

# Necroculture

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*Necroculture*. By Charles Thorpe. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016. Pp. 270, \$99.99 (hbk). ISBN: 9781137583024.

It is not difficult for contemporary sociologists to disparage efforts at providing unifying explanations for the multitude of social problems that demand sociological investigation, such as American gun violence, extractive industry, and human trafficking. Such “totalizing” explanations are easily dismissed as reductionist throwbacks to positivist sociology or vulgar Marxism. In *Necroculture*, Charles Thorpe challenges this received wisdom by gathering an ambitious array of macrosocial ills into cohesive categories and then drawing theoretical purchase from Karl Marx and Erich Fromm to explain them. For a relatively compact interpretive framework, Marx’s concept of alienation in conjunction with Fromm’s necrophilia turns out to have remarkable power for explaining such diverse social phenomena. Diverging from the discipline’s current momentum, Thorpe explains his objects of inquiry not as the outcome of a postmodern descent into chaos, but as the to-be-expected symptoms of an underlying pathology of capitalist social relations. For Thorpe, the operative mechanism which links these coercive institutions is a “necroculture” that systematically misidentifies the real causes of social pathologies for their solutions, thereby encouraging both the destruction of social antidotes and a thirst for social poison.

Such egregious counterproductivity depends on and manipulates actors who are incapable of critically examining their false presuppositions, even in the face of mounting contradicting evidence. In the book’s final and most accessible chapter, Thorpe flexes Fromm’s concept of negative freedom—a longing for freedom *from* oppressive social relationships, rather than the positive freedom *to* find positive social interconnection—to demonstrate how a culture-wide inability to question certain shibboleths about capitalism and human nature makes fertile grounds for the growth of a vexingly irrational individualism, a coercive institution which exacerbates the problems that it is supposed to solve. When alternative forms of freedom become unthinkable, American individualists respond to the loneliness, anxiety, and insecurity associated with the erosion of the middle class by hoarding doomsday supplies or enrolling in expensive survivalist courses.

But the more we drink of this negative freedom, the thirstier we become, without ever seeming to question the nature of the beverage. While each addition to my private hoard of material goods or improvement to my survival skills may temporarily ease my pangs of insecurity, it does nothing

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to address the deeper problem: a fundamental but unrecognized yearning for genuine social connection with other human beings and the real social and material gains that such connections produce. Thorpe argues that the actions encouraged by the ethos of negative freedom tend to separate people from one another, leading to “withdrawal from society into a hostile privatism, undermining society’s capacity for mutual assistance and collective action” (Thorpe, 2016: 231). Not only does negative freedom fail to address the real sources of prevalent social ills, it actively destroys the kinds of collectivism which can bring social progress and psychological well-being.

But while negative freedom may now be deeply irrational from a humanist perspective, Thorpe argues that it is actually perfectly rational from the perspective of capital itself. He grounds this inversion in theory by connecting Fromm’s negative freedom and Marx’s commodity fetishism, wherein the one tends to reinforce the other. In the absence of any positive social relationships, people are left with only the lofty promises of dazzling commodities, which themselves seem to take on social characteristics, and seem to offer resolution to social malfunctions. The more socially dissatisfied we are, the more commodities we buy—temporarily treating our symptoms yet allowing a deeper pathology to run unchecked. The net result for the consumer of such luxuries is material wealth on the one hand, and spiritual and psychological impoverishment on the other. But while the repetitious short-term gratifications of commodity consumption result in a “frenetic standstill” (Rosa, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 95) for the purposes of subjective happiness, from capital’s reproductive point of view, the processes of American consumerism produce a necessary sink for surplus commodities. Capital as alienated human labor thereby takes on a life of its own, augmenting itself in indifference to the lasting well-being of humans.

