Theories and Methodologies

Put Some Red on It: Maoist Brooding and Communist Laughter

JEREMY MATTHEW GLICK

> "Try to ensure that everything in life has a consequence." This is without doubt one of the most detestable of maxims, one that you would not expect to run across in Goethe. It is the imperative of progress in its most dubious form. It is not the case that the consequence leads to what is fruitful in right action, and even less that the consequence is its fruit. On the contrary, bearing fruit is the mark of evil acts. The acts of good people have no "consequence" that could be ascribed (or ascribed exclusively) to them. The fruits of an act are, as is right and proper, internal to it. To enter into the interior of a mode of action is the way to test its fruitfulness. But how to do this? (Benjamin, "Try")

> And what we succeed at is worth the pain, what we fail at is worth the understanding if we can understand. What the next step is.
> We are studying with all our minds and hearts and souls' determination to understand how to slay the serpent. (Baraka, "Fashion This" 196)

> Deng Xiaoping, dead dogs dangle from lamppost
> Long tongues
> Win or lose, the Maoists is still glum. (Woods, "Fever Grass")

What follows is one possible answer to Amiri Baraka's open-ended query repeated throughout his works: "What are they laughing about?" The inside back cover of Unity and Struggle/RAZOR's 2003 pamphlet titled *Negroes Older* features Baraka's xeroxed-overlay collage, displaying truncated announcements of a keynote for Bob Moses (SNCC secretary in Mississippi from 1962 to 1967), a retrospective from the filmmaker Regge Life, and a millennia-spanning group

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Fig. 1. W. E. B. Du Bois with Mao Tse-tung in a garden, Lake Country, Central China, March 1959. From the library of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-i0741).

lecture titled "The Black Presence in Asia." All are framed in the left margin by the iconic picture in south central China (March 1959) of Mao Tse-tung and W. E. B. Du Bois enjoying a laugh together at Mao's villa (fig. 1). It is captioned: "Unite the Many to Defeat the Few." RAZOR as a visual moniker is both a rallying cry, acronym and sounded-out shorthand signifying "Revolutionary Art for Cultural Revolution."[1]

"Win or lose, the Maoists is still glum" is Billy Woods's surgically astute aphoristic retort, recalling a grisly episode in the history of the 1980 Peruvian guerilla formation Partido Comunista del Perú (whose nom de guerre was Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path), in which dead stray dogs were hung from lampposts wearing caustic paper signs chastising Deng Xiaoping for his "revisionism": "Teng Siao Ping hijo de perra!" ("Deng Xiaoping son of a bitch!"). A quick digression proposing some reading procedures vis-à-vis Woods's brilliant and studied palimpsestic allusions is appropriate here. Instead of trying to deduce intent or win the prize for succinct, singular, and correct interpretation (ossifying a work in motion), Woods's juxtapositions encourage proliferating speculative use. Woods posits the juxtaposition and sets the scene for multiplicative

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red reading: How does glum despondency relate to a sequence of armed guerilla struggle in Peru, related to Deng's opening China up to capital markets, related to the semiotics of a bonkers act of spectacular animal cruelty, related to (perhaps) the Peruvian guerilla leader Abimael Guzmán's philosophical and scholarly work on German Idealism—particularly, Kant? Another example, Woods's "Cuito Cuanavale," asserts, "I rep my era, bridge the gap between Marechera and Sweatshirt, paperback *Secret Sharer*, admittedly it ain't his best work" (00:01:06–15). Juxtapositions here are an engine for ongoing speculative interpretation. "Cuito Cuanavale" asks impossible interlinking questions, yet rightly insists on them all the same: What are the conceptual linkages between the famous 1987–88 battle in which the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (joined by Cuba) faced off against Apartheid South Africa and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, a criteria evaluating the fiction of Joseph Conrad, and an overarching theory of periodization that can bridge Damubuzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger* with the rapper Earl Sweatshirt? Woods's red-read proliferations model a radically generative crisis of and for interpretation. Comparable to the structural role of women as revolutionary agents of ideological demystification positioned against insistent interpreters in Shakespeare (as theorized by Terry Eagleton), Woods's palimpsestic readings encourage interpretation "both partial and interminable" (Eagleton 65). Alternatively, insistent interpretation teases listeners to embark on a "pathological obsession with hunting down hidden knowledge," as crystallized for Eagleton by Othello's paranoiac overreading of a handkerchief (65).

