CHAPTER 2

Rhetorical Materialism: The Rhetorical Subject and the General Intellect

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Materialism is the affirmation of life, without either theoretical mystification or political authority. Materialism is always revolutionary.

Antonio Negri, *Negri on Negri: Conversations with Anne Douroumientelle*

The revolutionary character of materialism did not impress the editors of the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*. There is no entry for materialism, nor its many permutations: dialectical, structural, cultural, social, and/or physical materialism. The *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* is silent as to whether a rhetorical materialism or a material rhetoric exists and, if it exists, whether it might be or should be old or new, one or another, classical or modern, postmodern or poststructuralist. However, one does find many flowers with materialist roots: the critical tradition of communication (Robert Craig), constitutive rhetoric (Maurice Charland), critical rhetoric (Raymie McKerrow), rhetoric and power (Andrew King), and the ideograph (Michael Calvin McGee). As this associational list suggests, any materialist rhetoric would seem to manifest itself as a politically engaged rhetorical criticism of the strong and a commitment to empower the weak. While the proliferation of such a politically engaged rhetorical stance would support Carole Blair’s contention that “to write rhetorical criticism from within a perspective of materialism is no longer unique,” the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* would seem to relegate materialism to the family tree of modern and critical influences on contemporary rhetorical criticism. As such, the concept of materialism is all too often submerged by the interpretive function of criticism that risks displacing and erasing materialism’s revolutionary affirmation of life.

Due to “the critical disturbances of the late 1980s and 1990s,” disturbances the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* duly notes, at least three materialist stances emerged in rhetorical studies: “a traditional one that insists upon con-
tention to how its problematization partakes in regimes of cultural, economic, and political value. In other words, the invention of the rhetorical subject gestures toward its production while its problematization gestures toward its governance. By understanding the rhetorical subject as immanent to the articulation of regimes of production and government, I will conclude by discussing how the rhetorical subject generates value through the material labor of producing and appropriating the general intellect. As such, the revolutionary potential of the rhetorical subject is materialized in the antagonism and struggle over the value of the general intellect. Consequently, at the conceptual level, this essay argues that a materialist rhetoric should, first and foremost, be concerned with locating rhetorical practice and subjectivity within a material ontology of production. Moreover, at the level of critical practice, this essay will argue for an articulation model for assessing the productivity of rhetorical practices in opposition to the interpretive function of rhetorical criticism.

The Limits of Rhetorical Subjectivity

This chapter is interested in unpacking the claim that rhetoric is material by beginning with the production of subjectivity. To do so requires an investigation into the ideological. One of the central contributions of Louis Althusser was his insight that ideology be conceptualized as a mode of production that constitutes “concrete individuals as subjects.” Althusser describes the material process of this subjectification in the following way: “[T]he subject acts in so far as he [or she] is acted by the following system (set out in order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief.” Ideology is not so much an idea or set of ideas that make up a worldview, nor is ideology merely a “superstructural” effect of an economic mode of production. Ideology is a mode of production with its own (relatively autonomous) social practices. From such a perspective, ideology is not the interest lurking behind the back of the speaker or the critic, but a terrain and practice of turning individuals into subjects of a particular kind. Famously, Althusser leaves unanswered the differences between the varied modalities of materiality (actions, practices, rituals, and apparatuses) involved in the making of a subject. Nonetheless, we are left with the provocative possibility that a social formation is not so much the dialectical interaction between an economic base and a cultural superstructure (or a context and text, to use a rhetorical idiom) but the uneven configuration of different levels of production—levels of production that are themselves internally different.
across space and time. With an eye toward the accounting for the character of a social totality, the critical task according to Stuart Hall is to reveal how a social formation comes together as a “structure of dominance” by accounting for the articulation of different levels of production (ideological, political, economic). However, Althusser’s description of ideology as a practice that reproduces the conditions of production left in its wake a functionalist language; that is, in the last instance, ideology reproduces the relations of domination that remake and refresh the capitalist mode of production. In other words, the fear that the ideological prevents the production of an oppositional subject, a fear Joshua Gunn and Shaun Treit call “the zombie complex,” has made it difficult to appreciate the material consequences of Althusser’s intervention.\footnote{Where might we find the rhetorical in such a material theory of ideology? Here Althusser’s definition of ideology as a “representation” of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence takes center stage. The use of the imaginary, in this definition, gestures toward Althusser’s encounter with Lacan and the importance of the unconscious as the ground of ideological production. In kind, the Lacanian formulation that the unconscious is structured like a language authorized the reconceptualization of the productive capacity of ideology in terms of signifying processes and discursive practices. Thus, ideology describes how the “means of representation” partake in a general process of subjectivity, a process understood in terms of the structural logic of language. Increasingly, this emphasis on language came to be understood in terms of how a subject comes into being through its identification with an “other.” In this process of identification, the psychic life of the individual and the social formation are linked together by the recognition of the symbolic order.}

