THE PLAY IN THE SYSTEM

THE ART OF PARASITICAL RESISTANCE

ANNA WATKINS FISHER

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BUY

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For Antoine

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One of the best ways to recognize new, effective political forms is that you don't like them. They are paradoxical. They are disgusting. It doesn't belong to the dark side, but it points to something that is already there.

—AKSELI VIRTANEN, FOUNDER OF ROBIN HOOD COOPERATIVE

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INTRODUCTION — TOWARD A THEORY OF PARASITICAL RESISTANCE

The tactics of appropriation have been co-opted. Illegal action has become advertisement. Protest has become cliché. Revolt has become passé. . . . Having accepted these failures to some degree, we can now attempt to define a parasitic tactical response. We need to invent a practice that allows invisible subversion. We need to feed and grow inside existing communication systems while contributing nothing to their survival; we need to become parasites.—**NATHAN M. MARTIN FOR THE CARBON DEFENSE LEAGUE, "PARASITIC MEDIA" (2002)**

In 2006 the tactical media collective Ubermorgen gained access to Amazon's digital library, capturing more than three thousand copyright-protected books sold on the site by manipulating its "Search Inside the Book" feature.[1] Unleashing a series of software applications known as "bots," Ubermorgen sent five thousand to ten thousand requests per book and reassembled them into PDFs that were then distributed for free via peer-to-peer (p2p) networks. The bots tricked Amazon's preview mechanism (designed to limit user previews in accordance with copyright protections) into furnishing complete volumes of the books. Rather than hacking Amazon's digital library, Ubermorgen acquired the files through what they described as a mode of "frontdoor access."[2] The group merely accepted Amazon's invitation to preview the books, albeit at a much higher rate than Amazon intended. The project, *Amazon Noir: The Big Book Crime* (figures I.1 and I.2), is one installment of what the self-described "big media hackers," in collaboration with Alessandro Ludovico and Paolo Cirio, call their *Hacking Monopolism Trilogy*. The trilogy is a series of "conceptual hacks" with which they claim

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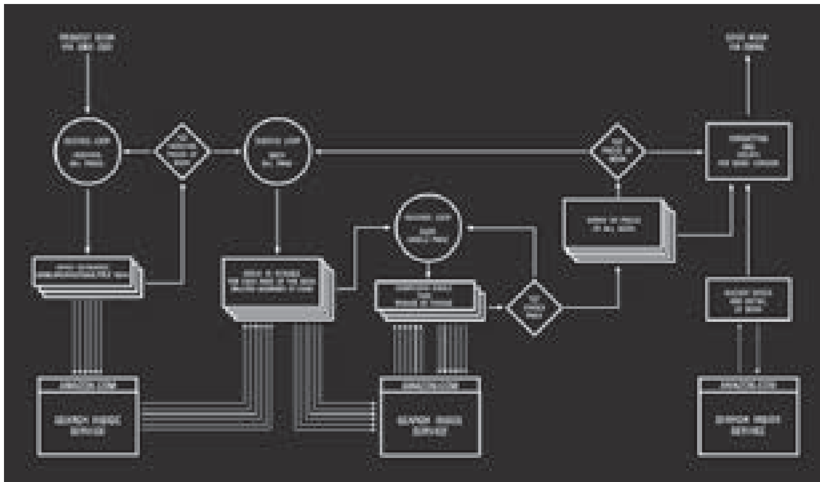

FIGURES I.1 AND I.2 Ubermorgen (with Alessandro Ludovico and Paolo Cirio), *Amazon Noir* logo and diagram, 2006. Source: Ubermorgen.

to have exploited "unexpected holes in [the] well-oiled marketing and economic system" of "three of the biggest online corporations (Amazon, Facebook, and Google)."[3] After Amazon threatened Ubermorgen with legal action, the case was settled out of court with Amazon buying the *Amazon Noir* software for an undisclosed sum on the condition that Ubermorgen sign a nondisclosure agreement, effectively containing the disruption and restoring the former system. What had been previously a fairly straightforwardly subversive artwork thus became financially implicated in Amazon's blackboxing practices.

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But even by giving in, Ubermorgen tells us something in their shift to complicity. Crucially, Ubermorgen had not only located a loophole in Amazon's marketing strategy; by obliging Amazon to settle in secrecy to ensure that the software stayed out of the public domain, the tactical media group exposed the corporation's investment in *an appearance of openness*. In the mid-2000s Amazon had begun pushing publishers to let them digitize their lists, a move that eventually helped the company secure a monopoly on the industry by making publishers dependent on Amazon for sales. *Amazon Noir*, and its co-option by Amazon, points to the hypocrisy by which big corporations like Amazon benefit from restricting the free circulation of information (strongarming publishers into exclusive agreements, dodging government regulation, criminalizing content sharing beyond their own site, forcing Ubermorgen into a nondisclosure agreement) while capitalizing on the ideal of shared access (its "Search Inside the Book" feature).[4] "Search Inside the Book" is a marketing tool that enables users to search through books while preventing access to the whole book. With *Amazon Noir*, as Nicholas Thoburn observes, Ubermorgen discloses "the inequity of the privatization of the nonscarce resource digital text, while taking advantage of the means by which the technological affordances of digital text are mobilized to excite consumer desire."[5] But not only does Amazon employ digital technology to privatize access; Amazon does not redistribute the profits it makes to the writers and contributors whose work it digitizes and samples via the tool.[6] The artwork—and resulting settlement—thus highlights the false pretenses by which Amazon profits from imposing a strong legal and moral distinction between the "good openness" represented by the company's free preview and the "bad openness" represented by Ubermorgen's pirated open access.[7] By insisting on its role as the good guy, Amazon disavows responsibility for how its dominant market position—the result of predatory business practices such as aggressive customer data mining and deep discounts intended to drive out small businesses and secure the cooperation of publishers—intimidates potential challengers. This shields the company from having to face up to its own compromised status: its potential liability for copyright infringement and antitrust violations.[8] Amazon's ability to claim the uncontested legal and moral high ground, to position itself as a champion of openness, is a function of its status as a monopoly—a position ironically secured by monopolizing and privatizing openness. As part of the settlement, Ubermorgen agreed not to discuss *Amazon Noir* publicly, and all media coverage of the artwork ceased.

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The critical issue at hand is not whether Ubermorgen's actions are right in the conventional legal or moral sense but why the same scrutiny is so rarely leveled at major players like Amazon. While a culture of nondisclosure agreements portends an era of posttransparency, wherein corporate and state interests feel little compunction to hide their nontransparent governance, *Amazon Noir* shows that powerful corporations like Amazon are nevertheless still invested in concealing their opacity and structural nonaccountability.[9] They selectively engage the law so as to keep their coercive practices in a proverbial black box—in this case, by avoiding going to court, black-boxing Ubermorgen's algorithm, and prohibiting any further press about the artwork.[10] It is not that they no longer hide their protocols, but they no longer hide that they are hiding them. The rise of big tech platforms like Amazon has been closely linked to the fulfillment of a postwelfare logic of capitalism that many have called neoliberalism. Digital technology both accelerates and emblematizes this reorganization of contemporary life and its turn toward privatization and deregulation, as a handful of leviathan-like corporations increasingly monopolize all aspects of industry, leaving democratic principles and institutions crippled in their wake.[11] Corporate monopolies' nontransparency and nonreciprocity (e.g., obstructionist strategies such as mandatory closed-door arbitration and settlements out of court) have become an open secret, even an expectation. As a result Amazon's commodification of a highly calculated form of open access cannot be remedied by an act of simple unmasking. Precisely because the hypocrisy of the system is already exposed, undermining it must necessarily take other forms.[12]

Ubermorgen's intervention effectively held Amazon hostage to the company's own purported openness (and legality) even as it performed a fundamental concession to the nontransparency of the system by agreeing to settle out of court. Put simply, the collective both called Amazon's bluff and folded at the same time. In the act of settling, Ubermorgen managed to make Amazon the patron of the anticorporate artwork. But by making Amazon the patron of their work, the group also sold out. What are we to make of the dual effect of this action? Does *Amazon Noir* ultimately reject or reinforce Amazon's monopolization of information? Is the artwork *resistant* or is it *complicit*? And more to the point, are these designations mutually exclusive? Does Ubermorgen's settling with Amazon nullify the critical potential of the work?

Like *Amazon Noir*, the performance-based artworks explored in this book manifest a logic of aesthetic resistance whose meaning and effects are far more indeterminate, far harder to pin down, than those which animated

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much of avant-garde and oppositional art in the late twentieth century. These artworks take seriously the ambiguity that is already implied by the word *resistance*, as an act that necessarily presupposes the structural conditions against which it struggles, precisely because it cannot destroy or escape them outright. By turns irreverent, irksome, and disturbingly amoral, the artworks I discuss are not virtuous. They are not good or reassuring in the way we may typically think of political art. But these works nevertheless raise necessary and difficult questions about the meaning and value of resistance, and the very possibility of critique, in a moment of ubiquitous appropriation and financialization characterized by extreme consolidations of capital and ever more enmeshed and dependent relationships to power. Can something still be considered resistant if it is complicit with the structural conditions it challenges? Is resistance thinkable from a position that is not autonomous but embedded?

This book responds to calls for politico-aesthetic strategies adequate to the waning sense of agency in a moment when the political tools on hand appear co-opted in advance. It begins from the premise that conventional notions of radical art and politics, gestures of transgression and refusal inherited from twentieth-century avant-garde aesthetics and revolutionary politics, traffic an idealism that does not fully account for the deep structural enmeshment of the contemporary subject. As corporate and state entities have become more efficient at recuperating disruption back into the workings of capital—and as digital technologies have intensified surveillance and accelerated appropriation—control and resistance have become nearly indistinguishable. Projects of artistic subversion and activist resistance not only appear to be impotent gestures or anachronisms of a bygone era, but, even more perniciously, seem to throw gas on the fire of systems of extraction and exploitation.[13] What are the meaning and value of a politics of disruption when artworks that are critical of corporations and government institutions can be said to help them—however inadvertently—close their loopholes? When hackers actually help states and corporations improve the security of their information systems?[14] When anti-establishment art and modes of critique are adopted as profitable marketing strategies?[15] What, we might ask, is the efficacy of resistance when it performs an immunitary function that renders the mechanisms it seeks to challenge all the more impervious to it? Today, when disruption and critique are not what threaten the stability of the system but are essential to its functioning, would-be radical artists and critics find themselves implicated in, even feeding, the very power structures they seek to oppose.[16]

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The Play in the System is not a book about specific digital platforms, practices, or technologies; neither is it a book that focuses on contemporary artists and interventionists either working in a particular media or visual genre or representing a specific ethnicity or gender. It is a book about an idea, a system, the emergence of a new aesthetic and critical formation in response to the blunted force of frontal resistance in the face of ever more accommodating and entrenched systems of power. The digital is not necessarily the medium or site of exhibition of these artworks; it is the informing condition of their emergence. The digital constitutes a favorable milieu for the consolidation of power structures that predate it, for technologies, sold as empowering, draw us ever more tightly into their ideological mechanisms through apparatuses of capture and economies of dependency. This study reconceives resistance under what Gilles Deleuze famously termed the regime of control, where power has moved outside disciplinary spaces of enclosure and made openness its constitutive promise.[17] Control, as compared to discipline, describes a formation of power that is more indirect, unbounded, and "flexible."

The book introduces and theorizes this tactic of complicit resistance as *parasitism*. Parasitical works use art as a means to wedge open—to redirect or subtly re-incline—the mechanisms used to justify and legitimize the privatization of resources and access. Parasitism responds to a contemporary political economy in which less powerful players are increasingly constrained and made dependent by the terms of their relationships to more powerful players. A new landscape of mass precarity has emerged in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis and the rise of the digital platform economy, as wealth and influence have consolidated ever more narrowly in the hands of a powerful few. Neoliberal conditions in the Global North (this book focuses specifically on the United States and Europe) present a seeming impasse for the once more reliable strategies of opposition and refusal associated with 1960s-, 1970s-, and 1980s-era anti-institutional, Marxist, and feminist art and critique as hegemonic power has immunized itself against these strategies by absorbing and monetizing once radical projects. As second- and third-wave feminism, cultural studies, and institutional critique have been integrated into and canonized by prestigious higher education and art institutions, the sites of analysis from which structural power has been most effectively critiqued have themselves threatened to become hegemonic. At the same time, the economic precarity of a new generation of radical artists and activists has been made more and more dependent on corporate and institutional resources for their financial survival, weighing

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down their political commitments with a sense of ambiguity. This techno-cultural and economic shift has transformed contemporary interventionist and feminist aesthetics, and it is the parasitical works of artistic resistance that emerge from this climate change that this book explores.

To understand how some have forged resistance within these conditions, the book convenes an original archive of (mostly) lesser-known and emerging artists and interventionists working on the margins of the mainstream art world and the traditional scholarly canon, who have been compelled to operate within this inhospitable—or rather, all too hospitable—order. I argue that the uptake (and rejection) of parasitism within particular strands of art and activism signals a tactical repositioning, a means by which certain artists and interventionists have sought to highlight and operationalize their contingent and derivative status with respect to established radical critical and aesthetic traditions. The artworks in this book at once inherit from and sit in uneasy relation to aesthetic strategies and practices associated with the twentieth-century feminist avant-garde insofar as they contest power structures while also highlighting their own complicity with such structures. The conditions that constitute these artists' host milieus vary from chapter to chapter. For interventionist artists working in the vein of institutional critique, it is the inexorability of digital and legal apparatuses of corporate and state power; for experimental women artists and writers, it is the dominating presence of an already established male avant-garde; and for a younger cohort of performance artists struggling to survive in the postcrisis economy, it is the outsized institutional shadow cast by an earlier feminist art canon. Many of these artists have found themselves precariously employed, increasingly reliant on the creative and academic gig economies of the neoliberal university and art market. Stringing together experimental festival appearances and adjunct teaching, performances in alternative art spaces, and exhibitions on social media while living off credit cards, most of the artists represented in this book reflect the burdens of a landscape of mounting debt, failing public infrastructure, and diminishing professional horizons. Here generation is thus understood less as a question of age than of sensibility and situation, for it is now defined by one's perceived contingency within the new economy of precarity.