The photograph of Du Bois and Chairman Mao's laughter—an example of Walter Benjamin's "Dialektik im Stillstand" ("dialectics at a standstill")[2]—encourages anew a speculative reading of Woods's glum Maoist despondency in dialectical interdependence with two comrades and their laughter. Du Bois and Mao's affective consistency in the face of both wins and losses resonates with the stance of the Lord's servant in the book of Job (*Book of Job* 1.8), discussed in *Politically Red* in relation to the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* and an art installation speaking to police terrorism (Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 227–28). It is a grand refusal of the transactional logic of measure, a politically inflected strategic theoretical savvy, fruit of a radically contingent, critical mass-reading praxis, decoupling action from result.

Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsió's *Politically Red* beautifully decants the parenthetically noted "race" from Fredric Jameson's magisterial *The Benjamin Files* (2020) as an answer to Werner Sombart's 1906 question: "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?"[3] Cadava and Nadal-Melsió open up Jameson's parenthetical, accessing all its readerly and Communist force. *Politically Red* adroitly actualizes Bertolt Brecht and Maxim Gorki's proletarian-militant pedagogic maxim in *The Mother* (1931): "Reading is class struggle" (qtd. in Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 29). The authors build upon the centrality of reading as Communist praxis famously qualified by Louis Althusser and others in *Reading* Capital (1965): "Only since Marx have we begun to suspect what, in theory at least, *reading* and hence writing *means*" (Althusser 29). Recall that a fundamental characteristic of two major Marxist-inflected twentieth-century revolutions (the Russian-Soviet and Chinese) is how reading and writing—seemingly in real time—announced, retroactively sorted, and made sense of almost every aspect of their respective unfolding sequences. Reading here is a set of anticapitalist protocols, an attendant insistence on the imperative of literary and aesthetic form (often honed in on the level of the sentence), the spiral swerve of the pen, massification as citation and method—in other words, a red-read Black Radical Communist improvisational procedure aspiring to cognize totality.

Politically Red expertly refashions the scholastic chore that is the book review as a flurry of episodic collation involving art history, philosophically inflected cultural critique, speculative etymology, literary criticism, and radical reasoning. Such a task proceeds by means of the book's "process of opening, unfolding, and expanding" (23)—both clarifying Benjamin's revolutionary commitments on their

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own terms and placing such commitments in dialogue with political theology and with Black Radical, anti-imperialist, and Communist praxis. Cadava and Nadal-Melsió's reading amplifies and adds onto Jameson's internationalist project and cultural-revolution analogical method for tackling organizational and aesthetic problems of mediation.[4] Their inquiries include Marx and Engels's references to Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615) in their unfolding critiques; careful attention to a handwritten page of the "Feuerbach" section of *The German Ideology* (1846) in which the right column of the page is populated by frantic, errant, ever-proliferating doodling of faces read as a "reading mass" (11); and Du Bois's insurgent labor inquiries into the American Civil War period as supplements to Marx's writings on abolitionist and Black Radical struggles—just to name a few. *Politically Red* declares its first principles with compact precision: "all readings are mediated" and "reading and writing are themselves labors of multiplication," as always "collaborative" potentialities of both "means of massification" and "matter of amplification" (9). Reading attains its anamnesis as it re-remembers its collective insurgent labor and patient discipline. The authors write thoughtful meditations on Benjamin's antifascism, his theory of mechanical reproduction, destruction as Benjaminian gestus, his delineation of law-positing and law-preserving violence, his insistence on thinking through various mediations make visible what was always already there: a Communist pedagogy propelling Benjamin's praxis and oeuvre and Black Radical critique as, rather than supplementary to, Communist struggle. Cadava and Nadal-Melsió invite readers to mirror their study's stated compulsion "to catch up to our own improvisations—by *reading more*" (23).