The concept that links the general process of ideological subjectification to particular discursive practices is interpellation. Interpellation describes the moment an individual recognizes him- or herself as the one addressed by a discursive practice. For example, Maurice Charland argues that in the White Paper of the Parti Québécois, the “rhetoric of interpellation” embeds a mode of address that hails an audience as (1) a collective subject, (2) a transhistorical subject, and (3) one free to choose.\footnote{From this perspective, interpellation describes a speech act, but does so with the presumption of successfully “turning” a reader/audience. Yet, as Judith Butler argues, interpellations do fail; one does not always recognize oneself as the one addressed by the speech act. Moreover, for Butler, the constitutive rhetoric of interpellation should not be associated with a subject recognizing itself in response to the creative power of a sovereign voice.\footnote{Interpellation cannot be reduced to a particular moment of enunciation, a particular speech act situated in time and place. Interpellation is better conceptualized as the cumulative effect of a process of (re)iteration and citationality. Unfortunately, the tendency of the case-study approach in rhetorical criticism to “textualize” the case as a situated practice is likely to limit the understanding of interpellation to a moment of enunciation. While the concept of interpellation reveals how the rhetorical, both as a situated practice of persuasion and as a general process inherent to all discourses, takes on its material status by addressing subjects, it becomes too easy to confuse a materialist theory of subjectivity with an uncritical social constructionism. More specifically, we tend to replace a theoretical tradition that might be useful in formulating a rhetorical materialism with an emphasis on constitutive rhetoric, a substitution that highlights the text as a “sovereign voice.” To embed the material dimension of rhetoric into a generalized constitutive process is to displace the Althusserian configuration of the social as an articulation of different levels or structures of production. In other words, a “constitutive rhetoric” has the potential to materialize rhetoric at the expense of “dematerializing” textuality from any process of production. Moreover, the modalities of ideological materiality (actions, practices, apparatuses, and rituals) are increasingly forced to appear as texts for rhetorical studies to perform its critical interpretation. Thus, to speak of rhetorical materialism as the constitutive power of a speech act or to translate the material modalities of ideological subjectification into a generalized process of textuality is to harness rhetorical materialism to an interpretive project that unpacks a cultural form for what it constitutes, hides, and/or cannot contain about the nature of ideological power. Even when rhetorical scholars are armored with the post-structuralist lessons provided by Butler’s insistence on interpellation as repetitive citationality immanent within an embodied praxis, our critical hermeneutics risks being limited to a general appreciation of how language and communication partake in the constitution of meaning. At its best, a constitutive rhetoric provides the foundation for approaching a text as an active intervention that reorganizes and/or reiterates a discursive field. However, reconfiguring the text/context relationship as one between a text and a discursive field still holds a person hostage to the text as a site of utterance and a critical act that demands the text speak about power. Moreover, the critical move toward a rhetorical understanding of subjectivity (a process more often understood as the cultural turn) tends to direct the interpretive gaze toward the internal working of a text, for example, the stylistic tokens that bring forth an ideal audience (or persona). Yet, how social agents are taught, formally or informally, to interpret texts is made invisible to a rhetorical theory of...}
of subjectivity that imagines the subject as an effect of a speech act.

From an Althusserian starting point, one might approach the representational character of public address as one material modality in the ideological production of subjectivity. From a less Marxist but more semiotic/psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity, a critic might attend to how a subject comes into being through his or her insertion into the symbolic order of language. From a semiotic starting point, the rhetorical is no longer one cultural practice among others, but a more general process that describes how all practices form subjects of a particular kind. Yet, what began as a Marxist concern about ideological subjectification and the articulation of different levels of production has been increasingly hijacked to an investigation into a more general process of rhetoricality. What this means for the material dimensions of rhetoric is that materiality begins to appear as a common topic for a critical hermeneutics that either explains the limit on the constitutive force of a speech act (more often than not the body and/or structural forms of power) and/or expands the cultural forms that a generalized rhetoricality infuses with meaning and power (for example, sculpture and quilts). If the former, we have simply returned to a stasis point we thought we left behind: a dual ontology that places materiality outside the rhetorical. If the latter, the material character of rhetoric is captured by a forty-year disciplinary drive to expand the object domain by which a critic can uncover a general process of rhetoricality. While the disciplinary drive to expand the object domain offers a way to bypass the limitations associated with traditional notions of rhetorical agency associated with white, masculine, and elite forms of public address, the refiguration of the material and the rhetorical as two different ontological planes dooms a materialist approach to a never-ending dialectical criticism moving between one plane and another. Such a dialectical criticism remains open to the charge of being neither rhetorical nor material enough and leaves unexamined how that interpretive gap between ontological planes emerged in the first place. In other words, “minding the gap” between the rhetorical and the material becomes a technology for producing “well-tempered” subjects. To advance a material rhetoric to expand the object domain risks the repetition of discovering a general process of rhetoricality as the transcendental telos of our rhetorical criticism while ignoring how the teaching and learning of such a cultural hermeneutics functions as a material practice of subjectification. What I find troubling is how the substitution of a general constitutive process (constitutive rhetoric) becomes a substitute for a material theory of rhetoric, a situation that often gets bogged down into a debate over the “limits” of the discursive plane while hiding the material history of rhetorical criticism from investigation.

