**Not All are Aboard: Decolonizing Exodus in Joon-Ho Bong’s *Snowpiercer***

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The *mise-en-scène* of Bong Joon-ho’s *Snowpiercer* (2013) indicts the deployment of scientific technology under the helm of capitalist development with destroying our environment.[[1]](#footnote-1) Seeking a purely technical solution to what is treated as a purely technical problem, major governments release a powerful cooling agent, CW7, into the globally-warmed atmosphere. CW7 plunges the planet into an Ice Age too cold to sustain any kind of life. The remnants of human and other living beings board a seemingly self-propelled train capable of destroying any ice that would derail any less-miraculous train. This Noah’s Ark, which ostensibly exists to stave off total extinction, condemns what remains of life itself to circle a lifeless world.

 Bong’s film draws inspiration from, but refuses to succumb to the existential despair of, Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette’s *Le Transperceneige*.[[2]](#footnote-2) The premise is roughly the same: the train is antagonistically split into a luxurious, first-class “head section” and a squalid, human cargo-holding “tail section.” Yet the storyline is radically different: Curtis (Chris Evans), a popular tail section figure, leads an insurgency to overthrow Mr. Wilford (Ed Harris), the inventor, owner, and master of the Snowpiercer. The original plan is for Curtis to take Wilford’s place at the head of the head section. When Curtis learns what it takes to keep the engine running, though, he accepts the alternative plan of Namgoong Minsu (Song Kang-Ho), a technician aboard the train who seeks an opportunity to escape it altogether. The revolutionaries end up derailing the train, from whose wreckage only Nam’s daughter, Yona (Go Ah-sung), and a young boy, Timmy (Marcanthonee Reis), emerge.

*Snowpiercer,* as many critics have screened it, is the story of a revolutionary movement against a class-divided world of oppression, exploitation, and dehumanization. Peter Frase, in an excellent review, claims the film exposes “the limitations of a revolution which merely takes over the existing social machinery rather than attempting to transcend it.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Joshua Clover poses the central question of the film as “[c]an the stuff of class domination be repurposed for some emancipatory system?”[[4]](#footnote-4) This interpretive frame of “taking” versus “smashing” the means of production and the state machinery captures a central insight into Bong’s allegory. However, it also obscures the film’s central contributions to critical theory—namely, (1) Bong’s postcolonial critique of the assertion that immaterial labor is the predominant form of work under global capitalism and (2) his postcolonial critique of the counter-hegemonic strategy of engaging with liberal-democratic institutional terrains and powers-that-be.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Let us begin with the first line of decolonial critique or the political-economic narrative. The Snowpiercer train, a luxury train from the old world of ecologically-unstainable capitalism, has been repurposed as the “necessity train” in the new world of post-environmental catastrophe. On board is a survival- and service-oriented economy that seems to function without productive labor. To uncover the reality of the situation, revolutionary actors must “pierce” not the official ideology, which they never believed anyways, but rather the veil surrounding the labor that reproduces the whole system*.* What is roughly the same veil obscures a crucial point from many western marxists:[[6]](#footnote-6) the post-modern service economies of the north (the head section) finds its conditions of possibility in the underdeveloped economies of the south (figured as child slavery) and the advanced industrial economies of the east (figured as intellectual work).

The second line of decolonial critique is the revolutionary politics narrative. It accordingly adopts the standpoint of peoples shut outside of global production, yet firmly situated inside of the global order. This reserve army of labor aspires to be a revolutionary army; theirs is the revolutionary work of otherwise non-working forces. Their view of revolutionary struggle, however, has long been distorted by deeper stratagems of power, subtle offers of hegemonic incorporation to the erstwhile dominated. *Pace* strategists of counter-hegemonic struggles in the North Atlantic,[[7]](#footnote-7) Bong argues that northern/western powers remain at the center of an increasingly hegemonically-constituted world system. The global south and east must exit this uneven terrain of hegemony because only exit enacts a mode of decolonization that neo-colonial capitalism can neither co-opt nor crush.

Both lines of argument introduce contrapuntal views from the global south and east that decenter, while still engaging with, North Atlantic theory. They can also be more historically presented as the unfolding of familiar, 20th century marxist and decolonial logics. The Gramscian question of this strategic conjuncture is whether to undertake the war of position (associated with Gilliam, the leader of the old guard) or the war of maneuver (associated with Curtis, the leader of the new guard) in the struggle for hegemony. The Fanonian question is whether to compromise with the colonial regime (Gilliam’s goal) or to take the place of the colonial regime (Curtis’s goal) in the independence struggle. Bong’s position would be that Fanonian independence and Gramscian hegemony, for all their contributions to emancipatory struggles, must be surpassed within a new political horizon.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The process of arriving at this conclusion is diegetically coded as the relentless movement of Curtis from the final to the first train car. As Tony Zhou notes, Curtis is obsessed by the idea of pushing “forward” (camera right), yet haunted by the sense that his humanity has been left “behind” (camera left).[[9]](#footnote-9) Here our interpretation is more political and less psychological than Zhou’s: the revolutionaries must to some degree repeat the “progressive” struggles of the past, but must also disrupt this “progressive” trajectory at the decisive moment (Curtis, abandoning linearity, goes “below”). Our politically-inflected interpretation, however, is none the less humanistic: the decisive moment of *decolonial exodus,* a novel creolization of decolonial thought and operaist theory,[[10]](#footnote-10) ultimately aims at human emancipation. The target of Bong’s critique is, more than any specific class or racial formation, a technocratic rationality that estranges our species from its social intelligence and political capacities.

**I. Maintaining the train and social reproduction**

We interpret *Snowpiercer* as an intervention into recent socialist debates over the character and places of production under contemporary conditions of globalization. The film is a critique of both technologically-fetishistic dreams of replacing laborers with machines and postmodern imaginations of radical alterations in the kinds of labor needed for social existence. These interventions become apparent if we read the film against Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Empire,* which stands below forthe autonomous marxist claim that today’s global capitalism privileges symbolic, communicative, affective, and “immaterial labor.”[[11]](#footnote-11) In this context, Bong addresses the claim that classical marxism failed to grasp the political implications of post-fordist production and, as a consequence, soon found itself “outmoded.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Bong’s alternative diagnosis would be that the limits of marxist theory, including autonomous marxist theory, are at least partially constituted by its Eurocentrism.

