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Fictions of Human Capital; Or, Redemption in Neoliberal Times

Christian P. Haines

Karen Bender’s short story “Refund” revolves around an irredeemable debt. Josh and Clarissa, two practicing artists, sublet their apartment in Tribeca in order to work as adjunct faculty at a university in Virginia. Their tenant, Kim, a tourist from Montréal, has the misfortune of visiting New York City during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Kim subsequently demands a refund for the entire amount of the rent: “I was on my way there. I wanted to go to the observation deck. I went the wrong way on the subway, or I would be dead.”¹ This conditional death hangs over the story as a whole, an object of exchange whose value defies measure and, in doing so, defers the possibility of resolution. It is the central point of contention, defining not only the relations between characters, but also their respective values as persons. Kim and Clarissa debate the amount of the refund, Kim asserting her right to a full refund (“I want it all back”), Clarissa insisting that the refund should be partial, since Kim had occupied the apartment for a portion of time. As the debate continues, Kim amends the initial demand, charging interest on the basis of the event’s psychological toll: “*I am requesting \$3,000 plus \$1,000 for every nightmare I have had since the attack, which currently totals twenty-four. You owe me U.S. \$27,000, payable now*” (134). Josh and Clarissa cannot pay the initial amount, let alone the amount with interest added — indeed, the story opens with their insolvency: “They had been lonely, met, married, worked at their painting for years, presented their work to a world that was indifferent, floundered in debt, defaulted on student loans...” (120). For Kim, this insolvency amounts to a moral as much as a financial failure. “*My pet peeves are injustice and dishonesty,*” Kim writes to Clarissa, “*I know when I am being treated fairly*” (126). In this view, to live is to be exposed to and responsible for financial risks, including unpredictable ones, so that Josh and Clarissa’s failure to pay up, to redeem their debt, constitutes a breach of an implicit social contract: financialization and neoliberalism, as I will explain, require the fundamental commensurability of every good, including not only tangible commodities, but also all of the qualities, skills, and capacities gathered under the rubric of “human capital.” There is a moral economy to neoliberalism, a deontological framework that includes not only ethical imperatives — one *ought* to pay one’s debts — but also procedures for evaluating an individual’s character according to their fiscal history.

The story’s climax interrupts this neoliberal moral economy, demonstrating that such financial commensurability can only assert itself as natural fact by operating as fiction: Clarissa writes a check for \$263.75, an amount that is arbitrary except that it is the sum total of her savings. In

response, Kim reiterates that she “want[s] it all” (plus interest), revealing to Clarissa that she was supposed to have met her friend Darla at the Towers:

“I was talking to her on my cell phone,” said Kim. “She was on the elevator to the observation deck.” She paused. “She wanted to go to the Empire State Building, but I thought at the Towers we would get a better view.”

What did one owe for being alive? What was the right way to breathe, to taste a strawberry, to love?

“Kim,” said Clarissa, “I — ”

“Do you know how long I’m going to charge you?” Kim said, her voice rising.

Clarissa closed her eyes.

“Do you know?” said Kim. (140)

The story’s conclusion cements the financial logic of the neoliberal era while at the same time highlighting its inconsistency: On the one hand, financialization depends on the convertibility of debt and guilt, that is, on the establishment of an uninterrupted circuit of exchange between personal and economic values, such that there’s no gap between person and economic agent. For the Marxist critique of political economy, the person is the “bearer” (*Träger*) of economic relations, a conduit for the impersonal forces of capitalist accumulation. In contrast, for neoliberal market rationality, the personal and impersonal enter into a state of indistinction: to live is, in some fundamental sense, to incur debt, to shoulder the burden of one’s material conditions, to engage in the Sisyphean task of making good on one’s fundamental debt/guilt in respect to society. This indistinction is all too evident in the metonymic chain that Clarissa constructs between bare life (“What did one owe for being alive?”), the sensation of taste, and love. There is implicit in this existential lament a foundational debt from which all of creation hangs. On the other hand, this financial ordering of the world cannot help but be fictitious — contingent, fabricated, and, in a sense, made up — for value is a social matter and the ability to impute debt/guilt, to charge another (“Do you know how long I am going to charge you?”), hinges on the gap between value and activity, economy and person, exchange-value and use-value. My point here is not so much the structuralist insight regarding the arbitrariness of the sign, but rather the Marxist claim that capitalist exchange, occurring as it does on the basis of a general equivalent (money), conceals a history of violence — so-called primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession — which is its material condition of possibility.² In the failure of exchange between Kim and Clarissa, Darla and the Twin Towers function as a sacrifice to global capital, a material offering in the name of which the fiction of universal value sustains itself: the specter of Darla is the present absence through which the future remains indebted to the past — suspense, in this situation, an effect of pursuing an impossible restitution. The guilt/debt that is the basis of this financialized moral economy is infinite only so long as it materializes itself through sacrifice, only so long as it extracts interest payments in both a literal and figurative sense. In short, it is the ritual of repayment/atonement that not only signifies indebtedness, but also reestablishes it in an endless process of accountability.

“Refund” offers a paradigm for discussing contemporary fictions dealing with credit and debt. It suggests a way of discussing contemporary fiction as a ritual whose provenance is the political theology of debt, that is, the nexus of Judeo-Christian theology, financialized capitalism, and governance. Contemporary fictions of credit and debt enact rituals that either sustain or contest financialization, depending on how they deal with the logic of sacrifice built into financialized capitalism. In work by writers such as Bender, Don DeLillo, Gary Shteyngart, Thomas Pynchon, and David Foster Wallace, the fictitiousness of finance reveals itself in terms of what it costs — that is, in terms of the toll it exacts on groups of people. Their novels and short stories do not simply offer a realistic accounting of the social costs of finance, for they also reckon with the economic, existential, and ontological implications of financialization. They investigate the ways in which financialization erases easy distinctions between the abstract and the concrete, as well as between the immaterial and material.³ Or, as Miranda Joseph has argued, they demonstrate “that injustice [the injustices involved in financialization or regimes of credit and debt] occurs not only through abstraction but in the inscription of particularities as well.”⁴ As I will argue, sacrifice is nothing less than the consecration of the abstract laws of finance through the violent articulation of social particularity.

