

The Consequence of Our Literal Speed's *Nevermade*

“That rule we set down at the beginning as to what must be done in everything when we were founding the city—this, or a certain form of it, is, in my opinion, justice. Surely we set down and often said, if you remember, that each one must practice one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit... And further, that justice is the minding of one's own business and not being a busybody, this we have both heard from many others and have often said ourselves... [T]his—the practice of minding one's own business—when it comes into being in a certain way, is probably justice.”

Plato, *Republic*, 433a-b¹

I

In his *Aesthetics at Large*, Thierry de Duve made a paragraph of Adorno appear four times—three in English and one in German—in a single chapter, marveled at its gloom and obscurity, and made it a springboard for his Kant revamp which is itself an endeavor whose total significance is not least unintelligible to me at this moment. Here is the paragraph:

Works of art owe their existence-in-the-world [Dasein] to the division of labor in society, the separation of physical and mental labor. By the same token, however, they themselves appear as in-the-world; their medium is not pure spirit existing for itself but the spirit that retreats into worldly existence [Existenz] and, by the force of such movement, lays a claim on the unity of what is separated. This contradiction forces works of art to make us forget that they are made: the claim their existence-in-the-world stakes, and hence the claim that existence itself is meaningful, is the more convincing the less something in them warns us that they have been fabricated, that they owe their existence to spirit as something external to themselves. Art that is no longer able to achieve this deception with good conscience—indeed its very principle—has dissolved the only element in which it can realize itself.²

In this postscript, I have a rather humble goal: to see and follow the logic of Our Literal Speed's *Nevermade* through the prismatic Adorno paragraph whose pathos is suggested to be resisted by de Duve. I would begin with an idea made explicit by both Adorno and OLS—the separation of physical and mental labor.

¹ Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, ed.2, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 111.

² Quoted and translated in Thierry de Duve, “Resisting Adorno, Revamping Kant” in *Aesthetics at Large*, vol.1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 109-110. The original is from Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1952), 104.

In the Adorno paragraph, this “technical” separation was preceded by the “social” division manifested in the brutal fact that “while one man composes music or poetry, another (wo)man has to bake his bread.”³ Our observation of this brutal fact could be said to be descriptive and not so ambiguous as the “technical” separation which is imbued with Adorno’s eulogistic refutation of Hegel’s philosophizing of the synthesis of matter and spirit in romantic art with the spirit claiming the priority within a unity. Compared with the idealist aesthetics of Hegel, Adorno seems to be writing with more sense. Both arguments read, nevertheless, ambiguous, or rather, of ambiguity.⁴ In the case of Hegel, this ambiguity is expressed in an exuberantly dialectical or tautological maneuver that “spirit is pushed back into itself out of its reconciliation with the corporeal into a reconciliation of itself with itself.”⁵ For Adorno, claiming the reconciliation is not achieving it, and in regard to the unlikelihood of this reconciliation shown in reality, a pretense turns out to be our last resort. This pretense has a form that is “to make us forget that [works of art] are made.” Thus “not artifacts but rather products of nature”—deduced by de Duve and then Kant was introduced.⁶ With not much Kant on my agenda, I will rewind a little and go backward to the point when we are asked by works of art to “forget that they are made.” Here we are witnessing a quite literal correspondence in the title of the OLS video: *Nevermade*.

“Nevermade” is announced proudly as a sounding concept rather late in the video by the Lady in White [henceforth W] as the 21st century improvement or overcoming of the 20th century “Readymade.” (*Nevermade* [henceforth NM] 18:25) The timestamping flirts with *Zeitgeist*—another “Hegelian garb”⁷ that is put upon a seeming American optimism which is greeted by the Lady in Black [henceforth B] with a non-ironical approval for the only time in the whole conversation. If B’s approval is not induced solely by W’s talent in nomenclature, we could say this optimism is supported by the superiority of the methodology behind *Nevermade*: rethinking. Rethinking is better than reproducing—the methodology behind *Readymade*—for at least one obvious reason: it leaves “zero-carbon footprint.” (NM 23:31) Saving the doubt on the frivolousness of their materialism for a later moment, I will first raise a question: is the methodology behind *Readymade* reproducing? And this question forcefully leads us to notice an omission⁸: the other pillar of the de Duve project, namely, Duchamp.