Following the trajectory outlined in this section, I would contend that a material rhetoric has increasingly been deployed to describe how a general process of rhetoricality appears in different material forms (media, bodies, places, buildings, discourse) and how those material forms offer themselves for (critical) interrogation. The recognition of a plurality of material forms rescues a material rhetoric from a dual ontology. However, all too often, what begins as a material rhetoric (a study of the rhetorics of material modalities) reproduces a dialectical criticism in which the discursive dynamic is evaluated in terms of its success to overcome a pre-existent context. In contrast, I want to suggest that a materialist rhetoric (or rhetorical materialism) might more fruitfully describe how the persuasive, deliberative, educational, technological, and/or aesthetic dimensions of communication are integral to the articulation of regimes of value. As such, a rhetorical materialism should partake in a materialist ontology that configures the rhetorical subject as a particular kind of being invented by and for specific apparatuses of production.

Like a material rhetoric, rhetorical materialism understands the rhetorical as material; that is, it rejects a dualist ontology that separates speech from materiality. A materialist rhetoric does so by positing materiality as an immanent process of production in which rhetoric and communication are integral elements of any mode of production. However, we will need to abandon an understanding of rhetorical subjectivity as a generalized ideological effect of discursive and signifying processes. In other words, we need to place limits on rhetorical subjectivity as a general consequence of how language constitutes subjectivity. In turn, we need a more specific and concrete concept of the rhetorical subject. As a beginning, I suggest that a rhetorical subject refers to a subject that speaks and is spoken to. The history of being able to claim the “right” to speak and be spoken to is a story of cultural value and political struggle. The question that should guide rhetorical scholars concerning the production of subjectivity is how concrete individuals come to understand themselves as subjects who communicate rhetorically. As such, the rhetorical subject has a specific history, whose value has been subject to intense problematization, beginning with Plato, and one that requires a set of institutions, techniques, rituals, and knowledge to inculcate in the subject the requisite “rhetorical sensitivity.” Rhetorical subjectivity, therefore, should not be approached as any form of subjectivity that appears as a “meaning effect” and/or psychological effect of discursive processes inherent to “texts,” but a specific kind of subjectivity ethically, politically, economically, and culturally produced and valued for the work it can and cannot accomplish. Thus, a rhetorical materialism first and foremost should be committed
to addressing how the production and value of the rhetorical subject informs the articulation of political, cultural, and economic modes of production.

Governing the Rhetorical Subject

As I am writing this chapter, eight years removed from the publication of “Another Materialist Rhetoric,” I find myself struggling with the problem of where this chapter sits in relationship to that first essay. One temptation is to view “Another Materialist Rhetoric” as the beginning of an argument and this chapter as something approaching a middle (optimistically) that will, in the future, be brought to a conclusion. The “rhetoric of continuity” would seem to demand that I do the impossible: to avoid those discontinuities in style and argument that appear between texts and within texts.23 Of course, a rhetoric of continuity betrays my own desire to keep the first essay alive, to maintain its fleeting value. My contribution to the material problematic began with the latter Foucault’s emphasis on the art of government.24 Specifically, my argument was to rethink the materiality of rhetoric as a “technology of deliberation” that informed governmental judgments to remake reality. Four key points are worth returning to: (1) a move from the semiotic to the technological, (2) the importance of institutions, (3) a critical interest in the organization of a governing apparatus, and (4) the importance of articulation as a methodological commitment. To explore each of these points, this section will turn to the production and articulation of the rhetorical subject.

If we begin with Althusser and emphasize the materiality of subjectification as the historical transformation of a concrete individual into a subject, then a Foucauldian approach to this process would emphasize the governmental dynamics of subjectification. As Nikolas Rose puts it, “[s]ubjectification is not to be understood by locating it in a universe of meaning or an interactional context of narratives, but in a complex of apparatuses, practices, machinations, and assemblages within which human beings have been fabricated, and which presuppose and enjoin particular relations with ourselves.”25 From such a perspective, the ontological privilege given to language, and by implication, the rhetorical, must be given up for a more modest understanding of how the rhetorical subject might exist as one particular mode of subjectification. To be sure, there are many different ways the rhetorical subject might appear (deliberative citizen, orator-statesman, salesperson, audience, voter, consumer), but each of these forms requires a particular articulation of the rhetorical subject in specific political, cultural, or economic directions. It is the historical articulation of the rhetorical subject to different ontological forms that generates disagreement about its value. However, to focus our attention on what the specific character of a rhetorical subject might be, Richard Lanham’s ontological distinction between *homo serious* and *homo rhetoricus* provides a useful point of departure. For Lanham,

Lanham discovers *homo rhetoricus* to be an active figure underwriting any understanding of the European Renaissance and, if we are to take his pronouns literally, a gendered subject, i.e., a man. *Homo rhetoricus* has origins in the Sophists of Athenian antiquity, and one might find its contemporary manifestation today in the advertising executive or the political campaign manager, even if he is often a she. To be sure, Lanham’s rhetorical subject would not satisfy many serious scholars, but what Lanham demonstrates is the way an empty figure (the rhetorical subject) begins to take on a set of characteristics and dispositions (content). Any disagreement over the character or proper disposition of the rhetorical subject, and how the rhetorical subject works to abstract or particularize the bodies that might occupy the subject position, points to the history of its problematization, a history that betrays any ontological priority to the rhetorical by pointing to the need to fabricate, mold, and transform the rhetorical subject in particular directions. It is the desire to fabricate the rhetorical subject that points to the technological dimensions of rhetoric—that is, how the rhetorical techniques and technologies manufacture a rhetorical subject.