Given that financial personhood is one of the central objects of this essay, it’s worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the concept of personhood more generally. Personhood is the nexus where religious, juridical, and economic registers meet. In economics, the person is a fictive entity, one which includes corporations, as well as laborers, and which regulates activity through social technologies such as the wage, the credit score, and the stock price. It is also a juridical norm through which one is held responsible in respect to the law; it is the figure to which one attributes rights but also imputes guilt. Finally, the person is a religious artifact through which, in monotheistic (especially Christian) traditions, the planes of immanence and transcendence, earth and heavens, flesh and spirit, are articulated and administered. This three-dimensional figure of the person has been theorized in perhaps the most concerted manner by Roberto Esposito, who’s argued persuasively that the person is one of the fundamental mechanisms governing social life in ancient and modern contexts, for personhood is what enables subjectivity and subjugation to coincide in a practical and theoretical manner.⁵ Personhood produces a subjectivity whose status as legal, economic, and religious subject depends on submission to a sovereign (nation-state, corporation, etc.). As Esposito demonstrates, the politics of personhood hinges on degrees of inclusion and exclusion in respect to the shifting thresholds of what constitutes a person.

In this essay, I focus on the personhood of human capital, contending that financialization is a matter not only of shifting sources of profit — the shift of corporate revenue streams from productive capital to fictitious capital, or from commodity sales to speculation⁶— but also of a transformation in the mode of producing, regulating, and punishing social subjects. Michel Foucault makes this point in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, describing the neoliberal concept of human capital in terms of the governance of an entrepreneurial subject endowed with particular capacities to generate revenue. Human capital invests in itself by taking on risks that promise, without guaranteeing, certain profits, or by managing risk towards the end of appreciating self-value.⁷ This neoliberal model of personhood has as its obverse side a regime of fiscal responsibility and discipline, which is to say a set of norms, institutions, and practices that

ensure that the financial subject pays what she owes or suffers the consequences for failing to do so. As Maurizio Lazzarato argues, debt has become the universal apparatus ensuring the social reproduction of capitalism: “Neoliberalism governs through multiple power relations: creditor-debtor, capital-labor, welfare programs-user, consumer-business, etc. But debt is a universal power relation, since everyone is included within it. Even those too poor to have access to credit must pay interest to creditors through the reimbursement of public debt; even countries too poor for a Welfare State must repay their debts. [...] If in times past we are indebted to the community, to the gods, to our ancestors, we are henceforth indebted to the ‘god’ Capital.”⁸ Although “god” falls between quotation marks, the theological language in this passage is not incidental: Lazzarato suggests that the subjective correlate of capital’s process of endless accumulation is an endless dialectic between guilt and penitence, between debt and obligatory repayment. As Friedrich Nietzsche — on whose work Lazzarato builds — puts it: “The conviction reigns that it is only through the sacrifices and accomplishments of the ancestors that the tribe *exists* — and that one has to pay them back with sacrifices and accomplishments: one thus recognizes a *debt* that constantly grows greater, since these forebears never cease, in their continued existence as powerful spirits, to accord the tribe new advantages and new strength.”⁹ The person qua human capital is therefore not only entrepreneurial agent, but also sacrificial figure, an indebted figure whose very existence depends on a never-ending process of making restitution to the abstract God of profit. Irredeemable debt becomes the social foundation of the economy. Although one can never pay off the principal, failure to pay the interest one owes transforms a person from agent of sacrifice — one able to sacrifice a piece of herself, the proverbial pound of flesh, while still remaining more or less intact — into object of sacrifice, the destruction of which sanctifies the neoliberal regime of fiscal responsibility. The apotheosis of this political theology of finance is the only seemingly strange overlap in contemporary US politics between an anger-fueled Christian fundamentalist rhetoric of salvation and damnation and a conservative fiscal ideology that divides society into “productive” or “responsible” members and “leeches” or “parasites.”¹⁰ Responsibilization, or the neoliberal system of imputing debt, entails an economy of sacrifice.

In what follows, I examine how two works of fiction, Gary Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) and Don DeLillo’s *Zero K* (2016), negotiate this economy of sacrifice. In these fictions, debt — in the general sense of social obligation, as well as the specific sense of financial obligation¹¹ — constitutes the central problem and conflict around which the narrative revolves. Unsurprisingly, given the intimacy between debt and guilt established above, it is redemption that functions as the promise of resolution in these novels — “promise” and not “guarantee,” however, because the critical value of these texts has less to do with successfully resolving such conflicts than with deferring, short-circuiting, or redirecting the desire for redemption. More specifically, Shteyngart and DeLillo diagnose contemporary capitalism as the pursuit of a secular version of immortality, an abstract yet material immunization of the self from economic and personal crises through speculation. Speculative practices are also rituals of sacrifice, borrowing against the profits of fictitious futures only so long as they appease the capitalist gods of fiscal responsibility through the collateral of subprime suffering. These novels suggest that the idea of redemption only intensifies the bond between social life and capitalist governance. To Clarissa’s question,

“What did one owe for being alive?” they seem to respond: “Everything”— at least from a neoliberal perspective.

Economy of Sacrifice

Gary Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story* and Don DeLillo’s *Zero K* could not be more different in regard to aesthetic form: DeLillo’s sentences are short and choppy, structured more like fragments of code than imitations of natural language. They read like a strange blend of technical manual and philosophical treatise, instructions on wealth management merging seamlessly with analyses of art objects. Shteyngart’s sentences, in contrast, alternate between two-to-three-word sentence fragments — frequently the punchlines of jokes — and long sentences littered with technical jargon, proper nouns (geographic locations, fictional trademarks, etc.), and existential musings. If, as Annie McClanahan argues, Shteyngart oscillates between caricature and stereotype, or excess of descriptive detail and reductive social types, DeLillo favors an almost monotonous stream of theoretical abstractions, a flat plane of general equivalence in which characters are more ciphers for ideas than semblances of individual psychology.¹² There is no space for irony in *Zero K*, or, if there is, it is not irony in the comedic sense, but in the German Idealist manner of an endless series of reflections on reflections. *Super Sad True Love Story*, on the other hand, thrives on a self-deprecating humor sharing affinities with the films of Woody Allen and the novels of Nikolai Gogol. While both novels deal with the financialization of personhood, they would seem to do so in opposite ways.