Bong’s vision of a global order with clear divisions between center, peripheral, and semiperipheral regions is out-of-line with Hardt and Negri’s vision of a decentered Empire in which immaterial labor has displaced material labor. The localization of various kind of labor in distinctive sections of the train is a reminder that, while it may predominate in core and some semiperipheral regions (e.g. the North Atlantic, some East Asian “tigers”), immaterial labor by no means predominates over the material labor in other semiperipheral and peripheral regions.[[13]](#footnote-13) Moreover, immaterial labor only becomes possible somewhere if something or someone elsewhere supports it with material labor. We associate this material labor on the Snowpiercer with the often-hidden labor of social reproduction in our world.

Entering the Snowpiercer almost eighteen years after the calamity of CW7, we are struck by the absence of labor in the very back of the train. Here the state is primarily interested in turning the “natural resources,” namely the tail sectioners themselves, into factors of production closer to the head of the train. Early on Gerald (Robert Russell) volunteers himself and his wife Doris (Magda Weigertová) in response to an official call for musicians. Inspecting both of their hands, a soldier declares that the front section only requires Gerald. Gerald, desperate as he is to move forward, refuses to leave Doris behind. The soldiers break Doris’ hand and take Gerald captive, thereby forcing the “supply” of manual labor to match their “demand.” The state relies upon domination more than hegemony to secure its conditions of rule and labor:[[14]](#footnote-14) Gerald’s consent is treated as optional, just as Doris’ ability to perform is rendered superfluous.

Soon thereafter, state agents march into the tail section again to initiate medical inspection of all its children. Tanya (Octavia Spencer) and Andrew (Ewen Bremner), who have no doubt seen other children “disappeared,” unsuccessfully try to keep their own children out of sight. Claude (Emma Levie), Mr. Wilford’s personal assistant, carefully measures the height of the children as well as the length of their arms. She quickly selects Andrew’s son Andy (Karel Vesely) as a promising candidate, but soon thereafter also selects Timmy (Marcanthonee Reis), whom his mother Tanya has been hiding. Andrew hurls his own shoe at his son’s kidnappers. The soldiers, in punishing this act of defiance, expose Andrew’s arm to the freezing air outside and smash it with a massive hammer. The *leitmotif* of limbs established in these early scenes already draws our attention to the questions of armed rebellion and manual labor.

Mason (Tilda Swinton), holding up Andrew’s shoe as a symbol of disorder, takes an opportunity to sermonize about the need for order: “We must all of us in this train of life remain in our allotted station. We must each of us occupy our preordained particular position [...] Know your place. Keep your place. Be a shoe.” Mason strips racial and class domination of the glossy narratives of opportunity, self-improvement, etc. that justify inequality in the North Atlantic;[[15]](#footnote-15) Mason lets the dispossessed of the Snowpiercer know that they are akin to what Fanon called the “damned of the earth,” akin to natural resources appropriated from the periphery to be processed in the core. If a shoe or a foot usurps the place of a hat or the head, Mason claims, “a sacred line is crossed” or, as Fanon might put it, the Manichean divide between spatially-located “species” is undone. Superficially, at least, the State wants to keep tail sectioners in their place, yet to reserve the right to promote a shoe or foot to the status of glove or hand (laborer).[[16]](#footnote-16)

While composed of what are commonly understood to be different racial groups (e.g. blacks, whites, Asians), the tail population is uniformly interpellated by biological racialization and subjected to outrageous punishments. Again, the colonial state seems to bottom on sheer violence, with little attempt to secure the consent of the brutalized. The commodified metaphor of a product (shoe) that is not a part of the body politic, like the biological metaphor that separates the tail from the head section, is rejected by the shoes and tails themselves.[[17]](#footnote-17) It is an open question as to who, if anyone, aboard the train “believes” in an official ideology plainly contradicted by the existence of a highly-flexible reserve army of labor.

Perhaps the biologized ideology would still function perfectly even if no-body believed it. Its force is what Negri and Hardt call “biopower” insofar as it “infuses” life itself, a material configuration of bodies and brains, into the train’s production and reproduction process as its ultimate “value.”[[18]](#footnote-18)The tail, to use Foucault’s terms, is not a network of disciplinary apparatuses that produces docile and useful bodies; it is constituted by a sovereign power that tortures the “body of the condemned” in the ritualized “spectacle of the scaffold.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Mr. Wilford’s juridical power coincides with social production “throughout the biopolitical society” wherein the hostile environment maintained in the tail section does highly specialized forms of affective, intellectual, and intersubjective “work.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Among the productions of the tail, after all, are unruly subjects who plot revolts more than produce commodities.

Curtis, Edgar (Jamie Bell), and Gilliam (John Hurt), the leaders of the tail section, ferment a revolution soon after Timmy and Andy’s kidnapping. Curtis and Edgar’s plan is for Curtis to “control over the engine” and therefore “control the world.” As the tail sectioners fight their way forward, securing one train car after another, they also discover how the Snowpiercer functions as a political-economy, solving the mystery of Timmy’s and Andy’s fates. Prior to the revelation of a still-hidden production process, though, the tail section appears early on as a racial more than a class formation. This works against the standard interpretations of Curtis as a “proletarian emissary” and the movement he leads as a “proletarian revolution.”[[21]](#footnote-21) The trouble is that the tail section is a class-which-is-not-a-class reminiscent of Marx’s lumpenproletariat and even more reminiscent of Fanon’s “cohort of starving men, divorced from tribe and clan [which] constitutes one of the spontaneously and radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people.”[[22]](#footnote-22) For this reason alone Bong should be read not only in relation to the Western marxist tradition, where Peter Frase situates him, but also against the backdrop of Southern and Eastern re-assessments of peasant and lumpenproletariat revolutions.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Tail sectioners only acquire an explicit productive function through either state employment or, less obviously, revolutionary activity. The first worker met is Namgoong, a “security specialist” whom Curtis and company ask to sabotage the gate-locking-system he designed for Wilford. Nam, however, seems indifferent to anything but Yona, his daughter, and Kronole, the recreational drug of choice for the head section and for himself. Kronole addiction, in addition to marking Nam as a post-fordist “dropout,” delivers the pleasure of finding the right “opportunity” to work subversively (Curtis offers Nam Kronole for each gate opened).[[24]](#footnote-24) Nam’s characterization is also likely a comment upon the ambivalent position of the East vis-à-vis the West/North and the South, as Eastern countries have both developed “capitalisms with Asian values” and enacted communist revolutions, both resisted European imperialisms and established their own empires.[[25]](#footnote-25) Recall that the officer Fuyu (Steve Park), whose name could suggest Chinese or Japanese descent, holds a megaphone for the official Mason, who speaks with a British accent. Notice, too, that Namgoong’s nickname “Nam” sounds like an abbreviation for “Vietnam,” which associatively links to various “Americans”: Curtis, played by an actor famous for playing Captain America, as well as Wilford, the high-tech American capitalist.