Drawing from this same theoretical premise, Thorpe reinterprets the right wing’s obsession with the second amendment within the frame of free-market libertarianism, arguing that the two are not incidentally related, but mutually constitutive. Thorpe points out that capitalism necessarily treats people as property, as objective bearers of labor-power to be bought and sold. In order to get by within the confines of this system, people find it useful to internalize a conception of themselves and others as commodities, to see themselves as capital sees them. This mindset of “possessive individualism” (Macpherson, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 214) organically leads to a conception of freedom as the freedom to buy and sell property, such that property rights come to be more important than the pursuit of happiness or life itself (thus the popularity of the NRA’s “cold dead hands” slogan, evoking a preference for death over the possibility of relinquishing possessions). Possessed by such a set of priorities, one’s fundamental imperative becomes to protect property and the self-as-property from theft by an ever-present multiplicity of threats—including elitist government agents from above and immigrants from below. The only way to guarantee such protection is by annihilating these imagined threats. Thorpe’s analytical connection renders intelligible and significant Ted Nugent’s outbursts against Obama-as-communist: “Obama, he’s a piece of shit. I told him to suck on my machine gun” (Nugent, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 224). For those who attribute a spiritual benevolence to capitalism and conflate selfhood with property ownership, the gun seems to offer the only real possibility of protection against personifications of wealth redistribution and the welfare state.

Ultimately, however, this movement away from the social and towards the objective is fundamentally counterproductive from the human perspective. Thorpe writes:

Holding the gun, one is assured that one is powerful, and that one will never have to depend on anyone else or open oneself to anything outside of oneself ... However, anxiety must always return as the inevitable accompaniment of a freedom that splits the individual off and isolates him or her. (Thorpe, 2016: 224)

Shopping for guns may bring a momentary shopper’s high and temporary feelings of security, but ultimately only intensifies our psychological, social, spiritual, and material alienation. In such

haphazard efforts to alleviate discontentment, we actually divorce ourselves from the only real wellspring of happiness and macrosocial improvement: social connection. If the function of the fetish is to conceal the truth of social relations under capitalism, the fetishized gun helps conceal the fact that America's love for negative freedom ultimately reduces to a form of necrophilia.

Thorpe's premise also permits an explanation for the apparent contradiction in the Tea Party mindset, which crusades for individual freedoms on the domestic front, yet supports American military intervention abroad. For Thorpe, these are not merely the "apparent inconsistencies" (Thorpe, 2016: 231) of a schizophrenic mind, but instead are an organic expression of the "inevitable psychological contradictions that arise within individualism" (Thorpe, 2016: 241). How does American individualism taken to its logical conclusion result in such a blatant violation of the golden rule? According to Thorpe, negative freedom's denial of innate human desires for social connectedness does nothing to eliminate them, so they instead become "more internally powerful the more they are repressed" (Thorpe, 2016: 241). And as the repressed inevitably returns, "Conservatives are attracted to collectivist patriotic symbolism and to authority structures of the military and law and order precisely as vehicles for their suppressed longing for collectivity" (Thorpe, 2016: 241). The glorification of the right hand of the state therefore becomes a temporary salve for the psychological and economic pains of alienation, the real pathologies that are produced when the left hand of the state disintegrates.

In the second and third chapters, Thorpe uses this same interpretive model in a fascinating and often brilliant analysis and critique of a less obvious target: a brand of technofuturism presented by tech gurus such as Ray Kurzweil, Hans Moravec, and Eric Drexler. This ideology augurs a future in which human subjects become immortal by merging with machines. Such cyborgs are supposed to then liberate themselves from Earthly struggles by launching into outer space, eventually saturating the universe with a disembodied intelligence. Technofuturists argue that this extraordinary outcome is "both inevitable and desirable" (Moravec, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 100): inevitable because it seems to be driven by the autonomous development of self-actualizing machines, desirable because it promises to overcome supposed human weaknesses and limitations.

Because technofuturism presents itself as a value-free and universal truth, Thorpe's real sociological contribution is to resituate it as a historically particular ideology, observing a qualitative correlation between this technofuturism and the economic mantras that surround financial capitalism. As Thorpe writes, technofuturism "fits perfectly with an era of financial speculation in which mobile financial capital seeks to outrun the underlying problems of the real economy" (Thorpe, 2016: 134). Just as contemporary economic gurus assure us that we are now passing through capitalism's dependence on manual labor and into an information economy, technofuturism promises that human intelligence is in the process of freeing itself from its material body.