At the same time, the two novels share an affinity not only because of their content — the late capitalist landscape of credit, debt, and speculation — but also because of the thematic and narratological structuring of this content in a dialectic between redemption and guilt, a dialectic driven by an aspiration for secular immortality. Not only do both novels fret over the ways in which impersonal financial abstractions such as credit scores and derivatives regulate social life. They both advance the same solution, namely, the pursuit of an immortality whose purview is not the afterlife, but the earthly realm; an extension of biological life beyond all finite limits through a practice of financial immunization, or the conversion of financial resources into technological means for insulating life from the accidents of living. The opening sentences of the novels signal this aspiration, so that the remainder of their narratives can be read as processes of working out the difficulties involved in financial immortality: DeLillo: “*Everybody wants to own the end of the world*”; Shteyngart: “Today I’ve made a major decision: *I’m never going to die.*”¹³ I elaborate on the narrative motivations for these openings, below, but it’s worth noting that the protagonist of *Super Sad* recruits clients for corporate life-extension services, while the plot of *Zero K* centers on a character’s decision to enter a state of cryogenic stasis, rather than succumb to terminal illness. Each novel thus focuses on attempts to achieve sovereign mastery over death through financial means, and each introduces a pharmacological imaginary according to which it is only finance that can save us from the risks produced by finance.¹⁴

The strangeness of this pursuit of secular immortality dispels itself when one considers the political theological dimension of credit and debt. In general terms, secular immortality is the form that redemption takes when, instead of suspending the dialectic between guilt/debt and

penitence/repayment, it immunizes a person from the consequences of the credit regime. This immunization doesn't erase the effects of debt, but instead transfers them on to others, which is to say that damnation — consignment to subprime status — isn't an accident of redemption, but its necessary condition. As Kiarina Kordela argues, the reproduction of contemporary capitalism requires the ideological support of fantasies of immortality, the corollary of which is a "bioracism" according to which dominant countries exorcise mortality by exporting it to others.¹⁵ The underside of financialization is thus an economy of sacrifice through which the personhood of the "creditworthy" entails the symbolic and biological death of the subprime. What makes DeLillo and Shteyngart's fictions interesting in this context are the strategies they devise for short-circuiting this economy of sacrifice by conjuring up a return of the repressed (mortality) of financialized capitalism.

The economy of sacrifice can also be understood in terms of depersonalization, which is to say that financialization depends on stripping the personhood from particular social figures in an effort to justify killing them off. By sacrifice, however, I mean not only the taking of life in an absolute sense but also degradation of living conditions, imprisonment, detention, occupation, enslavement — in short, all of those practices through which one segment of society sustains its humanity or personhood by stripping it from another. In the context of financialized capitalism, this economy of sacrifice includes the practice of paying interest on loans, understood as a kind of tithe — a partial sacrifice, a tribute — through which one temporarily ensures one's personhood but, at the same time, sanctifies the power of the credit regime. In the financialized conditions of the present, it should be noted, interest payments have increased and multiplied because of the rise of consumer credit, the latter functioning not only as a means for capital to compensate for economic stagnation (by using financial profits to offset declines in profits from production) but also as a means for workers to compensate for declining wages.¹⁶ Interest thus crystallizes a practical-symbolic circuit through which financialized capitalism sustains itself, not only as material mechanism for extracting profits, but also as ritual, as part of what Walter Benjamin (in the essay "Capitalism as Religion") terms a "system of guilt," in which atonement is impossible and in which "despair" and "destruction" are the "secret hope."¹⁷

According to this logic, human capital is not only, as the Foucauldian theorization of neoliberalism has it, a matter of entrepreneurial agents exposing themselves to risk in the pursuit of profits. It also entails an economy of sacrifice. This economy of sacrifice is immanent to human capital in the same manner in which credit-worthiness requires the subprime as its necessary point of reference. There are two bodies of human capital: a material body and an immaterial body. In the same way that sovereignty requires a split between body politic and natural body, human capital requires a division between the person qua bearer of immaterial value and the person qua living material substrate.¹⁸ This dualism reduplicates the constitutive political division in the citizen between patriotic subject (citizen proper) and bare life (animal substrate), recoding it as a split between credit (speculative power) and debt (financial bondage).

In thinking financial risk in terms of personhood, I'm hoping to call into question the dominant discourse according to which financial matters belong to an autonomous sphere of social life. As McClanahan argues, social personhood mediates between the concrete social subject (indebted

life) and abstract financial value (credit rating). *Pace* McClanahan, however, I would argue that the guilt associated with debt is not a “mask” covering over the impersonal character of the contemporary credit regime.¹⁹ Instead, guilt, understood as an assemblage of affect, ritual, and morality, mediates between the personal and impersonal on capital’s behalf. It should be understood, however, that *I* do not believe in my own guilt but rather *one* believes, which is to say that guilt is neither a matter of personal belief, nor an internalization of neoliberal morality. Instead, it is (in Lacanian parlance) belief in the Other’s belief: motivation on the basis of the unconscious idea that there are others (benchmark persons, as it were) who truly believe that making good on one’s financial obligations is a moral, as well as a legal and economic, imperative.²⁰ To paraphrase Louis Althusser’s well-known formulation regarding ideology: one does not kneel because one believes, one believes because one kneels — it is the *ritual* of sacrifice that counts.²¹ McClanahan is absolutely correct that guilt is not the efficient cause of debt, that “we are mostly in debt for more impersonal reasons, like the rising costs of health care and housing and education,” but I would qualify this assessment by suggesting that guilt is the *formal* cause of debt, or the pattern through which debt organizes the psychic life of human capital.²² A politics contesting financialized capital needs to grapple not only with impersonal economic conditions but also with the libidinal mechanisms that sustain attachments to these conditions.

