

“Called Forth” into Practice: Rhetorical Materialism and *The Call*

by

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*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Jack Dempsey Lassiter IV has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Rhetoric.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
“Called Forth” Into Practice: Rhetorical Materialism and <i>The Call</i> .....	1
l’appel .....	3
Immanent Compositions: Intention and Mediation Through Rhetoric.....	5
Strategy and Place: an Analysis of Experience.....	11
Substance and Attribution: Rhetoric’s Mediation of Labor-power .....	11
Immanence and Situation: Limits and Excess in Site.....	16
Conclusion – Post ’68: Emancipation and Articulation.....	22
Conclusion – Passion, Freedom, and Points of Subjectification .....	26
Bibliography .....	32

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the organization and mediation achieved by rhetoric as a discipline in its theorization of practices. Under particular consideration are practices of working class organization when confronting neoliberalism and strategizing methods of resistance to capital. The material status of affect and the role of agency in the organization of affects are questions addressed by this paper via a reading of the text *The Call* anonymously authored by “The Invisible Committee.”

Keywords: Affect, Practice, Class Struggle, Spinoza, Situation.

## **“Called Forth” Into Practice: Rhetorical Materialism and *The Call***

There are moments for any discipline, for any subject, where the world seems to call forth its resources and capacities to achieve some good. The terms of such a call are never set, and more often than not, a call is experienced precisely as the reconstitution of a practice’s foundational verbiage. A call is not a demand, and it is not simply a mode of address – to be called is to find one’s self pulled to become something or someone other than. Jamie Merchant identifies a point of theoretical resonance, where this impulse to reconfiguration is at work in the evolution of political discourse after the cold war, as embattled political discourses at “left, right, or center” “. . . were, in a sense, ‘called forth’ by the apparently novel historical circumstances constituted by the postwar consolidation of state capitalism.”<sup>i</sup> It is in line with Merchant’s understanding of a call here, and his contention that Rhetoric is on a trajectory to recover critique built around the rhetorical situation, that I posit my thesis. In this paper I argue that Materialist criticism should reassert rhetoric’s capacity for analyzing situations, as focal points for the circulation of affects, in order to meet rhetoric’s call to mediation.

Materialism is a critical practice diffuse throughout rhetorical theory. The range of inflections, emphases, and intellectual allegiances that make up the complex of “rhetorical materialism,” is far too expansive to be adequately covered in the pages that follow. Profound critical innovations have been achieved in recent years with the materialist contributions of authors like Dana Cloud who is engaged in a Marxist social and cultural critique directly built out of class struggle, Dickinson, Ott, and Blair in

their treatment of space and place as material arranged and synthesized through the body, and many others. While the materialism practiced by Ron Greene, Catherine Chaput, and Matthew May is not a departure from Marxist theory, its distinctive turn toward immanence and its concomitant synthesis of Foucauldian and Marxist dialectical frameworks positions my argumentation within the scope of this particular constellation of rhetorical materialist authors. The vein of rhetorical materialism occupied by Greene and his contemporaries is distinguished by its orientation toward refining practice as material synthesis and mobilizing the ethico-political insights of continental theory to resist neoliberal governing practices.

The mediating work achieved through rhetoric consists in a vast array of methods, theories, and criticisms. Yet, before anything else, rhetorical mediation is practice. The constraints, limitations, and excesses of our scholarship all find themselves synthesized in the act of attributing significance to fragments of the world as they emerge and *express* themselves to us. For Merchant, rhetoric's mediation with regard to such expression is a doubling practice “. . . it is a phenomenon of *both* constitution and representation, necessity and contingency, context and text, structure and action.”<sup>ii</sup> In the pages that follow I will forward the argument that it is precisely this double motion that bestows upon rhetoric its calling, in all of its practical senses, to mediate our own intellectual practices as we are “called forth” into the world.

## **l'appel**

The author of the text *l'appel* (translated into English as “The Call”) writes anonymously under the assumed title “The Invisible Committee.” While *l'appel* initially circulated in French, my project is confined to the copy of this work circulated in English so I will refer to it as *The Call* throughout my work. *The Call* is written in a propositional form spanning seven propositions and their respective scholium. The Invisible Committee ends the first proposition in *The Call* with the declaration that,

Faced with the evidence of the catastrophe, there are those who get indignant and those who take note, those who denounce and those who get organised. We are among those who get organised.<sup>iii</sup>

*The Call* is concerned with detailing the possibilities of organization in a political, communicative, and affective sense when positioned in the context of civilization-wide desertification.<sup>iv</sup> The author writes about who they are in a practical sense<sup>v</sup> and always in relation to the conditions outlined by *The Call*. The Invisible Committee’s intended audience is established in the opening lines of the first Scholium with the statement that “This is a call. That is to say it aims at those who can hear it.”<sup>vi</sup> Thus, *The Call* signals several shifts in the configuration of actors implicated in a global condition the author refers to as “the world civil war,”<sup>vii</sup> rather than arguing that these shifts are occurring the Invisible Committee populates its propositional frames with what is “evident”<sup>viii</sup> about the acceleration of governance and politics towards total control – it is the intensification of the evident that compels the Invisible Committee to organization.