Thorpe's causal explanation for this correlation identifies the capitalist mode of production as a lurking independent variable. In Thorpe's analysis, technofuturism and celebrations of financialization both amount to capitalism's ideological expressions, as they function to "legitimize the intensification of capitalist exploitation, while obscuring the way in which this intensification is producing crisis" (Thorpe, 2016: 135). The neoclassical economist's implicit insistence that exploited labor is not the driving engine of the world economy tends to hide the dark material secret of late capitalism's successes and excesses. In tandem, technofuturism promises that the solutions to economic woes and ecological collapse are not to be found in reimagining social relations, but in new and increasingly ethereal technologies. For instance, in the face of rising food prices in the 1970s due to economic stagnation, techno-salvationists sought the proliferation of "pollution-free nanomachines" (Drexler, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 78)—microscopic mechanical replicators that would autonomously produce bigger and more sophisticated technologies, ad infinitum. Such a scenario portends technological development's total emancipation from human creativity and labor, and from the latter's antagonisms and consequent ecological

detriments. Observing that this fantasy of a nano-technological equivalent of a perpetual motion machine coincidentally reappeared after the 2008 financial crisis, Thorpe concludes that “Techno-enthusiasts become more insistent about the ‘imperative’ for such technological fixes in proportion with the irrational, crisis-ridden nature of the prevailing economic system and its destructive relationship to the natural world” (Thorpe, 2016: 77). To Thorpe, this technological escapism amounts to the rationalization of ultimately irrational behavior, for the more that techno-capitalist ideologues witness evidence of capitalism’s negative byproducts, the more agitated and desperate their denials become.

These chapters demonstrate that technofuturist rationalizations have real material stakes and knowledge effects. Unable to acknowledge capitalist technology’s necessary negative byproduct—what Thorpe refers to as its “exterminism” (Thompson, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 5) or its “integral accident” (Virilio, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 132)—the solutions technofuturists provide to combat ecological destruction turn out to be the very things that actually *cause* environmental crises. If “the ecological problems of contemporary society have their solution in further technological escalation” (Thorpe, 2016: 111), then the “solutions” proposed by technofuturists actually reproduce the very problems they are supposed to ameliorate. For instance, unable to doubt capitalist industry’s essential trustworthiness, technofuturists seem to *welcome* ocean-bleaching “algal blooms” (Thorpe, 2016: 78) as a potential source of capitalist energy, and therefore a possible cure for ecological destruction, rather than a symptom of its exterminism.

Such puzzling irrationality provokes Thorpe’s sociological inquiry. He locates the root mechanism of this counterproductivity in a hegemonically condoned and self-reinforcing psychological imbalance which tends to divert the human capacity for imagination away from real social problems and towards the pursuit of technological development for its own sake. Technofuturists seem to have a powerful imagination for technological innovation on the one hand, yet a complete blindness towards social issues on the other. When collective human agency towards social progress is rendered unthinkable, the only real historical agent naturally seems to be technology itself, since technologies seem to autonomously develop at an exponential rate, while the social status quo seems to go nowhere. This failure of social vision ultimately leads technofuturists to naturalize capitalism and project it infinitely in time and space, such that “Linear time is submerged in the stasis of an eternal present” (Thorpe, 2016: 114). Supporting Žižek and Jameson’s observation that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, technofuturists tell us that the world of tomorrow “will be technologically advanced, but socially it will be like the present” (Thorpe, 2016: 97).

More than that, it is easier for technofuturists to imagine capitalist technology’s transcendence of *human nature* than it is to imagine humanity’s transcendence of capitalism (just as it is easier for them to imagine the projection of capitalism into outer space than to imagine altering the exploitative social relations that ultimately make escape necessary). The technofuturist’s technological imagination is matched by a dearth of any critical self-awareness or social reflexivity. Unable to question the perceived permanence of their own desires and fears, technofuturists like Kurzweil and Moravec locate the particular content of these dissatisfactions in human nature itself. Thus, the only way to produce satisfaction seems to be through transcending human nature (and the planet) completely.

This collective inability to imagine alternative forms of human social organization corresponds with a denial of capitalism’s integral accident, which in this case manifests as an inability to bear witness to the fact that “intense exploitation and waste” (Thorpe, 2016: 55) are necessary and significant byproducts of capitalist production, and that global warming “is not an aberration or breakdown but is, rather, integral to industrial capitalist economic growth” (Thorpe, 2016: 132).