Shteyngart’s *Super Sad True Love Story* performs a parodic overturning of the credit regime’s dialectic between guilt and penitence. The novel amplifies the contemporary credit regime by constructing a near-future setting in which credit evaluations are public (“credit poles” flash your credit score as you pass them by on the street) and the last vestiges of a distinction between social life and finance have disappeared. Lenny Abramov, the novel’s protagonist and the dominant narrative voice, pursues secular immortality through a combination of romantic liaisons, financial practices, and personal habits. Lenny works as a “Life Lovers Outreach Coordinator (Grade G) of the Post-Human Services division of the Staatling-Wapachung Corporation,” that is, as a salesman/analyst tasked with evaluating “High Net Worth Individual[s]” in terms of their ability to become clients of the company’s life-extension services (5). He constructs a gradated continuum of personhood, one immediately bifurcated by wealth (high net-worth versus low net-worth, or those with manageable debts versus the subprime) and refined by considerations of physical and mental health, family history, spending habits, and affective disposition. Lenny’s analytical perspective establishes a biopolitical continuity between these material and immaterial qualities, such that the character becomes a case in the medical sense — an object evaluated on the basis of norms of health, not least of all norms of financial health. In the final instance, however, each case comes down to an existential determination: a client not only needs to possess a living, material substrate capable of supporting the pursuit of immortality, she also needs to desire immortality. Thus, one potential client — a sculptor — gets diagnosed “ITP,” or “Impossible to Preserve,” as much because he is “swimming with the prevailing current toward his own nullification” as because he owes thirteen million dollars (18).

The credit regime, the novel suggests, is an apparatus that sorts life according to an imperative to take on the right kind of risks. The sculptor falls short not because he takes risks but because he indulges in *unprofitable* risks (drugs, sex, etc.). Randy Martin delineates the implications of risk-

based assessments of subjectivity in sharp terms: “Risk is not simply a calculation that benefits will exceed costs, but a wager on accumulating beyond expected returns. When every cost and uncertainty can become an opportunity, the secure precincts of happiness are left behind for the dizzying heights of risk. Risk is not simply a construct that one abides but something somatized as a way of being.”²³ It’s this somatization of risk that makes contesting financialization so difficult, because historically contingent financial norms take on the appearance of both natural laws and providential signs, which is to say that they end up seeming not only eternal but also transcendent or otherworldly. Financial ideologies of risk draw on elements of Social Darwinism and religious fundamentalism to divide persons into the categories of “righteous agents of history” (the fit and savvy entrepreneurs who always come out on top) and history’s “ashcan” (everyone who hasn’t figured out how to adapt to financialized capitalism). One’s lot in life comes to seem less like a consequence of determinate historical conditions than the predestined outcome of a financialized cosmos.²⁴

The fundamental premise of *Super Sad* is not simply that Lenny ranks social subjects in terms of biological and financial fitness but also that he himself does not measure up, that because of his physical and mental health (overweight, depressive), financial resources (indebted without much in the way of liquid assets), family history (second-generation immigrant), and ethnicity (Russian-American Jew), he falls outside of the parameters of the proper client (the high net-worth individual capable of being preserved, the body that has been converted into a temple for the immortal financialized soul). In short, Lenny doesn’t conform to a social type conventionally associated with taking the right kinds of risks or with entrepreneurial prowess. In this failure, however, Lenny is not alone, the novel making it clear that this falling short is a systemic, not an idiosyncratic, matter: “The truth is, we [Lenny alludes to his colleagues, as well as himself] may think of ourselves as the future, but we are not. We are servants and apprentices, not immortal clients. We hoard our yuan, we take our nutritionals, we prick ourselves and bleed and measure that dark-purple liquid a thousand different ways, we do everything but pray, but in the end we are still marked for death” (60). This passage develops a church of life-extension sustained by rituals that monitor and regulate the body for the purpose of rendering the afterlife immanent: living the good life means working on oneself in a manner that delivers one’s material body over to an immaterial future. Such financial good works do not so much abstract from the body as convert the body into an abstraction — a scored object — from which potentiality can, in turn, be extracted. However, in a parodic repetition of the doctrine of predestination, good works can only function as signs, not precipitants, of capitalist salvation: “we” are but “servants” to the elect, to the high net-worth individuals, so that our activities can only constitute sacrifices in the name of their election. It’s this contradiction between Lenny’s aspiration for secular immortality and its foreclosure that fuels the text’s critical stance: it exposes the providential vision of finance, with its fantasies of secular redemption, as no more than rituals of obedience, financial transactions disguised as prayers. That being said, these fantasies aren’t purely imaginary, for they organize, in practical and symbolic terms, the extraction of vitality (“we prick ourselves and bleed and measure that dark-purple liquid a thousand different ways...”) from indebted subjects. These financial rituals ward off the sacrifice of the subject only insofar as they reduce the subject to the material substrate of the financial elect, to the position of technical support for the speculative class. These subprime financial subjects are reduced to their mortal-

