

Article

Messianic Time and Monetary Value¹

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Abstract: In this essay we return to Walter Benjamin’s notion of messianic time as outlined in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Messianic time is read with Benjamin’s *Sonnette* as a “divestment” from historical time. That is, messianic time is a relinquishing of historical time’s formation of identities within late capitalism. Messianism represents that opening which whispers the possibility of bringing asymmetrical accumulation and subjective formation to a standstill. The aim of the essay is thus to push a rereading of Benjamin’s notion of messianic time as subjective divestment from historical time which in turn breaks the uneven distribution of time, accumulation, and the monetary value of market time at work in our current world of global finance.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin; messianism; time; money; value

We need to fetch back the time they have stolen from us.
Milky Chance [1].

Every line we succeed in publishing today—no matter how uncertain the future to which
we entrust it—is a victory wrested from the powers of darkness.
Walter Benjamin ([2], p. 262).

1. Introduction

In his recent volume, *Flashboys*, Michael Lewis narrates the complex ways in which our current moment within global finance capitalism in general, and the evolution of high-frequency trading (HFT) in particular, have compounded longstanding inequalities by refashioning both the time-value of money and the monetary value of time [3]. There are remarkable amounts of money to be made, for example, in trading futures in Chicago against the list prices of individual stocks in New York and New Jersey. Every day there are thousands of moments when price discrepancies between these geographies are leveraged by those with quicker access to both markets ([3] p. 8).² In this simple arbitrage between cash and futures, Larry Tabb suggests that “if a single Wall Street bank were to exploit the countless minuscule discrepancies in price between Thing A in Chicago and Thing A in New York, they’d make profits of \$20 billion a year” ([3], p. 15). What is more, with the creation of dark pools [4], where private stock exchanges are run by big brokers who are not required to inform the public of what happens inside of them, a broker’s traders might trade against their own customers in the pool ([3], p. 86). Though it may only take 100 milliseconds to blink your eyes, in a fraction of that blink, “vast market consequences” exist between those with and those without access to these

¹ Für Hind Lakhdar, die mich überzeugt hat, dass die Zeit tatsächlich angehalten werden kann.

² “In a paper published in February 2013, a team of researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, showed that the SIP price of Apple stock and the price seen by traders with faster channels of market information differed 55,000 times in a single day” ([3], pp. 98–99).

market milliseconds ([3], p. 49). If person B arrives even a millisecond after Person A, the market has vanished for the former ([3], p. 53). As one expert in the HFT business put it, “people are getting screwed because they can’t imagine a microsecond” quoted in ([3], p. 52).

What is distinct about our moment within the sprawling enclosure of global finance capital is that the market is increasingly becoming a “pure abstraction” ([3], p. 52). Moreover, the U.S. American stock market, as Lewis suggests, is “now a class system, rooted in speed,” differentiated between the haves and have-nots:

The haves paid for nanoseconds; the have-nots had no idea that a nanosecond had value. The haves enjoyed a perfect view of the market; the have-nots *never saw the market at all*. What had once been the world’s most public, most democratic, financial market had become, in spirit, something more like a private viewing of a stolen work of art ([3], p. 69).³

High-frequency traders make their money by digesting publicly available information faster than others; while their dark pools hide order information from the wider public ([3], p. 122).⁴ By the summer of 2013, global financial markets evolved “to maximize the number of collisions between ordinary investors and high-frequency traders—at the expense of ordinary investors, and for the benefit of high-frequency traders, exchanges, Wall Street banks, and online brokerage firms” ([3], p. 179); cf. [5]). These trades happen at unsafe and unfair speeds, as well as hedged by shrouds of secrecy. The same system that sold us subprime mortgages which collateralized debt obligations few investors understood, has now fashioned a stock market that trades at fractions of a penny at the unsafe speeds of nanoseconds, that no investor can possibly understand ([3], p. 233).

This is just one instance—a very particular instance, to be sure—of the ways in which long-standing inequalities are becoming compounded in our current moment of global finance capitalism. It is not the intention of this essay to say anything specific about HFT, cf. [6], or the “unsafe speed” of the nanosecond at which markets move for a small group of hidden elites. Nor is the aim of this essay attempting to narrate the old tale of the growing monetary inequalities of our age. This essay’s aim, rather, and its governing anxiety, relates to the distinct ways in which time itself has become classed (as well as gendered and racialized). The interest of this essay is in the distinct manners of temporal inequality released and compounded by global finance capitalism.⁵ Sadly, though extreme, the example of HFT is hardly an aberration to what this essay will phrase the production of *unequal access to time*. It is the rule.

It is this anxiety that I hope to merge with the mounting interest in the so-called “return of religion” within Continental philosophy in general, and the turn to messianism and the rising attention paid to St Paul and time in particular. In lieu of a conclusion, at the end of this essay an attempt is made to appropriate this new legibility of the first-century Apostle within contemporary critical thought into a comparative analysis and critique of *time* and *value*. The majority of this essay, however, pays little attention to the texts of the Apostle. Instead, we return to one of his more enigmatic interpreters, viz., Walter Benjamin and the notion of messianic time outlined in his *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* ([8], vol. 1, pp. 691–704). Benjamin’s notion of messianic time, however, will be read with his brief sketch, *Kapitalismus als Religion* ([8], vol. 7, pp. 101–3), as well as his *Sonnette*—which were, in a sense, programmatic reflections put to verse after the suicide of his close friend, Christoph Heinle. Read together, I suggest the messianic in Benjamin’s thought as a longing for a *divestment* from historical time. It is the removal of oneself from sovereignty’s accumulation, packaging, and trading off

³ Emphasis original.

⁴ Lewis gives the following example: “Say, for instance, that the market for P&G shares is \$80–80.01, and buyers and sellers sit on both sides on all of the exchanges. A big seller comes in on the NYSE and knocks the price down to 79.98–79.99. High-frequency traders buy on NYSE at \$79.99 and sell on all the other exchanges at \$80, before the market officially changes. This happened all day, every day, and generated more billions of dollars a year than the other strategies combined” ([3], p. 172).

⁵ Here, cf. the discussion of scientific paradigms and the capitalistic framing of time [7].

of what I will refer to as the *vested self*—that form of life produced by capital’s standardized meaning, value and relationality through precise renderings of space, time, and being. That is, messianic time is a relinquishing of the *self* from historical time, a disburdening from historical time’s plasticity. Messianism is the possibility for an opening or rupture within sovereignty’s enclosure, and threatens to bring sovereignty’s asymmetrical accumulation to a standstill. The expectation and longing for messianic time is thus for a *divested existence*.