Paul is the second worker encountered as the veil surrounding the locomotive’s (re)production slowly falls. While Namgoong, a highly ambivalent immaterial worker, is unambiguously Asian, Paul, a stereotypically apolitical industrial worker, is ambiguously “white.” Paul represents the “sleeping beauty” of the metropolitan proletariat,[[26]](#footnote-26) inhabiting an isolated car where nostalgic rock blares from tinny speakers and where the head section instructions are inserted into tail section “protein blocks” (e.g. the instructions to liberate Namgoong from his cryogenic prison). The working classes are either passive toward the movement which passes by them, as with Paul (“my place is here”), or literally dormant before the movement “awakens” them, as with Namgoong. They are also literally replacements for broken down of machine parts, as we learn from Paul’s account of how he came to manually operate the once-automated protein block maker.

As the migrants from the global south force their way into the post-industrial economies of the global north,[[27]](#footnote-27) the impression that cultural achievement (e.g. restaurant, education, various relaxation cars) means meeting biological needs (e.g. water supply, agricultural, fishery cars) grows. At a bar staffed by a man of African descent, for instance, Mason explains that sushi is only served twice a year to achieve the “proper sustainable balance” of the fishery, a “closed ecological system.” This scientific-sounding rationale receives a quasi-theological supplement in the school car, where a pregnant blonde teacher (Alison Pill) leads schoolchildren in a hyper-morbid cheer. “What happens if the Engine stops?” she calls out. “We all freeze and die!” they call back. Mason, the teacher, and the children at least seem to be highly enthusiastic adherents to this ideology of constantly driving towards sustainable balance. Once again, the ideological effect is more affective than ideational.

Unlike the “[o]ld world people… who got turn into popsicles,” as a schoolgirl puts it, Wilford prophesied that the Eternal Engine would save humanity from the catastrophic effects of CW7: technical problems are followed by technical solutions, which become fresh technical problems followed by technical solutions... The new world, to be sure, is different than the old world of fiscal crises and environmental devastation, profit-generation and commodities production. Aside from tightly-controlled food production, no production seems to be occurring, as machine parts and other manufactured goods (e.g. cigarettes, bullets) constantly “go extinct” in the vernacular of the train. Furthermore, the locomotive’s workforce is most visibly constituted by teachers, entertainers, security forces, food preparers, hairdressers, and others who perform “activity-without-a-finished work” or “immaterial labor.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Yet the locomotive can only disavow its need for material labor, a “problem” that cannot be eliminated by technology.

The post-fordist workers of the new world, like their counterparts in the old world, depend upon the proletariat and lumpenproletariat to satisfy their biological needs and to offer up replacement bodies.[[29]](#footnote-29) Material labor in a post-fordist society assumes a role akin the socially necessary labor that makes collective existence possible. The labor of social reproduction—including the labor of biological reproduction that only women and no machines have been able to perform—is often unacknowledged, unremunerated, and hidden from view.[[30]](#footnote-30) With respect to the ongoing process of “primitive accumulation,” as Rosa Luxemburg argued, “capitalism in its full maturity also depends in all respects on non-capitalist strata and social organizations existing side by side with it.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Similarly, as the revolutionaries discover behind the final veil surrounding the production process, the Snowpiercer’s “engine” of postmodern development depends upon supposedly-outmoded forms of child and slave labor. The reveal that decisively shifts the revolutionary endgame is that Timmy serves as a replacement part for the less-than-Eternal Engine. His blackness signals that Timmy, like enslaved Africans and other non-to-partial-citizens throughout the Americas, performs the labor of social reproduction on behalf of more “advanced” populations and productions.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Timmy is a reminder to operaist theorists that labor has not been de-materialized so much as material labor has been re-localized and that the transition from industrial to information-based employments has been regional in scope. While it is correct to see that industrial workers are a minority of workers in the global north, it is Eurocentric to ignore the fact that the global south is now home to the most numerous industrial working class that has ever existed.[[33]](#footnote-33) No matter where it is found, post-fordist capitalism results from a global restructuring of labor forces, that is, the demolishing of workers’ unions in the north and the concomitant outsourcing of industrial production to the south.[[34]](#footnote-34) This shifting geography of material labor from the standpoint of world systems theory is an update on asymmetrical north/south relationships. Following the Fanonian dictum that “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue,”[[35]](#footnote-35) Bong “stretches” the autonomous marxist thesis that immaterial labor “predominates” in contemporary global capitalism. Immaterial labor only dominates material labor in the way that the core is constituted by a disavowed dependency on an illusory independence from the periphery.[[36]](#footnote-36)

We agree with Hardt and Negri that “there is no outside to the world market,” a proposition to which marxist, postcolonial, and world systems theorists could all assent. But it does not follow that the “striated space of modernity” has been superseded by a “continuous, uniform space” of postmodernity,[[37]](#footnote-37) wherein neither labor forces nor political subjects can positively or even potentially be located. Bong aims at a global mapping of this kind in distinguishing industrial workers in a core economy (e.g. Paul) from hi-tech workers in a semi-peripheral one (e.g. Nam) from a lumpenproletariat found in the periphery (e.g. Curtis, Tanya, Edgar, and company). The sectional layout of the Snowpiercer, of course, cannot map directly or completely onto the currently constituted world-system. Rather, the explicit resurgence of binary racism and the continued mystification of material labor is just one of many possible destinations of our current socio-political trajectory. To play on Rousseau, Bong envisions a future that does not yet or perhaps will never exist, “of which it is, nevertheless, necessary to have true ideas, in order to form a proper judgment of our present state.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