The book is organized around the escalation and distortion of this tactic of resistance. It examines artworks across a number of genres and sites of practice that increasingly problematize the parasite-host binary over the arc of the book; as the political stakes of these works get messier, they increasingly display the critical and ethical limits, some might argue the reductio ad

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absurdum, of parasitism as a minoritarian tactic as it slides into autocritique. The book focuses on art because art has always been parasitical—always already compromised by virtue of being caught up in the economy of its consumption and patronage. This introduction lays out an affirmative theory of parasitical resistance, while the chapters that follow are case studies and readings of how it works in practice. The first part of the book explores parasitism in the context of interventionist works of systemic and institutional critique, and the second part looks at works in the arena of feminist art and aesthetics. The difference in scale between the examples in the first and second parts and the power differentials they represent are necessary to the book's investigation of the various faces and strategies of dominant power and the nature of its investment in appearing open and accessible, for these power differentials shape the forms of resistance it affords. The feel-good conceptualism of *Amazon Noir* looks a bit like a Robin Hood story, with hackers robbing the powerful and redistributing the spoils to the people. But when later artworks examined here use the same parasitical tactics against individuals, without the same altruistic effects, it can be harder to see them as resistance to power.

In 2009 a London-based Irish conceptual artist, Roisin Byrne, performed a very similar operation of parasitical resistance to Ubermorgen's. Instead of a megacorporation, though, Byrne targeted the German conceptual artist Jochem Hendricks, ripping off one of his most famous works. Byrne, then an MFA student at Goldsmiths, enticed Hendricks into an extended email correspondence after being, as she put it, "moved by an admiration for his work."[18] Posing as a fan, she turned Hendricks's reputation as a gadfly back on him, imitating and raising the stakes of his own methods at his expense. Whereas Byrne is a relative unknown (despite appearing on the BBC4 doc series *Goldsmiths: But Is It Art?* the same year), Hendricks is known for controversial works that challenge legal and moral boundaries. He has displayed the taxidermied corpses of fighting dogs (*Pack*, 2003–6) and paid undocumented workers to count millions of grains of sand (*Grains of Sand*, 1999–2007), even going so far as to describe the latter work as a magnanimous move on his part.[19] Hendricks characterizes his practice as a game without limits: "I start the game but whatever happens is fine, as long as people aren't bored."[20] He explores what he can get away with in the name of art.[21] Hendricks's work tests avant-garde art's capacity to function as a site of critical reflexivity and thus to be used as an alibi for actions that would otherwise be considered illegal or immoral. By staging art's potential complicity with exploitative economies of animal abuse and vulnerable labor, his

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work provides a platform for reflection on practices of exploitation, while at the same time Hendricks himself profits from circulating these practices as art.

When Hendricks came to Goldsmiths as a visiting lecturer, Byrne intervened as the university was processing his payment, replacing the bank information on his invoice with her own, rerouting his payment to her account. (Byrne exhibits a copy of the invoice but provides few details about how she accomplished this.) She then used the funds to create a replica of Hendricks's best-known work, *Tax* (2000). For *Tax*, Hendricks had purchased gold bars in the exact amount that he owed to the government and claimed them as "artist's materials" on his tax return. She called the piece *Look What You Made Me Do*. Arguably Byrne only played Hendricks's own script back to him. But when she told him what she'd done, he insisted on differentiating her practice from his. In an email responding to Byrne, he wrote, "If you are able to convince me with a profound concept and content, we can talk." Hendricks's response suggests that he did not take Byrne's work seriously, for he characterized the piece as a joke ("Of course I was laughing when I read your confession") and asked Byrne to further justify the merits of the piece ("Meaning, content are the major points," he pontificated).

Just as Ubermorgen demonstrated that Amazon's dominant market position enabled them to set the terms of access—to distinguish between their free preview (good openness) and Ubermorgen's pirated open access (bad openness)—Byrne's *Look What You Made Me Do* puts on display Hendricks's dominant position, his investment in his ability to act as gatekeeper, to determine what constitutes a legitimate artwork and what is merely a bad feminist prank or a lazy student imitation. In her artwork Byrne cleverly uses the copy (a symbol for what is considered secondary, degraded, feminized) to highlight how differently the same conceptual art script signifies when the artist is female.[22] The title of Byrne's piece, *Look What You Made Me Do*, uses the language of a (usually male) abuser, suggesting provoked aggression and the inevitability of retaliation while inverting the gender dynamic; in so naming her replica of *Tax* (a piece that symbolizes Hendricks's financial and social capital as a white European male), Byrne invokes systematic sexism as her alibi, in the same way that Hendricks himself uses power and exploitative social and economic structures as alibis. By parasiting the parasite, she discloses the masculine privilege that underwrites his claim to legitimate subversion. In creating a replica of his most famous work, Byrne literalizes and hyperbolizes long-held notions of femininity as a bad copy of or vampiristic threat to masculinity. As an act of feminist revenge,

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FIGURE I.3 Installation view of Roisin Byrne, *Look What You Made Me Do*, The Goma, Madrid, 2009. Photo by Borja Díaz Mengotti.

however, Byrne's replica "enacts the literalism that would enable its own dismissal," as Sara Ahmed has argued of Valerie Solanas.[23]

But the project's act of replication is only one facet of *Look What You Made Me Do*, which, though also comprising sculpture, photography, conceptual art, and installation, is best understood as a work of performance art, insofar as Hendricks's response to Byrne's provocation is the centerpiece of the work. (Similarly, Ubermorgen touted *Amazon Noir* as a "performative media event," and the project encompassed the reactions of the corporate entity, mainstream media, and legal system to their provocation.)[24] The critical gesture of Ubermorgen's and Byrne's artworks is not the copies themselves but the unauthorized acts of appropriation they represent and the responses they elicit. When Byrne shows the piece in a gallery setting (as she did in 2009 at The Goma in Madrid), she also exhibits Hendricks's artist monograph and headshot, a photograph of *Tax*, and redacted copies of the invoice and their email correspondence—"trophies" of her intervention (figure I.3).[25] Like Ubermorgen, whose logo and diagram for *Amazon Noir* resembles nothing less than the black box of Amazon's business practices, the work on display at The Goma is what Byrne is *able to get away with taking*.

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Hendricks's *Tax* purports to be a critical reflection on what it means to take capital out of circulation (gold bars being the reserve for those who do not participate in the exchange of virtualized capital), yet Hendricks himself remains possessive of his own cultural currency. Both *Tax* and *Grains of Sand* are artworks precisely about how the meaning and value ascribed to actions depend on the bodies that perform them or contexts in which they are performed, yet when Hendricks finds himself the target—when he is given an opportunity to yield some of his capital (both literal and symbolic) to Byrne—he is unwilling to acknowledge the legitimacy of her conceptual project. He reserves for himself the role of authority, which is precisely the role that his work takes pride in subverting—a remarkably unreflexive response. By retreating into the discourses of originality, Hendricks betrays the limits of his willingness to play the game, whose limits he once boasted were boundless. In his exchange with Byrne, Hendricks manifests his authority as an established white male artist, both as a function of individual identity and as a structural position; he has a monopoly on the position of the subversive artist in the context of their relation, and so he has the power to set the terms of their encounter.[26] Whereas Ubermorgen's incursion into Amazon's marketing tool fits within a recognizable anticapitalist narrative, Byrne's targeting of Hendricks provokes a more complicated response. While few are likely to identify with Amazon (which is faceless, impersonal, and dominant), more are likely to identify with Hendricks or at least find him sympathetic, thus complicating the effect of Byrne's critique. Because her act of appropriation is so imitative and so off-putting, Byrne's intervention simultaneously calls out and recalcifies Hendricks's positionality—an outcome she likely did not intend.

What critical and political value do such artistic projects have in our current moment? Do they ultimately achieve anything? Certainly their implications as anticapitalist and feminist interventions are debatable. Their gains appear mostly symbolic. Their effects, typically kept off the official record, are largely unverifiable. By probing and testing the oppressive conditions they inhabit, these works risk inadvertently legitimizing and expanding such conditions by reinforcing what they set out to critique. Yet for all of their limitations, works like *Amazon Noir* and *Look What You Made Me Do* also tell us something important about the systems of power in which they operate, for they manifest the ambivalence that necessarily contaminates any artistic or critical project of resistance today. They demonstrate a sense of being out of options. But more hopefully, they outline ways it may still be possible to express a kind of resistance from *within* this problematic.

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This book explores the following questions: What subversive possibilities might the complicit subject still hold? Can complicity be refashioned into a tool of resistance and redistribution? Both Ubermorgen and Byrne model ways of animating complicity as a tactic of furtive resistance. The fear of being complicit has helped maintain the idea that proximity to dominant power means allegiance to the social order. But the projects described here explore whether certain subjects can leverage their complicity (structural or circumstantial) with more powerful entities in order to open up unanticipated lines of intervention, redistribution, and potentially solidarity with more marginalized subjects—subjects whose identities do not always allow complicity as an option.[27] The artworks sketched in this introduction, like those that are analyzed in the rest of the book, exemplify the compromised performance of resistance that this book advances as *parasitism*. The term calls to mind insects, bacteria, viral agents. But this book is about something else: here parasitism captures the inescapability of dominance and the problem of structural dependency—perennial feminist concerns made newly urgent by an inexorable and hypernetworked neoliberal present wherein the experience of subjectivity has assumed the general form of parasitism. The problem of the parasitical guest, made complicit by its dependent circumstances, reanimates classic preoccupations of feminist theory, namely the secondary, supplementary, precarious status of women and of sexual and racial minorities under patriarchy.[28] To be a parasite is to be a guest in one's own home.

The theory of parasitical resistance advanced in this book draws on a range of critical and aesthetic experiments with the parasite as an ambivalent and nonemancipatory figure of institutional and systemic critique and intervention, ranging from the writings of the French philosopher Michel Serres to embedded art and design practice, from the digital incursions of tactical media to the tactics of free riding and "weapons of the weak."[29] While these previous engagements with and invocations of parasitism are not the book's focus, this body of work grounds and informs my conceptualization of parasitism as a blueprint for a compromised ethics of feminist, queer, and/or subaltern appropriation, wherein the parasite undermines its host system only to the degree that it can get away with it.

In its ideal form, the parasite advanced here is a figure neither of false consciousness nor of romanticized complicity but one imbued with the capacity for subliminal dissent: a form of alterity able to swim in hostile waters, if only temporarily. The parasite is an agent that can successfully install itself within the host system and can survive the host's attempts to inoculate itself

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against the parasite. As the parasitologist Claude Combes explains, parasite-host systems work differently from prey-predator systems. In prey-predator systems, after a mouse is eaten by a cat, its body and genetic information soon disappear. In parasite-host systems, the parasite enters into a persistent state of intimate cohabitation in its host, and its genetic information is conserved side by side with that of the host; the parasite's genetic material is not metabolized into the host but remains discrete within it (figure I.4).[30] The parasite-host system thus offers a temporal (*enduring*), spatial (*immanent*), and relational (*dependent*) model in which embeddedness and relative contingency do not mean total subsumption or eventual assimilation; instead they signal the possibility of incrementally redirecting the host's resources from inside. In an all-pervasive contemporary social, political, and economic system, parasites demonstrate that enmeshment need not be antithetical to disruptive action. The parasite's incremental undermining offers a sorely needed alternative to the overdetermining binary of radical versus reformist action. Parasitism inverts the dynamic at work in what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence" and Lauren Berlant "slow death" (the gradual and often invisible toll of environmental crisis and neoliberal attrition of social welfare on the poor), operating instead a kind of *slow resistance*, which goes along with the falsely innocuous and inviting front of hegemonic entities in order to allow something else just as imperceptibly to emerge.[31]

I am not suggesting that radical politics are obsolete, nor am I suggesting that frontal action is ineffective. Parasitical resistance on its own is necessarily inadequate. Rather, in a moment when modes of direct opposition are subject to violent elimination and rapid co-option, this book explores how we might account for nonfrontal or oblique (nonconfrontational) expressions of resistance that might otherwise go overlooked, whose mechanisms and implications are easily read and dismissed as mere capitulation. Parasitism is foremost a politics of disidentification. My understanding of the parasite's antagonistic yet unavoidable relationship to its host system (its status as both different from and part of the host), and thus the critical potential of its performance of complicity, is fundamentally informed by José Esteban Muñoz's theory of disidentification. For Muñoz, the disidentificatory subject of queer of color performance operates neither a straightforward identification nor a counteridentification with majoritarian culture but instead a "working on, with, and against . . . at a simultaneous moment."[32] Muñoz writes, "Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that

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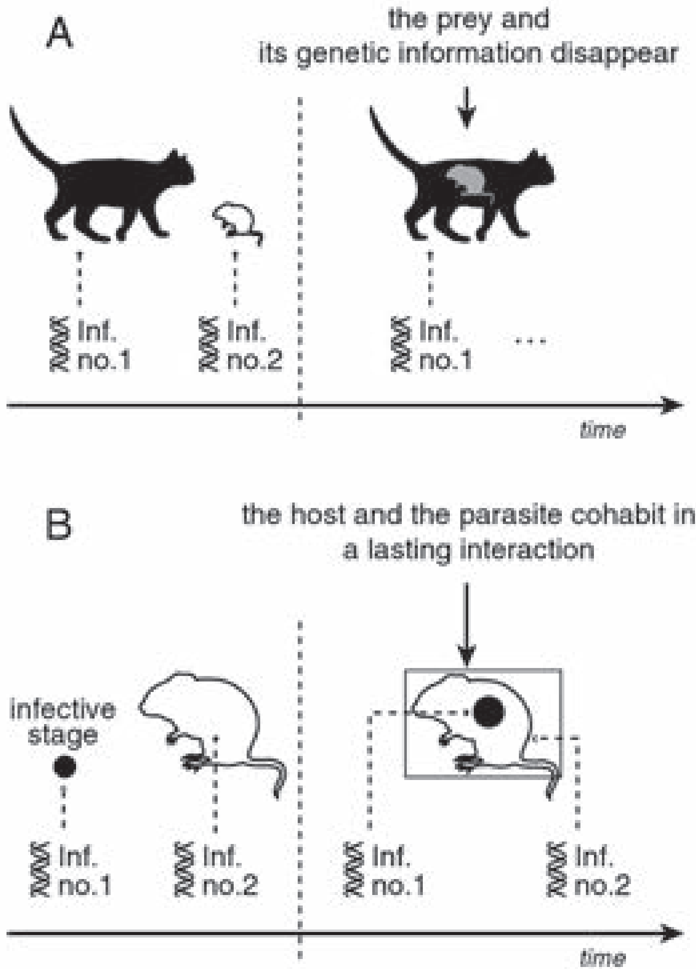

FIGURE I.4 Illustration from Claude Combes's *The Art of Being a Parasite*, 2005.

