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Communist Objects and Small Press Pamphlets

> Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades.
>
> —ALEKSANDR RODCHENKO, "Letter to Varvara Stepanova, May 4 1925"

> If the invention of the printing press inaugurated the bourgeois era, the time is at hand for its repeal by the mimeograph, the only fitting, the unobtrusive means of dissemination.
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> —THEODOR W. ADORNO, *Minima Moralia*

Print media has had an integral place in modern movements of art and politics, of which the "journal" or "revue" is perhaps the preeminent instance. *La Révolution surréaliste, Internationale situationniste,* and *Quaderni rossi,* to take three iconic examples of radical periodicals, are something like the mobile ground upon which Surrealism, the Situationists, and Italian Operaismo came into being through time—key sites and means by which these currents and movements honed their ideas and aesthetic styles, established group coherence, and gained purchase on the social imaginary. The point is aptly made by Guy Debord, and with a droll tone that strikes an appealing contrast to the hallowed respect that more usually accompanies talk of *Internationale situationniste*: "Even the fact of publishing a slightly 'regular' journal is very tiresome; and, at the same time, one of our only weapons to define and hold on to a base."[1]

In plain terms, then, journals are significant sites of political writing and publishing. And yet in their correlation between movement and medium, they reveal themselves to be just that little bit too obedient, "tiresome" even—ordered and contained by the requirements of a movement. In this respect journals tend more to the form of "media ecology,"

in Debray's terms discussed in chapter 1, than to the anti-book, because to warrant the latter designation would require a self-critical and disruptive relation with the organizations and audiences with which media are associated—an "inoperative" quality to their communism, to borrow from Jean-Luc Nancy—that is inimical to the consolidating tendencies of movement media.[2] Advocates for periodical publications will have numerous examples with which to challenge this assessment—indeed, in chapters 4 and 5, I consider some myself, and even this chapter turns to a journal at one point—but I make it as a helpful means of contrast to the media form that is the focus here: the "pamphlet."

Small press pamphlets tend to be much less correlated with social movements, allowing them a more indeterminate, exploratory, and critical character, in relation both to their sites of publication and circulation and to their sociomaterial forms and contexts more broadly conceived. Therefore, consideration of the medium of the pamphlet allows more atypical and anomalous instances and qualities of political media to come into view, even encouraging us to find the seeds of media communism in these atypical instances, over and against the more movement-oriented forms of political publishing.

A first elaboration of this point can be found in Jacques Rancière's early book *The Nights of Labor*. Here Rancière attends to the strange literary and aesthetic artifacts created by nineteenth-century worker-poets, -painters, and -writers as they struggled at night, in the precious moments between work, to breach their separation from intellectual practice and a life condemned to labor. Rancière at one point describes these artifacts, in a most evocative phrase, as "hieroglyphs of the anticommodity."[3] The use of the term *hieroglyph* here is anachronistic, certainly, but I will hold on to it for a little while, because Rancière's formulation moves us some considerable distance. In distinction from Marx's famous characterization of the "social hieroglyphic" of the commodity, which is surely a deliberate point of reference, Rancière does not employ the term principally to signal a strategy of demystification, where specialized interpretation of the object and its relations would reveal a truth obscured by its mysterious form. Rather, he seeks to put into service precisely the mysterious, indecipherable quality connoted by the popular usage of the word, to *champion* the

anomalous and paradoxical expressive features of these works. The point is clear in his gloss on the words of one bemused observer of said works:

> Our "friend of the workers," Ledreuille, was on target: "woods that aren't there, letters you would not know how to read, pictures for which the models have never existed." They would be so many hieroglyphs of the anticommodity, products of a worker know-how that retains the creative and destructive dream of those proletarian children who seek to exorcise their inexorable future as useful workers.[4]

If this indecipherable quality is, in concrete terms, a product of the amateur hands and heads of workers unschooled in bourgeois aesthetics, it is the social relations that the works index—or, better, *refuse* to index—wherein lies their anti-commodity valence. These artifacts created at night by "a few dozen 'nonrepresentative' individuals" are not the typical, popular productions of the working class (should such things exist); quite the contrary, they *confound* class identity, in a way that is manifest not only against the immediate capitalist imperatives of work but also, more significantly, against the role assigned to these workers by the workers' movement, whose mobilizing images, organizational forms, hierarchies of value, and visions of the future served, however unwittingly, to confirm the capitalist subject of "man-the-producer."[5] In Rancière's cutting assessment—and we should recall here the critique of programmatism in chapter 1—the discourse of the workers' movement "never functioned so well as when it was doing so in the logic of others or for their profit."[6] I say confound rather than escape, for these hieroglyphs of the anti-commodity have no autonomous existence; they articulate flight from the "dictatorships . . . of king work" that, paradoxically, reveal the impossibility of such flight under the social conditions of capitalism.[7] The mysterious, hieroglyphic qualities of these works lie, then, in this impossibility—at most they exist as a "gap" in the distribution of the sensible, calling forth worlds that are wholly unrepresentable within the social and aesthetic regimes whence they arose.

Significantly for my argument in this chapter, Rancière's formulation also carries associations of physical materiality, of the media *object,* because the hieroglyph is in origin a sign carved into material, a "sacred carving"

(from the Greek roots *hieros* and *glyphe*). Indeed, if we draw a little on a later book, *Mute Speech,* in which the hieroglyph is a recurring trope, it is clear that Rancière invests a great deal in the political potential of physical form (albeit that I would not want to substitute the class dimension of the anti-commodity in his earlier book with the false universals of "people" and "nations" as he does here).[8] More than words, bound as they are to the rules of signification within dominant discursive regimes, it is in the material forms of such anomalous aesthetic works that the anti-commodity finds its most adequate articulation. For here we have a "mute" expressivity that is elevated to the status of poetry, the "poeticity of the world," where the *medium* of signification becomes more decisive than the signification that it ostensibly carries: "mute-speaking works, works that speak as images, as stones, as matter that resists the signification whose vehicle it is."[9]

A poem, a painting, a piece of printed matter can, then, be an anti-commodity, or a paradoxical invocation of such, as it reveals the impasses of the social and discursive regimes of work and its identities. Moreover, this quality may be most apparent in the "mute" material form of such artifacts. It is a rare construction indeed. And yet this formulation of the anti-commodity remains somewhat undeveloped and difficult to grasp, especially in its material instantiation, its mute speech (no doubt, for Rancière, this is necessarily so, given its "hieroglyphic" resistance to meaning). While adhering to Rancière's feeling for the paradoxical quality of such entities, in this chapter I seek a more precise concept of the anti-commodity, what I call the "communist object." I form this concept out of three problematic fields: Russian Constructivist approaches to the object as "comrade" and the "intensive expressiveness" of matter; Walter Benjamin's analysis of the "collector," with particular attention to his critique of "use value"; and the confounding dynamics of the "fetish." After setting out the communist object, the chapter then mobilizes this concept in exploration of self-published or small press pamphlets, drawing on interviews I conducted with producers and an archivist of contemporary projects of nondoctrinal communist persuasion: Chris of South London's 56a Archive; Jakob Jakobsen, founder of Infopool; and Fabian Tompsett, publisher and printer of Unpopular Books.

THE OBJECT AS COMRADE

In formulating the concept of the communist object, one has to work against a dominant image of the place of things or objects in Marxism, that of communism as an ascetic order, hostile to or distrustful of objects. This image is associated with an at best simplified reading of Marx's diagnosis in *Capital* of the fetish nature of commodities, where, in a dichotomous relation between humans and objects, social relations between objects determine objectlike relations between people. Marxism in this image would seek to revalue people against the capitalist fixation on objects, in the process stripping objects of their seductive, diverting capacities and subjecting them to rational order and the plan. Bolshevik philosophy and official Soviet culture stand as the prime intellectual and empirical referents for this image of ascetic socialism. However, it is also in the midst of early Soviet art and culture, in the Constructivist movement, that an especially innovative formulation of communism and the object can be found, one that lays the groundwork for a concept of the communist object.

As Christina Kiaer has argued, the problematic of the object and its transformative relation with human thought and sensory experience had a pivotal place in Russian Constructivism, whose materialism she characterizes as having an "obsessive, even unseemly emphasis on . . . things themselves."[10] Indeed, writing home from the 1925 Paris International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts, Aleksandr Rodchenko quite astonishingly presents capitalism as the exploitation of the human *and* the object and projects their possible relation as one of equality, elevating the object to the status of *comrade*: "The light from the East is not only the liberation of workers, . . . the light from the East is in the new relation to the person, to woman, to things. Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades, and not these black and mournful slaves, as they are here."[11]

This "socialist object," as Kiaer names the Constructivist problematic, is an unstable entity emergent from numerous themes and contexts: the extension of art into industrial production toward the transformation of everyday life (the "expedient," utilitarian object) with all the associated issues concerning the place of the artist in industry; an achieved socialist

revolution that projected beyond property ("not . . . the elimination of material objects, but . . . the elimination of a possessive relation to them"); and the persistence of the commodity form (under the New Economic Policy's reintroduction of private capital and the global context of the endurance of capitalist commodity culture).[12] One of the many strengths of Kiaer's argument is that she understands the Constructivist object to be operative not in pristine autonomy but in the midst of the affective field of the commodity, where desiring relations to objects in capitalism are less to be negated than explored, teased out, deployed, and transcended in socialist material culture. All this leaves Constructivism as a highly complex and precarious project traversed by many points of tension, but the importance for my argument is the way the object features here as a sensuous entity in material equality with the human, the object as comrade. These features of the Constructivist object are at the forefront of Boris Arvatov's highly original essay "Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing" (1925), a text that warrants extended discussion.

Against idealist tendencies in Marxist philosophies of culture that foreground social consciousness at the expense of the material everyday, Arvatov places the "universal system of Things"—the field of "production and consumption of material values"—firmly at the center of social life.[13] This is of considerable historical significance, taking aim as it does at Trotsky's position in *Literature and Revolution,* but for the reader of Marx today, it is hardly contentious. Where Arvatov is still truly striking is in his communist alternative, the possibility of a proletarian material culture "imbued with the deepest sense of Things," even of the "becoming . . . thinglike" of communist politics.[14] Let us follow his argument, first through his critique of the commodity form, then into his vertiginous politics of the object.