Bong judges without apology: the child turned into an appendage to the machine is the high point of instrumentalized and alienated humanity. Even if it is true that the engine is in need of human labor, one can still question if enslaving children is the only possible “solution” to this problem. One might also wonder why fostering racial and class antagonisms that repeatedly bring the species to the brink of extinction is the only possible way to create “sustainable balance.” The existence of bare life “[which] may be killed and yet not sacrificed” signals that the end-goal of the system is not, and perhaps has never been, sheer human survival.[[39]](#footnote-39) The actual *telos* of the Snowpiercer is more like the domination of life for the sake of domination itself or, alternatively, the reproduction of a society of domination. Fragments of the “old world” exploitation and oppression are reconfigured into a totalizing system that fails on its own instrumental-rational terms: “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains”—and the bodies—“of the living.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

As with neoliberal governance, the “necessity train” forces the least well-off to pay the costs of austerity measures while it allows the best-off to live luxuriously. At the same time, all aboard are subjected to the train’s biological imperatives, systematic delusions, and anxieties towards extinction (e.g. the head section spends all its time pleasure-seeking); “everyone, even at the very top, appears to be powerless before the movements and laws of the apparatus itself.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In their first and final confrontation, Curtis comes to recognize that Mr. Wilford is no less “enslaved” to the locomotive than Timmy. While it could liberate humanity from the realm of necessity (e.g. the “hard work” of social reproduction), Wilford’s miraculous technology instead subjects humanity to theodicean claims of What the Divine Wilford Deems Necessary. Curtis’ refusal of this irrational rationality reveals a significant difference between Marcuse, who hopes that technological innovations can set the conditions of social emancipation,[[42]](#footnote-42) and Bong, who doubts that high-technology can contribute to the cause of revolutionary freedom. For Bong, specifically-political problems call for specifically-political solutions.

**II. Derailing the train and decolonial exodus**

We interpret the endgame of *Snowpiercer* in light of an on-going debate among radical political theorists regarding appropriate responses to contemporary globalization. A useful point of entry into this debate is Chantal Mouffe’s schematic distinction between two kinds of socialist strategies. Mouffe aligns figures like Negri and Hardt as well as Paolo Virno with the first position, which she terms “withdrawal from” existing institutions; their proposal is “an evacuation of the places of [existing] power” conceived as a post-fordist production process.[[43]](#footnote-43) Mouffe aligns herself and fellow traveller Ernest Laclau with the second position, which she calls “engagement with” existing institutions. Mouffe proposes a multi-pronged strategy of “dis-articulation” and “re-articulation” across multiple sites of power within “the existing hegemony,” all of which can be re-purposed for radical democratic projects.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Bong, on this schematic distinction, would align with the “withdrawal from” rather than the “engagement with” camp. It is besides our purposes to defend Negri, Hardt, and Virno here, although we will provide a roundabout vindication and decolonial critique of Virno’s rendition of exodus. Suffice it to say that Bong would reject Mouffe’s either “withdrawal from” or “engagement with” framing of the strategy question. Bong blurs the stark distinction in favor of an “*engaged withdrawal*”from market, state, and colonial terrains (that is, not only the terrain of post-fordist production).[[45]](#footnote-45) The real either/or for Bong is whether one struggles for hegemony within a supposedly “irremovable horizon” of conflict or whether one non-hegemonically struggles to create the horizon “within which [any] problem arises.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

The conflict between hegemonic and non-hegemonic strategies comes to a head just outside the final gate, where Curtis’ aim of taking the engine (re-hegemonization) squares off against Nam’s aim of escaping the train (exodus). Curtis wants to redeem all tail sectioners who have sacrificed their lives and especially Edgar, whom Curtis owed a special debt even before he made the heart-wrenching decision to let Edgar die. He confesses to killing Edgar’s mother and almost eating the baby Edgar in the early days of the train, when tail sectioners were driven to cannibalism. Gilliam stopped him, offering his arm in place of Edgar and inspiring others, but not Curtis, to cut off their limbs. Nam remains impassive before this tale of Gilliam’s “miraculous” sacrifice and Curtis’ desire for redemption. He wants to blow the door to the outside using Kronole, which turns out to have explosive properties. Unconvinced that life can persist outside the train, Curtis dismisses Nam’s dream as a product of drug-addled delirium.

 Tellingly, Wilford invites Curtis rather than Nam into his dining room. At this point, Curtis still thinks that the point of racialized class division is that the heads enjoy the biggest quarters, fresh food, and a life of luxury. Eyeing Wilford’s lifestyle with envy, Curtis perhaps still wants to take the colonizer’s place at the front of the train.[[47]](#footnote-47) Wilford quickly changes Curtis’ understanding of the bottom line. It turns out that Gilliam has agreed with Wilford that fostering and controlling racial and class antagonisms is the best way to maintain a sustainable population. Conditions of immiserating poverty, rituals of military/police brutality, and ideologies of racial inferiority are part of a hidden play of power: all these forms of oppression inspires periodic uprisings that achieve population balance within the “closed ecological system” and, yet more perversely, give tail sectioners something for which to live and die.

Wilford and Gilliam intended the Curtis Revolution, like all pseudo-revolutionary movements before it, to “cull the herd” and come to a predictable end. What turned the tide was Curtis’ tactic of bringing fire to the dark battleground of the Yakaterina Tunnel, where Curtis recuperated the “inherent unpredictability” of political action, “the new” marked in the diegesis as the coming of the New Year.[[48]](#footnote-48) What Wilford sees in Curtis, however, is a capable leader who should take the aging ruler’s place in the engine room. The neat symmetry of Wilford’s proposal is that the exception to sovereign power (Willford calls Curtis an “anomaly”) will become the sovereign who decides on the exception; Wilford, as the sovereign, decides in the exceptional situation of an unpredicted insurrection on how to restore the “normal situation” of population balance.[[49]](#footnote-49) Co-articulating State Order and Biological Necessity, Wilford urges Curtis to choose what must be chosen: “You’ve seen what people do without leadership. They devour one another.” His anthropological presupposition is that a cannibalistic war of all against all can only be held back by a sovereign with the authority and power to sustain bio-political projects.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The rub, of course, is that sovereigntyitselfpartakes of the biological warfare that encourages people to devour one another. In pitting “enemies” against one another, Wilford takes tail section life and lets the head section live: this is the traditional right of sovereignty. Yet in sustaining “friendship” (the greater good of the “sacred engine” theodicy), Wilford fosters all life aboard the train and “[disallows] it to be point of death”: this is the contemporary strategy of bio-power.[[51]](#footnote-51) Life is disallowed especially with regards to Timmy, whom the exercise of sovereignty is slowly killing, as Yona, bursting into Wilford’s quarters, discovers in a moment of “clairvoyance.” The work of the child installed inside the engine is to repeat one gesture over and over again; this replacement part, as Wilford technocratically puts it, is “manufactured” by the tail section to keep the Snowpiercer “going manually.” No self-sustaining or perpetual-motion machine, the engine requires the non-productive, yet system-reproductive labor of an embodied being. The Scared Engine, like CW7 and the protein-block machine, is not the technological miracle it is cracked up to be. It is rather trapped in a pre-calamity circuit of production that belies the aim of “saving” the human species.