The author purposes *The Call* as an appeal to the reader to take on the burden of organization when confronted with “...a general context – capitalism, civilization,

empire, call it what you wish – that not only intends to control each situation but, even worse, tries to make sure that there is, as often as possible, *no situation*.”<sup>xix</sup> The Invisible Committee identifies the context of *The Call* as the abstracted field of human relationships in which “situations” are actively suppressed by the context itself.<sup>x</sup> There are many places in *The Call* where context is brought into focus as the enabling condition for “disaster,” ranging from the sites of developing “urban pacification techniques,”<sup>xi</sup> to a violent entanglement with “*carabinieri*” (Italy’s national gendarmerie) in Genoa where the “militants” never arrived,<sup>xii</sup> to the integration of labor movements into “the state management apparatus” throughout Europe.<sup>xiii</sup> Across every contingency detailed in the Scholium of *The Call*, The Invisible Committee points “the desert” out to the reader as the circumstance prompting organization. *The Call* is a skeptical document that aims to challenge the strategies and values that assign the terms of “Biopower,” “Empire,” and “the spectacle” touchstone status in discourses of resistance.<sup>xiv</sup>

## **Immanent Compositions: Intention and Mediation Through Rhetoric**

In the text *The Call*, the anonymous author “The Invisible Committee” articulates the immanence of a global desert that covers the entire expanse of communicative possibilities and actively dissolves opportunities for engagement with the “deepening”<sup>xv</sup> hold of a neoliberalism that insists in making the appearance of “situations” impossible.<sup>xvi</sup> The Invisible Committee forwards a fundamentally materialist concern when they articulate the demands of the situation as a matter of organization, “To get organised means: to give substance to the situation. Making it real, tangible.”<sup>xvii</sup> My thesis takes up this organizing impulse as its starting point and interrogates prevailing frameworks in rhetorical materialism, in order to articulate a theoretical vision of affect and circulation structured around an awareness of the limitations and excesses that structure the very possibility of the “rhetorical situation” from within “the desert.”

I look to the work of Slavoj Žižek to provide an operative Spinozist understanding of “substance.” Žižek defines substance in relation to Spinoza as “the philosopher of substance,”

Substance means, first of all, that there is no mediation between attributes: each attribute (thoughts, bodies, etc.) is infinite in itself; it has no outer limit in which it would touch another attribute. “Substance” is the very name for this absolutely neutral medium of the multitude of attributes.<sup>xviii</sup>

My thesis concerns itself with the possibility of such a mediation in rhetorical theory. I will look to *The Call* as the interrogation of such a possibility under conditions where

“The desert cannot grow anymore: it is everywhere. But it can still deepen.”<sup>xxix</sup> My analysis seeks to illuminate the operations of a communicative situation that is seeking the very possibility of its being established as a situation under neoliberalism<sup>xx</sup>. From here, I take on Matthew May’s insistence on the distinction between labor and labor-power, “...because in modern capitalism while one may temporarily place their labor power at the disposal of a boss one may not sell it once and for all. Labor power is therefore constituted by a surplus that capitalism requires but that does not require capitalism.”<sup>xxi</sup> What Žižek articulates then, can be read as an insistence on affect constituting a material surplus that structures the surplus of labor-power,

As Deleuze later developed in a Spinozan vein, affects are not something that belong to a subject and are then passed over to another subject; affects function at the pre-individual level, as free-floating intensities that belong to no one and circulate at a level “beneath” inter-subjectivity. This is what is so new about *imitation affecti*: the idea that affects circulate directly, as what psychoanalysis calls “partial objects.”<sup>xxii</sup>

What is lost in May’s recommendation that “...a Spinozist approach to class struggle might consist of: intentionally acting through practices that organize the surplus of struggle into more widespread and powerful compositions”<sup>xxiii</sup> is the character of the affective dimension of struggle as “free-floating intensities that belong to no one.” The affective dimension of struggle is necessarily ambiguous.

Zižek elaborates the ambiguous character of affective composition by drawing a distinction between the work of Hardt and Negri and Spinoza. Zižek contends that,

In *The Empire*, we find a celebration of multitude as the force of resistance, whereas, in Spinoza, the concept of multitude qua crowd is fundamentally ambiguous: multitude is resistance to the opposing One, but at the same time, it designates what we call “mob,” a wild, “irrational” explosion of violence that through *imitatio affecti*; feeds on and propels itself.

The “undecidability” of multitude (and of compositional affective practices) must be reasserted in order to meet the demand forwarded by *The Call* – to provide the [rhetorical] situation with “substance.” The cycle that May and other rhetorical materialists wish to rupture is the strategic and selective engagement of rhetoric with an expansive series of “communicative models” that are premised on varying understandings of agency and subjectivity.<sup>xxiv</sup> May elaborates a vision of organization out of Greene’s “escape route” from the valorization of labor that captures communicative labor as capital.<sup>xxv</sup> In step with Greene’s theorization, May provides an explicitly Spinozist interpretation of how the labor/labor-power can inform practices of composition,

This explanation of the transformative power of struggle is really useful to identify what a Spinozist approach to class struggle might consist of: intentionally acting through practices that organize the surplus of struggle into more widespread and powerful compositions. In this way, struggles may communicate a common ration of motion across different compositions of bodies. But it is also a question of how bodies can affect and be affected by their own compositional processes in order to fabricate more complex and intense relations of antagonism.<sup>xxvi</sup>

For May, refusal opens up space for “compositional processes” to come into practice outside of labor-valorizing institutions. Similarly, Greene recommends that we “...abandon a debate about the political merits and limitations of different models of communication in order to better assess the historical interaction between rhetoric and capitalism.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Both rhetoricians assert the priority of considering rhetoric and struggle alike as processes wrought out of the manipulation and flow of labor as a power potential. This emphasis on “potential” is certainly carried out with May’s appeal to Baruch Spinoza, but it is also significant that Greene and May both rigidly

identify resistance with the deliberative opportunities discovered and invented by the working class. From a theoretical perspective that privileges the decision-making capacity of the working class as they articulate and understand themselves, the situation where such deliberative agency will be actualized becomes an irrelevant consequence of an inevitable historical trajectory laborers find themselves bound to.