Divestment, of course, may connote several meanings within a corporate context and business strategy. Carolin Decker and Thomas Mellewigt have helpfully surveyed the diverse range of meanings and strategic methods, which have historically been classified as “divestment” [9]. In addition to surveying important literature on the topic of divestment, Decker and Mellewigt structure divestment strategies into two general types. The first, “status quo-preserving,” is when a business unit’s divestiture happens without any systemic change in the firm’s prior strategic trajectory; the second, what they call a “strategic business exit,” involves systemic reorientation [9]. It is this second sense of divestment that I appropriate here. Divestment carries with it the potential for triggering strategic reorientation ([9], p. 2; cf. [10]). Divestment is read as a kind of reorientation and removal of the self from the current operations within historical time. The aim of the essay is therefore to press a rereading of Benjamin’s notion of messianic time *as divestment from historical time* which in turn breaks the uneven distribution of time, accumulation, and monetary value of market time at work in our current world of global finance in its packaging of forms of life. And it is this reading of Benjamin’s messianic time which, I will suggest at the end, provides a political lens through which to reengage with St. Paul.

2. Time, Life and Walter Benjamin

In the summer of 1913, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) returned to Freiberg after studying abroad in Berlin. While in Berlin, Benjamin read philosophy at Friedrich Wilhelm University, attending the lectures of, among others, the sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918). It is from this period where Benjamin’s exposure to Simmel’s thought, especially his essay on “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” and his students, (e.g., Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, and Ludwig Marcuse), began to shape Benjamin’s own developing views on social life and the so-called “problem of historical time.”⁶ The return to Freiburg was in some measure the result of a failure to secure reelection to the steering committee of the Berlin Independent Student’s Association on which he had invested significant political energies, cf. ([8], vol. 3, pp. 75–90). Gustav Wyneken (1875–1964), whose radical pedagogy of awakening youth would considerably influence the early Benjamin ([12], pp. 24–28, 35–39), urged him to take leadership of the School Reform Unit upon his return to Freiburg. The group held its meetings on Tuesday evenings to discuss various readings and works of art, and was led by Philipp Keller at the time. It was during this period Benjamin formed an “intense intellectual friendship” with the young poet Christoph Friedrich Heinle (1894–1914), which would leave a distinct and lasting influence on Benjamin throughout his life ([12], p. 53). In particular, I want to suggest the influence of Heinle’s death on Benjamin’s developing articulation of the problem of historical time.

2.1. “Disburden Me from Time”

On the morning of 9 August 1914, Benjamin would awake to an express letter written in Heinle’s hand, which read: “You will find us lying in the meeting house” ([13], vol. 2, p. 605). The ominous “us” referred to the self-abandoned bodies of Heinle and his partner, Rika Seligson—killed through inert gas asphyxiation. The significance of this event, and its effective force upon Benjamin’s thought and life, rests in no small measure in the distinct manners in which the deaths were represented and interpreted. Local newspapers portrayed the event as a kind of show of tragic love and the follies of

⁶ The phrase itself comes from Simmel, though, of course, Benjamin expressed deep reservations toward Simmel’s articulation of the problem, cf. ([11], pp. 14, 103–24).

youth. Benjamin and the social circle of the School Reform Unit, however, refused this explanation and interpreted the act as “the most somber of war protests” ([12], p. 70); a final act against their collective fears of conscription and internment.

The “shattering effect” of Heinle’s suicide on Benjamin would manifest itself throughout his life and writing ([12], p. 70; cf. [14]). Benjamin would take charge of Heinle’s poems and manuscripts and attempted, unsuccessfully, over the next several years to have them published. In addition, he penned a cycle of fifty sonnets, and added others through the years as a way to grieve the loss of Heinle—or, perhaps better, to give that loss signification. In his own writings, though cryptic, the corpse of Heinle factored in the opening pages of *One-Way Street* and *Berlin Childhood around 1900* [15,16]. He referred to his first literary-philosophical essay, “Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin,” as a reflection in memory of his departed friend ([8], vol. 2, p. 921).⁷ Though the text itself did not survive, Benjamin would repeatedly assert “that his most important work” up to 1922 was his editor’s introduction to Heinle’s writings and poetry which themselves proved a kind of foreground for Benjamin’s own concerns ([12], p. 169). Moreover, the poems of Heinle became a significant social marker within Benjamin’s circle of relationships. Those around Benjamin spoke of the cult-like veil he maintained around the poems, both in terms of their public reading and his guarding of the physical texts themselves ([18], p. 64). One’s proximity to the poems revealed one’s social standing with the aloof and guarded Benjamin. These points converge in Benjamin’s own *Sonnette* and provide an important lens through which to view his complex notion of *time* articulated in the later *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, and of course, the added dimensionality provided by *Kapitalismus als Religion*. Though presented in a form of mourning the death of Heinle,⁸ the *Sonnette* carry in addition to this mourning a cipher through which to read Benjamin’s anxieties over the political situation in which he felt entrapped.

Benjamin begins the *Sonnette* with an impassioned plea to be released from the burdens of time lived without his friend, Heinle. The register of time here carries a specific sense. The experiences of life since Heinle’s suicide have been enclosed within a temporality of loss and ruin. The specificity of Heinle’s death worked within Benjamin a wound inflicted in some general sense by the world—a “Bleeding openly from wounds inflicted by the world” (*Aus Wunden bluten die die Welt gezeißelt*) ([21], p. 103). The particularity of the loss of Heinle loosed a feeling of estrangement and alienation, and gave rise to Benjamin’s expression for a desire to be *released* from time. Benjamin’s philosophy of history and messianism were formed through his own personal sense of loss and despair, cf. ([22], p. 313). He was, in the elegant words of Wendy Brown, “the consummate theorist (poet) of political despair who mines a unique strain of hopefulness from the very same terrain” ([23], p. 143). The plea itself, “Disburden me of Time” (*Enthebe mich der Zeit*) ([21], p. 89), gestures toward the experimental aim of this essay in placing Benjamin’s desire to be released or disburdened from time as a kind of lens through which to read his discussions of messianic time in the *Begriff*, written in the early months of 1940 leading up to his own suicide. The suggested re-reading of Benjamin’s desire to be “disburdened” from time—this is Skoggard’s translation of the verb *entheben*—is near the desire for a messianic liberation from historical time (*Befreiung*) itself, or, as I wish to call it, the desire to be *divested* from historical time’s accumulating powers and their effective temporal inequalities. This will be the notion of messianic time put forward in this essay.