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tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance."[33] Whereas queer performance theorists like Muñoz and Judith Butler have focused on how subjects outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate, appropriate, and rework dominant culture as a strategy of survival, this study explores how minoritarian subjects with the racial or cultural capital to pass within and access protections within majority culture can manipulate the appearance that they acquiesce to power so as to undermine its functioning.[34] In these accounts of disidentification *performance* is not simply a concealment but a mode by which processes of subjectivation are negotiated and contested in ways that are not immediately recognizable as such. Where the more radical subject of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's undercommons, that "unassimilated underground" of institutional life, is said "to be in but not of" the hegemonic space it occupies, the more ambivalent parasitical subject can be said to be *both in and of* the space of the host—or, more precisely, it is both *of* and *not of*.[35] In this sense the parasite always walks the line between disidentification and overidentification, a hyperbolic form of mimicry by which privileged actors can parody authority.[36] These accounts offer a means of foiling the systematic work of interpellation and leave open the possibility for resistance from within.

As corporate practices and digital technologies have consolidated the project of privatization, they have incorporated and commodified difference and dissent, transforming the social field into a system, a closed circuit, a rigged game. *The Play in the System* advances an account of resistance in the face of increasingly totalizing analyses of power in critical and media theory in recent decades. The book brings the critical paradigm of performance to bear on the contemporary co-option of resistance. It is a work of cultural studies that stages a rare encounter among the fields of digital studies, performance studies, feminist and queer studies, political theory, and contemporary art history and criticism. Curating an archive of little-studied and emerging artists and interventionists not previously discussed in relation to one another, this study develops a logic of artistic resistance for a neoliberal networked era in which it is not a question of getting out but, following Foucault, it is instead "a question of how to work the trap that one is inevitably in."[37] The book discloses acts of parasitical resistance across sites of extreme consolidation and nonreciprocity: corporate monopolization, state power, toxic masculinity, and millennial precarity. Employing methods of discourse analysis and textual and visual close reading, it builds an

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analytical framework for understanding the adoption of this new critical and aesthetic paradigm of resistance in the spheres of digital art activism, institutional critique, and feminist art and performance.

But before we can imagine or access such forms of resistance, we need to ensure we fully understand the problem itself: the host milieu in which the parasite must operate. When I theorize a particular instantiation of parasitism as a minoritarian performance, I am thus also theorizing a particular mode of hospitality as a majoritarian performance. This dyadic structure is captured in the coerciveness of the host's *nongenerous giving* and the resistant effect of the parasite's *nonproprietary taking*. I argue (1) that powerful entities, from corporate monopolies to privileged individuals, perform hospitality, promoting and instrumentalizing precarity while masquerading as generous; and (2) that this performance of what I call *coercive hospitality*, while oppressive, contains within it a possible kernel of resistance.

THE NEOLIBERAL HOST AND COERCIVE HOSPITALITY

Who or what precisely is a host? I reserve the term *host* for an entity whose ability to claim a universal status endows it with the power to authorize or withhold resources and access. Corporations and digital platforms are some of the most easily recognizable hosts given the seemingly inescapable nature of their power. Indeed parasitism's new visibility as a critical and aesthetic formation is inseparable from the sense of inexorability wrought by our technopolitical juncture, from the totalizing logics of the internet to the unprecedented scalar complexity of life in the Anthropocene. Today neoliberal citizens find themselves reliant on a system whose conditions they have little or no ability to negotiate. In this system hospitality is the new dominant as experiences of uncertainty and dispossession, once consigned to the downtrodden few, move up the socioeconomic ranks.[38] To live in and with neoliberalism over the past decades is to have witnessed: 1) *the rise of a host economy*, as the privatization of social life has given way to an extreme consolidation of power in the hands of a few; and 2) *the recasting of the citizen as a parasite*, as citizenship has undergone a violent redefinition as a condition of precarity. Precarity describes the state of being dependent on the generosity of another: the Latin *precarius* refers to that which is "given as a favour" or "the idea of being given something—the right to occupy land, or to hold a particular position—'at the pleasure of' another person, who might simply choose to take it back at any time."[39] The generalizability of the parasite as a model of neoliberal subjectivity is thus indexical of the extent to which a

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certain form of power has increasingly represented itself as hospitable. (This neoliberalized soft power of coercive hospitality, however, has not replaced but rather is coextensive with the hard power of militarized policing and neofascism.)[40] Conceiving of neoliberalism as a host system through the classical paradigm of hospitality enables us to see it as a paternalistic logic that operates through the promise and withholding of protection and care to citizens, addressed as dependents.

By now the narrative of neoliberalism's entrenchment in social and political life is well rehearsed: in the drive to maximize profitability, risk and economic burden are placed on the very individuals and institutions that prop the system up.[41] Workers' benefits are repackaged as entitlements for the undeserving, and charity is instrumentalized in the guise of corporate responsibility. Voters are no longer shareholders of the state, which now unapologetically seeks to please its private investors. Public administration gives way to corporate governance, and citizenship is recast as a debt to be paid. Commonwealth resources such as water and scientific knowledge, in which in principle all citizens hold an equal interest, are taken out from under them and privatized. As private interests have held tighter sway over public life, the possibilities for occupying public space have been constricted as the expanded dominion of private property has made the commons ever more inhospitable to citizens.

These developments have not been experienced in the same way by all; a nuisance for some, they have meant a constant challenge to survival for others.[42] Laws have criminalized basic human activities such as eating and sleeping precisely at the moment when the number of homeless people outstrips the shelter beds available, making it effectively impossible for people to survive outside of the capitalist economy.[43] The assault on the homeless exemplifies the constriction and criminalization of public life under neoliberalism: LA restaurants and markets have erected elaborate enclosures to "protect" their garbage from growing homeless populations; France has only recently outlawed practices requiring that employees throw bleach on discarded food, ostensibly discouraging dumpster divers "to avoid being implicated in case someone gets sick"; and "anti-homeless spikes" and benches with armrests proliferate in urban centers from Montreal to Tokyo, making it difficult to sleep in public spaces.[44] These "hostile architectures" evidence the narrowing of acceptable scripts for occupying public and commercial space.[45] This has had the effect of inscribing contemporary social life within a logic of imposition: rent and taxation, credit and debt. It has reframed the terms of neoliberal citizenship as those of a patronage system. Expropriated

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from the commons, citizens are then offered the commons back *for rent*—an illusory choice within a system of coercive hospitality.

As many have shown, the reprivatization of what already belongs to the people is the defining feature of the twenty-first-century economy. This shift makes visible the logic at the heart of the digital platform economy, wherein users must go through gatekeepers to retrieve their own data, pay a third party to interact with one another, and submit to ever-changing terms and conditions to access their own content. As one IBM executive summed it up in an internal memo titled "The Digital Disruption Has Already Happened," the "World's largest taxi company owns no taxis (Uber)," the world's "largest accommodation provider owns no real estate (Airbnb)," the world's "largest phone companies own no [telecommunications infrastructure] (Skype, WeChat)," and the "most popular media owner creates no content (Facebook)."[46] The new economy is a host economy. What we find today is a multiplication of intermediaries, a growing economy of hosts that create no original content and offer no services in the traditional sense; instead they sell access to territory and infrastructure while capitalizing on the work of those who build and use it.[47] By strategically positioning themselves as "platforms," Tarleton Gillespie has argued, such companies monetize the content produced by others while minimizing liability.[48] They wear the mantle of generosity while capitalizing on spectacles of their own magnanimity; they pose as free and open while concealing the rent or tax they take.

Hospitality becomes coercive when the host alone is able to set the terms of its relationship with the guest and when those terms disavow the unequal and nonconsensual nature of the relationship.[49] Coercive hospitality thus speaks to the capacity of certain entities and actors to exempt themselves from or buy themselves out of the very ethics of care and structures of accountability that they profess to embody and to which they subject others. Crucially, however, coercive hospitality describes a specific disposition of power or mode of structural entitlement that exists both at the level of institutional and bureaucratic protocols and at the more mundane interpersonal level. The host is always at home, always entitled to space, always dictating the terms of access and belonging to others. The host's "rightful place" is never up for discussion; his papers are never demanded.[50] But like the parasite, the host is a *structural position* rather than a specific identity or subject position (though certain identities or subjects occupy this position more readily than others).[51] Who occupies the positions of host and parasite is ultimately less a matter of fact than of perspective and power; the normative language of social parasitism is, as Serres has shown, a deictic maneuver by

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which certain subjects get called out and others don't.[52] The host and parasite are, moreover, neither ontological entities nor fixed identities. As this book will show, the same entity can occupy the position of host and parasite at different times—sometimes even at the same time. The performance of the host need not be cynical nor even fully conscious; performance is not mask play but a complex staging of power. Indeed, more often than not, the host does not recognize its structural position and the violence of its capacity to include and exclude. When called out by the parasite, it is often quite sincere in its surprise. Just as Hendricks feels miscast in the story Byrne tells about him and his work, Amazon executives are unlikely to characterize the corporation's monetization of openness as a dispossessive strategy. If anything, the host's power rests precisely on this capacity not to recognize its structural authority over others.

Given the position's scalar relativity, it follows that not all hosts are created equal. The hosts I discuss range from powerful multinational corporations and states to individuals. Each chapter examines how *privatization* and *privacy* work hand in hand as immunitary strategies by which host entities and actors cultivate unanswerability in different ways. Each examines a different mode or valence by which majoritarian actors have privatized the commons or commandeered their privilege, in turn opening up different modes or valences of parasitical resistance. The respective hosts in these chapters prevent their own exposure to scrutiny, closing gaps and possible breaches, using technical, legal, moral, and intimate protocols to distance themselves from their parasites: the black box of big corporations' exploitative business practices (Ubermorgen's *Google Will Eat Itself* and Robin Hood Cooperative, discussed in chapter 1); the red tape of bureaucratic inefficiency and the liberal-democratic state's obfuscatory investment in its ethical righteousness (Núria Güell's *Stateless by Choice* and Kenneth Pietrobono's *Void [The Opposite of Property]*; chapter 2); the cease-and-desist letter and accusation of invasion of privacy that suggest the male cultural critic sees himself as outside of the cultural critique he offers (Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*; chapter 3); and the use of intellectual property to refuse to cede a place for younger performance artists at work in Marina Abramović's protectiveness over her legacy (Anya Liftig's *Anxiety of Influence* and Ann Liv Young's *Sherry Is Present*; chapter 4).

If part I, "Redistribution: Institutional Interventions," is tonally different from part II, "Imposition: Intimate Interventions," in its affective charge and level of intimate proximity, this is a function of the scale and nature of their hosts. Each chapter examines how a different hegemonic figure or

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functionary—the "open" corporate platform, the "welcoming" security state, the "progressive" male cultural critic, the "receptive" iconic woman artist—projects itself as a moral authority, a figure of conscience; while they prefer to regard themselves as outside of the power structures in which they operate, these figures and functionaries employ postures of benevolence and receptivity as alibis to cover the strategies that maintain their grip on power—hoarding their access to resources (wealth, private property, social capital, dynastic privilege) and restricting the access of others. When we name such entities *hosts* (without suggesting their equivalence or ascribing an ontology to them), what dynamics become visible?

In part I the host targets are leviathan-like structures, labyrinthine corporate and state institutions that exploit their massive scale through protocols of unanswerability. Chapters 1 and 2 investigate the strategies by which the multinational corporation and neoliberal state ensure and normalize their structural nonaccountability. Chapter 1 examines how corporate platforms enlist technological protocol as an alibi for their nonaccountability to their users and employees, and chapter 2 explores how the state tautologically invokes the law to justify itself. In part II the structural targets (or hosts) are individuals, public figures chosen as metonyms for forms of structural power. In chapter 3 I examine Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*, in which the real-life cultural critic Dick Hebdige is made to stand trial as a symbol of heteropatriarchy (the ultimate Dick); similarly, in chapter 4, I examine how a younger generation of white female performance artists (including Ann Liv Young, Anya Liftig, and Lauren Barri Holstein) reckons with the recent institutionalization of feminist performance art by targeting the equally celebrated and loathed performance artist Marina Abramović as the personification of a winner-take-all postcrisis art market. Part I thus explores the quandary of individual action and political refusal under present conditions; it is primarily diagnostic, more interested in making the limits of radical intervention visible than in transgressing them. In contrast, part II examines parasitical works that aggressively and queasily insist on intimacy with their hosts. When there would otherwise be no one to be held accountable, the artists nominate a single individual as representative of the hostile system in question in order to force a response, making it impossible for their hosts to ignore them or to remain indifferent. All these artworks thus address structural power, but the latter works stake their critiques in the personal rather than the institutional realm.

