

A ≠ A

Capitalism, Symbols, &  
The Conditioning of Human Nature

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**A ≠ A: Capitalism, Symbols, and the  
Conditioning of Human Nature**

By: Eli Namay

*The Axiom “A” is equal to “A” appears on one hand to be the point of departure for all our knowledge, on the other hand the point of departure for all the errors in our knowledge. To make use of the axiom “A” is equal to “A” with impunity is possible only within certain limits... vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, a workers state, etc. as fixed abstractions... the fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectical thinking gives to concepts by means of closer approximations... a richness of content and flexibility.*

- Leon Trotsky, *A Petty Bourgeois Opposition*, 1939

*...not only that what we experience on a personal level has profound political implications, but that our interior lives, our emotional lives are very much informed by ideology. We oftentimes do the work of the state in and through our interior lives. What we often assume belongs most intimately to ourselves and to our emotional life has been produced elsewhere and has been recruited to do the work of racism and repression.*

- Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 2016

### **The Foundation: Agriculture, Domination, and Class Society**

Much of our ability to act in this world is shaped by various forms of coercive violence directed at us by the ruling classes, their policies, and the institutions that they control. In its most obvious form this is **direct domination** that is carried out by the police, the “justice” system, and the military. Coercive violence also takes the more subtle form of **abstract domination**. Both kinds of domination have existed in a formal way at least since the dawn of agriculture. This revolution in the way food was produced is what made large scale **class societies** possible. If we go back even further, the agricultural revolution that enabled us to grow beyond small scale tribal units was only made possible because of the evolution of the human brain. This new large scale social

organization and production of a food surplus freed some humans from the labor of food production, which allowed specialized technical, artisan, and political classes to arise. This is the heart of the story of the rise of class society (e.g. nation-states, empires, etc.). As the material basis for class society, the production of a surplus is what makes formalized domination of both kinds possible. In turn, maintaining control of that surplus by a given ruling class is the ultimate goal of both kinds of formalized domination. Losing control over the means of production would mean losing power and social control. Power is the name of the game for the ruling classes as well as those that seek to be rewarded for their cooperation.

We have passed through many regimes of production (ancient agrarian states, European feudalism, etc.), but in our modern times the current dominant mode of production and wealth accumulation on this planet, and therefore the root cause of both **direct and abstract domination**, is **capitalism**. This writing focuses on understanding **capitalism**, and its constituent **ideologies** as systems of **symbols** that have grown out of certain historical conditions which are separate from, but deeply affect **material reality**. It is this relationship that constitutes **abstract domination**.

**Abstract domination** is made up of both external formalized systems (the entertainment industry, corporate news channels, wage labor, consumerism, etc.), as well as internalized **conditioning** (misogyny, racism, homophobia, etc.) which is produced and carried out both through those formalized systems as well as through informal, everyday interactions. **Abstract domination** can occur in such a manner and at such a rate that it becomes alienated from its sources, elusive to perception and definition, and ultimately perceived as natural and objective (it becomes **reified**). Questions such as these tend to get brushed under the rug: Why is my right to exist tied up with money? Why are people of certain races and gender identities particularly impoverished and subject to high levels of state violence? Why do women experience so much sexual violence? What is race? What is gender? Etc. In order to understand the various forms of **abstract and direct domination**, and how they flow from and in turn support **capitalism**, we must first look at that which makes us human.

**Capitalism and the Brain:**  
**The Physiological Basis of Class Society**

In order to understand the nature of human societies, we must look at the unique nature of our brains. Our brain significantly distinguishes us -- not as better or worse of course -- from other organisms on this planet because it allows us to use symbols and myths to organize ourselves into many different types of large scale social formations. Around 70,000 years ago the evolution of the neo-cortex, and in particular the frontal lobes, of the human brain reached a point of development that enabled humans to engage in complex abstraction. This evolution enabled us to make up stories about things that aren't real (i.e. **myth**: including everything from religion, to art, to law, to money, etc.), and infer about aspects of the physical world that escape our immediate perception (the physical sciences: physics, chemistry, etc.).

We can conceive of this process of abstraction as having three distinct components that are constantly interacting with each other in various ways: 1) **Material Reality**, 2) **The Human Capacity for Abstraction**, and 3) the various **Symbols** we use for abstraction.