³ De Duve, *Aesthetics at Large*, 109.

⁴ The social division being less ambiguous than the technical separation could also be understood as the former having a literal expression—the division happens between individuals—while the latter being a conceptualization of a separation within an individual which is usually perceived as a unity.

⁵ Quoted in Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2014), 54. Original from G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 517-518.

⁶ “Nature, we say, is beautiful if it also looks like art; and art can be called beautiful only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature.” Quoted in de Duve, *Aesthetics at Large*, 110. Original from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 174.

⁷ If not actually the same garb used by Adorno to dress his pessimism.

⁸ A list of individuals mentioned in *Nevermade* could be helpful: Emily Post, Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman, James Earl Ray, Andy Warhol [as an adjective—Warholian], Pablo Picasso, Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Eugène Atget, Patsy Ramsey, Harvey Oswald.

What Duchamp did for his Readymade has been historicized by de Duve, which makes answering my question easier: No, the methodology behind Readymade is not simply reproducing. Taking *Fountain* as an example, Duchamp did not reproduce a urinal but bought one from a shop, administered its circulation, and waited for the “message” to be received. Those activities could leave some carbon footprints but they could hardly be categorized as “reproducing.” They are, however, very much “rethinking”: a urinal rethought, or asked to be rethought, as a work of art. This rethinking, thanks to de Duve’s meticulous articulation, should be taken as less a flash of some singular genius but a collectivization of many overdetermined historical happenings from which a revolutionary lesson of art, politics, and ethics would be learned.⁹ If put on a spectrum with “rethinking” and “reproducing” as its two ends, the legacy of Readymade is closer to the “rethinking” side. And if closer attention were paid to the conversation in *Nevermade*, I should admit that the coupling of Readymade and “reproducing” and making the latter the methodology of the former is only my speculation—neither B nor W has stated such a relation.

III

The superiority *Nevermade* holds over Readymade seems to be trivial because Readymade, at least in the case of Duchamp, is mostly [of] rethinking. Or rather, further dramatized: Readymade’s inferiority is precisely its being “mostly [of]” rethinking while *Nevermade* will be rethinking pure and simple. Purism’s insurrection is called for, Modernity is an incomplete project, and the materialism of “zero-carbon footprint art” should not be taken as some joking rhetoric but a categorical imperative. When *W* called MLK “capital ‘M’ Modern Art” and asked for “[n]o more Warholian ironic postmodern gestures,” three movements are performed simultaneously (*NM* 12:43-13:06):

1. *MLK is historicized*—no matter how problematically “historicize” appears here—into Modern Art through a theory of the paradoxical solipsism: “making your life unlivable to save your life”—an update of Modern Art History if not simply Art History;
2. This particular *historicization* of MLK is itself an attempt of the new paradigm of being an environmentally friendly artist whose sole job is to rethink—perhaps Art will be saved by not being made?;
3. “This particular historicization of MLK” *being called out* occurs in a material body and thus exemplifies the supposedly negated “Warholian ironic postmodern gestures.”

Thus we are observing how *Nevermade* embodies the technical separation of physical and mental labor. The very object upon which the separation has been operated is “*Nevermade*” itself: *Nevermade* as art as a phenomenon vs. *Nevermade* as a prospect for art. The former is of course a result of physical labor while the latter is a bet laid for posterity: NO MORE NEW STUFF (*NM* 18:04).

⁹ For the historization of the Richard Mutt case, please consult the first two chapters of de Duve’s *Duchamp’s Telegram*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2023). For the lesson to be learnt, please consult de Duve’s *Aesthetics at Large*.

We recall Adorno's suggestion: to make themselves meaningful, works of art need to make us forget that they are made. While de Duve reads this negation of "being-made-ness" as an implication of semblance of nature almost dialectically, OLS pragmatized its negativity resolutely. So far many works of art have been made, fabricated, and owe their existence to spirit external to themselves. Fine. Forgetting or not forgetting their *past* being-made-ness is *at best* a theoretical problem qua Platonic anamnesis. What matters is the practical problem: What Is To Be Done? The answer is: forget about making and start rethinking only. Here "forget" is not a failure of remembering but a command to move on. And it is not so much an ambiguous morphology between art and nature but a negation of art making as exclusively a human activity.