What Jamie Merchant identifies as the encroachment of neoliberalism into the temporal and spatial dimensions of rhetorical situations is concurrent with what The Invisible Committee articulates as “the absence of situation.” Thus, neoliberalism is a mode of governance that nullifies the historical and resistive valence from diverse sets of struggles and “bodily compositions” through discursive processes of bracketing and separation,

Second, neoliberalism as a technique of governmentality evacuates all temporality and history from the discourse of political economy, and particularly from the concepts of work and labor. Although classical liberal political economy attempted to analyze the spheres of production, circulation, exchange, and consumption as interrelated processes forming the metabolism of the social structure as a whole, however opaque that whole may have been, neoliberal doctrine brackets the entire problem of the social structure and focuses, instead, on individual laborers as “entrepreneurs” of themselves. Instead of understanding the role of labor power as a process in the historical reproduction of a social formation, neoliberalism sees labor as the expenditure by individuals of their “human capital,” or “the set of all those physical and psychological factors which make someone able to earn this or that wage,” and wages as the return on a given individual’s investment of that capital (2008, 224–25).<sup>xxviii</sup>

To jettison the discussion of rhetorical agency in its entirety, is to leave behind the site of contact between governmentality and the oppositional compositions of labor movements and bodies that it generates. This is not to say that subjectivity should reign

as the priority of rhetorical materialism, but rather that the attempt to move outside the conversation about how subjectivity emerges vis-à-vis the rhetorical situations risks dispensing with the consideration of the situation itself because it “evacuates” the situation of material status along the axis of “temporality and history.” This is not to say that Greene and May intentionally efface the value structure accessed in mediation of the rhetorical situation, but that their asserting the agency of the working class as the atomistic and self-producing subject at the center of materialist analysis displaces the historical and temporal dimensions of laborer’s practices, and in doing so further distances theory and practice from resistance against the governance of those practices.

The mistake to make in rhetorical materialism is to theorize as if the question left to rhetorical materialism beyond the constraints of “rhetorical agency” as “communicative strategy,” is primarily “...a question of how bodies can affect and be affected by their own compositional processes in order to fabricate more complex and intense relations of antagonism.”<sup>xxxix</sup> This is a mistake insofar as the structure of bodies in possession of “their own compositional processes” maps the same structure of agency and subjectivity that an immanent perspective wishes to abandon, onto the structure of the rhetorical situation. Merchant points this out in his advocacy of a focal shift in rhetorical practice.<sup>xxx</sup> For him Rhetoric does not simply construct theoretical compositions, it initiates its own mediating practices, an organizational requirement immanence cannot possibly efface,

This reading of Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism suggests that the drive to a purely immanent perspective for thinking the relationships between discourse and subjectivity should not be seen as an ahistorical methodological imperative, but rather as a historically specific effect of neoliberal governmentality ... Or, in other words, the singularity of neoliberal

governmentality lies in its being a historical totality that assiduously denies the very possibility of conceptualizing it as such a totality.<sup>xxxii</sup>

This critique of the immanent perspective echoes Zizek's articulation of an inherently undecidable mode of affective composition and materialization as practice. Throughout this work, I will examine how Merchant's call for re-asserting the utility of the rhetorical situation might be achieved in an analysis of *The Call* that locates the possibility for theorizing situations in the neutrality of affect mediated as substance.

## **Strategy and Place: an Analysis of Experience**

### **Substance and Attribution: Rhetoric's Mediation of Labor-power**

May posits the distinction between labor, and labor-power as the entry point for a rhetorical materialist analysis of class struggle.<sup>xxxii</sup> He quotes Marx and formulates Labor-power as a potential that “. . . becomes a reality by its exercise; it sets itself in action only by working.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> The decision to draw a parallel between a Spinozist understanding of “Substance” and a Marxist theory of “labor-power” here is deft and appropriate. Labor-power rightly belongs to the mediating domain of Substance, which is the potential status of all matter bound to the world by the possibility of its activation and coming into being.<sup>xxxiv</sup> We could properly refer to Substance as unmediated material in line with Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Spinozist attributes. The example of subjectivity elucidates the substance activating operations of mediation as “[The] lack of mediation is the same as the lack of subjectivity, because subject is such a mediation.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Labor-power is distinct from labor because it is precisely this unmediated, inactivated, and non-attributable potential, while labor is the commodified act of production. For May, assigning priority to an analysis of general subjectivity falls into the same trap as a privileged analysis of labor over labor-power – criticism remains confined to the sphere of commodity relations and has no mechanism for registering the material import of substance, namely the substance of affect.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Thus, May is engaged in a project of reconciling a rhetorical criticism focused on interpreting material historical factors, and the immanent status of such requisite material as affect and labor-power. This prompts his turn to “refusal” as a mechanism

for approaching critical participation in the intellectual and political struggles of the working class.<sup>xxxvii</sup> May prescribes refusal as a mechanism for curbing the “valorization” of labor as the materialization of human capital in the sphere of commodity relations.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The problem for such a prescription occurs at the level of intention. May suggests that “. . . a Spinozist approach to class struggle might consist of: intentionally acting through practices that organize the surplus of struggle into more widespread and powerful compositions. In this way, struggles may communicate a common ratio of motion across different compositions of bodies.”<sup>xxxix</sup> If refusal denies labor-power to external authorities in order to prompt future compositions of the working class in struggle (or withdrawal), then it also denies the potential of the working class to make strategic decisions to resist the apparatuses of capital’s circulation because the strategic and mediating functions of those practices are discrete and incommensurable. Hardly a way out of the deadlock of labor and commodification, May’s prescription of refusal intentionally theorizes the possibility of an agent vested with the capacity to freely decide it’s position in an immanent historical domain outside of the mediating force of institutional narratives and valorizations of labor. The tension and mutual-exclusivity between these two theoretical gestures, that is to say theorization from an immanent standpoint and the intentional mediation of an agent or subject, will be a crucial site for theorizing the role of rhetoric in any form of class struggle, additionally this tension will lodge itself deeply inside the mechanics of critical rhetorical practice.