The first point to emphasize about a Foucauldian approach to subjectification is a shift from the semiotic to the technological dimensions of rhetoric. From such a perspective, the semiotic does not go away as much as it is refigured as one of rhetoric’s technological products. Thus, if we begin with Foucault’s distinction between four types of technologies (technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of the self), the rhetorical subject, offered by Lanham, has a particular relationship to sign systems: it is fluid, playful, antagonistic, and
flexible. Yet, the rhetorical subject is not a naturally occurring being in the world; it must be cultivated. In other words, a rhetorical subject may live his or her life utilizing sign systems, but this requires training or pedagogy. Thus, rhetoric can move from its “typical” location within the terrain of meaning to appear as a technology of the self, using communication and other techniques, to help individuals develop relationships with themselves, as rhetorical subjects. For better or worse, the existence of the public speaking class is a rather shaky technology that produces different techniques (persuasive speeches, after dinner speeches, etc.) to instill in a student a sense of being a rhetorical subject. So, too, would a rhetorical criticism class or a class in the history of public address. Moreover, rhetoric becomes a technology of power when its techniques and technologies are used to create objects for persuasion, a target population, to be transformed through the act of persuasion. This was the primary way I imagined rhetoric working as a technology of deliberation: through a host of multiple discursive genres, particular populations, behaviors, and situations would become visible for the purpose of intervention and calibration. From this perspective, controversy is to be expected, and the rhetorical character of that controversy is a crucial element of any governmental intervention. However, if we were to stay closer to the rhetorical as a specific subject, then technologies of power would focus on how ways of speaking become objects of concern and how certain ways of communicating become active in submitting individuals to certain ends. For example, recent attempts to use “entertainment-education” to persuade women and men, mostly in the Southern Hemisphere, to use birth control is an example of rhetoric as a technology of power. Finally, in a world in which our ability to manipulate things, to produce and transform things, are increasingly associated with communication technologies, rhetoric can appear as a technology of production, a way to manipulate things. For example, design dynamics and marketing, two modern-day rhetorical forms, are increasingly built into the production process associated with the exchange of commodities.

Thus, the rhetorical subject, as a particular subject, may exist as primarily a “symbol-using animal,” but its fabrication requires a host of technologies to encourage the subject to imagine him- or herself as a rhetorical subject. For example, Darrin Hicks and I have argued that “debating both sides” of a proposition, with its roots in the sophistic practice of *dissoi logoi*, should be approached as a rhetorical technology of the self, one assigned the power to transform the ethical relationship between a subject and his or her convictions. Working through a particular moment when debating both sides was made an object of intense scrutiny (1954–1966), we have demonstrated how the technique was valued for its ability to adjust one’s convictions toward the norm of free and full expression and away from a substantive conviction associated with a particular policy option. At this point, the rhetorical subject fashions itself as a liberal citizen committed to a proceduralist notion of democracy.

The debating-both-sides controversy also demonstrates how technologies of the self are closely attached to specific institutions. It should not be a surprise that many of the technologies of the self advocated by rhetorical scholars to produce rhetorical subjects are likely to be found in specific institutional forms, for example, educational institutions providing courses in composition and communication in the United States. Thus, the second reason for a more governmental approach to the material history of rhetoric is to heighten the relationship between technologies and institutional histories. A central lesson I have taken away from the Althusserian approach to subjectification is that how subjects emerge due to their contact with the type of specific institutions he calls ideological state apparatuses. While the Althusserian emphasis on ideology as representation has authorized a careful investigation of the role media texts play in forming subjects, we have often lost track of the internal workings of media institutions and how they contribute to particular visions of subjectivity. To appreciate the specific history and forms by which the rhetorical subject might appear, it would be important to pay attention not only to media institutions, but to the whole cultural terrain associated with educational institutions, state institutions, transnational networks, and the institutional forms associated with advertising and public relations. For example, the debating-both-sides controversy pulled together the close relationship between speech education and the extracurricular activity of competitive intercollegiate debate. This institutional interface was made visible, in part, due to the importance of pedagogy to the mission of speech departments and rhetorical theory. It is the growing invisibility of pedagogy to rhetorical theory that makes it difficult to recognize how the discipline partakes in the construction of a rhetorical subject. One of the most unfortunate effects of Michael Calvin McGee’s initial call for a materialist theory of rhetoric was his insistence that we look beyond the institutional history of rhetoric to the practices of persuasion in everyday life. In so doing, the investments of rhetorical studies, as an institution, in the fabrication and regulation of the rhetorical subject is often dispersed into the act of criticism. To be sure, it is important to pay attention to the practices of persuasion, but, even here, one should pay close attention to their institutional histories. One might find important similarities and differences about the process of persuasion from the standpoint of institutions involved with direct mail campaigns as opposed to
institutions attempting to persuade by the use of interactive blogs. Moreover, how well “technologies of public persuasion” circulate as cultural forms might be due to how institutional forms take care to produce and reproduce these rhetorical technologies.31