Nevermade is better than Readymade. Although making *Nevermade* will be a *conceptual* suicide, this judgement needs to be made heard because "Marcel Duchamp's silence is overrated." It is overrated, not for the reason Joseph Beuys put forward as Duchamp's failure at "draw[ing] the clear and simple conclusion that every human being is an artist"¹⁰ but a failure at drawing a further inference from "the clear and simple conclusion" that every human being, being an artist, should not make new stuff. If we were to acquit Beuys of his mis-attribution but still register the content of "the clear and simple conclusion," we could see OLS's conceptual maneuver more clearly: The challenge raised to the social division of labor is to be taken as a preparation for the technical separation of mental and physical labor, or rather, the universal substitution of physical labor with mental labor. It is worth a final contradiction—*Nevermade* has been made, once for all, so that we shall not dare make any more art.

The ambition is formidable and the environmentalist motivation behind the ban on art making is too ridiculous to be not metaphysical. A formulation of an Intellectual-Art-Historical dialectical movement could be loosely attempted here: the eclipse of the German Protestant Individualist Beuysian Romanticism by the French Catholic Institutionist Duchampian Dandyism sublated in the Philosophical Idealist Hegelian Cynicism. We are asked to participate in, not by making but rethinking, the preservation of Art at the end of Art History.

IV

But this is way too European. Without explicit anti-eurocentrism sentiment, I should ground my argument on my American object, *Nevermade*. If the *Nevermade* vs. *Nevermade* distinction is made clear by the 2nd (historicization of MLK as rethinking pure and simple) and the 3rd (historicization of MLK as rethinking but materialized) of the three movements speculated above, the 1st has not been examined yet: It is MLK that is rethought and thus historicized. Here lies another judgement: *Nevermade* is better than readymades—the former as art by OLS vs. the latter as art by Duchamp—and this time it is not Duchamp's silence that is overrated but his "indifferent" choice of *objects*. The artist famously "claimed to have chosen everyday objects 'based on a reaction of visual indifference, with at the same time a total

¹⁰ De Duve, *Duchamp's Telegram*, 94.

absence of good or bad taste...”¹¹ No taste is better than good or bad taste: No taste is a better negativity.¹² This negativity is, nevertheless, embodied in objects which, no matter how indifferently chosen, are mostly made. It could sound like I am about to behave like a dogmatic Adornian nitpicking about Duchamp’s failure of hiding the “being-made-ness” and it could be argued that readymades’ “being-made-ness” is only a disposable episode of Duchamp’s first and foremost exposure of the invisible Institution of Art. I am not going to refute that but I want to make it clear that I am switching from the Adornian tonality to the American: This negativity championed and masqueraded as indifference is just too innocent of the *depth* of the American Deep South. Duchamp’s readymades are man-made objects while MLK’s America has made millions of African people objects—(wo)men made objects. Choosing MLK as their object with no pretense of indifference, OLS objectifies the objectified as if somehow a grammatical operation could cancel all the negation cast by Slavery—“Grammatical operation? You gotta be kidding me”—I said to myself when I typed out the previous sentence but if I allow myself to keep saying I am ready to be silenced by the great quietist Wittgenstein: “Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be *deep*? (And that is what the depth of philosophy is.)”¹³

If the grammatical operation is better dismissed as some fancy of formalism, we are better to follow *W*’s early suggestion to doubt her later statement: “Form outlives content.” (*NM* 12:16) Thus another question needs to be raised: Who is the very objectified, the rethought content, Martin Luther King Jr.? I feel unqualified to answer this question since I am just starting to learn this history, shamefully, after staying in America for more than seven years. But I will still suggest that one relevant aspect of the MLK legacy to *Nevermade* is pronounced by Dr. King himself in his last speech:

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. Now, we are poor people. Individually, we are poor when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively—that means all of us together—collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine. *Did you ever think about that?* [sic] After you leave the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and I could name the others, the American Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States, and more than the national budget of Canada. *Did you know that?* That's power right there, if we know how to pool it. We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles. We don't need any Molotov cocktails... [W]e are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy—what is the

¹¹ “Marcel Duchamp and the Readymade,” The Museum of Modern Art, 2024:

<https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/dada/marcel-duchamp-and-the-readymade>

¹² I deliberately choose to focus on the ideology Duchamp intended, ironically or not, to spread, while many positive things can be said of many readymades by him—de Duve’s writing on his *Peigne* presents a substantial body of knowledge. See de Duve, “The Readymade and the Tube of Paint” in *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998).

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 47e.

other bread?—Wonder Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain.¹⁴

Economic withdrawal, boycott, General Strike—the better negativity. The redistribution of the pain is advanced by not-making, of which the power has not been *thought* about, still, by too many of us—“US? Who is this ‘us’? The garbage men?” But am I a garbage man and in regard to which History?

I will first anticipate an answer to this question and then give an explanation. Answer: Although “the garbage man”¹⁵ is not a title I shall claim on my own, I am meeting them on the path, if not at the end, of Art History. Explanation: Jeff Giering’s critique of *Nevermade’s* “flattening history”¹⁶ holds tight because “(re)categorizing MLK and the Civil Rights as this commodity for a white elite” (*NM* 21:06) has neither intention nor capacity to positively address American History—the specific History of the Atlantic slave trade. There is, however, another specific history called Art History. Its specificity is of a different kind: not as a property but a goal—Art History is where a struggle for specificity or autonomy emblemizes its modern development. But this autonomy is nothing but a vacuum which many theories and practices have been made to be sucked into. The Greenbergian strategy is to feed this nothingness with “medium” while the Beuysian “agents” aka every human being—and thus an opportunity for not

¹⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *I've Been to the Mountaintop*, delivered 3 April 1968, Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters), Memphis, Tennessee: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>

¹⁵ A related art historical image of “the garbage man” is to be found in Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* while Adorno seems to be more focused on the object—“All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage...” “Beckett’s garbage cans are emblems of the culture that was reconstructed after Auschwitz.” De Duve, *Aesthetic at Large*, 129-130.

¹⁶ It would be helpful to quote Giering’s speech on the closing reception: “There is such a thing as a 10,000 year old sculpture stolen from 10,000 miles away from an empire that has already died, from a people whose language may no longer even exist, the tenth great-grandchildren of the sculptors now very long dead, detached from time, place, language, and cultural understanding. That is what Museums are for, apparently, with an incidental plaque on the wall to ape at the notion of “context.” Museums house artefacts, and in the case of the United States and the Met in particular, they are stolen away from anywhere where they might have had political meaning originally imbued in them. The loss of that political meaning is not something which “just happened;” the way it happened is the shame of the museum system; it is the most-easily-criticized part of the art world... So if there is offense in the way the characters in *Nevermade* talk about MLK, it is in their flattening of history. Both accept the premise that MLK and the movements he took part in can be legibly compared to a 10,000-year-old sculpture. They take for granted that the death and violence in those protest movements places them, seemingly immediately, into a severed history. They take for granted that they can make art by referring to newly-dead people as historical artefacts. When it comes to the prehistoric sculpture, they have no words for the people who actually survived the beheadings. Nor have they any words for their modern-day neighbors who survived the lynchings. Just as MLK might have lived to be 94, most of the teenagers who participated in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s are still alive today. They are not simply figments of some artists’ historical imagination... Ferguson and Selma do not just rhyme or echo—they are part of the same project. *Nevermade’s* characters do nothing to prevent any of the events they gesture at glibly among books they do not bother to read; the defense for their proposed project is exactly this, that it can do nothing anyway.” Full documentation please visit: <https://shanghaiseminary.com/012025/>

only “every human being” but also MLK to meet by this logic of the History.¹⁷ The integrity if not cruelty of OLS is their conscientious abuse of Greenberg’s doctrine of flatness and Michael Fried’s comparativism: if there is something in need of flattening, it should be Art History so that a Depth—buried by a variety of Illusionism—will be brought forth; and if MLK is finally recognized as a player in the League of Art, would *I*, damned to be an artist as a human being, make anything be able to “support comparison with [MLK’s] work within [Modern Art] whose quality is not in doubt?”¹⁸—that is a question, a thought with hardly any carbon footprint, and a