COMMODITY FETISHISM: THE A-MATERIAL FORM OF THE OBJECT

Arvatov makes his move initially from the perspective of consumption. As he sees it, the structure of consumption in capitalist culture as a private, individual arena separated from machine-rich collective production

creates an object that is experienced as severed from its genesis, its manifold material relations, and that is as a result constituted as an isolated, "finished," and repeatable unit of private property.[15] In this manifestation, style and form become "clichéd," subject to "imitative conservatism" in a world where the potentially dynamic object is reduced to a token in the affectations of bourgeois individualism.[16] This has effects too on the object's sensory form. A property relation to the object, for all its affective power in the composition of bourgeois identity, is a reduction of the human sensorium. As Marx puts it, "*all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple estrangement of *all* these senses—the sense of *having*."[17] For Arvatov, then, the object consumed as a commodity is a dead and solitary object:

> The Thing as an a-material category, as a category of pure consumption, the Thing outside its creative genesis, outside its material dynamics, outside its social process of production, the Thing as something completed, fixed, static, and, consequently, dead—this is what characterizes bourgeois material culture.[18]

This "a-material" manifestation of the object in consumption is a structural complement to its mode of existence in production, where exchange value, not utility or material quality, is the object's determining aspect. It is a point best pursued through Marx directly. In a dozen or so dazzling pages of *Capital,* Marx famously argues that the capitalist commodity has a strange kind of agency, a mystical power that appears to emanate, fetishlike, from the object itself, as if "endowed with a life of [its] own."[19] Marx is explicit, however, that this mystical agency is not a product of the material qualities of the object—it has "absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this"—but of its specific existence in capitalism, its *commodity form.*[20]

The explanation lies in the structure of labor. To précis Marx's account of commodity fetishism, the source of value in capitalism is social or "abstract" labor, the uniform quality of labor in general that arises in the production and circulation of commodities. Abstract labor is a product of the myriad different instances of "concrete labor" undertaken by

the multiplicity of producers. However, abstract labor is not manifest in the labor process itself, where concrete labor is undertaken in relative isolation, but in the circulation of commodities after they have been produced. For it is only through the manifold practices of exchange that the uniform quality of labor in general (abstract labor) can emerge from all the different kinds of private, concrete labor. Since this occurs in the sphere of commodity circulation, apart from and outside the sphere of their production, the social character of capitalist *labor* appears to be a property of *commodities*—whence comes their fetish quality, as value appears to emanate from the commodities themselves, with their circulation in a very real sense determining the form of their production, that is, the concrete labor so expended.

Much more can be said about commodity fetishism, but to stay focused on the aims of this chapter, there are two points to underscore. First, the concept of commodity fetishism does not posit that capitalist cultures are overly enamored with objects, as it is commonly understood. Marx's principal point, rather, is that the production and circulation of commodities *structure the form of labor*—or, better, constitute social activity *as* labor—isolating people qua producers from a fully social relation with each other *and* with objects. Workers' experience becomes one of "pure subjectivity," as the communist journal *Endnotes* describes Marx's position, "all objectivity existing against [them] in the form of capital."[21] To be clear, this is not somehow the fault of the object; the perverse aspect of the commodity form, the fetishlike inversion, is that it is the very characteristics of social labor that perform and entrench workers' a-social subjection. Second, insofar as commodity fetishism does also describe a broader condition of social veneration of commodities, it is quite the opposite of the common understanding. Commodity fetishism is veneration not of the commodity *object* but of *private property,* whose value lies not in its material specificity but in its universal exchangeability; put otherwise, commodity fetishism is the social veneration of value as an end in itself, of self-expanding value. Thus, in commodity fetishism, the object is *emptied* of materiality; commodity fetishism is a fixation on the *a-material.* The point is well made by Peter Stallybrass: "To fetishize commodities is, in one of Marx's least understood jokes, to inverse the whole

history of fetishism. For it is to fetishize the invisible, the immaterial, the supra-sensible. The fetishism of the commodity inscribes *im*materiality as the defining feature of capitalism."[22]

THE INTENSIVE EXPRESSIVENESS OF MATTER

From Arvatov and Marx we have learned that the realms of consumption and production entail the production of both object *and* subject, which are sundered from each other as such. By contrast, Arvatov's communist material culture is oriented toward an elimination of the "rupture between Things and people" at the level of their dynamic interaction, where the object has an agential power—it is retrieved from "immobility," "inactivity," and the "absence . . . of any element of instrumentality"—in the practical, psychological, and sensual reconfiguration of the human.[23] Devoid of the constraining "*egoistic* nature" of the property relation, as Marx has it, here inorganic nature "has lost its mere *utility*" in a world of "*social* organs" in mutual and transformative exchange with "*social* object[s]."[24] And so, by contrast to the foreclosed sensorial scope of the commodity object, communism, in Marx's ecstatic expression, is "the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes" as humanity comes to "suffer" the object: "To be *sensuous,* i.e. to be real, is to be an object of sense, a *sensuous* object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, object's of one's sense perception. To be sensuous is to *suffer* (to be subjected to the actions of another)."[25]

The question remains as to how to advance such a communism—of where it may come, how it might be glimpsed. For Arvatov, it is the movement away from individual property in the *sharing of complex technical objects* that enables this opening of the isolated and clichéd commodity to a social collectivity of objects and sensations, of which he attends to two aspects. First, the material qualities of things come to the fore, something the human acts upon as form cedes to function:

> Glass, steel, concrete, artificial materials and so on were no longer covered over with a "decorative" casing, but spoke for themselves. . . . The thing was dynamized. Collapsible furniture, moving sidewalks, revolving doors, escalators, automat restaurants, reversible outfits, and so on

> constituted a new stage in the evolution of material culture. The Thing became something functional and active, connected like a co-worker with human practice.[26]

I will return to the utilitarian theme in this passage shortly; for the moment, let me underscore the strong presence here of a culture of materials, what Arvatov elsewhere describes as an engagement with matter at an "elemental" level, at its "intensive expressiveness."[27] To push that formulation a little further, materials here overtake the artist or producer, who comes to interpret and respond to the forces and qualities of matter; Tatlin, for instance, is described by Maria Gough as having sought to "foster the volition of the material," displacing his role as creative subject and "reconfiguring himself as the material's assistant."[28] This approach is enhanced by a second aspect, Arvatov's concern with the "natural" life of things, their expression of the "powerful and indefinitely expanding energies of the material sphere."[29] While Arvatov looks to the institutional research and production cultures of the American technical intelligentsia for tendencies to communist material culture, the technical object here still remains "self-sufficient" and "retired within itself" to the extent that in capitalist culture it is severed from its relation to nature. As such, the "dynamic-laboring structure" of the object "and its living force are never simultaneously present; thus both become 'soulless.'"[30]

Yet for all Arvatov's appreciation of the "intensive expressiveness" of matter, it vies with a dominant imperative in his work, and Constructivism more widely, toward the utilitarian or "expedient" object. The proper environment of the Constructivist object in mass production and its part in the transformation of everyday life through the rational reorganization of Soviet society is the profound promise of Constructivism, but also its most troubling feature. For having foregrounded the expressive and disruptive forces of matter, now even the most abstract and experimental material values—the "qualities of pure color, line," for instance—become subject to the plan and the imperatives of social utility against any "unorganized arbitrariness."[31] There is a logical basis for this apparent contradiction. Constructivism, in keeping with Leninist orthodoxy, conceived of the transformation of capitalist industry to socialism as a process of collectivization,

the transfer of ownership of the forces of production from the capitalist class to the State. Industrial production so transferred was the condition for the socialist object to flourish. But this approach fails to appreciate the immanence of capitalist structures and imperatives to the production process itself; socialist factories are still factories. And so the socialist object reaches its limit, being too comfortable in a social regime that leaves the capitalist relations of production—the domination of the worker by the technical machine, the social affirmation of the subject of work, and the separation of production from consumption—largely untroubled.[32]

OBJECTS AGAINST USE

What, then, might be a communist object, a material comrade, that is not traversed by the imperatives of utility and production? Benjamin's speculations on the socioaesthetic phenomena of collecting and collections help answer this question. It is a testament to Benjamin's great originality that he discerns that to undo the commodity it is not enough to ward off exchange value; if an object's intensive expressiveness is to come forth, then its *use* must also remain in suspension. I will explain how.

Faced with the situation of commodity fetishism outlined earlier, it is not uncommon for critics (Marxists included) to reach for "use value" as the reassuring ground for a politics of the object—use value grasped as an extracapitalist and needs-based relation to the object that is only secondarily caught up in commodity relations and from which it can hence be disinterred. But this is a position that Marx refutes. I have already quoted Marx on the sensory movement of communism beyond "mere *utility*." We can now develop this point. As he writes in a passage that has considerable impact on Benjamin's theory of collecting, our estranged relations to objects are a product and experience not only of "property" and "capital" but of "*use*" also: "Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when we directly possess, eat, drink, wear, inhabit it, etc., in short, when we *use* it."[33]

Use, in this formulation, is what patterns and regularizes the object for iteration in the commodity mode. It is not an exteriority to exchange

value but the foreclosed metabolic and sensory experience of the object formed within and functional to the atomized, everyday life of capitalism, where the uses of objects are a "*means of life*; and the life they serve is the *life* of *private property,* labour and capitalization."[34] This is implicit in the Constructivist critique of the reduced sensorial scope of bourgeois things, but for Benjamin the communist alternative must be no less removed from utility. As he puts it, the proper materialist approach to the object "entails *the liberation of things from the drudgery of being useful,*" a thesis that Adorno considered to be Benjamin's "brilliant turning-point in the dialectical redemption of the commodity."[35]

It is to this end that Benjamin makes his move into the politics of collecting, for him a mode of experiment in the "Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character" (Sisyphean because uselessness is a momentary breach in capitalist relations rather than an achieved escape).[36] In a fashion that is initially not so different from Arvatov, Benjamin's collector has a "tactile instinct," an immersive relation to the object that complements the optical sense with touch, handling, smell, contemplation, love, and imagination, where the object is experienced as an affective "strike" on the sensorium, a destabilizing sensory event.[37] Marx's point about "suffering" the object becomes clearer. As Esther Leslie argues, this is "an intensified perception, bound up with shock, impact and curiosity," one that at the level of everyday material culture complements the enhanced technological perception Benjamin famously detects in photography and cinema: "everything—even the seemingly most neutral—comes to strike us."[38] But in contrast to Arvatov, the functional, useful properties of objects do not elicit this experience, they *get in its way* and hence need to be evaded or excised. Collectors, these "physiognomists of the world of objects," appear to value everything *but* the object's usefulness, for collecting is

> a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness—but studies and loves them as the scene, the stage, of their fate. . . . The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object.[39]

This formulation of the object requires, hence, an environment that suspends use, if only momentarily. Against the social relations of work within which the useful socialist object fits comfortably—that is, Arvatov's object qua "co-worker"—the collected object is a co-*zero*-worker. Its environment is not an advanced plane of industrial production but a resolutely nonproductive, unstable, and momentary arrangement of pure consumption, a "collection."[40] The object is not here produced but encountered. And it is encountered as a fragment or, to use Leibniz's term that I develop later on, a "monad," a selection of the world that is simultaneously a world unto itself. In the "circumscribed area" of a collection, objects are "extracted" from their determining social relations of use and exchange, so allowing the collector to encounter the *shock* of their undetermined material specificity, as a sensorial field is opened that overtakes the collector: "for a . . . real collector . . . ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that [objects] come alive in him; *it is he who lives in them.*"[41] As Cesare Casarino remarks, this most intimate relation is thus also the "most extimate."[42] It is an intimacy that *opens out* and *unsettles* the subject of consumption, against the usual logic of possession whereby objects come alive in the consumer, reflecting back the image of the successful buyer who "bestows life on inert matter through the demiurgic power of money, and whose love of objects, therefore, can only be a narcissistic gesture of self-congratulation."[43]