2.2. “La situation” [...] and Its Ending

Benjamin begins his last major work, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, with the evocative story of a puppet, a dwarf, and a game of chess. The story is well known and has factored significantly in the

⁷ Here, see the important reflections of Peter Fenves ([11], pp. 21–24). Heinle also figured in important ways in Benjamin’s later work on Colour—cf. ([11], pp. 67, 290, n. 2). On the poems themselves, see Beatrice Hanssen [17].

⁸ On stylized form and politics, see Jill S. Kuhnheim [19]. See, too, the interesting study of Susan Blood [20].

work of Žižek, Agamben and others ([24], esp. pp. 3–10; [25], p. 145). The story itself does not need to be recounted here, but the question we might pose to the “philosophical counterpart” (*ein Gegenstück in der Philosophie*; ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §1) to the chess-playing automaton has to do with the identity of the *Schachspieler* on the other side of the board. Against whom is the game being played and what are the stakes? We will return to this below, but here I want to suggest that the opponent is in fact *historical time*, that *empty, homogenous time* of capital, and what is at stake is the idea of *progress* and its production of a *vested self*—that form-of-life which historical time packages, values, speculates and leverages, and then collects on the accrued interest or dumps and moves as loss.

Leading up to his penning of *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* in 1940, Benjamin increasingly concerned himself with the dire and inescapable nature of the present political situation in Germany ([12], p. 658). Though Benjamin demonstrated little interest in publishing the *Begriff* in its current form owing to his fear it would be misunderstood ([26], vol. 1, pp. 286–87), its ideas were circulated among confidants. In varying correspondence, he stated that the work itself was motivated by the “experience of his generation in the years leading up to Hitler’s war” ([12], p. 659). In particular, the operative polemic within the work was pointed against a particular understanding of “progress” (*Fortschritt*) which troubled Benjamin, cf. ([8], vol. 1, Theses §8–10, 12 and 13), and the many historians and politicians who were swept along and seduced by its promise owing to their failure to “grasp the order of the day” ([12], p. 662).

This notion of progress is an important backdrop for understanding what Benjamin will call the messianic task or vocation (*Aufgabe*) called for in each moment. Posing as “an historical norm” (*eine historische Norm*), fascism sold the German people on its rule by calling for a state of emergency (*Ausnahmezustand*) “in the name of progress” (*im Namen des Fortschritts*), ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §8).⁹ Politicians and historians who opposed fascism eventually nullified their position of critique not by some capitulation with the political doctrines of the *Führer*, but by their tacit operation within the logic of a state of emergency owing to their “stubborn faith in progress” (*sturer Fortschrittsglaube*). In order to stand against fascism, then, one must disentangle oneself from the snares and entrapments of this logic—this history—entirely. To stand against fascism, one must stand outside fascism’s enclosure and posturing as an historical norm. Historical materialism, for Benjamin, *is that politics* which introduces a conception of history against “accustomed thinking” (*gewohntes Denken*). It is a history of, and indeed, a history against, “every complicity” (*jede Komplizität*), and a politics away from “servile integration” (*servile Einordnung*), ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §10).

As Benjamin would write these reflections on history and time in the *Begriff*, he would elsewhere write to Theodor Adorno of the utter uncertainty of what time remained for him personally ([32], p. 339). In an attempt to escape the reach of the Nazis, Benjamin fled to France. He held an entry visa for the USA, a transit visa for both Portugal and Spain, but lacked the necessary exit visa from France. At the time, half of France was occupied by the Nazis along with the collaborationist Vichy regime [33]. And against all hope for an alternative, at some point on the evening of 26 September 1940, Benjamin composed a note for Henry Gurland to send to Adorno.

In a situation presenting no way out, I have no other choice but to make an end of it. It is in a small village in the Pyrenees, where no one knows me, that my life will come to a close. I ask you to transmit my thoughts to my friend Adorno and to explain to him the situation in which I find myself. There is not enough time remaining for me to write all the letters I would like to write ([34], p. 946).

Dans une situation sans issue, je n’ai d’autre choix que d’en finir. C’est dans un petit village dans les Pyrénées où personne ne me connaît que ma vie va s’achever. Je vous prie de transmettre mes

⁹ On this complex notion of *Ausnahmezustands*, cf. e.g., [27–31].

pensées à mon ami Adorno et de lui expliquer la situation où je me suis vu placé. Il ne me reste pas assez de temps pour écrire toutes ces lettres que j'eusse voulu écrire ([26], vol. 6, p. 483).

The cruel turn of fate was that those in Benjamin's company were allowed to cross the borders into Spain the following day while the corpse of their companion remained behind.

How should we interpret Benjamin's suicide? His suicide, as he argued with respect to Heine's death, was an acting out against *la situation* and the totalizing threats of conscription and internment. But what more can be said? In addition to his *Sonnette* and reflections on Heine's death, Benjamin's understanding of Baudelaire's writings on suicide provide potential insight [35].

In "On the Heroism of Modern Life," Baudelaire makes a distinction between modern and ancient suicides and the peculiarities of representation within each epoch. In Baudelaire's text, Benjamin sees an early theorization of modernist aesthetics. Baudelaire, argues Benjamin, saw within classical artistic representations of suicide, particularly those of Hercules, Cato, and Cleopatra, a preservation and perpetuation of their image. Suicide, as it was classically represented, "affirms the validity of an idealized image" while modern representations, mark "a radical transformation" ([36], p. 501). Suicide within modernity resists this idealized timelessness and instead appears as disruption. As opposed to classical representations of suicide, the modern does not act in order to confirm or establish continuity with or in one's person. Rather, suicide within modernity is an act of disruption which opens to an unpredictable other—a metamorphosis ([36], p. 501).

Baudelaire spoke of "modernism" living within the break of the "grand tradition" of the past and the yet-to-be of the new ([35], p. 104). And Benjamin situated the *élan* of the individual acting within modernity as itself a resistance to the *life* produced within this break—within the productions and representations of modernity.

The resistance that modernity offers to the natural productive *élan* of an individual is out of all proportion to [their] strength. It is understandable if a person becomes exhausted and takes refuge in death. *Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide*, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical toward this will. Such a suicide is not resignation but heroic passion. It is *the achievement of modernity in the realm of the passions*. In this form, as the *passion particulière de la vie moderne*, suicide appears in the classical passage devoted to [Baudelaire's] theory of the modern ([35], p. 104).