The third Foucauldian-inspired move required for a rhetorical materialism is the role of a governing apparatus in both contextualizing and localizing rhetorical practices. A governing apparatus exists to formulate and solve public problems. It is, therefore, an ensemble of different elements including, but not limited to, political appointments, think tanks, social movements, state and non-state institutions, discourses, technologies, and populations. For a governing apparatus to produce and reproduce itself requires the rhetorical work associated with representation, persuasion, and deliberation. A governing apparatus may have a specific national or local history, but it may also exist as a transnational and global space. In fact, as public problems take on more global dimensions, for example, climate change, we are likely to experience even more global forms of a governing apparatus. A governing apparatus exists, therefore, as a material space by which to investigate the effectiveness of rhetorical practices by analyzing how they answer questions concerning such classic policy dynamics as the nature of the problem, the causes of the problem, what solutions are advocated, and which solutions are discounted. While I have done work on the existence of a population apparatus, a governing apparatus organized to deal with the problems associated with population growth, a governing apparatus may exist in less visible ways.32

For example, returning to the history of the rhetorical subject, one might speak to how the rhetorical subject traverses a citizenship apparatus—that is, an apparatus dedicated to solving problems associated with citizenship. At a minimum, we might include in such a governing apparatus institutions (state and non-state actors) that promote civic engagement among high school kids, discourses drawn from progressive education among white school kids, discourses drawn from progressive education among black school kids, and the government’s treatment of educational matters. The rhetorical subject would seem to be an integral element of any citizenship apparatus built on a progressive foundation of communication, but one might also imagine a citizenship apparatus less committed to communication as a means for manufacturing good citizenship. In other words, some might prefer a citizenship apparatus distinct from such a heavy investment in participatory models of communication and prefer simply enlarging the number of voters who vote. Of course, perhaps the history of rhetorical theory is nothing other than the problematization and en-

ticements in favor of a particular ideal of the rhetorical subject. In other words, the dominant form the rhetorical subject takes is the result of a balance of forces that occupy a rhetorical apparatus—that is, a governing apparatus dedicated to the problems associated with the speaking subject.

The different roles played by communication in a governing apparatus points to the need for a theory and method of articulation to guide the empirical work of a rhetorical materialism. As developed in cultural studies, articulation refers to connecting diverse elements into a working ensemble, what Hall calls “a unity in difference.”33 Following the suggestion of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, articulation is often associated with a discursive process of linking concepts to practices to orient the production of meaning.34 This approach views articulation as primarily a discursive process and taking place as part of an ideological struggle for hegemony. From the standpoint of Stuart Hall, however, articulation requires a second move from discourse to the conjuncture: “A theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at conjunctures, to certain political subjects.”35 Hall, then, envisions a more “structured” totality than Laclau and Mouffe, one that calls for more sensitivity to how “free” a signifier might be for re-articulation. Thus, an approach to articulation that does not reduce the social totality to a discursive field has, according to Jennifer Daryl Slack, “[o]pened the way for cultural theorists to consider the role of other social forces both in their specificity and in discourse, interrogating the ways in which they are complexly articulated in structures of domination and subordination and considering the ways they might be re-articulated.”36

A double articulation requires that a critic explain how the significance of a cultural form depends on its links to a discursive field, as well as how this plane of signification is attached to a conjunctural history made up of different modes of production. It is a view toward how the plane of signification and ideology crisscrosses other planes of effectiveness (affective, economic) that underwrites Lawrence Grossberg’s claim that articulation provides the conceptual possibility for a theory and practice of contexts. Therefore, to inform rhetorical materialism with a theory and practice of articulation requires a critical stance that is less hermeneutic and more diagrammatic, one made possible by mapping the temporal and spatial disjunctures and conjunctures provided by different articulations.37 From the materialist perspective I have laid out, a conjuncture might best be thought of as a spatio-temporal articulation of different apparatuses forming a diagram of power.
In my earlier work, I posited a governing apparatus as a peculiar site for the articulation of different social forces. If we were to begin with the rhetorical subject as a concrete, but empty, form, the articulation of a rhetorical subject requires (1) an appreciation of the discourses that give flesh to the concrete rhetorical subject as a subject with particular characteristics and dispositions, (2) the specific techniques and technologies deployed to bring about the valued disposition of a rhetorical subject, (3) the articulation of the rhetorical subject to other forms of subjectivity, and (4) other social forces and planes of efficacy that allow a rhetorical subject to formulate a new context. In discussing how to approach a history of subjectivity, therefore, Foucault argues, “Whoever wishes to study the history of subjectivity will have to uncover the very long and slow transformation of an apparatus of subjectivity, defined by spirituality of knowledge and the subject’s practice of truth, into this other apparatus of subjectivity, governed by the question of a subject’s knowledge of himself and the subject’s obedience to the law.”