Given the common image of collecting as a somewhat fusty practice, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate the collection as a *dynamic* mode of association, until one recognizes that, for Benjamin, it is a "balancing act of extreme precariousness" and psychological intensity, created of chance encounters, protracted searches, intensive strategies of acquisition, and, as the fictional and factual cases explored by N. A. Basbanes attest, even criminal activity.[44] A collection is a permeable contour, maintained at the edge of disorder. And the tactile appreciation of the object here contains a destructive aspect that aligns the collector with the noncontinuous mode of historical perception Benjamin conjures in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," as the intensive constellations of the collected object, in their little way, "blast open the continuum of history," the reified linear progression of "empty time" produced by the rhythm of commodity

production.[45] There is a development here too of Arvatov's concern with the destabilizing forces of nature, for in the appreciation of the singular "fate" of the object—its orbits, its streams of past and future—the collector is attuned to the dissipative properties of matter. The collector's mode of relation thus opens to the many and singular durations of things, so displaying an "anarchistic, destructive" passion, a "wilfully subversive protest against the typical, classifiable."[46]

It is a little disconcerting that Benjamin makes acquisition and ownership constituent features of the collected object, given Marx's critique of property as the a-material experience of the object; even more so that he posits private collections against public collections, where, in the latter, the "phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner" and "objects get their due only" in the former.[47] But the point about the collector, her passion at once "domesticated" and "dangerous," is that property is the starting point for its undoing.[48] Benjamin is seeking a mode of relation to objects that is situated in the everyday field of commodity consumption, while seeking to undo its structures of use and value and the identity forms these impart and confirm. (In any case, while the public collection may superficially appear to be "less objectionable," in Benjamin's words, he sees it as complicit with capitalist property, with its correlated bourgeois myth of the generic public and its practice of wresting objects from their contexts "to create the illusion of universal knowledge," as Douglas Crimp presents it, "displaying the products of particular histories in a reified historical continuum.")[49] As to the obvious objection that collecting has an intimate association with class distinction and speculation, Benjamin retorts that the "passion" of the true collector is sparked not principally by objects of commercial value but by the anomalous, kitsch, popular, mysterious, and discarded items of mass production. It is a practice within reach of all.

FETISHISM OF THE ANTI-COMMODITY

The qualities of the communist object discussed thus far can be brought into greater focus through a little comparison with the Surrealist *objet trouvé,* or "found object," perhaps the most influential formulation of

the object as a politico-aesthetic entity. Benjamin places great stress on the revolutionary transformation of things—"enslaved and enslaving objects"—in Surrealism, a movement that "bring[s] the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in . . . things to the point of explosion."[50] These are objects that slip out of and rise up against the circuits of commodity exchange; indeed, André Breton characterizes such objects of "prolonged sensual contact" in precisely our terms as "useless."[51] Yet Breton's found object is ordered by chains of psychosexual association that impose a second-order use upon that which had initially escaped the determining relations of utility. This is no more apparent than in his account in *Mad Love* of flea market finds with Alberto Giacometti, where the narrative moves from an initial flux of undetermined objects—"between the lassitude of some and the desire of others," as Breton describes the object constituted in a field of chance encounter—to the imposition of a most determined psychoanalytic pattern of meaning, as the secret of the wooden spoon that attracts Breton's attention is found, in that tired refrain, to be "a symbolic figuration of the male sexual apparatus."[52]

When pushed, the Surrealist formulation of the found object may reveal further compromised patterns of association. In bracketing off the avant-garde pedigree of the Surrealist approach to objects and mapping instead its emergence in relation to its wider social milieu, Romy Golan detects a strong correspondence between the structure of the Surrealist object and the colonial fantasies, art markets, and commodity tastes of 1930s France.[53] This adds a socioeconomic dimension to Deleuze and Guattari's polemical assertion that "Surrealism was a vast enterprise of oedipalization."[54] But that points away from our concept of the communist object, which I will continue to develop by drawing now from the margins of Parisian Surrealism.

Georges Bataille's dissident Surrealist journal *Documents* (1929–30) indicates a more fruitful resonance with Benjamin's collected object, through the tropes of the "document" and the "fetish." The journal's title announces its obsessions, its pages filled with what it understood to be "documents"—such things as Hollywood film stills, images of abattoirs, prayer scrolls, coins, flies, flowers, and works by Giacometti, Pablo Picasso, André Masson, and the latter's young daughter Lili. This list indicates

the ethnographic leveling at work in the trope of the document, breaching divisions between artifact and art, while heightening appreciation of the heterogeneity and material specificity of each documented entity. As Denis Hollier describes it, the document signifies less a *sur*-real experience than a realist "condemnation of the imagination": in its alien heterogeneity, the document presents a material and antimetaphorical "shock-value."[55] This formulation recalls my discussion of the destabilizing shock of the object in Marx and Benjamin. But to this Hollier adds an additional aspect, irreverently presenting these qualities through the category of the *fetish,* a point he seeks to convey with this quotation of Bataille, from an essay in *Documents* 8: "I challenge . . . any art lover to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves a shoe."[56]

If one keeps in mind that the fetishism being developed here is not the psychosexual kind (despite the choice of Bataille's Freudian example), then Hollier's formulation is most helpful. I touched on this earlier, with Stallybrass's astute observation that commodity fetishism is an inversion of the history of fetishism, in that it is a fetishism not of objects but of suprasensible value. Now we can go further, beyond Marx's playful inversion, and claim the fetish for communism, the communist object as *anti*-commodity fetish. As Peter Pels elucidates in his reckoning with "the spirit of matter" (working with William Pietz's exemplary three-part work on fetishism in the journal *Res*), a fetish is a destabilizing object, an anomalous singularity whose "lack of everyday use and exchange values makes its materiality stand out" and "threatens to overpower its subject."[57] In this sense, the notion of the fetish is proximate in structure and effect to Benjamin's collected artifact. But there is an aspect of the fetish that sheds light on a feature of the communist object that is less overt in Benjamin, its persistent interaction with the commodity form. As Pietz shows, the fetish, as both object and idea, is a "cross-cultural" entity, one "arisen in the encounter of radically heterogeneous social systems" and having no proper existence in a prior discrete society.[58] The concept originated in the efforts of seventeenth-century Dutch merchants to account for what they perceived to be the irrational attribution of value in West Africa to arbitrary objects; what was valued was not the universally exchangeable object of money but any "'trifle' that 'took' an African's 'fancy.'"[59]

The fetish only existed, then, in the encounter of noncapitalist and capitalist value systems. And if we can deploy it today—giving a positive valence to this category born of mercantile plunder and misrepresentation, and no longer using it to name a relation in need of demystification—then it is this feature that lends itself especially well to thinking the communist object. Characterizing the communist object as a fetish helps hold together, as necessary complements, both its excessive materiality *and* its disruptive interaction with the commodity form. It is a compound apparent in this description from Pels:

> The fetish is an object that has the quality to singularize itself and disrupt the circulation and commensurability of a system of values. . . . Its singularity is not the result of sentimental, historical or otherwise personalized value: The fetish presents a *generic* singularity, a unique or anomalous quality that sets it apart from *both* the everyday use and exchange *and* the individualization or personalization of objects.[60]

With the fetish, we have come full circle: from the commodity fetishism that is challenged and unmasked as the atomizing subjection to a-material value to a fetishism of unbound and disruptive materiality that operates *against* the commodity, troubling its values of exchange and use and their structures of production, consumption, and subjectivity. At risk of being overly schematic, this invites a statement of the principal lineaments of the concept of the communist object drawn from the discussion so far. As "comrade," the communist object exists on a plane of equality with the human, so amplifying the sensory exchange between organic and inorganic matter and unsettling the affective organization of the capitalist subject. It is an object of neither utility nor commercial exchange—closed and dead as these commodity values are—but one open toward undetermined circulation and destruction. This is a circulation that is not found in laboring practice and market exchange but in fleeting and permeable arrangements or "collections" that call forth the object's singularity, its intensive expressiveness. Yet the communist object is not a rarefied other to the commodity; the passional and destabilizing bond it produces emerges in the midst of the everyday objects and desires of commodity culture. And here it has something of a fetish character;

it is not a discrete or fully achieved entity but an excessive materiality that emerges only in its disruptive intersection with commodity values. This is an abstract presentation of the concept of the communist object, but the intensive expressiveness of matter that it champions necessitates that it be approached as always already enmeshed with, and shaped by, the singular properties of particular objects. While displaying these generic features, the communist object is existent, then, only in its manifold concrete expressions. It is one of these, the small press pamphlet, to which I turn shortly.

PRINTED MATTER

Before considering the pamphlet, I want to address the broader question of how the concept of the communist object might assay the particular features of *printed* matter, where objects combine with text. The book and its margins may seem an all too obvious place to find communist objects, given the relatively free rein that textual media has given to the expression of communist ideas. But that would be to focus on textual media only in terms of its content, not its artifactual forms and broader sociomaterial relations. Editions of Marx's *Capital,* for instance, are not wholly, or even principally, communist objects; as Conrad Bakker has explored in his hand-carved and -painted mail-order replicas of *Capital,* a dominant modality of Marx's book is the *commodity* (Plate 2).[61] Bakker's replica draws attention to the social relations of labor, industry, marketing, and desire of the book qua commodity, and does so all the more effectively for barring access to the means, the book's textual content, by which such observations can be interrogated and unfurled. Such interrogation seems to need estranging interventions like this to overcome the strong tendency in the economies and cultures of books and publishing to obscure the capitalist forms of printed matter, a point I made in chapter 1. Granted, this obscured condition has an ironic benefit in the impetus it gives books as sites of projection beyond capital, as, in the realms of imagination, it loosens their tethering to the determining parameters of the commodity form: "By the specific ways in which they participate in and shape the world of goods, books allow us to believe that there is an escape from or

an alternative to that world."[62] Nevertheless, what Trish Travis describes as this "transcendent identity" rather discourages a politics of the rich materiality of printed media, and it is this that I pursue here.