Thorpe does not offer a causal mechanism explaining the correlation between these two kinds of imagination failure, but it is plausible that the two poles are mutually reinforcing. If one is unable to see that an “unprecedented human degradation of the natural world and assault on conditions for life” (Thorpe, 2016: 55) are immanent to capitalism, why would one devote energy to finding an alternative mode of production? Conversely, if one is unable to imagine a viable alternative to capitalism, one has a motive to produce rationalizations that justify the status quo. After eternalizing capitalism and minimizing its negative byproducts, the only answer to the question “what is to be done?” naturally seems to lie within the capitalist mode of production itself. When technofuturists make a virtue of apparent necessity, their prognostications and recommendations tend to reproduce the problems’ underlying conditions and root causes. Unable to question their blind faith that gasoline extinguishes fire, the bigger the blaze becomes, the more they demand to toss gasoline onto the flames.

Fromm’s conception of necrophilia is particularly useful for understanding the technofuturist’s obsession with immortality, as the latter’s essential content bears a distinct resemblance to the primary capitalist inversion whereby productive machines are treated as subjects and human subjects are treated as productive machines. For the “atomized and narcissistic individual who has no ability to identify with future generations” (Thorpe, 2016: 116), the linear extension of the individual’s lifespan becomes the only worthwhile project—indeed, the only *imaginable* project. For instance, unprepared to pursue improvements in quality of life at a macrosocial level, Ray Kurzweil becomes preoccupied with augmenting the quantity of individual life. But in doing so, he ends up judging the value of human life according to standards and criteria that are normally applied to machines. Thorpe observes that in Kurzweil’s vision “each aspect of humanity is found wanting and replaced by technology” (Thorpe, 2016: 117). Compared to machines, humans appear deficient on the grounds that they are frail and prone to failure, such that they amount to little more than second-rate robots. Kurzweil’s complaints about the “cumbersome maintenance rituals” (Kurzweil, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 112) which burden him seem to indicate not so much a necrophilic love of death as a hatred of life, and one is left wondering what will make mechanized life more bearable than the tedious existence which presently suffocates him.

Nevertheless, the implicit suggestion is that the more machine-like we become, the happier we will be. For Kurzweil, machine-life promises a resolution to anxiety, fear, and other human discomforts. But as a will to containment and order rather than an embrace of change and diversity, this attraction to mechanical life resembles an attraction to suicide as an escape from suffering. Incapable of questioning the source and nature of this suffering, Kurzweil devotes his energy to the resolution of his needs and fears as they immediately present themselves, to extending the individual’s quantitative lifespan. Under the influence of this blindness, while explanations for *how* it could be done become more and more sophisticated, any attempt to address *why* it should be done results in “utter banality” (Thorpe, 2016: 109). Incapable of serious critical examination of the subjective stakes of his singularity between humans and machines, Kurzweil ends up pursuing a mechanized world solely for the sake of pursuing a mechanized world.

In these chapters, Thorpe heralds Marx and Fromm’s full restoration as useful sociological theorists by re-demonstrating their capacity for explaining perplexing social problems, while undermining common if implicit excuses for their marginalization. Mainstream 21st century sociology may be characterized by Marx’s conspicuous absence. Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin bear witness to the “strange” disappearance of capitalism and its great critic from the sociology of social movements in particular: “While capitalism has spread to nearly every corner of the globe, scholars who specialise in the study of social movements ... have increasingly ignored the ways in which capitalism shapes social movements” (Hetland and Goodwin, 2013: 83). They

explain this disappearance by speculating that sociological fashions like the cultural turn and the popularity of micro-sociological analysis “have effectively—and *unnecessarily*—‘crowded out’ a concern with political economy in the field” (Hetland and Goodwin, 2013: 90, emphasis in original). Though few contemporary sociologists would explicitly claim that Marx has no contemporary relevance, in practice the discipline often overlooks capitalism’s unique causal effects on 21st century social phenomena.

However, there will inevitably be a contradiction immanent to any justification for *replacing* Marx with more “nuanced” theorists: to justify the erasure of Marx on the grounds that his paradigm is necessary but incomplete produces sociological analysis that is faulty on its own terms, since it lacks the Marxian conception of capitalism which it already admits is necessary. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that we ignore Marx—and also Fromm—at our own peril. For instance, the emergence of something resembling 21st century American fascism will not come as a surprise to Marxist sociologists like William Robinson (see Robinson and Barrera, 2012), nor to those who see the fascistic potential embedded in negative freedom. Thorpe’s rich analysis of the American Right ultimately shows that if Marx and Fromm have fallen from grace within mainstream sociology, it is not because they lack contemporary relevance. To the contrary, any attempt to explain the Right’s global resurgence will be greatly impoverished without developed conceptions of global capitalism or false consciousness.