Recalling transatlantic slaveries from our world, Timmy’s “blackness” alludes to his occupation of the dehumanized position of a living instrument. Besides, even Wilford’s “whiteness” is “not really a color at all,” but rather the marker of “a set of power relations.”[[52]](#footnote-52) His sovereignty in both its juridical and biopolitical modes has created head sectioners (global north, “whites”) as the population to be protected against the sheer survival and violent uprisings of the tail sectioners (global south, “non-whites”).[[53]](#footnote-53) More complexly coded is Curtis, who partially resembles a “white savior”; his intervention, rather than his mother Tanya’s (Octavia Spencer) combat, directly emancipates Timmy. However, unlike the closely-related figure of “racial convert,”Curtis does not “go Native” to lead the anti-colonial resistance.[[54]](#footnote-54) He is no less a racialized “tail” than members of populations colonially marked, say, black or Asian prior to the environmental apocalypse.

What brings Curtis around to Nam’s exodus strategy and compels him to sacrifice his arm is seeing that Timmy, like himself, has been treated as a technical means for a preordained end. The sudden recognition of Timmy as *homo sacer*, the bare life that can be killed without being sacrificed, prompts Curtis to transvalue Timmy as a human life worthy of sacrifice. He shoves his arm into the gears for the sake of Timmy, repeating Gilliam’s sacrifice of his arm for Edgar with a radical difference: his “teleological suspension of the ethical”—that is, the imperative to sustain survival at the cost of life disallowed—is an act of revolutionary faith.[[55]](#footnote-55) Put simply, Curtis acts with no assurance of sheer survival, but not without an aim. The *telos* of the suspension are the future generations (in the sense of creations and children) of more life as opposed to the preordained balance of mere-life*.*[[56]](#footnote-56) There can be no other “reason” for stopping the engine, which to Gilliam, Wilford, and even Curtis (prior to discovering Timmy inside the engine) seemed like “a suicidal act.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

 For Bong, the revolutionary act is revolutionary work, a Work [*poesis*] that “[embraces] within itself many of the prerogatives” of Action [*praxis*].[[58]](#footnote-58) Revolutionary work is akin to, yet radically different in purpose and effect from the kinds of performance-based work seen throughout the train. Indeed, Bong’s representation of virtuosic work in the first class section (e.g. Gerald’s violin playing) resonates with Virno’s claim that post-Fordist work in the sense of symbolic, affective, and communicative labor has absorbed the powers of what Arendt terms action. What Virno terms an alliance of general intellect and work is represented, for instance, by the the state’s transformation of Nam’s “virtuosic activity” into the gate-locking system at “the point of fusion between knowledge and command.”[[59]](#footnote-59) Upon his and Yona’s release, Nam puts the technical knowledge acquired through the production process to subversive usages. He unlocks locks of his own design and helps destroy the final gate.

Emerging as Nam and Curtis learn to cooperate for common ends is what Virno terms terms an alliance of “general intellect and political Action.”[[60]](#footnote-60) General intellect in this emergence is not the application of scientific knowledge as a force of production (e.g. Nam’s work for Wilford); nor is it the narration of subjective experience in dialogical exchange (e.g. Curtis’ confession to Nam, conducted through an English-Korean translation device). It rather is our exteriorized capacities for learning, language, and abstraction that spontaneously coordinates the action against a centralized, neo-colonial state apparatus. That activity of intellect which phenomenologically appears in the space in-between the actors obviates the need for, or even forecloses the possibility of, a leader’s commands or a common will. All it takes is general intellect as “a direct attribute of living labor,” “a repertoire of a diffuse intelligensia,” to imagine that jamming the engine or blowing off the gate can derail the Snowpiercer from its relentlessly linear, yet ultimately circular track.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The conjuncture of general intellect and political action marks a shift in the violent struggle from the phase of revolutionary warfare to that of de-colonializing work. Like Fanon, Bong insists that the violence of decolonization is the sacralized “praxis” that “constitutes [the] only work” of the otherwise non-working lumpenproletariat.[[62]](#footnote-62) As for Fanon, this *praxis* comes in two varieties for Bong. Conservative violence is associated with wars of maneuver (direct attacks on the state military and police forces) and wars of position (side-winding accommodation of Gilliam’s demands under Wilford’s hegemony). The literal violence of the war of maneuver, like the bloody consequences of the war of position, presupposes “the real possibility of physical killing” concrete individuals.[[63]](#footnote-63) Transformative violence, by contrast, is not aimed at embodied beings such as Wilford, who is left to eat his steak, but against the engine, the door, and other mechanical operators of the biopolitical system. Transformative violence is the disruptive act of “[putting] your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels,” to redeploy Mario Salvo’s phrase, the decision to risk one’s life and limbs more than to inflict violence upon another embodied person. It is associated with a friend/enemy conflict that seeks to abolish the state monopolization of political decisions rather than shift it “into new hands.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

Friendship for Bong is more than the “negation” of enmity or, as Schmitt would say, the willingness to defend a “way of life” against whatever the “actual participants” in the conflict decide is an existential threat.[[65]](#footnote-65) That is, friendship is neither a popular will nor a sovereign decision to violently protect an old way of life, as on Schmitt’s account. Friendship among Curtis, Nam, and Yona is, in Virno’s terms, the “working *together* to invent opportunities that up until that point have not been computed” or, in Fanon’s terms, the *praxis* of the people’s “brains and muscles” that actualizes and sustains revolutionary freedom.[[66]](#footnote-66) A friendship forms according to which Curtis, the figure of red-hot compassion, comes to understand the value of exodus and Nam, the figure of ice-cold cunning, comes to understand the value of sacrifice. The two men in their final gesture run forward to protect Timmy and Yona from the bomb blast.