Modernity (die Moderne) here, I suggest, is near *la situation* mentioned in his final letter left for Gurland to pass along to Adorno, cf. ([36], p. 505, n. 5). Modernity is marked by its assimilation of life into forms of enclosure, and thus alienates life from life itself.¹⁰ In this respect, suicide is symptomatic of the enclosure even as it is a reaction to it. Jared Stark is worth quoting at length here:

[Suicide] becomes a symptom, a cry for help to which the only appropriate response is to seek to prevent suicide (politically, medically, etc.). Understood as a symptom, however, suicide appears fundamentally as a mistake, in that it cannot achieve its own aims, such that the effort to prevent suicide itself becomes complicit with modernity's victory over individual agency. Modernity is thus imagined as a totalizing force that leaves no space for resistance ([36], p. 501).

¹⁰ Simmel's is an important voice on alienation, and more needs to be done on this topic in relation to Benjamin. Two passages are worth quoting from Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*: "[...] the various elements of our existence are [...] placed in an all-embracing teleological nexus in which no element is either the first or the last. Furthermore, since money measures all objects with merciless objectivity, and since its standard of value so measured determines their relationship, a web of objective and personal aspects of life emerges which is similar to the natural cosmos with its continuous cohesion and strict causality. The web is held together by the all-pervasive money-value, just as nature is held together by energy that gives life to everything" ([37], p. 453). And: "Whenever our energies do not produce something whole as a reflection of the total personality, then the proper relationship between subject and object is missing" ([37], p. 454; cf. [38,39]).

No space (or time) for resistance, that is, within *la situation* or *die Moderne* and their mappings of space, time, and being. However, suicide carries with it the political potential to tear, disrupt, and act outside conscription.¹¹ The desire to be disburdened and divested from time is thus the messianic longing of dying to the totalizing force of historical time and its logic of “progress”—of dying to the enclosure’s power of packaging the *self*.

2.3. Dying to Time

Evgeny Pavlov, in his comparative study on Benjamin and Osip Mandel’shtam, suggests that “the question of time” dominated the aesthetics and poetics of modernism ([41], p. 445). In particular, he reads Benjamin’s complex assemblage of time and history through the lens of his Moscow diary [42], placing it into conversation with Stalinist metaphysics of history. The diary itself has been treated elsewhere and need not concern us [43–47]. Of relevance here, however, is Pavlov’s discussion of the “frenetic rhythms of the Revolution” which attempted to work an end, or victory over time in a collective effort to *kill time* ([41], p. 449). Though writing of the French Revolution, Benjamin himself speaks of a revolutionary attack on time as well. What distinguishes the revolutionary classes “at the moment of their action” (*im Augenblick ihrer Aktion*), according to Benjamin, is a “consciousness” (*Bewußtsein*) of exploding the continuum of time, of history ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §15). But what is this *Aktion*? It cannot be redemption as such. Redemption (*Erlösung*) and its image of possibility are set by time and the experience of existence within time ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §2). Ideas of redemption can themselves be indexed.¹² Revolutionary action is instead the disruption of history’s representation of time as continuum or a chain of events and the enclosing of selves into its actualizing force.

Benjamin explicates this attack upon historical time by turning to the French Revolution, which, he states in Thesis §14 of the *Begriff*, was an idealist revolution in that it blew apart (*heraussprengte*) a history which presented itself as a ([8], vol. 1). Recalling Thesis §9, history is not “a chain of events” (*eine Kette von Begebenheiten*) ([8], vol. 1). The turn to history becomes revolutionary at the point it is informed by the now-time (*Jetztzeit*) of the oppressed.¹³ The *Jetztzeit* is the activation of the past into new possibilities to tear through and open the norm of sovereignty’s history [23] (p. 144). The signal of the Revolution’s disruption of the continuum of history was its ability to “introduced a new calendar” (*führte einen neuen Kalender ein*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §14). For Benjamin, the beginning of a new calendar functions as a kind of “historical time-lapse camera” (*ein historischer Zeitraffer*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §14). The purpose of a time-lapse camera, according to Benjamin, is to reveal action within real time which is difficult to perceive during real time. Experiences of time within the calendar keep recurring (*wiederkehren*) as days of remembrance of that first day made holy or special ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §14). Benjamin makes the distinction between the calendar and the clock in their ability to “measure” or account for the (*zählen*) time. Calendars are “monuments of an historical consciousness” (*Monumente eines Geschichtsbewußtseins*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §14). In addition, the clock measures, standardizes, disciplines, and enforces this historical consciousness. To live within historical time is thus to live within an historical consciousness and measurement of that time.

Benjamin saw an enactment of this revolutionary consciousness in an incident that occurred on the first evening of the Revolution. Allegedly, simultaneously and independently throughout several places in Paris, the clocks in the high towers of the city were fired upon. This literal assault on time enacts for Benjamin an awakening of consciousness to the historical consciousness of the time. It is also a disruption and destruction of that time—*arrêter le jour* (stopping the day),¹⁴ as Benjamin takes

¹¹ This, of course, is quite delicate. Worth considering is the argument made by Ghassan Hage [40].

¹² Here there are important comparisons to be made with Derrida and the indestructible nature of justice; see [48–50].

¹³ This turn to history is always at risk in that it takes place “in an arena” (*in einer Arena*) of sovereignty. This is the paradox which is also perilous: even the revolutionary step toward the tradition of the oppressed takes place within the enclosure of sovereignty and at its commands, ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §9).

¹⁴ On the ground-clearing efforts of “destructive character,” see ([22], p. 332).

from the French revolutionary rhyme—even as it is a commemoration of that disruption with new calendars of the Revolution itself (cf. ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §15).¹⁵ On 5 October 1793, e.g., the demands of revolutionaries like Maréchal, Gorsas, and Manuel, came to fruition in the adoption of the new republican calendar. The calendar was composed by Danton’s secretary, Fabre d’Églantine, and the mathematician, Romme ([55], pp. 496,686; [56], pp. 405–9, 430; [57], pp. 19–22). Benjamin is not entirely explicit on what is intended in this recourse to the calendar of the Revolution. Jonathan Israel, for example, reads the republican calendar as an instance—perhaps even a coordination—of wider “de-Christianizing initiatives” affecting daily life ([55], p. 496). Charles Taylor has himself provided an account of modern life lived in what he calls a “purely secular time,” and what he perceives to be “the felt inadequacies of modern anthropocentrism, and the need to recover contact with greater force” ([58], pp. 322–51, esp. 329, 342). To place Benjamin within this conversation—viz., the formation of the secular and its time, cf. [59–61]—is to stress that *la situation* and *die Moderne* fashion a particular form-of-life in which Benjamin himself felt trapped and limited. This form-of-life is an historical consciousness enclosed and enforced within a particular calendar-ized time. The promise of the Revolution, then, is less on the formation of a new calendar as it was on its undoing of the sovereign measurements of the *Ancien Régime* and the tear it opened within its temporal organizations.