Thorpe’s treatment of Marx also makes a noteworthy intervention in sociological theory, since it diverges sharply from mainstream readings of Marx as determinist. Jeffrey Alexander, for instance, takes the position that “in the famous manuscripts of 1844”—one of Thorpe’s main sources for Marx’s theory—“[Marx’s] logic evidences a decidedly deterministic bent” (Alexander, 1982: 15). Thorpe, by contrast, insists that “Marx’s dialectical conception of history, premised on the active, historical character of human production, has nothing in common with determinism” (Thorpe, 2016: 137). To the contrary, Thorpe demonstrates that it is the modern-day *antagonists* of Marx who are deterministic, as hyper-capitalist tech gurus portray technology as an abstract force that is both unstoppable and benevolent. Hans Moravec, for instance, tells us that technological change is “bigger than we are. We are merely components within it” (Moravec, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 100). Ultimately, what these cheerleaders for capitalist production occlude is the basic Marxian truth that as capitalism unfolds it “opens up new possibilities and paths for future action” (Thorpe, 2016: 138), even as it treats humans as passive objects.

Thorpe encounters the limitations of his otherwise ingenious model in the fourth chapter, which draws parallels between technofuturism and the internet’s predominant function as a mechanism for pornography consumption. This connection may be understandable, as we find apparent similarities in function and content. Just as technofuturism promises the emancipation of abstract intelligence, the internet promises freedom from constraints of geographic particularity. More specifically, the internet promises a kind of sexual liberation in the sense that it offers unprecedented access to a multitude of sexual fantasies. Additionally, just as technofuturism’s celebrations of ethereal technology function ideologically to cover up capitalism’s integral accident, the fetish of the internet seems to hide its own necessary negative byproducts. For instance, the production of internet pornography depends on the “unfreedom” (Thorpe, 2016: 163) of pornography actors. Pornography’s promises of consumer freedom therefore contrast violently with the abuse apparently inherent not only in the production of child pornography but also the production of more “mainstream” pornography which involves “the actual brutalization and humiliation of the women in front of the camera” (Thorpe, 2016: 166). Using the anti-pornography lens of radical feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon and Susanne Kappeler (whom he cites favorably), Thorpe sees human subjects of pornography undergoing not only physical but symbolic and social violence. For Thorpe, this kind of violence structures not only the production of notoriously coercive

pornography (such as the infamous Abu Ghraib images), but also more common pornographic representations of women that “encode domination and the position of the woman as an object” (Thorpe, 2016: 166), thereby legitimizing the mistreatment of women and professing their lack of social efficacy.

Thorpe’s contribution to this familiar position is to identify qualitative correlations between the content of violent internet pornography and the internal logic of late capitalism. Just as he reveals that technofuturism substitutes machine values for human values, he locates a similar love–machine logic in gonzo pornography, whereby quantity supersedes quality and pleasure becomes a commodity that is produced by rationalized human-machines. Thorpe explains this correlation by arguing that violent pornography is an expression of capitalist violence, and that it in turn *perpetuates* capitalist violence. Fleeting images of violent acts may temporarily alleviate the consumer’s chronic boredom, but do nothing to address an underlying loneliness fostered by an alienating set of social relations. This creates a vicious cycle wherein “emptiness feeds on itself, creating a craving for additional consumption” (Perelman, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 192). Significantly, for Thorpe it is a short step from this passive sadism of escalating pornography consumption to active violence. For instance, not only can internet child pornography *create* pedophilic desires which “might have been different in the pre-computer age” (Thorpe, 2016: 173); it also tends to lead consumers to act on these desires. To support this claim, Thorpe cites case studies wherein perpetrators of sexual abuse against children report that internet pornography was a contributing factor in their development as sexual predators.