material bodies (bodies without value, without the speculative dimension of immortality), and these bodies are, in turn, appropriated by high net-worth individuals as sacrificial offerings that enable the disavowal of mortality, as body doubles that absorb the material blows of risk. In short, Shteyngart narrates the class politics of financialized capitalism — the division of society into those for whom debt is a source of profit and those for whom it institutes bondage²⁵ — as a perverse communion in which, instead of a Christ figure that expiates guilt/abolishes debt, one finds the infinitely repeated sacrifice of financial and material vitality to the pockets of others.²⁶ The overall narrative structure of *Super Sad* consists in the oscillation between, on the one hand, realizing the economy of sacrifice through apocalyptic revelation and, on the other, deferring apocalypse through the offering up of substitute sacrificial figures. Lenny’s story revolves around his use of women as sacrificial objects, which sustain his investment in the capitalist fantasy of immortality. The novel represents Lenny’s relationship with Eunice Park, a young Korean American woman, as yet another mode of transferring vitality: “I talked her out of her pants, cupped the twin, tiny globes of her ass with my palms, and pushed my lips right inside her soft, vital pussy. ‘Oh, Lenny,’ she said, a little sadly, for she must have sensed how much her youth and freshness meant to me, a man who lived in death’s anteroom and could barely stand the light and heat of his brief sojourn on earth. I licked and licked, breathing in the slight odor of something authentic and human, and eventually must have fallen asleep with my face between her legs” (25). The qualities of prayer and revelation in this passage suggest a practice of worship, the implication of which would seem to be Lenny’s subservience to Eunice, but, at the same time, Eunice constitutes a fountain of youth and an oracle: she is a well from which one draws pleasure, truth, and youth/ vitality — a means for moving Lenny from “death’s anteroom” to a restored humanity (“something authentic and human”). This image extends the previous financial equation — the reduction of the subprime to sacrificial bodies enabling the bourgeoisie’s transcendence — by introducing a compensatory mechanism: the subprime sustain their own fantasies of immortality, their own fantasies of transcending conditions of exploitation, by transforming gendered and racialized figures into sacrificial proxies. The hierarchy implied in the economy of sacrifice moves beyond a simple binary structure, as the category subtending the ruling class of immortals bifurcates into the petty bourgeoisie (the intellectual-technical support staff of the bourgeoisie) and proletarianized subjects (including not only waged workers — so-called blue collar workers — but also the under- and unemployed, the subaltern, and a great deal of the service sector of late capitalism).

The hybrid of sentimentality and instrumentality in Lenny’s romantic attachments takes on geopolitical dimensions in his articulation of the difference between Fabrizia, a former Italian lover, and Eunice: “Fabrizia. The softest woman I had ever touched. But maybe I no longer *needed* softness. Fabrizia. Her body conquered by small armies of hair, her curves fixed by carbohydrates, nothing but the Old World and its dying nonelectronic corporeality. And in front of me, Eunice Park. A nano-sized woman who had likely never known the tickle of her own pubic hair, who lacked both breast and scent, who existed as easily on an *äppärät* screen as on the street before me” (21). Love in the time of human capital recapitulates the Hegelian trajectory of world history, moving from “East” to “West,” from Old World to New World, from material excess (fetishism as “primitive” religiosity, as subsumption of spirit in the

sensuous object) to immaterial spirit (the Christian passion according to which sinful flesh gives way to a glorious, immaterial body).²⁷ In this geopolitical and sexual fantasy, Eunice constitutes the precise bare minimum of matter (“nano-sized”) required for inclusion within secular existence, while at the same time being unloosed from mortal constraints, released into a reality in which there is no difference between screen and world, or avatar and material body. Although Eunice’s Asian American identity might seem to break from the whiteness of the Hegelian world-historical telos, it does so only by transforming Eunice into an object of Lenny’s fantasy, which is to say that the novel re-instantiates the racialization of history or, in dialectical terms, that Eunice occupies the position of the in-itself (sensuous raw material), Lenny the for-itself (self-consciousness, transcendence through the sublation of material conditions). In the context of financialization, the motor of history remains a slaughter bench, a constantly renewed ritual of sacrifice through which racialized and gendered (non-)persons sanctify the immortality of speculative agents through their social and biological deaths or through their reduction to raw material.

The novel attempts to preserve a critical stance in respect to this capitalist, misogynistic, and racist fantasy of immortality through ironic self-consciousness, polyphony, and narrative reversal. Not only does *Super Sad* repeatedly indicate the impossibility of transcendence or secular immortality by humorously commenting on Lenny’s schlubiness, his inescapable material awkwardness, it also includes Eunice’s voice by incorporating excerpts from her Globalteens account — a social media interface — providing another perspective on their romance and, in the process, calling into question Lenny’s ideological investments. Finally, the novel’s plot climaxes with a geopolitical reversal of fortunes, a US political and economic crisis (an historical conjuncture of social revolution and default on public debt) that forces the United States into a condition of peonage overseen by its lenders (China, in particular) and by global organizations including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. One could elaborate on each of these aspects at length, but I want to focus on the way in which the novel’s narration of crisis involves a return of the repressed mortality of finance. Following the consummation of the crisis, Lenny participates in the welcome party for a group of Chinese financial elite at which there is an art exhibition consisting of “extreme satellite zoom-ins of the deadly conditions in parts of the middle and the south of our country. [...] Dead is dead, we know where to file another person’s extinction, but the artist purposely zoomed in on the living, or, to be more accurate, the forced-to-be-living and the soon-to-be-dead. Grainy close-ups of people using people in ways I had never openly considered, not because murder doesn’t run through my veins, but because I grew up in an era where the baroque was safely held at bay” (318). The text articulates a zone of limbo in which life and death reach a point of indistinguishability, as life becomes consigned to a waiting for death (“soon-to-be-dead”) secured by coercive force (“forced-to-be-living”). These hyphenated phrases register the truth of the capitalist world-system through the sheer banality of the deaths that the system engenders. “Murder,” or the “baroque,” is not extrinsic to capitalism, but rather its perverse underside, so that what distinguishes this post-crisis moment is not death as such, but rather the disappearance of viable immunitary mechanisms, or the extinction of means for practically and symbolically marking the division between the immortal soul of capitalist value and the material life sacrificed to it.

Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* is an analysis of petty bourgeois political theology. The novel charts the libidinal vicissitudes of the technical-intellectual support staff of the owners of the means of production, showing how the petty bourgeoisie invest themselves in fantasies of immortality and transcendence, in dreams of reaping the rewards of speculative capital without exposing themselves to its risks. At the same time, the self-consciousness of this class in regard to its own impotence entails the frantic pursuit of immunitary devices for warding off sacrifice, for protecting oneself from the vicissitudes of capitalist production. The force of this immunitary paradigm is not only to offer protection but also to enable the disavowal of redemption's impossibility. *Super Sad* interrupts this disavowal. It performs the affective labor of articulating redemption in class-specific terms, of demonstrating that transcendence over the dialectic between debt and repayment, guilt and penitence, is a luxury afforded only to the owners of the means of production (not least of all the owners of the means of issuing credit). Put differently, the novel indicates the insufficiency of sacrificial rituals, the impossibility of substitute objects filling up or overcoming the gap of class division. (It drives this point home, in plot terms, by having Eunice leave Lenny for his boss, Joshie Goldmann.) In doing so, *Super Sad* tracks the contemporary historical transition, described by Esposito, from sovereign debt to "debt sovereignty," "the transfer of sovereignty from the national government to global finance," a transition which means that "instead of talking about the end of political theology, we should be talking about its transformation into economic theology, one that is itself endowed with political attributes, including the supreme one of deciding on the possible survival of subjects."²⁸ Shteyngart's novel doesn't demystify financialization, instead it locates the theological niceties (as Marx puts it) that are constituent elements of financialized capitalism. In so doing, it offers not the hope of redemption, but rather a kind of apocalyptic frustration — a mode of revelation that supplements the economy of sacrifice with the practice of consolation: acknowledgement of mortality without pursuit of penitence, abandonment to one's own finitude without grace. Shteyngart writes a fiction of human capital only to do away with it by introducing another form of personhood, one in which dignity inheres in animality, in which value is not immortal but predicated on finitude. *Super Sad* does not therefore trace a horizon beyond financialized capitalism, but it does articulate the terms of a shared dissatisfaction with it.

A Final Shrine of Entitlement

The limit of *Super Sad True Love Story* lies in its consolatory vision: in allowing the pleasures of mortality to suffice, the novel holds redemption in reserve, implying that it is a real, if withheld, possibility. This is not to say that Shteyngart's novel doesn't criticize secular pursuits of immortality. *Super Sad* suggests that the pleasures of the speculative class are inauthentic, because they are not rooted in history. Indeed, its final pages identify authentic pleasure with literariness: the reader discovers that Lenny's diary — fictional excerpts of which compose the novel — has become "as Xiangbao [the literary critic] put it, 'a tribute to literature as it once was [emphasis mine]'" (327). Lenny's writing thus constitutes the final offering ("tribute") in the novel's economy of sacrifice, serving as an effigy of literature that encapsulates personhood (or humanity) in a protective shield. Literature, *Super Sad* proposes, testifies to human frailty and fallibility and, in doing so, it repeats the ritual of sacrifice, but in a manner that preserves

dignity, that affords consolation. This is not the negation of human capital as an apparatus of control, but compensation for it. The novel cleaves out a third space beyond the dichotomy between person and sacrificial object, composing a fiction of human capital in which vulnerability coincides with non-monetary value. Echoing a well-known series of credit card commercials, one might describe this space as “priceless,” noting that the term indicates not the negation of the capitalist value-form, but rather a playful suspension of it — its literary abeyance.

My analysis of DeLillo’s *Zero K* will be brief, as my interest in it is specifically its foreclosure of the space of consolation articulated by *Super Sad*. *Zero K* narrates a financialized world from the perspective of the speculative class, so that the objects that circulate in the text are always already apprehended as assets subtending financial instruments. In this context, the concrete is not merely the condition of possibility of abstraction, but a set of disposable instruments for the sake of a specific genre of technical abstraction, namely, securitization, or the bundling of assets and the subsequent financial exchanges on the basis of this bundling.²⁹ In other words, the novel bypasses the question of whether or not there is a difference in kind between the abstract and the concrete by presupposing a world in which these ontological poles are always already convertible, if not simply identical. Identifying the perspective of the novel with the speculative class is not quite right, however, because the bulk of the narrative is presented through the son (Jeffrey Lockhart) of the entrepreneurial agent (Ross Lockhart, a “man shaped by money”) (13). The text introduces a margin of difference, a perceptual gap as it were, through which the speculative class exhibits itself not so much against itself — though Oedipal conflict certainly informs the relationship between Jeff and Ross — but beside itself, in uneasy reflections on what it means to live in proximity to an agent of finance. If *Super Sad* provides insights into the credit regime by focusing on those affiliated with the speculative class (the technical-intellectual support staff), *Zero K*’s insights emerge by focusing on those *filiated* with the speculative class: those in and of, but not necessarily for, the credit regime.

This position “in and of, but not for” the speculative class enables a critique of financialized redemption, one which is not predicated on a distinction between authentic and inauthentic modes of existence but approaches finance as an arts of existence. The phrase “arts of existence” comes from Foucault, describing “those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.”³⁰ From this perspective, financialized personhood and the aesthetic domain should be understood as mutually imbricated, which is to say that novels such as *Super Sad True Love Story* and *Zero K* do not simply reflect finance, but participate in it. *Zero K* constitutes an extended meditation on this insight, for, as in much of DeLillo’s recent fiction, it opens up a zone of interference between literary writing, philosophy, art criticism, and financial speculation. The novel develops a complex series of analogies between speculation and art, as well as between speculation and religious redemption. These analogies are not declared in an authoritative manner by the novel so much as posed as a series of questions: If the aesthetic tradition conventionally defines value as synonymous with immortality, then wouldn’t the realization of a life in aesthetic terms coincide with its becoming immortal? If the aesthetic tradition sublimates the longing for redemption, then wouldn’t a technics of immortality — a

social assemblage of financial and biotechnological means for the preservation of human life — be the culmination of a secular arts of existence? Finally, if speculation is necessary not only to finance this technics of immortality but also to gain access to it, then what distinguishes the arts of existence from investment banking?

Zero K's critique depends on holding these questions open, on allowing them to interrupt both the valorization of financialized redemption and the romantic demystification of it. For every instance that the novel presents a seamless continuity between aesthetics, finance, and redemption — what might be called the aesthetic ideology of finance — Jeff's first-person narration introduces a tear into this continuity, as in the following passage:

All pods [devices for cryogenic preservation] faced in the same direction, dozens, then hundreds, and our path took us through the middle of those structured ranks. The bodies were arranged across an enormous floor space, people of various skin color, uniformly positioned, eyes closed, arms crossed on chest, legs pressed tight, no sign of excess flesh.