The detonation is the desperate “solution” to the problem of how humanity can survive the Snowpiercer’s conservation of “the bloody tensions fed by class… the racial hatred, slavery, exploitation and, above all, the bloodless genocide” from the world before the train.[[67]](#footnote-67) Much like Fanon, Bong thinks that the global south and east must stop trying to play “catch up” with the west and initiate the alternative trajectories for which the west is no model. Nam hints at this point when he mentions that an Inuit woman lead an earlier, ill-timed exodus to an icy demise (officially remembered as “The Revolt of the Seven”). Notice, too, that the survivors of this exodus are an Asian teenager and a black boy, two “train babies” who catch a glimmer of hope that there is, after all, life outside of the train—a polar bear. Bong decolonizes the imaginary that haunts Virno’s offering of North American workers “headed off to the ‘frontier’... to colonize low-cost land” as exemplars of exodus from the factory regime.[[68]](#footnote-68) The horizon from which Timmy and Yona escape is the “spiritual adventure” of the West that tragic-comically continued along the fixed trajectory of the Snowpiercer.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Exodus from the Snowpiercer is relentlessly decolonial in that the alliance of revolutionary action with general intellect aims at the exit of the global south (Curtis and Timmy) with the global east (Nam and Yona). Bong’s vision, at least within the confines of this film, is a post-colonial riposte to the counter-hegemonic strategies of Mouffe and company. As Mouffe contends, liberal-democratic spaces of legitimated opposition have been institutionalized in the global north/west; on such terrains, counter-hegemonic struggles to “disarticulate” and “re-articulate” power might seem to be strategically appropriate. Yet Bong might claim that non-violent, “bracketed” friend/enemy conflict of the kind Mouffe advocates cannot eliminate colonial and capitalist relations;[[70]](#footnote-70) a counter-hegemonic strategy can at best re-articulate capitalist-colonial powers already constituted, in part, on the hegemonic terrain. If Bong is correct, hegemonic relations supplement dominative relations between north and south, east and west to keep the north/west at the center of the world.

For the tail section’s colonial ordering, which appears to bottom on force, is actually sustained through the consent of the tail section leadership to the *neo-*colonial conditions of the head section’s rule. The promise of another Wilford, another yearly revolution around the globe, and another pseudo-revolutionary revolt all signal neo-colonial capitalism’s capacity to recapture popular affects and energies for the purposes of self-regeneration. Bong’s account of the neo-colonial condition, then, complexifies Fanon’s portrait of a post-colonial bourgeoisie serving as an “intermediary” to the former colonizing power out of materialistic self-interest.[[71]](#footnote-71) By contrast, the neo-colonial leadership of the tail section has “higher” motives for cooperating with the head section leadership. Gilliam accepts Wilford’s claim that periodically thinnings of the ranks of “un-sacrificeable” tail life are driven by the biological necessities of the whole. He fulfills the supposed imperative by “sacrificing” his own flesh as well as his fellow tails: this is the terrible secret at the heart of Gilliam’s genuine love for his section.[[72]](#footnote-72)

This arrangement, if not identity between Wilford’s biopolitical logic and Gilliam’s sacrificial logic partially fulfills and mutually limits what both leaders demand: Wilford wants replacement parts for the engine, while Gilliam wants the tail sectioners to live on and perhaps have something for which to live. The danger is not only that the subaltern is ultimately incorporated on terms set by the dominant, as a Gramscian analysis would suggest (“Control the water supply,” Gilliam tells Curtis early on, “control the negotiations.”) It is that the very aspiration for hegemony—roughly, moral-intellectual leadership[[73]](#footnote-73)—threatens to re-articulate once-emancipatory movement leaderships as fresh sources of socio-political domination.[[74]](#footnote-74) Bong proposes that the only way out of this deadlock of securing consent to rule is to dissolve the problem of leadership internal to the horizon of hegemony.

For the very question of “who will lead us?” is a sign of “the hegemony of [the idea of] hegemony” in both classical marxist and modern liberal thought.[[75]](#footnote-75) Curtis’ leadership, so crucial to the coherence of the revolutionary bloc during the war of maneuver, is sublated within a differently militant stage of exodus. Upon understanding the complicity between Gilliam and Wilford, Curtis refuses to reproduce the leadership so crucial to the self-reproduction of the Snowpiercer. Leadership is no longer a problem once the aim of radically disrupting social reproduction has replaced that of re-hegemonizing the social. As a peer and equal who neither leads nor is led, Curtis acts-in-common with Nam and Yona, who in any case never gave any indication of accepting Curtis as their leader. Their leaderless action itself, rather than any novel blueprint or extended discussion, anticipates a society where “the whole principle of rulership no longer applies.”[[76]](#footnote-76) A republic without rulership is the more life of the “train babies” Timmy and Yona for which the train builders/destroyers Nam and Curtis staked their mere lives.

**III. Saving politics and seeking humanity**

*Snowpiercer* elaborates its vision of decolonial exodus at the vexed intersection of marxist and postcolonial theory. Bong, in the end, poses a stark either/or that speaks to longstanding debates over leftist strategy: either we undertake efforts already anticipated by the existing hegemony or we leave the hegemonic terrain in search of uncharted, even potentially hostile, territory. What makes Bong’s insistence upon revolutionary politics decolonial is an understanding of how neoliberal hegemony is neo-colonially constituted and an imagination of how southern and eastern exits from this hegemony *per se* might look. Overcoming the reductiveness of marxist “economisms” and postcolonial “culturalisms,” Bong’s anti-colonialism includes anti-capitalist critique and his critique of political-economy refuses to reduce race to class.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Bong’s vision achieves what Sheldon Wolin terms “epic theory” in its aspiration to outline “the whole political world” as well as its quality of “public concern” over systematic domination.[[78]](#footnote-78) We will argue that Bong’s *Snowpiercer* (2013) surpasses Danny Boyle’s *Sunshine* (2007) and Christopher Nolan’s *Interstellar* (2014), two other recent films about environmental crises, in its specifically-political understanding of “the world,” its problems, and our responses to them. Moreover, we will demonstrate that the trio of *Snowpiercer, Sunshine*, and *Interstellar,* corresponds to the triad of revolutionary, liberal, and neoconservative politics. Put another way, Bong imagines a revolutionary politics that enact “the new” with low tech, while Nolan and Boyle imagine non-revolutionary politics that utilize hi-tech to preserve “the old.”