¹⁷ I expect the language of this sentence is awkward enough to drive every reader to this footnote. I will begin my elaboration on this “logic” by raising a question: Why do we need such a digression to generate empathy with MLK? In other words, why should we connect through Art History if we already have Human History? Are we not all human in the first place? Can we not just speak of Human History? An Afropessimist answer to the question would be: We are not all human in the first place—Human History was inaugurated on the cost of a history of the slave/Black [See footnote 19]. That explains why Human History is merely wishful but does not justify Art History as an alternative. I will attempt a justification in the following. The logic of “recategorizing MLK as an artist” is not of the simple Beuysian conclusion “every human being is an artist” for MLK as a member of the slave/Black is ontologically antagonized against the Human. The Beuysian conclusion must be contextualized in a particular version of Modern Art History—the paradoxical solipsism—that is announced in a vernacular manner in *Nevermade*. The paradox of this solipsism owes its momentum to a sense of negativity—“the dance of negation”—elaborated eloquently by T. J. Clark in “Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art” in *Critical Inquiry*, 9, no. 1 (1982), 139-156. At the end of this article, Clark addresses his prospect of a species of modernism that is not the one in which “art can substitute itself for the values capitalism has made valueless”—Greenberg’s vehement belief. That species would be born out of class struggle and involve “a search for another place in the social order” in addition to “the kinds of inward turning.” As a species of modernism, it is itself a risk to Art: modernism could lead to Art’s dissolution. This risk is rejected by Greenberg and he is entitled even more “to be impatient with the pretense of risk so dear to one fringe of modernist art and its patrons—all that stuff about blurring the boundaries between art and life and the patter about art being ‘revolutionary.’... The risk is large and the patter odious; but the alternative, I believe, is on the whole worse.” Clark’s refusal of Greenberg is unambiguous but more importantly his reservation on “that *stuff* about blurring the boundaries between art and life” leaves a clue for a *literal* possibility of Art History. The synthesis of art and life is often associated with coinages like non-art, anti-art, or anti-aesthetic: various forms of negation put upon something [of] art. I will not address those meaningful nuances of their nomenclature but spot the commonality and pose a question: why is “art” the negated part? Or rather, positively negated instead of resolutely negated like its counterpart “life” which is however negated to invisibility? Why is this art-life synthesis not called non-life, anti-life, anti-livliness?—Once that *last* movement of “the dance of negation” is performed, the logic of Modern Art History will be satisfied and the justification of the Modern-Art-Historicization of MLK made—not of something but of nothing. At the end of Art History there is the negating MLK who is at the same time the negated non-life at the beginning of Human History while those members of the Human species recognize themselves positively as “every human being” as Modern Artist, and they will meet on the top of the depths of negativity. There is an episode in my argument that I have to mention in passing for my recognition without hermeneutic capacity for it: Class consciousness implicated in Clark’s wager on “class struggle.” In *History and Class Consciousness*, Georg Lukács exposed the antinomies of bourgeois thought to which he countered the standpoint of the proletariat. To what extent *Nevermade* is another expression of the bourgeois antinomies and how to properly understand the interaction among Marxism, Aesthetics, and Afropessimism suggested by OLS—properly addressing such problematics demands certain studies and sensibilities which I have not yet properly attempted.

¹⁸ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 165. Fried’s comment on the dialectics of object, theatricality, and objecthood is worth noting here: “[Tony] Smith’s account of his experience on the turnpike bears witness to theater’s profound hostility to the arts and discloses, precisely in the absence of the object and in what takes its place, what might be called the theatricality of objecthood. By the same token, however, the imperative that modernist painting defeat or suspend its objecthood is at bottom the imperative that it defeat or suspend theater.” (AO, 169) In

mental labor that is mandated as in the 2nd movement of *Nevermade*. As a thought, or rather, re-thought, it has a content substantiated by the paradoxical solipsism theorized in the 1st movement—a rethought of who I am, am not, ought, and ought not to be, regarding MLK and our History.¹⁹ And the typed out text, the show—many (re)thoughts made shared and shareable—with their electrical and bio-chemical expenditure exemplify again the unfortunate but inevitable sacrificial “postmodern Warholian ironic gestur[al]” physical labor that has been exemplified in the 3rd movement of *Nevermade*.