The ways in which the subject interacts with and within different apparatuses speaks to the need for a methodological commitment to articulation. Thus, a double articulation about rhetorical subjectivity includes how one is invited to partake in a hermeneutics of the self that orients a concrete individual toward an ideal of the rhetorical subject, and how this rhetorical subject finds itself linked to other productive apparatuses.

The Rhetorical Subject and the General Intellect

In the last couple of years, I have become increasingly committed to making explicit how this Foucauldian starting point should participate in a rhetorical materialism that envisions itself as contributing to the creation of a Marxism “beyond Marx.” As such, I have argued that the production of the rhetorical subject requires its contextualization as a mode of communicative labor and as an element in the articulation of a class struggle. But doing so requires a more materialist understanding of the rhetorical subject than the one provided by rhetorical appropriations of Marxism that advance a political/economic identity speaking in the interest of the working class. We need to be more sensitive to how communication and, more specifically, the rhetorical subject operate alongside an apparatus of subjectivity associated with changes in capitalism that understands that commodity production is not the only site for generating class antagonisms. An important element in the rearticulation of the rhetorical subject, I argue, concerns how it emerges as immaterial labor. Thus, this section will disperse the rhetorical subject into the historical changes in the modes of labor to make visible how the rhetorical subject operates to produce and extract value from the general intellect.

What is immaterial labor? In its broadest sense, immaterial labor is “labor that produces an immaterial product, such as ideas, images, forms of communication, affects, or social relationships.” In discussing the changes in the production process of commodities, Maurizio Lazzarato highlights how the commodity form increasingly gains value through the harnessing of immaterial labor. Two key changes are noted. First, the “informational content” of the commodity relies on a labor process increasingly required to handle information, make decisions, work in teams, and use communication technologies. Second, immaterial labor refers to the “cultural content” of the commodity. Lazzarato defines the cultural content as “[t]he kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashion, tastes, consumer norms, and more strategically, public opinion.”

Immaterial labor does not mean that commodity production or manual labor has disappeared, but that at the qualitative end of capitalist social relations, labor produces the most value when, as Lazzarato puts it, “one has to express oneself, one has to speak, communicate, cooperate.” When we disperse the rhetorical subject into a capitalist apparatus of subjectivity, we discover a particular laboring subject that communicates to produce value. From this perspective, we can begin to understand why communication skills have such a high cultural value for firms when we keep in mind how communication skills partake in the harnessing of immaterial labor.

The capitalist mode of production increasingly breaks down the distinction between forces of production and relations of production when faced with the articulation of the rhetorical subject. Since communication finds itself as both a force and relation of production, the rhetorical subject would seem to have lost any critical function. The capture of the rhetorical subject by capitalism would seem to warrant Gilles Deleuze’s maxim that “speech and communication have been corrupted... not by accident but by their very nature.”

In other words, while rhetorical scholars might lament or celebrate the marginalization of rhetorical studies, a process Robert Hariman believes has something to do with the inability of rhetoric to professionalize itself in the early twentieth century, the rhetorical subject did find many new professions: in public relations, advertising, journalism, and propaganda. From Deleuze’s perspective, communication makes possible a “control society” where no one is “left alone for long” and everything is subjected to the force of a “modulation, like a self-transmuting molding, continually changing from one moment to the next.” A control society would seem to ensure the commodification of home rhetoricus and command that everyone cultivate the required rhetorical sensitivity.

One solution to this state of affairs is to posit a subject outside of capi-
ism (the deliberative or radical citizen) as an antidote to the control society. However, such a view removes the rhetorical subject from its history of production and may only feed the state’s demand for the immaterial labor of civic engagement, a kind of labor that contributes to governing public problems and produces the value of legitimacy for its rule. Not only does this political hope for the rhetorical subject ignore how political communication has been colonized by money, but it assumes that the critical function of the rhetorical subject needs to be located outside the mode of production. A more materialist place to start would be to begin with the real subsumption of communication by capitalism in order to trace how the rhetorical subject might disrupt capitalism’s regime of value.

In other words, an affirmative criticism is necessary that begins with a premise, posited by Antonio Negri, that “the actuality of communism, then, is the actuality of community. Thereby, the desire for community is formed in a mature, visible and immediate way during the process of re-appropriating the means of communication.” To begin to understand the antagonism that is produced due to the contradictions of immaterial labor for capitalism, it is useful to return to Karl Marx’s concept of the “general intellect,” one of the few English words he uses in the Grundrisse:

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry: natural material transformed by organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.

This passage appears at the end of what is known as the “Fragment on Machines” and highlights both the replacement of workers by machines (fixed capital) and how production becomes increasingly reliant on the social practices of real life. In today’s language, the general intellect would not only describe machines that produce commodities and services, but all the “research and development” investments to invent new products, services, and concepts. The general intellect makes it possible to investigate how invention (rhetorical and otherwise) “becomes a business, and the application of science to direct production itself becomes a prospect which determines and solicits it.” For Marx, the absorption of the general intellect into the forces of production creates the potential of a crisis for capitalism because “automatisation and socialization create the possibility of—the necessity for—dispensing with wage labor and private ownership.” From where Marx stood, capital required the production of surplus value, a process that could only be extracted from appropriating the labor-time of wage labor. Thus, to the extent that wage-labor became less necessary due to machines, capitalism’s existence as a mode of production was threatened.