As with Benjamin’s interpretation of Heinle’s suicide, then, his own cannot be reduced to the desperate actions of one who had lost all hope. The step outside of this form-of-life, this vested self, *through the destruction of life* was a political act, a disburdening of oneself from sovereignty’s totalizing enclosure of consciousness through its measurements and standardizing of time. It was an embodied expression of *killing time*—that final departure from the time of capital’s accumulating powers and logic of progress.

3. Time Is Money and Vice Versa

On 28 December 1926, Benjamin mentions in his *Moscow Diary* a conversation he had with the playwright Bernhard Reich (1894–1972), where Vladimir Lenin was quoted to the effect that “time is money” ([62], p. 47). The quote itself appears in a wider context about watchmakers and Benjamin’s contention that Russians are not particularly worried about time. The entry, sadly, does not delve into any reflection on the relationship between time and money—or the sovereign disciplining of the clock. But what if he had cf. [63]? Here I suggest is a moment for a new legibility of Benjamin—and, in turn, a point of critical intervention into our spiraling political-economic situation of global-finance capitalism. The purpose of this section is to appropriate Benjamin’s notion of messianic time into a broad picture of monetary value within so-called “late-capitalism.” The relationship between time and money, of course, touches upon fundamental relationships in life regarding value, sovereignty, gender, race, age, class, and access.¹⁶ In this section, the compounding nature of inequalities effected within these fundamental relationships will be situated through a reading of Benjamin’s fragment, *Kapitalismus als Religion* (1921) ([8], vol. 6, pp. 100–3). In addition, at the end, we will turn to a consideration of the messianic disburdening or divestment from the rule of historical time. Capitalism structures time because, in the end, time is money.

3.1. Time, Value, and Money

Georg Simmel suggested that money transformed the modern world into one big arithmetical problem, cf. [65]. Life becomes “absorbed” and packaged by these processes of “evaluating, weighing, calculating and reducing the qualitative nature of values to quantitative ones.” This absorption and packaging leads to what Simmel terms “a much greater precision in the comparison of various contents

¹⁵ On the radical vision of the French Revolution’s attempt to remake time itself, see [51–54].

¹⁶ Money here is intended both in its specificity, and, as Viviana Zelizer has brilliantly demonstrated, in its diverse and informal range, cf. [64].

of life" ([37], p. 444). My argument here, in addition to Simmel's important claim, is that the social effects of these complex processes of valuation lead not only to precisely rendered comparisons of various *contents* of life, but their varying *forms* as well. In other words, Simmel's narrative of modernity's increased precision in measuring the contents of life reflects a sordid tale of asymmetric valuations of and access between *forms-of-life*.¹⁷

As Simmel states:

The mathematical character of money imbues the relationship of the elements of life with a precision, a reliability in the determination of parity and disparity, an unambiguousness in and arrangements in the same way as the general use of pocket watches has brought about a similar effect in daily life. Like the determination of abstract value by money, the determination of abstract time by clocks provides a system for the most detailed and definite arrangements and measurements that imparts an otherwise unattainable transparency and calculability to the contents of life, at least as regards their practical management. The calculating intellectuality embodied in these forms may in its turn derive from them some of the energy through which intellectuality controls modern life ([37], pp. 445–46).

Simmel's comparison between money and the clock is significant. The clock, for Simmel, made possible the determination of an abstraction of time which could then be fashioned into a technology of practical management. In Max Weber's history of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), time measurements factored within a divine economy so as to condemn wasted time as "the first and in principle the deadliest of sins," because, in such an economy, idleness equates to time's labors lost for the greater glory of God ([66], p. 104). The determinations of profitability may have themselves shifted from imaginaries of divine economy, but their measurements remain similar ([58], p. 542). Within modernity, the *practical management* of time reduced the laborer's *form-of-life* into contents and movable parts through schemes of factory organization and scientific management, cf. [67,68]. This economizing of time into efficient movements and measurements of labor split labor-time from time itself [69]. As evident in Simmel's critique of labor theories of value, e.g.,—where he argued that labor itself cannot be the common measure of value owing to the theory's faulty presupposition of unconditional interchangeability between varying forms of labor—we see in the comparison between money and the clock unequal access to both ([70], p. 344, cf. 342–46; [71], pp. 70–72, 128–32; [72]; [73], pp. 125–26).

Though not entirely new,¹⁸ our current moment within capitalism has compounded longstanding inequalities into basic spatio-temporal orientations cf. [64,74–77]. The abstraction of time into the objective measures of the clock highlight these dynamic inequalities. Such inequalities manifest themselves, e.g., in growing disparities in the life expectancies among contemporary Americans. Recent studies have demonstrated that the top "one per cent" of American men live 14.6 years longer than the poorest one percent [78,79]. The mounting and compounding inequalities within our current experiences of capitalism capitulate time and money into access to longer life. The complex processes of this history is an important one to tell, but, to return to the clock, the focus of this section is on the more immediate manifestations of the inequalities of time.

In *Discretionary Time* [80], Robert Goodin and his research team propose "time" as an appropriate "currency of egalitarian justice" within current political theory ([80], p. 3). Time is an appropriate comparable currency, they suggest, owing to time being both inherently egalitarian (everyone lives within a twenty-four-hour day) and inherently scarce (no one has access to *more* than twenty-four hours per day) ([80], pp. 3–4). And yet, somehow, some appear to have more time than others. By "more

¹⁷ Zelizer's project, among other things, is in many ways an attempt to "capture the rich new social hues" which emerge in a money economy missed by Simmel's otherwise brilliant analysis of money ([64], p. 201).

¹⁸ That is to say, the long history of inequality contains many rhyming verses. There are, however, important distinctions to be made between "modern" and "postmodern" conceptions of capitalism. On which, see the many important works of Celia Lury, Wendy Brown, David Graeber, Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiapello, and Jim Conley.

time” they mean fewer constraints and greater choice over the use of their time. What they term “temporal autonomy” is a matter of access to greater time efficiency and autonomy ([80], p. 4). In other words, access to and control over time is shaped by social inequalities ([81], p. 3). The temporal rendering of life into a schedule is “connected to the schedules of others, especially our employers, our coworkers, and our family members” ([81], p. 3). This is what Dan Clawson and Naomi Gerstel term in their important study, *Unequal Time*, the “web of time.” One’s access to the twenty-four hours of the day depends upon where one lives within the hierarchies of their social web of time ([81], pp. 14–15).

