This thesis examines the way post-industrial capital manifests itself and attempts to define how it functions. Žižek’s theorization of capital’s fantasy dimension and its simultaneous role as the Lacanian Real is evaluated. Žižek’s concept of the ideological fantasy is deemed helpful as it aids in explaining how capital perpetuates itself in a world that appears aware of its failures. His conceptualization of capital as the Real is considered to be counter-productive as it reduces the phenomenon in question to an impermeable abstraction that cannot be schematized or analyzed in any detail. In an effort to address this problem, Franco Berardi’s notion of semio-capital is discussed. Berardi’s work is determined to be a vital supplement to Žižek’s analysis as it enables us to perceive the way in which capital functions as a master-signifier that operates according to the logic of recombination. The benefit of theorizing capital in this way is that it permits us to appreciate one of capital’s chief antagonisms—the production of the experience of attentional disorders as a series of symptoms that are averse to capital’s functioning. Finally, the diagnostic criteria for Attention-Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder is interrogated in an effort to elucidate the way in which AD/HD functions as a discursive regime that seeks to police this contradiction.
This thesis is dedicated to my family, Schaeffer, Judy, Allan, and Margaret who have supported me in everything that I have done.
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INTRODUCTION

Capital may be said to have always been, from its inception, an impermeably abstract concept. Indeed, the attribution of exchange-value to a product of human labor obscures the tangible material properties of an object that make it useful as a tool for survival by equating it with money, an ephemeral and intangible mediator of a commodity’s ontological essence. The physical properties that are commonly used to identify an object’s use-value thus become occluded and are replaced by the immaterial monetary values of capital. In part, capital represents that universal equivalent of exchange that dissolves a product’s objective character and replaces it with incessantly varying denominations of currency. This is a classical Marxist conception of capital, one that must be revised to account for the exponential increase in the level of abstraction of capital. Technological developments in computing and information technology represent a fundamental shift in the productive forces of capital that have rendered its contemporary manifestation thoroughly informational. Capital now exists as a type of master-signifier that is entirely divorced from material reality and seeks omnipresence through the seamless substitution of itself for other signs and symbols. This thesis represents my attempt to theorize capital in its new dimension by synthesizing Slavoj Žižek’s theorization of capital as the Real with Franco Berardi’s notion of semio-capital.

Capital’s rapid expansion over the past fifty years culminates in its near ubiquitous presence in all corners of the globe. There are now stock exchanges in countries upon every continent, ranging from major developed countries such as China and the United States to fledgling free markets such as the Philippines and Zambia. Even in those countries that lack such centers of global commerce, the movements of capital through these exchanges are felt on a global scale. This was made explicitly clear during the financial crisis of 2008; the crisis directly
impacted the financial institutions of developed countries, but the fallout of the crisis was an economic recession of global proportions. And, this is the chief reason that I have chosen my intended line of inquiry. There is perhaps no other more universal experience today than the encounters with capital engendered through the globalization of the free market. The effects of capital’s circulation are seen in even the most remote areas. What the financial crisis reveals is that the decisions made by an elite group of those with access to capital have significant implications for the well-being of entire populations of people all over the world. I am compelled to theorize capital because I feel it necessary to explicate this near-universal phenomenon lest other lines of philosophical and cultural inquiry are rendered incomplete. Any attempt to make coherent the various phenomena of social relations on any scale must come to terms with capital as the single most important question of our time. Slavoj Žižek’s analysis of capital helps to elucidate the implications of this vital question.

According to Slavoj Žižek, the only way to account for the cynicism that contemporary subjects direct at ideology today is through the notion of *ideological fantasy*. Žižek points out that subjects appear well aware that behind the belief systems that claim access to universal truths lie the interests of elite groups of individuals. As such, the traditional Marxist conception of ideology as false consciousness where the individual wears the mask of a distorted reality no longer seems to apply. It is at this point that Žižek postulates capital’s fantasy dimension. He argues that the formula “they do not know it, but they are doing it” should be inverted to read as “they know it, but still they are doing it.” This illustrates the way in which subjects today continue to act as if ideology is an embodiment of truth, despite the dominant ideology’s loss of hegemony and subjects’ cynical distancing from its ideological formations. Capital’s ideological illusion is therefore double. Not only is our social reality guided by illusions that represent
deceptive bourgeois fabrications, but we overlook the fact that these illusions continue to
structure our social reality. And, it is this overlooked, unconscious illusion that Žižek terms the
ideological fantasy.

The strength of Žižek's discussion of capital's fantasy dimension is useful because it
helps to explain how capital persists in a world that appears to have become aware of its failures.
A great deal of cynicism has been directed at capital and its financial institutions since the
financial crisis, and yet capital seems to have found a way of reproducing itself. The concept of
the ideological fantasy calls attention to the way in which subjects perpetuate the underlying
ideological illusions of capital through their behavior rather than their attitudes. While it is
considerably the case that subjects form identities through the appropriation of various ideological
formations, the fundamental, underlying illusions upon which social reality is predicated and
through which capital is perpetuated are inherently unconscious. In the case of the financial
crisis, despite all of the distancing from capital, people continue to invest in markets and entrust
banks with long-term well-being; people continue to act as if the market were capable of being
stabilized. While Žižek's account helps to articulate how capital sustains itself in the face of
adversity, it ultimately hinders the ability to theorize capital beyond the level of a mere
abstraction.

In addition to capital's element of fantasy, Žižek argues that capital is also based in the
Real. Here, Žižek draws a distinction between social reality and Lacan's conception of the Real.
Social reality designates the realm where the material processes of production and social
relations occur. Conversely, the Real is the abstract kernel of Truth around which social reality is
structured, but can never be apprehended. For Žižek, the Real is Capital itself, or more
specifically, the abstract internal logic that underlies capital's movements. Thus, the abstract,
spectral logic of Capital is the Real in the sense that its internal functioning is beyond
apprehension while also serving as the central structuring force of social reality itself. The
abstraction is real in the effect that it has upon social relations.

Žižek’s analysis of capital in this instance is counter-productive because it renders capital
as a conceptual abstraction that cannot be schematized in any detailed manner. By equating
capital with the Lacanian Real, Žižek labels capital as an inherently unknowable category that is
beyond description. This prevents any attempt to account for the specific ways in which capital
operates and the particular logic that governs its circulation. It precludes a comprehensive
examination of the rationale that propels capital. I argue that Žižek’s analysis should be
supplemented with Franco Berardi’s conception of semio-capital because it provides a
descriptive account of capital that enables us to appreciate its antagonisms.

Franco Berardi argues that capital has transitioned from an economy based on the
production of material goods to one based in the circulation of information commodities. The
development of new technologies in the areas of computing and information technology resulted
in a shift in the productive forces put in service of capital that has resulted in capital manifesting
itself in a novel form. During industrial capitalism, the production process consisted of workers
using their physical attributes to manipulate the corporeal properties of materials. Today, the
production process has become purely informational, synthesizing linguistic labor and
commodity production. Labor is now primarily cognitive, and workers create and manipulate the
semiotic material that has come to represent capital. This info-labor creates a digital sphere of
semiotic artifacts, an info-sphere in which capital’s signs and symbols are circulated. Semiotic
capital, or semio-capital, flows through the info-sphere, instantiating itself in discrete signs and
symbols transmitted between bio-informational organisms.
Semio-capital consists of a series of signs and symbols that are self-referring, self-reproducing, and dissociated from material reality. Semio-capital is composed of data that represents internet activity, which is then packaged for circulation within the info-sphere. Semio-capital is also the breaking down of info-commodities and the recombination of their basic elements into novel forms in an effort to regenerate value from an object that has already been circulated. Semio-capital is also the series of signs and symbols generated by algorithms and appear on the monitors on the floors of stock exchanges around the world. This is to say that commodities have become thoroughly informational and that the value of these signs and symbols are a function of their continual re-signification within the info-sphere of semio-capital. For Berardi, capital has become a linguistic production whose value is a function of its own self-representation.

I argue that by taking Berardi’s analysis to its logical conclusion, Berardi’s concept of semio-capital successfully supplements Žižek’s theorization of capital by providing a means of thinking about the internal logic to capital and how it functions. I argue that Berardi’s work reveals the way in which capital operates as a master-signifier. I draw upon Lacan’s work in Seminar XVII to elucidate the way in which semio-capital, as a master-signifier, seeks to subsume all other signifiers under it and is predicated upon a fantasy of attaining unified Truths through the closure of meaning. I also utilize Rex Butler’s analysis of the master-signifier to illustrate the way in which semio-capital functions as a master-signifier by operating in a way that is fundamentally self-referring and seeking to occupy the void left by the attempt to signify democracy. I argue that providing a descriptive account of capital that recognizes its function as a master-signifier is crucial to recognizing its antagonisms. Specifically, I argue that the articulation of semio-capital as a master-signifier reveals the way in which its production of
AD/HD as an ideological construction is in contradiction with the threat that attentional disorders pose to production. Semio-capital engenders the experience of attentional disorders by overstimulating subjects through a constant barrage of semiotic material, resulting in an unbearable cognitive load that causes attentional stress and emotional trauma. As such, capital creates conditions that are averse to its functioning: it devalues labor-time by cognitively fatiguing its workers during production. At the same time, semio-capital-as-master-signifier produces the very disorders that threaten production on a linguistic level as discursive regimes aimed at policing the symptoms that threaten production. This reflects a tension between the way that semio-capital-as-master-signifier produces a phenomenological experience within subjects that threatens productivity and the fabrication of those disorders through language. Only a descriptive account of capital that takes capitalist theorization beyond the point of labeling it as a pure abstraction is capable of recognizing this antagonism.
CHAPTER I. ŽIŽEK‘S CONCEPTION OF CAPITAL: FANTASY AND REAL

The Sublime Object and Ideological Fantasy. In the *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek asks the question: did Marx, as Lacan proposed, first conceive of the psychoanalytic symptom? Žižek argues that he does and points out what he considers to be a fundamental homology between Marx‘s analysis of commodity fetishism and Freud‘s method of interpreting dreams. The critical dimension of each of these authors‘ analyses lies not within some supposed hidden content underlying the object of study. In the case of Freud, his primary concern was not with the overt dream content, but with the form that gives shape to that particular content. The same is true for the analysis of commodities according to Žižek. He writes, "The real problem is not to penetrate to the hidden kernel of the commodity – the determination of its value by the quantity of the work consumed in its production – but to explain why work assumed the form of the value of a commodity, why it can affirm its social character only in the commodity-form of its product (4). Žižek‘s inquiry here is thus driven at explicating how the form taken by the values that are fixed to commodities, and how those values come into being. His investigation is fundamentally an examination of ideology and its structure.

Žižek argues that the ideological abstraction intrinsic to commodity exchange operates around a central, transcendent essence—a sublime object—that renders this exchange coherent. The ideological abstraction of value from a commodity is not real in the same sense that an object-commodity has a set of tangible properties that combine to give it a particular use-value. Žižek points out that contrary to the objects that are possessed for their utility in survival, the commodity is treated as if it were not subject to the normal processes that physical objects undergo; namely, the commodity is treated as if it were outside the natural process of aging and degradation. The example that Žižek provides is that of money itself. —We know very well that
money, like all other material objects, suffers the effects of use, that its material body changes through time, but in the social effectivity of the market we none the less treat coins as if they consist of an immutable substance, a substance over which time has no power, and which stands in antithetic contrast to any matter found in nature;” notes Žižek (12). It is understood that money is a material object and that material objects necessarily degrade over time. It should follow then that money would be treated as if the aging process caused a decline in value from its original state. However, this is not the case. A dollar bill produced in 1984 is likely to have considerably more wear than one produced in 2008. Yet, the two bills are treated as if they contain the same value. Žižek argues that this puzzling treatment of money signifies that Value, as created through commodity exchange, is an immutable essence that transcends the material itself.

Žižek contends that the immutable property that is Value—as embodied in money and commodities—functions as a supra-material essence that serves as the point of origin for all acts of exchange, a sublime object of ideology. In the process of commodity exchange, the tangible characteristics of an object are occluded by its exchange-value. Money is an embodiment of Value itself and serves as the universal equivalent against which all exchange is measured. As Žižek points out, objects such as money retain their value despite their degradation over time. This points to a central antagonism within commodity exchange. Here we have touched a problem unsolved by Marx,” as Žižek argues, that of the material character of money: not of the empirical, material stuff money is made of, but of the sublime material, of that other indestructible and immutable‘ body which persists beyond the corruption of the body physical” (12). Money and the object-commodity alike are defined by their exchange-value where Value is a transcendent substance that lies outside the bounds of normal physical processes. This
incorporeal and unchanging body within the body” of commodities is precisely what Žižek terms the sublime object of ideology (12).

It would appear then that the ‘real abstraction’ of commodity exchange has no basis in reality compared to the realm in which an object has certain effective properties that confer upon it a certain level of utility. However, Žižek maintains that this abstraction is not merely a mental phenomenon, and here he returns to the distinction between form and content present within the homology between Marx and Freud’s work. He argues that although the process of abstraction takes place within the mind, this process is not thought itself but the form of thought (13). And, this Žižek argues, is one of the potential definitions of the unconscious, as the form of thought whose ontological status is not that of thought” (13). Put differently, the unconscious is a separate scene that always-already shapes the form of thoughts in advance. This concept is critical because it establishes a relationship between the unconscious and the ideological abstraction intrinsic to commodity-exchange. Žižek argues that in the act of exchange, individuals act as ‘practical solipsists” where they operate under the assumption that the free market permits them to act as free individuals (13). However, in making this assumption, they ignore the social dimension of exchange that is facilitated by the abstraction of an object’s value. According to Žižek, they misrecognize the socio-synthetic function of exchange: that is the level of the ‘real abstraction’ as the form of socialization of private production through the medium of the market” (14). The abstraction of an object’s value in the form of an exchange-value allows the object to be held up against other object-commodities for its relative worth measured. It is this process that all social relations within capitalism are formed. By atomizing market exchange as a series of individual transactions between self-determining agents, the process of abstraction that has real consequences for how such exchanges take place is obscured.
However, it is the repression of market exchange‘s social character that serves as the condition of its very possibility.