The media form of the book can have a strong affective allure that recalls the unsettling powers of the collected object; for some, "the archetype of the book is so powerful that it has a way of reaching out and grabbing you and taking you into a dimension of itself."[63] Benjamin would surely not disagree with the tenor of this statement, because much of his formulation of the destabilizing powers of the collection arises from reflection on his own practice of book collecting, where the collection takes the specific bibliographic form of the *library.* And yet, if he had some attraction to the "archetype" of the book, some kind of generic book form, what really grabbed him were the *individual copies* of books, books in their material particularity. Moreover, Benjamin's texts display a specific attraction to forms of textual media that exist at the limits or outside of the book form proper. In "Unpacking My Library," an essay that explores the collection's dialectical interplay between order and disorder in discussion of book collecting, Benjamin draws attention to the "fringe areas" of libraries, "booklike creations" that "strictly speaking do not belong in a book case at all."[64] These "prismatic fringes"—he lists stick-in albums, autograph books, leaflets, prospectuses, handwritten facsimiles, typewritten copies of unobtainable books, religious tracts, and pamphlets—appear to articulate in their anomalous and fragile forms the generative chaos that is the true dynamic of a collection. One might say that in not having a proper place in a library, they mark its *essence,* the library qua collection. And in *One Way Street,* he goes further, positing such fringe areas *against* the book, with its "universal" form, this time conjoining the fragmentary material quality of such media with the situated vitality of interventionist writing: "Significant literary work can only come into being in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that better fit its influence in active communities than does the pretentious, universal gesture of the book—in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards."[65]

Benjamin's library has moved us from the material politics of collecting to our specific object of discussion, the "prismatic fringe" of the

pamphlet. But we still need to consider the place of signifying *content* in the materiality of print media. After all, books are objects with the capacity to be highly expressive through their content. Indeed, given the soaring achievements of text, it may well appear a perverse or tasteless move to seek the expressivity of books anywhere else, to concentrate on books as objects. Such an assessment is memorably dramatized in Mike Leigh's television play *Abigail's Party* (1977), when the petty bourgeois man of the house talks animatedly about the physical form of his volumes of Shakespeare, their bindings, gold emboss, only to remark—it is the comic effect that illustrates my point—that these are not items one can actually *read*. But the joke should be soured when the subject to which it appeals comes into clearer focus. For disdain toward those who would treat books as objects has been a central constitutive feature of the bourgeois subject constructed in the institution of literature and the culture of books. It is a culture entwined with the entrenched hierarchy of the senses that descends, as Agnes Blaha describes, from vision and hearing to touch and taste, with the European "eye man" at the top and the African "skin man" at the bottom, to take an example of this dismal tradition from the nineteenth-century naturalist and biologist Lorenz Oken.[66] Hence, as Leah Price has shown, in the content and cultures of the Victorian novel, and tied to the threat that the spread of literacy presented to class distinction, it was poor illiterates, effete gentry, women, and racialized others who were commonly portrayed as taking the wrong pole of a book–text dichotomy. These groups at the margins of the bourgeois public sphere, or upon whose exclusion it was structurally constituted, were deemed to value the material of the book, while lofty abstraction in the aesthetic work characterized the pole of value and its true subject: "the proper relation between a man of sense and his books," as the Fourth Earl of Chesterfield had it, speaking for his class, is "due attention to the inside of books, and due contempt for the outside."[67]

It is cheering, then, and in keeping with our focus here, that Benjamin's critical appreciation for the value of books comes through a critique of their socially valorized use as repositories of text: the "inveterate collector of books," he writes, proves himself by his "failure to read these books."[68] That orientation plays a part in what follows, in accord with Rancière's

feeling that the medium of signification may sometimes be more politically decisive than the content it carries, and perhaps this precisely in its *resistance* to signification. And yet textual content *is* part of the material form of the book, and so we need also to have a way of working with it in a manner that is conducive to thinking the materiality of textual media. Here Adorno's late essay "Bibliographic Musings" is illuminating, a work considerably influenced by Benjamin's approach to books and collecting. I will spend some time with it, because it is a singular philosophical excursus on the content–form relation, a relation that is central to *Anti-Book* and returns in various different ways throughout.

There are limits to Adorno's essay. It is too much a lament to a lost archetype of the book unsullied by commerce; as I argued in chapter 1 and will return to in chapter 3, there was never an Eden of the book before a fall into the clutches of the commodity, the condition where, according to Adorno, alternate formats, images, and loud colors (God forbid) force us to "acknowledge that books are ashamed of still being books and not cartoons or neon-lighted display windows."[69] And here Adorno holds out little hope for the "fringe areas" that attract Benjamin's eye; those who would seize on a new form, such as "the leaflet or the manifesto," to express the true nature of the book in new times are "only acting as secret worshipers of power, parading their own impotence."[70] Nonetheless, if we can bypass Adorno's faith in the archetype of the book and hold on a little more before considering the fringe area of the pamphlet, the essay offers an enticing construction of the place of content in the book's materiality.

Adorno's case for printed matter is made through critique of the commodity book. As a commodity, the book "sidles up to the reader," existing not "in itself" in expressive autonomy but "for something other," a generic unit of exchange "ready to serve the customer."[71] Along with the general design features noted earlier, Adorno presents a particular example, a trend to omit the paratextual detail of place and date of publication from books' title pages, so taking away "the *principium individuationis* of books . . . along with time and space," as they become "mere exemplars of a species, already as interchangeable as best-sellers," "drug[s] on the market."[72] This has impact on content, for intellectual engagement, which requires "detachment, concentration, continuity," is undone by the commodity

transformation of books "into momentary presentations of stimuli" (as ever, our contemporary fears surrounding the decay of reading echo those of earlier times).[73] But it is Adorno's work on the possibility of *opposition* to the seductive drug of the book commodity that is salient to this chapter.

Adorno locates the politics of books in their capacities to *resist* their owners, authors, and readers. He is well known for advocating the political value of difficult writing. As thought and language are invaded by capital—by clichéd patterns of meaning, by managed public opinion, by "the liberal fiction of . . . universal communicability"—writers must create a "vacuum" in language, the "suspension of all received opinions," if writing is to have any political effect. In this austere defense of modernism, those who would challenge "the word coined by commerce . . . must recognize the advocates of communicability as traitors to what they communicate."[74] But in "Bibliographical Musings," Adorno takes a different route, attending to the disruptive capacities not only of language but also of the form and materiality of the book itself. Books lose their owners, he writes, they fall apart, they reveal their errors to authors only after having taken the solidity of print. They mock attempts to recall their content or to find quotation, "as though they were seeking revenge for the lexical gaze that paws through them looking for individual passages and thereby doing violence to their own autonomous course, which does not want to adjust to anyone's wishes."[75] With this last point, Adorno moves from concern with the physical form of books to consideration of its interplay with *content,* which is what concerns us here. I will appraise this with regard to his comments on Marx.

If a limited number of Marx's statements are "spouted like quotations from the Bible," the form of Marx's writing otherwise defends itself by "hiding anything that does not fall into that stock of quotations."[76] Adorno traces this through the feeling Marx's work often conveys of having been written, as it often was, as commentary and marginalia, a condition that in the volumes of *Theories of Surplus Value* "becomes almost a literary art form," a "conspiratorial technique," perhaps unwittingly so, that expresses an "antisystematic tendency in an author whose whole system is a critique of the existing one."[77] In such instances are revealed the singular politics of the book as media form. For the commodity book is not challenged by

the *meaning* of Marx's antisystematic critique of the capitalist system, or his resistance to quotation as such; the significant feature is the exchange between the two, a "mimetic" relation between meaning and form as the two heterogeneous domains are momentarily held together in an expressive unity that operates somewhere between language and object, what Jameson, in his essay on form in Adorno, calls a "poetic object."[78]

The nature of this mimetic quality of books becomes clearer in Adorno's detour through musical notation, whose graphical elements—notes' lines, heads, the arcs of their phrases—"are not only signs but also images of what is sounded."[79] We should expect the same of language, Adorno argues, but here the primacy of meaning, of the "conceptual-significative aspect," leaves the mimetic moment "much more extensively suppressed" than it does in music.[80] Indeed, it survives only "in the eccentric features of what is to be read."[81] We have seen this in his comment on resistance to quotation in Marx, though Adorno's interpretation of Proust's "stubborn and abyssal passion" for writing without paragraphs is perhaps more instructive.[82] Again, the reader is resisted, but in a way that foregrounds the *visual* and *spatial* qualities of writing and printing: "[Proust] was irritated by the demand for comfortable reading, which forces the graphic image to serve up small crumbs that the greedy customer can swallow more easily, at the cost of the continuity of the material itself."[83] Against this, Proust's sentences, in their "polemic with the reader," come to *resemble* the written content, in a mimetic mode of writing that "transforms Proust's books into the notes of the interior monologue that his prose simultaneously plays and accompanies."[84] Significantly, this mimetic exchange between content and form is not limited to elusive quotation and the graphic arrangement of the page but can be woven out of the range of a book's material and paratextual features:

> The eye, following the path of the lines of print, looks for such resemblances everywhere. While no one of them is conclusive, every graphic element, every characteristic of binding, paper, and print—anything, in other words, in which the reader stimulates the mimetic impulses in the book itself—can become the bearer of resemblance. At the same time, such resemblances are not mere subjective projections but find their objective legitimation in the irregularities, rips, holes, and footholds

> that history has made in the smooth walls of the graphic sign system, the book's material components, and its peripheral features.[85]

Such mimetic resonance is of course difficult to fathom: "What books say from the outside, as a promise, is vague" (though, "in that lies their similarity with their contents").[86] And so the role of the engaged reader is central. If some mimetic resemblances come forward, have a certain objectivity in a work (Proust's antiparagraphs, for example), the reader "stimulates the mimetic impulses" in poring over the breadth of the work's semiotic and material components for resemblance. Chance too is decisive, the poetic object of mimesis being a "contingency temporarily transmuted into necessity," in Jameson's characterization.[87] Nothing, hence, is conclusive, but it is possible to refine this sensibility, and to the degree that the closest, most intimate relationship to books is one that *needs not read them.* And so we return to the collector's relation to books, only now, paradoxically, in not reading books we achieve the most profound relationship not only to their material form but also to their *content*: "the ideal reader, whom books do not tolerate, would know something of what is inside when he felt the cover in his hand and saw the layout of the title page and the overall quality of the pages, and would sense the book's value without needing to read it first."[88]

With Adorno's account of the mimetic experience of books, we have a particular rendering of the self-differing exchange between content and form that I proposed in chapter 1 to be a central feature of the anti-book. In this context Adorno does a considerable service in emphasizing that we are not necessarily in a specialist field of book production, for even great works of literature and philosophy can only be fully experienced in such relationship to their form. And yet it is at the same time a politics of the book that appears *limited* to such works—aside from Marx and Proust, Adorno mentions in these terms Kafka, Kant, Schiller, Baudelaire—and one that is both rare and dying. It also seems to be contained by a limited number of features of the book (bindings, paratext, paragraphs) and its circulation (being damaged, lost); should the author or publisher seek a more experimental trajectory—that is, head off more overtly on the path that will become the bookwork—he receives short shrift: "Books

that refuse to play by the rules of mass communication suffer the curse of becoming arts and crafts."[89]

Having learned from Adorno's reading of the content–form relation in books by the great authors, it is time to turn to the pamphlet, a printed medium of considerably more minor provenance that has, nonetheless, had a persistent presence in radical scenes for some four hundred years.[90] To introduce what follows, the discussion moves from the fragmented circulation and compact folds of the pamphlet, through its self-institutional properties, its base and outmoded physical composition, and its ephemeral duration, before ending with a discussion of its "unpopular" interventions on the terrain of the public and the book commodity. Each of these dimensions of the pamphlet is pursued as it is appears in concrete publishing projects, and each draws out one or more of the features of the concept of the communist object. I do so in a fashion that seeks an exchange between particular pamphlets and the concept of communist object, expanding understanding of each while maintaining a sense of the processual openness inherent to that concept, a concept that sheds light on but does not determine the concrete field it surveys. In parts, I discuss the textual content of these printed objects, though the overriding tendency here is to approach content only insofar as it finds mimetic or self-differing relation to pamphlet form, such that it is more the political and conceptual orientation of a pamphlet's content that comes into view than its specific arguments. In other parts, I make no mention of textual content, in keeping with the thesis of the communist object, that "mute" materials and the nontextual dimensions of textual media are means of political expression in their own right.

