are not taken as the grounds for other larger and more significant types of judgments of other people or groups. They have largely given up the differentiating function of rock even as they attempt to hold onto its "territorializing function" in relation to a politics of fun and everyday life. They are tolerant beyond anything that the once dominant, now residual, paradigm could understand. Taste is increasingly lived as if it were merely a site of individuality and shared entertainment, nothing more and nothing less. . . . People dislike what they dislike (or what particular individuals in the group dislike) but they do so largely without the mediations of a logic of authenticity. (48)

In short, young people still happily consume classic rock, but it's precisely the content-free *consumption* of music that's the problem for Grossberg. No one's willing anymore to get into screaming matches about the relative merits of *Wish You Were Here* because people's investments in Pink Floyd are now unmoored from larger claims to (their own or their group's) subjective authenticity. Grossberg's claim (or maybe his "disappointment") is that classic rock is now just another product—"shared entertainment, nothing more and nothing less." In the rock era, by contrast, it used to be a cornerstone of authentic identity formation and a potential site of oppositional cultural resistance.

The question of classic rock's present-day "authenticity" has taken another somewhat bizarre turn in a recent flap among rock critics concerning the "whiteness" of contemporary "indie" music. In a 2007 essay called "Paler Shade of White," *New Yorker* rock critic Sasha Frere-Jones wonders "why rock and roll, the most miscegenated popular music ever to have existed underwent a racial re-sorting in the 1990s. Why did so many white rock bands retreat from the ecstatic singing and intense, voicelike guitar tones of the blues, the heavy African downbeat, and the elaborate showmanship that characterized black music of the mid-twentieth century?" Such "miscegenation" is yet another way to make a retroactive claim for the authenticity of classic rock—and quite a bizarre one at that: the claim seems to be that Led Zeppelin, with its full-blown appropriation of African American blues forms, was somehow racially more progressive than bands like the Decembrists or Arcade Fire, whose sound doesn't rely heavily on such forms.

In responding to Frere-Jones, *Slate* critic Carl Wilson (2007) takes the opportunity to pile on, arguing that not only is contemporary indie music too "white," but it also lacks classic rock's broad class appeal (cue Springsteen, and obligatory shots of football stadiums full of white kids raising a fist to blues licks served up by Grand Funk Railroad). Wilson calls contemporary indie music "bookish and nerdy," "blatantly upper-middle class and liberal-arts-college-based": in short, "class, as much as race, is the elephant in the room." Even though classic rock's most successful practitioners are aging white multimillionaires whose primary talents consisted of repackaging black music for white audiences, classic rock nevertheless somehow continues to function in contemporary music debates as a kind of unquestioned, authentic gold standard for racial openness and the classless society.⁶

Regardless of how (in)accurate such estimations of contemporary indie music may be, what interests me here is the notion that both Frere-Jones and Wilson share with the substantially more sophisticated analysis of Grossberg: the contemporary sense that the classic rock era was an unparalleled harbinger of cultural authenticity. This stance is summed up by no less an authority than *New York Times* editorialist David Brooks (2007) in his two cents on the issue: "Musical culture," he writes, "has lost touch with its common roots," which Brooks helpfully limns out for us:

“Muddy Waters, the Mississippi Sheiks, Bob Dylan and the Allman Brothers.” For Brooks, the memory of those “thongs who sat around listening to Led Zeppelin” function in the new millennium not as a pathetic portrait of aimless, white suburban stoners, but as the last vestige of a common culture that could “span social, class, and ethnic lines.”⁷ One could, of course, say much about the willful cultural amnesia of all this—more aging white male, baby boomer exceptionalism—but I’m particularly interested in noting here the myriad high-culture places where classic rock continues to function as a marker for authenticity of all kinds, ideological fantasies of both the left and right: classic rock functions as a common cultural heritage, a version of the classless society, a place of racial understanding and admixture, and a site of oppositional identity formation. It’s also worth noting that this authenticity is, on all these accounts, completely lost on the younger generation, even if they profess to “like” classic rock among a series of other musical genres.

Oddly, though, even if one accepts this kind of tsk-tsking reading of the new generation, the young music fans of today are both dupes and not dupes enough—insofar as they have been tricked into falling for a once-vibrant, but now flatulent and reified product (a Top-40 version of classic rock); but interestingly enough they haven’t fallen for the economic engine of these larger consumerist processes, the endless dialectic of commodity obsolescence. On the rock-critic reading, young people today are not supposed to like this product (yesterday’s classic rock); they’re supposed to like that one (today’s hip-hop or emo)—and all the while they’re supposed to be vaguely worried about the commodity status of music itself. But a product’s a product, and it’s getting increasingly hard to believe the baby boomer line that classic rock was ever anything but one—the fable that it actually had a great deal of political content that could somehow be siphoned off from its commodity status (for further skeptical ammunition, see here prepackaged protest songs like the Monkees’ “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” or Sonny and Cher’s “The Beat Goes On,” which poignantly reminds us that “the rock band’s a business man today”).⁸ Ironically, it’s those of us cultural-critic types (those who still stubbornly believe in the ultimate trumping value of the “new”) who may be the real cultural dupes waiting patiently at the end of this story, as we are perhaps the last generation still holding out for the high modernist connection between stylistic/formal innovation and cultural value, where the culturally new functions as the vanguard moment of the dialectic, that emergence that has yet to be completely assimilated.