The fact that the social implications of the abstraction of value are ignored by those participating within the market is a precondition for exchange‘s very functioning. Žižek‘s point here turns on the common characteristics shared between the conception of the unconscious and the thought process which gives rise to this real abstraction. Initially, Žižek argues that the form of thought that the process of the abstraction of value takes resembles the unconscious in that this form of thought gives shape to the content of this abstraction just as the unconscious structures our thoughts. The process of abstraction shares another commonality with the unconscious—that of the subject‘s non-knowledge of its form. Žižek argues:

The social effectivity of the exchange process is a kind of reality which is possible only on condition that the individuals parking in it are not aware of its proper logic; that is, a kind of reality whose very ontological consistency implies a certain non-knowledge of its participants—if we come to “know too much,” to pierce the true function of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself. (15)

The social relation that is commodity exchange is made possible by an abstraction of value of which participants in the market cannot be conscious. The functioning of exchange is itself predicated upon this non-cognizance of the process of abstraction. Were those that participate in exchange to come to appreciate the way in which the values affixed to commodities were arbitrary constructions with no basis in their effective properties, the sublime object that guarantees its consistency would be realized and the economic order that depends upon it would disintegrate.
For Žižek, the notion that commodity exchange requires a non-knowledge on the part of its participants provides a basic definition for ideology. The subject’s failure to perceive how economic exchange is predicated upon the social process of arbitrarily abstracting an object’s value is a precondition for ideology’s functioning. ‘Ideological’ is a social reality whose very existence,” according to Žižek, —implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence —that is the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals do not know what they are doing” (15-16). To describe something as ideological then is to describe a set of real conditions that maintain consistency through the parties involved not having an understanding of the logic that propels said conditions. Thus, in the context of the classical Marxist conception of ideology as false consciousness, ideological” is not a situation in which an individual is mystified and in a state of false consciousness, but is in fact the individual, as a social being, misrecognizing the social dimension of commodity exchange. As such, Žižek argues that ideology can be defined as a Lacanian symptom: a symbolic formation whose coherence presupposes the subject’s lack of knowledge regarding its origin. However, Žižek notes that the predominant cynicism displayed by contemporary subjects toward ideology seems to point to a tension here; namely, that subjects’ skepticism appears to indicate that they are well aware that ideology represents the interests of certain elite groups. In order to account for such cynicism, Žižek draws further distinctions between the classical conception of ideology as false consciousness and his notion of ideology as a social reality of which its participants must remain uninformed.

Žižek argues that the classical conception of ideology in terms of false consciousness no longer applies to the contemporary cynical subject. The most basic formulation of the concept of false consciousness is articulated by Marx when he says, they do not know it, but they are
doing it” (24). As Žižek points out, this assumes a fundamental misrecognition of reality where the subject’s naiveté is worn like a mask which overlays a set of objective conditions. The aim of the ideological procedure then is to aid the subject in recognizing the distance between the mask and the effective conditions of its existence, thereby dissolving the subject’s psychic beguilement. Frankfurt School theorists offered a more nuanced conception of ideology, emphasizing that it is not as easy as tossing aside the distorting spectacles of ideology as social reality is precisely the distortion itself. Together, these two conceptualizations of false consciousness can be summarized as describing the process of the “misrecognition of the social reality which is part of this reality itself” (25). It is here that Žižek poses the question: does this model of ideology continue to apply today in the face of the cynical attitudes displayed by subjects? It would appear that such cynicism indicates that the subject is conscious of the fact that they wear a mask that obscures the actual conditions of their existence. Nonetheless, subjects continue to wear the mask. Marx’s formula of false consciousness might then be revised to read, as Peter Sloterdijik suggests, as they know very well what they are doing but still, they are doing it” (25). Žižek agrees with Sloterdijik’s reformulation and describes this new conception of ideology as a type of “enlightened false consciousness” where the subject is fully aware of the mask that they wear, but refuses to renounce it.

The cynicism that Žižek is describing is an offshoot of Sloterdijik’s notion of kynicism. According to Žižek, kynicism describes the way in which the dominant culture is underpinned by particular political interests which are reified through irony and sarcasm. The kynistic procedure confront[s] the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology…with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime noblese of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power” (26).
Through ironic detachment, kynicism calls attention to the way cultural institutions and the
discourses circulated by those institutions represent the self-serving interests of elite groups and
how these discourses and institutions are at the heart of a power struggle between the underclass
and the bourgeoisie. The cynicism that Žižek speaks of is the answer to the kynicistic operation.
That is, cynicism takes into account in advance the particular interests behind supposedly
universal values and beliefs as well as the distance between this distorting mask and reality. This
constitutes a negation of the negation” of the ruling ideology, where cynicism views acts that
might traditionally be considered moral as acts of supreme immorality and deception. The idea
here is that, as Žižek puts it, “the truth is the most effective form of a lie” (26). The question then
becomes for Žižek: do we truly find ourselves in a post-ideological world? It would appear that
the traditional conception of false consciousness which describes ideology’s efficacy according
to the subject’s relative belief in its truth does not explain cynical reason. However, Žižek argues
that despite the subject’s cynical distancing, this operation still leaves intact the fundamental
level of ideology fantasy, that level upon which ideology shapes social reality itself.

In order to elucidate ideology’s fantasy dimension, Žižek returns to the classic Marxist
formula of ideology—they do not know it, but they are doing it—and argues that this postulation
must be reversed. Žižek asks: is ideological illusion today on the side of the doing or that of the
knowing? Within the context of the notion of false consciousness, the answer is that the illusion
lies in the subject’s misperception of reality, in the knowing; there is a disconnect between what
people think they are doing and what it is that they actually do (28). Žižek argues that the
classical formulation of ideology leaves out a vital illusion that exists at the level of what
individuals are doing. The example he again returns to in order to illustrate this point is people’s
treatment of money. Žižek contends that individuals are perfectly aware that there is nothing
magical about money, and that as the universal facilitator of exchange, it is an embodiment of social relations. As such, people are cognizant that behind the relations between things (money, commodities) there are relations between people. However, people do not act according to this belief. People's daily social activity is guided by the notion that money is an embodiment of wealth rather than simply a piece of paper with a series of markings upon it. People act as if money and commodities intrinsically contain the value that they are thought to embody (28). This seems to indicate that the place of the fetishistic inversion for the contemporary cynical subject lies on the side of doing.

What this treatment of money reveals is that our daily social activity, what we do, is guided by an ideological illusion. What subjects fail to recognize is not, according to Žižek, the ideological mask that distorts the objective conditions of their existence, but how social reality is itself structured by the illusion. Žižek states that what [people] overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know” (30). According to Žižek, the ideological illusion itself is doubled in the case of the cynical subject: not only are supposedly universal truths and values actually illusory bourgeois fabrications aimed at mystifying the underclass into accepting their oppression, but more importantly, although subjects are no longer beguiled by such mystification, the daily social activity of subjects continues to be guided by these very ideological illusions. And, it is this overlooked, unconscious illusion that Žižek terms the ideological fantasy. He argues that the fundamental level of ideology, however, is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an [unconscious] fantasy structuring our social reality itself” (30). It appears then that we do not live in a post-ideological world. The locus of ideology seems to have shifted from the
realm of what the subject thinks it knows to what the subject thinks it is doing. The cynical subject knows that its social activity is guided by an illusion, but continues to act otherwise.

Thus, for Žižek, capital has a fantasy dimension. This is illustrated again through the example of people's treatment of money. In the case of money, we know very well that the pieces of paper upon which it is printed does not inherently contain the value affixed to them. Furthermore, we know that the physical state of a coin diminishes over time. However, this does not prevent us from treating money as if it were the immediate embodiment of its ascribed value, nor does it prevent us from treating coins as if they retain their value despite the gradual degradation of their physical state. In the cynical subject's daily social activity, this illusion is perpetuated unconsciously. The illusion becomes fantasy in a psychoanalytic sense when it is unconsciously overlooked. And, again, this is a precondition for the functioning of ideology. Thus, capital is in part composed of an ideological illusion that not only operates at the level of the subject's misrecognition of social reality, but at a level that structures this very social reality itself. Seemingly paradoxically, Žižek argues that alongside this fantasy element of capital exists its dimension in the Real. He explains the roles of fantasy and the Real in the form of capital in *The Fragile Absolute*.

*Capital's Dimension in the Real.* Žižek argues that the best way of ascertaining the defining characteristics of a period is through an examination of the ghosts that haunt it. Here, Žižek is playing upon Marx's statement in the *Communist Manifesto* that –"A spectre is haunting Europe." Žižek's point here is that periods are primarily defined by those disavowed apparitional forces that impact social reality from just off stage. Žižek writes, Perhaps the best way of encapsulating the gist of an epoch is to focus not on the explicitly features that define its social and ideological edifices but on the disavowed ghosts that haunt it, dwelling in a mysterious
region of non-existent entities which none the less persist, continue to exert their efficacy” (The Fragile Absolute 3). The critical dimension such a ghost or spectre according to Žižek is the way in which it continues to exert a pull on social reality despite having been repressed and relegated to the space of disavowal. According to Žižek, the Balkans is a prime example of a spectral presence that continues to structure social reality from the realm of the repressed.

The key aspect of the situation in the Balkans for Žižek is the brand of racism directed at those from this region and the way in which this racism is an analogue to the way in which capital’s expansion has progressed to the point where social activity is fundamentally self-referring. The self-reflexivity of the racist attitudes expressed toward the Balkans stems from the fact that the region is set within the geographical borders of Europe, making the racism directed at the Balkans fundamentally an act of self-reference that points back to Europe itself as its point of origin. The Balkans are a perfect corollary to the ghost of primary concern for Žižek (capital) precisely because it helps to demonstrate how the tremendous expansion of global capital renders all social activity that takes place within its structures as self-referring. Capital functions acts as a ubiquitous, self-referring locus through which all cultural and economic exchange operate. It is for this reason that Žižek considers capital to be the ultimate ghost of contemporary global culture.

The process of global reflexivization is ultimately a product of capital’s expansion, which for Žižek is the quintessential ghost of our time. Žižek argues that Marx correctly predicted the way in which the proliferation of capital ultimately leads to a self-enclosed, global network of circulation. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx describes how the need for new markets causes capital to nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere,” thereby creating intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of
nations” (*The Fragile Absolute* 12-13). Žižek asserts that this perfectly describes the world in which Hollywood culture pervades the globe and manufacturers have shifted domestic production to locations overseas (*The Fragile Absolute* 13). It is the globalization of capital and its subsequent eradication of traditional culture that Marx describes when he contends that “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned,” (*The Fragile Absolute* 13). However, Žižek contends that an account of global capital is not complete without the inclusion of the dialectical opposite to material production’s evisceration of the spiritual. Here, Žižek is referring to the spiritualization of material production itself. Žižek maintains that while capitalism’s radical secularization of social life…mercilessly tears apart any aurora of authentic nobility, sacredness, honour” by subordinating them to the needs of production, this process generates ideological abstraction as capital’s monstrous spectre (*The Fragile Absolute* 14).

Žižek states that the eradication of traditional culture through the globalization of capitalism not only subordinates the spiritual to material production, but also results in the spiritualization of production through the ideological abstraction of value that occurs in commodity exchange. Here, Žižek is referencing the classical Marxist concept of the fetishism of commodities. He contends that is not enough recognize that the abstraction of an object's value within commodity exchange makes this transaction appear to be a relationship between things, and in so doing, occludes the fact that there are real people and natural objects on whose productive capacities and resources Capital's circulation is based, and on which it feeds like a giant parasite” (*The Fragile Absolute* 15). According to Žižek, the recognition that commodity exchange masks relations between people still fails to appreciate how ideological illusion itself has real implications for this social reality. He writes:
It is far too simplistic to claim that the spectre of this self-engendering monster that pursues its path regardless of any human or environmental concern is an ideological abstraction… The problem is that this abstraction does not exist only in our (financial speculator’s) misperception of social reality; it is real in the precise sense of determining the very structure of material social processes: the fate of whole strata of populations, and sometimes of whole countries, can be decided by the solipsistic‘ speculative dance of Capital, which pursues profitability with a blessed indifference to the way its movement will affect social reality. (The Fragile Absolute 15)

Žižek emphasizes that the abstraction of value which obscures how commodities embody relations between people is not a purely psychic phenomena existing only within those minds that are beguiled by ideology; the spectre of capital is not simply an illusion. Capital‘s ideological abstraction is very 'real' in the sense that its movements affect the well-being of large groups of people across the globe. Thus, for Žižek, ideology is not made-up of pure fantasy material, but has a tangible influence in the dimension of social reality.

Žižek argues that although capital produces an ideological illusion whose abstract construction of value obscures relations between people, capital today manifests itself as the psychoanalytic Real. The relationship between the illusory aspect of capital's ideological abstraction and the tangible impact that it has upon social conditions is predicated upon the distinction between the Lacanian Real and social reality. For Žižek, the distinction between the two lies in the difference between daily our social practices and the forces that affect those activities. He writes, —‘Reality’ is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive process, while the Real is the inexorable, abstract‘ spectral logic of Capital which determines what goes on in social reality” (The Fragile Absolute 15). Social reality is the
realm of the material where the capitalist mode of production establishes a hierarchical division of labor that results in class conflict. Conversely, the Real for Žižek is precisely that abstraction, that ideological illusion that Capital generates in the process of commodity exchange. It is the logic behind that mysterious construction of (exchange) value that dissolves away the physical properties of an object that make it useful as a tool in survival. The Real is fundamentally the abstract internal logic to capital—it is Capital itself (the capitalization of Capital' reflects its status as the Real). But, Žižek again warns against viewing the Real of Capital merely as an ideological abstraction. The highest form of ideology lies not in getting caught up in ideological spectrality, forgetting about its foundations in real people and their relations,” according to Žižek, “but precisely in overlooking this Real of spectrality, and pretending to address directly real people with their real worries” (The Fragile Absolute 16). Žižek is moving away from the classical Marxist conception of false consciousness where ideology is primarily a process of mystification where the subject is duped into accepting fallacious version of reality. Instead, he emphasizes that the abstract internal logic of Capital has a real, ontological gravity that exerts a tangible force in the space where social relations take place.

The Real as Žižek conceives of it is not identical with the notion of the Real forwarded by Lacan because for Žižek, the Real is intimately linked with fantasy. Although Žižek emphasizes that Capital‘s production of an ideological illusion does not preclude this illusion from exerting a real force on social relations, he does nonetheless argue that the Real is inexorably tied to fantasy, an argument that distinguishes his conception of the Real with that of Lacan. The difference between Žižek‘s conception of the Real and that of Lacan is manifest in the distinction that Žižek draws between a culture‘s symbolic history” and its spectral, fantasmatic history” (64). According to Žižek, a culture‘s symbolic history constitutes the
various narratives, myths, rituals, and other traditions that together form the constellation of meaning that is a culture's symbolic order. The history of a culture's symbolic universe is distinct from its fantasmatic history, which is the history of the traumatic event that served as the impetus for the symbolic order's founding. According to Žižek, the spectral fantasmatic history tells the story of a traumatic event that "continues not to take place," that cannot be inscribed into the very symbolic space it brought about by its intervention" (The Fragile Absolute 64). The founding of a symbolic order is always a traumatic event, not because it labors to suppress previous institutions and ideologies, but because the symbolic order comes to prohibit the very act that serves as its point of origination. And, it is the reality of this antagonism for which the symbolic order cannot account and refuses to accommodate. As such, the Real is impossible in that it is a traumatic event that cannot be recognized if the symbolic order is to retain its coherence. The example that Žižek gives is the transition that the Jewish faith makes during the time of Moses from away from the conventional polytheistic cosmology of paganism to a world paradigm based in monotheism. The repressed of Jewish monotheism is not, according to Žižek, "the wealth of pagan sacred orgies and deities but the disavowed excessive nature of its own fundamental gesture: that is—to use the standard terms—the crime that founds the rule of Law itself, the violent gesture that brings about a regime which retroactively makes this gesture itself illegal/criminal" (The Fragile Absolute 63). The challenge posed to the new monotheistic Jewish worldview lies not in suppressing past religious traditions, but in repressing the memory of the new order's violent imposition of this violence and the subsequent tension that arises when it later prohibits this violence.