The introduction to *Politically Red* is framed by the aphoristic formulation, "The red what reading did re adding reproducing revolution" (27), from Amiri Baraka's 1991 essay "The 'Blues Aesthetic' and the 'Black Aesthetic': Aesthetics as the Continuing Political History of a Culture," signaling "the homonymic play between 'red' and 'read'" (26). Note the purposeful flurry of gerunds, the grammatical-temporal play and emphasis on process over product: *reading did*, *re adding*, *reproducing*. Such homophonic exegesis in both Baraka and Sun Ra is beautifully theorized by Brent Hayes Edwards in his *Epistrophies*. This includes Baraka's *Raise Race Rays Raze*, *Wise WHY's Y's*, and the clarion call "who/hoo" in "Somebody Blew Up America." Benjamin's critique of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's maxim (quoted at the beginning of this essay) is motivated by Goethe's woefully transactional and insufficiently dialectical theory of causality. Goethe syncs benevolent and malevolent actions with their matching consequences. This is not chastisement as much as it is an expression of entangled disappointment. For Benjamin, Goethe comes up so short because he is so revered. Benjamin wages war against transactional evocations of measure and easy correlatives between cause and effect, reaching toward a method on how to "enter the interiority of an action" ("Try"). Benjamin concludes his meditation open-endedly by posing a question: "But how to do this?" Such a challenge conjures future protocols of reading at odds with Goethe's symmetry of reward and benefit, transgression and punishment. Baraka's interpretive improvisations on the converging Blues-Black aesthetic as red reading, history, and radical politics model one possible answer to Benjamin's query.

Beginning with a caveat and an insistence on constituting the "Blues Aesthetic" as cultural process and structure of feeling "useful only if it is not [a] depoliticization of reference," Baraka's essay scorns an academic tendency that delinks the Blues from the "national and international source, the lives of the African, Pan-African, and specifically Afro-American people" ("'Blues Aesthetic'" 101). As both memory register and transformative tactical repertoire, the Blues corresponds with the "mass mainstream [political] ideology" that is "Stay and Fight" (101). The challenge of entering the interior Blues mode of action as "one vector expressing the material and psychological source" (101) is met by way of Baraka's committed insistence on thinking culturally at the level of the all, the whole, the "everything is everything" that is totality (103): "The Blues as a verse and musical form is one thing, but what needs to be gotten to here is the whole, the aesthetic overview, the cultural matrix that the Blues is but one expression

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of" (102). Friedrich Nietzsche's Athenian Attic "Apollonian aesthetic mode" as "formalism and restraint" garners its significance "only in contradiction to the older, once world-dominating 'Dionysian' (expressionist, emotion-characterized humanistic) philosophical and aesthetic mode" (103). It is the dialectical contrast here that is paramount—the one dividing into two. Repurposing the "African Aesthetic" as first "expression of the Animist world of our earliest ancestors" corresponds to an analytical and political ambition to think totality as all: "It is not 'One God,' as opposed to many, the qualification for savagery—but that every thing is one—All is All—everything is everything! Allah means literally All-everything is part of the same thing" (103).[5] It provides a key to what Baraka identifies as the "historically traceable Cosmopolitanism of the African people," evoking Cheikh Anta Diop's assertion of "the essentially non-African essence of Nationalism. Again, the recognition of all as All—everything is everything" (105). Prioritization of the *all* is a conceptual royal road of sorts connecting to the political and intellectual project that is Black Radical Internationalism.

Baraka maps a materialist historical process of national becoming—"by the nineteenth century the diverse Africans had become African Americans"—mediated through his analytic parsing of musical "verse," "form," and "whole" (102). Historical periodization here is prefixed and punctured by a "post" that signifies an aspirational goal of political struggle rather than a severance from an earlier historical sequence: "So the Blues itself must express the human revelation of life outside, or 'post' the plantation, though I guess we ain't got very much 'post' that bad boy yet!" (102). Baraka flags his earlier name as the author of *Blues People* (1963) alongside a genealogy of thinkers forming a "single yet endlessly diverse African cultural matrix": "Equiano, Du Bois, Douglass, Diop, Robert Thompson, and LeRoi Jones" (102). Such a weaving clears expository room for Baraka to end on a self-critical addendum. This is, among other things, a Marxian and Mao-inflected protocol.