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THE LOGIC OF THE PARASITE

Let us now examine the other side of this codependent dyad. Parasitism describes a relation whereby an organism depends on a host for its continued survival. There is no outside to the parasite's relationship with the host: if the parasite kills its host, it goes down with it. Because the parasite is not separable from the host systems it attacks, it represents an ethically and politically complex model of nonoppositional resistance. The double-dealing parasite maintains itself by flattering and aggrandizing the host to its face while undermining it behind its back. The affordances of the parasite, which cannot dictate but can only respond to the terms of its environment, are well suited to the inescapability of the contemporary condition.

Despite common perceptions, parasitism was originally a social rather than a biological paradigm; scientists in the seventeenth century borrowed the term to describe forms of life that depend on others for survival, draining nutrients or gaining shelter at the expense of others.[53] Long before it came to be associated with biology, parasitism referred to a performance of complicity with subversive potential in ancient religious practice. In its little-known earliest form, parasitism described a mode of social passing at the table of the host, whereby a figure of lower birth is welcomed as a special guest of those in power in return for simulating affection and deference. A priest or temple assistant, the parasite earned his name (meaning "next to" the "food" [*para sitos*]) because he was permitted to dine with superior officers and enjoy meals at the host's expense as a reward for his specialized knowledge and religious consultation.[54] (This derivation is echoed in the biological concept of *commensalism*, which denotes an association between organisms in which one benefits while the other is not harmed; it is from the Medieval Latin *commensalis,* meaning *com-* "sharing" + *mensa* "a table.") The parasitical guest, aware of its precarious status at the table, its not-belonging, finds an opening for itself (and protection from reprisal) in the ritual form of obligation that lies at the heart of the ancient concept of hospitality as *xenia* (guest-friendship). These rituals of sharing forge an alliance of reciprocity between individuals from different social strata and yield benefits to both, such as shelter or favors.[55] By accepting the host's gifts, companions may be folded in as accomplices to (and occasional beneficiaries of) the host's power, by virtue of their social proximity and performance of friendship.

The parasite's means for responding to its situation, while not fully determined, are heavily constrained by its dependency on the host. The parasite is individuated, yet it is inconceivable—literally impossible—outside

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the ecosystem it inhabits. Parasitism, then, is best understood as a performance of social acquiescence under coercion rather than as a mode of action predicated on individual subjectivity. What is so provocative and so difficult about parasitism as a paradigm of resistance is that it threatens to upend conventional critical rubrics for assessing political and ethical agency—notions of individual will and intentionality that presume an autonomous and rational subject. Lacking the full range of choice implied by such frameworks, the parasite is imbued with the quasi-subjectivity of the performer who must sing for their supper.

Its early association with social mobility was retained in the parasite's later use as a stock character in ancient Greek and Roman comedy—literally, a persona non grata, a position that could be occupied by donning its character mask.[56] The figure of the parasite was for much of its ancient history a neutral figure, coming into circulation as a derogatory term when it left the stage to threaten the wider economies of the world. At stake in the hatred of the parasite (a decidedly patriarchal fear of a kind of simulation that is unmistakably feminized) is its ability to trade in performance: it can use imitation as a tool to bend the protocols of the dominant order without being detected.[57] For Plato, mimesis, or the ability to "play" by manipulating appearances—in the parasite's case, to reflect back the desired image of the host—represents a troubling loophole by which one can interfere with the natural hierarchy of things.[58] Mimesis represents for him a counterfeit economy, an aesthetic loophole or dark art by which the artist can, through the trickery of artifice, upend the accepted truth of the social order and make it possible for slaves to be confused with kings.

It is this provocative (if not fully subversive) potential that informs Serres's characterization of the parasite as a *duplicitous guest*.[59] In what is the best-known philosophical account of the parasite, Serres offers a master theory of the parasite as an interdisciplinary, transhistorical actor with the potential to short-circuit normative hierarchies and economies of exchange.[60] In his most salient description, he uses the framework of immunology to describe the reaction the parasite elicits from its milieu, characterizing the parasite as a "thermal exciter" of its ecosystem. The parasite does not radically or obviously change the nature of the system; rather it introduces into the system a "minimal" and "differential" form of interference. The parasite smuggles in alterity under the guise of similarity. As Serres explains, by secreting a tissue identical to the host, the biological parasite neutralizes the host system's standard mechanisms for rejecting the potential threats posed by foreign bodies. By making the host think that it is cut from the same cloth, then in-

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crementally revealing itself, the parasite stuns the host's usual defenses. By the time the host realizes that it has been hijacked, it is too late: "The parasited, abused, cheated body no longer reacts; it accepts it; it acts as if the visitor were its own organ. It consents to maintain it; it bends to its demands." The interloping parasite *plays* its environment; it "plays a game of mimicry"; it "plays at being the same."[61]

But this parasitical mimicry is not a straightforward aping. The parasite does not so much *copy* the host as *adopt the script* of its host system. It does not imitate the host but simulates assent to it, dissolving its own singularity in the process. It disappears, as Serres puts it, "into the milieu that is the other."[62] The figure of the parasite, then, is abhorred not for its claimed inability or refusal to contribute to its host economy but for the threat it represents: its ability to pass as (or give the appearance of being) nonthreatening to the host and thus its potential to undermine the host-guest hierarchy. The parasite represents a breach that threatens to expose the contradictions of the "hospitable" values of its host economy.

As a mode of artistic intervention, parasitism is thus productive on two levels: *pragmatically* and *heuristically*. Pragmatically, it offers ways to envision a different form of politics when direct activist modes are foreclosed. While it can seem that the house always wins, parasitism demonstrates that systems too can be made to adapt. If neoliberal power works by dressing up market strategy as generosity through the masquerade of public image, then the parasite accepts its given role in order to remain in the game. The crucial dynamic is not opposition but (the appearance of) radical acceptance. Unlike their radical counterparts, parasitical works do not visibly challenge or openly contradict their host systems but adapt to operate on their terms. When leaving the system is not an option, playing along with one's constraints becomes, paradoxically, a means of owning one's lack of agency. Parasites affirm their hosts with manic intensity, jarring the hosts' routine operations by following their hegemonic scripts to the letter. The parasite locates a point of contradiction in its host (such as Amazon's and Hendricks's wish to appear to be moral authorities and thus legitimate arbiters of access) and moderately recalibrates the host's protocols of access, if only for a moment. Even as the host jostles to deflect this appearance of hypocrisy, the parasite often also provokes a response from the host akin to an immunological reaction, a bodily defense that attempts to neutralize the foreign agent. We see this kind of immunological reaction in Amazon's offer to settle and Hendricks's patronizing rationale, both attempts to discredit and neutralize their parasites. I argue that where bigger actors answer their parasites by

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trying to delay or avoid having to respond, black-boxing in order to protect a semblance of openness, smaller actors answer by acting offended or by invoking the discourses of privacy and private property. But these reactions only draw more attention to the original contradiction of the host's investment in appearing generous.

As a heuristic, parasitical works thus make several things explicit. First, they display the discursive mechanisms and administrative protocols by which the host tries to differentiate its own actions from those of its so-called parasites in order to rationalize its exceptional status—and that the host need not justify itself beyond a certain point. Second, they foreground the fact that what the host promotes as gratuitous acts of generosity are actually functional necessities, as hosts that claim to be autonomous and self-sufficient need their parasites. Third, they make visible the invisible stratification that pervades the system of institutional access, despite its claims that everyone is equal on the level of human capital. Consequently the parasite makes clear that the host's protocols, which purport to be fair and universal, are in fact conditional and mutable—if more for some than others.

Like hosts, those who can be said to hold parasitical subject positions do not all occupy the same relationship to dominant power; as such, they are not equally accommodated. The discourse of parasitism is often invoked to describe the struggle for survival of the most vulnerable subjects for whom, under especially hostile conditions, as Muñoz observes, resistance cannot be too frank or too conspicuous for fear of retaliation.[63] But parasitism is not only a function of the struggle to survive. The sense of parasitism foregrounded in this book emphasizes a more implicated, entangled, and ambiguous relationship to dominant power. This less cut-and-dried sense of parasitism comprises those subjects who serve as dominant power's chosen companions, its trophies of inclusion; these parasites are others or duplicitous hangers-on who can pass as belonging within spaces coded as white, as gender-conforming, as straight, as middle-class. They occupy social positions that afford them special access to those with power, yet they are denied autonomy by this arrangement; they remain precarious, for their inclusion is granted (or revoked) at the whim of the host.

Rather than seeking to expose this hypocrisy, to show the real face of power (as if such a thing were possible), the parasite enacts a second-order exposure. It exposes not the thing itself but the exploitability of its performance. Parasitical artists play this fiction of hospitality, which is an unguarded point of access to the host. The contemporary artists and interventionists explored in this book engage parasitism as a counterstrategy

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for using more powerful entities' pretense of benevolence—their desire to see themselves as inclusive of difference and dissent, however symbolic and perfunctory—as an opening by which certain minoritarian subjects can gain access. The phrase *the play in the system* invoked by my title refers to the working tolerance that exists within a system (required for its operation), which might be manipulated to alter the system's functions and to open up spaces of redistribution and critique that wouldn't otherwise be possible. It speaks to the possibility of accepting (and exploiting) the invitation that protocols of coercive hospitality make available to different ends from those intended by the host. The defining feature of parasitical works is their ability to make the very entities and institutions they confront into the reluctant hosts and patrons of their disruptions. The parasitical artist does this through exaggerated performances of dependency that compel the host either to accommodate them or to reveal the terms by which its hospitality is conditional. What I identify as resistance may not be fully conscious or even realized in the artworks I discuss. As we will see throughout the book, the parasite, almost as a matter of course, loses ground or gets co-opted in the process of launching an attack. What I call resistance is the differential between *what the host is willing to give* and *what the parasite is able to get away with taking.* It is the parasite's ability to calibrate its actions to this interval of accommodation, this limited room for maneuver, that is the play in the system.

THE THRESHOLD OF ACCOMMODATION

"How does the parasite usually take hold? He tries to become invisible. We must speak of invisibility again," Serres observes.[64] Let us map more precisely *how* the parasite becomes invisible: how it evades reprisal in spaces of domination, how it makes its opposition seem negligible or even useful to the host. The parasite's survival on the territory of the host is calibrated to what we might call the *threshold of accommodation* at which the host will allow it to endure without taking decisive action against it. Much as drivers who go only five to ten miles per hour over the speed limit (the threshold of accommodation within which they are unlikely to be ticketed), the parasite takes advantage of the margin of subjective enforcement, knowing that (for reasons of limited resources or potential equipment error) small-scale transgressions are unlikely to draw scrutiny from authorities. (This analogy, however, falsely presumes that all drivers bear the same relation to the police state and to detectability, when African American drivers are the most likely to be stopped and, like Hispanics, are ticketed, searched, and arrested

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at higher rates than white drivers. As antiblack police brutality has shown, non-white subjects are not met with the same leniency.)[65] This margin of tolerance afforded to some also serves the state, which gives only as much accommodation as it needs to in order to maintain the allegiance of those it governs. In the interlude that follows this introduction, I examine more systematically the thresholds of accommodation by which the host differentially enforces the access it grants to parasitical subjects.

The parasite's ability to inhabit and exploit the interval opened by the degree of leniency granted by the system is most of all a function of the potential loss posed to the host by what the parasite takes and the resources available to the host to surveil and discipline the parasite.[66] The parasite's performance of submission is on a continuum with that of the enslaved subject, the colonized subject, or the peasant—figures that, as Saidiya V. Hartman, Homi Bhabha, and James C. Scott have shown, respectively, feign acquiescence, even pleasure in submission, in order to survive.[67] These scholars elucidate the selective historical deployments of hospitality as a strategy of white supremacist, colonial, and imperial domination. However, in its Western, bourgeois manifestations, parasitism's performance of submission might be closer to Joan Riviere's 1929 psychoanalytic account of "womanliness as masquerade," in which she observed that highly intellectual women wear "the mask of femininity," flattering and wooing men by feigning delicacy and confusion.[68] The rather more privileged and duplicitous parasite examined in this book can still presume a degree of safety if it is detected; unlike the enslaved subject, the colonized subject, and the peasant, it is not faced with the consequences of bodily harm or death.

In such accounts of resistance and survival, the greater the risk posed by the performance, the more tightly the mask is worn. Hartman has observed that demonstrations requiring slaves to feign compliance and contentment for the slaveholder's pleasure ("puttin' on ole massa") were difficult to unmask as performances; how does one tell the difference, Hartman asks, between "the simulation of compliance for covert aims" and plain compliance?

> At the level of appearance, these contending performances often differed little. At the level of effect, however, they diverged radically. One performance aimed to reproduce and secure the relations of domination and the other to manipulate appearances in order to challenge these relations and create a space for action not generally available. However, since acts of resistance exist within the context of relations of domination and are not external to them, they acquire their character from these relations,

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and vice versa. At a dance, holiday fete, or corn shucking, the line between dominant and insurgent orchestrations of blackness could be effaced or fortified in the course of an evening, either because the enslaved utilized instrumental amusements for contrary purposes or because surveillance necessitated cautious forms of interaction and modes of expression.[69]

Similarly it is difficult to think through the parasite's resistance as it plays its host because its performed acquiescence has ambiguous effects. In this description of the master-slave relation, Hartman affirms the indeterminacy opened up by power's desire to be affirmed (what I have described as neoliberal authority's wish to be perceived as open and accessible). This account of resistance applies also to the broader host-parasite relation, in which the conspicuousness of the enactment of submission is bound to its conditions of subjection and enforcement. The parasite's potential as a figure of furtive resistance also relies on the undecidability of its intentions. The parasite finds momentary refuge in the flash of indeterminacy, the blind spot created by its ambiguous relationship to the host (*Is it or isn't it sincere?*).