Jamie Merchant positions the relationship between the rhetorical materialism of May’s approach and rhetorical criticism premised on subjectivity as the contemporary

contestation of the theoretical legacies of Marx and Foucault. Merchant locates a parallel theoretical tension in the American ideological transition from the logic of Fordism to a distinctly *abstract* neoliberalism,

“Society” is here dissolved into an aggregate of rational “enterprise units.” From a rhetorical perspective, the ultimate effect is a decisive inversion of the ratio between scene and agent: rather than the “scene” of the social whole determining the agent, the essence or “substance” of the agent determines that of the encompassing scene, with the individual enterprise unit projected as the grid of intelligibility for managing, or rationalizing, social life. In this framework, Kenneth Burke’s alignment of the rhetorical focus on “agent” with philosophical idealism has more than a little relevance: the passage from Fordism to neoliberalism can be characterized as in part a general movement from a materialistic, scene-based dramatic frame to one of agent-centered idealism (1969, 171). Thus, when Catherine Chaput, in her analysis of neoliberal affect, suggests that “economics determines the landscape of neoliberalism” (2010, 2), this can partly be taken as indexing a general inversion of the rhetorical composition of the social substance relative to its predecessor, Fordism.<sup>x1</sup>

The “enterprise unit” is theorized with the force of necessity as the complexity of circulation under neoliberalism exceeds the explanatory potential of prior methodologies. Given the impossibility of generating knowledge with regard to the “totality” of neoliberal relationships and attachments, the task of coming to know the agent or subject’s relationship to the totality is rendered equally impossible. Merchant contends that the rhetorical turn to theories of “immanence” that dissolve the structure of subjectivity is posited as a similar structural necessity,

. . . theoretical immanentism and neoclassical economics actually represent two sides of the same governmentalizing coin: the neoclassical conceptualization of the workers as individual subjects possessing human capital-abilities abstracts the laborers from the entire historical, objective political-economic context in which they act. Similarly, the general post-Fordist

fixation on theorizing subjectivity as the effect of purely immanent power relations has, through the repression of totality, come at the cost of losing sight of this larger context. Both forms of knowledge production advance a conception of subjectivity as essentially malleable, fluid, and contingent through the repression of this wider historical context of constraint and social domination.<sup>xli</sup>

The prevalence of this theoretical trajectory in rhetoric hints at May's appeal to refusal as a means to "intentionally" ". . .organize the surplus of struggle into more widespread and powerful compositions."<sup>xlii</sup> In the case of refusing to participate in the practices of "labor movements" because of their commodity valorization, the loss of focus on the totality manifests as the relinquishment of the worker's access to the logistical and strategic lessons of labor's history.

The Invisible Committee locates its associations with the labor movement as a lived pedagogical reality in the lessons wrought out of the failure of unions and labor organizations throughout Europe. By operating from a theoretical frame that privileges a focus on "bodily compositions" but that also refrains from *willing* a compositional direction they are able to synthesize an explanation of labor organization that accounts for the organizational failures of workers and governing apparatuses alike,

In Europe, the integration of workers' organisations into the state management apparatus – the foundation of social democracy – was paid for with the renunciation of all ability to be a nuisance. Here too the emergence of the labour movement was a matter of material solidarities, of an urgent need for communism. The Maisons du Peuple were the last shelters for this indistinction between the need for immediate communisation and the strategic requirements of a practical implementation of the revolutionary process. The "labour movement" then developed as a progressive separation between the co-operative current, an economic niche cut off from its strategic *raison d'être*, and the political and union forms working on the basis of parliamentarism or joint management. It is from the abandonment of any secessionist aim that

the absurdity we call the Left was born. The climax is reached when the unionists denounce violence, loudly proclaiming that they will collaborate with the cops to control the rioting demonstrators. The recent securitisation of the State proves only this: that the western societies have lost all force of aggregation. They no longer do anything but manage their inexorable decay. That is, essentially, prevent any re-aggregation, smash all that emerges. All that deserts. All that stands out. But there is nothing to be done. The state of inner ruin of these societies lets a growing number of cracks appear. The continuous refurbishment of appearances can achieve nothing: here, worlds form. Squats, communes, groupuscules, barrios, all try to extract themselves from capitalist desolation. Most often these attempts fail or die from autarchy, for lack of having established contacts, the appropriate solidarities, for lack also of conceiving themselves as parties to the world civil war. But all of these re-aggregations are still nothing in comparison with the mass desire, with the constantly deferred desire, to drop out. To leave.<sup>xliii</sup>

From a strategic perspective, the imperative to refuse labor organizations is redundant and counter-productive. Not only are these organizations (and the state apparatuses they have been integrated into) themselves engaged in processes of constant re-composition that are always exceeding the terms of refusal, the compositions that emerge out of the failures of neoliberal organization require the resources, attachments, and lessons of those organizations in order to “leave” the theoretically oppressive domain of neoliberal logic. In what follows, I will look to the notion of “the rhetorical situation” to approach a number of the contingent strategic, temporal, and formal concerns that characterize the utility of a rhetorical analysis for developing strategies in antagonism with neoliberal governance.

## **Immanence and Situation: Limits and Excess in Site**

Analysis regarding the rhetorical situation is structured out of and effaced by the immanentism of material analysis such as May's. When May states that, "Refusal may then be translated practically into any number of practices of non-collaboration provided that they are deployed with an eye toward affects as the anonymous forces that communicate across bodies as they encounter and transform each other in a process of revolutionary composition."<sup>xliv</sup> Here, the rhetorical situation is not simply left out, but it is rendered useless by the methodological imperative of having "an eye toward affects." The limitations imposed by an analysis of rhetorical situation are the demarcations of a "site" or "location" where "affects as the anonymous forces that communicate across bodies" emerge and accrete in the embodied form of participants, actors, or agents engaged by the situation.<sup>xlv</sup> In short, the rhetorical situation is where affects lose their anonymity and assume their "activated" presence. From May's starting point, any utility that the rhetorical situation might hold now for materialist analysis is lost. Refusal cuts the rhetorician off, not simply from the constraints of labor, but also from the practical attachment of labor to a situation that precipitates it.