1) **Material Reality**- All that exists independent of our ideas. The forces that give rise to it and shape its existence. This includes human beings, and the material world that humans reshape through their labor.

2) **The Human Capacity for Abstraction and Myth** - The human brain is the basis for human thought, which evolved from certain pre-human material conditions present on Earth. Human brains -- along with the other aspects of human bodies that are used in these processes such as vocal cords -- are what physiologically enables humans to both engage in abstraction and myth making, and to communicate that abstraction and myth to other humans.

3) **Symbols** - Human thought as it manifests in practice. Numbers, math, language, and the larger systems they constitute like religions, economies, legal frameworks, scientific thought, musical and artistic traditions, etc. Each of these categories are quite different in their character, but they are classified together here because of their dependence on our capacity for abstraction.

It is crucial to note two things here: 1) out of this unique ability to create and share abstract **symbols** and **myths** has grown the ability for **humans** to coordinate with one another on massive scales, and 2) that our **myths** and **symbols** act as the medium in which **abstract domination** takes place. The survival of class based societies of any kind has always relied on the intervention by the ruling classes on the **capacity for abstraction** and **myth**. This subtle and pervasive intervention determines the **symbols** that are acceptable to use, and also limits reflection on the process and nature of abstraction and myth making itself. This is what's often called the creation of **ideology**. To allow humans to fully reflect on the nature of **symbols**, to allow humans to see that **symbols** are not concrete, fixed forms would be to admit that the dominant power structures of a given society can be changed. This is how revolution has historically been prevented. Given that all large scale human organization has been made possible because of the evolution of our brains -- specifically, the ability to create and share myth and abstraction, and the ability to create and coordinate large social structures through those abstractions -- all human societies in large part exist psychologically as a complex web of **symbols** (money, laws, etc.) that we impose upon **material reality**. This is not a problem in and of itself. We cannot help but interpret the world around us as symbols. It is only in our *perception* of the *relationship between symbols* and **material reality** that problems arise. Our market dominated **capitalist** society produces a type of flawed perception of this relationship in a process known as **reification**.

A = A:  
Reification and Capitalism

**Capitalism** relies upon, and **abstract domination** stems from, mainstream modes of understanding the world (formal logic, empiricism, etc.) that, when filtered through certain power structures, often result in a particular type of fallacy called **reification**. **Reification** is a word that describes processes in which the **symbolic** becomes mistaken, or intentionally replaced, for the **material reality** it's supposed to represent.[1] **Reification** arises both from active conditioning, as well as from the very nature of a market based **capitalist** society. It is at the heart of the **commodity form**. [2] Taken on their own, mainstream modes of understanding the world at best limit our view of the world to that of static pictures, and at worst (under **capitalism**) actively support the reduction of all of life into monetized expressions of **value** through the processes of **commodification and commodity production** that take place in our market dominated (**capitalist**) society. Under **capitalism** this mode of production permeates all parts of the globe, and is key to the creation of **profit**. **Commodification** can be thought of as the symbolic violently collapsing in on the real. It is a process of turning the quality of experience (**experiential value**) into a monetized quantity (**exchange value**). [3]

These types of thinking tend to move us towards **idealism** or **essentialism** (two forms of **reification**). **Idealism** is an outlook in which **material reality** is explicitly expected to take root in static **symbols** that **humans** use to represent it. **Essentialism** is an outlook that speaks of transcendent forms to which material reality is expected to conform. These often exist as unconscious assumptions. In any form that **reification** takes, abstractions are seen as fixed, and understanding of the world is based on the formula  $A = A$ . For example, notes on a sheet of music become concretely attached to the sounds they represent (or at least the manifestation of a perfect, transcendent musical ideal), or people of a particular racial or gender category become concretely attached to a given pattern of behavior. This represents a crisis of popular **epistemology** (theory about how knowledge works). By imposing this mode of thought, the ruling classes seek to control the political

discourse and cultural symbols of our society in such a way that makes these areas seem unchangeable beyond acceptable limits.