FRAGMENTED CIRCULATION AND COMPACT FOLDS

In its resistance to conventional circuits of exchange and use, the pamphlet qua communist object necessarily circulates with a degree of autonomy and contingency. It is a feature that can be discerned through some comparison with the medium of the journal. In contrast with the cumulative thematic concerns and sedimented intellectual habits of a journal—the homogenizing tendencies of this periodical form—one of the defining

experiences of reading a pamphlet is encountering a particular and focused discourse that is unmoored from a familiar and prestructured critical environment. Pamphlets are discursive fragments, isolated units that tend to be disseminated without the intellectual and institutional authority of an established and sanctioned discourse. This observation on the discursive form of pamphlets is simultaneously an observation on their circulation as objects. Lacking the institutional infrastructure, distribution, and temporal pacing that order and distribute periodical publications through time and across space, pamphlets tend instead to be circulated by varied and discontinuous informal flows and associations—friendships, chance encounters, political events, and the bookfair margins of the book trade. Johanna Drucker presents this as an aspect of printed matter that bookworks make their own, an "independent life," "a potent autonomy," an "animate quality." "Books, because they have the capacity to circulate freely, are independent of any specific institutional restraints (one finds them in friends' houses, motel rooms, railroad cars, school desks). They are low maintenance, relatively long-lived, free-floating objects."[91]

We need to be a little careful here, for this is in part the *ideology* of the book commodity, the autonomy of the bourgeois subject finding a complement to his freedom—apparently determined only by his personal will and intellect—in the vaunted autonomy of the book, equally undetermined by base social relations. As Price puts it of Victorian ideologies of the book, the "self-made reader . . . implies a self-propelling text."[92] Nonetheless, Drucker is surely correct that books have the capacity for a relatively high degree of autonomy and contingency in their circulation, and this capacity is something that the pamphlet form makes its own, with its self-published, unmarketed, and often extracommercial properties. It is a characteristic foregrounded in Iain Sinclair's remark about the newsletter published by the London Psychogeographical Association (LPA), established by Fabian Tompsett of Unpopular Books: "This anonymous, unsponsored, irregular, single-sheet squib is probably the most useful of all London's neighbourhood tabloids. And certainly the most entertaining. It has no fixed cover price and no distribution. If you need it, it finds you."[93] We do not need to follow Sinclair in attributing intention to the pamphlet to see in this an appreciation of the intensive quality of the chance encounter and a feeling that such encounters arise from and confirm an open and unknowable field,

that which Jason Skeet and Mark Pawson indicate when writing of self-publishing that "it will always remain impossible to see the whole picture. A random sampling at a single point in time is the best you're going to get."[94]

If this haphazard mode of circulation gives to the pamphlet a quality of contingency and surprise, it also leaves it as a necessarily self-sufficient form. Rather than sidling up to the reader, unfurling across social space through an established infrastructure of production and consumption (as does the periodical journal, the work by a renowned author, or the best-seller book), the pamphlet as fragment holds back from the social world, circulating instead as a closed and compact object. This has an aesthetic quality, as the small press Guestroom conveys when it describes its core interest as constituted on "the love of books, . . . the compactness of the space they create."[95] It is a quality central to Mallarmé's understanding of the book. I refer not to his often cited spiritual formulation of the total book—"all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book"—but to a rarer feature of his conception, his appreciation of the *dense* and *compact* nature of books, their "folding" of time and matter: "their thickness when they are piled together; for then they form a tomb in miniature for our souls."[96] How are we to understand this folded compactness? Deleuze provides an answer in the gloss he gives to Mallarmé's somewhat esoteric construction. This is the book as "monad" with "multiple leaves," a particular selection or contraction of the world that is at once "a specific world absolutely different from the others" and "that which constitutes and reconstitutes the beginning of the world," a self-enclosed vessel "ready to burst open."[97] We encounter the book as monad, then, as the "extraordinary energy" of a compact fold of pages at the limit of unfolding.[98]

Yet surely Mallarmé's book qua folded monad conjures images of hefty leather-bound tomes—even of the book as total work, total *world,* to anticipate a theme from chapter 3—quite the opposite of the negligible volume of the pamphlet? Adorno would seem to be thinking in such terms when he describes the book, in Mallarméan fashion, as "self-contained, lasting, hermetic—something that absorbs the reader and closes the lid over him, as it were, the way the cover of the book closes on the text."[99] For these are sturdy books that can "stand solidly on their feet," they have spines broad enough to support their "face" of crosswise titles.[100] But what if the pamphlet, which has no proper spine for titles of *any* kind, were

also a monad? What if its fragmentary character made it *especially* so? Deleuze argues that a fragment is less an extraction from a whole, as we might usually consider it, than a condition where there *is* no whole, "no totality into which it can enter, no unity from which it is torn and to which it can be restored."[101] The fragment displays "the extraordinary energy of unmatched parts," "parts of different sizes and shapes, which cannot be adapted, which do not develop at the same rhythm."[102] If the sturdy volume of the book, standing on its feet, produces and bears a feeling that the book is a world and the world a book, the self-evident incompleteness of the pamphlet produces the world as fragmentary, incomplete, and open, qualities held in its slim, compact closure. It is the textual fragment, then, and not the total book that is the true textual monad:

> It is well known that the total book is as much Leibniz's dream as Mallarmé's, even though they never stop working in fragments. Our error is in believing that they did not succeed in their wishes: they make this unique Book perfectly, the book of monads, in letters and little circumstantial pieces that could sustain as many dispersions as combinations.[103]

This feature of the pamphlet as compact and fragmented fold has an additional valence in the common tendency of pamphlets to comprise previously published text. Pamphlets often consist of original textual works, but equally often they are a selection or folding of works that have appeared elsewhere in different forms and contexts. This is a feature of editions by Unpopular Books, one that is often highlighted by the publisher in a manner that encourages the reader to appreciate its pamphlets as momentary concrescences, as publication takes up a text and presses it with new prefaces and other paratextual reframing, sending it off on a different course. But the most curious instance I have encountered of such reflexive refolding is a small press edition of Jacques Camatte and Gianni Collu's text "On Organization," copublished in North America by New Space and Beni Memorial Library. The text is itself a fragment, being an open letter that led to the dissolution of the group that was emerging around the French communist journal *Invariance* in the wake of May 1968, a result of the letter's critique of the "racket" function of political organization (that is, the furtherance of capitalist forms of identity and

self-marketing in nominally anticapitalist milieus). But what interests me here is another letter, written by Beni Memorial Library and included with the posted copies of the pamphlet, a document enticingly titled "The 'On Organization' Pamphlet—A Bibliographic Dissection."

In a sense, this letter undermines the contingency and surprise of the pamphlet qua monad by locating the pamphlet's origin and the process of its production, but it does so in a way that unsettles the stability that such narrative placement might usually produce. The document informs the reader that the pamphlet comprises two texts that were sent to New Space (a Chicago book shop favorably inclined toward ultraleft currents) from Savona, Italy, most likely from the publisher of Camatte's Italian editions, Edizioni International, but that the package was sent anonymously, with no identification of the translator, publisher, or distributor, describing only the texts' original publication details in *Invariance.* The U.S. publisher goes to some length to highlight these details, even including in the document mock-ups of parts of the cover sheets that identify the original publication sources. But above all, the document makes apparent that here is a printed letter about a pamphlet that is a reprint of the text of a letter that had been published twice before, in the same journal, one time with a new preface. It is a textual fragment that has sustained many combinations indeed: "folds in folds, over folds, following folds."[104] The letter also describes in considerable detail the physical shape and format of the original documents and the subsequent processes of printing the pamphlet. *On Organization,* hence, is not only a textual folding but an artifactual one also, as it folds and unfolds from one concrescence to the next, from "mimeographed, black on white, 21 × 29.5 cm, corner-stapled, unillustrated," as the account commences, to "making plates, offset printing about 1500 copies, and collating, folding, binding," as it draws to an end.[105] And finally, just as the anonymity of the original package unsettled conventional paradigms of distribution, which integrate parties and objects in networks of money and obligation, the "bibliographic dissection" seeks to ensure that the pamphlet endures as a contingent and unbound fragment: "as with everything I distribute, I do not wish to put anyone under any obligation to do anything. Also, though I am poor, donations of money are gratefully refused."[106]

VULNERABLE POWERS OF INSTITUTION

The compact nature of the pamphlet as folded monad generates something of an *intimate* quality in its encounters, in its "collections" or permeable associations, but where the intimate, to recall my earlier discussion, is also an *extimate* relation. It is an affective aspect of printed matter—what Drucker calls "the densely informative immediacy and intimacy of the experience provided by books"—that has a prominent place in the understanding of the pamphlet developed by Infopool.[107] Manifesting the fetish quality of a communist object, Infopool's formulation of the unsettling material qualities of the pamphlet emerges in part through its encounter with commodity values, as described in the Infopool text "Operation Reappropriation." As we will see shortly, the text addresses a violation of the pamphlet's communist form that occurred when some Infopool editions crossed the threshold between two very different kinds of collection to become part of a major exhibition at the Tate Modern museum.