If, instead of accepting May's insistence on the starting point of refusal as the methodological insight of "Spinoza and Class Struggle" we look to the mediation of substance as an entry point for rhetorical work, then the rhetorical situation can be seen under new light. Merchant understands rhetoric as an essentially mediating activity,

Consequently, critical rhetorical theory could benefit significantly from a certain recovery of rhetorical situationality, which could be greatly expanded to encompass a given historical form of capitalist society that is mediated in and through rhetorical practices. Rhetoric, then, is not merely a text that emerges from a larger, extradiscursive context, as in Bitzer's original

formulation, nor solely that which discursively constructs subjective understandings of that context, as in Vatz's argument. Nor, pace Biesecker, is it merely that which articulates or disarticulates the identity of audiences, as a vehicle of "radical possibility" (Biesecker 1989, 127). Rather, as mediation, rhetoric is a double-sided phenomenon that reproduces a historically specific, total structure of practice through the refraction of its appearance to the very subjects who constitute that structure.<sup>xlvi</sup>

What the situation carries forward into practice is an emphasis on the contingent social and historical dimensions of our encounters with neoliberalism *as a totality*. The language of "refraction" is crucial to understanding what is at play in the work we achieve through an analysis of the rhetorical situation: where immanentism effaces the need or desire for sites and subjects of analysis, critical rhetorical theory premised on the situation works to establish focal points that do not exist in isolated vacuums, but themselves refract and unfold as new situations and new foci emerge.

From this rhetorical perspective, the relationship between subject and situation is clarified, and consequently, the role of subjectivity and situation within rhetorical theory becomes evident. For the Invisible Committee, the theoretical import of "the situation" and the advancement of material analysis are inextricably linked.<sup>xlvii</sup> For The Invisible Committee, the necessity that prompts our looking to the material requirements and conditions of an analysis of situations is pedagogical in character,

We have a political education to mature together. A theoretical and practical education. For this, we need places. Places to get organised, to share and develop the required techniques. To learn to handle all that may prove necessary. To co-operate. Had it not renounced any political perspective, the experimentation of the Bauhaus, with all the materiality and the rigor it contained, would evoke the idea that we have of space-times dedicated to the transmission of knowledge and experience. The Black Panthers equipped themselves with such places; to which they added their politico-military capacity, the ten thousand free lunches they distributed

everyday, and their autonomous press. They soon formed a threat so tangible to power that the special services had to be sent to massacre them. Whoever constitutes themselves as a force knows that they become a party to the global course of hostilities. The question of the recourse to or the renunciation of “violence” does not arise in such a party. And pacifism appears to us rather as an additional weapon in the service of empire, along with the contingents of riot police and journalists. The things we have to take into consideration concern the conditions of the asymmetrical conflict which is imposed on us, the modes of appearance and disappearance suitable for each of our practices. The demonstration, the action with faces uncovered, the indignant protest, are unsuitable forms of struggle for the present regime of domination, they even reinforce it, feeding up-to-date information to the systems of control. It would seem to be judicious, in any case, given that the frailty of contemporary subjectivity extends even to our leaders, to attack the material devices rather than the men that give them a face. This is out of sheer strategic concern. Therefore, we must turn ourselves to the forms of operation peculiar to all guerrillas: anonymous sabotage, unclaimed actions, recourse to easily appropriable techniques, targeted counter-attacks. There is no moral question in the way we provide ourselves with our means to live and fight, but a tactical question of the means we give ourselves and how we use them. “The expression of capitalism in our lives” a friend once said, “is the sadness”. The point now is to establish the material conditions for a shared disposition to joy.<sup>xlviii</sup>

The example of the Black Panther Party makes it abundantly clear that the attachment of a compositional process to a given place is not simply a constraining moment, rather, the organization and pedagogical composition of a movement *at a site* is a necessary step in “equip[ing]” any bodily composition with the space to form, reform, and organize.

Subjectivity is quite often disregarded in rhetorical theorizations from immanent perspectives because they look beyond agency and representation as modes of organization in a world occupied by vast networks of commodities, governance, and

norms. The anxiety found in rhetorical materialism is that the subject is so bound to these networks that subjectivity is compromised as a theoretical object or relation – reference to the subject ceases to explain and now works to mystify. *The Call* finds radically different theoretical baggage for subjectivity in the operations of governance and public resistance to it. For *The Invisible Committee*, whether or not subjectivity is something we equip our analysis with, its residual presence in publicly circulated practices of resistance is marked so that it constitutes vital logistical and strategic information that is taken up by the apparatuses of repression and “systems of control.” An awareness of subjective markings is thus necessary in the theorization of resistance. Retaining the theoretical vocabulary for applying subjectivity to our understanding of strategy signals a newly clarified perspective on the relationship between neoliberal actors and the processes of repression, composition, and expression they are bound to. Such clarity, again, is necessary to fulfill the strategic demands of resistance to neoliberal governance so that we might aim “. . .to attack the material devices rather than the men that give them a face.”

What is most important about the *Invisible Committees* claim that practices of resistance with exposed faces are antiquated is the realization that the markings of subjectivity acknowledged by articulation theory as the residue of neoliberal processes of production are not the substance mediated by analysis and determined to be material. Coming to grips with the bound status of subjects and their markings (their faciality) prompts the following realization that the recognition of subjectivity is made possible by the appearance of subjects forged through the constraints of institutional systems of intelligibility and the historically positioned practices of antagonism with those

structures of recognition themselves. Instead articulation theory identifies agency in the enunciation and expression of one's self as resisting (i.e. refusing) the categories and values of capitalist institutions, insisting on the status of the working class as an agent distinguished by its radical separateness and distance from neoliberal actors and compositions.

The justification for returning to the rhetorical situation is evident in the necessity of having a place from which one can contest the permeation of governance into every-day practices. The expression of these governing affects is present not just as “the sadness” one feels when suffering the coordination and habituation of neoliberal spaces, rather, these spaces themselves are best conceptualized as expressions and mediations from governance. Thus, Merchant touches on the inevitability of mediation in his justification for recovering the rhetorical situation,

Such a critical theory of capitalism is therefore crucial to understanding the historical trajectory of capitalist modernity as well as its specific logic of domination. Perhaps most important for rhetorical theorists, it is not “extrarhetorical,” or antirhetorical: the forms of social practice denoted by the categories of value, labor, and so on—the Daseinsformen of capitalist society—are culturally, discursively, and intellectually mediated in countless ways.