In an April 1999 talk at the Collège International de Philosophie, Alain Badiou affirms "the century is a figure of the nondialectical juxtaposition of the Two and the One" ("One" 59). This is a mathematically inflected distillation, indexing a key contentious theoretical debate in Chinese Cultural Revolutionary history.[6] In the light of *Politically Red*'s luminous analytic and insistence on reading as massification-multiplication two-step, Badiou's account resounds:

> In China, particularly during 1966 and 1967, and in the midst of unimaginable fury and confusion, the Cultural Revolution pits the partisans of these two versions of the dialectical schema against one other. When it comes down to it, there are those who follow Mao—at the time practically in a minority among the Party leadership—and think that the socialist state must not be the policed and police-like end of mass politics, but, on the contrary, that it must act as a stimulus for the unleashing of politics, under the banner of the march towards real communism. And then there are those who, following Liu Shaoqi but especially Deng Xiaoping, think that—since economic management is the principal aspect of things—popular mobilizations are more nefarious than necessary. The educated youth will spearhead the Maoist line. The Party cadres and a great number of intellectual cadres will put up a more or less overt opposition. The peasants will cautiously bid their time. Last but not least, the workers, the decisive force, will be so torn between rival organizations that in the end, from 1967-8 onward, with the State at risk of being swept away in the whirlwind, the Army will be forced to intervene. What ensues is a long period of extremely violent and complex bureaucratic confrontations, not without a number of popular irruptions, right up to the death of Mao (1976), which is swiftly followed by the Thermidorian coup that brings Deng to power. (61)

Baraka echoes variations on these lessons, proliferating by way of a protracted reading praxis. First is the parenthetical mash-up of Marx and the Maestro: "('Two is One' says Monk and Marx) . . . Dialectical character of what is, negation of the negation, the unity of opposites. The religion must have the music,

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since 'The spirit could not descend without song'" ("'Blues Aesthetic'" 104; ellipsis in original). Second is a materialist mystical analogic riff of speculative play and creative etymological license linking Lenin, Kamite, and Hamite:

> The flatted thirds and fifths, the slurs or bending of notes of singer or instrumentalist, is from the antiquity of Kamite cultural character and summation of reality. KAM or HAM means change (the changes, the chemistry—the Chemists or Kamists); Hamites were the first chemists. The change from one quality or element to another. The dialectic of life itself. One is two, as Lenin said, explaining the dialectic in *The Philosophical Notebooks*. Everything is itself and something else at the same time, i.e., what it is becoming. . . . One is two. One breaks into Two. (106)

Third is an implied sorting of Blues scholarship and Blues ideology into two warring ideological camps: a more conservative reconciliation of Blues Aesthetic with American pluralism as limit and litmus for bourgeois democracy. Tacit but implied are the writer-thinkers Albert Murray, Stanley Crouch, and Ralph Ellison (despite Ellison's unique characteristic complexity),[7] and both Baraka and Brecht slightly modify the Hegelian stages of perception from *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a form of perception, rationale, and use. The Blues and Black Aesthetic refracts, reflects, and adds onto the "Marxist theory of knowledge" as such a form of perception, rationale, and use:

> The Blues is the first come from Black—Red, the last, going to re-come. The cycle the circle. The Red what reading did re-adding reproducing revolution, red, old going out into black and coming black through blue Mood Indigo. . . . Being and Changes Coming and Going Happy and Sad. It is life's feeling, and the rising restay of revelation, evolution, raise on up, rah rah rah we say to our sol above and first cheer leader Rah Rah Rah alive is holy the consciousness which ultimately combines KNOW & HOW is Conscience (raised consciousness) perception, rationale, use, as Mao laid out explicating the Marxist theory of knowledge. (107)

In the spirit of *Politically Red*'s triumvirate protocols for reading—"massification," "multiplication," "amplification" (Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 9)—Baraka's text models mediation by entering the converging Blues-Black Aesthetic. Such a mass expository procedure-process unfolds through a typographic, etymological, literary-cultural-forensic, and poetic-linguistic fever dream: Rising, restay, revolution, raise, rah, Rah. Such consonant groundworks are the discursive and methodological building blocks that anticipate a model of reading "as Mao laid out," a preamble to the following self-critical addendum:

> Actually, in deepening an understanding of American culture (really Pan-American culture), Bruce Franklin's observation that "African-American culture is central to American culture not peripheral to it" is a key element. When I talked (in *Blues People*) about surviving Africanisms in Afro-American culture, I did not take into consideration that *American culture itself* is historically partially constructed of continuing and thematic Africanisms!
>
> (Baraka, "'Blues Aesthetic'" 109)[8]

Baraka's readings amass in the form a self-criticism directing readers both to his own incomplete reading and to the reading of others—it is a permanent genealogical assembling, splitting, and reassembling of tradition and culture, inheritance and errant departure, center and periphery. It models reading as permanent revolution.

"The life of dialectics is the continuous movement toward opposites," according to *Chairman Mao Talks to the People* (212). And as Du Bois writes, "What the Negro did was to wait, look and listen and try to see where his interest lay. There was no use in seeking refuge in any army which was not an army of freedom; and there was no sense in revolting against armed masters who were conquering the world" (*Black Reconstruction* 57): cultural revolution as revolution incorporates rigid partisan criteria in order to foster improvisational experiment. It zigs and zags, regresses and progresses, attacks and

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retreats. Cultural revolution unmoors a bourgeois causal calculus that syncs action with consequence. And sometimes, it laughs. Laughter, as Richard Halpern and Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue, affectively unbinds. Halpern in his forcefully brilliant *Eclipse of Action: Tragedy and Political Economy* reminds readers that "[l]aughter, for Hegel, *dissolves*, specifically, it dissolves ethical binding into free self-consciousness" (217). And Adorno and Horkheimer (hilariously) theorize how laughter mitigates to the point of dissolution Poseidon's anger, allowing Odysseus to resume his sequence of returning home.[9] For Antonio Negri's Job, God's laughter "adds a decisive element" to the structure of the book of Job—Job's juridical appeal pertaining to the questionably just nature of his extreme suffering coupled with God's laughter impacts the reading (57). It adds a characterological element to the juridical-philosophical-theological dialogue modifying the interpretive stakes.

In furtherance of developing a Hegelian-Lacanian Communist philosophical project, Slavoj Žižek recently expanded on his ongoing readings in the field of physics: "Quantum mechanics defines a hologram as an image of an object which catches not only its actual state but also its interference pattern with other possibilities that were lost when the final state is actualized" (29). This is in the service of proposing what Žižek calls a "quantum-holographic history" in which "retroactivity is rendered visible, and all superpositions that were erased through their collapse become apparent once again" (33). Perhaps Du Bois and Mao's laughter might be read as a mediated affectivity, an expressive-emotive bridge between the elation of wins and the glum despondency of loss, an "interference pattern" in a revolutionary sequence; whereas wins and losses perpetually in motion fight against being retroactively quantified and tallied. A red-read coupling of Benjaminian "dialectics at a standstill" and "quantum-holographic history": in its sequence of errant revolutionary unfolding, wins constitute a new set of contradictions and often recalibrate as losses. Losses are multiplicative pedagogic insights, readings informing permanent struggle. The biding of time is a militant strategy and a dynamism propelling a people's patient refusal to buy or sell their time. Amid the sartorial splendor of overcoats, homburgs, and page boy hats, Du Bois and Chairman Mao affectively form a bond—dialectical reversal is hilarious.[10]

Notes

The title of this essay is an allusion to "Put Some Red on It (Shabazz Palaces Remix)," by the South African artist Spoek Mathambo. I thank Brent Hayes Edwards and Richard Dienst for their sage suggestions in revising this text.