In order to demonstrate such inequalities within the “web of time,” Clawson and Gerstel propose the following scenario: It is 5:00 a.m. and your child is severely ill. It also happens to be the morning of an important day at work. What is to be done? Or, more to the point, what *can* be done? What possibilities exist? The options available at that moment depend upon where one resides within the web of time. Clawson and Gerstel examined the healthcare industry, interviewing a male surgeon (earning \$360K per year), a female nurse (\$70K), a male firefighter/EMT (\$47K), and a female certified nursing assistant (\$16K). A child’s illness could happen (and has happened) to any of these workers. This is what Clawson and Gerstel refer to as “normal unpredictability.” They discovered, however, that the level of “control over unpredictability” was markedly different, “with class and gender organizing those difference” ([81], p. 3). This important study complements others which demonstrate the many steep divides operative within workweeks cf. [82]. For example, “the more-educated work more hours, and the less-educated are unable to get enough hours” ([81], p. 5). The workweek is differentiated by gender, too, cf. [83]: on average, men are working forty hours per week and women thirty-five, cf. ([84], p. 35; [85,86]).

It may be that twenty-four hours are equally available to individuals throughout the day in some theoretical sense, but the profitability of those hours, and their rates of efficiency and return, vary drastically depending upon where one lives within the web of time. For those on the margins of this temporal web, time is expensive, inefficient, and unproductive. For those at the center, time produces higher rates of return. The inequality of labor hours amongst race, gender, and class reflects nothing about levels of effort or energy or laziness—or whatever. They reflect compensation and return inequalities. It is not that highly-educated white males work *longer hours* as such, but that those hours *count as labor hours*, and are compensated higher. Their access to time is more efficient and productive.

This inequality of access to the profitability of time crumbles a long-standing motivational cliché: everyone does *not* have the same twenty-four hours in a day. Access to time is relative to where one resides within the social web of time. “The control of time is one of the most pervasive—and most unrecognized—issues in our society” ([81], p. 268; [87]). And *time is money*. However, not everyone’s time is valued or compensated the same. In addition, not everyone has equal access to the time of the day. Racialized, gendered, and classed time reproduce monetary inequalities. Unequal time equals unequal money. Inequalities experienced within the web of time are thus compounded by the inverse of this truism as well: viz., *money is time* ([72], p. 269). With greater access to the profitability of time in terms of monetary value, such value produces an excess of time—which, in turn, produces excess capital. Goodin’s important study is thus slightly misleading in its fundamental presuppositions on the scarcity and egalitarian nature of time. Not everyone has access to the exact same twenty-four hours per day. Depending upon where one resides within the web of time, some have access to *more* than twenty-four hours per day—and, of course, some have access to *less*.¹⁹

3.2. Trapped in an Elevator

In order to illustrate the inequalities of time the previous section has attempted to articulate, consider the following scenario. An elevator has broken down at Central Bank with two people

¹⁹ There are other ways, of course, to understand time. The focus here, however, is an economized conceptualization of time. I am grateful to Seline Reinhardt for pointing this out.

inside: a single mother and a high-ranking banking executive. The single mother is putting herself through night school on student loans that the Bank has issued—and which the high-ranking banking executive’s team manages. The woman has had to take time off from her hourly job to come into the bank to show identification and sign paperwork that needs to be processed in order to apply for an additional loan. Her children need to be picked up from daycare within the hour or she has to pay late penalties. The banker is returning to his office after a strategic meeting with his investment team which handles student loans. In this theoretical stoppage of time, time-value is experienced quite differently between the man and the woman. The woman’s loans are accruing interest, she is punched out from work so is not garnering a wage at her day job, she will be late to pick up her kids from daycare and will have to pay penalty fees. The banking executive, however, as a salaried employee, is not losing his salary while trapped in the elevator. His investment team is executing his strategic plan, his hired *au pair* is looking after the needs of his children, and, as more time passes, the interest on the principle of the woman’s loan grows.

There are far more complexities in this scenario than can be examined here. In this theoretical stoppage of time, for example, the banking executive may himself be losing profits. Being trapped in an elevator prevents him from maximizing the profitability of his time. Any loss of profit, however, occurs from a position of excess. The woman, however, is experiencing a compounded sense of loss from a position of scarcity. In both cases, time is money. Though certainly not optimally, the banking executive’s time is making money even while trapped in the elevator. For the woman, time in the elevator is costing money. This theoretical stoppage of time thus reveals fundamental inequalities in the experience of time, access to time, and the monetary returns from time.²⁰

The time value of money produces a monetary value of time. In addition, the growing inequalities of capital compound social disparities of time. Though not without controversy, Thomas Piketty’s important analysis of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* thus acquires added significance. In capitalist countries, argues Piketty, the return of wealth (r) tends to exceed the rate of growth (g) of the economy. His equation $r > g$ reflects how the share of national income workers receive as their compensation decreases while the share of income going to owners of wealth continues to rise [88]. This is the vicious wheel of compounded inequality with which we are faced in our current cultural moment within global finance capitalism: the rich are getting richer, yes, but the wealthy are also getting more (or greater access to) profitable time.

3.3. Messianic Divestments

The final text to consider in my rereading of Benjamin and time is his *Kapitalismus als Religion* (1921)—what Eiland and Jennings refer to as Benjamin’s text of “romantic anticapitalism” ([12], p. 149; cf. pp. 291–92, 513). The timeliness of Benjamin’s thought for our current moment within global finance capitalism—or its sudden legibility—is in his diverse explorations of what Peter Fenves, in his important study on Benjamin and the shape of time, phrases, “the tension between the nondirectionality of time and the unidirectionality of history” ([11], p. 3). The experience of the former *as directional* is owing to the construction of sovereignty’s promise of progress—viz., history. Fenves suggests Benjamin’s interventions divined time as “plastic” ([11], p. 4). In addition, the messianic vocation of the historical materialist is to work an awakening to history’s production of consciousness—to reveal the permanent contestability of all historiography ([23], p. 155).

Before turning to *Kapitalismus als Religion*, Thesis §6 in his *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* is an important moment in the interpretation being put forward in this essay ([8], vol. 1). If history, or the measurements and standardizations of time, is viewed as vesting interest for those in power, the articulation of the past occurs through a “moment of danger” (*Augenblick einer Gefahr*) ([8], vol. 1,

²⁰ This, of course, is the point Benjamin himself stresses when he states that only through time’s momentary suspensions can one begin to see its vacillating structure, see ([41], pp. 450, 457).