Consider an example of how the parasite leverages a form of temporary illegibility or local know-how to negotiate the threshold of its host's hospitality. For his series *paraSITE* (1998–ongoing), the Iraqi American artist Michael Rakowitz attaches plastic inflatable shelters to the heating and cooling vents outside buildings in Boston and New York City. Using the air leaving the buildings to inflate and heat the structures, he appropriates the spare energy they emit to provide shelter for the homeless (figure I.5). Likewise, for *Parásitos Urbanos* (2005–7), the Mexican artist Gilberto Esparza creates robotic sculptures inspired by the surplus economy of Mexico City street vendors, who redirect stray electricity from nearby electric poles to power their stands.[70] Temporarily diverting the city's spare resources, these works model the parasite as a figure that locates and siphons off untapped pockets of energy in its host system. They showcase the fact that the parasite's reconfiguration of access points to resources is often situational, illicit, and makeshift.

Rakowitz has said that *paraSITE* was never intended as a replacement for social services but rather was "a symbolic strategy" designed to raise awareness about homelessness.[71] In the same way, the parasite can make its host system adapt (redirecting the wasted energy generated by industry into a rough and ready stopgap for the problem of homelessness) without questioning its foundations (making activist demands about the need for social services). The parasite can make the system adapt precisely because it does not call into question its fundamental principles. In Rakowitz's case, the parasite

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FIGURE I.5 Michael Rakowitz, *paraSITE*, 2000. Source: Michael Rakowitz.

does this practically by showing that this excess *can* be redistributed at no cost to the system and conceptually by calling out the greed and wastefulness of a postwelfare system of private ownership, while appearing relatively harmless. Rakowitz's and Esparza's parasites demonstrate the capacity to lay low or the social capital to pass without setting off too many alarms. The artists rely on the deniability provided by the projects' status as artworks (rather than activism) to ensure that their installations are not destroyed and that they are not arrested.

PLAYING ALONG: RETHINKING COMPLICITY FOR AN AGE OF EMBEDDEDNESS

The compromised position in which the artists and interventionists explored in this book find themselves recalls the feminist predicament famously captured by Audre Lorde as trying to dismantle the "master's house" using the "master's tools." How can one fight the man while being paid by him, drinking his Starbucks, and using his Apple products? As Lorde's argument goes, those who stand "inside the circle" of social acceptability can never get rid of structures of domination so long as they need and benefit from them. Meanwhile, for those subjects from whose survival and well-being the system has continually divested—predominantly poor women, lesbians, and women of

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color, Lorde argues—radical oppositionality is not a privilege but the only imaginable recourse.[72] How are we to understand the master's house today, when complicity with exploitation is an increasingly pervasive and automated structural condition, when those on the bottom need what those on top control and provide? In the contemporary digital economy, the master's house more closely resembles a platform; the liberal dream of every citizen owning their own home has been replaced by the neoliberal affordances of the rental economy represented by Airbnb. This transformation captures the neoliberal conversion of the welfare state into a *host*—a provider and facilitator of access that retains the rhetoric of care (but only the rhetoric). There is a hollow paternalism at the heart of neoliberal policy and discourse, which replaces the social safety net with individual responsibility, demonstrating care by enjoining individuals to take care of themselves.[73] The designation *host* attests to the difficulty of challenging forms of consolidated power that disavow their threat of physical violence (unlike the overt *master, oppressor, despot*) but whose capacity for violence nevertheless remains implicit in the formal and legal structures of ownership that still underwrite their authority.

As neoliberalism's automation of domination suggests, there is an unreconciled tension in how scholars have approached resistance as a small-scale tactic. Sometimes such tactics, which are premised on acting within the space of power, are characterized as the tools of weak or less-resourced actors (such as in certain media theory representations of the exploited citizen-user under digital capitalism); at other times they are characterized as the tools of privileged or more resourced actors (such as in certain critiques by queer and feminist of color scholars, for whom resistance is too reactive and too accepting of the status quo and for whom only the politics of radical refusal and practices of collective care are adequate to the intolerable conditions of life under racial capitalism).[74] Rather than resolving this tension, parasitism offers a third term. It is neither the selective interventionism of those who can afford to intervene, to play the game and then retreat, nor is it the absolute refusal of the most marginalized. Parasitism is not—in its appearance, methods, or effects—a liberationist politics; it does not directly fight, destroy, or refuse the conditions of capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist oppression. But when it redistributes what it takes from these host systems, the parasite can find common cause with more radical projects. My argument thus runs not counter to Lorde's but underneath it. It traces the contours of a submerged possibility whereby those inside the circle might simulate or exaggerate their complicity with the master as a tactic for undermining the master's house. Whereas Lorde emphasizes the impossibility

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of using the master's tools to completely dismantle the master's house, *The Play in the System* explores the room within structures of domination for something less than total dismantling but still capable of wearing away at them.

By passing as nonthreatening or even sympathetic, the artists I examine act as double agents or Trojan horses; they introduce forms of immanent and lateral interference, transforming their complicity with hegemonic structures into a counterintuitive resource for undermining them in plain sight. They get away with this by leveraging the ambiguous status of art and performance, which are perceived as relatively harmless, merely symbolic. The parasite's covert rebellion thus represents a tactical possibility afforded to those with the racial, sexual, and cultural capital to pass within spaces of white heterosexist masculine privilege. In all of the artworks I examine, the artists' complicity with the host economies they attempt to subvert bleed over, making the viewers or readers of the work also complicit and demonstrating that, while some are more compromised than others, no one is immune from this entanglement.

The chapters proceed from the more palatable and recognizable examples of this tactic to the more challenging. As the chapters progress, the artists' complicities with the structures they try to subvert reverberate more strongly. The political coordinates of the book shift, becoming both more pointedly self-critical and more feminist in orientation, as the parasite's fire begins to ricochet back on it. This intensification reflects the escalating levels of investment and thresholds of accommodation of the parasites explored here and the increasingly personal targets of the parasites' weaponization of complicity: complicity with the market in chapter 1, with state belonging in chapter 2, with heteropatriarchy in chapter 3, and with the legacy of white liberal feminism in chapter 4. Part I theorizes how the logic of coercive hospitality subtends institutional protocols. Chapter 1, "User Be Used: Leveraging the Coercive Hospitality of Corporate Platforms," examines how platform cooperativist projects play the scripts of coercive hospitality back on corporate platforms. Chapter 2, "An Opening in the Structure: Núria Güell and Kenneth Pietrobono's Legal Loopholes," examines legal incursions into state sovereignty and private property by the Spanish artist Núria Güell and the Chilean American artist Kenneth Pietrobono. These works investigate, at something of a remove, the system and the institutional structures that make up its economic, legal, and social operations; they read the fine print and work within the confines of the "9 to 5"; they ask big questions about how the system works and test its mechanisms—but mostly from a safe dis-

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tance. These incursions into corporate and state protocols have a certain conceptual cleanness to them: they settle out of court, they close the box, they do it all with an air of professional discretion. The relative sterility and formality of the opening chapters' parasitical interventions are a function of the institutional nature of their corporate and state hosts and the kind of bureaucratic tactics they make allowable.

In contrast, the artworks in part II deploy more visceral, relentless, and cringe-inducing tactics of parasitical resistance. Embracing parasitism as an emblematic site of feminist aesthetic practice, these works enact a far more aggressive confrontation with the host. They are messier, riskier, more audacious: fewer containment measures are taken, and as a result, they at times suggest an enactment of the parasite that poses real risks to its survival. It is not that the structural problematic or artistic methods are different than those in the first part, but that the targets have moved closer to home—to include the parasite's own romantic attachments and means of financial subsistence. Chapter 3, "Hangers-On: Chris Kraus's Parasitical Feminism," reads the literary motif of correspondence onto the host-parasite dyad by examining epistolary art projects by Chris Kraus (*I Love Dick*, 1997) and Sophie Calle (*Take Care of Yourself*, 2007). These projects engage in practices of viral accumulation, producing hundreds of love letters that stalk, and eventually overwhelm, the male hosts of their projects. Chapter 4, "A Seat at the Table: Feminist Performance Art's Institutional Absorption and Parasitical Legacies," complicates the apparent oppositionality of this sexual warfare by examining an antagonism within feminist aesthetic practice itself. The chapter foregrounds disidentificatory performances by a younger, precarious generation of would-be feminist performance artists, including Ann Liv Young, Anya Liftig, Amber Hawk Swanson, and Lauren Barri Holstein. These artists disidentify with an earlier generation of white liberal feminism, the generation that spawned these artists themselves, by employing a tactics of alienated self-parody and aggressive homage. Finally, in the coda, "It's Not You, It's Me: Roisin Byrne and the Parasite's Shifting Ethics and Politics," I examine the mutual dependence of art and criticism, following a chain of events whereby Roisin Byrne, previously known for stealing and forging the works of well-established male artists, began to steal and forge my scholarship on her art practice. These latter chapters refuse the discretion and propriety that characterized those earlier chapters, a refusal that is markedly feminist and that demands to know: Who gets to remain clean or to keep things hidden behind a screen? Who has the ability to stop the game? These chapters revisit the problem of the corporations' black-boxing

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of responsibility to show that propriety is also an alibi for privatization and that privacy is a feminist problematic.

The charge of complicity is often a disqualifying accusation marking the end, rather than the beginning, of a conversation about radical action (the inevitable rejoinder "You say you're anticapitalist, but . . ."). When many argue it is precisely at this moment that complicity must be called out and eradicated and that opposition must be at its most pure because to work within the system is to grant it legitimacy, these artists embrace complicity as a strategic opportunity for resistance. To be made complicit, as the word's etymology attests, is to be embraced, welcomed, folded in.[75] Our relentlessly accommodating neoliberal moment, which leverages individuals' structural dependence on large-scale informational and institutional powers, demands not a simple binary understanding of complicity (complicit/not complicit = bad/good) but a complex understanding, able to take the measure of a vastly asymmetrical and relational field of responsibility.[76] The autonomous individual (implicitly raced and gendered as white and cis male), imbued with the capacity for consent or refusal on which traditional conceptions of radical action are based, has progressively been replaced by a fragmented quasi-subject embedded in a system of hegemonic power and exploitation.[77] The purity and idealism implied by the political and ethical frameworks of intention and agency based on the notion of the liberal subject (a category from which so many have been excluded) no longer align with the ever more diffuse and improvisational expressions of neoliberal power. The rise of the network as a dominant cultural form, Patrick Jagoda has argued, can lead to a sense of despair, since it posits that everything is interconnected and "makes scarcely imaginable the possibility of an alternative or an outside uninflected by networks."[78] Users and citizens are interpellated as subjects who have the ability to be ethical and moral—and are financially, legally, and juridically held accountable for being so—while at the same time we are profiled and managed algorithmically within big data regimes that are indifferent to our subjective will.[79] For example, systems of data collection, as Finn Brunton and Helen Nissenbaum observe, are "still theoretically voluntary" but

> the costs of refusal are high and getting higher: a life lived in ramifying social isolation . . . [with] only very particular forms of employment, living far from centers of business and commerce, without access to many forms of credit, insurance, or other significant financial instruments, not to mention the minor inconveniences and disadvantages—long waits at

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road toll cash lines, higher prices at grocery stores, inferior seating on airline flights—for which disclosure is the unspecified price. It isn't possible for everyone to live on principle; as a practical matter, many of us must make compromises in asymmetrical relationships, without the control or consent for which we might wish.[80]

But even as this book explores the possibilities opened up by short-circuiting the idea that complicity is the opposite of resistance—that in order to challenge domination, minor actors must be unimplicated—it should not be misunderstood as a celebration of complicity. To the contrary, the book traces how hegemonic entities routinely excuse themselves by accusing others of complicity, by presenting the compromised actions of individuals as commensurate with their own, much more impactful and damaging actions. Discussions of the catastrophic implications of climate change, for instance, routinely interpellate all actors, regardless of their actual habits of consumption, as equally responsible for the overdeveloped capitalist world's dependence on fossil fuels.[81] The tactical complicity of the parasite thus follows work by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Alexis Shotwell, Donna Haraway, and Jagoda, who have called for a new ethical ground of implication that relinquishes purity, an ethics of "justice without progress," a politics of "staying with the trouble" and "learning to inhabit a compromised environment."[82] "To be against purity," Shotwell writes, "is to start from an understanding of our implication in this compromised world."[83] Rather than console ourselves with the redemptive narrative offered by an imagined outside, this book examines what it could mean to inhabit embeddedness as the ground for a nonproprietary ethics.

These artworks offer no definitive answers, and likewise, my own study does not propose anything such as a solution—a deus ex machina, an escape from the inescapable condition with which it tries to reckon.[84] Rather, it advances parasitism as a necessary critical category for understanding the latent or unspoken political stakes of artistic projects of resistance not otherwise recognizable as such. The book's aim is neither to promote nor to denounce parasitism—to deliver judgment on whether it is good or bad—but to critically assess its new visibility as a compromised praxis of resistance in the field of contemporary art and interventionism. The book both develops a theory of parasitical resistance and weighs the risks of this gambit. It reads the ethical purchase of these works within the frame of feminist and queer studies scholarship that theorizes agency under nonemancipatory and nonteleological conditions. As the promise of freedom or an emancipatory

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outside has been shown to be an effective instrument of control, parasitical artworks eschew historical leftist benchmarks based on autonomy and oppositionality. If this form of interventionism holds subversive potential, it is a subversive potential that is necessarily compromised from the start.