In writing about the “Fragment on Machines,” Nick Dyer-Witheford represents Marx’s view as both “astoundingly prescient and sadly anachronistic.” It is prescient for how it predicts the coming of the “knowledge economy.” The concept of the general intellect offers a way into why questions about the funding of research and development from industrial and state sources remains such an important, if often unreported, topic of public debate. However, the “Fragment on Machines” is anachronistic in its prediction that capitalism might fall due to the contradiction of making wage-labor less important to the production of capital. One problem with the “Fragment on Machines” is a conceptual assumption that as capital appropriates the general intellect, the general intellect becomes, like machines, fixed capital or “dead labor.” Based on Marx’s labor theory of value, the forces of production, like machinery, represent dead labor, while the labor power brought into relations of production to animate the forces of production is called living labor. Without the social relationship of wage-labor, surplus value cannot be generated. Yet, one of the important revisions of the “Fragment on Machines” is the dispersal of the general intellect back into the relations of production, i.e., into living labor. As Paulo Virno puts it,

Marx [neglects] the instance when [the] general intellect manifests itself . . . as living labor. This is precisely the decisive aspect today. Today it is not difficult to enlarge the notion of the general intellect far beyond the kind of knowledge which is materialized in fixed capital, to include all those forms of knowledge which structure social communications and which impel the activity of mass intellectual labor. The general intellect understands artificial languages, system and information theories, the whole gamut of qualification in the way of communication, local knowledge, informal linguistic play, as well as certain ethical preoccupations.

What Virno calls “mass intellectuality [. . .]: living labor in its function as the determining articulation of the general intellect” draws our attention back to the immaterial labor of the rhetorical subject and what Dyer-Witheford calls “the contest for general intellect.”

From the standpoint of rhetorical materialism, then, the general intellect is a useful concept for describing the articulation between the means of communication (computers, televisions, telegraphs, bodies, airplanes); the social dimensions of communication (cooperation, decision making, persu-
sion, affects); the "technologies of public persuasion," i.e., the cultural forms/commodities of communication (movies, speeches); the types of knowledge (natural, social, and human sciences) that promote better communication; and, finally, the kinds of subjectivity made possible by communication (consumer, citizen, soldier). From this standpoint, we can move rhetorical materialism "beyond Marx" because the subsumption of "the life process" breaks apart any remaining residue of a base-superstructure configuration of the social totality and the dual ontology separating out the rhetorical from the material. Moreover, the very distinction between production and reproduction becomes less tenable as new antagonisms emerge over the immaterial labor of care. To put it differently, as mass intellectuality and immaterial labor emerge as a driving force for capitalism, the very idea of commodity production takes on a dimension that stretches out beyond the factory walls that tether Marxism to its past. As feminist-inspired materialists have been arguing for over three decades, commodity production is just one vector in a material ontology concerned with the social (re)production of the life process. The collapse of the distinction between the forces and relations of production as well as economic production from social reproduction inaugurates a bio-political stage of capitalism that extracts value from the life process.

A rhetorical materialism, then, should attend to how the rhetorical does some of the communicative work of immaterial labor and how the rhetorical subject becomes dispersed into a host of productive apparatuses articulated together by how the general intellect activates and regulates the life process ("bio-power" in Foucault's language). Thus, the cultural, political, and economic value of the rhetorical subject is increasingly brought to bear on a common antagonism between a "bio-power from above against a bio-power from below." The revolutionary potential of rhetorical materialism is made manifest, therefore, in the class struggle over the general intellect. Put another way, the rhetorical subject finds a materialist grounding in the struggle of living labor to value the general intellect in ways that escape and resist the command logics of capital and the state. More ontologically, as living labor, the rhetorical subject partakes in a constructive process that potentially subtracts itself from a production process committed to its death (fixed capital or dead labor) by articulating an alternative regime of value: one more likely to orient the general intellect toward the collective needs and desires of the community.

If a rhetorical materialism is to activate the revolutionary potential of its philosophical legacy, it must do more than authorize a critical hermeneutics of cultural forms. We can no longer be content expanding the object domain under the sign of a material rhetoric. The discovery of a generalized process of rhetoricality requires a second articulation, an articulation of rhetoricality into the modes of production and diagrams of power. This chapter has argued that articulating the rhetorical subject to the shifting character of capitalist forms of labor explains how efforts to govern this generalized rhetoricality partake in the production, regulation, and appropriation of value. In other words, "the rhetorical subject" is a subject formed to generate the cultural, political, and economic value through ways and means of communicating. The need to govern the rhetorical subject is due to how a generalized rhetoricality infuses capitalism with its dynamic energy to produce and appropriate the social wealth of communicative labor. The revolutionary future of the rhetorical subject finds its constitutive power in its articulation to the contest for the general intellect and a biopolitics of living labor against the commands of empire.