There are two important implications of Žižek's analysis here with regard to the fantasy dimension of the Real. When Žižek says that the traumatic founding gesture of the symbolic
order — continues not to take place,” he is saying that the Real never takes place because the history of the symbolic order’s violent self-imposition cannot be recognized. The realization of the symbolic order’s destructive generation would be too traumatic, as it would reveal an antagonism between the violent nature of its birth and its own prohibition of such violence. The Real continues to not take place because the traumatic history of the symbolic order’s founding cannot be recognized, lest the legitimacy of its codes and laws is lost and the Symbolic itself begins to dissolve. The Real is thus fantasmal in the sense that it is a ghost that is never permitted to enter the symbolic universe that comprises social reality; it is an apparition that must be overlooked if the symbolic order is to retain coherence. The second aspect of the Real to which Žižek is alluding is the notion that the Real of the symbolic order’s violent origination is not a confined event, but continues to shape the functioning of the symbolic order as its inescapable history—it continues to not happen. Despite being treated as a disavowed past that never happened, the Real continues to haunt the present as the inexorable kernel to which the Symbolic owes its very existence. This is what leads Žižek to say that the primordially repressed myth of the symbolic order’s origination is not simply a past event but a permanent spectral presence, an undead ghost that has to persist all the time if the present symbolic frame is to remain operative” (The Fragile Absolute 65). What is critical here is that the fantasy dimension of the Real which takes the form of a spectral abstraction does not prevent it from continuing to alter the trajectory of the daily activity within the symbolic order. The Real is at its most basic level traumatic kernel of the Symbolic’s origination that structures this very activity.

**Implications of Žižek’s Analysis.** The strength of Žižek’s theorization of capital lies in its ability to explain how capital has found a way to perpetuate itself in a world that has become aware of its failures. Since the financial crisis, a great deal of cynicism has been directed toward global
capital and its institutions. A poll taken in 2008, five years after Lehman Brothers declared
Bankruptcy, revealed many Americans are still angry with Wall Street and disenchanted with
how the economy is structured. More than half of those polled stated that they felt that not
enough has been done in the way of reforms to prevent a future crisis from occurring (Erman par.
8). Slightly more than half of respondents thought that not enough was done to hold speculators
and others on Wall Street accountable for the crisis, and only fifteen percent said that they were
satisfied with the outcome of legal proceedings (par. 7). Perhaps Judith Klatt, a sixty-seven year
old retiree from Wisconsin, encapsulated the sentiments of Americans best when she said,
―Nothing’s really changed…I’m angry at the government and Wall Street. I think they’ve both,
in plain language, screwed the public and are still doing so‖ (par. 12). In addition, the debt crisis
and the insolvency of nations continues to cause unrest in the European Union. In Greece, there
has been tremendous fallout stemming from austerity measures that cut benefits for average
citizens, while the economic elites that are to blame for the crisis escape being held accountable
for their mistakes (Kitsantonis par. 1-3). As a result, prosecutors are now working independently
from politicians and conducting investigations in an effort to bring to justice those responsible
for Greece’s economic decline (Kitsantonis par. 3-4). These are only a few examples of the
distrust and the anger that continues to be directed at financial institutions and the elites
responsible for the financial crisis.

This all begs an important question: if the majority of people in the countries that were
affected by the financial crisis are disillusioned and frustrated with the organization of the
current economy, then how has capital been able to perpetuate itself? Žižek’s notion of the
ideological fantasy helps to provide an answer. Capital continues to thrive because although
there is overt distrust directed at capital, the fundamental ideological fantasy of finance
capitalism continues to structure our daily social activity. That is, despite the public outcry regarding the instability of the market and the abuses that render the market unstable, individuals act as if the market is capable of being stabilized. The actions of free market ideologues perpetuate the underlying ideological illusion of market stability by behaving as if the market can be secured through econometric models that systemize the fickle decision-making process of non-rational actors. This ideological illusion of market stability also presents itself in people’s decision to continue to invest in the market and as well as in the notion that the bailing-out of financial institutions would restore order to the global economy. What this indicates is that the public’s intellectual distancing from capital has left intact the structuring illusion of capital’s consistency. Žižek’s idea of the ideological fantasy of the overlooked illusion that continues to structure social reality crystallizes how capital sustains itself in the face of this cynical distancing. However, despite the strength of Žižek’s analysis of capital’s fantasy dimension, there is a critical drawback to Žižek’s theorization of capital, and it has to do with the notion that Capital-as-the-Real is hopelessly abstract and possesses an impenetrable logic.

Žižek’s theorization of Capital’s dimension in the Real is ultimately counter-productive because it precludes detailed analysis of capital as an ontological material that should be theorized to the greatest specificity possible. For Žižek, Capital resembles the Lacanian Real insofar as it is an impossibly abstract and unfathomable concept that escapes the act of signification. What is problematic about this description is that the internal logic of Capital, because it is abstract and unknowable, cannot be further described. This stymies any attempt a providing a more comprehensive account of the specific ways in which capital operates and the logic according to which it circulates. The notion of the ideological fantasy is certainly productive in providing a way of conceiving of some of the illusions underlying capital’s
functioning. However, the conceptualization of Capital-as-the-Real does not permit a thorough examination of how capital manifests itself or the logic that propels it. Žižek’s theorization of capital does not come to terms with the way that capital operates as a master-signifier that functions according to a logic of recombination. There occurred a fundamental shift in the productive forces of capital within recent decades that birthed a field based on the schematization of capital and the production of information commodities through mathematical algorithms. I argue that this is a particular and distinct manifestation of capital that warrants closer examination. In the next chapter, I consider Franco Berardi’s notion of capital as purely semiotic as a way of conceptualizing capital in light of this development in its productive forces.
CHAPTER II. CAPITAL AND THE MASTER-SIGNIFIER

Capital as Semiotic. Franco "Bifo" Berardi's argues in Precarious Rhapsody: Semiacapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation that capitalism transitioned from an economy in which production is based in the creation of new objects for consumption to an economy predicated upon semiotic production and the fabrication of information commodities. Berardi considers the late 1970s to mark the end of modernity and the beginning of a new era in capital's history paved through technological development. In what he refers to as semio-capitalism," technology no longer consists merely of tools wielded for the improvement of the human race, but is instead a totalizing omnipresence that is constantly assembling and disassembling new interconnections (28). Advances in technology now enable capital to insert itself into the body and the brain of the individual through the internalization of its self-referring technical systems (28). The inescapability of semio-capital’s invasive technological apparatus leads Berardi to conclude that we are witnessing the closure of "the horizon of possibilities" and the end of the future itself (28). History now becomes "a chain of irreversible automatisms" engendered by new technological systems, the rote execution of mental operations in service of semio-capital (28). Ultimately, the lack of viable alternatives and choices effectuated by the conjoining of techné and the economy renders democracy toothless and empty (28). This end of the future" stems from a fundamental change in the productive forces of capital; that is, the digitalization of production. It is this transformation in the structuring of capitalism that gives rise to info-labor, work performed by individuals that produces information commodities. Production in info-labor is purely linguistic as it relies upon the creation and recirculation of capital’s various signs and symbols. The conjoining of production with the iteration of semiotic material is the decisive outcome of the technological developments which altered the productive forces of capital.
Semio-capitalism is for Berardi the stage in capital’s development that succeeds industrial capitalism and marks the complete unification of linguistic labor with the process of production. The implications of this transition are made evident by an attempt to apply Marx’s labor theory of value to an economy based upon linguistic production. It is not difficult to determine the amount of time necessary for a particular act of labor to be carried out; although there will be some variation, the time required to attach all four legs to a dinner table will be a calculable duration. This, however, is not the case in an economy in which production is semiotic. The creation of semiotic material does not follow a standard time-table; the relative amount of cognitive activity required to produce a sign of value within semio-capitalism varies across the diverse population of bio-cognitive intelligences. The result of the production process being predicated upon linguistic output is a system of indeterminacy and instability (150). This is exacerbated by the fact that language also begins to embody economic principles such as competition, shortage, and overproduction (150). Berardi is especially concerned with the overproduction of signs and argues that the barrage of semiotic material to which bio-cognitive intelligences are subjected leads to psychic trauma. It is for this reason that he argues that semio-capitalism is pathogenic. Also important is the idea that capital’s transition to an economy of semiotic production alters the very form of labor that is performed by workers.

According to Berardi, key developments in technology such as the invention of the micro-processor and wireless communication devices create info-labor: segments of labor-time which are used to produce information commodities through the formulation and re-articulation of semiotic material. As Berardi states, the provision of time for the elaboration and recombination of segments of info-commodities, is the extreme point of arrival of the process of abstraction from concrete activities that Marx analyzed as a tendency inscribed in the capital
labor relation” (32). Here, Berardi is referencing the concept the same concept discussed by Žižek, i.e. ideological abstraction. Again, the idea is that capital obscures the concrete physical activities that are performed in the production of a commodity by using money as a universal equivalent against which all commodities are valorized. Marx also argued that the creation of exchange-values through the production of commodities results in an abstraction of labor. When a product is placed upon the market, its value is determined using money as a universal equivalent of exchange, and it acquires an exchange-value—although, to say that it acquires an exchange-value is not entirely accurate because the market makes it appear as if the value is intrinsic to the commodity, that is inheres within it as an inexorable property of its existence. In acquiring an exchange-value, a product’s use-value is erased: the properties of a product that are imparted through the labor process and give it its particular utility as a tool for survival are obscured. As a consequence, the labor that imparted those properties to the object is equally obscured. Berardi argues that this process of abstraction is exponentially increased in the case of semio-capital. He states:

The informatization of the production processes constitutes a leap in the process of abstraction. Industrial labor consisted in the transformation of mechanical matter by an operator who applied its physical energies in the process of goods production. After the informatization of production techniques, processes of transformation increasingly become processes of elaboration of information. Info-labor is the activity that produces material and immaterial goods through the elaboration of information. (145)

Production under semio-capitalism at its most basic level involves the recirculation of signs and symbols in novel recombinations within the digital nervous system of the info-sphere. This constant rearticulation of semio-capital means that the info-labor required to initially create these
commodities becomes one step further removed each time that they are reformulated into new products. The result is that the process of abstraction that obscured labor through ascribing exchange-values to products is exponentially increased when these exchange-values are altered and reassigned through the process of recombination.

Berardi argues that this process of abstraction is further exacerbated by the fact that the recombination of information through digital systems obviates the labor that is specific to the process of material production. Labor is now largely disembodied, with laborers being able to interface with the info-sphere from inumerable locations at any time. Furthermore, info-labor creates self-producing systems that perform labor that was once conducted by humans, further obscuring the organic element of the production process by eliminating the possibility of evaluating the objective time necessary for the production of a commodity (33). As a result, capital merely purchases packets of time such that the sphere of production becomes the realm of cyberspace where global production [is] an immense expanse of depersonalized human time” (33). Semio-capitalism thus creates an info-sphere composed of bits of labor, a process that renders workers increasingly disposable. This uncertainty leads some to argue that work has changed qualitatively since the introduction of certain key technological developments. However, Berardi is quick to point out that this misses the structural cause of this uncertainty.

Berardi contends that the argument that work has become increasingly uncertain and precarious is misguided because it assumes that labor was at one time stable. He critiques those that nostalgically argue that labor has become volatile, that human relations are fleeting and work no longer follows a consistent linear progression of tasks (30). He instead emphasizes that labor has always been precarious. According to Berardi, since the 1970s (with its energy crisis, recession, and the replacement of human workers with machines) there has existed a class of
people whose livelihood is constantly at risk, a group that he refers to as the precariat” (31). What is new Berardi states is not the precarity of labor but the particular technological developments and cultural conditions that engender this precariousness; namely, the digital transformation of production and the recombination of info-work in networks (32). Hence, any consideration of the uncertainty of labor should account for the way in which the human has been gradually weeded out of the production process. Today, rather than an embodied worker following a consistent schedule in which tasks are oriented toward producing material goods, work takes the form of info-labor, that work provided by workers to employers in cellularized packets of time which, through disembodied cognitive activity, recombine bits of information into –info-commodities.”

The worker’s recombination of digital information into info-commodities results in a state of overproduction within the info-sphere (44). In order to understand the way in which semio-capitalism effectuates the overproduction of semiotic goods, it is important to appreciate the distinction Berardi draws between cyberspace and cybertime. According to Berardi, cyberspace represents the unbound productivity of workers’ collective intelligence (44). It is a “telematic network,” a web of the general intellect whose power is a function of the infinite interconnections between bio-cognitive organisms (44). This psychic network enables info-production to become entirely uninhibited, creating –an infinite supply of mental and intellectual goods” (44). Conversely, for Berardi, cybertime denotes the ability of disembodied cognition to process the information circulating within cyberspace (44). There are very real limitations on cybertime by virtue of the various physical, emotional, and affective constraints experienced by bio-cognitive organisms (It is this tension between the infinite productivity of cyberspace and the limited functionality of cybertime which is at the core of the psychic trauma caused by semio-
capitalism) (44). This is fundamentally a problem of overproduction. According to Marx, overproduction occurs when an amount of goods are produced that outstrips the demand for those goods. In an effort to address crises of overproduction, goods were destroyed and production scaled back at the expense of those who could have used the goods to survive. In the case of semio-capital, what is being overproduced is psychic stimulation. As Berardi notes, “The mental environment is saturated by signs that create a sort of continuous excitation, a permanent electrocution, which leads the individual mind as well as the collective mind to a state of collapse” (44). The info-sphere of semio-capital resembles a digital cloud of info-commodities that bombard bio-cognitive intelligences to the point of overstimulation. This is the consequence of a crisis of overproduction in which semiotic material is never taken out of circulation; it is ceaselessly recombined into amalgamated iterations of capital.