However if we stop and reflect, it is common sense that, for instance, the word apple taken on its own does not give us the full story of what an apple is. There can be many different types of apples, and each apple has a life cycle where it starts as a seed, grows on a tree, ripens, and eventually is eaten, or rots and becomes food for other plants and microbes.[4] And to go even further, this story about the life cycle of the tree does not tell us much about the galactic conditions under which the planet that the apple tree is growing on was formed, or how the atomic and subatomic particles interact that make up the apple. Do these stories ever fully encapsulate reality? No. We are merely left with more theoretical descriptions that give us insight into a particular aspect of reality. [5]

We also know that music can be interpreted many different ways. If we can see this simple truth in regards to an apple and music, it shouldn't be that hard to make the leap towards rejecting fixed (**essentialist/idealist**) notions of **value**, **race**, **gender**, and acceptable artistic expression. It is only when we stop to think that we truly recognize this relationship between **symbols** and **material reality**. When obscured within a market dominated society, "imperfect" apples get thrown away at market, music loses its creative character and its practitioners are reduced to **symbolic** reproduction machines, myths about superficial biological phenomena such as skin tone become the basis for socioeconomic hierarchies, and we become forced into often violent performative acts that are supposed to be fundamental features that coincide with the genitals we are born with. At the heart of these examples of violence is this **epistemological** misconception that  $A = A$ . Truly getting beyond this will require a particular kind of psychological understanding and intervention.

A = A:  
The Conditioning of Human Nature

For **capitalism** to function, it must condition human nature in order to both maintain consumption rates (**consumerism**), and stifle people's capacities to accurately organize against it. Desired behavior is created both through the physical arrangement of society, as well as through conditioning. The former can be seen in how cities and suburbs are set up in a way that necessitates certain consumption patterns (e.g. the necessity for cars, certain appliances, etc.) and reinforce certain ideologies (e.g. the racial division created by infrastructure within cities).[6] In this way, needs are manufactured from external pressures created by how roads, bridges, interstates, public transit and housing are set up. The latter point can be thought of as consumption patterns manufactured through the conditioning of desire. The history of the advertising industry is one of mass manipulation, made possible through the exploitation of weaknesses in human psychology. Through exploiting these weaknesses, the ruling classes transformed the United States from a needs based economy to a desires based **consumerist** economy.

This need to control people takes more violent forms as well. Creating and maintaining socially constructed, legally, economically, and culturally reinforced hierarchies conditions people to be divided against one another along lines of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, political orientation, cultural preference, etc.[7] While these represent drastically different categories, when seen as static **symbols**, the contradictions of **reification** have the potential to blossom from each of these diverse seeds. Black, white, man, woman, trans, Democrat, Christian, Buddhist, Socialist, Anarchist, etc. represent socially constructed symbolic categories that, when taken without reference to the material historical conditions that they arise from, how they evolve in time, and how they are functioning in a particular situation, lead people to over identify themselves and others with these categories. This becomes especially problematic when this plays out with a category that has been explicitly created or shaped for the

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purpose of subjugation and control (e.g. **race**). Furthermore, this view of humans as occupying static **symbolic** categories becomes reinforced through an all too common process of community building that is based on the negation (exclusion, verbal denigration, etc.) of others. This, of course, does not mean we should disregard the **symbolic** all together, or that we should give up striving to understand large scale social structures. There is an alternative.

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A ≠ A:

Connecting Abstractions and Avoiding Reification

These observations about the complexity of reality, and the real limits of symbolic representation magnified by **the conditioning of human nature**, are not cause for hopelessness. It is clearly useful to have the word “apple” in everyday life even if it cannot articulate a given apple’s full complexity as it actually exists in time. It is also useful to have an understanding of how apple trees grow, even if that still doesn’t tell us the story of how that apple tree evolved, or the physical properties that made the life of that tree possible in the first place. So, instead of completely throwing out the static **symbols** given to us by mainstream modes of thought, we can connect these **symbols** in different ways to create more complete views of reality depending on what needs to be communicated. This type of thinking predates any labels that have been used to describe it, but in more modern times it became formally articulated as **dialectical thought**: the methodology that Karl Marx used to study society. His writings and this label are extremely useful, but we must be careful to know when dogmatic and inflexible modes of thought, and bureaucratic modes of organization hide behind this label. The most blatant example of this is Joseph Stalin’s distortion of the tradition of Marxist **dialectics** to justify his bureaucratic mode of governing the Soviet Union. Like all other **symbols**, Marx’s work and this method of thinking does not represent a ready made cure-all for social ills, nor is there a concrete connection between any political theory and **material reality** itself. In its critical form, **dialectical thought** does not view things as fixed, and therefore rejects the formula  $A = A$  as the basis for knowledge. This mode of thinking recognizes that in reality  $A \neq A$ : things are in a constant state of motion, and **material reality** does not conform to, arise from, nor is it in any way *concretely* attached to the **symbols** that we use to represent it. This should be distinguished from a relativist position claiming that all knowledge and truth depend on perspective and personal interest. The position I advocate claims that there is an objective reality, but it 1) is always in a changing state, and 2) is always being interpreted through the brain and the **symbols** it uses to interpret the