Duchamp’s readymades there is no *literal* absence of objects. Those objects’ absence is *conceptual* for they are chosen indifferently—Duchamp’s literalism thus could be considered a more sophisticated one. While “modernist painting defeating its objecthood” sounds indeed too anthropocentric if not *chūnibyō* and thus unjustifiably paranoid, should “the slave defeating their subjection/objecthood” not be affirmed? I could be overly sympathetic to Fried’s critical endeavor but I still wish to read Fried’s paranoia reparatively, following David Velasco’s example—“Love’s Work,” *Artforum*, November 9, 2023: <https://www.artforum.com/columns/loves-work-252014/>

¹⁹ Led by this rethought, I rediscovered and finally registered Frank B. Wilderson III’s definition of Afropessimism and its significance. An anecdotal account in some close relationship to the Institute of Art might not be untelling. I visited Aria Dean’s *Abattoir, U.S.A.!* and attended her talk at the Renaissance Society in early 2023. I was generally [and might still be] biased against the use of CGI and game engine in art but overall the transformation of the Ren space into an immersive multi-sensory slaughterhouse felt somehow inaccessible. In mid 2024, Arthur Jafa’s survey show at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago proved timely and I was encouraged to rethink Dean’s work in relation to Jafa’s. I read Dean’s collection of essays *Bad Infinity*, (London: Sternberg Press, 2023)—whose Hegelian title I was very much confused by at that time—and the opening statement by Frank B. Wilderson III was a shock. Here is Wilderson:

[Responding to Dean’s question “[w]hat is Afropessimism?”—] I think that the first people who were being designated as Black, living on a continent that was being named as Africa, were Afropessimists. In other words, as the people who were soon to be known as Arab, Iranian, Iraqi, Chinese, East Indian, and Moroccan Jews vamped on people who were, at the time, members of various identities, such as Kikuyu, Buganda, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, as the former vamped on the latter—and through this process instantiated a new world order, one which inaugurated two new species, the species of the Human and the species of the slave/Black—even as this was happening the Blacks understood that the absolute deracination of their capacity for subjectivity was inextricably tied to the emergence of capacity, Human capacity, for all others... Afropessimism, as a critique of Human capacity and the absence of Human capacity embodied in the Black, the Slave, begins in 625 AD. From 1997 to about 2004, Afropessimism takes shape as a field of research that intervenes in an overtly conscious way in order to explain and give theoretical shape to what I have said above: that everyone’s (every Human’s) capacity to be (in other words, subjectivity, agency, identity writ large) is fundamentally a parasitic capacity; one in which the host of the parasite is the Black/the Slave. When I say “everyone,” I really and truly mean, everyone; from genocided Native Americans to exalted, White male, genociders. Everyone. No Marxist worth their salt would make a structural distinction between a soft and sunny capitalist like George Soros and a rabid-crazed capitalist like Donald Trump. To do so would be to have a conversation about capitalist performances, rather than capitalist capacity: a capacity that is parasitic on the labor-time and the intensification of work.

After spending some serious hours on *Nevermade*, that initial shock brought by Wilderson is hammered under my skin. Wilderson also talked about how the “probably unwell and paranoid, and straight up racist” Lars von Trier’s *Manderlay* “is extremely cerebral, a lot of Brechtian distancing and so on” and thus “a brilliant Afropessimist film”—a title I would also save for *Nevermade*. And the fact that it is *Nevermade*—neither Dean nor Jafa—ironed this “truth” for me could be itself a symptom.