Berardi argues that digital production within the info-sphere resembles a biological organism where the fundamental structures responsible for an organization’s functioning resemble a human nervous system (35). Just as all living organisms are sustained by autonomic systems that operate without conscious effort, human-produced organizations operate according to self-regulating subsystems that autonomously reproduce the conditions necessary for the organization’s survival. Prior to the digital revolution, these subsystems did not exist, and bits of information were not linked together through information technology as they are today. To continue the analogy between semio-capital as an organization and living organisms, one might say that the connections between the neurons within the brain had not been formed. Today, however, businesses are prime examples of artificial nervous systems at work (35). Information flows at the speed of human cognition and an organization’s actions are easily coordinated through a network of interconnected subsystems (workers) (35).
The result of this digital nervous system is a world in which general systems theory and biogenetics combine in a bio-info model of production that is fundamentally post-human. As Berardi states, "In the connected world, retroactive loops of general systems theory are fused with the dynamic logic of biogenetics in a post-human vision of digital production” (35). The flesh becomes integrated with the circuit board through software technologies that are designed to enable the business‘ digital nervous system to self-replicate through self-referring, autopoietic systems (35). The subsystems or autonomic protocols that are employed by the digital nervous systems are autopoietic in the sense that they are self-creating and perpetuate their own internal organization by processing their environment through self-reference. These self-sustaining subsystems can then be implanted into an organization and programmed to execute operations in service of the production of info-commodities. The final outcome of the creation of these digital nervous systems is the integration of the human mind into a network continuum of the cybernetic type” that schematizes and structures —the fluxes of digital information” (35). Production becomes a cognitive operation occurring through a vast, distributed digital network that serves as the infrastructure for the info-sphere. The subsystems that are created through these cognitive operations, through info-labor, then produce autonomously as independent microorganisms that manage the data in the info-sphere.

Semio-capital itself comprises the information commodities and other semiotic material that flow throughout the info-sphere. According to Berardi, the path to semio-capital was in part paved by deregulation and the measures instituted in the conservative 1980s by Thatcher and Reagan. Up to that point, the state apparatus traditionally served as a means of repression, enforcing codes and norms that served ideology. However, developments in technology enabled the shifting of the locus of control from within the state to within consciousness itself. The result
of this transition away from the state was a profound sense of indeterminacy. Berardi contends that Baudrillard precisely captures the spirit of this indeterminacy when he says that the principle of reality coincided with a certain stage of the law of value. Today, the whole system has precipitated into indeterminacy and reality has been absorbed by the hyper-reality of the code of simulation (quoted in Berardi 124-5). Berardi argues that deregulation, in removing the state as the executor of ideology‘s demands, took away capital‘s chief point of reference. For Berardi, capitalism thus ‗precipitates into indeterminacy as all correspondences between symbol and referent, simulation and event, value and labor time no longer hold‖ (125). Without laws and norms against which value can be measured and governed, capital‘s internal structure began to deteriorate. Semio-capital now exists as a series of signs and symbols without tangible referents whose locus of value is self-contained and self-referring. —An uninterrupted flow of fractal and recombining info-labor circulates in the global web as the agent of universal valorization, yet its value is indeterminable,” says Berardi (125). The creation of objects of value within semio-capitalism occurs through the rearrangement of the bits of information that comprise info-commodities, thereby generating novel orientations of information that then become consumable. However, the process of the construction of these info-commodities is incestuous as their production is the result of the recombination of like elements. Rather than acquiring value through an external object that exists outside the info-sphere, these products of info-labor gain value through self-reference, through re-representing the binary and systematized linguistics that are the mechanics of semio-capital‘s very functioning. In this way, semio-capital is composed of self-referring info-commodities that float freely in the info-sphere, severed from any stable external referent.
Berardi argues that another defining characteristic that distinguishes semio-capital from industrial capital is that goods are now immaterial and reproducible. In the sphere of semiotic-capital and cognitive labor, when a product is consumed, instead of disappearing it remains available,” Berardi states, “while its value increases the more its use is shared. This is how the network economy works, and this contradicts the very principle of private property on which capitalism was founded until now” (59-60). Today, semio-capital is in part composed of data representing internet activity and user behavior, which is then packaged and circulated within the info-sphere for consumption. Semio-capital is further the breaking down of these info-commodities into their constituent parts and recombining them into novel formations which create new semiotic constructions of value. Semio-capital is also the series of self-referring signs and symbols that appear upon the screens on the floor of the stock market and the monitors of home investors. This is to say that the goods produced within the info-sphere are thoroughly informational; they are pure signifiers that have value merely through their re-signification of the signs and symbols that are of life-blood semio-capital’s various digital nervous systems. This is what prevents their value from extinguishing; these signs and symbols remain available for constant recombination and rearticulation within the info-sphere.

Berardi argues that the internal logic to semio-capital’s and its various subsystems is one of recombination. According to Berardi, cognitive activity has always been the foundation upon which all human production is based, but to a lesser extent in industrial capitalism (34). In industrial production, the mind primarily served as the driving force behind routine muscle movements. However, in semio-capitalism, the need to innovate and communicate in a variety of languages and media increases the importance of cognitive capacity (34). Berardi argues that cognitive activity within the context of the post-mechanical economy of semio-capitalism now
follows a logic of recombination. Recombination is both a form of cognition as well as a mode of operation. It is the breaking down info-commodities into their basic elements, the organization of these discrete parts in new ways, and finally the construction of entirely new assemblages of data from these parts. Recombination is fundamentally the boiling down of semio-capital’s signs and symbols into their fundamental elements and the quilting of those elements together in a novel formation. Examples of such recombinant elements include the ones and zeros of binary code as well as the four components that make up human DNA sequencing. Both of these coding languages provide the constituent elements for human life and computer software just as the raw data elements of info-commodities provide the necessary coding for the construction of semio-capital’s signs and symbols. The logic of recombination is problematic according to Berardi because it is not dialectical (149). The constant re-articulation of elements in novel formulations results in the erasure of histories; there is no traceable linear progression of an element’s existence. Elements are frozen in time in a sort of perpetual present until their bonds are radically severed and are integrated into a new symbolic formation. As such, recombination precludes the possibility of sustaining meaning as all elements appear in a static present without reference to other instances of signification.

There are a number of ways in which Berardi’s discussion of semio-capital corresponds with Lacan’s concept of the master-signifier. A juxtaposition of the notion of semio-capital with the discussion of the discourse of the master in Lacan’s Seminar XVII helps to elucidate the way in which semio-capital functions as a master-signifier. This line of inquiry helps to illustrate the way in which semio-capital functions as a master-signifier by attempting to subsume all other signifiers under it. Semio-capital also seeks to construct unified Truths as info-commodities whose production is mastered through the vast interconnection of bio-cognitive organisms.
Furthermore, semio-capital seeks to fill in the void left by the act of signification; in this case, the failed signification is that of democracy. Finally, the way its operation is inherently self-referring also establishes semio-capital as a master-signifier.

*Semio-Capital as the Master-Signifier.* In Seminar XVII, *L’Envers de la Psychanalyse (The Other Side of Psychoanalysis)*, Lacan contends that discourse goes beyond mere utterances; language establishes certain conceptual relations (structures) that are supported by and reproduced through acts of signification (13). In this way, language is a system that creates and sustains certain codes and norms that tell us how to think and how to behave. According to Lacan, linguistic communication can take four forms: the discourse of the master, the discourse of the analyst, the discourse of the hysteric, and the discourse of the university. He schematizes these modes of communication in the following algebraic equations:

\[
\frac{a}{S_2} \cdot \frac{S_1}{S_2} \quad \frac{a}{S_1} \cdot \frac{S_1}{S_2} \quad \frac{a}{S_2} \cdot \frac{S_1}{S_2}
\]

The little *a* represents l’objet petit â, or the little other, that which is the object of the subject’s desire. The barred *S* represents that of the split subject that is divided through its initiation into language. *S*1 and *S*2 and their interrelation are of particular importance to Lacan as they represent the primary relationship that is formed between two signifiers. Specifically, *S*1 stands for the master-signifier, the signifier which represents the subject in relation to another signifier. *S*2 is meant to represent the field of knowledge, the arranged network of signifiers into which *S*1 intervenes at its point of origin.

The relationship to which Lacan devotes the majority of his attention to in the discourse of the master is that between *S*1, the master-signifier, and *S*2, the field of signifiers that represent...
knowledge and into which the master-signifier is inserted. For Lacan, the discourse of the master is entirely predicated upon the signifying function of S1. He states, S1 is, to say it briefly, the signifier, the signifier function, that the essence of the master relies upon” (21). That is to say, the master-signifier relies upon the signifier’s ability to enter into associations with other signifiers to create schemas of meaning. It is the signifying function that enables the master-signifier to refer to all other signifiers and make itself a suitable substitute in all acts of signification. The discourse of the master comprises an episteme that assimilates outside knowledge in a way that is self-legitimating. It is very precisely a question of something that,” according to Lacan, “links one signifier, S1, to another signifier, S2, in a relationship of reason” (30). The point here is that knowledge can only be known as knowledge in itself, not as representing or corresponding with phenomena in the external world. The knowledge in the field of signifiers is fundamentally knowledge of association and not of acquaintance. The critical aspect of the master-slave dialectic as it pertains to the master-signifier is that the master-signifier intervenes into the field of knowledge, into S2, and attempts to schematize it according to its own logic. Lacan is making precisely this point when he emphasizes the way in which the signifier stands for the subject and opens up a space for the subject’s familiarization with the field of S2.

The element of S1 that is most fundamental to the master-signifying function is the notion that the signifier stands in for the subject and acts as a point of origin for the subject’s efforts to make sense of the field of S2. The master-signifying function is precisely this attempt on the part of the subject to schematize the signifiers of S2 according to the master-signifier’s own organizing principle. Lacan distinguishes between S1 and S2 when he states the following:
I am talking about those signifiers that are already there, whereas the point of origin at which we place ourselves in order to establish what discourse is about, discourse thought of as the status of the statement [l’énounce], S1 is the one to be seen as intervening. It intervenes in a signifying battery that we have no right, ever, to take as dispersed, as not already forming a network of what is called knowledge [savoir]. (4)

S1 is the starting point for the subject’s efforts to discern and organize the structural elements of language that are instantiated in utterance. The master-signifier thus represents the subject’s attempt to organize through association the already pre-structured field of signifiers into which it is inserted. In this way, the master-signifier serves as a pointe de caption, a point of origin that quilts together all other signifiers under itself.

Semio-capital also seeks to subsume all other signifiers under itself by making all foreign signs and symbols substitutable for each other through itself as the universal equivalent of exchange. Berardi’s analysis helps to point out that in assigning exchange-values to the signs and symbols assimilated into the info-sphere, semio-capital re-schematizes the diverse field of semiotic material that occupies S2. It recodes linguistic products of human labor under the supreme rubric of capital, rendering all signifiers subject to its semiotic ubiquity. Berardi is making this observation when he states that capital follows a logic of recombination; information commodities within semio-capitalism are produced through the breaking down of semiotic material into its constituent elements (within the context of Lacan’s schema of the discourse of the master, this corresponds to the master-signifier’s disruption of the chains of signification of the field of signifiers in S2) and the rearticulation of that material into novel exchange-values, which equates with the master-signifier’s reorganization of the chains of signification such that all signifiers refer back to itself. This process is illustrative of the drive on the part of the master-
signifier-as-semio-capital to systematize the field of S2 and bring all other signs and symbols under its umbrella through their commodification. This is achieved through the reassembling of semiotic material into new exchange-values that can then seamlessly substituted for each other through semio-capital as the universal equivalent of exchange. It is semio-capital’s rearrangement of the field of signifiers represented by S2 and the making of itself as a universal substitute for these signs and symbols that creates a constant barrage of semiotic material upon the psyches of bio-cognitive organisms. Semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s constant assimilation of all other signifiers and the recirculation of that semiotic material under its own rubric produces an endless stream of signification that places tremendous attentional stress upon workers. For this reason, semio-capital is pathogenic in the sense that it creates the experience of attentional disorders as an antagonism that is averse to capital’s functioning.

Another important element of the discourse of the master that is relevant to the discussion of semio-capital as the master-signifier is the notion that the master-signifier is bound up in the fantasy of obtaining Truths, or constructing unified wholes that represent a one-to-one correspondence with external phenomena. Lacan uses politics as a way of explicating this dynamic:

What is well designed to show how little impact the schools carry is the fact that the idea that knowledge can make a whole is, if I may say so, immanent to the political as such…The imaginary idea of the whole that is given by the body, as drawing on the good form of satisfaction, on what, ultimately, forms a sphere, has always been used in politics by the party of political preaching. What is more beautiful, but also what is less open? What better resembles closure of satisfaction. (31)
So, for Lacan, both philosophy and politics suffer from the false belief that representation can somehow faithfully contain the final Truth of the phenomenon that it is supposed to articulate. This is the guiding principle behind Plato’s theory of forms, that there exists a realm of ideals that embody the Truth behind the material. However, the project that seeks to circumscribe Truth and achieve closure of meaning is pure fantasy. It ignores that the master-signifier, that which is wielded in an attempt acquire transcendent Truths, is thoroughly vacuous. In order to accommodate all of the signifiers that make up S2, the master-signifier necessarily drains itself of meaning; it becomes an empty vessel which can be suitably substituted for any number of other signifiers. The bodies that philosophy and politics believe to carry transcendent Truths are merely shells whose ability to contain other signifiers renders them emptied.

Lacan argues that the master-signifier’s attempt obtain unified Truths through closure of meaning is further precluded by the structure of language. For Lacan, Truth is impossible because symbolization through language is always incomplete, requiring further acts of signification to clarify the signifiers in question. As Lacan states:

What is it that is true? My God, it is what was said. What is it that was said? A sentence.

But the only way of having a sentence supported is by signifiers, insofar as they do not involve objects. Unless, like a logician whose extremist views I will come to shortly, you claim that there are no objects, only pseudo-objects. As for us, we hold that signifiers are not concerned with objects but with sense. (56)

Claims to absolute Truth are only as viable as language’s ability to effectively communicate a supposedly objective reality. For Lacan, the problem with such claims is that language prevents the communication of any such Truths. As sentences, truth claims are composed of signifiers that are unstable as a result of their requiring further signifiers for the clarification of their meaning.
For example, the signifier t-r-e-e” is not sufficient in itself as a bearer of meaning; it necessarily refers to other signifiers to support itself, such as g-r-e-e-n” and l-e-a-f.” What is problematic is that the signifiers g-r-e-e-n” and l-e-a-f” then also require further clarification through further signifiers. The result is an endless chain of signification in which the totality of meaning is always deferred. As such, knowledge is merely a function of familiarity with the circuits of association that make up S2; the unified wholes which embody pure meaning that the master-signifier seeks to stand in for simply do not exist.