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world which, while they can exist in various degrees of accuracy in terms of representation, can never fully encapsulate the complexity of **material reality**. A more in-depth discussion of this is warranted, but exceeds the scope of this writing.

## Cultural Struggle & Political Struggle

The **abstract domination** that flows from **capitalism** has interrelated interpersonal components and large scale systemic components. Broadly speaking, we can discuss struggle for emancipation from these systems as taking on two forms: **cultural struggle** and **political struggle**.

The **conditioning of human nature**, along with the perpetuation of **capitalism** as a whole, is rooted in various types of the **reification fallacy**. Along with the **production, reproduction, and destruction of physical nature** (i.e. natural resource extraction, ecological destruction, etc.), the ruling classes rely on the **conditioning of human nature** for the continuation of the **capitalist** system and therefore, their power.[8] Generally speaking, struggle against **capitalism** and its constituent **corporate** and **state** power systems on the one hand, and against the interpersonal effects of the **conditioning of human nature** on the other represent **political struggle** and **cultural struggle** respectively. Each area of struggle has its own distinct characteristics and scope, but they are both deeply interrelated and dependent on one another. Processes that are good for one struggle might not be good for the other, but success in the bigger struggle for liberation from **class society** will depend on both.

**Cultural struggle** and **political struggle** differ in both scale and scope. There is a barrier of scalability from the local (largely cultural) to the national and global (largely political) due to the limitation of our cognitive ability to individually keep track of and have meaningful relationships with groups larger than about 150 people.[9] Within this number we can do a very good job of keeping track of all those around us and understanding how our actions affect the group, but beyond this number we need help from shared **myths and symbols**. (*It is not the myths and symbols themselves that are inherently oppressive, their oppressive nature has to do with how they are used and how we reflect, or are prevented from reflecting on them.*) Again, while there is certainly a relationship between the two realms, there also exists a barrier of scope. For example, while important to both general morality and political organizing, the struggle for us to understand and root out patriarchal and misogynistic

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tendencies in ourselves alone will not lead to the abolition of class based domination as a whole, from which patriarchal conditioning both flows and supports.

### Struggle in Both Realms is Needed

Paying attention to only one or the other will spell disaster for our movements for liberation. Organizing around **political struggle** without concern for the detail of the **conditioning of human nature** and the interpersonal oppression that it creates will only reproduce the exploitative social relations that are characteristic of capitalist society (racism, patriarchy, etc.). This ties back to the main theme: **symbols** are not the **material reality** they represent. **Material reality** can change while labels stay the same. It is naive to think that one is ever totally above the conditioning of this system while still existing within it. And practically speaking, our political movements will also fail in their organizing efforts if we do not connect them with meaningful cultural building, and create environments that combat social alienation and interpersonal domination.

On the other hand, the cultural realm will not truly change without adequate political struggle that seeks to abolish **capitalism**. The belief that our value (in the philosophical sense) is dependent upon productivity and competition (i.e. the creation of **value** in the **capitalist** sense), or is something that can be diminished or increased according to superficial physical traits, is a product of the vile **capitalist** system that affects us through **direct domination** via state violence, and **abstract domination** through the process of commodification, the extraction of **abstract wealth** from our labor and consumption, and the **conditioning** of our thoughts and emotions to maintain social control in the forms of **consumerism** and **interpersonal domination**. When affected by **abstract domination** in the form of conditioning we feel pressured, mostly unconsciously, to shape our social interactions, creative pursuits, and bodies in a way that give us **exchange value** within the **capitalist** system. In these ways the **commodity form** becomes imposed on human beings. We must be careful because the aesthetics of **ideology** are constantly changing as **capitalists** seek to adapt in order to preserve their power. In other words, this adaptation is the process of **appropriation** where progressive cultural values and aesthetics are stripped of their radical foundations, and **commodified** by the capitalist ruling classes for their own