Based at times in London and Copenhagen, Infopool (2000–2009) was a collaborative writing, print, and Internet project established by the visual artist Jakob Jakobsen. It intersected with the research, exhibition, and social spaces of the East London Info Centre (1998–99) and the Copenhagen Free University (2001–7). As Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen describe it, Infopool was founded on a commitment to self-publishing as "a vector of activity and thought—usually fueled by pleasure/disgust/lack," and an investment in the wider processual and associational properties of media across the boundaries of art and politics.[108] In terms of the content of the pamphlets, some comprise single essays, notably Howard Slater's text on the Scandinavian Situationists, "Divided We Stand" (*Infopool* 4). But there is a decided "R&D" orientation to the pamphlets, apparent for example in *Infopool* 8, a self-reflexive text and interview by and with Emma Hedditch on the process of writing an essay on the conceptual artist Adrian Piper, and *Infopool* 6, a photo essay by Stewart Home concerned to discover America while journeying through Britain. Other instances pertain to Jakobsen's art practice. *Infopool* 1, for example, includes texts on his experiments with the use and disuse of modernist objects, on experiencing one site in another through transposing imagery of the 1976 Seveso

chemical disaster to the streets of south London, and on the domestic synthesis of plastic and beer. I consider the physical properties of these pamphlets in a different part of this chapter, but suffice to say for now that they are A5-size with metallic-silver covers that are uniform except for the different number and date of each edition.

Commonsense views of media chronology would see online availability of the Infopool texts as invalidating the pamphlet as a pertinent form, but Infopool had a more post-digital sensibility and saw it quite differently. Online availability relieves the pamphlet of the function of content dissemination, allowing other qualities and dimensions to come forward into expression, not least of which is the pamphlet's self-positing character. These are "self-institutional" entities, as Infopool describes it—they establish contexts and incite affects and modes of association:

> Taking the form of pamphlets is not irrelevant. Using a small press, or post-media form, implies that they are documents that are circulated in extremely small numbers. They are, in a sense, intimate and specific and, crucially, the communication they aim for is one that is unmediated. In short the pamphlets, infopool projects, are concerned with developing their own contexts.[109]

We are in the domain of Benjamin's collected object, its intimate capacity to have unsettling, extimate effects, though here the "shock" of encounter takes a specific and nuanced form. The permeable contour of self-institution has an explicitly *collective* dimension and a "fledgling" quality, infused with "vulnerability."[110] As Infopool describes it, without formal institutional structures or copyright protection, the pamphlets extend only a "contract of 'trust'" concerning sensitivity toward content and aim in an "unprotected offer of communication."[111] That may sound like a weakness, but it is in fact a signal feature of the self-institutional object. Since, in contrast to instances of political expression that are the products and bearers of institutional norms and regularities, this vulnerability affirms precisely the pamphlet's *emergent* quality, its existence only in the open, exploratory, and intimate "institutions" that are articulated, or held, in its encounters. It is hence no contradiction to say, as Jakobsen has it, that "the vulnerability of the pamphlet is also its power."[112]

It was most likely something of this self-institutional quality that appealed to the curators of the Tate Modern's 2001 *Century City* exhibition, when it chose, without notification or consultation, to bind together three Infopool pamphlets in newly fortified covers, doctor the cover text, and display the artifact threaded on a presentation wire (Figure 2). As Infopool see it, the museum's interest in these pamphlets is exemplary of the "valorization of socialization"—the commodification of social relations that seek to escape the commodity—that is common to contemporary cultural institutions as they cast around for content and legitimacy. In this particular case, it shows the inability of the Tate to understand and handle the very qualities of form, intimacy, and association that had caught the curators' attention in the first place. For in its new guise, the pamphlet's values of tentative and emergent self-institution were converted, with proprietorial disregard, into exhibition value—the value, as Arvatov has it, of "murdered objects" "hidden under glass."[113] The only adequate response was for Infopool to liberate the artifact from exhibition, documenting their "Operation Re-appropriation" with a damning critique of the museum's blunt and clumsy action:

> On display in a new hardback cover and threaded through with wire (the new vitrine) the pamphlets take on an aura that undermines both their form and content. They are no longer able to be passed on, given as gifts, and circulated to friends and fellow travelers i.e. to be self-institutional. In short the pamphlets have been commodified beyond their informal and nominal £1.00 price. The generator of value that is the Tate Modern has allotted them an immaterial cultural value (prestige, distinction) in exchange for the appearance of the value of their autonomy. . . . We picked the pamphlets up on Friday February 9th. To negotiate their exit would have taken too long.[114]

BARBARIC ASCETICISM

Having moved from the pamphlet's fragmented circulation and compact folds to its self-institutional capacities, we can turn now to focus on the more immediately physical properties of this medium, starting with paper. Far from a mere substratum or support, paper is a complex and sensual entity—for Derrida, "paper . . . gets hold of us bodily, and through every

Figure 2. Reappropriated *Infopool*.

sense"—and is intrinsic to the pamphlet's peculiar physical and sensory form.[115] In his anatomy of the emergence and form of the pamphlet in early modern Britain, Joad Raymond shows that the properties and economies of paper had a central place.[116] The early modern pamphlet was a stitched rather than bound quarto, a size that allowed for the use

of smaller, cheaper paper at a time when this material comprised up to three-quarters of printing costs. It would typically number between one and twelve sheets, giving between eight and ninety-six pages in total, and would normally be produced in editions of 250 to 1,500. Raymond places considerable emphasis on its physical attributes, arguing that "some of the most fundamental aspects of the pamphlet" were "its appearance, size, weight, texture," "readers knew what a pamphlet looked like, and how it felt in the hand."[117] The feel, ragged form, and relative lack of commercial value also played a role in the meaning and cultural associations of the early modern pamphlet, which, though it rose to some degree of recognition and influence in the seventeenth century, existed—unlike the manuscript, the book, and, later, the newspaper—as a somewhat disreputable entity. This is especially clear in Raymond's assessment of the common perception of this medium in the late sixteenth century: "Pamphlets were small, insignificant, ephemeral, disposable, untrustworthy, unruly, noisy, deceitful, poorly printed, addictive, a waste of time."[118]

Something of this base and ragged nature persists as a defining feature of pamphlets and associated inconspicuous media forms throughout the twentieth century. The Russian Futurist books and pamphlets of the 1910s were produced in very small editions using cheap paper and ephemeral materials, including burlap and wallpaper (as we will see in chapter 3). In the clandestine samizdat of the Soviet bloc, the functionality of carbon paper for illicit domestic reproduction made it a common material, and even today, with popular access to desktop publishing, strategies deployed in self-publishing often eschew the overly smooth and professional visual aesthetic (typified by *Wired* magazine) that such technologies enable. Tompsett, for instance, describes the contemporary possibilities of using an old Roneo mimeograph machine, with its poor register, to play with color and bleed—"entropy in print"—as a challenge to much contemporary design that he finds "so slick" that it induces one's "gaze to slide off the page."[119] Similarly, the physical attributes of pamphlets continue to be central to their material and sensory nature: their texture and feel, the variable smell of paper dependent on age and condition, the quality of the print, the physical act of turning the page. It is not necessary to pose

a hard opposition between analogue and digital media to recognize the specific properties and pleasures of print:

> All books are visual. . . . All books are tactile and spatial as well—their physicality is fundamental to their meaning. Similarly, the elements of visual and physical materiality participate in a book's temporal effect—the weight of paper, covers, endpapers or inserts, fold-outs or enclosures all contribute to the experience of the book.[120]

An attention to such physical qualities of the pamphlet—with Arvatov, to the "deepest sense of things"—is an enduring theme in Infopool. Insistent on the coimplication of material, conceptual, and social aspects of this medium, Jakobsen talks of Infopool pamphlets as articulating an "everyday materiality," a "materiality of available means." Unlike the finished object of the mass-produced and perfect-bound book, the pamphlet "tells a story through its material," one that foregrounds the process of its production, or the "practical task" of developing a pamphlet "as an individual, as a little entity."[121] The vulnerable and emergent nature of Infopool's self-institutional gesture has a correspondence, then, with the story the pamphlets tell of their simple fabrication. These pamphlets were produced in relatively inexpensive fashion with photocopied paper and A5 covers assembled from metallic-silver card purchased from an east London remaindered-stationery shop. The cover text includes a combination of print and script numerals, playfully indicating the handwrought nature of the object while, in the contrast between the two graphic technologies, foregrounding the pamphlets' existence at the interface of different technologies of production.

There is also a revaluation of materials here, following a concern with the pamphlets' processes of emergence *and* dissipation. Jakobsen explicitly addresses this theme in a text that troubles the notion of the "new" through the construction of a table from discarded materials, a table connected to the self-institution (as site of display and discussion) of Infopool pamphlets.[122] Here Jakobsen comments on Baudelaire's ragpicker (a figure Benjamin closely associates with the collector) in terms of the creation of value from the gray zone between waste and utility,

a practice that is disavowed in the Global North by the consumer object and its temporal pattern of novelty and obsolescence. Yet for Jakobsen, the revaluation of material is not simply extant in economy; rather, it seeks to tarry with the commodity form, unsettling the social and economic partitions of waste and value as the waste material is enlivened in its new social arrangements.

The destabilizing effects of waste have a further role to play in the pamphlet form. I noted earlier that digital media have freed up pamphlets from the function of content dissemination to take on other qualities and roles, but that post-digital assessment left something out. Is there not, all the same, an outmodedness to the pamphlet, as a form now eclipsed by the digital? We could still account for contemporary interest in the pamphlet form, considering it to be a product of the form's final illumination, a medium intensely appreciated at the moment of its extinction.[123] But I find that Benjaminian construction unsatisfying, preferring Adorno's variation on this theme. He shows interest in outmoded media, but less from the perspective of their imminent passing than from their *enduring relation to the newest forms,* to which they stand as a persistent negation, a "barbaric asceticism." As he argues, recently outmoded media present the opportunity to be "strategically nonsynchronous" with the "ostentatious" compound of new technology and capital, which commands social and affective adherence to the "united front" of the new: "Progress and barbarism are today so matted together in mass culture that only barbaric asceticism towards the latter, and towards progress in technical means, could restore an unbarbaric condition."[124] To this end, appeal to outmoded and "unobtrusive" media is not a celebration of the old but a "repudiation of false riches," for such media introduce a breach in the temporal structure of the new that, paradoxically, constitutes them as the most *contemporary* media: "older media, not designed for mass-production take on a new timeliness: that of exemption and of improvisation. They alone could outflank the united front of trusts and technology."[125] There is a *modernism,* then, to Adorno's advocacy of the outmoded, a barbaric asceticism of media form to complement, say, the violent linguistic asceticism of Samuel Beckett.[126]

Recalling the epigraph to this chapter, we can see now how it is that a somewhat clunky medium at the point of obsolescence—the mimeograph, a publishing technology that has had a pivotal place in modern pamphleteering—can be called on to repeal the book designed for commerce. It is an object lesson that, enticingly, Adorno put into play himself, in a first version of his canonical work with Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—a version named by the subtitle of the later work, *Philosophical Fragments,* circulated among the associates of the Institute for Social Research—that took the form of a mimeographed typescript with decidedly unobtrusive covers comprising brown pasteboard.[127] The value of this work can be most appreciated when related to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* Apparently, Adorno's work of readying the text for its formal publication, as it morphed from self-published mimeograph to a book proper, entailed that he not only moderate its Marxian terminology, so as to ease the book and the Institute into a broad reading public, but also drop references to the work's incompleteness, so aiding its reception as a determinate entity, a movement confirmed in the change of title.[128] As such, the movement between the mimeograph and book presents an enticing instantiation, a mimesis of sorts, of Adorno's critique of the book qua commodity, which sidles up to the reader, only one that manifests his thesis to the extent that it undermines his book.