Bong’s film is politically-conceived because it holds humanity responsible for both global warming and CW7, what a media soundbite hypes as the “revolutionary solution to mankind’s warming of the planet.” CW7 sounds a lot like the “revolutionary solution” for a post-political world that can more easily imagine humans rekindling the sun (*Sunshine*), travelling through wormholes (*Interstellar*), or achieving perpetual-motion (*Snowpiercer*) than eliminating fossil fuel emissions, finding alternative models of “development,” or formulating any policy responses to environmental change. The official ideology of the train, in turn, sounds like the climate-conscious corporate speak of “sustainable,” “green,” and “eco-friendly” capitalisms where everybody (developed and developing countries) wins. As the revolutionary sequel to CW7, the Snowpiercer system is symptomatic of a post-political imagination of “revolutions” in the vein of agricultural, industrial, and digital revolutions.

A hyper-technical disavowal of politics also renders the Snowpiercer world hyper-political. The governments that release CW7 upon the advice of scientific experts, for instance, conceive of human agency in the form of technical solutions to technical problems. Their conceit is that science is neutral, “merely a tool” with “no awareness of itself,”[[79]](#footnote-79) and equally utilizable for survival or destruction, capitalism or socialism, colonialism or decolonization. Bong rejects this value-neutral, means-end conception of technology. As Adorno and Horkheimer argue, nothing prevents “the enthronement of the means as the end” or, for that matter, the conversion of ends into means for instrumental rationality.[[80]](#footnote-80) While Wilford argues that only his system (the means) can save humanity from itself (the end), he practically degrades biological existence (the supposed end) into “mere stuff to be dominated, without any other purpose than that of this very domination” (the actual end).[[81]](#footnote-81) Curtis’ refusal to assume command of the Snowpiercer system, in turn, is a substantive judgment and revolutionary commitment unthinkable under Wilford’s purely instrumental conception of reason.

Bong’s critique of the rationality characteristic of capitalist, colonial, and other dominations is nearly unintelligible for Wilford, Nolan, or Boyle, who all harness applied-scientific technology to the end of species-survival without a second thought. Boyle, for instance, claims that environmental disasters arising independently of human activity can be rationally addressed by a unified humanity. The premise of *Sunshine* is that a dying sun is slowly extinguishing life on earth and our last hope is for the *Icarus II* spacecraft to reignite the sun with a massive nuclear explosion.[[82]](#footnote-82) Unlike the technology aboard the Snowpiercer, which both dominates and threatens all life, the technology aboard the *Icarus II* harmonizes with humanity’s will to live and ultimately delivers its “payload.”

Boyle cleverly humanizes this relatively mechanistic action through the all-too-human frailties and heroic sacrifices of the crew, who act according to the maxim that “the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few... or the one.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Boyle cunningly dramatizes it by pitting the scientific reasoning of the *Icarus* crews against the theocratic madness of Pinbacker (Mark Strong), who who would derail both *Icarus* missions. Pinbacker’s pseudo-religious worship of the sun is strictly opposed to Capa’s (Cillian Murphy) quasi-mystical vision of the universe—the liberal-humanitarian universe of Boyle’s worldview. That is, Pinbacker is the “constitutive outside” of a cosmopolitan, univocal reason; Mr. Wilford, by contrast, may be deeply mistaken, but he is definitely not insane. Politics for Boyle is international cooperation in the face of common problems, meaning humanity unites against an uncontestable evil.[[84]](#footnote-84) Politics for Bong is global conflict over the question of common good, meaning humans take uncertain actions on behalf of what they deem best for “humanity.”

If Danny Boyle is the liberal internationalist of recent environmental catastrophe sci-fi, Christopher Nolan is its neoconservative Anglo-Americanist. Nolan’s *Interstellar* uses interview footage from a Ken Burns PBS documentary, *The Dust Bowl* (2012), to introduce its premise: a blight of unknown origin decimates the Earth’s crop production.[[85]](#footnote-85) The film, however, omits Burn’s relatively-mild critique of mechanized over-farming as a condition of “the Dirty Thirties.”[[86]](#footnote-86) Living in a dusty North American world with no “need” for space exploration, the former NASA pilot Joseph Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) laments that humans who once looked up to the sky now only look down at the dirt. Nolan makes a characteristically imperialist claim about humanity’s deeper “needs” for exploration, expansion, and colonization. This need, even more than the one for agriculture, justifies the annexation of other planets.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Nolan’s neoconservative politics seamlessly blends older-style European empire with advanced-technological U.S. “white vanguardism.”[[88]](#footnote-88) While *Sunshine* and *Snowpiercer* feature ethno-racially diverse leads, *Interstellar* features Anglo-American “pioneers” working with NASA to “discover” a new habitable planet. Here the fate of humanity turns on the resolution of family drama. To close the emotional and symbolic distance between Joseph and Murphy (Mackenzie Foy, Jessica Chastain, and Ellen Burstyn), both arrive to a fuller apprehension of temporal and spatial reality: Joseph develops his capacity to love, while Murphy develops her capacities for science. A desire to reconcile after the father’s “abandonment” of the daughter leads the scientifically-minded Coopers to the gravitational equations that allow humanity to colonize a New World. Where *Sunshine* humanizes instrumental rationality through the sacrifices of the *Icarus II* members, *Interstellar* accomplishes the same feat through “love,” which Amelia Brand (Anne Hathaway) argues might be “evidence” of “a higher dimension that we can’t consciously perceive.”

For Bong, what we truly have trouble perceiving is less a pre-existing physical dimension than a not-yet existing political horizon. This new horizon is perhaps nearly impossible to see in pre- and post-CW7 worlds created by technological rather than political revolutions. It cannot be foreseen by Yona’s “clairvoyance,” which as an analogue to marxist political-economy can only trace the unfolding of established trajectories and systematic tendencies. The anti-systematic, unforeseeable horizon of Bong’s revolutionary politics, we have argued, is decolonial exodus. It is only intimated in Bong’s “exaggerated” and “extravagant” vision of where our trajectory of unsustainable, uneven development could end up.[[89]](#footnote-89) Decolonial exodus is the decolonization of politics itself from the instrumental and technological rationalities that would dominate all life. What comes of it is ours to master.