ends. New aesthetics will be adopted, but fundamental exploitative relationships will remain. So, if we are concerned with **interpersonal domination** and the advancement of new kinds of culture, merely changing which kinds of aesthetics, pursuits, and people that are **valued** does not go far enough. We must seek to abolish the **capitalist** system and the type of **value** (fundamental social relations) that it produces.

From this analysis of how **cultural struggle** and **political struggle** do and do not relate, we can see that large scale communally beneficial political and economic frameworks will not simply emerge from cultivating good interpersonal social relations and culture, or even from good small scale political structures in and of themselves. Due to **capital's** fundamentally abstract nature, its tendency to escape direct perception, and its all pervasive global character, we will not be able to halt the current global system of **capitalist** exploitation without intentional, international political intervention.

**Political Struggle:**  
**Large Scale Struggle for Another World is Possible!**

A variety of tactics will need to be employed on local and global levels. In order to get at the root of both **abstract and direct domination**, ultimately different local struggles around the globe will need to be connected under the banner of **internationalist**, anti-capitalist, **socialist** politics. The more different organizations who spend time thinking about the particularities of given issues can coordinate towards taking a unified, but not falsely homogenized, clear anti-capitalist and **socialist** line the better chance humanity will have at rooting out all forms of domination and creating a decent existence for all. We need to be sensitive to personal particularities of exploitation while also keeping our eye on the big picture. The power of the state will need to be leveraged and its fundamental nature ultimately changed towards the implementation of a *democratically* controlled economy. Some organizations that I have been in closest proximity to recently that are currently, or have in the past been working towards internationalism are (for sake of focus I am leaving out many fantastic organizations that, for one reason or another, do not/did not explicitly center internationalism): **Democratic Socialists of America** (only recently, and only certain factions), **The Industrial Workers of the World**, and **Socialist Alternative/The Committee for a Workers International**.

## Cultural Struggle

Broadly speaking, cultural struggle can take three forms: 1) struggle against ideological conditioning, 2) the creation of culture that directly illuminates particular manifestations of exploitation and domination and aims to organize people in struggles for liberation, and 3) the creation of culture that challenges underlying value systems and pushes the boundaries of what is considered acceptable expression.

Activist groups like **For the People Artists Collective** do fantastic work along the lines of the second category, directly illuminating various issues. In January of 2018 the collective curated a massive art exhibition titled *Do Not Resist?* Each piece in the four gallery exhibition was derived from a 100 year timeline of police violence and resistance to it in Chicago, including such events as the 1917 raid of the Industrial Workers of the World headquarters, the 1969 murder of Fred Hampton, and the 2015 awarding of reparations to the victims of police torture under the watch of Police Commander Jon Burge.

What I do artistically falls more under the third category, as I attempt to push the boundary of acceptable expression. Both spectacle culture and conservative academic culture operate according to the logic of capitalism. Their all pervasive presence is instrumental in the **conditioning of human nature**, limiting our ability to explore our inherent creative capacity through the manufacturing of an all present **commodified** creativity, that presents itself as the only legitimate form of expression. These observations have led me to an experimental music practice that focuses on three areas:

1) Non-idiomatic improvisation (free improvisation) which breaks down barriers created between people that arise from commercial genre, and level and type of musical training. It is a type of practice that says people can have a meaningful creative relationship immediately.

2) The strategic decontextualization or structural deconstruction of popular musical objects (e.g. the backbeat, a recognizable song, a genre or tradition). This gives listeners an entry point to think about new possibilities with creation, the popular symbol acts as a pivot point. Hopefully they will also ask “I wonder what else needs to be different.” [11] This is my

interpretation of the practice of such musicians as Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk. In their practices the standard song form is utilized both for its cultural accessibility, and as a rich source of critique. More on this will have to wait for another writing.