Accordingly, to adopt such a critical standpoint is to enable the possibility of theorizing the role of rhetorical practices in the reproduction, contestation, and general mediation of a historically dynamic totality, which, as a general form of society, decisively limits inventional possibilities and “calls forth” certain kinds of discourse. I therefore propose that we think of the general form of society

during a given historical epoch as a macroscale “rhetorical situation.” This implies the necessity, at the current historical moment, of recovering Bitzer’s fundamental insight: “Not the rhetor and not persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity—and, I should add, of rhetorical criticism” (1968, 6).<sup>xlix</sup>

The expression of governance in our daily lives is seen here as the force of a totality calling a range of discourses into being. The selective appearance of certain logics and mediated outcomes is achieved not with the direct nullification of prior discourse, but with the insistence of positive governing discourse that displaces past moments in a historical trajectory that culminates in the situation. This is the operative framework for neoliberalism as a totality which precludes knowledge of itself as such a totality. With the reassertion of the situation in rhetoric, we return theory to the work of mediation and the contestation of neoliberal governance as it emerges and expresses itself through mediation.

## **Conclusion – Post '68: Emancipation and Articulation**

The conceptualization of Neoliberalism as a totality is actively resisted in the individuation presupposed by a rational interest driven stand-point. Articulation theory, vis-à-vis Ron Greene, accounts for this proliferation of individualized stand-points with the claim that subjectivity is locatable as the immanent emergence of “a subject that speaks and is spoken to.” Thus, Greene concerns the rhetorical subject with the production of a self-understanding as a subject becoming an interlocutor. My contention acknowledges the immanent status of the subject, but refuses the insistence on subjectivity as process or expression locatable as articulation. What the rhetorical situation demands from materialist analysis is the binding of subjectivity to constitution – the situation is the contingency whereby subjectivity emerges and appears as marked, at the same time, the situation is the revelation or obscuring of markedness to another. For a subject bound to an awareness of itself crafted through articulation, encountering their self as speaker is an event in the production of relations and thus deliberative authority is attributed to and addressed by the appearance of an other. A constitutive materialist framework locates the affective material of relation in the always prior experience of the world as an expansive network of governing attitudes because,

By dint of seeing the enemy as a subject that faces us – instead of feeling it as a relationship that holds us – we confine ourselves to the struggle against confinement. We reproduce under the pretext of an “alternative” the worst kind of dominant relationships. We start selling as a commodity the very struggle against the commodity.<sup>1</sup>

If we are to acknowledge the immanent elements of the subject as the affective substance of subjectivity, then we must confront the immanence of decision-making authority in processes of articulation. The Invisible Committee vividly details the point of departure from a subject with agency derived from articulation toward a rhetorical situation constitutive of a rhetorical subject – resistance from the bound state of the situation becomes the practice of engaging capital as “a relationship that holds us” and not as the actors that represent it to us.

One of many lessons to be taken from the legacy of May '68 might clarify the stakes of articulation theory as rhetoricians continue to approach subjectivity and articulation through practice. The implications of immanence for practice are not found in the assertion of a certain kind of subjectivity, rather the subject referred to in articulation theory may very well be the same as the subject of any other analysis in rhetoric. The practical impact of articulation theory is the narrative projected from a subject (in the case of my criticism here, the working class) and determined as the theoretically insurmountable limit of subjective-experience. The consequences of this projection of a historical trajectory out of subjectivity are made evident in Kristin Ross' description of how the events of 1968 in France are both remembered and forgotten,

The very surplus of an event of this magnitude, the way in which it exceeded – as it was occurring – the expectations and control of even its most alert protagonists, is an important factor, I believe, in two of the subsequent confiscations I trace in this book: the biographical (personalization) version and the sociological. Neither of these defiguring strategies is new. Forgetting, just as much as remembering, is made possible by the work of various narrative configurations – narratives that model the identity of the protagonist of an action at the same time as they shape the contours of events. To reduce a mass movement to the individual

itineraries of a few so-called leaders, spokesmen, or representatives (especially if those representatives have renounced their past errors) is an old, tried and true tactic of confiscation.<sup>li</sup>

The announcement of workers' agency embedded in Matthew May's argument achieves a similar kind of "confiscation." As "Spinoza and Class Struggle" declares the arrival of a working class that understands and shapes itself, the text works to identify a moment where the class as a composition amounts to an agent enacting its desire on history and claiming its narrative outside of capitalism. Ross' reflection on the intellectual loss following from the proliferation of narratives after '68, resonates with my contention that embracing the "... capacity of the working class to determine its own freedom..." amounts to the valorization of an individual rational actor with absolute control over the production of their identity. In both cases we can observe the loss of accuracy, practicality, and materiality with the privileging of "liberated" agency at the expense of contextualized practice.

The affective allure of forgetting plagues the legacy of 1968 in France and in it we can see the immense narrative gravity of freedom. The narrative requirements of mass movement call for capacities in language and thought that are almost never up to the task of capturing the affective or material aspects of resistance. Thus, in the example of May '68 we confront the shimmering narrative appeal of celebrating the worker' agency and their expression of it in their movement,

The immediate political context in France was in fact one of triumphant Marxism: in large sectors of the workers movement, in the university in the form of Althusserianism, in small groups of Maoist, Trotskyist, and anarchist militants, and in a dominant frame of reference for work conducted in philosophy and the human sciences since World War II. All these developments recede in the service of a narrative in which a "spontaneous" May suddenly "erupted out of nowhere." The exclusion of the Algerian and worker prehistory to May, as well

as its *gauchiste* aftermath, is the price that must be paid for “saving” May as a happy month of liberated “free expression.”<sup>lii</sup>

Again, the stakes at play in immanence theory are clarified. The costs of determining a path to emancipation in our theorizations are the relinquishment of our attachment to the world through practice and our lived experience of history as it implicates and binds us to places and spaces in time that make the prospect of emancipation so urgent. So long as we insist on the complete liberation of the working class’ agency from its attachments to neoliberal governance we commit the interpretive error of 1968 – we understand the struggle of workers as the expression (or experience) of that struggle rather than understanding it as the practices and everyday realities that such a struggle calls forth.