1. Like *Politically Red*'s key expository and theoretical move, Unity and Struggle/RAZOR has multiple readings and iterations. Unity and Struggle was both the publishing imprint and the newspaper title of the Revolutionary Communist League (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism) and the publisher of the 1979 pamphlet "The Black Nation" by Baraka as chair of the Afro-American Commission of the RCL. When I joined in the early nineties it was both a newspaper and an independent publishing venture under Baraka's leadership consisting of the political organizations New Jersey Freedom Organization, PA'Lante, and Black NIA FORCE, and then it became a preparty formation newspaper and publishing outfit calling for a united front of all revolutionary organizations under a rubric of anticapitalism, anti-imperialism, and self-determination along similar political lines as Harry Heywood and others. It was a revolutionary network based mainly in Newark and New Brunswick, New Jersey. RAZOR was a cultural imprint of Unity and Struggle that published Baraka's chapbooks and pamphlet interventions, and its name is a homonymic and acronymic play on Revolutionary Art for Cultural Revolution (RACR or RAZOR). The volume published by Third World Press in 2011 titled *RAZOR: Revolutionary Art for Cultural Revolution* collects some of these pamphlets as well as other pieces.

2. From Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* on image as "dialectics at a standstill": "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.—Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language" (462).

3. From Jameson's *The Benjamin Files*: "But when, in the 1920s and '30s, world revolution begins to recede and capitalism's production of the lifeworld is tendentially universalized, then—particularly in so-called Western Marxism—the problem of the theorization of superstructures returns in full force, and with Lukács's epoch-making *History and Class Consciousness* (and quite against his own political intentions), commodification becomes a

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political issue. Indeed, after World War II, it takes a central stage as a crucial problem of political strategy and mobilization. The dangers of Americanization were recognized long before decolonization and the Cold War. Lenin could speak of the bribery of the working classes in a support for Hitler in the German elections of 1932, but which will come to seem inadequate (even if true) for answering the new hoary question of 'why there is no socialism in America?' (whose better answer would seem to be 'race')" (153). Jameson approaches without naming it a procedure that supplements Lenin's payoff with Du Bois's formulation in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935) of the "psychological wage": "It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage" (700–01).

And Jameson on cultural revolution: "Benjamin then, in another attempt, produces an opposition between the two approaches of the optical and the tactile, where the failure of the optical—associated with contemplative knowledge (that bad method of science and positivism, in which the object stands before us independently—literally, a *Vorstellung*—and offers itself for 'disinterested' inspection)—now gives way to a tactile reception whose function is not to disengage an external picture or idea of the thing but rather to *form habits*" (*Benjamin Files* 205). The evocation of habit is then the most decisive moment in Benjamin's projection of what he cannot yet call "cultural revolution" (although it was an expression already invented by Lenin himself [*Benjamin Files* 205]).

4. For a sustained engagement with how Jameson mobilizes Chinese radical politics and the politics of cultural revolution to think about analogical reasoning and problems of mediation in his essay "Periodizing the Sixties," see Glick. Questions related to Mao and method inform Jameson's *Brecht and Method* (1998), a monograph propelled by an engagement with Brecht's *Me-Ti: Book of Turning Ways*, an exercise in what Jameson (following the scholarship of Anthony Tatlow) calls "Brecht's Chinese Dimension" (3). I do not think it is so far-fetched to think about how Du Bois's "Of the Meaning of Progress" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) in its speculative meditation stages his learning from and teaching alongside students of a Tennessee teacher's institute, anticipating both Mao's learn-from-the-masses radical pedagogy and Benjamin's illuminous dialectical conceptual unpacking of "progress" in both social-democratic and production-accelerationist variants, most famously in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

5. See Baraka's 1999 chapbook "Allah Mean Everything!," which turns on a similar logic.

6. In a curious slippage between personal control and revolutionary collective gain and in the light of its radical commitment to multiplying reading, *Politically Red* frames the Cultural Revolution as a narrow, personally motivated power grab: "He [Jameson] later refers to the violence of this 'reading effect' as 'an unusual pedagogy which has to do with the perceptual levels within the mind, a kind of pedagogical surgery that can be characterized as a cultural revolution within the reading process.' Evoking the decade-long Great Proletarian Revolution that began in May 1966, initiated by Mao in his effort to reassert his control over the Communist party—by mobilizing the Chinese masses against it—Jameson points to the violence that characterized this revolution. Because he links this violence and this revolution to a transformation in the activity of reading, he reminds us that the Cultural Revolution was furthered by the printing and circulation of its official handbook, the Little Red Book, a pocket-sized collection of quotations from Mao that offered a blueprint for Red Guard life" (Cadava and Nadal-Melsió 30–31). The philosophically inflected periodization of the Cultural Revolution in Badiou's *Communist Hypothesis* offers stern corrective: "A struggle for power? Of course. It is rather ridiculous to oppose 'power struggle' and 'revolution' since by 'revolution' we can only understand the articulation of antagonistic political forces over the question of power. Besides, the Maoists constantly quoted Lenin, for whom the question of the revolution in the final instance is explicitly that of power. Rather, the real problem, which is very complex, would be to know whether the Cultural Revolution does not in fact put an end to the revolutionary conception of the articulation between politics and the state. Indeed, this was its great question, its central and violent debate" (108). See also Karl 139–63 for further historicization of the Cultural Revolution.