3) The use of absurdly specific/complex notation to indicate physical movements (as opposed to indicating a desired sound). This is a widening of the gap between the symbol (notes on a page) and the sound itself. This can act as a direct confrontation to the notion that  $A = A$  by pushing notation to an absurd breaking point in which there is no pretext for **idealistic** interpretation.

I will leave critique of cultural worlds that I do not inhabit up to folks in those communities (but maybe you can also infer how how I might feel about certain things?). To my comrades engaged in experimental art practices who are trying to push the boundaries of what is acceptable: what we do is important but we have some serious baggage to deal with. This includes insular and elitist tendencies, racist and patriarchal conditioning, (these two points are particularly true the closer in proximity we get to formalized institutions), and uncritical competition for a spot in what George Lewis calls the “bourgeois playpen.” Regardless of how many hours we’ve put in, how much training we have, the traditions we come from, or the aesthetics we present, what we engage in is an act of play. Of course play has social implications, and it is beautiful to play. As much as is possible within the realm of our play, we must engage in it in such a way that is empowering and inviting for others outside of our communities. If we are concerned with empowering broad masses of people to explore their creativity we must also link up our life practices to big picture political issues by engaging in concrete **political struggle**. There is no piece of political art that can substitute this. It is the reactionary, self serving, opportunistic artist that tries to carve out their space in this world without challenging the systems that make it so hard for humanity as a whole to blossom in the arts and sciences.

Summary:  
A Synthesis

Above all else, this pamphlet is a call for the synthesis of ideas towards the examination and systematic organized dismantling of the root causes of exploitation and domination. It is my belief that a well-rounded approach will strengthen us. In other words, there must be some **cultural struggle** in our **political struggle**, and some **political struggle** in our **cultural struggle** while maintaining clarity on what the scope of any given activity is at any given moment in time (*the discussion of scope does not imply fixed categories*). We must be careful that in the political realm we are paying attention to the three areas of cultural struggle: 1) fighting ideological conditioning, 2) creating culture that draws people in and illuminates both root causes and the particular manifestations of exploitation and domination, and 3) creating culture that challenges underlying value systems, or pushes the boundaries of what is considered acceptable expression. And in our **cultural struggles**, we are connecting with **political struggle** waged against *root causes* of domination.

If we are not aware of the slippery nature of symbols, of the reality that  $A \neq A$ , our culture will become appropriated by the interests of capital, or at the very least seek to uncritically benefit from class society, and we will not be able to build politically in a way that is adequately self reflective and communicative enough for the task of liberation from class society. This system is ready to change on a dime, it is ready to **appropriate** and **commodify** any and all of our movements that do not take the proper precautions against this. All forms of **abstract and concrete domination** under **capitalism**, as well as barriers to effectively organize against these systems, stem from static notions of categorization inherent to mainstream modes of understanding the world. Therefore, we must be as self reflective and flexible as possible in our thought and action in order to truly work towards the liberation of humanity from all forms of domination. In shortest possible terms we must remember that  $A \neq A$ .

### Glossary of Terms

- **Abstract Wealth Accumulation/Profit** - Wealth extracted from lower classes of society in the symbolic form (i.e. money instead of as directly hoarded material goods (i.e. surplus harvest).
- **Abstract Domination** - Domination that occurs through the various myths and symbols of a given society, often taking on a naturalized and objective character. Having to rely on a wage for survival in a market dominated capitalist society exemplifies this.
- **Appropriation** - Used here as the use of symbols of the working class by the owning class in order to make money and/or protect their power.
- **Capital** - “Capital is not a thing but a process in which money is perpetually sent in search of more money. Capitalists — those who set this process in motion — take on many different personae. **Finance capitalists** look to make more money by lending to others in return for interest. **Merchant capitalists** buy cheap and sell [high]. **Landlords** collect rent because the land and properties they own are scarce resource, **Rentiers** [owners] make money from royalties and intellectual property rights. **Asset traders** swap titles (to stocks and share for example), debts and contracts (including insurance) for a profit. Even **the state** can at like a capitalist, as, for example, when it uses tax revenues to invest in infrastructures that stimulate growth and generate even more tax revenue.”[10]
- **Capitalism** - A market dominated society. Capitalism has taken many forms and is in constant flux, but in short it is a system of production based on private