PARASITICAL RESISTANCE AND ITS CHALLENGES TO CRITIQUE

Even as it poses new possibilities for our moment, parasitical intervention blurs the line of what constitutes resistance. How can one evaluate—let alone hold accountable—a form of resistance possible only for those subjects already afforded leverage within the system? If everyone is now complicit by virtue of the scale of neoliberal capitalism's coercive hospitality, is there any way to differentiate between degrees and forms of complicity? At times parasitism opens up clear forms of resistance; at other times it serves less as a strategy of subversion and solidarity than as a screen or alibi for active forms of bad faith and further exploitation. But the parasite is always a compromised figure. What criteria, then, can be used to assess not only parasitism's effectiveness as a mode of resistance but also its ethical implications?

Parasitism represents an intensification of the turn to immanent critique in 1990s and 2000s tactical art, media, and activism as it has given rise to ever more ethically and politically ambiguous styles of resistance; in their embeddedness and enduringness, parasitical interventions differ from tactical art and media's more punctual incursions.[85] Rather than causing a momentary disruption, the parasite nests within the host. Parasitism has no clear limits, no absolutely discernible beginning or end. Its constitutive ambivalence and complicity with the host cannot easily be resolved or wished away. This enduringness is the unique temporality of the parasite: its inevitable subsumption provides the ground for future planning.

But, because of its abiding temporality and ambiguous character, conventional critical methods and principles can initially appear to falter on their encounter with the parasite. The parasite's embeddedness and enduringness pose clear challenges to criticism's customary investment in externality and stability—objectivity, critical distance, and detachment—and its reliance on binaries (the word *criticism* deriving from the Greek *krinein*, meaning "to decide," "to cut"). For traditional critical methods to activate the parasite's potential, they must be able to ascertain its political intentions and effects. Therein lies the rub: in order to realize its political potential, as I have argued, the parasite can never appear to the host to be a fully coherent agent. Parasitism traffics in indeterminacy and is a paradigm that is necessarily

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immanent and nonbinary. The parasite's political potential thus lies in and depends on precisely what makes it so evasive to criticism.

But the parasite need not pose an insurmountable impasse for criticism. Rather it offers an opportunity to reassess criticism's historical attachment to the autonomous subject—to clearly recognizable and stable political positions and to legal and moral value systems based on propriety and private property that code payment and protocols of authorization as inherently moral—as grounds for making ethical and political judgments. These traditional critical attachments do not account for how the ethics and politics of the parasite are necessarily conditioned by the host. While we may not easily be able to draw boundaries around the parasitical agent or work or determine with certainty the ethical and political intentions of the parasitical act, this does not mean that we cannot make claims about the ethical and political valences of a parasitical work of art. Parasitical resistance emerges in response to the pervasive sense that the epistemology of exposure is no longer an efficient engine of political change in a neoliberal information economy in which it has become painfully obvious that knowledge does not equal power. While the act of critical exposure is not the solution, it nonetheless remains an important political tool; however, it is one tool among others. As a work of criticism, this book remains invested in the act of critical exposure, if not in the belief that knowing will necessarily facilitate concrete change, then as a tool for glimpsing the subversive charge of artworks that will not or cannot themselves avow their political efficacy or potential. Parasitism calls for methods for reading a performance of hegemonic power that cannot be unmasked by a discourse of truth. It demands political tools that are not absolute or predictable but relative and improvisational, pragmatic and situated, that are responsive to a dynamic ecology of relations in which there is no "once and for all" answer but highly contingent and conditional thresholds, loopholes, and openings that might yield more transparent, redistributive, and equitable relations among people, institutions, and systems.

While the parasite must be careful not to show its hand, the critic can (and where possible, must) still read for its political and ethical intentions without falling back on a model of criticism based upon discerning a fully coherent intentional subject. (Some parasites have tells. Certain parasites, for instance, signal their criticality by employing irony; a wry or camp sensibility permeates many of these works.) In my analysis, intention—how did the artist *feel* toward their chosen target?—remains a significant factor in how I understand the politics of the work. It *matters* that Ubermorgen at least articulated a critical stance toward Amazon rather than admiring Amazon

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and wanting to be bought out by it; it *matters* that Byrne signaled her work as a critical statement about gendered authorship and legitimacy, as opposed to being hostile toward Hendricks for other reasons.

But because the parasite's intention is always at least partially effaced, and thereby cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty, the task of the critic is to adjudicate the parasite's political and ethical efficacy primarily by other means. This means adopting a mode of reading that prioritizes effect over intention. Much as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called for the recognition of the limits of the epistemology of exposure, introducing the reparative complement she calls "weak theory," I propose two provisional criteria for assessing the ethics and politics of parasitical works whose intentions cannot be fully known.[86] These criteria map onto the two halves of the book: the work's *redistributive effects* and its *disruptive charge*. The redistributive effects of parasitical works refer to their ability to recirculate what they take from the host beyond the parasite's own interest and in solidarity with similarly or more precarious others—to work against privatization, to open hosts' black boxes and disseminate the material, symbolic, or conceptual resources stashed therein. The disruptive charge is the work's ability to impose on and make visceral the host's hypocritical instrumentalization of openness so as to compel it to host the parasitical work, effectively turning the host's words and actions against it. Whether the parasite is resistant ultimately depends on whether the effects of its redistribution or disruption positively outweighs the cost of its original act of complicity.

While these criteria can be complementary with each other, they can also be directly opposed. In order to have a disruptive charge, a parasitical intervention has to call attention to itself in some way; conversely (as we see in the cases of Ubermorgen's *Amazon Noir* and Rakowitz's *paraSITE*), evading attention and remaining invisible for as long as possible can be necessary for the artwork's redistributive effects to be maximized. Moreover because the artists seek to support themselves through their art, they have a material interest in their works being recognized that can impede the more furtive dimensions of parasitism. Insofar as these works facilitate their own exposure via protocols of exhibition and promotion, their visibility raises questions about how much more effective the project would have been (for others, not necessarily the artists themselves) had they kept it quiet for longer and enabled more people to benefit from them. And yet by not being visible enough, by not explicitly appealing to their host-patron's public images, they might have been shut down earlier and even more decisively.

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Whether particular deployments of complicity will be put to redistributive or self-serving ends cannot be known in advance. The works examined in this book are not didactic, and they are rarely exemplary; they largely avoid being consigned to any single aesthetic category or critical or political position. My investment in these works, moreover, is neither one of fan nor apologist. It is not a matter of *liking* these works, many of which have been described by critics as unlikeable or unsavory, for they are largely uninterested in formal concerns or aesthetic pleasure; rather it is a matter of contending with their critical force. These works invest in art as, rather than a formal medium, a blunt tool for accomplishing a particular objective. While the book's methods are feminist, the works themselves are not necessarily feminist or even progressive. While the parasite can be critically and politically useful, it is only a temporary vector, a moment of possibility: when it finishes its work, it is no longer a parasite.

Moreover the parasite's and critic's investments are not necessarily aligned. During the course of writing the book, it became clear that my own investment in a feminist and anticapitalist mode of criticism was undermined by certain parasites' self-serving opportunism or self-destructive drive. As the chapters develop, there are progressively more moments when the parasite's personal interests and risky tactics exceed my critical containment measures and escape my grasp. As I was writing the book, several of the artists began to respond to, contest, and even plagiarize previously published chapters' characterizations of their practices as parasitical. Kraus challenged the charge in an earlier published version of chapter 3 that she was dependent on her then-husband's press, Semiotext(e). Byrne, by adopting the terms of my analysis of her work, would compel me to reassess my initial optimism about her deployment of parasitism, as I explore in the coda. These works initiated a certain call and response between scholarly work and experimental practice, with the artists' responses effectively breaking the fourth wall of the project's conceptualization of parasitism. Their responses crystallized in artistic practice my efforts to theorize the parasitical relation from which there is no safe retreat. These moments forced me to recognize my implication in my attempts to immunize myself against the parasite's work—to manage, to suppress, or to redirect certain parasites' manifestly unethical or volatile charge. This is where the act of criticism shows its hand. The book thus explores the tension between the progressive critical possibilities of the parasite and its artistic applications. In its metaconceptual framing, this book interrogates the dissolving boundaries between criticism and

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practice in a digital era of instantaneous circulation and appropriation, in which critics are never only purely reactive but also participate in constituting the meaning of the work.

These works are not radical but parasitical. The parasite's appearance of acquiescence is the condition of possibility for trafficking in something different when it wouldn't otherwise be possible, perhaps even something radical. But the parasite remains a dangerous figure on which to base a politics. There are no guarantees against its mechanisms. Just as these artworks can subvert and siphon the power of their hosts, they can also fortify them. Far from a replacement for direct action, the parasite is a politics of last resort. And precisely because it flatters and mirrors the system, it cannot easily be identified, unlike oppositional art practices where the mask is eventually taken off. There is no revelatory epiphany, no happy ending—yet the parasite is neither a nihilistic nor merely cynical actor. It demands a different metrics: a wider lens, a determination to account for the coercive and asymmetrical structures that attend contemporary conceptions of choice and agency, a form of critique attentive to dynamics of scale and economy. But for all its limitations, the parasite cannot be judged in isolation because it always carries with it the system that conditions its existence in the first place.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION. TOWARD A THEORY OF PARASITICAL RESISTANCE

1. Scholars have mostly written about Ubermorgen in the context of discussions about art hacktivism and tactical art and media. See the following representative works: Arns, "Feeding the Serpent Its Own Tail"; Bernhard and Lizvlx, *UBERMORGEN.COM*; Raley, *Tactical Media*; Broeckmann, "Software Art Aesthetics"; Dieter, "Amazon Noir"; Kampf and Cox, "Using Digital Art"; Mihai, "Art Hacktivism"; Thoburn, *Anti-Book*; Vavarella, "Art, Error."

2. "All of our work is done out in the open," the group noted in a press release about the project. Ubermorgen, "Press Release," November/December 2006, www.amazon-noir.com/TEXT/PRESS_RELEASE_151106.pdf.

3. "The Hacking Monopolism Trilogy," Face to Facebook, accessed December 27, 2017, www.face-to-facebook.net/hacking-monopolism-trilogy.php.

4. A press release announcing funding for *Amazon Noir* describes the piece as "question[ing] the inconsistencies in the enforcement of copyright law" and "point[ing] out the hypocrisy of the digital copyright lobby." Amazon Noir collaborator Paolo Cirio explained in an interview, "When a common good has been given to people for free or for a cheap price, the whole of society grows. Every day we see the rampant privatization of commons [*sic*], as soon as people become more poor and ignorant. The latest movements of CC [Creative Commons], Wikipedia, P2P free networks, etc. are a much needed [*sic*] resistance in a world where the use of cultural content is ever less a right and ever more a business." Edith Ross Haus for Medienkunst, "Stipends 2006," entry "ubermorgen.com, 'Amazon Noir—The Big Book Crime,'" accessed May 16, 2018, www.edith-russ-haus.de/en/grants/grants/archive/stipends-2006.html; Cirio, Ludovico, Bernhard, and Lizvlx, "The Big Book (C)rime."

5. Thoburn, *Anti-Book*, x.

6. Pasquale, *The Black Box Society*, 89.

7. See Philip, "What Is a Technological Author?," on "good versus bad" open source as a function of a Western versus a non-Western paradigm. In his "Guerrilla Open Access Manifesto," the digital prodigy and activist Aaron Swartz challenged as hypocritical big corporations' moralistic stance against open access: "It's called stealing or piracy, as if sharing a wealth of knowledge were the moral equivalent of plundering a ship or murdering its crew. But sharing isn't

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immoral—it's a moral imperative. Only those blinded by greed would refuse to let a friend make a copy."

8. In a 2004 online article for the Independent Book Publishers Association, Jonathan Kirsch, an attorney specializing in copyright and publishing law, wrote, "Amazon, of course, is such a dominant player in the book industry that many publishers, and especially independent publishers, feel compelled to participate even though they fear that it might not be in their best interest to do so. . . . Although there has been much grumbling among both authors and publishers about the Amazon programs . . . no one has gone so far as to test the legality of the programs in court." Kirsch, "Danger! Amazon's Inside the Book Programs Pose Legal Risks for Publishers," Independent Book Publishers Association, June 2004, articles.ibpa-online.org/article/danger-amazons-inside-the-book-programs-pose-legal-risks-for-publishers/.

9. The rise of an explicitly authoritarian figure like Donald Trump, however, has attested to an ascendant form of naked sovereign power in U.S. mainstream politics that does not feel the need to dissimulate its bigotry, misogyny, nepotism, and jingoism under the guise of hospitality.

10. Frank Pasquale defines a black box as "a useful metaphor . . . [that] can refer to a recording device, like the data-monitoring systems in planes, trains, and cars. Or it can mean a system whose workings are mysterious; we can observe its inputs and outputs, but we cannot tell how one becomes the other. We face these two meanings daily: tracked ever more closely by firms and government, we have no clear idea of just how far much of this information can travel, how it is used, or its consequences" (*The Black Box Society*, 3).

11. For helpful discussions of digital technologies and neoliberalism, see, among others, Chun, *Control and Freedom*; Dean, *Democracy*; Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*; Taylor, *The People's Platform*; Chun, *Updating*; G. Hall, *The Uberfication*; Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*; Cohen, *Never Alone*.

12. The perceived inefficiencies of an earnest form of revelatory criticism find support in the resignation that has generally characterized mainstream public response to the seismic bursts of transparency that followed the Wall Street bailouts; Wikileaks, Snowden, and the Panama Papers; and a revolving door of Trump whistleblowers—suggesting ours to be a moment when the exposure of corruption or extralegality cannot be said to produce revolution or even regulation. As dismissals of the politics of revolution seem perpetually proven wrong, it is not that on-the-ground protest or the epistemology of exposure are not useful or even crucial gestures but rather that we cannot expect them alone to fix what they make manifest. Nico Baumbach, Damon R. Young, and Genevieve Yue write, "[Since 2009] we have witnessed what looked briefly like the implosion of the global financial system followed by a wave of protest movements challenging the neoliberal consensus, but business as usual has returned, indeed with a renewed sense of inexorability. Capitalism is both broken and all-pervasive. . . . The global financial system to which we are all beholden has never been more opaque in its operations, or more transparent in its effects" ("Introduction," 1).