I recalled the three body pods that Ross and I had looked at on my earlier visit. Those were humans entrapped, enfeebled, individual lives stranded in some border region of a wishful future.

Here, there were no lives to think about or imagine. This was pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing. It was a form of visionary art, it was body art with broad implications. (256)

Jeff draws a distinction between something like a realist art in which bodies and lives coincide in a quasi-organic fashion (“entrapped, enfeebled, individual lives stranded in some border region of a wishful future”) and a “visionary art” in which the body achieves a spare perfection. The latter belongs to an ideology of late modernism, according to which the role of the work of art is to realize the potentiality of its medium, to achieve an identity between matter and form beyond the constraints of figuration.³¹ The “structured ranks” of bodies suggest an efficiency of form in respect to function akin to the architecture (or at least the principles) of Le Corbusier. Of course, the corporeal form of the human body is the pinnacle of figuration, that which late modernism negates or disavows, but the constitutive tension of the pod qua modernist art object occurs between figuration as the overcoming of the merely mortal (the cultivation of “bodies regal in their cryonic bearing”) and a post- or transhuman supersession of organic life (“no sign of excess flesh”). In other words, what intrigues Jeff in this presentation is the point of indistinguishability between figuration and sheer materiality — the point at which immortality transcends the human without leaving the material world behind. At the same time, however, this passage is situated in a novel that shifts back and forth between, on the one hand, a view of immortality technics as a subgenre of modernist aesthetics and, on the other, a demystifying view of it as a class-specific “final shrine of entitlement” (117). There's a kind of parallax effect according to which one and the same object — the cryogenic pods — can be viewed as the aesthetic negation of financial calculation and as the culmination of it.

Zero K derives its own aesthetic value from this back-and-forth between critique and consummation: while the aesthetic ideology of finance enables the text to engage in speculative

flights — that is, to engage in a conceptual art of its own — the reflexivity regarding the material conditions of everyday life sustains a commitment to literature’s power for social criticism. The implication of this fusion of critique and complicity is not only the general point that criticism is immanent, that it cannot help but be structured by its object. It is also the more specific one of a shared affinity between the speculative qualities of aesthetic practices and those of finance. This point is not novel — critics in the field of critical finance studies, as well as artists in a variety of mediums and genres, have been making it since at least the collapse of the dot-com bubble.³² What is distinct, however, about *Zero K* is the way in which it links this affinity between conceptual art and finance to a theological vision of apocalypse and redemption. The novel suggests that the economy of sacrifice underpinning the mobility of speculative capital not only targets particular populations (the subprime), it also implies that the logical conclusion of this economy is nothing less than the annihilation of the entire world. The opening sentence of the novel — “*Everybody wants to own the end of the world*” — should be read in this light. The hypermodernity of the pod involves a suspension of worldliness, a rebirth or conversion of personhood consummated by the negation of history as such. As one of the ideologues of the immortality program puts it: “Your situation, those few of you on the verge of the journey toward rebirth. You are completely outside the narrative of what we refer to as history. There are no horizons here. We are pledged to an inwardness, a deep probing focus on who and where we are” (237). This suspension of worldliness characterizes not only the pods but also the compound that houses them: a labyrinth complex containing offices, art objects, apartments, and common dining areas, as well as the facilities for cryogenic preservation, and which exists in a zone of limbo beyond or between the borders of nation-states. It is, in other words, in the world but not of it, an aesthetic monad (in the Adornian sense) that incorporates the negativity of the social totality only insofar as it holds it at a distance, through its own negativity. However, whereas Theodor Adorno argues that the critical negativity of the work of art entails the guilt of luxury in a world in which humans still starve, the aesthetic ideology circulating in *Zero K* amounts to the sale of indulgences for a speculative elect.³³ Redemption becomes synonymous with economic privilege, the latter term having the precise meaning, in this context, of immunization from the material accidents that make up mortal life and of a kind of power over those condemned to creaturely existence. What Kordela describes as the secular fantasy of immortality and what Christopher Breu terms “avatar fetishism” — the exporting of mortality/materiality to so-called developing nations so that those in the core of the capitalist world-system can maintain the fantasy of immaterial value and immortal life — is inextricable from an apocalyptic vision of redemption. The “inwardness” to which the subjects of immortality pledge themselves entails an abandonment of the world — the world’s consignment to the fateful drive of capital, as the latter exhausts the world’s resources, including its people, in a never-ending pursuit of profit.

If I have touched very little on the plot of *Zero K*, it’s because the novel does not attempt to resolve material contradictions, nor to provide consolation. It doesn’t even sketch an itinerary of practical or theoretical opposition to the apocalyptic drive of high finance. Instead, its exceedingly bare plot tracks rituals of sacrifice and self-sacrifice insofar as they personalize the speculative class, that is, insofar as they mark the concrete dimension of the abstractions involved in belonging to the speculative class. The narrative begins with Artis (Ross’s wife) surrendering herself to cryogenic preservation in order to avoid the conclusion of her terminal illness, but it then

moves on to Ross's decision to do the same, despite being in good health. This self-sacrifice is, at one and the same time, a sentimental gesture (Ross would rather share non-life with Artis than live without her) and the ultimate symbolic consolidation of class power: to make even the suspension of one's life an element of an arts of existence not only requires wealth, but also consecrates wealth as the sign of true personhood.