ownership of companies, workplaces, and finance, propped up by the the state, whose job it is to protect the interests of those that own production. While the majority of the population has to sell their labor to earn a wage, capitalists make a living by getting profit on their investments. Central to this process is the flow of capital. Economist David Harvey defines capital as “value in motion.” Capital and the commodities it produces are simultaneously **symbolic** (exchange value e.g. as it is expressed in a money price) and **material** (an experiential value that fulfils a need or enables more profit to be made). Backed by the violence of the state, **capital** is the the central force that drives the privately owned production process. There are many resources for reading further about the details and evolution of this system, but for a thorough yet quick introduction I recommend two: For a 45 minute summary of how this process works watch David Harvey’s 2017 lecture at the New School titled *Visualizing Capital* (available on YouTube), and for a quick summary of the historical development of class society and capitalism read Yanis Varoufakis’ book *Talking to my Daughter about the Economy* (available as a 4 hour audiobook on YouTube). Both are great for commuting on the train or in the car!

- **Class Society** - Stratified social organizations where specialization is able to take place due to the production of a surplus of the necessary goods for survival. Those that produce the surplus in these societies (farmers, workers, etc) do not control the wealth they produce, instead ruling class[es] do (kings, capitalists, landlords, etc). Class Society can take many different forms.
- **Commodity/Commodification** - A good that is produced for sale in the market/the process of other non-mass produced items (including humans and their labor) receiving exchange value.
- **Conditioning [of Human Nature]** - The psychological manipulation of humans in order to

maintain power structures (e.g. advertising, racism, political propaganda, etc.).

- **Corporation** - A generally non-democratic, hierarchical institution whose bottom line is to produce profit for its shareholders (owners).
- **Dialectical Thought** - In most basic terms, the label for a system of thinking used by Marxist thinkers. A system that sees the world in constant motion, and does not concretely attach symbols to the reality they represent.
- **Direct Domination** - Direct violence or coercion that takes on an explicit character. For example police repression of black and/or poor communities.
- **Exchange Value** - A quantitative, usually money related value that is imposed upon an object when it is put up for sale in a market.
- **Experiential (Use) Value** - The qualitative value brought to human beings by the experience of a given thing in the world (e.g. another human, food, a place, etc).
- **Ideology** - The perspective that reflects the thinking or serves the power interests of the dominant classes in a class based society (e.g. racism, mainstream economics, nationalism, etc). Used in this text as a synonym for **conditioning**.
- **Interpersonal Domination** - Domination that happens between people of the same, or similar, economic strata. For example, domestic violence carried out by men. This results in a tiered oppression in which the domination of the ruling classes is carried out both directly (as in the example) and indirectly through the prevention of solidarity building. The latter point can be seen clearly in the history of the segregation laws dating back to the beginning of European involvement in this country.
- **Money/Value** - Value is a social relation between commodities (everything, including humans becomes commodified under capitalism), that is made possible when wage labor becomes generalized and pervasive in a society. Money is an expression of this social

relation known as value. “Marx...refers to money almost exclusively as the ‘form of expression’ or as the ‘representation’ of value. He...avoids the idea that money is value incarnate, or that it is an arbitrary symbol imposed by convention on exchange relations (which was a widespread view in the political economy of his time). Value cannot exist without money as its mode of expression. Conversely, however autonomous it may seem, money cannot cut the umbilical cord that ties it to what it represents. We should think of money and value as autonomous and independent of each other but dialectically intertwined. Here is how Marx thinks of it: *It has become apparent in the course of our presentation that value, which appeared as an abstraction, is possible only ... as soon as money is posited; this circulation of money in turn leads to capital*” [12]

- **Myth** - An abstraction that is not directly derived from the observation of a directly perceived event in the material world.
- **Reification** - The fallacy of treating an abstraction as if it were a real thing. This phenomena is central to an understanding of how our current social relations under capitalism function, and therefore is a concept that is central to this writing. **Commodity Fetishism** is a type of reification that permeates life and objectifies relations between people, turning them into relations between commodities (quantities of value).