Lacan’s analysis of the master-signifier’s attempt to stand in for whole Truths further illuminates the way in which semio-capital functions as a master-signifier. The info-sphere is an embodiment of semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s drive to achieve omnipotence through interconnection, to produce knowledge that can be put in service of capital; the info-sphere assimilates bits of information into the reticular network of the digital nervous system to create an organizational structure whose schematization of its environment is thought to increase efficiency and generate surplus-value. The info-sphere is predicated upon the belief in semio-capital’s ability to know, manipulate, and master the field of signifiers that is S2. Furthermore, the fundamental activity of semio-capital, the production of info-commodities, is based in the belief that capital is capable of fabricating semiotic artifacts with a fixed value, the two terms being equivalent in an economy in which information has become the dominant commodity form. Semio-capital’s recombination of signs and symbols that results in the production of info-commodities operates under the assumption that such semiotic material can possess stable exchange-values that persist despite the immaterial character of such commodities. Semio-capital is thought to have the ability to imbue an informal substance with the permanent property of value, which at its basest level equates with a fantastical belief in creating a unified knowledge
system based upon value as a permanent property that stabilizes a commodity's meaning. Semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s attempt to master the field of S2 through the creation of unified truths produces a suffocating info-sphere that assaults the consciousnesses of bio-cognitive organisms. The pursuit of an organizational structure that can apply fixed values to info-commodities creates a rigid, all-encompassing schema of association that binds consciousnesses through an unyielding interconnection with these info-objects. It is this oppressive environment that is responsible for the production of the experience of attentional disorders. An application of Lacan's analysis of the discourse of the master to semio-capital is productive because it illustrates how semio-capital functions as a master-signifier in a number of ways. However, there are further characteristics of the master-signifier that semio-capital embodies, but that Lacan does not cover in *Seminar XVII*. Rex Butler's discussion of the master-signifier reveals further ways in which semio-capital operates as a master-signifier.

One important dimension of Butler’s work on the master-signifier is the notion that the master-signifier covers the void left by the act of signification. Butler's contention is predicated upon the familiar Lacanian concept that the process of symbolization through language requires the incessant clarification of signifiers through further acts of signification such that a determinate meaning of an utterance is never achieved. Butler takes as an example the signifier of "society" whose tremendous symbolic weight points to the way in which signifiers acquire their meaning through association with an infinite array of other signifiers in a way that the definition of a signifier never contains a fixed set of further modifiers. The articulation through language of what constitutes society” is doomed to be incomplete because the need for clarification results in the revealing of further and further associations with other signifiers, making the semiotic transmission of society” as a unified whole impossible. —It cannot be
rendered whole not because of some empirical excess but because any supposed unity is only able to be guaranteed from some point outside of it, because the master-signifier that fathers together the free-floating ideological elements stands in for a void,” Butler contends (par. 10).

All acts of signification aim at achieving closure of meaning whereby signifiers and utterances possess a unified semiotic center that stabilizes its own meaning as well as that of the other elements in the linguistic chain. This stable center represents an ideal outside to language as a system of difference that requires constant clarification of signifiers through further signifiers. However, this stable point of origin is a fantasy precluded by the process of symbolization that occurs through language in which signifiers are constantly substituted for each other in an endless chain of signification. The result is that all acts of signification, far from arriving at a stable core, necessarily result in a void at the symbolic center of the utterance where a determinate meaning ought to be; every act of signification fails to arrive at closure of meaning with the result that every act of signification is accompanied by an emptiness around which the chain of signification oscillates, and this void is precisely where the master-signifier resides. Or, it would be more accurate to say that the master-signifier covers over this void. The master-signifier is the pointe de caption, the universal quilting point that is a substitution for the empty center of the act of signification. It represents the fantasy of a point outside of the sign system of language that ensures its coherence.

Semio-capital as the master-signifier of our day seeks to cover over the void left by the attempt to signify democracy within the field of signifiers, S2, that is dominated by techné. Berardi argues that in the late 1970s, technology ceased to be merely a series of tools wielded for the progression humanity and became an inescapable omnipresence that eradicated other ways of being. Berardi points to the way in which various technical systems that are embedded in
software programming have infused themselves with the cognition of semio-capital's subjects. Constant interfacing with these subsystems results in mental activity becoming the rote repetition of the protocols of semio-capital’s internal mechanisms. This shift marks a transition in the make-up of the field of S2 with the field of signifiers into which a master-signifier now thoroughly dominated by techné and its subsystems. The attempt to signify democracy fails because semio-capitalism produces automated consciousnesses that cannot conceive of alternative possibilities outside its technical systems, a condition which Berardi describes as the end of democracy and the future itself. Put simply, democracy as master-signifier cannot unify a field of signifiers that is so averse to its most elemental signifier: choice. The master-signifier stands in for the failed master-signifier of democracy and seeks to occupy the position of the outside point of origin that unites all other signifiers under itself. Because the notion of a unified whole that encompasses all other signifiers is a fantasy, the master-signifier merely covers over the void left by the act of signifying democracy. Its relative success in supplanting “Democracy” is a function of the associations that semio-capital successfully shares with the field of technical signifiers of S2; namely, its schematization of S2 is abetted by the interrelation of semio-capital's drive to produce surplus-value through increased efficiency and the promise of such efficiency through technical systems. It is the evisceration of democracy from the field of S2 that ensnares bio-cognitive organisms into semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s oppressive organizational schema. The elimination of choice results in the subject’s forced integration into an info-sphere of overstimulation, thus ensuring the production of attentional disorders. Another important dimension of the master-signifier that Butler addresses is that it is inherently self-referring.
Butler argues that the master-signifier represents a point outside the field of signifiers that organizes this field in a way that is inherently self-referring. He argues that the master-signifier is an imagined point of origin that ensures the coherence of the sign system of language from the outside. He states:

As with the order of language, this empty signifier or signifier without signified is the way for a self-contained, synchronic system, in which the meaning of each element is given by its relationship to every other, to signify its own outside, the enigma of its origin (TK, 198). This means that any potential master-signifier is connected to a kind of hole or void that cannot be named, which all the elements stand in for and which is not defined by its relationship to others but is comparable only it itself: object a. (par.10)

The master-signifier is a means for language to render itself coherent. As a sign system based upon the symbolization of phenomena, language is bound to be an incomplete representation of the concepts that it attempts to articulate. To avoid the endless chain of signification that results from the attempt to clarify its signifiers, language refers to a master-signifier as a pure signifier that is outside of itself, a signifier without signified that unifies all other signifiers by making itself equivalent with them. However, the master-signifier, because it can stand in for any other signifier, is necessarily empty and serves only to cover the void left by signification rather than filling it in. The subject alternatively seeks to fill this void with the object of desire, l’objet a.

The critical point here for the discussion of semio-capital is that because the master-signifier is an external point that unifies all other signifiers under itself, it is essentially self-referring. All other acts of signification point back to the master-signifier as their point of origin and because the master-signifier requires no further clarification, because it is the ultimate quilting point for all other signifiers, can only truly refer back to itself. As such, all instances of the master-
signifier are fundamentally self-referring. Semio-capital is precisely this self-referring master-signifier that makes itself the point of origin for all other acts of signification.

Lacan comes close to articulating the way in which the master-signifier is self-referring when he argues that the instantiation of the signifier results in an endless chain of signification. Here, the critical point is that the attempt to produce meaning becomes caught up in an endless process of substituting new signifiers for that which one is attempting to define. However, what is important in the case of the master-signifier, and this is the point made by Butler, is that this chain comes to form a loop in which signification always returns to the master-signifier as its most elemental level of definition. The result is a system that defines itself against a vacuous external locus of origin that is rearticulated and reinstated through further acts of signification. The step that Butler takes which is not taken by Lacan is to argue that this means that the master-signifier is essentially self-referring as it subsumes all other signifiers and thus requires none for its own definition; it is an ideal, whole outside to language as a sign system.

Semio-capital is engaged in the same process of self-reference whereby the semiotic material circulated through economic exchange acquires value through association with semio-capital itself rather than by in some way pointing back to an object with a material presence. The value of info-commodities is purely a function of linguistic iteration that appeals to a differential sign system that oscillates around semio-capital as its stabilizing center. Signs and symbols have value insofar as they make reference to the master-signifier of semio-capital and can be considered substitutable for it. The info-sphere is fundamentally an intellectually incestuous cloud of signs and symbols that all have their basis in the process of recombining and rearticulating info-commodities in the image of the master-signifier that is semio-capital. As such, all instances of semio-capital functionally refer only to themselves and all acts of
signification refer back to semio-capital as the external point against which they are defined. It is the intellectually homogenous info-sphere of self-referring semio-capital that produces the experience of attentional disorders. The self-referring element of semio-capital-as-master-signifier ensures its absolute ubiquity and that bio-cognitive consciousnesses are bombarded by its manifestation from every direction. This all-encompassing, inescapable info-sphere places an enormous attentional stress upon workers produces mental trauma in the form of disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.
CHAPTER III. ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER AS SEMIO-CAPITAL’S ANTAGONISM

The examination of semio-capital through the lens of the discourse of the master helps to point out the various ways in which it functions as a master-signifier. The key aspects of Berardi’s analysis correspond with the concept of the master-signifier such that one could argue that this association is the logical conclusion to his argument. What is especially fruitful about this line of inquiry that is not achieved by a theorization of capital that is content to argue that its concept is too abstract to schematize is that it enables us to appreciate one of semio-capital’s chief antagonisms. As Berardi’s analysis makes clear, labor under semio-capital-as-master-signifier is purely cognitive, and the constant barrage of semiotic material to which cognitive activity is subjected results in attentional stress. This unmanageable cognitive load impedes worker productivity and ultimately decreases the value of the labor-time purchased by the capitalist through wages. This is indicative the first part a fundamental antagonism; namely, the creation of the psychic experience of attentional disorders as a series of symptoms that are averse to its functioning. The second element that makes up this antagonism is semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s attempt to manage these symptoms through the construction of specific discursive regimes such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder to discipline non-normative bodies that threaten production and the capitalist’s ability to extract surplus-value from

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1 I would like to emphasize that my argument here is not that semio-capitalism is the root cause of attentional disorders. Instead, I would like to argue, as does Berardi, that the unique set of technological forces involved in production within semio-capitalism produces symptoms that are emblematic of attentional disorders. It is not my intent to diagnose large populations of individuals with atypical neurochemistry. What I would like to suggest is that subjects endure an experience that is akin to having an attentional disorder as a result of their participation in the structures of semio-capitalism. It is my argument that semio-capitalism produces symptoms of inattention within subjects and that it attempts to manage those symptoms through the construction of discursive regimes such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Any attempt to elucidate a causal connection between AD/HD and specific economic structures through case studies or statistical analysis of trends is beyond the scope of this project.
exchange. The diagnostic criteria for AD/HD seek to police these symptoms by reifying ideological notions of labor and time as described by Marx’s labor theory of value. Specifically, the language of these criteria instill the notion that human activity is naturally a form of labor that should be standardized and evaluated according to whether such activity produces a tangible object of value. Furthermore, these criteria reinscribe the notion of a universal reason and the assumption of the dualist model of Cartesian subjectivity that one can retreat into consciousness as a space of pure will. This maintains the illusion of individual autonomy and construes the loss of agency within semio-capitalism as an aberration. In this way, semio-capital both produces the phenomenological experience of attentional disorders and creates on a discursive level the very disorders that are deleterious to production. The tension between linguistically producing such disorders and the threat that those disorders pose to production is a primary antagonism of semio-capital-as-master-signifier.

Semio-Capital as Pathogenic and Marx’s Labor Theory of Value. Berardi argues that semio-capitalism is pathogenic in the sense that the process of semiotic production produces the experience of attentional disorders and mental trauma. One of the defining characteristics of semio-capitalism that distinguishes it from an economy based upon industrial production is its increased emphasis on cognitive labor. The linguistic production of signs and symbols to be put in service of capital places an enormous load upon the daily mental functioning of the cognitariat. There is an overall increase in both the quantity and intensity of stimuli that workers encounter in their daily activities, the result of which is a decline in laborers’ mental health. As Berardi states, The acceleration of stimuli is a pathogenic factor that has wide ranging effects in society. Economic competition and digital intensification of informatics stimuli, combined together, induce a state of permanent electrocution that flows into a wide-spread pathology
which manifests itself either in the panic syndrome or attention disorders” (36). Berardi’s argument here is made from the standpoint of a cultural critic. He does not employ the seemingly objective methodology of medical science, but this should not delegitimize his contention. It is not Berardi’s intent to diagnose a specific population of individuals with a mental disorder. Instead, Berardi is arguing that semio-capitalism produces damaging psychological symptoms that are characteristic of certain mental disorders such as AD/HD. Berardi contends that semio-capitalism produces the experience of having an attentional disorder, not necessarily that semio-capital produces these disorders themselves. At the same time, given the important role that one’s environment plays in shaping one’s psychic experience, it appears at least plausible that a situational context that constantly bombards subjects with sensory material might in some way contribute to an overall increase in the presence of attentional disorders within a group. However, the intent of this project is not to develop a causal connection between AD/HD and semio-capitalism. Instead, the goal is to compare the psychological experience of subjects exposed to semio-capital-as-master-signifier and those that experience attentional disorders on a phenomenological level. The argument is that semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s production of symptoms that are at least in some ways consistent with having attentional disorders is indicative of a fundamental internal contradiction.

Another reason that Berardi argues that semio-capitalism is pathogenic is because the widespread prescription of various pharmaceutical drugs seems to indicate that it produces negative psychological symptoms. According to Berardi, the experience of having an attentional disorder such as AD/HD is the result of a production process that puts an unbearable load upon the psyche. This cognitive load placed upon the minds of workers precludes them from attending to other parts of their lives. Berardi writes:
The available attention time for the workers involved in the informatics cycle is constantly being reduced: they are involved in a growing number of mental tasks that occupy every fragment of their attention time. For them there is no longer the time to dedicate to love, to tenderness, to affection. They take Viagra because they don’t have time for sexual preliminaries. They take cocaine to be continuously alert and reactive. They take Prozac to cancel out the awareness of the senselessness that unexpectedly empties their life of any interest. (38)

Semiotic production imposes such great demands upon the attention of workers that the other areas of their lives become ignored, resulting in an emotional decline. The profitability of the pharmaceutical industry is a testament to the pathogenic character of semio-capital-as-master-signifier: adults are routinely given medications to cope with the fallout of this attentional stress and children are prescribed Ritalin and other stimulant medications (39). Berardi’s argument is not that semio-capitalism causes attentional disorders, but that the growth of the pharmaceutical industry seems to indicate that the presence of certain symptoms, some of which could be the product of the economic structures in which subjects are situated. The medicinal treatment of these symptoms at least demonstrates that they exist, and it appears plausible that semio-capital-as-master-signifier could produce at least some of these symptoms. Ultimately, the prescription of these medications could indicative of the way that semio-capital-as-master-signifier attempts to address those symptoms that threaten workers’ ability to be productive.