Thesis §6). That moment is the persistent threat of becoming instrumentalized, made a “tool” (*Werkzeug*), for power’s invested past; that is to say, for the value of one’s existence to accrue worth for the gain of the “ruling class” (*herrschenden Klasse*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §6). Each “epoch” (*Epoche*) must “attempt,” or “wrest” (*versuchen*), the “tradition” or “transmission” (*die Überlieferung*) of the past from this vesting ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §6). It is at this point where Benjamin introduces his notion of the messiah. The messiah is not merely a “redeemer” (*Erlöser*), but “the subduer of the antichrist” (*der Überwinder des Antichrist*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §6). Benjamin shifts the language from the Luther Bible of 1912, but the imagery of the one who “restrains” (*aufhalten*) from 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 is present. The antichrist is the accumulator of worth from the existence of others as it precisely renders space, time, and being for others. The messianic need is long past the restraint of the antichrist. The antichrist is here and victorious. What is needed is a subduing of and disburdening (a divesting!) from this enemy (*Feind*). Remember from Thesis §3, “only a redeemed humanity receives the fullness of its past” ([8], vol. 1). And in Thesis §2, each *Geschlecht* is endowed with a weak messianic power. The historian is thus placed within a messianic economy of “fanning the spark of hope in the past” (*im Vergangenen den Funken der Hoffnung anzufachen*) away from its citable moments by, and the accrued interest of, the antichrist ([8], vol. 1).

In *Kapitalismus als Religion*, cf. [89], Benjamin suggests four features of the “religious structure” (*religiöse Struktur*) operative within capitalism that elicit these themes ([8], vol. 6, p. 100).²¹ The first is that capitalism effects an enclosure, or sphere ([91], pp. 91–113; [92], pp. 128–41), in which all things find their meaning (*Bedeutung*) only in relation to the sphere. There is no meaning outside the cult. The cult of capitalism therefore produces standardized forms of meaning, value and relationality in its precise rendering of *space*. Secondly, Benjamin speaks of the permanence of the cult through its sacralizing of time. “There is no day that is not a feast day” (*keinen Tag, der nicht Festtag*) within the cult. Time is charged with the meaning-making of the enclosure, and, as such, all must rush to keep pace. The cult of capitalism thus produces standardized forms of meaning, value and relationality in its precise rendering of time. Third, Benjamin sees in the cult of capitalism a universalizing of *Verschulden/Schuld*. In this context, *Schuld* can signify “guilt” or “debt.” According to Benjamin, the cult stands alone in its production of *Schuld* as opposed to the atonement schemes of other cults.²² *Schuld* and not *Entsühnen* (absolving or atonement) becomes the operative dynamic within the cult. As such, the cult produces a rhythm, which hammers *Schuld* into an individual’s consciousness (*dem Bewußtsein sie einzuhämmern*) ([8], vol. 6, p. 100).²³ It is through *Schuld*, then, that “identity” is minted, as the dynamics of personhood are assumed by—and then themselves assume—the logic of *Schuld*. The cult of capitalism thus produces standardized forms of meaning, value and relationality in its precise rendering of being. The fourth and final feature is in the cult’s eclipse of “god.” The hiding of god by the cult is not the death of the divine, but is its functional displacement or merging of the former into the latter. In the end, *debt becomes divinity*—*Schuld* becomes Sovereign. As Fredric Jameson phrases it, “we have come to think of capitalism [and no longer the divine!] as natural and eternal” ([94], p. 7). The precisely rendered valuations of space, time, and being by the divine have merged into and been acquired by the cult of capitalism. Its eternity and enclosing order have eclipsed what was formerly God’s. Within this logic of *Schuld* and the totalizing enclosure of the cult—where standardized forms of meaning, value, and relationality are shaped through precise renderings of space, time, and being—there can be no working for reform in Benjamin’s estimation. There can be only a “smashing”

²¹ This religious structure is more fundamental for Benjamin than Weber’s explication of the formation of capitalism as *conditioned by religion*. For Benjamin, *it is essentially religious*, cf. ([90], pp. 288–91).

²² For a contemporary application of Benjamin’s views on guilt and debt in relation to the Panama Paper’s controversy, see Devin Singh [93].

²³ Benjamin continues that this universalizing and internalizing of “guilt” has even absorbed “God in the system of guilt,” thereby rousing within the divine “an interest in the processes of atonement” ([8], vol. 6, p. 101). On rhythms and noises in Benjamin, see ([41], p. 453).

or “fragmentation” (*Zertrümmerung*), cf. ([11], pp. 125–51). The time for restraint is over. The antichrist is here.

At this juncture in the overall argument, it would help to consider Agamben’s appropriation of the important work of Gustave Guillaume and his articulation of time and its representations. As Agamben summarizes Guillaume, “the human mind experiences time, but it does not possess the representation of it, and must, in representing it, take recourse to constructions of a spatial order.” This latter construction is conceived of as *operational time*: the time the mind makes to realize a given time-image ([25], p. 65). In any stylized representation of time, however, time outside of these representations remains ([25], p. 67). Operational time, then, is the time needed to disburden oneself from and bring to a halt all representations of time. The *now time* (*ho nyn kairos*) of the messiah can therefore never fully live within the enclosure of a given historical or chronological moment ([25], p. 70). Messianic time is the tear and opening through which the sheer ungraspability of the *now* seizes time, and makes its end ([25], p. 100). What I want to call *the vested self*—capitalism’s precise rendering of time, space and being—is given further valence in Benjamin’s notion in Thesis §2 where he states that our “image of happiness” (*das Bild von Glück*) is affected by time and our experience of existence within time ([8], vol. 1). Time, for Benjamin, thus sets not only any understanding of happiness (*Vorstellung des Glücks*) but also where time is going—of redemption (*Erlösung*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §2). Benjamin’s next move in Thesis §2 is complex. The past, he states, “carries with it a *temporal* [hidden] *index* by which it is referred to in redemption” (*Die Vergangenheit führt einen heimlichen Index mit, durch den sie auf die Erlösung verwiesen wird*) ([8], vol. 1). What exactly is *indexed*? If our conception of happiness is set by time, and happiness and redemption are linked, is not the very conception of redemption affected by time as well? How can one be redeemed if one’s conception of redemption is assigned or given within the enclosure’s representation of time? It is here where Benjamin inserts what he calls “a weak messianic power” (*eine schwache messianische Kraft*) which refers to past generations’ expectation of *our coming* ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §2). And yet how should we think of this “expectation” (*Dann sind wir auf der Erde erwartet worden*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §2)? Would not even the conception of *expectation* itself be affected by time as well?