As for the pamphlet, to get back on track, if it is a post-digital form for its range of expressive qualities, Adorno's lesson in barbaric asceticism is that it is also this as a result of the fissure it opens with the fixation on the technologically new and the linear temporality of media "progress." That is not, however, the pamphlet's only temporal quality.

EPHEMERAL DURATION

Each pamphlet has a variable duration, dependent on its site and moment of political intervention, its mode and extent of circulation, popularity of theme, and so on; for Jakobsen, "the specificity of any of these self-publications is that they have their own time."[129] Such atypical specificity is accentuated by the *ephemerality* of pamphlets, their tendency to fall out

of circulation, get lost, or accumulate undisturbed in a stack of documents. Indeed, the pamphlet has not only been rendered outmoded by digital and online media; it has ever been treated as a disposable object, a property clear in Thomas Bodley's interdiction against preserving pamphlets at (what was to become) Oxford's Bodleian as media "not worth the custody in suche a Librarie."[130]

Such singular existence courted by destruction can articulate a pertinent political value, what can be called, after the fetish, a value of the "untransposable." It is a value that pervades the 56a Archive (1991–). This open access archive and reading room based at a social center in London's Elephant and Castle holds ten thousand plus items of radical ephemeral media—media associated with direct action, anarchist, queer, squatting, antigentrification, feminist, and communist politics.[131] It was established in part as an *effect* of the ephemerality of self-published media, for as printed matter moved haphazardly through the networks of radical groups and individuals that used the center, some of it fell out of circulation to become the germ of the archive.[132]

Contrasting 56a's archival practice with tendencies in radical librarianship that would preserve a set of pamphlets in a perfect-bound book, Chris talks of ephemerality as a fundamental feature of these media objects: "the ephemerality of the zine or pamphlet, that's what it's about. Zines come to you because they will."[133] Pamphlets "make trails" through an open set of encounters, and these encounters are registered on their bodies.[134] An attention to these characteristics is clearly in tension with the conventional archival imperatives of completeness and preservation, but instead of resolving the tension, the 56a Archive holds it open through an articulation of the ephemeral qualities of the pamphlet in the archive itself. Material continues to arrive in a largely informal fashion, and the archive itself holds together at the edge of dissipation; the gentrification of inner London may well commit the collection to dispersal, should the social center be closed under pressure from property values and the class-cleansing effects of so-called urban regeneration. And within the archive, an emphasis is placed on a tactile relation to the media objects collected, a "sensuality," a "conscious relationship to stuff," and one that allows for decay. As Chris continues, "we just have the barest minimum,

which is space full of things. And then time and climate does what it does, or weevils, or . . ."[135]

Far from suggesting that the pamphlet's temporality is only immediate, here ephemerality becomes, paradoxically, a quality that endures. It is a quality that permeates the printed object and colors its social encounters, providing a sense of the discontinuous and variegated nature of intellectual, political, and inorganic time. Benjamin's speculation that objects embody times and sensations associated with previous owners and contexts can manifest here in terms of their connection to, or expression of, particular political events, movements, or critical currents. It is a point picked up by Adorno. The strongest motif in "Bibliographic Musings" is the disfigured book as unity-in-disruption with the damaged life of emigration, where "damaged books, books that have been knocked about and have had to suffer, are the real books."[136] But he also makes a comment about ephemeral political media in these terms, now on board with Benjamin's taste for print's fringe: "Revolutionary leaflets and kindred things: they look as though they have been overtaken by catastrophes, even when they are no older than 1918. Looking at them, one can see that what they wanted did not come to pass. Hence their beauty."[137] Moreover, this catastrophic quality appears to be intrinsic to these media forms, for this is "the same beauty the defendants in Kafka's *Trial* take on, those whose execution has been settled since the very first day."[138]

Such an appreciation is apparent in Chris's remarks on archiving radical media, though the ephemeral revolutionary artifact is for him less beholden to the affect of mourning attendant upon Adorno's feeling for leaflets. This is how Chris frames the strong affective pull of original editions of political printed matter: "What is that impulse? We're not talking about collecting trophies. We're talking about a thing that has a desire for change, for revolutionary change."[139] From the perspective of Benjamin's collector, a trophy is the integrated object of linear, historical memory—the concern, as Leslie puts it, of the "souvenir-hunter."[140] In Chris's formulation, we can detect a political inflection of a more undetermined and future oriented charge, somewhat akin to the evental shock of Benjamin's collected object, where memory is involuntary, "impromptu, bouncing off objects encountered randomly. It is lucid, pre-verbal, and

coupled with euphoria."[141] What is most attractive here for a communism of objects is the meeting of matter and nonlinear time with revolutionary history, an unstable compound that Deleuze and Guattari seek to convey with their (somewhat counterintuitive) concept of the "monument":

> the monument is not something commemorating a past, it is a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and that provide the event with the compound that celebrates it. The monument's action is not memory but fabulation. . . . [It] confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their recreated protestations, their constantly resumed struggle.[142]

That said, the monuments of revolutionary printed matter have a more troubled relation to their own endurance than this concept implies. Indeed, the peculiar intensity of the ephemeral printed artifact can be destroyed, ironically, through efforts to preserve it. To explain this, we can return to Hollier's formulation of the fetish quality of printed matter. For Hollier, the materialist "document" has an intrinsic and affirmative relation to ephemeral instantiation, to "what does not last," an untransposable or evental quality that he detects in the journal *Documents* itself.[143] When subject to commercial reprinting—to preservation and iteration in the publication circuits of art history—the journal *loses* its value: "But it is for the kamikazes, for the most fleeting trackers of the avant-garde, those who have not even seen two winters, that the honor of the reprint is intended. He who wins loses."[144] It is a problem that surfaces too in the conceptualization of the political poster developed at Atelier Populaire, the occupied École des Beaux-Arts in the Paris events of May 1968, where it is said that some six hundred thousand silk-screen stencil posters were fabricated in 350 designs.[145] For Atelier Populaire, the integration of media with situated political practice was so tight that they not only opposed the sale of the posters, or a distracted appreciation of their aesthetic value, but deemed even archival preservation to be a violation of their singular, evental consistency:

> To use [the posters] for decorative purposes, to display them in bourgeois places of culture or to consider them as objects of aesthetic interest is to impair both their function and their effect. This is why the Atelier

> Populaire has always refused to put them on sale.
>
> *Even to keep them as historical evidence of a certain stage in the struggle is a betrayal,* for the struggle itself is of such primary importance that the position of an "outside" observer is a fiction which inevitably plays into the hands of the ruling class.[146]

I would not deny the importance of this move toward an immediate and irrevocable consumption of political art in the event. But the point to extract is that this antiarchival configuration is an expression of the *enduring vitality* of an object of 1968 today, a vitality that articulates that extrahistorical event precisely in the ephemeral object's untransposable resistance to preservation.

If, in such ways, the ephemerality and destruction of printed works are alloyed with the intensity of political events, the determination of these qualities is rarely independent of broader social forces. In 1970s Italy, to take one example, the possession of radical printed matter was regularly used as a pretext in the mass arrests and prosecutions of individuals involved with the Autonomia movement, such that it was common practice for militants to destroy their personal archives (a point registered on the 56a website with a quotation from Nanni Balestrini's account of one such episode from his novel *The Unseen*). And such destruction was not only an act performed by individuals. In Antonio Negri's case, following charges against him of "the publication and distribution of pamphlets and communiqués that incite armed insurrection," his pamphlets, such as *Domination and Sabotage* and *Workers Party against Work,* were pulped by the publisher, Feltrinelli.[147] Of course, the presence of the State in the practice of destruction in no way negates the notion that ephemeral media have their own time.

UNPOPULAR PAMPHLETS

For the properties I have been describing, the pamphlet can be a rather seductive object. Indeed, a certain seduction is present in its etymology, the word derived from the Greek *pamphilos,* meaning "loved by all," after the lead character of a popular twelfth-century love poem and publication, *Pamphilus seu de Amore.*[148] The concept of the communist object celebrates

the seduction of the object, that should be clear by now, but not uncritically; generic love and popularity can be a problem, the nature of which is tested by Unpopular Books through experiments in pamphlet form, where the pamphlet is developed as an *unpopular* medium, manifest, as I consider here, in relation to the reading "public" and to the commodity.

Unpopular Books was established in the late 1970s by Fabian Tompsett, in part a product of his involvement in the cooperative print shop scene and the Rising Free book shop and press.[149] Rising Free published the first single-volume English edition of Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life,* a book that suffered from poor knowledge of binding materials such that—in Tompsett's words, a foretaste of his rare feeling for mimesis in publishing form—it became an "autodestructive commodity," "the perfect Situationist book: it fell apart as you read it."[150] The first two editions from Unpopular Books are an indication of its somewhat unorthodox orientations: a Persian translation of Rod Jones's essay on factory committees in the Russian revolution, published in 1979 in a critical constellation with the Iranian Revolution, and an early text on "communization" by Jean Barrot, playfully titled by Tompsett like a beginner's guide: *What Is Communism.*[151] Though Unpopular Books has published books and leaflets, the pamphlet is Tompsett's preferred medium, a point he makes with reference to the pamphlet's textual and physical form and its processes of production: "It's not bulky, ideally you can put it in your pocket easily. It's not going to take you too long to read, but it's long enough to get somewhere. And you can make it in all these different ways."[152] We can consider some of the "different ways" Unpopular Books make and problematize pamphlets with regard, first, to the political problem of the public, once more starting with a contrast to the media form of the journal.

Journals and formal political organizations share the need to court and consolidate a sizeable public, in the mode of readership, market, or membership. For a journal, this requirement is determined in part by the financial demands of publication, whereas for an organization (and for movement journals), it is the dominant criterion for social validation as a pertinent political entity. By contrast, the low production cost and the fragmentary and occasional form of the pamphlet, along with its

frequent remove from direct relation to organizations, frees it up from the journal's requirement of audience share. This makes it an ideal medium for a communist press that seeks, as does Unpopular Books, to challenge received political truths and the tendency of political groups and radical subjectivities toward self-flattery—a press that seeks to be, in other words, *unpopular*—while destabilizing any political community that the press itself may otherwise accrue from the prestige attendant upon such challenge. The appeal of intellectual autonomy in this regard is readily appreciable, notwithstanding the common attraction to dogma in political circles, but such a willfully unpopular approach to political community requires further elucidation.