While Berardi’s analysis aids in illustrating how the master-signifier that is semio-capital produces the experience of attentional disorders such as AD/HD, it is also important to consider the way in which semio-capitalism produces AD/HD as a discursive construction aimed at managing the symptoms that impede worker productivity. Critical here is the notion that medical
science’s self-proclaimed objectivity does not imbue it with the ideological neutrality that it would hope. The categories that its classification systems create can be considered institutional fabrications that reflect the hegemony of the dominant economic order. From this vantage point, AD/HD can be seen as a historically contingent category used for disciplining non-normative bodies that threaten production. An examination of the medical understanding of AD/HD in conjunction with Foucault’s analysis on of the rise of mental asylums in Europe during the seventeenth century helps to elucidate this point.

Contemporary psychiatry articulates Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder as a neurobehavioral disorder whose onset first appears in early childhood. At one time, children that suffered from both inattention and hyperactivity were diagnosed with ADHD, whereas children that were thought to suffer primarily from inattention were diagnosed simply with ADD. The revised diagnosis of AD/HD now encompasses both diagnoses and reflects the contemporary perspective that considers AD/HD to be a spectrum composed of three key symptoms (inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity) that manifest in varying degrees across those diagnosed. The symptom of inattention is taken to be primarily characterized by the inability to remain attendant to a single task or to focus on one thing at a time” (Meyers 14). The tendency to be easily bored, messy, and unable to take in important details are also all characteristics of inattention. People that are said to struggle with inattention are frequently labeled as “lazy, spacey, or daydreamers” (14). Impulsivity is said to manifest itself as the inability to adequately regulate verbal and physical behaviors. Individuals that are thought to struggle with impulsivity frequently speak over others during conversations, generally “wear their emotions on their sleeves,” and frequently blurt out inappropriate language (13). Children that struggle with impulsivity tend to be labeled as trouble makers for the difficulty they have with considering the
long term impacts of their actions (13). Similar to impulsive behavior, the symptom of hyperactivity is said to be a function of the individual's inability to adequately self-regulate. The symptom of hyperactivity appears to most commonly manifest as the inability to remain in one place for extended periods of time, including sitting quietly at the dinner table or in school” (13). People that have trouble with hyperactivity are considered to be frequently fidgety and are often described as always on the go (13). Despite the seeming naturalness that AD/HD is imbued with through the supposedly objective gaze of modern psychiatry and the school, it is important to consider the manner in which AD/HD is also a historical construction.

Philosopher Michel Foucault sought to demonstrate in *Madness and Civilization* that mental illness was the byproduct of social and economic processes rather than biological traits. In his genealogy of the rise of mental illness in Europe during the seventeenth century, he points out that the diagnosis and subsequent confinement of the mentally ill at this time corresponded to the interests of the economic elite by ensuring a minimum level of productivity from. Foucault notes that the medical standards used to diagnose and confine the mentally ill functionally served to assign the same homeland to the poor, to the unemployed, to prisoners, and to the insane” (124). In this way, mental illness is conflated with the economic failure at the level of the individual. It is the targeting of the individual as the root cause of society’s ills that later suffices to justify the mass confinement of the infirm. Foucault goes on to argue that the rise of the psychiatric hospitals at this time had nothing to do with any attempt to administer medical care and was instead “an instance of order, of the monarchical and bourgeois order being organized in the form of the totality of measures which [made] work possible and necessary for all those who could not live without it” (126-7). Europe's economic elite at the time produced mental illness as a category that justified the confinement and reformation of individuals that were not effectively
producing in a way that sustained the dominant economic order. As he points out, in considering the label of mental illness as a precondition for helping those deemed to be ill, Our philanthropy prefers to recognize the signs of a benevolence toward sickness where there is only a condemnation of idleness” (128). Foucault thus argues that mental illness persists today as its own discursive regime that continues to police those bodies that fail to meet normative levels of economic productivity. For Foucault, mental illness is not a biological reality, but an institutional schematization of consciousness that serves to reproduce the dominant order.

Much like Foucault, Thomas Szasz, a psychiatrist and an academic during the latter half of the twentieth century, controversially argues in *The Myth of Mental Illness* that the biological deficiencies modern psychiatry considers to be illnesses are actually constructions of its own systems of measurement and classification. Szasz states that mental illness is a myth in the sense that it is not an objective biological reality that medical science passively observes, but rather a product of the linguistic and other classificatory structures that science uses to map out the neurological processes of the brain. Szasz states that:

Such rules, however, are not God-given, nor do they occur “naturally.” Since all systems of classification are made by people, it is necessary to be aware of who has made the rules and for what purpose. If this precaution is not taken, there is the risk of being unaware of the precise rules, or worse, of mistaking the product of classification for “naturally occurring facts or things.” I believe this is exactly what happened in psychiatry during the past sixty or seventy years (Szasz, 1959b). During this period, a vast number of occurrences were reclassified as illnesses.” We have thus come to regard phobias, delinquencies, divorce, homicide, addiction, and so on almost without limit as psychiatric illnesses. This is a colossal and costly mistake. (43)
For Szasz, the concept of naturalness” or some essential category of Nature” does not exist. These are in fact conceptual and linguistic categories that are fabricated, brought into existence by humanity's organization of its environment. In our attempt to make sense of problematic phenomena such as crime and “aberrant” behaviors, we use science as a system of meaning that reclassifies these phenomena that previously existed without being labeled as indications of mental illness.” Thus, entirely new understandings of these behaviors are spawned that represent historical contingencies rather than inherent, natural realities. In the close examination of the diagnostic criteria for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder that follows, I argue that AD/HD is a fabrication of semio-capital-as-master-signifier and is predicated upon the notions of labor and time that are articulated in Marx’s labor theory of value.

Marx formulates the exchange of commodities as the basic form of economic activity within the capitalist mode of production. A commodity is considered to be a form of capital in so far as a commodity that is acquired through an act of exchange that uses money as a universal equivalent can then be placed back upon the market as part of an effort to initiate an exchange in which a greater amount of capital is acquired than was initially invested. This formula can be expressed as: M—C—M. In order for a capitalist to generate wealth through this equation, the capitalist must be able to acquire a type of commodity which can be consistently exchanged at a higher value than for what it was initially acquired. Several questions arise here: what is this unique commodity? How does this commodity possess the ability to acquire a value that is greater than that for which it was initially exchanged? From where within this equation does the value-enhancing element of the process of economic exchange come? Marx contends that the value created through the exchange of commodities cannot emanate from money itself, as the value of currency is fixed. Value expressed in currency, as Marx states, is a value petrified,
never varying” (62). Indeed, except in rare instances when a dollar bill has particular
distinguishing characteristics relating to age, imperfections created during the production
process, or other desirable distinguishing features, a dollar bill’s value will always be no less and
no more than one dollar. Marx then turns to the second half of the equation (C-M) and questions
whether this is the locus of the anomalous value that is generated through commodity exchange.
Yet, this mystical source of self-engendering value cannot be generated within this portion of the
equation either because within this process, the value of the commodity is simply converted back
into its monetary equivalent. Hence, Marx concludes that the creation of value that eventually
takes the form of profit is necessarily generated in the first half of the equation, M—C, where the
capitalist exchanges money for a commodity. To produce this peculiar form of value through the
exchange of money for a commodity, Marx argues that the capitalist must have access to a very
special type of commodity—labor.

The value produced within the Money-Commodity portion of economic exchange is
made possible only through the capitalist's purchase of labor-power where labor itself is the
commodity-object that is acquired. Labor-power is a peculiar commodity in that its consumption
results in a net gain of value. In discussing the special commodity that is labor-power, Marx
states that:

In order to be able to extract value from the consumption of a commodity, our friend,
Moneybags, must be so lucky as to find, within the sphere of circulation, in the market, a
commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value,
whose actual consumption, therefore, is itself an embodiment of labor, and consequently
a creation of value. The Possessor of money does find on the market such a special
commodity in capacity for labor or labor-power. (62)
What distinguishes labor from other commodities is that it contains within it the potential to generate more value through its very consumption. This is made possible through the issuance of wages by the capitalist to the worker as the compensation for their labor; the capitalist pays the worker the means of subsistence, the absolute minimum necessary for the worker to maintain a quality of life that ensures that the worker is able to continue to produce. This process generates value when the commodities that workers produce are exchanged on the market for a greater value than what was paid the worker in the form of wages. This difference between the value of the wages paid to the worker and the value of the commodities that are produced through the worker's labor constitutes the surplus-value produced over the duration of time purchased by the capitalist, labor-time. This surplus-value, as generated in the M—C portion of the exchange, is made possible through the commodification of the worker as a source of labor-power that produces more value than is expended in its consumption by virtue of the disproportion between the value of the wages issued the worker and the value of the capital that is acquired through exchange by the capitalist. Crucial to the discussion of AD/HD as an ideological construction is the role that labor-power plays in the capitalist’s ability to generate surplus-value and the factors that influence the value of labor-power.

The capitalist's capacity to generate surplus-value is influenced by the value of the labor-power that is consumed as labor-time. In defining labor-power, Marx states that the capacity for labor is to be understood as the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description” (63).²

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² Here, use-value refers to a product of human labor that is not a commodity, an object whose value is a function of an individual's assessment of its personal utility as a tool for survival. However, the concept of labor-time equally applies to both use-values and exchange-values, commodities whose value is a function of their relative position within the conditions of exchange.
The labor-power that an individual worker represents is a reflection of that worker's ability to efficiently perform tasks that are crucial to the production of commodities as a function of the worker's physical and mental traits. The value of labor-power is determined...by the labor-time,” as Marx states, and that it is necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article” (64). The value of labor-power is thus a function of the labor-time required to produce a particular commodity. If the quality or quantity of commodities produced during a particular period of labor-time that is consumed by the capitalist through wages does not create value that exceeds those wages, then the exchange of money for the commodity of labor fails to produce surplus-value for the capitalist. As such, the physical and mental attributes of workers are of critical concern to the capitalist as they will come to bear upon the amount of labor time that is required to produce a particular commodity.

The critical element of Marx's labor theory of value to the discussion of AD/HD as an ideological construction is the notion that a worker's physical and mental traits directly impact the capitalist's ability to acquire surplus-value. The efficiency with which a worker's physical and mental traits enable them to perform certain tasks, as measured by both the quantity of labor-time it takes them to perform those tasks as well as the quality of the end product, is crucial to the capitalist because the ability to generate a profitable disparity between the wages issued and the capital acquired is contingent upon these traits. In order to produce the greatest possible surplus-value, the capitalist seeks to maximize worker output through standardization and regimentation of work activity. Workers' physical and mental capabilities are measured according to their ability to work within the confines of the labor processes such that the time it takes for the worker to achieve standardized outcomes—in the form of commodities—is as low as possible, thereby establishing a level of efficiency that ensures the production of surplus-value
and profit. AD/HD is a byproduct of precisely this process of normalizing standardized notions of labor and time in an effort to ensure the extraction of surplus-value. A close examination of the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD reveals the presence of ideological notions of labor and time that seem to reflect semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s effort to ensure a minimum level of productivity. As such, AD/HD might best be described not as a biological condition that inheres within the body of the individual, but as a social construction composed of a number of ideological concepts that reflect the dominant interests within the hierarchical division of labor.

Psychiatrists and medical professionals utilize *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* to diagnose AD/HD and other purported mental disorders. The fourth edition of the *DSM* outlines a variety of potential symptoms of the three primary characteristics of AD/HD, including inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. The *DSM IV* enumerates ten symptoms that are thought to be manifestations of these three characteristics, six of which are of particular interest to the present discussion:

1. Often does not give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities.
2. Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
3. Often does not follow instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace.
4. Often has trouble organizing activities.
5. Often avoids, dislikes, or doesn't want to do things that take a lot of mental effort for a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework). (Chandler 40)

The diagnostic criterion for the characteristic of inattention as an indicator of AD/HD reifies ideological notions of labor and time that are articulated in Marx’s labor theory of value. These
criteria normalize the notion that human activity is naturally a form of labor and that this activity should be evaluated according to whether it efficiently produces a tangible object of value.

The description of inattention in the *DSM IV* normalizes particular notions of labor and time by operating under the assumption that that human activity should at its basest level be considered labor. However, this is an illusion. The notion that human activity should be standardized according to a person's ability to remain productive in a task-based environment reflects the attitudes of a particular institution (psychiatry) within a particular mode of production (semio-capital) at a particular point in human history. In contrast to the medical model of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, one could create an alternative argument. For example, one could argue that the basest level of human activity is creative expression or the creation of social bonds. Althusser would note that there is nothing natural about psychiatry’s characterizations of human behavior; they are merely fabrications that seek to order the world according to a particular set of interests. Indeed, the attempt to establish standards for human behavior against which deviance can be defined in part reflects the capitalist imperative of ensuring that worker activity reaches pre-determined levels of productivity. As Foucault suggests, categories of mental illness reflect the elite class's interest in securing a minimum level of productivity in order to maintain their dominant position within the relations of production. Similarly, the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD establish the notion that human activity should be policed as a form of labor, ultimately ensuring that non-normative bodies are disciplined for their failure to produce.

There are a number of other ideological mystifications present within the DSM's criteria for the symptom of inattention, including the notion that human activity, as labor, should be evaluated by its efficiency as a function of the time required to produce a tangible object of
value. The language used to describe inattention within the DSM’s diagnostic criteria make constant reference to the ability to complete work,” citing the individual’s difficulty in performing duties at work, completing schoolwork, and completing household chores. To an extent, this is indicative of certain functions that must be performed by individuals to survive and successfully adapt to social expectations. It could be argued that these criteria are merely a reflection of these basic demands placed upon us by society and through necessity. However, these criteria also seem to tacitly perpetuate the notion that human activity should be measured and evaluated according to one's ability to finish standardized tasks. Any activity that does not result in the completion of a particular task and fails to produce a tangible outcome that can be measured according to universal standards of evaluation is not considered to be productive labor; only those activities that result in a complete final product are valued. The student is considered to have completed their work if and only if they can produce an assignment whose sufficiency is measured according to universal standards of value. These criteria also reify the assumption that this end-product's value, in addition to its completeness, is determined by the quantity of time required to produce the object. Inattention is only problematic in cases where the imperative to produce large quantities of goods has imposed constraints upon the time allotted for the completion of particular tasks. The ability to organize activities” and to sustain mental effort over a long period of time” (Chandler 40) have value only insofar as they affect the amount of time required to create a product. Both imply that cognitive ability should be standardized according to the efficiency of labor. This can be argued to be an ideological construction of semio-capital-as-master-signifier that privileges the labor-time invested in completing a task as a commodity in itself. In so doing, subjects are trained to believe that human activity is naturally a
form of labor geared toward producing complete commodities whose value is a function of the time invested in their production.