## **Conclusion – Passion, Freedom, and Points of Subjectification**

Catherine Chaput outfits the rhetorical situation with the verbiage of “circulation” in order to adapt models of materialist criticism premised on location to the reality that governance under neoliberalism permeates all discourses. She delinks the subject-and-site determining model of the rhetorical situation and the organic inflection of location that the notion of the rhetorical situation offers us by working through the status of affect in materialist dealings,

Affective energies, regardless of whether they open up or close down individual capacities to affect and be affected by the labor of communication, operate on an entirely different level than rational deliberation and self-interested choice. Affective energy precedes our conscious decisions, cajoling us into habituated movements that are valorized through repetition and that are separate from our “slower linguistic consciousness, which formulates the reasons for our actions, [and] claims intentionality after the fact” (Brennan 2004, 146).<sup>liii</sup>

Affects are neither determining nor the object of intention - rather, they are the precondition for our very experience of determination or intent. In every instance affect precipitates the form and content of our engagement and negotiation of the multitude of “totalities”<sup>liv</sup> that populate the world. The question left to rhetorical materialism is, what we can *do* with our heightened awareness of affects and their circulation.

May has prescribed one model for enacting an affective understanding of circulation and material. For him, working with affect (as Substance) is not simply recognizing the operations of affect that inhere in events, struggles, and occurrences everywhere around us, but “. . . intentionally acting through practices that organize the surplus of struggle into more widespread and powerful compositions. . . . it is also a

question of how bodies can affect and be affected by their own compositional processes in order to fabricate more complex and intense relations of antagonism.”<sup>lv</sup> What is so effective about May’s prescription is the slipperiness of intention in the circuitry of such a mode of organization. We are presented with a claim that foregrounds the presence of intention in its initiation and then promptly tethers this intention to the conceptual boundaries of “action.” Thus, May’s vision of class struggle appears to bi-furcate the motions of intent and organization or “compositional processes.” His position relies on the presupposed association of affect and composition which he hinges on “practices” to delineate the two conceptual directions of his prescriptive sentence. Within this model we intentionally act into our practices, and our practices proceed to “organize” the excess of class antagonism.

More insidious than the intentional structure displayed and distributed across the surface of May’s articulation of practice, is the matrix of determination(s) that this model of practice is positioned to proliferate. This positioning is lucid in the example of practice May has selected to elaborate his position – refusal. For him, “. . .the strategy of refusal consists of tactical materializations of non-collaboration that may take the form of wildcat strikes, factory occupations, withdrawing efficiency, or other compositions provided that they reflect the capacity of the class to determine the content of its own freedom.”<sup>lvi</sup> Whatever mediating sensibility we could attribute to the bi-furcated intention-composition model of practice is dissolved via the harsh sequencing May imposes on the relationship of strategy to composition. For him, strategic evaluations are mobilized to sustain a moment where the working class is empowered to “determine the content of its own freedom.” While this moment might

appear at first glance to be the time and scene where mediation could be actualized, it is crucial that we look deeper into the *space* this formulation of practice leaves to the lived experience of strategic criticism. For May, whatever the significance of emergent or contextual conditions for strategic refusal might be is necessarily effaced by the drive to free up the working class' labor-power to the determination of what freedom might be under those conditions – this is the force of refusal as a withdrawal from valorization, what was valorized must be understood now as ephemeral and ordinary.

My suggestion is, quite simply, that such a determined relationship to freedom is the very myth sold to the working class via the valorization of labor, in order to maintain the expansive scope and diversity of the governing apparatuses that emerge in neoliberal habituation. The very notion of this freedom renders our drive to strategically engage neoliberalism as a totality defunct because it dangerously evidences the claim that our everyday lived experience – in so many ways our embodied practices – is individually our own and inaccessible to the institutionally imposed will of governing compositions. The confrontation between the working class and governance occurs as they each emerge from history and converge in an antagonism that mutually attributes subjectivity and value. To proclaim the practiced organization of affect as an opening for determining freedom is to deny the reality that “Affective energy precedes our conscious decisions, cajoling us into habituated movements that are valorized through repetition. . .”<sup>vii</sup> To deny this reality is to assert the absolute pre-eminence of individual decision and deliberation, and abandon subjectivity to the governance of rationality,

. . . this absolute, subjective will is only apparent, for it is itself determined. As opposed to Homo juridicus, or the legal subject of contractualism and natural right who is prior to the

constitution of political sovereignty and limits it externally, the subject of interest makes reference to no such extrinsic factors. Instead, it opens up a way of knowing that is opaque to the gaze of the sovereign, and that is founded on the nontotalizable, endlessly differentiated play of irreducibly self-interested, individual decisions. The interest of an individual will is itself determined by this play, but in a way that eludes the self-consciousness of any particular actor.<sup>lviii</sup>

Strategy as a practice is incommensurable with the very notion of this empowered actor. The over-determined agency of Foucault's *Homo economicus* evidences the complimentary reality that under neoliberalism we do not devise strategies because we experience moments of deliberative freedom and relief from governance, but precisely because we are never absolutely free from such governing forces and have only our practices to guide us through the neoliberal totality we come to inhabit, refuse, and embrace across time.

My proposition is that we approach the rhetorical situation not as the fixed and determined location of communicative events, but as more akin to Deleuze and Guattari's "point(s) of subjectification" in an inexhaustible precession of situations and points where our everyday capacity for self-formation is implicated by the antagonism with neoliberal governance. With reference to "the point of subjectification," the doubling alluded to by Merchant is modeled here as a process of mediation and attribution,

The point of subjectification is the origin of the passional line of the postsignifying regime. The point of signification can be anything. It must only display the following characteristic traits of the subjective semiotic: the double turning away, betrayal, and existence under reprieve.<sup>lix</sup>

The generative tension of subjectification inextricably links mutually constituted subjects and binds them in their revulsion against each other and drive to distinguish

themselves. Here, the impossibility of self-determination and self-determined freedom is the presumed condition of becoming a subject at all. Deleuze and Guattari do the work of formulating the mediation of communication via this model for us, “Substance has become subject, as they say. *The subject of enunciation recoils into the subject of the statement, to the point that the subject of the statement resupplies subject of enunciation for another proceeding.*”<sup>lx</sup> This recoiling is the binding and freedom-constraining force that is imposed on us not by governance itself, but our embodied and lived-out experience of our world and ourselves. I believe, this point of subjectification is the subject-precipitating situation which rhetoric equips us with the tools to mediate as the circulation of affects.