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13. As Steven Shaviro argues, "transgression no longer works as a subversive aesthetic strategy . . . Transgression is now fully incorporated into the logic of political economy. It testifies to the way that, under the regime of real subsumption, 'there is nothing, no 'naked life,' no external standpoint . . . there is no longer an 'outside' to power'" ("Accelerationist Aesthetics").

14. Since the 1990s, the practice of hiring "white-hat hackers" (many of whom are "black-hat hackers" who turned coat) to locate vulnerabilities in corporate or government software and cybersecurity systems has become more and more prevalent. Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Samsung, Uber, Tesla, Apple, and even the U.S. government all have cash-for-bugs schemes, enlisting end users as bug-hunters. "A Bug-Hunting Hacker Says He Makes $250,000 a Year in Bounty," MIT *Technology Review*, August 22, 2016, https://www.technologyreview.com/s/602224/a-bug-hunting-hacker-says-he-makes-250000-a-year-in-bounty/. See also "A Framework for a Vulnerability Disclosure Program for Online Systems (Version 1.0)," U.S. Department of Justice Cybersecurity Unit, July 2017, https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ccips/page/file/983996/download/. Accepting payments in exchange for helping fortify state and corporate power appears to stand in clear opposition to the hacktivist ethos, which Gabriella Coleman associates with "an enthusiastic commitment to antiauthoritarianism and a variety of civil liberties" that is generally concerned with checking mechanisms of state control and supporting internet freedoms ("Hacker," 160).

15. "[Artists] can easily become extensions of the museum's own self-promotional apparatus, while the artist becomes a commodity with a special purchase on 'criticality,'" writes Miwon Kwon in *One Place after Another* (47).

16. Stevphen Shukaitis observes that "in the current functioning of capitalism, the critical function of governance is to be more critical than the critics of governance itself. Functionaries in a system of power, by presenting themselves as their worst critic, thus deprive critique of its ammunition and substance, thereby turning the tables on it. This is to go beyond both the arguments put forward by Boltanski and Chiapello; that critique has been subsumed within capitalism and that, within autonomist politics, reactive forms of social resistance and insurgency still remain a driving motor of capitalist development. This hints at the possibility that strategies for the neutralisation of the energies of social insurgency are anticipated even before they emerge" ("Overidentification," 28). See also Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit*.

17. Deleuze, "Postscript." Since Deleuze, media theorists have called upon the concept of control to advance an analysis of the postdisciplinary logics of domination as the everyday experiences of exploitation have only become more discreet, internalized, and automatic—in a word, participatory. For discussions of the diagrams of power advanced by digital networks, see Galloway, *Protocol*; Chun, *Control and Freedom*; Raley, *Tactical Media*; Franklin, *Control*; Hu, *A Prehistory*; Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*.

18. This is a quote from Byrne's description of *Look What You Made Me Do* on the artist's website, formerly roisinbyrne.co.uk.

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19. When asked by an interviewer about the choice to count the grains by hand (punishing work in which the artist himself claims also to have actively participated), Hendricks responded, apparently unironically, “You have to consider that my 12 assistants received money for something which other people pay a lot of money. Anyone, for instance, who attends meditation courses, and attempts to achieve a sense of nothingness has to dig deep into their pockets for the privilege. I give them money for it!” “Interview: Conversation between Eva Linhart and Jochem Hendricks,” in Hendricks, *Legal Crimes*, 29.

20. Sally Churchward, “Fighting Dogs, Theft and Avoiding Tax—Artist Jochem Hendricks Brings His Controversial Work to Southampton,” *Daily Echo*, November 5, 2012, https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/leisure/news/10026459.fighting-dogs-theft-and-avoiding-tax-artist-jochem-hendricks-brings-his-controversial-work-to-southampton/.

21. This method is captured by the title of Hendricks’s 2002 artist’s monograph, *Legal Crimes*.

22. What is so threatening about the feminized copy, Rebecca Schneider argues, is its potential to destabilize a patriarchal order that masquerades as original and foundational. “Perhaps one result of a mimesis not properly vilified would be that the seeming first would have to acknowledge its indebtedness to the second” (“Hello Dolly,” 96).

23. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 253.

24. “The piece is a performative media-installation and thus continues the historical tradition of happenings and performance art. Provoking reactions from conventional media and business is an integral part of the project,” reads the work’s entry on the website announcing the funding it received from the Edith Ross Haus for media art. Edith Ross Haus for Medienkunst, “Stipends 2006.”

25. Like *Amazon Noir*, *Look What You Made Me Do* translates as installation art when it is represented in a gallery space (an effect of exhibiting the piece’s component parts), while it presents as conceptual art in its exhibition on the artist’s website, which takes the form of a brief description and digital images that metonymically stand in for the larger work.

26. In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed observes that this is how white men come to embody “an institution”: “White men refers also to conduct; it is not simply who is there, who is here, who is given a place at the table, but how bodies are occupied once they have arrived” (153).

27. Insofar as the artists in this book achieve a kind of solidarity with more marginalized and exploited communities in their attempts to undermine the host, it is at a remove, from a position that does not take on the challenges and risks faced by these communities and that lacks affective ties to them.

28. My use of the designation *women* refers not to a biological category but a political and historical one. I follow Silvia Federici, who has argued for the necessity of maintaining the category *woman* to confront the economic and insti-

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tutional forces that produce it, its problematic positing of a universal political subject notwithstanding ("Sipping Tea").

29. Serres's *The Parasite* is credited with parasitism's arrival on the scene of contemporary art, design, and architecture in the 1980s. For discussions of parasitism as an artistic, design, and curatorial practice, see Sara Marini, "Parasitical Architecture," *Domus*, May 10, 2010, www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2010/05/10/parasitical-architecture.html; Fitzpatrick and Brothers, "A Productive Irritant"; Jahn, *Byproduct*; Pilcher, "Parasitic Art"; Anagnost, "Parasitism." The very language of parasitism is used to signify cutting-edge art and curatorial experimentation, as the term's appearance in the names of exhibition spaces such as Ljubljana's P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art, Hong Kong's Para/Site Art Space, and the German online art magazine *Berlin-ArtParasites* attests. For figurations of the parasite in digital interventionist practice, see Martin, "Parasitic Media"; Lovink, *Dark Fiber*; Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance*; David Garcia and Geert Lovink, "The ABC of Tactical Media," January 10, 2008, *Tactical Media Files*, www.tacticalmediafiles.net/articles/3160; Raley, *Tactical Media*. See also *the parasite*, a massive Alternate Reality Game (ARG) experiment led by Patrick Jagoda at the University of Chicago: H. Coleman, "the parasite." Invocations of parasitism in the work of Michel de Certeau, such as the passive tactics of free riding (working slowly, pursuing nonwork efforts while on the clock, squatting), will be familiar to many. "The space of a tactic is the space of the other," writes de Certeau. "Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. . . . It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection" (*The Practice*, 37). Such "weapons of the weak" (to use James C. Scott's phrase) follow a parasitical logic in that they are improvisational, short term, and fragmentary practices of resistance available to those constrained within spaces of domination. See also Scott, *Weapons* and *Domination*.

30. Combes, *The Art of Being a Parasite*, 8–12.

31. Nixon, *Slow Violence*; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. I am indebted to Ingrid Diran for this insight and phrasing.

32. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," 70.

33. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 11–12.

34. In *Bodies That Matter* Butler asks, "What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of misrecognition, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong? . . . it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that the failure of identification, is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference" (219). See also Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 121–40.

35. Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 31, 26.

36. Stevphen Shukaitis, Jean Baudrillard, and others have described "overidentification" and "overacceptance" as manic maneuvers by which one pretends to take the system at its word, performs sincerity at a fevered pitch, or plays so

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close to its script that the system shudders at the intensity of one's participation. For a compelling analysis of overidentification, see Shukaitis, "Overidentification." For a discussion of overacceptance, see Jean Baudrillard, "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media," trans. Marie Maclean, in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Anna Watkins Fisher with Thomas Keenan, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 515–22.

37. Butler, "The Body," 84.

38. Lauren Berlant's influential diagnosis of aspirational political attachment as a form of "cruel optimism" powerfully conveys the high cost of political idealism in this moment.

39. Peter Gilliver, "Precarious," OED *Online*, *Word Stories* (blog), accessed February 10, 2017, http://public.oed.com/aspects-of-english/word-stories/precarious/.

40. Wang, *Carceral Capitalism*, 53.

41. See Harvey, *A Brief History*; Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*; Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*; W. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*; Feher, *Rated Agency*.

42. Regarding the challenge to survival, we might think, for example, of Lester A. Spence's discussion of the neoliberal transformation of the term *hustler* over the past thirty years, from a "person who tried to do as little work as possible in order to make ends meet" to "someone who consistently works" (*Knocking the Hustle*, 2). As higher numbers of black men in the United States have been expelled from the formal labor economy, their choices limited by lack of education and jobs, criminal records, and discrimination, some have turned to informal economies or shadow markets for income. In this context they are vulnerable to arrest and police brutality (as was the case for Eric Garner, who sold loose cigarettes, and Alton Sterling, who peddled CDs, both killed by police who approached them for petty street hustles).

43. Emily Badger, "It's Unconstitutional to Ban the Homeless from Sleeping Outside, the Federal Government Says," *Washington Post*, August 13, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/08/13/its-unconstitutional-to-ban-the-homeless-from-sleeping-outside-the-federal-government-says/.

44. Davis, "Fortress L.A.," 104; Edward Delman, "Should It Be Illegal for Supermarkets to Waste Food?," *Atlantic*, May 29, 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/05/law-france-supermarkets-food-waste/394481/.

45. Caroline Mortimer, "Space, Not Spikes Protest Artist Says 'Hostile Architecture' Is 'Anti-Human,'" *Independent*, July 23, 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/space-not-spikes-protest-artist-says-hostile-architecture-is-anti-human-10409673.html. Even bourgeois customers are subject to disciplinary strictures. A sign outside of one Whole Foods Market, a grocery chain that serves an upper-middle-class customer base, informs shoppers of the expiration date on their welcome: "Warning: 3 Hour Customer Parking Only." The capitalist mandate to keep circulating reframes paying customers as trespassers.

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46. John Kennedy, “How Digital Disruption Changed 8 Industries Forever,” *Silicon Republic*, November 25, 2015, https://www.siliconrepublic.com/companies/digital-disruption-changed-8-industries-forever.

47. See Terranova, *Network Culture*. For discussions of how women of color built the internet and what they have done to fix it, see Nakamura, “Indigenous Circuits” and “The Unwanted Labour.” For a discussion of the shift from a model of permanent to temporary ownership, from buying a product outright to temporarily licensing it, see Perzanowski and Schultz, *The End of Ownership*.

48. Gillespie, “The Politics of ‘Platforms.’”

49. Drawing on feminist accounts of hospitality by Tracy McNulty and Irina Aristarkhova that extend the philosophies of Kant, Levinas, and Derrida, I understand the concept of hospitality as necessarily implying a coercive dynamic, for ownership (the privilege of having an official right of permission or possession in the face of another who does not) makes the act, in its unconditional form, structurally impossible. Given the power differential that subtends it, the hospitality relation can never be fully consensual. See McNulty, *The Hostess*; Aristarkhova, *Hospitality of the Matrix*; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*.

50. Writes Tracy McNulty, “Hence *potis* identifies not only the master, but the master who is ‘eminently himself’” (*The Hostess*, ix).

51. “Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong,” writes Nirmal Puwar, “while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically, and conceptually), circumscribed as being ‘out of place’” (*Space Invaders*, 8).

52. Serres, *The Parasite*.

53. Anders M. Gullestad writes, “Again according to the OED, as a noun, ‘parasite’ was first used in the current scientific sense in Ephraim Chambers’ *Cyclopædia* (1728), when he—under the heading ‘PARASITES, or PARASITAICAL [*sic*] Plants’—defined the subject as ‘in Botany, a Kind of diminutive Plants, growing on Trees, and so called from their Manner of living and feeding, which is altogether on others’” (“Parasite”).

54. Arnott, “Studies,” 162–63. See also Gullestad, “Parasite”; Hassl, “Der klassische Parasit” and “The Parasitic.”

55. “Gift exchange forms part of what is called an ‘embedded economy,’” writes Anne Carson, “that is, a sociocultural system in which the elements of economic life are embedded in noneconomic institutions like kinship, marriage, hospitality, artistic patronage and ritual friendship” (*Economy*, 11–12). Carson is particularly interested in the complicit role of court singers and poets who come to be stitched into the embedded economy by trading their art for food and shelter in Homer’s *Odyssey*. “At the moment when Odysseus, in the banquet hall of Alkinoos, carves out a hot chunk of pig meat from his own portion and proffers it in gratitude to the singer Demodokos ‘so that he may eat and so that I may fold him close to me,’ we see the embedded economy in its ideal version,” she writes (14).

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56. Gullestad, "Parasite." Drawing on the work of W. Geoffrey Arnott, Gullestad notes that "over time the parasite ended up as a more or less interchangeable rival to the earlier comedic stock character of the *kolax* (the flatterer) as a name for those characters in Greek and Latin comedy looking for a free lunch, be it in a literal or metaphorical sense." See also Damon, *The Mask of the Parasite*.

57. In *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, Plutarch "acknowledges that the comic parasite, on stage, is impossible to miss, given his stereotypical traits and blatant self-abasement. But he goes on to warn of the dangers we face when parasitism and flattery become hard to detect, when the flattered takes on the standard features of civilised elite behaviour, hiding his nefarious purposes behind him: 'Whom, then, do we need to guard against? . . . He is usually sober, he is busy, and he thinks it necessary to get involved in everything, and wants to be in on all the secrets, and plays the part of friendship seriously, like a tragic actor, not a satyric or comic one'" (Jason König, "Philosophers and Parasites," in *Saints and Symposiasts*, 243–44).