The symptoms that the DSM-IV provides that are said to be indicators of hyperactivity also contain within a number mystifying ideological notions relating to labor and time. The DSM IV lists six symptoms of hyperactivity, four of which are particularly relevant to the present discussion:

1. Often gets up from seat when remaining in seat is expected.
2. Often runs about or climbs when and where it is not appropriate (adolescents or adults may feel very restless).
3. Often has trouble playing or enjoying leisure activities quietly.
4. Is often “on the go” or often acts as if “driven by a motor.” (Chandler 41)

The symptoms that are said to be characteristic of an individual suffering from hyperactivity can be considered to be ideological fabrications that reify the notion that all human activity is a form of labor. Furthermore, they construct the notion that such human activity is naturally task-based, aiming at the production of a tangible object of value.

It may at first seem counter-intuitive that semio-capital would take a highly active individual to be a problematic presence within the labor force. However, it must be remembered that production within semio-capitalism is task-based and standardized according to the quality of a product and the quantity of time required for its completion. Any behavior that extends the amount of time required to produce an object or that threatens to produce an object that is incomplete necessarily threatens the capitalist's ability to extract surplus-value. The evaluation of hyperactivity appears to be a response to this concern, reinforcing the ideological notion that all meaningful behavior is necessarily task-based and measured according to universal standards of
time and productivity. Remaining in [one's] seat can be problematic for a variety of reasons. For instance, such disruptions can inhibit the creation of a community environment. However, it is especially troublesome when there are other tasks that require completion and deviation from the object of attention threatens the timely completion of these other tasks. This is precisely the case with semio-capital-as-master-signifier, which relies upon an individual’s ability to produce efficiently by remaining stationary for extended periods of time to produce info-commodities. In this light, these criteria can be seen as seeking to discipline hyper forms of human activity such that the need to produce whole objects of value in standard time appears to be the normal condition of human existence. This ideological notion of human behavior as labor is further policed by the idea that forms of human behavior that are not an immediate form of labor, i.e. play, are invariably related to labor in that they may interfere with production. This privileges productive forms of behavior that create objects of value over activities that can only interfere with the process of production. This task-based ideology of human behavior is vital to the worker's efficient production of commodities within the regimented structures of the capitalist mode of production.

The symptoms that the DSM-IV uses to describe the characteristic of impulsivity for AD/HD perpetuate a number of ideological notions pertaining to labor and time as well. The symptoms that the DSM lists include:

1. Often blurts out answers before questions have been finished.
2. Often has trouble waiting one's turn.
3. Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g. Butts into conversations or games).

(Chandler 41).

The diagnosis of impulsivity within individuals that are thought to have AD/HD reinscribes the
notion that human behavior should be standardized according to efficiency as a function of labor and time. They also reify the idea that a division of labor is a natural condition of human existence.

The criteria for the diagnosis of impulsivity reproduces the ideological notion that human behavior should be rationally calculated according to the standards of one's environment. For the elite class within the capitalist mode of production, this is vital to ensuring a level of efficiency within worker behavior that keeps the cost of labor-time low enough such that surplus-value can be extracted through the production process. A worker's failure to wait for their turn to act or to answer a question before it has been fully stated does have implications for the worker's daily life; this places stress upon social interactions and may impede one's ability to process information if. However, the need to act in turn is also a normative process of the capitalist mode of production that must be adhered to if productivity is to be sustained. Thus, the diagnostic framework of AD/HD can be viewed in part to be an ideological formulation that trains workers to function strictly within the confines of the regimented structures of capitalism. These particular criteria also reproduce the ideological notion that a division of labor is a natural condition of human existence. Implicit in the understanding of one's failure to answer a question at the appropriate time as non-normative is the assumption that certain individuals are naturally answerable to others. As previously mentioned, there are a number of reasons why one might find the inability to respond in turn to be problematic. Yet, these criteria also seem to perpetuate the notion of a division of labor and the hierarchical oppression that results from this power structure. The symptoms for the characteristic of impulsivity for AD/HD within the DSM IV reproduce the ideologies of efficient human behavior according to environmental standards as well as the notion of production occurring through a division of labor.
In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Rene Descartes seeks to liberate himself from the false beliefs” of conventional science by establishing a first principle upon which truly objective ontological and epistemological paradigms can be built. The obstacle that Descartes seeks to overcome is what he considers to be the inherently deceptive nature of the senses in their mediation of the object world. His inquiry proceeds from the hypothetical premise that God is a deceptive being, and that all that is perceived through the senses is illusory. From this, Descartes concludes that the fact that he can be deceived by such malicious God necessarily implies that he himself exists as a thinking being. Descartes contemplates: But there is some deceiver or other who is supremely powerful and supremely sly and who is always deliberately deceiving me. Then too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something” (64). If to be deceived is to adopt a false belief, then according to Descartes logic, there must be some subjective entity, an I,” to have believed improperly in the first place. Descartes argues that because this self is constituted through thought, then the I” is first and foremost a thinking thing” that does not depend upon the body for its existence (65). Descartes thus establishes a mind/body dichotomy in which the body's function is merely a vessel for a spiritual subjectivity whose privileged ontological status imbues its decision-making process with absolute autonomy. What is surprising is that the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy, which is predicated on a thoroughly insubstantial model of mental functioning, finds its way into the research of contemporary cognitive scientists. Functionalists such as Cary Wolfe and Daniel Dennett argue that this field’s subtle perpetuation of Cartesian dualism to be highly problematic.
In *What is Posthumanism?*, Wolfe employs a theoretical framework that synthesizes systems theory and deconstruction to criticize the Cartesian dualism upon which cognitive science bases itself and the model of subjectivity that accompanies it. Like other functionalists such as cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett, Wolfe seeks to construct a model of subjectivity that is in harmony with current descriptions of neuroscience’s description of the chemical processes that underlie cognition. The functionalist position embraces a materialist reductionism” that understands the mind as a sort of computation” carried out along the hardware (neural circuits) of the brain (32). Wolfe agrees with cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett’s claim that the disembodied notion of self within Cartesian dualism is a phantasmal model of subjectivity that is not scientifically rigorous. Cognitive scientists reproduce this same fallacious model of dualism in arguing that there exists within the brain a central knower” or inner boss” that processes supposedly lower-level neural activity as information that it then uses as the basis for planning and organizing behavior (34). Functionalists like Dennett argue that this concept of a central Agent reinscribes the illusion of a “Cartesian puppeteer” that simultaneously acts alongside and above neural activity within the brain (Cited in Wolfe, 34). Wolfe succinctly describes what makes this assumption problematic: to assume that what you are is something else, some Cartesian *res cogitans* in addition to all this brain-and-body activity ‘is to betray a deep confusion,‘ because what you are just is this organization” (34). Subjective consciousness should not be understood as a disembodied self,” but rather the subjective experience of mind that results from the sum total of the neural activities that occur within the brain at a particular point in time. Cognitive science‘s failure to restrict its conceptualization of cognition to the observable processes of neural activity results in a phantasmal notion of subjectivity resembling Cartesian dualism. The theoretical framework used in the diagnosis of Attention
Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is an exemplary instance of cognitive science’s articulation of the central executive as a concept based in the problematic mind/body dichotomy of Cartesian subjectivity.

Research within the cognitive science community contends that the three primary symptoms of AD/HD all stem from deficiencies in the functioning of the central executive. Chris Chandler, a Principal Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, describes executive functions as emanating from the most recently developed areas of the brain in terms of its evolution, the frontal lobes, and comprise the “collection of high-level cognitive processes that control and regulate other lower-level processes” (86). These lower-level processes involve the body’s sensory systems—vision, hearing, olfaction, touch, and taste—taking in stimuli and transforming those stimuli into information as patterns of neurotransmitter emission that are, according to what Chandler calls “the science behind ADHD,” used by the brain for higher-level processes such as “goal formation, planning, execution of goal-related plans, and effective performance” (86). For these higher-level, decision-making processes to be carried out, contemporary cognitive science asserts that the low-level sensory processes within the brain must be governed by a central executive” that oversees these lower-level processes. According to Chandler, this central executive “deals with inputs from the world around us, organizes the inputs, and selects a response output” (86). In this way, the central executive resembles the conductor of an orchestra, or “the manager of many workers that together produce a product (behavior)” (86).

The idea that dysfunction of the central executive is the root cause of AD/HD perpetuates the dualist model of Cartesian subjectivity that Dennet and Wolf criticize for lacking a firm biological basis. The implication within the diagnostic framework for AD/HD is that the central executive processes this low-level neural activity autonomously, without being influenced by the
very neural activity from whence it came. In this way, the central executive precisely resembles
the fallacy of "the Cartesian puppeteer" described by Dennett, or that free-floating "self" that is
inexplicably both a product of the brain's neural activity and simultaneously a separate entity free
to manipulate it. The diagnostic framework for AD/HD thus perpetuates the illusion of a
disembodied, self-determining, Cartesian subject that, while partially tethered to the material
world through brain matter, is able to retreat to a subjective space that is entirely apart from
material existence. As such, the loss of agency within semio-capitalism is made to appear as if it
was an aberration rather than the inevitable result of a mode of production that assaults the
senses with semiotic stimuli. The functionalist model of cognition embraced by Dennett and
Wolfe unveils the way in which this concept of a central executive is rooted in an illusory
conception of subjectivity rather than biology.

The question then becomes, if the notion of the central executive is not rigorously
scientific, what are the central assumptions it relies upon for its coherence? A closer inspection
of the notion of the central executive reveals that it is predicated upon an imaginary notion of
Cartesian subjectivity that idealizes the subject's relation to the relations of production within
capitalism. Not only are the subject's "choices" within capitalism not autonomous, but the linear
and systematic mode of thought that the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD universalize are
inherently ideological. Althusser's conceptualization of ideology as imaginary and
fundamentally material illuminates the way in which the central executive/brain model of
subjectivity is based in semio-capital.

Althusser argues that for the capitalist mode of production to reproduce itself, it is not
enough that it merely produce goods that fulfill the wants and needs of the market. Instead, he
contends that "every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same
time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce” (Norton 1336). According to Althusser, capitalism achieves this through ideological mystification. He argues that capitalism’s ideological superstructure normalizes its repressive, hierarchical relations of production such that these relations appear to be —natural” and benefiting society as a whole. In this context, supposedly universal —truths” such as Democracy, Science, Virtue, etc., are illusory constructions that, although they are an effect of the material conditions in which the subject exists, represent —the imaginary relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence” (1350). This is not to suggest that impoverished workers are lead to believe that the material conditions of their poverty are in some way favorable to them. Rather, what subjects fundamentally misrecognize according to Althusser is that their relative agency and autonomy within these relations are imaginary in a Lacanian sense, psychic idealizations that deceive the worker into accepting the conditions of their exploitation. The concepts of misrecognition and the imaginary are vital to appreciating how ideology’s inherently material existence undermines any attempt to retreat to a subjective space of pure will and autonomy.

The notion that one can escape ideology by retreating into a psychic space of absolute autonomy ignores the implications of ideology’s inherently material existence. For Althusser, ideology is ‘imaginary’ in the sense that it represents the subject’s illusory idealization of its relation to the relations of production. In this way, ideology is the subject’s misrecognition (mécognition) of its position and relative agency within the hierarchical structures of the capitalist mode of production. Althusser borrows the notion of mécognition from Lacan who argues that the infant constructs an illusory, ideal self (Ideal-I) during the mirror stage when it misrecognizes the stable, coherent subjectivity manifest in its imago within the mirror as an indication of its own stable subjectivity within the object world. The critical aspect of the process
of méconnaissance that reveals ideology’s inherently material existence involves the way in which the subject's misrecognition of its relation to the relations of production is simultaneously an act of recognition that reifies certain ideological formations. For Althusser, ideology is realized and entered into the subject's field of existence when it is recognized by the subject as a coherent material and symbolic formation. Ideology thus acquires an ontological gravity that exerts a constant pull within the social field in which the subject is situated. Ideology is not merely an idea with some “spiritual existence” (Norton 1352). Through subjects' recognition, ideology becomes concretized in apparatuses, where their practices have a inherently material existence (1352-3).

This is all to say that ideology is not merely an internal phenomenon with an ephemeral essence to be entertained and then tossed aside by a disembodied subject or “central executive.” On the contrary, through Ideological State Apparatuses like the School, the Church, the Media, etc., ideology structures subjects' social activity, compelling them to enact and perform ideology such that ideas, regardless of their status within the subject's internal consciousness, are reified within the object world that the subject is constantly attempting to negotiate. This is precisely the case within semio-capitalism. The info-sphere is semio-capital’s chief apparatus and attains coherence not by making reference to material objects such as commodities, but through the subject’s recognition of the legitimacy of its constellation of signs. The info-sphere is constituted in every instance in which cognition identifies capital’s semiotic material as distinct formations with their own symbolic weight. Ideology within semio-capitalism is informational, but takes the form of a very real, material network that interconnects cognitions and regulates bodies in an effort to extract surplus-value. And, as Althusser would argue, the subject cannot merely withdraw from the info-sphere and retreat into its consciousness as a space of pure will and
autonomous subjectivity. The info-sphere that the subject creates through its recognition of its ontological coherence exerts an inexorable force upon its decision-making process. Even actions that are thought to be free of interference from the info-sphere are always-already reactions to the gravitational pull of the ideological bodies within the subject’s symbolic universe. All of the subject’s actions are intimately linked with the info-sphere such that all its actions are in some way a reaction to its presence. Thus, the autonomy presumed in the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD is an imaginary illusion that ignores the materiality of ideology and idealizes the subject’s position within the relations of production. The construction of AD/HD allows semio-capital to normalize this illusion and construe the loss of autonomy as an aberration. The manner in which ideology’s material existence inevitably alters subjective experience is further elucidated through Althusser’s description of the process of the individual’s interpolation into ideology as a subject.

Althusser’s understanding of the interpolation of the subject into ideology in every aspect of its daily activity reveals the autonomous Cartesian subjectivity assumed within the diagnostic framework of AD/HD to be an ideological mystification. Althusser emphasizes that —ideology has always-already interpolated individuals as subjects” (Norton 1357), thus making the intellectual process in which the disembodied “central executive” is thought to have autonomy an act fundamentally constituted by ideology. Althusser provides the example of an individual—again, this person is an individual only hypothetically because “the individual” has never truly existed—who, in walking down the street, is hailed from behind by an officer of the law. In turning to respond, the “individual” is immediately interpolated into ideology as its subject. That is, in recognizing the officer as a symbolic authority to which it must respond, the individual establishes the officer as a coherent, material manifestation of a particular ideological apparatus.
The individual thus establishes itself as a consciousness that is forever subject to an ideological apparatus that ensures that the subject's future actions will always-already have been influenced by it.