There is much more one could say about *Zero K*, but I want to conclude by suggesting that in conjunction with *Super Sad True Love Story*, DeLillo's fiction of human capital indicates the political impossibility of redemption. There is no hope of recuperating redemption for the sake of opposing neoliberalism. Redemption itself is a financial instrument whose effect is the reproduction of the credit regime and its fiscal discipline. If *Super Sad* consoles readers by suggesting that the transcendence achieved by the speculative class is inauthentic, that its material pleasures imply spiritual bankruptcy, *Zero K* indicates that the very rhetoric of authenticity and inauthenticity is a symptom of financialized capitalism: it is the effect of a world so delivered over to speculation that existence itself comes to appear subprime and only "inwardness" (a speculative retreat into the soul) can save one from exposure to risk. In such a world, redemption can only ever constitute an alibi in support of dominant class power or a fantasy of escape. Instead of turning to redemption as a possible answer to finance, we would do better to turn to profanation, understood as a way of working through the political theology of debt. Giorgio Agamben has described profanation as a process of "deactivat[ing] the apparatuses of power and return[ing] to common use the spaces that power had seized."³⁴ In Esposito's terms, profanation implies an exodus from the apparatus of personhood, a suspension of the economy of sacrifice for the sake of an unqualified generosity, an impersonal yet singular gift of existence. In other words, it involves the production and reproduction of social life in terms other than human capital. This third space beyond the personhood of human capital and the economy of sacrifice, which is to say beyond neoliberalism, would not involve another kind of redemption but rather (to borrow from Hollis Phelps) an "unredeemable" manner of living. It is only then that one could respond to Bender's question in "Refund," "What did one owe for being alive?" with the only politically adequate answer: "Nothing."

Notes

¹ Karen Bender, "Refund," *Refund* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2015), 126. Further citations indicated in the body of the essay parenthetically.

² On the violence of so-called primitive accumulation in capitalism, see Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. (New York: Penguin, 1990), Chapter 26; David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chapter 4; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

³ On the critical, social, and political implications of the distinction between the abstract and the concrete, in the context of finance, see Leigh Claire La Berge, "The Rules of Abstraction: Methods and Discourses of Finance," *Radical History Review* 118 (2014): 93–112.

⁴ Miranda Joseph, *Debt to Society: Accounting for Life under Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 55.

⁵ See Roberto Esposito, *Two: The Machine of Political Theology and the Place of Thought*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); *Persons and Things: From the Body's Point of View*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (London: Polity, 2015); *The Third Person*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (London: Polity, 2012).

⁶ On financialization in terms of a political economic shift in revenue streams, see especially Greta Krippner, “The Financialization of the American Economy,” *Socio-Economic Review* (2005) 3:173–208. On financialization as a transformation of the politics of everyday life, see especially Randy Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002) and *An Empire of Indifference: American War and the Financial Logic of Risk Management* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015), 70–72.

⁷ See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 215–266; Michel Feher, “Self-Appreciation; or, the Aspirations of Human Capital.” *Public Culture* 21.1 (2009): 21–41.

⁸ Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of Indebted Man*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2012), 32.

⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 88–89.

¹⁰ Melinda Cooper has written incisively on the specific confluence of Christian fundamentalism, financialization, and neoliberal politics. See especially Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology & Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), Chapter 6; *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), Chapter 7.

¹¹ On debt as the fundamental paradigm of the social bond, see Richard Dienst, *The Bonds of Debt: Borrowing Against the Common Good* (New York: Verso, 2011), especially Introduction and Chapter 7. Dienst distinguishes between debt, understood as a framework for social belonging constituted by the memory of obligation, and credit understood as the extraction of profit from debt.

¹² Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First Century Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 55–75.

¹³ Don DeLillo, *Zero K* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2016), 3; Gary Shteyngart, *Super Sad True Love Story* (New York: Random House, 2010), 3. Further citations of the respective texts indicated in the body of the essay parenthetically.

¹⁴ On the pharmakon, see Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

¹⁵ Kiarina Kordela, *Being, Time, Bios: Capitalism and Ontology* (State University of New York Press, 2013), 139–52. Kordela’s critique of the secular fantasy of immortality accords with Christopher Breu’s critique of avatar fetishism. See Christopher Breu, *Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 22–23.

¹⁶ On financialization as a compensatory mechanism in respect to the stagnation of productive capital, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 2010); and Greta Krippner, “The Financialization of the American Economy,” *Socio-Economic Review* 3 (February 29, 2008): 173–208.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1: 1913–1926, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 289.

¹⁸ This argument regarding the two bodies of human capital builds on the theories of sovereignty articulated by Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, and Eric Santner (which, in turn, build on Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*). In addition to Esposito’s *Two*, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 91–94; Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹⁹ Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges*, 94–95.

²⁰ See Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 29; and Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (New York: Verso, 2016), 185–190.

²¹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation),” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 2001), 114.

²² McClanahan, *Dead Pledges*, 95.

²³ Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, 21.

²⁴ Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, 21.

²⁵ Ivan Ascher articulates this financialized mode of class struggle in terms of the extraction of credibility; that is, he argues that just as capitalism depends on the management of labor-power and control over the means of production,

it also depends on the management of lines of credit and the means of prediction (credit evaluation). See Ivan Ascher, *Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2016), 78–81.

²⁶ On the tendency of Christian theological tropes to re-inscribe debt, even as they appear to abolish it, see Hollis Phelps, “Overcoming Redemption: Neoliberalism, Atonement, and the Logic of Debt,” *Political Theology* 17.3 (May 2016): 264–282.

²⁷ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: with Selections from the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett Classics, 1988).

²⁸ Roberto Esposito, *Two*, 204.

²⁹ On the subject of securitization, see Li Puma and Lee, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Dick Bryan, Randy Martin, and Mike Rafferty, “Financialization and Marx: Giving Labor and Capital a Financial Makeover.” *Radical Political Economics* 41:4: 458–472.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 11–12.

³¹ See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on Ontology of the Present* (New York: Verso, 2002), Part II.

³² On the affinity between finance and aesthetics in the contemporary period, see especially Fredric Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital,” *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998* (New York: Verso, 1998); “The Aesthetics of Singularity,” *New Left Review* 92 (March/April 2015): 101–132; Joshua Clover, “Autumn of the System: Poetry and Financial Capital,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41.1 (Spring 2011): 34–52; and Leigh Claire La Berge, “Wages Against Artwork: The Social Practice of Decommodification,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114.3 (2015): 571–593.

³³ On the critical negativity of the work of art, see especially Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 37–54. Elsewhere, I’ve attempted to update Adorno’s insights on lyric poetry and critique in response to financialization. See Christian Haines, “Financialisation,” *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Economics*, eds. Michelle Chihara and Matt Seybold (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 240–251.

³⁴ Giorgio Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 77.