One might define authenticity, on this line of reasoning, as a certain kind of refashioned modernist “make it new,” that which remained most stubbornly left over from modernism in the work of postmodernism.⁹ For his part, Jameson succinctly defines the postmodern condition like this: “What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation” (1991, 4–5). In terms of Jameson’s work on the concept, any number of critics have pointed out that his postmodernism remains driven by a kind of hypermodernism of avant-garde innovation—and this seems true enough. But, stepping from the diagnostic to the critical for a moment, I think we’d also have to locate the properly critical power of postmodern critique precisely in that same “make it new” modernism; that is, the critical moment in most economic or cultural analyses of the postmodern depends on the continuing sense of shock, indignation, or dislocation at the fact that cultural production does indeed share the same logic as high-end economic production; the impulse to point this homology out then functions as a kind of “aha” moment of critical revelation.¹⁰

So, you’re postmodern in this Jamesonian sense if this collapse of economic production into cultural production (and vice versa) still strikes you as something that endlessly needs pointing out. For example, Grossberg sums up his analysis of the musically eclectic, post-rock present, as follows: “If those within this [dominant] apparatus embrace commodification without illusions, it is because they cannot imagine an outside to or a way out of commodification” (2002, 49). I think it’s fair to say that you take up a “postmodern” position if such rampant commodification remains, strictly speaking, a “problem” for your analysis (in other words, if commodification functions as a conclusion or end point of your analysis, as it does for Grossberg). Conversely, if rampant commodification functions as a more or less neutral beginning premise for your analysis of popular culture, your position is “post-postmodern”: if the tongue-in-groove meshing of artistic and economic production is all you’ve ever known, the very thing we learned from folks like Jameson in the early ’80s, why should it shock or discombobulate you three decades later? In other words, insofar as today’s youth (and this is really a global story—there’s even a thriving heavy metal scene in Iran¹¹) still has a great investment in classic rock, cultural critics should be able to find something to laud (maybe even something ironically “new”) here. In embracing and recycling the rock music of the past, the current generation is simultaneously refusing the larger engine of the culture industries, the constantly updated tyranny of the culture industry’s obsolescence machine. If nothing else, it shows young people staring down the reality of their times, marked by “commodification without illusions.”

Ironically, though, in refusing the absolute tyranny of “authenticity” or “innovation” in their musical consumption patterns, today’s classic rock youth are not so much throwback figures in this story (Adorno and Horkheimer’s “victims” of the culture industry) or even ironic postmodern consumers who consume the faux authenticity of the old with a certain new cynical or knowing edge; rather, today’s classic rock fans seem to function as what we might call quintessential post-postmoderns—those for whom the entire economic and cultural logic that holds “newness = value” seems a suspicious holdover of something else, or at least something that doesn’t really name their experiences of consumption or life. And as we look back, it’s a little hard to explain how the 1960s story of discovering a commodity like rock radio that then inexorably changes one’s suburban white life—an experience enshrined in countless personal testimonies and in classic rock staples like the Velvet Underground’s “Rock and Roll” or Queen’s “Radio Gaga”—is qualitatively different from a subsequent generation’s discovery of iTunes or the shopping mall: they both allow a certain sense of atomized belonging mixed with the potential for constant updates of your self-branding through commodity consumption. One undoubtedly seems “cooler” than the other (I’ll leave it to the reader to decide which is which), but in the twenty-first century, it’s very hard indeed to suggest that knowing a lot about the Beatles is different in kind (or somehow more “authentic”) than knowing a lot about the various styles at Abercrombie & Fitch. In contemporary parlance, they both allow you to be a quintessential “prosumer,” that consumer who produces him- or herself through consumption.¹²

In strictly theoretical terms, the upshot of this would seem to be that Jameson’s postmodernism hasn’t at all failed or been overcome, but rather triumphed in a way similar to other classics of the late twentieth-century theory canon. Think of Roland Barthes’s “Death of the Author” or Judith Butler’s gender performativity: these are no longer concepts that you have to laboriously sell to freshmen. They already know this stuff, in fact, they live it. Postmodernism, performativity, and the death of the author are no longer “emergent” phenomena, but they’ve become “dominant” ones. For example, if you grew up with chat rooms and Facebook, the performative truisms that people have multiple identities and that identity is not “original” (it has to be cited and repeated from a social stock of available avatars) can hardly come as a shock. Concerning the death of the author, not even the most sincere freshman these days needs to be told that Emily Dickinson is not the ultimate arbiter of her poems’ meanings—quite the opposite (if anything, students today are a little too confident in their own ability to produce meaning). In terms of postmodernism today, the links that Jameson highlights between cultural and economic production/ innovation have hardly disappeared in the new millennium; rather, they’ve been smeared across a broad range of other commodities. The connoisseur’s care and attention that used to be reserved for wonking your favorite bands has made its way all the way up to the board room—where innovation and rebellion are touted as necessary to any healthy business model—and all the way down to the ever-changing minutiae of cell-phone applications and ring tones.

So, in the end, it may be that classic rock's unprecedented longevity is not an exception to the iron rule of planned obsolescence, but oddly, in classic rock's very obsolescent popularity, its long strange trip shows the cultural logic of authenticity and obsolescence itself becoming increasingly obsolete. Consumption in the present cultural market for music has largely become unmoored from newness as the ultimate test of authenticity and value; and in the offing this cultural shift gives us an inkling of the passing of the high postmodern phase of US cultural production into something not exactly new, hardly "better" or "worse," but something that's certainly different: cultural and economic post-postmodernism.