The notion of the central executive articulated in the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD and the Cartesian form of subjectivity that it embraces suggest that individuals can retain autonomy in by intellectually distancing themselves from their environment. However, the act of recognition, as a necessary precursor to all intellectual work, is altered by ideological structures within the subject's environment. In the previous example, the individual may choose to disobey the officer. However, this "choice" is the product of ideology's intrusion into the individual's subjective experience; any psychic distancing from one's environment is a response to and empowers ISA's. In recognizing itself as a subject of the ideological apparatus of the Law, the decision-making process itself becomes an encroachment into the individual's conscious experience that would not have otherwise occurred. This incursion inevitably alters the course of the individual's conscious experience such that its "freedom" is always-already abrogated by ideology. As such, the concept of a truly self-determining subjectivity is merely an imaginary illusion that allows semio-capital to instill the notion that it is possible to be an agent of pure will, even within the confines of an info-sphere that disables its workers. This imaginary sense of autonomy is also reproduced through the universal Reason that is ascribed to the central executive.

The diagnostic framework for AD/HD further perpetuates cognitive science's ideological model of subjectivity by perpetuating the illusory notion of universal Reason. In criticizing the sciences for their lack of empiricism and tendency to uphold principles only because they are accepted by the majority, Descartes argues that the pursuit of knowledge should be guided by the
basic — good sense” or — reason” that is universally present within all individuals (Discourse on Method 1). In arguing that — all the things that can fall within human knowledge follow from one another in the same way,” Descartes contends that human thought is naturally ordered and systematic (9). He also maintains that this order is inherently linear: Truth is only appreciable within the framework of Cartesian subjectivity if one — keep[s] to the path one must take in order to go in a more straightforward direction” (11, 9). Thus, Cartesian humanism’s concept of universal Reason is principally defined by systematic thinking that follows a linear logic. Descartes is quick to emphasize that although there is a universal standard for Reason, not all subjects reason properly. According to Descartes, the mental activity of those who are impulsive and — hasty in their judgments” is inherently inferior (my emphasis, 9). The subject that conducts thoroughly contemplative, calculative thought alone displays the necessary — patience to conduct all their thoughts in an orderly manner” (my emphasis, 9). Thus, for Descartes, absolute Truth is an intrinsically desirable telos only accessible through a universalized notion of Reason predicated upon systematic thinking and linear logic.

Despite Descartes’ contention that this notion of Reason is universal, its emphasis on ordered thought is thoroughly ideological as it serves to ensure worker productivity. There are two vital implications within Cartesian humanism’s othering of impulsive, non-systematic thinking. First, is the notion that the failure to follow ordered, linear reasoning results in the analytical process becoming less efficient and ultimately less productive. Descartes' standardization of thought implies that Reason involves sustained attention, which both expedites the attainment of and ensures the quality of the desired object of value— in this case, Truth. Furthermore, the Cartesian understanding of universal Reason is ideological in its privileging of systematic thinking as a means of ascertaining objective Truths as objects of value and
commodities. The consideration of efficiency within mental activity is only necessary or warranted if there is an end-product that one wishes to obtain. Hence, non-systematic, unfocused thinking is only problematic to the extent that it is detrimental to the efficiency of worker productivity. An application of Marx's labor theory of value to the diagnostic framework of AD/HD illustrates how the notion of universal Reason based on systematic thinking within Cartesian humanism is founded upon the ideological notions of production.
CONCLUSION

One could argue that capital is always-already amorphous, that money as a universal equivalent of exchange that is substituted for material objects is a virtual medium. However, I argue, along with Franco Berardi, that there has been a fundamental shift in the productive forces of capital that have rendered its manifestations exponentially more abstract. Technological developments in information technology and computing have enabled capital to become increasingly informational in character. As a result of advances in micro-processing, info-commodities are created through the massive collection of user data that is then endlessly recombined in novel orientations in an effort to generate new sources of surplus-value. Capital now moves instantaneously across screens on the floors of stock exchanges in a series of self-referring signs and symbols. Today, capital has moved further away from the material; in fact, it has become entirely semiotic. The value of semio-capital is purely symbolic as it is divorced from material reality and is generated through an autopoietic process of self-reference.

Slavoj Žižek’s recognizes the increasingly abstract nature of capital and argues that its impermeability decisively marks it as the Lacanian Real. This contention is inexorably linked to his argument that capital has a fantasy dimension, a point that is in part predicated upon his conception of the sublime object of ideology. For Žižek, market exchange is made possible by a transcendent material that ensures that economic exchange retains an intellectual continuity. This supra-material substance is Value itself. The function of this sublime object of ideology is made evident in our treatment of money: we act as if money is the immediate embodiment of wealth despite the fact that, as a material object, it necessarily degrades over time. This is the pinnacle ideological illusion of capital, i.e. the idea that Value inheres within money and commodities rather than as a construction that is inscribed upon objects by the market.
What is critical about the concept of the sublime object of ideology (Value) and the underlying illusion upon which it is predicated is the aspect of fantasy's involvement in that illusion. Žižek argues that in order for exchange to retain coherence, the underlying illusion upon which it is predicated cannot be perceived. If subjects were to recognize that the value which they presume to be contained within money and commodities was an illusory fabrication generated by capital, the system's symbolic efficacy would dissolve. For this reason, Žižek argues that subjects must be ignorant to the internal logic of capital if it is to remain intelligible. For this reason, Žižek argues that capital has a fantasy dimension: capital's ideological illusions must be overlooked, remaining unknown to those that support them through in their daily social activity. It is this overlooked, unconscious illusion that Žižek terms the ideological fantasy.

What is useful about Žižek's conceptualization of capital's ideology fantasy is that it offers a way of theorizing how capital perpetuates itself in a world that is aware of its failures. Žižek's analysis brings to light the way in which capital sustains itself through the daily social activity that bolsters ideological illusions that subjects denounce on an intellectual level. Indeed, while a great deal of cynicism is directed at global capital and its institutions, subjects' behavior continues to sustain the fundamental illusions that are vital to its functioning. The relationship between fantasy and ideology also provides a useful point of departure for his discussion of capital's status as the Lacanian Real. While capital's fundamental illusions operate at the level of fantasy, Žižek maintains that Capital, as the Real, also affects social reality as an abstract locus around which our daily activity revolves.

Žižek's contention that Capital exists as a manifestation of the Lacanian Real is founded upon the distinction between the Real and social reality. For Žižek, the latter designates the space of social relations and the material processes of production. Alternatively, the Real is the
abstract, impossible unity that structures our social activity itself. The Real is Capital itself insofar as the spectral, internal logic of Capital’s movements is an unknowable abstraction that serves as a locus whose ontological gravity shapes social reality. Although Žižek’s analysis is on point, attending to capital’s most fundamental characteristic, its abstraction, his theorization of capital is ultimately counter-productive as we are unable to conceptualize capital beyond the level of pure abstraction. We are precluded from developing a descriptive account of capital that would describe its internal logic or the forces that determine its functioning. For this reason, I turn to Franco Berardi’s concept of semio-capital as a means of developing a more systematic account of capital’s operation.

Franco Berardi addresses capital’s increasingly abstract quality through his notion of semio-capital. He contends that capitalism has transitioned away from an economy based on the production of material goods to one that is predicated upon the re-circulation of information commodities. Where workers once used their physical attributes to manipulate the material properties of objects, there is now a form of linguistic labor that produces symbolic commodities that are entirely divorced from material reality. This info-labor generates an info-sphere, a self-contained cloud of semiotic material through which the flows of semio-capital constantly re-circulate. At times, semio-capital instantiates itself as user data that is algorithmically processed and formulated into info-commodities. Semio-capital is also the manifestation of the distillation of these info-commodities into their discrete components and the subsequent recombination of these elements into novel formations for the production of surplus-value. Semio-capital also describes the squalls of signs and symbols that flicker across the screens of investment bankers and on the floors of stock exchanges. Capital has become semiotic, existing in streams of data that instantiates itself in self-referring signs and symbols. Berardi’s account of capital succeeds
where Žižek’s fails by providing a detailed account of capital that brings to light the ordering principle behind its functioning. Berardi’s analysis permits us to appreciate the way in which capital manifests in a variety of discrete signs and symbols that all operate according to a logic of recombination. From this, we are able to draw further conclusions about the nature of capital. Specifically, we can conclude from Berardi’s description that capital functions as a master-signifier.

Berardi’s description of semio-capital helps to elucidate its function as a master-signifier in a number of ways. His analysis reveals that semio-capital operates as a master-signifier by attempting to subsume all other signifiers under it. Semio-capital subordinates these signifiers by assigning them exchange-values as they are assimilated into the info-sphere. Capital-as-master-signifier thus attempts to recode all semiotic material in its own image, incorporating this material into the process of linguistic production and recombination. Additionally, Berardi’s work reveals the way in which semio-capital functions attempts to create unified Truths. Semio-capital seeks a type of omnipotence through interconnection; its goal is to generate surplus-value through an elaborate digital network that enhances cognition via the efficient flow of semiotic material between bio-cognitive organisms. These supposed Truths are precisely those info-commodities that are manipulated and mastered through this network. It also becomes apparent through Berardi’s analysis that semio-capital acts as a master-signifier through in trying to fill in the void created by signification. Berardi argues that the transition to semio-capitalism followed the failed attempt to signify democracy and in this way reveals how semio-capital situated itself as a master-signifier that attempted to cover over this failed act of signification by uniting signifier and signified in a pure act of communication. Finally, Berardi’s analysis helps to elucidate the way in which semio-capital operates as a master-signifier in the way that it is
inherently self-referring. Semio-capital acts an ideal whole that unifies linguistic artifacts from outside the system of signification, ensuring the coherence of the sign system and necessitating that all acts of signification refer back to it as their common point of origin. This is precisely what occurs in the case of semio-capital when info-commodities acquire value through their reference to capital itself rather than by pointing back to some object with a material presence.

The ability to recognize the way in which semio-capital functions as a master-signifier according to a logic of recombination is productive because it enables us to recognize one of capital’s chief antagonisms, the simultaneous production of the psychic experience of attentional disorders and as well as their creation of threatening disorders through discourse. Berardi’s detailed and systematic description of semio-capital makes clear the way in which labor within semio-capitalism has become purely cognitive, resulting in an influx of sensory material that places enormous attentional stress upon workers. He argues that in so doing, semio-capital produces symptoms that the experience of which likely resembles that of having an attentional disorder such as AD/HD. Berardi is not seeking to diagnose a segment of the global population with a disorder, but is instead suggesting that semio-capital produces a psychic phenomenon that is similar to an attentional disorder. This is indicative of one part of semio-capital’s primary contradictions; that is, it produces symptoms of attentional disorders that are deleterious to its functioning. By placing a tremendous cognitive burden upon laborers, semio-capitalism decreases their efficacy as workers and puts production at risk. Thus, semio-capitalism’s engendering of attentional stress upon workers creates conditions that threaten its own production process and the division of labor itself. Not only does semio-capital produce the experience of attentional disorders, it also produces AD/HD as a discursive regime aimed at managing non-normative bodies that threaten production. This is the second aspect of the
contradiction. A tension arises between the fact that semio-capital-as-master-signifier creates
cognitive activity that is deleterious to its functioning and its concomitant construction of these
seemingly harmful disorders as linguistic constructions. There are a number of ideological
mystifications within the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD that illustrate the extent to which it
functions as an ideological construction.

The language of the symptom of inattention can be viewed as pointing toward AD/HD’s
function as an ideological construction through its treatment of the concepts of labor and time.
The discourse within the DSM-IV surrounding the symptom of inattention appears to assume that
all human activity is a form of labor. The notion that human behavior should be standardized
according to one’s ability to perform in a task-based environment serves the interests of capital
by ensuring a minimum level of productivity from workers. The DSM-IV’s discussion of
inattention also perpetuates the idea that human activity should be evaluated according to
whether it produces a tangible object of value. Inattention seems problematic because it hinders
one’s ability to complete “work” or other duties. The language that describes the symptom of
hyperactivity is troublesome as well. It also reinforces that idea that human activity is a naturally
a form of labor by construing behavior that does not efficiently perform in a task-based
environment as non-normative. Additionally, it reproduces the notion that human activity should
be judged according to whether it creates tangible objects of value by deeming behavior that
behaviors which fail to meet objective outcomes as undesirable. Furthermore, the discourse in
which the symptom of impulsivity is enmeshed fabricates the idea that human activity should be
standardized according efficiency as a function of labor and time by valuing a calculated and
linear approach to the performance of tasks. It also reinscribes the notion that a division of labor
is the natural condition of human existence by implying that individuals are invariably
answerable to a higher authority in task-based contexts. AD/HD can also be considered to be a discursive construction in light of the way in which the notion of a central executive reproduces both the illusion of autonomy and the concept of a universal reason.

The diagnostic criteria for AD/HD can be viewed as an ideological construction through their articulation of a dualist model of Cartesian subjectivity that posits an illusory sense of individual agency. Medical professionals argue that the underlying cause behind attentional disorders such as AD/HD is poor executive functioning. According to this view, the central executive is an autonomous “central boss” that oversees and processes lower-level neural activity within the brain. What is troublesome about this concept is that it embraces a Cartesian model of subjectivity that is predicated upon a thoroughly unscientific dualist mode of consciousness. The assumption here is that the central executive acts above and apart from the very neural activity that is responsible for its functioning. The diagnostic criteria for AD/HD thus forward the premise that there is a detached, Cartesian observer that sustains total agency with respect to one’s interaction with one’s environment. Not only is this model of subjectivity not scientifically rigorous, but it is thoroughly ideological. The Cartesian notion of a disembodied subject perpetuates the fallacious belief in a space of pure-will into which the subject can retreat and retain absolute intellectual agency. This autonomy is a ruse as it ignores the material existence of ideology and our fundamental inability to separate ourselves from the Ideological State Apparatuses that interpolate us as subjects. The notion of a faulty central executive also produces the notion that the loss of agency that occurs within the structures of capitalism is aberrational, glossing over the reality that the hierarchical division of labor ensures that the disenfranchisement of the working class is an inevitability. Furthermore, the diagnostic criteria for AD/HD can be seen to reflect an ideological conception of subjectivity based upon the notion
of a universal reason. These criteria operate under the assumption that the inability to follow linear, systematic thinking is problematic, which is an artifact of semio-capital-as-master-signifier’s concern with worker efficiency. In so doing, they privilege an ideological conception of ordered thought as a precondition to worker productivity.

Future research in this area might consider developing the connection between attentional disorders and semio-capital through a medical model of disability. It was beyond the scope of this thesis to pursue such a project, but further investigation into way that the medical community conceives of the effect that certain environments have in relation to specific disorders might be fruitful. The goal might be to find justification within medical literature for the claim that semio-capitalism not only produces the experience of attentional disorders, but plays an active role in increasing the number of individuals diagnosed with such disorders. It might also be worthwhile to explore sociological studies that investigate the occurrence rates of various illnesses in relation to the economic structures in which certain populations reside. It could be useful to know how the percentage of the population with attentional disorders in mixed economies compares to those that live within semio-capitalism. This could help to generate a causal connection between attentional disorders and semio-capitalism.
WORKS CITED