Despite his clearly benevolent intentions, Thorpe’s argument here is questionable at nearly every step. His case studies aside, there is not much evidence to support the thesis that watching violent pornography tends to cause violent behavior. To the contrary, there is a growing scientific literature which associates the prevalence and accessibility of diverse forms of pornography with *reduced* rates of sexual violence, and even associates permissive attitudes toward pornography with *positive* views of women (see Diamond, 2009). Even so, this does not excuse the abuse of subjects who may be coerced into producing pornography, particularly child victims. But Thorpe’s analysis makes little distinction between coerced victims of pornography on the one hand and sex workers who may themselves own the means of pornography production. To conflate the two is to ignore the various levels of agency that porn actors might exercise within and without the capitalist mode of production, and risks participating in the very elision of agency that Thorpe aims to challenge. Furthermore, while Thorpe’s causal connection between pornography consumption and psycho-sexual pathology aligns with hegemonic anxieties and stigmatizations surrounding pornography consumption, it is not supported by solid empirical evidence and overlooks potentially constructive uses of pornography (see Watson and Smith, 2012). In short, by embracing the anti-pornography position of some second-wave feminists, Thorpe exposes himself to critiques of this position that were leveled by some porn-positive *third-wave* feminists.

These problems seem to express the instabilities of a buried immiseration thesis, which implies that the proletariat *ought* to be denied the dazzling products of capitalism in order to come to full class consciousness. If the commodity is a drug, this position conflates drug use with addiction, denying the possibility of any medicinal value. However, there is sufficient historical evidence to raise serious doubts over the claim that depriving people of consumer comforts encourages revolution, rather than defeatism. Furthermore, Marx himself recognized that capitalism was superior to previous modes of production, both culturally and materially. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had reserved praise for bourgeois culture on the grounds that it had “torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’” and “torn away from the family its sentimental veil” (Marx and Engels, 2010/1848: 247–48), a veil which had previously hidden the virtual enslavement of women to their husbands.<sup>1</sup> Both Thorpe and Fromm agree with Marx’s

position that capitalism's unprecedented productive powers would be a necessary precondition for a more humanist society. Thorpe maintains that capitalism enables new kinds of nourishing social relations by enabling "a future of abundance, in which the fight for economic privileges is no longer necessitated by economic scarcity" (Fromm, as cited in Thorpe, 2016: 246). Indeed, to Thorpe, the same capitalist technologies which carry an integral accident also hold the "potential to produce new forms of global sociality, coordination, and planning, and new forms of democratic, cultural, and social relations between individuals" (Thorpe, 2016: 246). Thus, even if one accepts Thorpe's premises that capitalism necessarily produces a negative byproduct and that internet pornography is an expression of late capitalism, it does not necessarily follow that internet pornography is a part of capitalism's exterminism, so long as one entertains the possibility that capitalism does create some progressive byproducts as well. In other words, the sexual activities and identities that may stem from a *primarily* destructive mode of production are not themselves necessarily destructive.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, *Necroculture* succeeds sociologically insofar as it renders the familiar foreign and denaturalizes the natural. Armed with a robust reading of Marx and Fromm, Thorpe reveals sinister imperatives that are hiding in plain sight—a fact which makes Thorpe's dialectical reversals all the more startling. For instance, while futuristic technologies are supposed to solve human problems, Thorpe demonstrates that technofuturism aims to solve human problems in order to create futuristic technologies. For all of its pretenses of scientific prophecy, technofuturism boils down to a faithful expression of present-day capitalism's confusion between means and ends, a perverse logic that is also stitched into the fabric of American individualism. Thorpe effectively conveys how such cultural phenomena are deeply pathological, showing that the higher we build our protective walls, the less secure we feel. Indeed, the less secure we actually *become*, for the more we focus on imagined personal dangers, the more we give free reign to real *impersonal* dangers. Capitalist necroculture therefore exhibits what social philosopher Ivan Illich called "specific counterproductivity," since it "paradoxically takes away from society those things [it] was designed to provide" (Illich, 2009/1973: 213), yet somehow continues to elude critical examination. In the absence of any reflexive critique or self-awareness, such an ideological complex tends to reproduce itself and become more attractive the more that it fails to deliver on its promises of wealth or well-being. *Necroculture* is a must-read for anyone interested in studying such camouflaged macrosocial addictions.

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## Notes

1. In her sophisticated reading of Marx's treatment of gender and the family, Heather Brown (2012) finds some positive assessments of the patriarchal family's erosion due to the machinery-spurred introduction of women into the factory.
2. For an artful historical-materialist consideration of the proliferation of sexual identities within late capitalism, see Hennessy (2000).

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