One of the mysteries of Plato's *Republic* is the literary relation between the city and man: Is Plato's communism in the end not an actual guideline for city planning but a metaphor for individual well-being? If we are tempted to say yes, it thus presents itself as an early model of the morphology between the technical separation and the social division of labor. For our purpose, Socrates' queer definition of justice—"minding one's own business"—has a unique echo in Kant's theory of Faculty. While de Duve anthropomorphized "the free play between the imagination and the understanding" in his chapter with an emphasis on the third Critique,²⁰ I am here to provide a parallel observation on the duel between speculative reason and practical reason of the first two Critiques. This duel is articulated in sheer clarity by the philosophical optimist Gilles Deleuze:

Kant insists on a difference between the Critique of *pure* speculative Reason, and the Critique of Practical Reason: the latter is not a critique of 'pure' practical Reason. Indeed, in the speculative interest, reason cannot legislate itself (take care of its own interest): thus pure reason is the source of internal illusions as soon as it claims to assume a legislative role. In the practical interest, on the contrary, reason does not give anyone else the responsibility of legislating: 'where it is once demonstrated to exist, it is in no need of a critical examination'. It is not pure practical reason which needs a critique, or which is the source of illusions, but rather the impurity which is mixed up with it, in so far as empirical interests are reflected in it. Thus, to the critique of pure speculative reason there corresponds a critique of impure practical reason. Nevertheless, there remains something in common between the two: the so-called transcendental method is always the determination of an *immanent* employment of reason, conforming to one of its interests. The *Critique of Pure Reason* thus condemns the transcendent employment of a speculative reason which claims to legislate by itself; the *Critique of Practical Reason* condemns the transcendent employment of a practical reason which, instead of legislating by itself, lets itself be empirically conditioned.²¹

Drawing upon Kant's language, could we thus say the hostility displayed and the ban put upon making by *Nevermade* need to be condemned as the transcendent employment of a speculative reason which claims to legislate by itself? That would be accepted with common sense, I assume, and *Nevermade* could be seen as at most a caricature of the hubris of Thinking, because it is simply absurd to spectate your artist peers being policed and asked not to make art. But are we still so sure to think the Thinking of *Nevermade* is not of a practical reason? And if it is, the Thinking of *Nevermade* is to be regarded as an immanent employment of a practical reason and its legislation should be not conditioned empirically—in other words, commonsensically—but solipsistically: it is you, with your own business, right, and responsibility, that are re-minded on the train called "human race" speeding on the rail of History, and entitled

²⁰ De Duve, *Aesthetics at Large*, 120-125.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), 36-37.

to decide if the emergency brake should be pulled.²² We are not collectively witnessing the violence of the social regulation of labor like watching a malicious car crash but individually commanded to undergo a private session of transvaluation of values, mentally and mindfully, alongside everything we will labor into our world, physically and naturally. The separation of mental and physical labor is technical for it is nonetheless a brutal fact of us as human beings: we think and we act. And if you wonder why *Nevermade's* privileging Thinking over Making sounds so desperate, I guess it is because “[f]ascism sees its salvation in granting *expression* to the masses—but on no account granting them rights.”²³

Nevermade does not pretend. Its pathos is a breed of intellectual probity which could be seen as aesthetic terrorism. It drains the melancholy of the Adornian negativity and injects its remaining Hegelian body with an exceptional dose of American squalor. No noble lie: its hideous use of words and showy audio-visuals proudly claim vulgarity. Not quite ironic: it is those who take it as only an “ironic gesture” that aestheticize its politics—a politics that is better served as an invitation to some’s personal Purgatory. When B finally agreed to make this video, she was persuaded by nothing but W’s “playing it out” (*NM* 22:34): Nothing will make B happy except for making *Nevermade*. Pleasure could not be passed without notice for convenience but should be acknowledged, in the most shameful manner, for having the very last word. Many of *Nevermade's* effects could thus be discredited as Christianity with American characteristics. No problem. As long as its asceticism is set fast, it affirms its identity as negativity as Critique—Capital “C” Critique with no qualification meaning its nature, or rather, its own business, is minding everybody’s owned business.

²² Walter Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’” in *Selected Writings*, vol.4, ed. Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 402: “Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely, the human race—to activate the emergency brake.”

²³ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility” in *Selected Writings*, vol.4, 269.