The work of applying the insights of Deleuze and Guattari to our practices is left to us in rhetoric. The Invisible Committee reveals the pedagogical aspects of such applications and practices, and Deleuze and Guattari themselves initiate the process of identifying how we might find spaces to engage and “mature” our “political education,”

The various forms of education or “normalization” imposed upon an individual consist in making him or her change points of subjectification, always moving towards a higher, nobler one in closer conformity with the supposed ideal. Then from the point of subjectification issues a subject of enunciation, as a function of a mental reality determined by that point. Then from the subject of enunciation issues a subject of the statement, in other words, a subject bound to statements in conformity with a dominant reality (of which the mental reality just mentioned is a part, even when it seems to oppose it).<sup>lxi</sup>

The task left to us, which rhetoric is poised to take up as its calling, is to mediate the shifts and fluctuation in the precession of points of subjectification. The object of our strategizing is not to generate a space where our freedom might be determined, but to

observe and evaluate the ways in which the contours of our freedom is mutually determined by and determining of governance. The role of strategy in such evaluations might be most precisely understood in step with reference to the purposing Deleuze and Guattari provide the practice of “Pragmatics” in the same chapter,

Pragmatics as a whole would consist in this: making a tracing of the mixed semiotics, under the generative component; making the transformational map of the regimes, with their possibilities for translation and creation, for budding along the lines of the tracings; making the diagram of the abstract machines that are in play in each case, either as potentialities or as effective emergences; outlining the program of the assemblages that distribute everything and bring a circulation of movement with alternatives, jumps, and mutations.<sup>lxii</sup>

Here, I have argued that we return practice to the habituated realm of the practical. I believe that in our consideration of the material constraints and excesses that emerge out of class struggle we might still find the space required to heed rhetoric’s calling to mediate the expansive neoliberal situation attributable to each of us as academics and educators affected through practice.

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- <sup>i</sup> Merchant, Jamie. "Immanence, Governmentality, Critique: Toward a Recovery of Totality in Rhetorical Theory" *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Volume 47, Number 3, 2014, pp. 227-250 (Article). 242.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid. 246.
- <sup>iii</sup> The Invisible Committee. *The Call*; translated from French. US Committee to Support the Tarnac 9 (2004). 3.
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>v</sup> The Invisible Committee develops a vocabulary that inflects the strategic posture assumed in their waging the call, "Nothing that is expressed in the known distribution of political identities is able to lead beyond the disaster. Therefore, we begin by withdrawing from them. We contest nothing, we demand nothing. We constitute ourselves as a force, as a material force, as an autonomous material force within the world civil war. This call sets out the conditions." Ibid. 13.
- <sup>vi</sup> Ibid. 4.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid. 10.
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. 4.
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid. 9.
- <sup>x</sup> "Worlds are everywhere calibrated to slide by or ignore each other. The 'normal situation' is this absence of situation. To get organised means: to start from the situation and not dismiss it. To take sides within it. Weaving the necessary material, affective and political solidarities. This is what any strike does in any office, in any factory. This is what any gang does. Any revolutionary or counter-revolutionary party. To get organised means: to give substance to the situation. Making it real, tangible." Ibid. 9.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid. 14.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid. 28.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid. 54.
- <sup>xiv</sup> "By dint of seeing the enemy as a subject that faces us – instead of feeling it as a relationship that holds us – we confine ourselves to the struggle against confinement. We reproduce under the pretext of an "alternative" the worst kind of dominant relationships. We start selling as a commodity the very struggle against the commodity." Ibid. 8.
- <sup>xv</sup> The Invisible Committee. *The Call*. 4.
- <sup>xvi</sup> "The "normal situation" is this absence of situation. To get organised means: to start from the situation and not dismiss it. To take sides within it. Weaving the necessary material, affective and political solidarities. This is what any strike does in any office, in any factory. This is what any gang does. Any revolutionary or counter-revolutionary party." Ibid. 9.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. *Organs Without Bodies*. Routledge. New York, New York. 2004. 30.
- <sup>xix</sup> The Invisible Committee. *The Call*. 1.
- <sup>xx</sup> What I mean by neoliberalism will be explained further in the conclusion. The definition I borrow from Merchant takes neoliberalism to be a totalizing "agent-centered Idealism" wrought from economic rationality. Merchant, Jamie. "Immanence, Governmentality, Critique" 244.
- <sup>xxi</sup> May, Matthew. "Spinoza and Class Struggle" *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* Vol. 6 No.2, June 2009, pp. 204-208. 205.
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Organs Without Bodies*. 31.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> "Spinoza and Class Struggle." 206.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Greene, Ronald Walter. "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor" *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2004. 202.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Ibid. 201.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> "Spinoza and Class Struggle." 206.
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- <sup>xxviii</sup> Merchant, Jamie. "Immanence, Governmentality, Critique." 234.
- <sup>xxix</sup> "Spinoza and Class Struggle." 206.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Merchant, Jamie. "Immanence, Governmentality, Critique." 246.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Ibid. 236.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> May, Matthew. *Spinoza and Class Struggle*. 205.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Marx, Capital Vol. I (New York: Modern Library, 1906). 190. Ibid.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid. 204.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. *Organs without Bodies*. 29.

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- xxxvii Ibid.
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- <sup>1</sup> The Invisible Committee. *The Call*. 8.
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- lx Ibid.
- lxi Ibid.
- lxii Ibid. 146