Unpopular Books may seem a perverse name for a communist publishing project, and yet one of its sources is a remark from Marx: "Both of us scoff at being popular."[153] The remark is made against the emerging cult of personality attending to Marx and Engels in the 1870s and favors instead a formulation of communism as a *distributed* and *self-critical* process, a process that wards off any delimiting center of attraction. The remark is part of an epigraph to Camatte and Collu's "On Organization," a text we encountered earlier, though now as included in the Unpopular Books edition of Camatte's *Capital and Community.* And this is one of a dozen works published by Unpopular Books on communist theory that can be understood, inter alia, as reworking Marx's disdain for popularity through the critique of capital. If communism is a critical movement immanent to the mutating limits of capitalist social relations, and not a privileged political subject, organizational form, or repertoire of ideas, then the popularity of any of the latter is contrary to its imperatives, serving to close communism down to a delimited identity. Or, as Unpopular Books has it (if I can generalize from a comment made against the enduring appeal of the Situationist International), the "popularity" of a particular critical position is a manifestation "of the fact that the revolutionary movement has yet to overcome [its] weaknesses."[154]

If the communist critique of social relations turns against reified identities, organizations, and ideas, it turns also against the commodity object; this is the second dimension of this publisher's unpopularity. The Danish press release for Debord and Jorn's *Mémoires,* a book famously

covered by sandpaper, establishes the work as an "unpopular book," doing so not on the terrain of its textual content but on that of the commodity: "in a time where all civilized nations battle to achieve the most popularity, using industrial design and mass-production of art objects and home appliances in the world market, a very unpopular book would be a much-needed rarity. . . . There is too much plastic, we prefer sandpaper."[155] While this is not a direct source of the name of Unpopular Books, it is neither an unwarranted association, for Tompsett has played a significant role in the critical appropriation of Situationist thought, not least as (re-)founder in the early 1990s of the LPA (an organization originally established and folded simultaneously as it fused with the Lettrist International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus to found the Situationist International). Moreover, Tompsett's choice of name partook of the same critique of the popularity of the book commodity, playing as it did with the name and business model of the Popular Book Centre chain that was then common to the London high street, its prominent window banners succinctly articulating the economic dimension of the popular: "POPULAR BOOK CENTRE/EVERYTHING EXCHANGEABLE AT HALF PRICE/HALF BACK CREDIT ON ALL BOOKS SOLD HERE."[156]

That is the communist terrain, then, of the unpopularity of Unpopular Books: against the identity of reified political communities and theories, and against the popularity of the commodity unit of exchange. Bearing this condition, Unpopular Books has developed a most enticing publishing practice. While Unpopular Books shares the critique of the commodity with *Mémoires,* the communist qualities of its publishing experiments are constituted more in relation to the ideas and practices of Jorn, who, in contrast to Debord after the 1962 split in the Situationist International, maintained an overt commitment to a communism of art and fabrication—to a "materialist's love for matter," as Jorn put it.[157] In the case of Unpopular Books, this materialism is manifest through engagement with the arts and conventions of printing and the means by which commercial and political value are articulated with printed matter. It is important to appreciate that aesthetic form and the critique of capital are here held close together, a point Tompsett directly addresses in an obscure unpublished text called "kArt Boo," which details some of the interventions by this press in publishing form. Enticingly, Tompsett does this in relation to a problematic

that is foundational for the concept of the anti-book, namely, the relation between the artists' book and communist publishing.[158] If, as kArt Boo has it, publishing is a field of struggle—"publishing is war carried out by other means, or if you prefer war is publishing carried out by other means"—this is operative in the realm of printed form.[159] The artists' book intervenes in the latter, by definition, but kArt Boo suggests that it does so without a feeling for the conflictuality of the terrain, tending to reduce the book to an art object, a trajectory Tompsett disparages in this wry manner: "and now, hundreds of years later," after the invention of print and the book's entry into modern commodity production, "when the role of the book is being undermined by electronic media, the book is being abased to a level even below that of the simple commodity—the book is being turned into *Art.*"[160] One might retort that labor—the conflictual form at the heart of communist thought—is a common theme in artists' books, but here it has tended to appear somewhat uncritically, with the artists' book "immersed in creating a parody of the old artisanal skills of the printer."[161] By contrast, Unpopular Books has "always prided itself on the shoddiness of the finished product," wearing its critique of labor on the printed surface of the page.[162]

Developing this theme, Tompsett comments thus on the labor and value of printing: "when you hear the term congealed labour you think of congealed ink. All the other printers do as well. . . . We would watch the printing press as the paper passed through it and imagine it squeezing value into these pieces of paper."[163] The matter that is "congealed" and "squeezed" here is complex, comprising dimensions that are *abstract* as much as concrete, dimensions that can only be grasped with the aid of thought—with critique of the commodity form. That is to say, Tompsett's reference is to the concrete dimensions of abstract labor, where the circulation of the print commodity determines the form and value of the congealed labor and ink invested in its production (an observation that has considerable historical purchase, given, as I noted in chapter 1, that print was central to the emergence of the social form of abstract labor, through its leading role in the mechanization of handicraft and the separation of aesthetic activity from technical work).[164] Not artisanal labor, then, it is the labor of industrial printing that Tompsett refers to, a point confirmed in kArt Boo, where the destruction of the print unions by News

International in the 1986–87 Wapping dispute indexes in time and place the more generic condition of the imposition of work.[165] But Tompsett's remark about congealed ink simultaneously gestures toward something else in the printing process, a value of inks and papers that, as it tarries with the commodity form of the printed object, can be understood as an anti-commodity fetishism. It is a point made in the material form of the Jorn pamphlet *Open Creation and Its Enemies* (Plate 3).

This Unpopular Books edition includes Tompsett's English translation of Jorn's "Open Creation and Its Enemies" and his "Originality and Magnitude (on the System of Isou)" with an introduction by Richard Essex (one of the numerous pseudonyms taken by Tompsett in his unpopular dissimulation of authorial property and prestige).[166] *Open Creation* was fabricated through reflexive attention to its material form in a fashion that repeats the bibliographic self-consciousness that Raymond shows was a common motif of early modern pamphlet culture.[167] Unusually for a pamphlet, Tompsett had it allocated an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and logged a copy with the British Library. In this manner, it was placed and validated in the commercial field of the book as a uniform and determinate exchangeable commodity—and we should recall from chapter 1 that it was precisely the standardizing properties of print technology that enabled the Gutenberg book to set the example of the modern commodity, being the first uniform and repeatable mass-produced object.[168] But *Open Creation* enters this field in order to trouble it, playing with the mechanisms that constitute the pamphlet as a standardized and determinate entity. It was printed in contravention of the ISBN allocation regulations with two different covers (though for consistency across the pamphlets—"the particular mix of colours," "the same moisture going into the paper"—they were set out simultaneously on the same A2 plates).[169] A "Note to Librarians" on the back of each resolves this problem, but in a way that requires the antiarchival and devaluing act of physical destruction, for it advises that the cover, a highly designed and attractive lithographic print, is merely a protective for the text in transit and should be expunged to avoid confusion for future bibliographers. And the inside covers each announce different Unpopular Books editions—*A Trip to Edzell Castle* and *An English Hacienda*—that remain

unpublished, so introducing doubt into the authority and reliability traditionally associated with the institution of the publisher and the act of print publication.

The *Open Creation* pamphlet is not, then, an autonomous entity wholly outside the structural patterns of the commercial book. Rather, as befits the fetishism of the communist object, it achieves its particular intensive expression of matter and value by operating immanently to them, as something of an *unreliable mimic* that opens a gap in the protocols and institutions that constitute the book as commodity. At the same time, this pamphlet cuts more directly against the commodity mode of the book. As with other pamphlets by Unpopular Books, it has a price, but it has no exchange value; no capital was invested to realize surplus value from its sale. That it was hence produced as something other than a commodity is not in itself so rare, but this fact was alloyed with other features. To take up again the problem of labor, Tompsett has often produced pamphlets in the downtime between commercial print runs. One might view this as a stolen moment of "unalienated" work, but it is better understood as a contemporary instance of the *unsettling* of work and its identities that Rancière, as I discussed earlier, calls the "nights of labor"—the flight from work that, paradoxically, reveals the impossibility of such flight under the social conditions of capitalism. And when this liminal labor is consumed, its utility can be further unsettled. For Tompsett also frames the production and consumption of the pamphlet as constitutive of a "potlatch"—the nonproductive expenditure of the extravagant gift—though in contrast to the mutual obligation of gift economies, the LPA would surreptitiously place such pamphlets in book and charity shops encountered on its excursions, a mode of noncontractual distribution Tompsett calls "negative shoplifting."[170]

With all these features, is *Open Creation* not a seductive object, just like a commodity? Yes and no. An object in its commodity mode is universally enticing, it has a most "empathetic soul," as Benjamin puts it: "If the soul of the commodity which Marx occasionally mentions in jest existed, it would be the most empathetic ever encountered in the realm of souls, for it would have to see in everyone the buyer in whose hand and house it wants to nestle."[171] By contrast, picking up again the theme

of "unpopularity," *Open Creation,* as other small press pamphlets, has no need to be consumed simply for the sake of turnover because it does not valorize the labor of its production, and so it can elide such expansive appeal. Against the dominant mode of marketing commercial books today (even the most difficult works of theory and critique), it "does not demand the approach of a reader," to quote Mallarmé once more.[172] Relieved of this, its seductions—and they are indubitable—can be emergent to its assorted encounters, with all the gradations of affect and situated processes of negotiation and unsettling that such encounters produce.

In some of those encounters, the pamphlet will have an untransposable quality, a quality that is designed into an earlier version of *Open Creation.* The 1994 pamphlet is actually a revised edition; the preface notes a version published by the LPA the year earlier, in an issue of fifty to accompany a trip to the standing stones at Calanais in the Outer Hebrides, a Summer Solstice event associated with the commemoration of Jorn's death. There is a ritual dimension to the Calanais edition—it is something of a "talisman," in Tompsett's phrasing—that establishes the untransposable quality of this communist object. Unlike the revised edition, this pamphlet was not a mimic in the circuits of exchange of the book commodity but an artifact exclusive to its event, where an event can be described, in the topological terms of Jorn's text, as "the constancy of intensity and the unique feeling of the propagation of the process," "the transformative morphology of the unique."[173] This evental existence is recorded in the preface of the Calanais edition with an account of its publication and exclusive distribution and is consolidated with a copy held by Tompsett in a sealed envelope, posted from Calanais on the date of its publication. A few other copies were sent (along with inserts of local plant matter) to copyright libraries, where the envelopes take their own part in the pamphlet's untransposable form. In contrast to the instruction in the later edition to destroy the finely crafted cover, here librarians were advised to consider the inconsequential envelope to be intrinsic to the publication—postmarked, as it was, and adorned with an LPA mock first day of issue stamp. A sticker on the seal deploys the topological trope of nonlinearity, a mimesis with the model of "open creation" developed in the enclosed text: "Open with caution as effects are irreversible."