58. Jonas A. Barish quotes Plato: "The painter's craft thus reduces itself to an effort of slavish mimicry. And the same holds, says Socrates, for the tragic poet, who, like the painter, is an imitator, and hence 'thrice removed from the king and from the truth'" (*The Antitheatrical Prejudice,* 6).

59. See Gullestad, "Parasite." For a brief essay on the evolving political currency of parasitism, see Samyn, "Toward an Anti-Anti-Parasitism."

60. Serres's extraordinary 1982 book, *The Parasite* (which first appeared in French in 1980), offers a framework for thinking through complex systems of power. Serres's treatise is as virtuosic as it is elliptical, and it may be for this reason that its contributions have still not fully been contended with. His elusive philosophy is concerned less with parsing the politics of the parasite, which remains largely opaque in his account, than with unearthing a lively and ambitiously intertextual theory of the parasite. Serres tracks the term's tripartite semantic resonance in the domains of anthropology, biology, and information theory, noting that the French sense of *parasite* means "noise" or "static" (a semantic dimension lost in English). But what the figure yields is ultimately a study of systems.

61. Serres, *The Parasite*, 191, 202.

62. Serres, *The Parasite*, 202.

63. Writes Muñoz: "At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere" (*Disidentifications*, 5).

64. Serres, *The Parasite*, 217.

65. Stanford Open Policing Project, "Findings," 2019, https://openpolicing.stanford.edu/findings/. See also: NYCLU, "Stop-and-Frisk Data," 2019, https://www.nyclu.org/en/Stop-and-Frisk-data.

66. It is helpful to bring a sense of the scale of the host system into this discussion, as Nathan M. Martin does in "Parasitic Media." Martin contends that in larger systems, larger tolerances are given for error; in smaller systems, the stan-

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dard deviation is already so small (and the monitoring so direct) that it is difficult for a parasite to remain invisible and still be able to function properly. He writes, "An example would be the amount of theft by employees that occur[s] at a small business where the owner is a visible source of monitoring being much lower in most cases than a large corporation where the owner is not present and possibly not known. Retail thefts, like employee thefts, increase with the size of a business. Corporations such as Wal-Mart factor the losses they will see due to theft into their financial planning and cost analysis. Usually if the amount of theft grows relative to the size of the corporation, the level of standard deviation will not increase and no alarm will go off that will force the host to change its behavior." Martin (for the Carbon Defense League), "Parasitic Media."

67. See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

68. For Riviere, the masquerade of womanliness is "worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" ("Womanliness," 306).

69. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 8.

70. See Pederson, "Autopoiesis."

71. "This project does not present itself as a solution," explains Rakowitz. "It is not a proposal for affordable housing. Its point of departure is to present a symbolic strategy of survival for homeless existence within the city, amplifying the problematic relationship between those who have homes and those who do not have homes." Quoted in Mike Hanlon, "The paraSITE—An Inflatable Shelter for the Homeless that Runs Off Expelled HVAC Air," *New Atlas*, August 19, 2005, http://newatlas.com/go/4455/.

72. "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" asks Lorde. "*It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable. . . . For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" ("The Master's Tools," 110–11, emphasis mine).

73. See Ouellette, "'Take Responsibility."

74. See Sara Ahmed on the "desire for resistance" as a way of suturing over discussions of racism too quickly, so as to will them to go away ("A Phenomenology," 165). For discussions of the queer, black, and feminist of color politics of refusal and escape, see Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*; Mengesha and Padmanabhan, "Introduction," 1–8; Brewer Ball, "The Only Way Out"; Moten, "Taste Dissonance"; Keeling, *Queer Times*; Campt, "The Visual Frequency."

75. The OED shows that *complice* derives from the Latin *complicō*, which according to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* means "fold up, bend, tie up, involve, wind, roll, curl up, double up." The entries on both *complice* and *complicity* also

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make reference to declensions of *complector*—that is, "embrace, encircle, surround, include, grasp, seize, involve, welcome, take in."

76. The etymology of *complicity* reveals two definitions. The first and most common is that of a moral or legal judgment of indirect culpability ("the being an accomplice"); the second, which is more value-neutral, speaks merely to the fact of being embedded in a given structure, to be folded in or subject to two or more realities that are never fully commensurable (Joseph and Rubin, "Promising Complicities," 436–37).

77. For a critique of the racial and gender politics of interventionist tactics, specifically of the prankster, see Kanouse, "Cooing Over the Golden Phallus."

78. Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 221.

79. See Cheney-Lippold, *We Are Data*.

80. Brunton and Nissenbaum, *Obfuscation*, 55.

81. This issue is illustrated by the term *Anthropocene*, which indiscriminately lumps together every human being under the homogenizing banner *anthropos*. "As the Anthropocene proclaims the language of species life—anthropos—through a universalist geologic commons, it neatly erases histories of racism that were incubated through the regulatory structures of geologic relations," writes Kathryn Yusoff (*A Billion Black Anthropocenes*, 2). Feminist critique has questioned the "we" that subtends this category. Claire Colebrook, for instance, writes, "The Anthropocene has tended to erase the problem of scale. . . . The policy implications of the Anthropocene have tended to suspend the typically feminist questions of this 'we' that we seek to maintain and has instead led to the return to supposed species solidarity. . . . How is it that geological readability (of a specific scale) has become that which defines the human?" ("We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene," 11). On feminism's special purchase for the historical situation of extreme enmeshment that is the Anthropocene, see Grusin, *Anthropocene Feminism*.

82. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 1; Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 25; Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 225. In the face of this sense of political impasse, Jagoda proposes "ambivalence" as a strategy of resistance. Forgoing the gratification of oppositional or escapist political models, ambivalence "is not a variety of opting out. If anything, it suggests a process of opting in completely. Going all in, however, need not be reduced to naïve complicity or the hyperbolic extremism of strategies such as accelerationism. . . . Ambivalence[, rather,] is a process of slowing down and learning to inhabit a compromised environment."

83. Shotwell, *Against Purity*, 204.

84. This book investigates not utopian or pessimistic narratives of resistance imagined as escaping or irreducible to economic or semiotic formalization but the pragmatic and temporal conditions of resistance immanent to the system. In this it follows Eugenie Brinkema's critique of affect theory's tendency to see excessive affects as inherently salvific, subversive, or resistive. Brinkema, *The Form*.

85. "These projects are not oriented toward the grand, sweeping revolutionary

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event," writes Rita Raley, "rather, they engage in a micropolitics of disruption, intervention, and education." Tactical media "are more interested in repurposing, modifying, and disrupting than they are in remaining invisible" (*Tactical Media*, 1, 14).

86. Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading."

INTERLUDE. THRESHOLDS OF ACCOMMODATION

1. Explains Ellison's narrator, "I learned in time though that it is possible to carry on a fight against them without their realizing it. For instance, I have been carrying on a fight with Monopolated Light & Power for some time now. I use their service and pay them nothing at all, and they don't know it. Oh, they suspect their power is being drained off, but they don't know where. All they know is that according to the master meter back there in their power station a hell of a lot of free current is disappearing somewhere into the jungle of Harlem. Several years ago (before I discovered the advantages of being invisible) I went through the routine process of buying service and paying their outrageous rates. . . . That was based upon the fallacious assumption that I, like other men, was visible. Now, aware of my invisibility, I live rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century" (*Invisible Man*, 5–6).

2. Spillers, "Peter's Pans," 5.

3. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 14. See Malik Gaines's discussion of Spillers on Ellison's *Invisible Man* in his theorization of Nina Simone's transfiguration of alienated marginality into a radical position of black subjectivity (*Black Performance*, 39–40). For more recent discussions of the retooling of tropes of darkness and opacity in black radical practice, see also Moten, *Black and Blur*; Keeling, *Queer Times*; Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*; and Musser, *Sensual Excess*.

4. Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 26.

5. Browne, *Dark Matters*. For discussions of "infrastructural whiteness" and state biometric capture systems' disproportionate failure to read women, people of color, and people with disabilities, see Pugliese, "The Biometrics of Infrastructural Whiteness," in *Biometrics*; and Magnet, *When Biometrics Fail*.

6. McGlotten observes that for black and brown subjects, for whom the threat of surveillance is often most severe, performative tactics of evasion are often least available. "Techniques of refusal, such as anonymous massification vis-à-vis masks, are unevenly available. There are some for whom flight may not be possible and/or for whom it may be forced. For example, becoming clandestine or deserting are not really options for populations already subject to spatialized forms of control." The predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods in which the New York Police program Stop-and-Frisk almost entirely operates, McGlotten writes, are "contexts in which people yearn to escape police harassment and violence but where efforts to evade surveillance or to contest it only result in heightened forms of scrutiny" ("Black Data," 273).

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7. In 2018, in only the span of several weeks, there were at least a half-dozen incidents widely reported in the mainstream U.S. press when a white person has called the police about a black person for merely existing in certain spaces, including a Starbucks, a Nordstrom Rack, a Yale University dorm, an LA Fitness, a convenience store, an Airbnb, and a golf course. At the same time, in direct contrast, news of Marilyn Hartman, a white woman in her mid-sixties who was arrested after successfully bypassing multiple checkpoints and airport security, boarding planes and successfully stowing away without a ticket or passport, has made headlines. Ray Sanchez, "She Claimed a 9-Year-Old Boy Groped Her. Then She Apologized," *CNN*, October 13, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/13/us/new-york-woman-calls-police-black-boy/index.html; Christina Caron, "No Passport or Ticket: How a Woman Evaded Airport Security and Flew to London," *New York Times*, January 22, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/22/us/stowaway-ohare-plane.html. Such events have been memeified on Twitter via the hashtag #LivingWhileBlack. Using data collected from approximately 90,000 tweets that engage with or directly use the hashtag, data scholar Apryl Williams argues that black activist memes constitute a form of resistance to the colonization of space, online and offline, under white supremacy (see Williams, "Black Memes Matter").

8. McNulty, *The Hostess*, viii.

9. The parasite's figuration as an outsider recalls the logic of supplementarity as theorized in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. The supplement is presented "as exterior, foreign to the 'essential' nature of that to which it is added or in which it is substituted." Yet, as Derrida shows, the supplement is in fact no less essential than the supposedly complete and self-sufficient entity to which it is purportedly attached. See Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 103.

10. Esposito argues that in Nazi propaganda parasitism ceases to be a metaphor of exclusion and becomes literalized: "Certainly the characterization of the Jews as parasites is part of the secular history of anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, such a definition acquires a different valence in the Nazi vocabulary. . . . What to a certain point remained a weighty analogy now actually took form: the Jews didn't *resemble* parasites; they didn't behave *as* bacteria—they *were* bacteria who were to be treated as such" (*Bíos*, 116–17, emphasis in the original).

11. Schlossberg, "Introduction," 2.

12. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America*, 126.

13. McNulty, *The Hostess*, x.

14. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 89.

15. On the institutional politics of diversity, inclusion, and erasure, see Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*; Ahmed, *On Being Included*; Ferguson, *The Reorder*; Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*; Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal*; Nash, *Black Feminism*. For the trope of the model minority or racial and ethnic minority endowed with honorary whiteness, see Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?*; Kim, "Critical Thoughts."

16. Here we can think of the performance studies scholar Richard Schechner's foundational claim that, in the act of performing, the performer is "not me" and

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yet “not not me,” or Gregory Bateson’s influential articulation of the metacommunicative “as if” double register of play. Theorists of performance and play alike have described the concepts as the “staging of a paradox,” by which one’s actions during play signal the message “I am hereby placing myself on a different register of existence which nevertheless stands in for its suspended analogue” (Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, 4; Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 112). See also Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 92–93.

17. See Michel Feher’s public talk, “The Neoliberal Condition.”

18. White women are structurally complicit with a system of care in which white men accrue status and power by assigning themselves the role of white women’s protectors and defenders, against (and counter to) those nonwhite subjects to whom by the same logic they deny care, justice, and citizenship. Insofar as those who are accommodated under the signs of femininity and whiteness are the beneficiaries (whether they like it or not) of white patriarchal structures of care, both femininity and whiteness function parasitically. For discussions of white women’s complicity with white supremacy, see McIntosh, “White Privilege”; Frankenberg, *White Women*; Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*.

19. Wiltz, “Persecuting Black Men,” 162. For a discussion of the racial politics of innocence, see Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*.

20. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 45.

CHAPTER ONE. USER BE USED

1. Olivia LaVecchia and Stacy Mitchell, “Amazon’s Stranglehold: How the Company’s Tightening Grip Is Stifling Competition, Eroding Jobs, and Threatening Communities,” Institute for Local Self-Reliance, November 2016, https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ILSR_AmazonReport_final.pdf, 7.

2. Chun, *Control and Freedom*.

3. Russell, *Open Standards and the Digital Age*, 1–2.

4. Nathan Schneider, “The Meaning of Words,” in Scholz and Schneider, *Ours to Hack and to Own*, 14.

5. These are the terms with which Astra Taylor sets up her argument on her book jacket and publicity materials for *The People’s Platform*.

6. Taylor, *The People’s Platform*, 22.

7. Gillespie, “Politics of Platforms.”

8. Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 47.

9. Digital platforms, Gillespie asserts, enjoy an inordinate degree of legal protection as the result of a safe harbor carved out in Section 230 of U.S. telecommunication law. This cover is aptly captured by a common phrase included in their terms and services agreements, stating that they have “the right but not the responsibility” to remove user content (“The Myth of the Neutral Platform,” 31; see also 24–44).

10. Walmart increasingly functions like a platform. The company has pioneered a supply chain management model called “vendor-managed inventory,”

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