Notes

ment," Philosophy and Rhetoric 30 (1997): 50–69; Lies Raelin, "I Remember Mama: Ma-
terial Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and One Woman’s Turn-of-the-Century Quilt," 

7. James Jasinski, "The Status of Theory and Method in Rhetorical Criticism," Western 


9. The definition of the rhetorical subject as one that speaks and is spoken to should not be 
read as a defense of orality. In contrast, I am referring to the speaking subject; one can 
speak" in many different media and in many different genres. More importantly, what 
counts as a rhetorical subject at any given time is an effect of privileged discourses that 
take the production of the rhetorical subject as its object domain.

10. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Lenin and Philosophy 


the humanities tends to replace the ideological with the cultural as a terrain of reposi-
tion. As this section will demonstrate, such a substitution brought with it a reduction of 
the cultural to the discursive (understood as the articulation of linguistic and nonlinguistic 
elements) but primarily concerned with signification and ideology. For a critique of the 
translation of the cultural for the discursive plane of signification, see Lawrence Gross-
berg, We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern 

13. Joshua Gun and Shawn Treat, "Zombie Trouble: A Protoaesthetic on Ideological Subject-


16. Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuples Quebecois," Quar-

17. For Butler’s critique of interpellation modeled on the sovereign voice, see Excitable 

18. On the relationship between rhetoric and rhetoricality, see John Bender and David E. 
Wellbery, "Rhetorically: On the Modernist Return of Rhetoric," in The Ends of Rhetoric: 
History, Theory, Practice, ed. John Bender and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stan-
ford University Press, 1990), 3–42. In rhetorical studies, the idea of rhetoricality author-
izes the "globalization" of the rhetorical object domain. For an introduction to the 
promise and perils of the globalization thesis, see the essays in William Keith and Alan 
Gross, eds., Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science 

19. On this process of expanding the object domain, see Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "The 

20. I am glossing an important argument from within the terrain of cultural studies that cri-
quences the primacy of the text as an object of cultural criticism. See Ian Hunter, Culture 
and Government: The Emergence of Literary Criticism (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 
1988); Tony Bennett, Outside Literature (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Toby Miller, 
Well Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture and the Postmodern Subject (Baltimore, MD: 

21. For example, while I find Lisa A. Flores and Dreams G. Moon’s critique of the discursive 
logic of Race Traitor to be extremely persuasive, their concept of the “racial parado-
” smuggles in the need for dialectical criticism to assess the limits and effects of rhetorical 
influence. See “Reconsidering Race, Revealing Dilemmas: Imaging a New Racial Subj-

22. Apologies for my promiscuous use of rhetorical sensitivity. See Roderick P. Hart and 
Don M. Burks, “Rhetorical Sensitivity and Social Interaction,” Speech Monographs 39 
(1972): 75–94.

23. I am glossing a point about the “rhetoric of continuity” made by Gayatri Chakravorty 

24. A good place to begin is Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in The Foucault Effect: 
Studies in Governmentality with Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault, 
ed. Colin Gordon, Graham Burchell, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago 

25. Nikolas Rose, Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood (Cambridge, 


27. Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with 
Michel Foucault, ed. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton (Amherst: 
University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 16–49.

28. For example, see Ronald Walter Greene and David Brashears, “Bio-Political Media: 
Population Communications International and the Governing of Reproductive Health," in 
Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power, ed. Lori Reed and 
Paula Sanfilippo (Albany: State University of New York, in press).


30. Michael Calvin McGee, “A Materialist’s Conception of Rhetoric,” in Explorations in 
Rhetoric: Essays in Honor of Douglas Ehninger, ed. Ray E. McKerrow (Glenside, IL: 

31. The phrase “technologies of public persuasion” belongs to Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar 
and Elizabeth Fornielli, “Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, 
Recognition,” Public Culture 15 (2003): 385–97. It is my argument that the circulation of 
such technologies requires institutional uptake and support.

32. Greene, Multicultural World.


34. Key essays on articulation include Ernesto Laclau, Politics and Ideology in Marxist 
Thought (London: New Left Books, 1977); and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, 
Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (London: Verso 
Press, 1985). Two essays in rhetorical studies deserve special attention: Barbara Bie-
secker, “Reconsidering the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of Difference,” 
37. Such a spatial turn has been underappreciated by rhetorical critics harnessed to the textual case study. Key theoretical texts for exploring this more spatial dynamic include Grossberg, We Gotta Get Out; Greene, Malathusian Worlds; Raka Skorne and Radha S. Hegde, "Culture, Communication, and the Challenge of Globalization," Critical Studies in Media Communication 19 (2002): 72–89; and Gaonkar and Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms."
40. For my initial attempts to bring my Foucauldian starting points more directly in contact with the history of capitalism, see Greene, Malathusian Worlds; "John Dewey's Eloquent Citizen"; and "Rhetoric and Capitalism."
49. Marx, Grundrisse, 704.
54. It should be noted that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's emphasis on immaterial dimensions of affective labor has been challenged for how it recognizes but displaces femi-