Specific Notes

1. For a discussion of reification and capitalism see Georg Lukacs, *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* (1923).
2. Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867), Ch 1.
3. David Harvey, *Limits to Capital* (1982), Pg. 14
4. Example Taken from the Workers & Socialist Party Pamphlet: Shaun Arendse, *Introduction to Dialectical Materialism* (2015)
5. This point echos the position Noam Chomsky takes about intelligibility and the scope of human understanding in his lecture *The Ghost, the Machine, and the Limits of Understanding*. Various refutations of his positions on physicalism and the nature of mind can be found in the collection of essays *Chomsky and his Critics*.
6. A few quick google searches will reveal many resources on the history of suburban flight, the history of redlining and segregation in Chicago, and the history of deindustrialization in the United States. These phenomena are all examples of the physical space of a society conditioning ideology and consumption patterns.
7. The History of segregation in the United States starting in the 1600s: Howard Zinn, *People's History of the United States* (1980), Ch. 2 *Drawing the Color Line*, pg. 23
8. David Harvey, [lecture] *Visualizing Capital* (2017)
9. Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language* (1998)
10. George Lewis, Aaron Cassidy, *Noise in and as Music* (2013)
11. David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital* (2010), Ch. 2
12. David Harvey, *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (2017)

## General Notes

These notes represent the articles, books, and documentaries that have influenced my thinking, and provide much of research foundation for my positions. Due to the repetition necessary to build dialectically I decided that it would be best to, instead of citing sources as they correspond to each statement, cite sources by the topic they pertain to. Often times the nuance of perspectives on a particular issue, or political conclusions reached by the authors represented may differ a considerable amount from each other and from my own. Going into those differences will unfortunately have to wait for another time, but you might be able to guess where I disagree with who, and on what ;). Most can be accessed in electronic form on the internet

### Statistics on State Violence & Inequality

- ACLU report, *The War Comes Home* (2014)
- Oxfam Report, *Reward Work, Not Wealth* (2018)
- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010)

### Origins of Class Society, and its relationship to the Brain

- Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997)
- Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884)
- Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014).
- Christopher Ryan & Cacilda Jetha, *Sex at Dawn* (2010)

### Ideology, Consumerism, & the Entertainment Industry

- Christopher Ryan & Cacilda Jethá, *Sex at Dawn* (2010)
- John Berger, [doc] *Ways of Seeing* (1972)
- Adam Curtis, [doc] *Century of the Self* (2005)
- Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967).
- Rahmi Gabriel, *Why I Buy* (2013)
- bell hooks, the New School lectures (2014)
-

- James Baldwin, *On Being White and Other Lies* (1984)

Political Economy and the Critique of Capitalism

- David Harvey, *Limits to Capital* (1982)
- David Harvey, [lecture] *Visualizing Capital* (The New School, 2017)
- Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867)
- Moishe Postone, [lecture] *Capitalism, Temporality, and the Crisis of Labor* (American Academy in Berlin, 2016)
- Yanis Varoufakis, *Talking to My Daughter about the Economy* (2013)

Cultural Critique & Cultural/Interpersonal Struggle

- Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategies* (2017).
- bell hooks, *an Open Dialogue on Transgressive Sexual Practice* (2014)
- George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (2017)
- George Lewis, *Improvised Music after 1950* (1996)
- Anthony Braxton, *Ism vs Is* (2015)

**About the Author**

Originally from a Syrian/Lebanese community in Charleston West Virginia, Eli Namay is a musician and activist living in Chicago. Eli is interested in exploring ways economic and ideological influences on music might be disrupted artistically, thus creating a genuinely creative practice that is emotionally healing for both the listener and practitioner. This has led him to an interest in non/pan-idiomatic improvisation, experimental notation that gives rise to a multiplicity of outcomes, and the use of liminal perceptual frameworks.

Eli has done activist work in proximity of groups such as the Democratic Socialists of America, For the People Artists Collective, the #NoCopAcademy coalition, and Socialist Alternative amongst others.

Also, if it helps to give some context -- I do suggest that you not make assumptions based on these labels because they are quite broad and *do not represent fixed phenomena* -- Eli is 2.75th generation Syrian/Lebanese, non-binary, kind of queer, kind of a redneck, and is sometimes seen as a mother/grandmother like figure (or so he is told by those closest to him).

More info along with lots of music can be found at:

[elinamay.org](http://elinamay.org)  
[gildedrecords.org](http://gildedrecords.org)