Again from Jameson's *The Benjamin Files*: "Experimentation is, in such a situation, not necessarily to be judged on the basis of popular reception: Brecht's *Lehrstücke* [learning-play] were not meant for a music-hall public (and possibly, indeed, not even meant for a public at all, but rather for the actors themselves), and even Mao Zedong himself made a plea for artistic experimentation in the otherwise seemingly orthodox instructions of the Yenan Forum talks" (214–15). Referring to Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, Brecht's Epic Theatre, and other works, Jameson mines the contradiction of how such "obsessively pedagogical" works "betray a heightened commitment to dogmatic theses and lessons all while they are able to take credit for an enlargement of the role of readers. . . . The paradox, indeed, the contradiction of this unique aesthetic impulse has perhaps its political analogue in Maoism: bombard the headquarters! Make your own judgments (insofar as they coincide with mine)! It is the strong personal conviction that wishes to disengage itself from the personal (or from the 'author,' in all its poststructural senses) and that acknowledges some new freedom of interpretation of the readership at the same time it longs to annex interpretation of the readership to its own ends, which it prudently omits to specify" (36).

This is not a sectarian quibble. I am interested in how the attribution of Mao's personal motive forecloses rather than proliferates the very ethos of mass-multiplied reading that *Politically Read* so beautifully instantiates. Stated otherwise, recall Fidel Castro's formulation at the meeting of artists and intellectuals at the National Library in Havana in June 1961: "I believe that this is quite clear. What are the rights of writers and artists, revolutionary or nonrevolutionary. Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, there are no rights" (220–21). What becomes possible if "within the revolution" is read not as prescription but rather as infinite parameter?

7. I am fairly confident I first heard a version of this line of reasoning from Fred Moten.

8. For Franklin's line of argument, consult further the introduction to the first edition of Franklin's *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*.

9. "This antimythological element appears in Teiresias' prophecy that it will be possible to appease Poseidon. Odysseus is to carry

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an oar upon his shoulder and continue to wander until he reaches a people 'who do not know the sea and never eat food seasoned with salt.' When he meets another traveler who mentions the winnowing fan [a tool used to separate grains similarly shaped as an oar] he bears on his shoulder, the right spot will have been reached to make the expiatory sacrifice to Poseidon. The core of the prophecy is the mistaking of the oar for a winnowing fan. The Ionians must have found it comic. But this humor, on which expiation is made to depend, is not intended for men but for the angry god Poseidon. The misunderstanding is to make the fierce elemental god laugh, so that while he laughs his wrath will disappear" (Adorno and Horkheimer 76–77).

10. As Brecht writes in *Refugee Conversations*, "[Hegel] had such a good sense of humour that he couldn't even conceive of something like order, for example, without disorder. He was convinced that the greatest order is to be found in close proximity to the greatest disorder; in fact, he even went so far as to say they were to be found in exactly the same place! He understood the state as something that emerges where the starkest contrasts between the classes arise, so that the harmony of the state thrives on the disharmony of the classes, so to speak. He contested the idea that one equals one, not only because everything that exists changes inexorably and restlessly into something else—namely its opposite—but because nothing is identical with itself. Like all humourists, he was particularly interested in what things turn into . . ." (62). Brecht was Benjamin's partner in a future, unrealized desire to achieve Lenin's plan to organizationally constitute a "Materialist Friends of the Hegelian Dialectic." Benjamin and Brecht came up with this idea after being inspired by a 12 Mar. 1922 letter of Lenin's to the Moscow periodical *Under the Banner of Marxism* (Wizisla 41).

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