1. *Snowpiercer*, Blu-ray, directed by Joon-ho Bong (2013; Prague: Weinstein Company, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette, *Snowpiercer: The Escape*, trans. Virginie Selavy (London: Titan, 2014). The protagonist of the first volume of the graphic novel, Proloff, ends up as the caretaker of the train’s engine, Olga. In the end, Proloff despairs as he ponders his impending death and the “death” of human civilization. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Peter Frase, “Smash the Engine,” *Jacobin,* July 3, 2014, accessed online October 28, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/07/smash-the-engine/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Joshua Clover, “From Lenin to Lego,” *The Nation,* March 24, 2015, accessed online October 28, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/lenin-lego/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We use the terms “postcolonial” (typically associated with South and East Asian theory) and “decolonial” (typically associated with Latin American and Caribbean theory) interchangeably to refer to anti-colonial theory (typically the critique of European empires). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. E.g. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2004); Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham: Duke University, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E.g. Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics* (London: Verso, 2013); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Criticisms of hegemonic and national-state strategies are also prevalent in contemporary anarchist thinking, e.g. Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead* (London: Pluto, 2005); Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructural Anarchism* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. “Snowpiercer - Left or Right,” YouTube video, 2:51, posted by “Every Frame a Painting,” Oct. 28, 2014, <https://youtu.be/X05TDsoSg2Y> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. Jane Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory* (New York: Fordham University, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 292-293. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The crucial implication is that the industrialized proletariat is not *the* revolutionary subject. Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 52-53; cf. Harry Braverman,  *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review, 1998), 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cf. David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 130-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 4; Karl Marx, "On Imperialism in India," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 663. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cf. Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The colonized is “made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of [their] inferiority.” Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), part one. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Clover, “From Lenin to Lego”; Frase, “Smash the Engine.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 601; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Fraze compares Bong to Moishe Postone, Jacques Camatte, Kathi Weeks, and Paolo Virno; we strongly agree with the Virno reference. Frase, “Smash the Engine.” See also Peter Worsley, “Fanon and the ‘Lumpenproletariat,’” *The Socialist Register* 9 (1972): 193-230. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Paolo Virno, “The Ambivalence of Disenchantment,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics,* eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 24-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The alternative claim is that seeing Europe rather than Asia as center is itself Eurocentric, e.g. Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 62, 123. Paul could also be read as the “relatively privileged” (neo)colonial proletariat. However, his music and mannerisms work against this reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. They are journeying into the “heart of (structural) whiteness.” Cf. Mills, *The Racial Contract,* 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Paolo Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus,” in *Radical Thought in Italy*, 192; Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 290-291. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. These laborers can also be located in the tertiary sector of a colonial society, working under a similarly unproductive native bourgeoisie. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Evelyn Nakano-Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002), 70, 74-76; cf. Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1989), 192-195. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital,* trans. Agnes Schwarzschild(London: Routledge, 2003) 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Mary Gabriel, *Love and Capital: Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Immanuel Ness, *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of the Global Working Class* (London: Pluto, 2016), 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ness, *Southern Insurgency,* 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. During the great postwar waves of African and Asian decolonization, Fanon insisted that “European opulence… owes its very existence to the soil and subsoil of the underdeveloped world.” Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), 53. Cf. Immanuel Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University, 2007), 28-29.  [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hardt and Negri, *Empire,* 190; cf. xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the Discourses,* trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: Everyman, 1993), 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans.Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University, 1995), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 595. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*: *A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization,* 35-37, 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics* (London: Verso, 2013), 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Mouffe, *Agonistics,* 73-74. Cf. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* 2nd ed.(London: Verso, 1985)*,* 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Paolo Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 196. Italics original. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 198. Cf. Virno, “The Ambivalence of Disenchantment,” 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 23; cf. 9, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 2nd ed.(Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 191-192. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology,* trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), chap. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), chap. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978)*,* 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Falguni Sheth, *Towards a Political Philosophy of Race* (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), 51-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cf. Linda Martin Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition,* trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University,1983), 53-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2009), 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 190. Cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* chap. 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 194-195. Italics original. Cf. Virno, “The Ambivalence of Disenchantment,” 20-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 193-194. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 50-51. The caveat here is that Bong, unlike Fanon, does not think that the “violent chain” is the birth of the future nation. See also Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 204. Cf. the mythic/divine violence distinction, Walter Benjamin, *Reflections,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 277-300. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 105; italics original. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 141.  [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Virno, “Virtuosity and Revolution,” 198. The point is not that white workers had no right to “exodus,” but that they participated in the dispossession of the original inhabitants of the Americas. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), chap. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 98-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Gilliam is no less a secretive figure than Wilford. He disavows his love for Grey, who bears a tattoo of his name, to serve as a “straight” mentor for Curtis, whom he encourages to keep his arms. Two arms are better for “[holding] a woman,” Wilford says. “All who renounce give away more of their life than is given back to them, more than the life they preserve.” Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Antonio Gramsci, “The Modern Prince,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Smith(New York: International, 1971), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See Fanon’s diagnosis of neo-colonial leadership in Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Day, *Gramsci is Dead,* chap. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Cf. Subir Sinha and Rashmi Varma, “Marxism and Postcolonial Theory: What’s Left of the Debate?” *Critical Sociology* (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Sheldon Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969), 1078. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment,* 9, 43; cf. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), 85-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University, 1974), 66-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. *Sunshine*, Blu-ray, directed by Danny Boyle (2007; London: Fox Searchlight, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,* Blu-ray, directed by Nicholas Meyer (1982; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Boyle’s liberal politics is characteristically moral (i.e. humanitarian) and economic (i.e. utilitarian). See Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political,* 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *Interstellar*, Blu-ray, directed by Christopher Nolan (2014; Alberta: Paramount Pictures, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. “The Dirty Thirties” refers to the 1930s Oklahoma dust bowls that forced farmers to migrate to California. *The Dust Bowl*, Blu-ray, directed by Ken Burns (2012; Arlington: PBS, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. “‘Expansion is everything,’ said Cecil Rhodes, and fell into despair, for every night he saw overhead ‘these stars...these vast worlds which we can never reach. I would annex the planets if I could.’” Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Inc, 1968), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness,* 24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Theory,* exp. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 2004), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)