It is here, I suggest, that the expectation and longing for messianic time is for *divested existence*. Benjamin’s weak messianic power is that longed-for experience of space, time and being (*viz.*, *the vested self*) outside of completed philosophies of history and logics of “progress,” cf. ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §4). The messianic rupture of time is thus its call for a divestment from the enclosure’s historical citations and accumulation of, and trading on the space, time and being of others. As Benjamin elaborates in Thesis §5, the “past” (*Vergangenheit*) is not something to cite but to be seized by a present—the messianic now—which recognizes its concerns in an image of the past ([8], vol. 1).²⁴ And yet, he continues, the “true picture of the past *flits by*” (*Das wahre Bild der Vergangenheit huscht vorbei*) ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §5). True images are uncitable. The imagery of the past “flitting by” which Benjamin emphasizes in his text communicates a secretive escaping from one’s creditors or obligations. The enclosure’s citations of the past are always already invested. In addition, the historical materialist along with her messianic vocation works against this grain of universal history (*Universalgeschichte*) and citation, cf. ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §17) in order to awaken existence outside the logic of *Schuld* and progress, cf. [95]. Benjamin counters this approach with historical materialism’s “constructive principle” (*konstruktives Prinzip*) of arresting thought, stopping it, and presenting it as “a constellation pregnant with tensions” (*in einer von Spannungen gesättigten Konstellation*; ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §17)).

The construction of such constellations introduces a “shock” (*Schock*). In addition, this shock “crystalizes” (*kristallisiert*) into a “monad” (*Monad*). Leibniz’s *La Monadologie* (1714) is in view here [96]. For Leibniz, the monad was an *irreducible force* which makes possible the characteristics of the inertia

²⁴ Cf. ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §5): “Nur als Bild, das auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Augenblick seiner Erkennbarkeit eben aufblitzt, ist die Vergangenheit festzuhalten. [...] Denn es ist ein unwiederbringliches Bild der Vergangenheit, das mit jeder Gegenwart zu verschwinden droht, die sich nicht als in ihm gemeint erkannte.”

and impenetrability of bodies, and yet contains within itself the source of all its actions. They are the first principles of every *composed* thing. The historical materialist approaches each “historical subject” (*geschichtlichen Gegenstand*) as a *monad*. That is, each subject is viewed as a composed thing and yet within that composed thing contains the source of all its actions. It is within the structure of the monad, that one recognizes “the sign of a messianic cessation of happening,”—or, as Benjamin rephrases it, “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.”²⁵ The structure of the monad is the result of a stoppage of time. In addition, this stoppage becomes a sign of the messianic which is a cessation and restraining of happenings. The messianic therefore brings about a stoppage of time wherein a chance arises for the oppressed past to emerge. Such a stoppage of time thus releases a revolutionary whisper for an existence outside of sovereignty’s measurements and enclosures of historical time. The revolutionary gesture is that “tiger’s leap into the past,” which disinters “repressed emancipatory hopes and experiences from their tombs beneath the putative march of progress” ([23], p. 157).

4. The Pain of Becoming

In this essay I have proposed a reading of Benjamin’s complex notion of *messianic time* as the revolutionary disburdening or divestment from historical time. By *divestment*, I mean a strategic reorientation away from capitalism’s standardized meaning, value, and relationality and its precise rendering of space, time and being. It is the longing for divested existence—a life lived outside the *vested self*. In lieu of a conclusion, it is this reading I would like to lend toward the increased attention of messianism in recent years, which, I think, bears witness to its sudden legibility in providing vibrant suspensions to historical time’s plasticity ([97], pp. 87–91, 155–61, 173–79, xvi). Moreover, the increased appearances of St. Paul, one of messianism’s most active theorists, has become an interlocutor for contemporary thought with whom new ideas are finding expression and new forms of cultural contest mobilizing, cf. [98].

It is this Benjaminian rereading of the messianic as a longing for divested existence, I suggest, that might bring a new legibility to the apostle himself, and, by extension, fix a site for critical thought within our muddled moment of the sprawling enclosures of global finance capitalism. Agamben famously defined the messianic vocation as the *revocation of every vocation* ([25], p. 23), and wondered what it might mean to live *in the Messiah* ([25], p. 18). Agamben sees the “most rigorous definition of messianic life” explicated in the apostle’s first letter to the Corinthians (esp. 1 Cor 7:29–32). In this text, the exchange between the *as not* and the *as if* produce the undoing of historical time and its citations through the formation of new communities of messianic longing ([25], pp. 35–39). But how can such formations and collectives emerge in our moment when even economic and environmental apocalyptic realities cannot shake the hold of capitalism’s sprawl? Perhaps the fault of our moment rests in some measure with ourselves as critics. Are we, too, swept along by the logic of progress which troubled Benjamin in his own day? Can any critique get to the heart of capitalism’s standardized forms of meaning, value and relationality that does not first question its purported state of emergency in the name of economic progress and prosperity? The need of the day is surely for monetary and temporal equality. But do our critiques themselves assume the logic of the forms-of-life produced by the enclosure of global finance capitalism?

Irving Wohlfarth surmises that if “Benjamin’s generation was forced to recognize that ‘capitalism will not die a natural death,’ ours has had to learn the further lesson that capitalism is not, for the foreseeable future, going to die at all,” quoted in ([23], p. 138). Within the traumatic temporalities fixed within late-capitalism, the end is no longer here nor is it arriving. The end itself has ended. In his elegant reading of Brecht’s aesthetic and political vision, Fredric Jameson claims that what is needed in our moment is a Brechtian “embrace the pain of [...] Becoming, [of] passing away, in order

²⁵ Cf. ([8], vol. 1, Thesis §17): “In dieser Struktur erkennt er das Zeichen einer messianischen Stillstellung des Geschehens, anders gesagt, einer revolutionären Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit.”

to reach our more satisfying human possibilities" ([94], p. 7). What Jameson sees in Brecht, we might well see in a post-Benjaminian reading of St. Paul, cf. [99]. "To live is Messiah; and to die to the [vested] self is gain" (Phil 1:21). Or elsewhere, "It is no longer "I"—the vested self, produced by capitalism's precise renderings of space, time, and being—who lives, but Messiah in me" (Gal 2:20). It is this messianic passing away, this killing of time, this disburdening from historical time's plasticity, which divests the self from historical time's accumulations and citations. The possibility for more satisfying alternatives rests outside the logic and promise of "progress," and packagings of the *vested self*. The pain of becoming therefore also includes the messianic pain of an *unbecoming*; a strategic reorientation of existence outside the sprawling enclosure ([23], p. 172).

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